

# Revision: Ethics and Morality

**Absolute morality**—This is the belief that if an action is right or wrong, it is always right or wrong, no matter what the circumstances or consequences.

**Relative morality**—This is the belief that an action can sometimes be wrong but in other circumstances it may be right depending on the circumstances or consequences

**Humanism** - Humanists have a positive view of Humans and think we can make our own moral decisions based on reason, personal experience and history. They do not believe in God, an afterlife or Holy Books.

**Christianity and the Golden Rule**—The story of the Sheep and Goats told by Jesus teaches that if a person is hungry you should feed them and if you do this then it is like you are doing it for God. The Golden Rule teaches that we should treat others as we would want to be treated. When Jesus was asked:  
36 “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” 37 Jesus replied: “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” Matthew 22: 36-7

**Secular Golden Rule**—The Golden Rule. About 2,500 years ago the great Chinese thinker, Confucius, said ‘Do not do to others what you would not like for yourself’.

**Criticism of the Golden Rule**—One criticism of the Golden Rule is that it doesn’t take into account people’s likes and dislikes. Sometimes people don’t want to be treated in the way you want to be treated. They want to be treated in the way THEY want to be treated.

**Consequentialists**—Consequentialists claim that an action is morally right if the consequences or outcome of the action is of benefit to others.

**Intentionalists** -Intentionalists believe that the action is right or wrong based in the intention or motivation of a person who does it regardless of the actual outcome or consequences

**Teleology** - moral theory based on ‘telos’ or ends or consequences.

**Utilitarianism** - Jeremy Bentham devised this theory. He argued that all human beings were motivated by pleasure and pain, and so he can be called a hedonist. (hedone is Greek for Pleasure). *‘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. Pain and happiness identified what we should or shouldn’t do.

**Principle of Utility**—To help people understand what Bentham was trying to explain in determining what is moral or right he developed the UTILITY principle. The rightness or wrongness of an action is determined by its ‘utility’ or usefulness. An action is useful if it generates happiness rather than pain.

**Greatest Happiness Principle**- ‘An action is right if it produces the greatest good for the greatest number’ or ‘An action is right if it produces the greatest happiness or least pain or sadness for the majority or people.

**Hedonic Calculus**—Bentham developed something called the Hedonic Calculus which can be used to weigh up the pain and pleasure generated by available moral actions to find the best option. It considers 7 factors such as Its duration- how long it will last. Its purity – whether it will be followed by pains rather than more happiness. Its extent – the number of people who will be affected by it.

**Bentham and Equality**—Bentham **believed in equality** – this was a **really radical idea at the time**. He believed that all people, men, women, rich or poor, whatever background, whatever nationality, whatever skin colour were all equal. Bentham said that one person’s happiness was to count as equal to another

**Strengths of Utilitarianism:** Utilitarianism is fair. Every person is worth the same *'Each person is to count for one, and no person for more than one'*. Bentham. No actions are forbidden so you can always act in a really difficult or extreme situation e.g. like in a war. Considering the majority works well in governing a country. Bentham aimed to bring social reform. He aimed to help the majority of people who were poor and not treated well in society at the time. Happiness is valued by most people. *'It seems reasonable to link morality with the pursuit of happiness and the avoidance of pain and misery, and this connection would receive popular support'*. (Robert Bowie)

**Weaknesses of Utilitarianism:** Utilitarianism requires the **need to predict future consequences** and this always lacks certainty. Hume the famous philosopher pointed out that people may suffer 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> hand over consequences that appeared positive at first. We have special duties and responsibilities towards our family and friends over that of a stranger. We cannot be objective or impartial (not favouring someone) in the way we need to be to follow Utilitarianism. The minority matter as well. *'it guarantees nothing for minorities'* (Robert Bowie). No action is forbidden but some actions are simply morally wrong- P. Pettit (a scholar) argued that it could justify murder or other horrendous acts if it was seen to bring about the greatest happiness for the greatest number.

