

## PHILOSOPHY SUMMER WORK

Read through the information provided below and reflect on the scenarios underneath to think of issues or potential problems with the theory. Then do your own research to answer the other utilitarianism questions in the **second** box.

### **Utilitarianism is one of the best known and most influential moral theories.**

Like other forms of consequentialism, the core idea of utilitarianism is that whether an action is morally right or wrong depends on its effects (consequences). The most important classical utilitarians are Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). Their work has had a major impact both on philosophical work in moral theory and on approaches to economic, political, and social policy. Although utilitarianism has always had many critics, there are many 21st century thinkers who support it.

Utilitarians believe that the purpose of morality is to make life better by increasing the amount of good things (such as pleasure and happiness) in the world and by decreasing the sum total of bad things (such as pain and unhappiness). They reject moral codes theories that consist of commands based on custom, tradition, or instructions (commandments) given by leaders or supernatural beings (i.e. classic religious traditions.). Utilitarians think that what makes morality be true or justified is the contribution it makes to human (and perhaps non-human) beings.

Jeremy Bentham was a hedonist. According to hedonism, the only thing that is good in itself is pleasure (or happiness). Bentham's Principle of Utility that stated that "*the greatest happiness for the greatest number is the measure of right and wrong*". Hedonists do not deny that many different kinds of things can be good, including food, friends, freedom, and many other things, but hedonists see them as "instrumental" goods that are valuable only because they play a role in producing pleasure or happiness. Pleasure and happiness, however, are "intrinsic" goods, meaning that they are good in themselves and not because they produce some further valuable thing. Likewise, on the negative side, a lack of food, friends, or freedom is instrumentally bad because it produces pain, suffering, and unhappiness; but pain, suffering and unhappiness are intrinsically bad, i.e. bad in themselves and not because they produce some further bad thing.

### **Why might utilitarianism fail to be useful in the following situations?**

- 1. A group of 10 people wanted to beat up one person**
- 2. You have one spare ticket to Thorpe Park. Two friends both say it would make them very happy to go.**
- 3. You try to make a friend happy by giving them chocolate. You don't know it but it turns out they are allergic.**

### **Do your own research to answer to these questions**

- 1. Define the following terms;**
  - a. Consequentialist**
  - b. Deontological**
  - c. Agent-centred ethics**
- 2. Which of the above terms describes utilitarianism? Why?**
- 3. What is hedonism?**
- 4. Who is Peter Singer? What does he add/change to the theory of utilitarianism?**
- 5. Having thought about the two tasks, do you think that utilitarianism is a good ethical theory?**

**Task. Explain why/why not in no more than 500 words. Bring your work with you in September.**