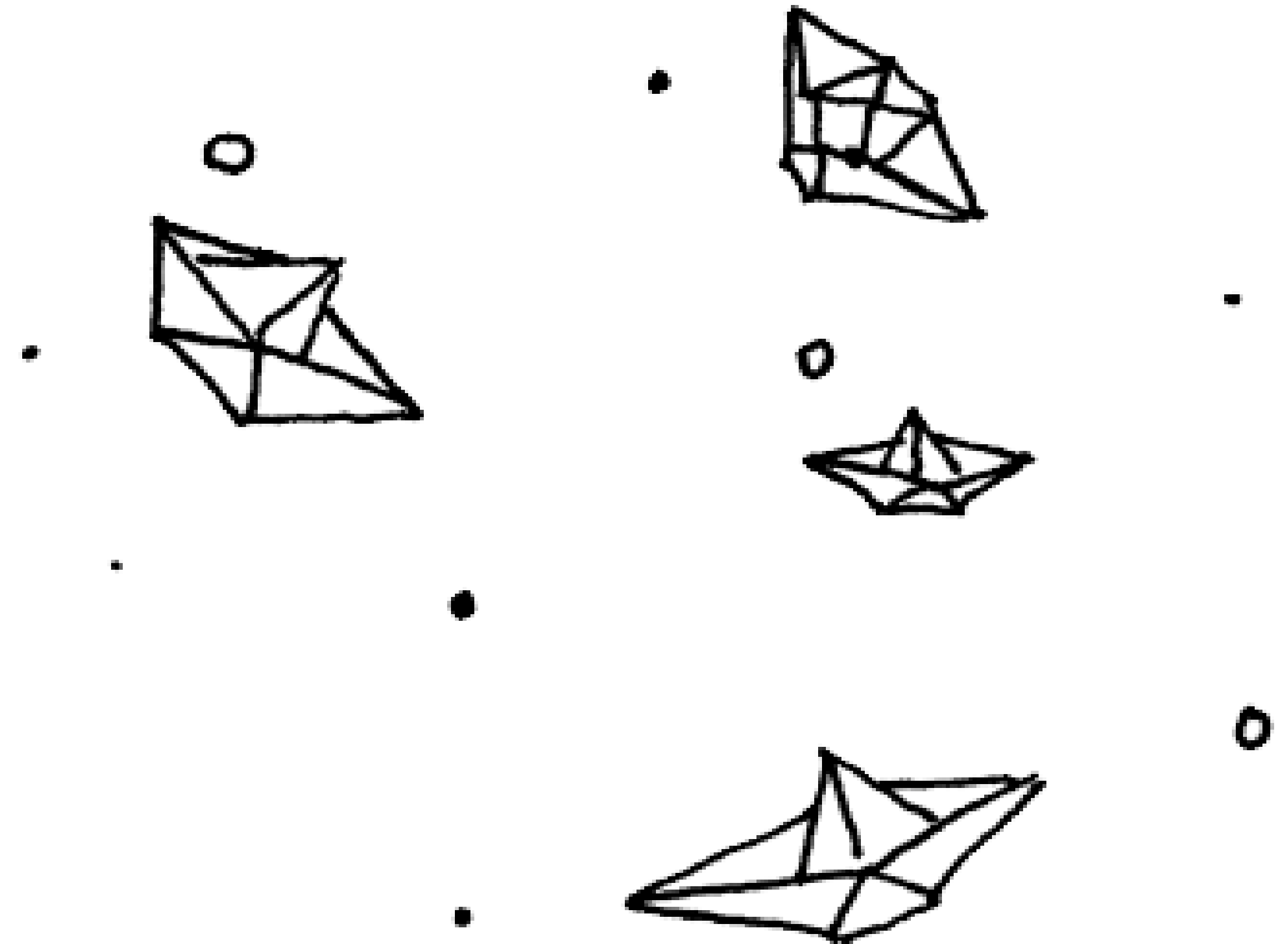


Ethics | Class 4

Utilitarianism, deontology and contemporary moral dilemmas.
Reason, happiness and duty.



—

How do you usually make decisions?