**Mill's Utilitarianism:** Decisions should be based on the quality of happiness rather than quantity to prevent the minority being abused. Mill famously said ***'It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied'***. In other words it was better to find the pleasures of the mind tricky and frustrating at times that to just follow bodily pleasures like eating, drinking and sleeping as animals can do that! Mill believed that Utilitarianism did not exclude religion it was not a 'godless doctrine' but that if God was loving then God would want happiness for his creation and therefore Utilitarianism and God sought the same thing.

**Higher Pleasures**—of the Mind

**Lower Pleasures** - of the body.

**Deontology** - from the Greek 'deon' meaning duty. Moral actions are right or wrong in themselves.

**Kantian Deontology** - Kant proposed perhaps the most famous deontological theory.

**Moral Law**—Kant believed that there was a moral law that we can discover through reason. We should follow the moral law to carry out moral actions.

**Duty** - our motivation for actions should be our duty—our duty was to follow the moral law and we discovered the moral law by using our reason.

**Reason** -- our ability to think things through and make moral decisions.

**Universal Law**—Kant argues an action is right if it can be universalised and applied to everyone.

**People as Ends in themselves**— Kant believed that people should only be treated as an end not as a means to an end. They shouldn't be used for our benefit.

**The Categorical Imperative**—this is what Kant says should determine moral decisions. This is a rule or imperative that doesn't change. Two of the formulations are the universal law and people as ends in themselves.

**Strengths of deontology:** People are not exploited or used. They are valued in and of themselves. This is real justice *'Justice is always an absolute, even if the majority of people do not benefit'* Tyler and Reid There are clear rules for morality. *'It recognises the value of moral absolutes that do not change with time or culture. Tyler and Reid. Morality is based on reason which doesn't shift or change like emotions do. This makes it accessible to all human beings because it appeals to reason alone.'* Clarke Consequences are hard to predict so duty is a better basis.

**Weaknesses of deontology:** The consequences do matter, they are what affects us. *'Only consequences have a real effect on human well-being'* Tyler and Reid. Sometimes such as in times of war we may need to use some people as a means to an end to help the majority. *'A government can't sacrifice a few for the many.....such a sacrifice is politically necessary for the good of the majority'*. Bowie We cannot get rid of our emotions when we make decisions. Kant rejects acting out of compassion (Bowie). We are motivated by more than duty.

# Revision Activities: Ethics and Morality

Draw a line between the correct term and its meaning

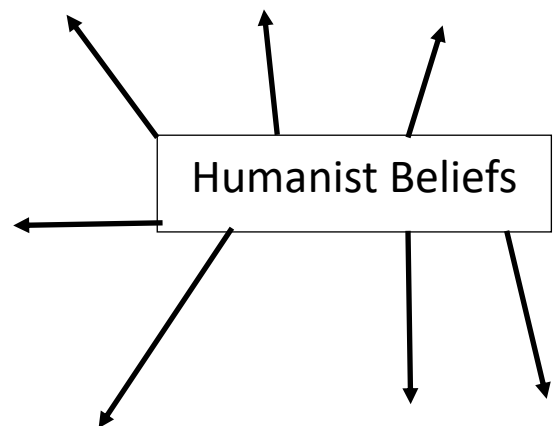
## Key Terms:

## Meaning

Absolute morality:	Non-religious
Relative morality:	Moral theory based on duty. Actions are right in themselves
Secular:	Positive view of Humanity, moral ideas based on reason & experience.
Humanist:	Moral theory based on ends or consequences
Deontology:	Moral rules are absolute and do not change.
Teleology:	Moral rules change depending on the situation.

