



A school project on Utilitarianism

A short introduction to the Philosophy of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill

It is the final week of school before the summer holidays and a group of students have been working on a Philosophy project throughout the year. As a conclusion of their project, they decided to organise a short Theatre Play for their classmates and friends.

Their teacher has been helping them to write the script and make sure their philosophy-related commentary is accurate, while the other students and their friends helped them to create their costumes.

The roles of the Theatre Play are:

Doris: Jeremy Bentham

Natasa: John Stuart Mill

Soteris: Student (acting as himself)

Mazen: The Storyteller

Louiza: Class president (acting as herself)

It is now the day of the Theatre Play and all the students are very anxious to play their role and help their friends learn about Utilitarianism. And the Theatre Play begins...

Storyteller: Good afternoon, dear friends. Please grab a snack and a glass of juice and take your seats. As you know, a huge argument broke out in our school, as the students cannot decide which Greek island to visit during our summer school trip, and they have invited two well-known philosophers to help them. Please, dear friends, give your warmest applause for Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill.

Bentham and Mill: Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for inviting us to your school.

Bentham: How can we help you?

Soteris: Well, we can't reach a mutual decision about which island to visit for our summer school trip and we are hoping you can help us make a decision that will make everyone happy.

Mill: I see, so it's a situation where individual pleasure and group pleasure cannot be reached with one single choice.

Louiza: The actual problem is that although we have agreed on a destination, the island of Icaria, some students claim that their opinion and needs have not been taken into consideration!



Soteris: That's unfair! It is the majority of students that have expressed their concerns about Icaria. It is a beautiful island, and it would certainly be very nice to visit some of its local summer festivals, but it is also very similar to what we saw last summer when we visited Santorini. All we said was that we wanted to do something different.

Louiza: So, what do you want to do?

Soteris: I don't know. We need to discuss this, but you haven't really asked all of the students what they think about Icaria.

Mill: Wait a minute. So how did you reach this decision Louiza?

Louiza: I looked into some islands that have nice beaches and are quiet and I thought that Icaria would be a nice option, so I talked to the school principal about this idea. Then, I asked the other students if they would like to visit Icaria and they seemed happy with the option.

Bentham: So, if Icaria will give you all pleasure and make you happy, what is the problem?

Soteris: The problem is that Louiza is the Class President, and she made this decision because her friends are fascinated by the idea of visiting Icaria. But there are many students who were not asked and did not have the option to participate in the decision-making process. So, now we feel unhappy.

Bentham: Okay, this is indeed a problem. Let's discuss this issue in terms of Utilitarianism, a field in Philosophy that studies morals and values and how these affect our decisions.

The Storyteller: Utilitarianism is a moral theory in which the division of actions between right and wrong depends on their effects or consequences. Utilitarians believe that the purpose of morality is to maximize happiness and pleasure while minimizing pain and unhappiness. In other words, a certain action can be considered right if it results in happiness and pleasure, but it is considered wrong if it leads to unhappiness or pain, not only to the person performing the action but also to all those impacted by it. Utilitarianism stands in direct contrast to egoism, which is the view that each person should pursue their own self-interest, even if it means harming others. Our guests today, Bentham and Mill, are the founders of Utilitarianism.



Bentham: Exactly, I believe that the moral value of an act is purely determined by the amount of pleasure and happiness it produces. The greater the amount of pleasure, the more moral the act is. So, for Louiza and all the students who agree with her, going to Icaria will offer them pleasure and happiness and it is therefore a moral act.

Soteris: And what about the students who disagree with her?

Bentham: Throughout my work on Utilitarianism and Philosophy my focus has been on the individual, so I don't judge a decision or an action solely based on the potential injustice it might cause to a group of people. I concern myself with how much pleasure it will bring to the individual making this decision or action. To me, happiness and pleasure are synonymous and can be quantified by the joy they bring to one or more individuals.

But now, being here with you I don't want some of you to be happy and some to be unhappy. So maybe my dear friend Mill could explain his own understanding of Utilitarianism.

Mill: Yes. Indeed, I disagree with the way Bentham expresses happiness and pleasure. I believe that there are higher and lower pleasures. Higher pleasures are those that require mental faculties that only educated humans have the ability to obtain, while lower pleasures are bodily pleasures that both animals and humans can experience. Therefore, higher pleasures are more valuable than lower pleasures because they have this form of 'intrinsic superiority'.

So, in your case Louiza, you should also consider the general happiness of all the students and not just what will make you and your friends happy. I think that if you try to satisfy the needs of all your classmates the satisfaction you will feel afterwards will offer a higher level of pleasure to you and thus your decision will be a moral one!

Louiza: Okay, I think you're right. It was never my intention to make the other students unhappy. It will be much nicer if all of us are happy during our summer trip.

Soteris: I agree, it would be an amazing experience that will give us all a lot of pleasure if we see that our classmates are as happy as we are during our holidays. How about we consider keeping Icaria as our primary destination, while also planning extra activities that can cater to the diverse interests of the other students?

Mill: That's a great suggestion.

Bentham: You might consider organizing a day trip to Fourni, a complex of islands near Icaria. There, you could explore the Fourni shipwrecks, providing a unique opportunity for all of you. With more than 50 shipwrecks recently discovered around Fourni, Diving there will enable students to discover an ancient world beneath the sea.

Soteris: This is a lovely idea!

Louiza: I agree. Let's start planning our upcoming trip. Thank you for your help, dear Bentham and Mill.



And this is how the Theatre Play ends. The audience gave a big applause to the students, and they started discussing Utilitarianism and Philosophy.