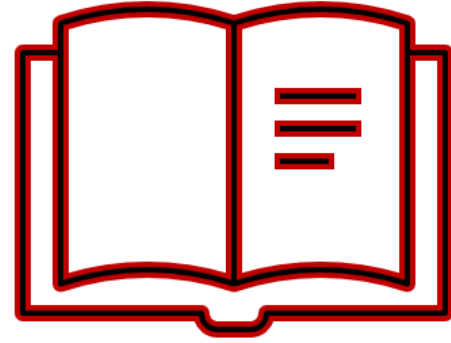
Who was Jeremy Bentham?

(1748–1832) - An interesting chap...

And a **Utilitarian** to the end!

- **Pleasure and pain** guide our moral action
- The **principle of utility** (taken as aggregate) allows us to guide our choices
- We act morality through **sanctions** (internal) and external) ones
- The government should look to maximize utility.





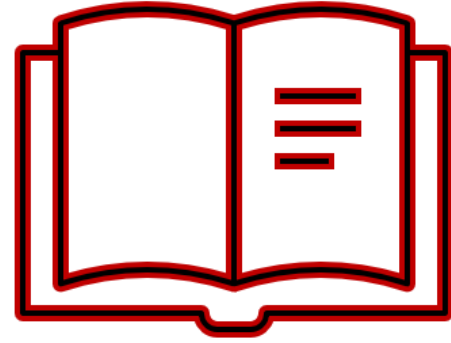
Reading Bentham

An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation (1781)

*I. 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. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne.*

*They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think: every effort we can make to throw off our subjection, will serve but to demonstrate and confirm it. In words a man may pretend to abjure their empire: but in reality he will remain. subject to it all the while. **The principle of utility recognizes this subjection, and assumes it for the foundation of that system, the object of which is to rear the fabric of **felicity** by the hands of reason and of law.** Systems which attempt to question it, deal in sounds instead of sense, in caprice instead of reason, in darkness instead of light*

(Chapter I: 14)



Reading Bentham

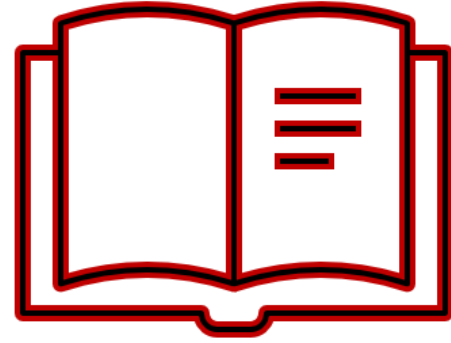
An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation (1781)

By the **principle of utility** is meant that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever. according to the tendency it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question: or, what is the same thing in other words to promote or to oppose that happiness.

I say of every action whatsoever, and therefore not only of every action of a private individual, but of every measure of government

(Chapter I: 14)

What is the principle of utility?



Reading Bentham

An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation (1781)

Small note – beyond the action, consequences matter.

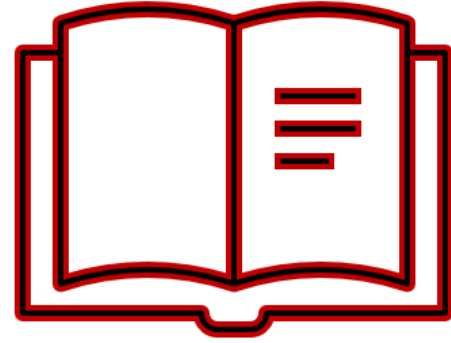
II. The general tendency of an act is more or less pernicious, according to the **sum total of its consequences**: that is, according to the difference between the sum of such as are good, and the sum of such as are evil.

III. It is to be observed, that here, as well as henceforward, wherever consequences are spoken of, such only are meant as are material [or of importance].

