

Utilitarianism

- “Given our present perspective, it is amazing that Christian ethics down through the centuries could have accepted almost unanimously the sententious doctrine that “the end does not justify the means.” We have to ask now, “If the end does not justify the means, what does?” The answer is obvious, “Nothing!” (Joseph Fletcher, *Moral Responsibility* (1967) cited from *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, James Rachels

New Approach to Ethics

- David Hume (1711-1776), Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) revolutionized ethics.
- The 18 and 19 centuries were a period of great ferment. Industrial revolution, the French Revolution, the American independence, the American Civil War, etc.
- The beginning of the end of slavery and the institution of monarchy

Morality – not about God

- Jeremy Bentham argued that morality was not about pleasing God but an attempt to bring about maximum happiness to the maximum number of people
- Therefore, the ultimate moral principle is the principle of Utility, which promotes the happiness of the parties concerned.
- Freedom from pain

John Stuart Mill

- J. S. Mill, the son of James Mill, a friend and protege of Bentham
- Mill emphasized the Greatest Happiness Principle – an existence as free as possible from pain, and as rich as possible in enjoyments
- Gone from this definition of morality are the reference to God, Commandments and duties

Social reformers

- The utilitarians wanted to reform the English society of the times.
- They made a ever-lasting impact on two issues that interest us even today: 1. Euthanasia and 2. Animal rights
- The utilitarians were the first to urge people to treat animals humanely.

Euthanasia

- The case of Matthew Donnelly
 - Donnelly was an x-ray physicist who developed cancer after working with x-rays for over 30 years
 - Donnelly lost a part of his jaw, his upper lip, his nose, and his left hand, and two fingers from his right hand
 - Donnelly begged his three brothers to kill him since he had utmost a year to live

Donnelly-Euthanasia

- Donnelly's two brothers refused to take his life.
- But Harold, the third brother, shot Donnelly to death.
- This is a true story.
- Initially, the Christian tradition did not allow any form of killing. Later, allowance was made during the times of war and capital punishment for criminal offences. For the Church, “the intentional killing of innocent people is always wrong.”

Thou Shall Not Kill

- This particular commandment has influenced the Western moral sentiment more than any other theory for the past two millennia.
- Utilitarianism takes a completely different approach. What is the quotient of happiness on the part of Matthew Donnelly?
- Matthew's death would lessen his pain infinitely. Hence for the utilitarians, Harold's action is noble and permissible.

Should euthanasia be made legal

- Bentham was also trained in law. So, the moral basis of euthanasia should be translatable into a legal tenet.
- Bentham thought that the utilitarian principle of utility would be a valuable guide to the legislators and ordinary people.
- Law must not impede into people's individual rights such as freedom to consensual sex. These laws only diminish happiness.