## 5 Facts about Bentham's Utilitarianism

- \* Based on the quantity of Happiness
- \*
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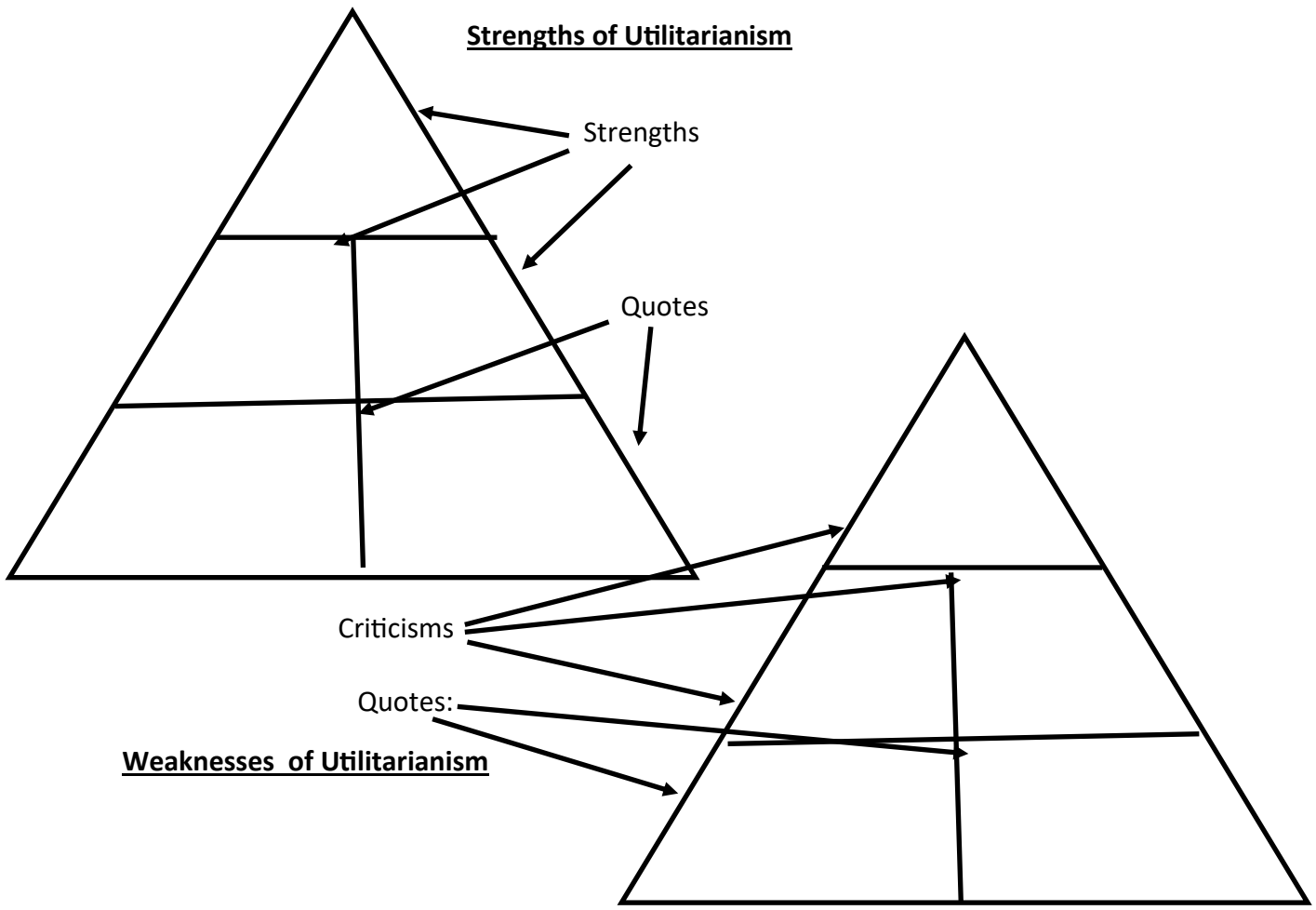
Mill's Utilitarianism	Higher Pleasures	Lower Pleasures
Definition:		
Example:		

## Golden Rule

Secular Version:

Christian Version

Criticism:



Kant's Deontology:

The Moral Law:

Reason:

Duty:

Categorical Imperative

Universal Law

People as Ends

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