IV. To a number of persons, with reference to each of whom to the value of a pleasure or a pain is considered, **it will be greater or less, according to seven circumstances**:

1. Its intensity.
2. Its duration.
3. Its certainty or uncertainty.
4. Its propinquity or remoteness.
5. Its fecundity.
6. Its purity.
7. Its extent;

(Chapter VII: 61)



Reading Bentham

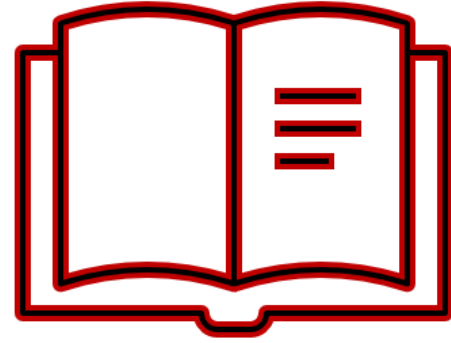
An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation (1781)

What counts as pleasure, and what counts as pain?

*To pleasure, whether it be called **good** (which is properly the cause or instrument of pleasure) or profit (which is distant pleasure, or the cause or instrument of, distant pleasure,) or convenience, or advantage, benefit, emolument, happiness, and so forth:*

*to pain, whether it be called **evil**, (which corresponds to good) or mischief, or inconvenience. or disadvantage, or loss, or unhappiness, and so forth.*

(Chapter IV: 33)



Reading Bentham

An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation (1781)

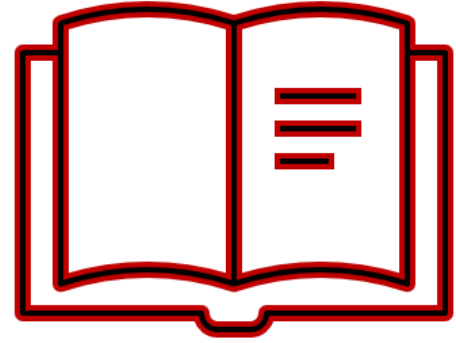
Individual and Collective Utility

VI. An action then may be said to be conformable to then principle of utility, or, for shortness sake, to utility, (meaning with respect to the community at large) when the tendency it **has to augment the happiness of the community** is greater than any it has to diminish it.
(Chapter I: 15)

The **community is a fictitious body**, composed of the individual persons who are considered as constituting as it were its members. The interest of the community then is, what is it?—the sum of the interests of the several members who compose it.
(Chapter I: 15)

I. The business of government is to promote the **happiness of the society**, by **punishing** and rewarding. That part of its business which consists in punishing, is more particularly the subject of penal law. In proportion as an act tends to disturb that happiness, in proportion as the tendency of it is pernicious, will be the demand it creates for punishment. What happiness consists of we have already seen: enjoyment of pleasures, security from pains.

(Chapter VII: 61)



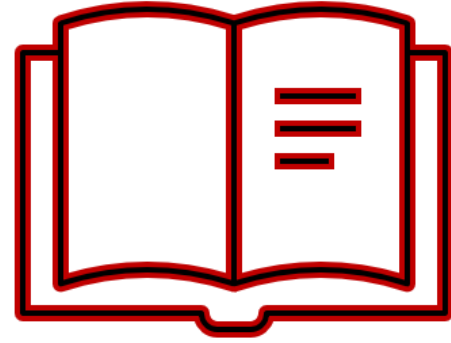
Reading Bentham

An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation (1781)

Why the principle of utility? Bentham gives us some hints...

*“By the natural constitution of the human frame, on most occasions of their **lives men in general embrace this principle, without thinking of it:** if not for the ordering of their own actions, yet for the trying of their own actions, as well as of those of other men. ” (Chapter I: 16)*

“10. Admitting any other principle than the principle of utility to be a right principle, a principle that it is right for a man to pursue; admitting (what is not true) that the word right can have a meaning without reference to utility, let him say whether there is any such thing as a motive that a man can have to pursue the dictates of it: if there is, let him say what that motive is, and how it is to be distinguished from those which enforce the dictates of utility: if not, then lastly let him say what it is this other principle can be good for? ” (Chapter I: 18)



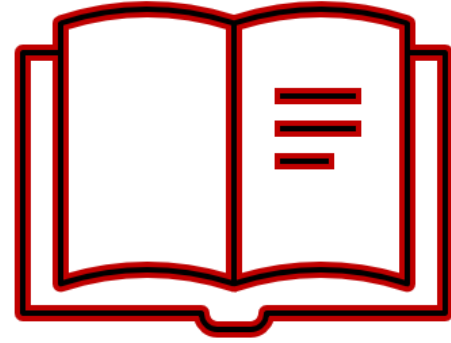
Reading Bentham

An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation (1781)

