

Transition Booklet



Philosophy and Ethics

So you want to study *Philosophy and Ethics*?

If you have had teachers chasing you for work all through school and you don't like hard work, then this is not the right course for you...don't even think of taking this subject!

The Course is divided into three sections:

1. Philosophy – obviously!
2. Ethics – of course!
3. The dialogue between Christianity and Philosophy, and then, Christianity and Ethics, so if you are an expert in another world religion... 🙄

There will be two exam papers at the end of the two-year course:

Paper One: Philosophy and Ethics – 3 hours = 50% of marks.

Paper Two: Philosophy and Ethics/Christianity and Dialogues – 3 hours = 50% of marks.

Remember if you are lazy or do not enjoy hard work STOP READING NOW and choose another course!

If you do wish to continue, then congratulations! Philosophy and Ethics is highly regarded by universities and professions such as the legal profession, journalism and the medical world to name but a few.

Peter Vary, the famous British theologian (look him up and make a note of his careers) says that Philosophy and Ethics, in the modern world is crucial for most areas of life.

Your task:

Read through this summary on the ethical theory of *Utilitarianism*:

Utilitarianism

In its simplest form **Utilitarianism** is a theory that says that you should decide what you do in order to provide the most happiness and the least pain in a situation.

It is therefore **Hedonistic** - it is centred around pleasure.

As you look at all the different possible outcomes of a situation to see where pleasure and pain will be balanced the best, it is **consequentialist** or **teleological**.

As the outcome of a different ethical question will be different each time, it is **relativist**.

Bentham's Utilitarianism

Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) stated that naturally we are ruled by two key things - pleasure and pain - two basic instincts.

'Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do as well as to determine what we shall do.' (Bentham, *Introduction to the Principles of Moral Legislation*, 1789)

Bentham said that we need to look at the possible things we might do and the various outcomes and calculate how much pleasure and pain they might create, finally choosing the one that best maximises pleasure and minimises pain. His approach is therefore **quantitative**.

He said we need to consider seven different factors, his **Hedonic Calculus** or the **Felicific Calculus**.

1. Intensity (how great the pleasures/pains will be)
2. Duration (how long the pleasures/pains will last)
3. Certainty (how likely certain outcomes are)
4. Propinquity (how near to you the pleasures/pains will be - i.e. how much they will affect you personally)
5. Fecundity (how likely the pleasures/pains will be followed by similar pleasures/pains)
6. Purity (how likely the pleasures/pains will be followed by the opposite types of pleasures/pains)
7. Extent (how many people will be affected by it)

Advantages of Bentham's Utilitarianism

- It is reasonable to link morality with the pursuit of happiness and the avoidance of pain and misery.
- It is also natural to consider the consequences of our actions when deciding on what to do.

Criticisms of Bentham's Utilitarianism

- You cannot predict the future so the calculations cannot always be accurate.
- Pain can be good and pleasure can be bad, therefore utilitarianism can be contradicted.
- There are certain things that are intrinsically good or bad, so there is no reason to do calculations each time.
- Should animals be considered in the equation? The environment?
- Some would say that we have a particular obligation to our family.

- The majority may sometimes be corrupt (for example two prison guards who got pleasure out of torturing a prisoner might be allowed to do it under Bentham's Utilitarianism).

Mill's Utilitarianism

John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) was uncomfortable with some of the implications of Bentham's Utilitarianism. He suggested that utilitarian principles could be used to make 'rules of thumb' to live by. He took a **qualitative** approach - some pleasures are more valuable than others.

He divided pleasures into *higher pleasures* and *lower pleasures*. Higher pleasures are things such as poetry and music; lower pleasures are things such as eating and drinking. He said that it is 'better to be a human being dissatisfied rather than being a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied'. (J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 1863) Mill felt that we should aim not for pleasure but for **happiness** - the general happiness of society.

Act vs Rule Utilitarianism

Bentham is sometimes referred to as an **Act Utilitarian** because in his view each time you need to consider each act individually. Mill relies on rules more, and is sometimes known as a **Rule Utilitarian**. However some scholars are uncomfortable with this as Mill advocated following general rules that could be broken when necessary. He is therefore sometimes known as a **Weak Rule Utilitarian**. By contrast **Strong Rule Utilitarianism** would say that utilitarian principles should establish rules that should then never be broken - which might become an absolutist theory!

General Advantages of Utilitarianism

- A large number of people benefit as the principal is greatest good for the greatest number.
- Mill's Utilitarianism promotes general societal happiness and it is natural to see physical and mental pleasures are different.
- It is natural to consider consequences, so it is easy to use Hedonic Calculus.
- It is applicable to real-life situations because it doesn't generalise and recognises the complexity of life.

General Disadvantages of Utilitarianism

- We do not know the consequences of our actions.
- Strong rule utilitarianism is not really sticking by utilitarianism but is absolutist and nothing will benefit the greater good in certain situations.
- Weak rule utilitarianism becomes the same as Act utilitarianism, so is worse for minorities as the majority always rules.
- It is impractical to calculate what you should do to such an extent in day-to-day life.

Using 14 font, type out one side of A4 and explain why you think *Utilitarianism* is a good OR a bad theory for working out the correct course of action in any dilemma.

There is no right or wrong answer. I want to see how well you can put across your point of view on this ethical theory.

Your next task is to look at the example below and tell me, if you were following *Utilitarianism* would you lie in this situation or not? You should give a reason for your answer.

If a sinister looking man carrying an axe knocked on your door and asked you where your best friend was (and you knew where he or she was), would it be morally acceptable to tell a lie?

Look up the Cosmological Argument, the Ontological Argument, and the Design Argument. Watch videos on YouTube about them and **think** for yourself: do these arguments really prove the existence of God?

Finally, explain why you want to study Philosophy and Ethics.