Take his view of the principle of sympathy (of being partial)

*“It is often affirmed that utilitarianism renders men cold and unsympathising; that it chills their moral feelings towards individuals; that it makes them regard only the dry and hard consideration of the consequences of actions, not taking into their moral estimate the qualities from which those actions emanate. If the assertion means that they do not allow their judgment respecting the rightness or wrongness of an action to be influenced by their opinion of the qualities of the person who does it, this is a complaint not against utilitarianism, but against **having any standard of morality at all;** for certainly no known ethical standard decides an action to be good or bad because it is done by a good or a bad man, still less because done by an amiable, a brave, or a benevolent man, or the contrary”*

(Chapter I: 21)



Reading Bentham

An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation (1781)

*II. There are four distinguishable **sources from which pleasure and pain are in use to flow:** considered separately they may be termed the physical, the political, the moral and the religious:*

and inasmuch as the pleasures and pains belonging to each of them are capable of giving a binding force to any law or rule of conduct, they may all of them termed sanctions

(Chapter III: 27)



RECAP

Bentham and Utilitarianism

Hedonism

Psychological Hedonism

Individuals always tend to seek **pleasure** and avert **pain**

Ethical Hedonism

Individuals **ought** to seek pleasure and avert pain

- The principle of utility determines whether an action is right or wrong. In Bentham utility is defined by the tendency of an action in augmenting pleasure and diminishing pain.

- Pleasure leads to happiness.

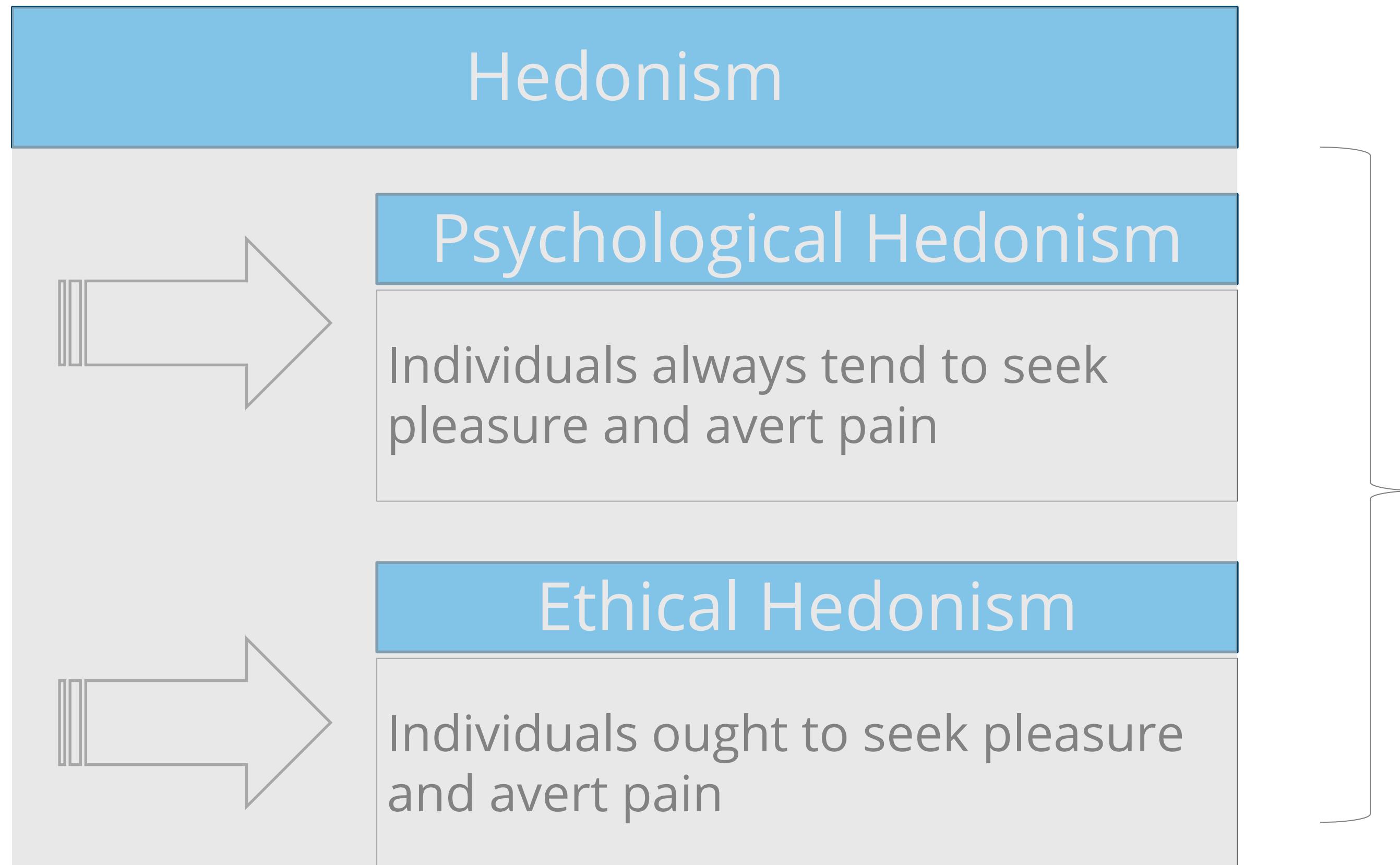
- There are four types of sanctions/sources of pain and pleasure – physical, political, religious and moral.

- The utility principle guides our moral conduct, but also legislation



RECAP

Bentham and Utilitarianism



Utilitarianism

Theory for ethical decision making.

Moral conduct but also public policy should seek to maximize the balance of pleasure and pain for the society as a whole

Bentham's work was important for the discipline of economics

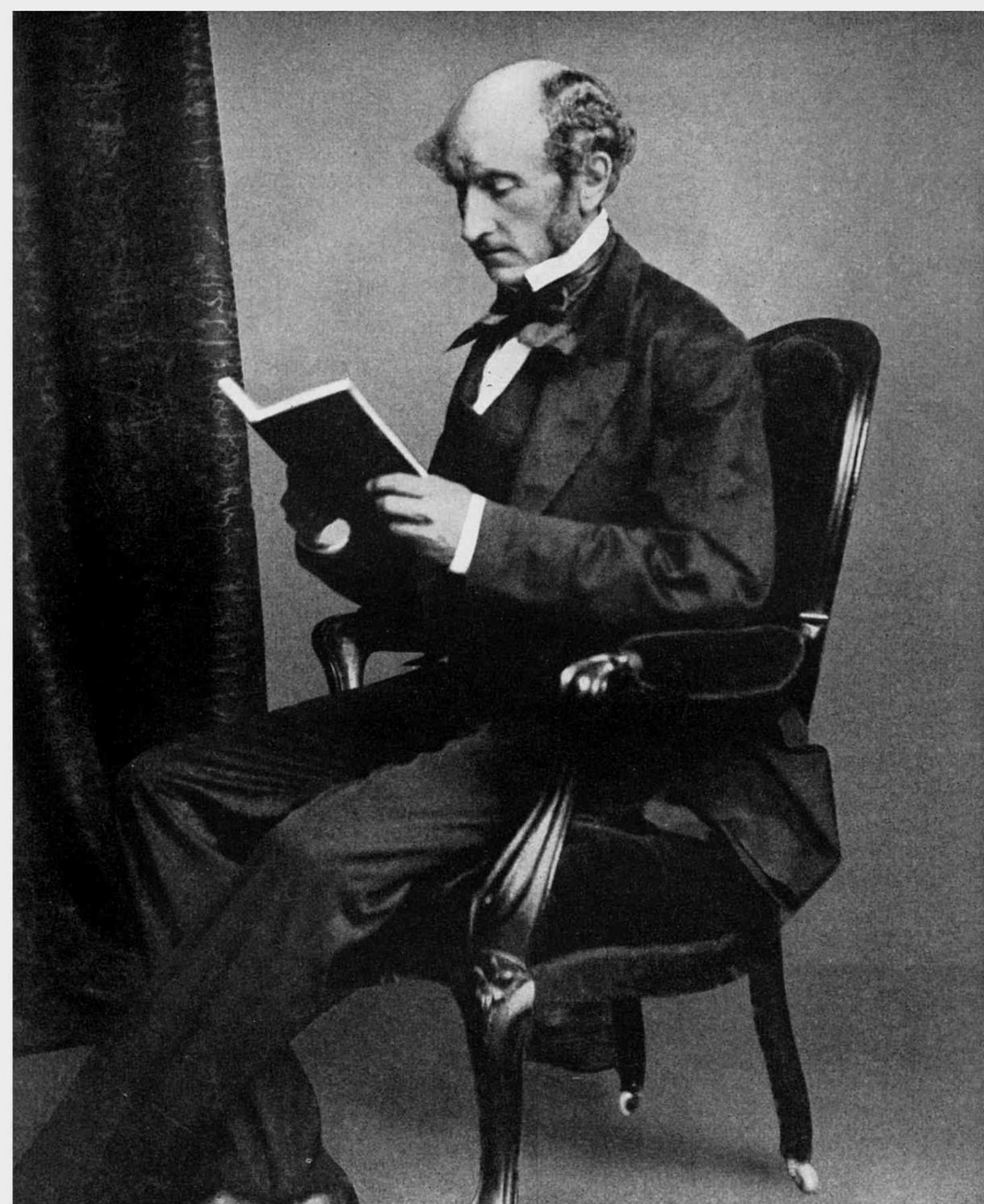
- Idea of utility, and aggregation of interests
- He also developed the theory of marginal utility, important for the legislator to address the uneven distribution of social happiness
- The process we discussed – the felicific calculus – provided the basis for the development of cost-benefit analysis.

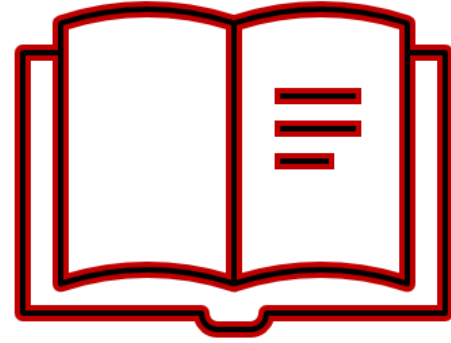


Bentham's work was quite influential, especially to John Stuart Mill (1806–1873)

Three main new ideas

1. **Happiness** as desirable end, will lead us to differentiate between lower faculty and higher faculty pleasures
2. **Utility principle** is justified on the grounds of sympathy with others, and human dignity
3. Government should take a **positive role**





Reading Mill

Utilitarianism (1863)

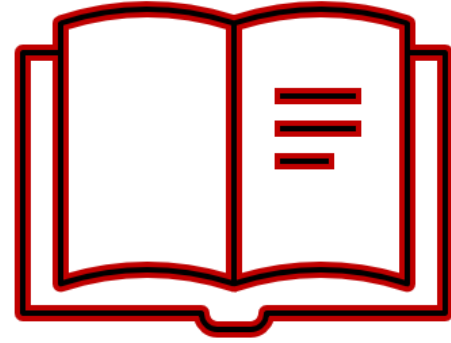
Happiness as the desirable end (I)

*“The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to **promote happiness**, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure.”*

(Chapter 2: 10)

*The utilitarian morality does recognise in human beings the power of sacrificing their own greatest good for the good of others. It only refuses to admit that the sacrifice is itself a good. A **sacrifice which does not increase, or tend to increase, the sum total of happiness, it considers as wasted**. The only self-renunciation which it applauds, is devotion to the happiness, or to some of the means of happiness, of others; either of mankind collectively, or of individuals within the limits imposed by the collective interests of mankind.*

(Chapter 2: 19)



Reading Mill

Utilitarianism (1863)

Happiness as the desirable end (II)

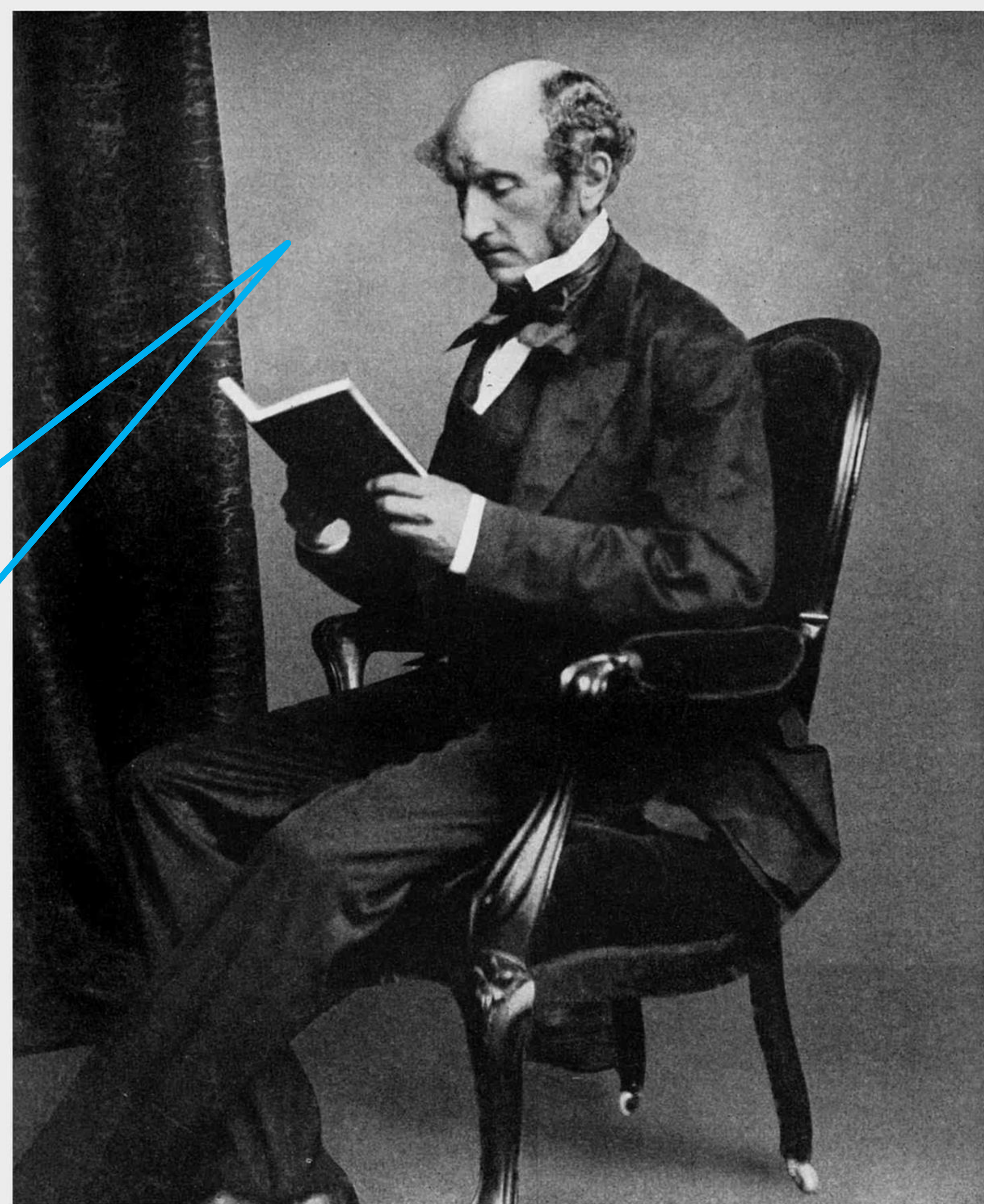
*“Human beings have faculties more elevated than the animal appetites, and when once made conscious of them, do not regard anything as happiness which does not include their gratification (...). But there is no known Epicurean theory of life which does not assign to the pleasures of the **intellect**, of the **feelings** and **imagination**, and of the **moral sentiments**, a much **higher value as pleasures** than to those of mere sensation.*

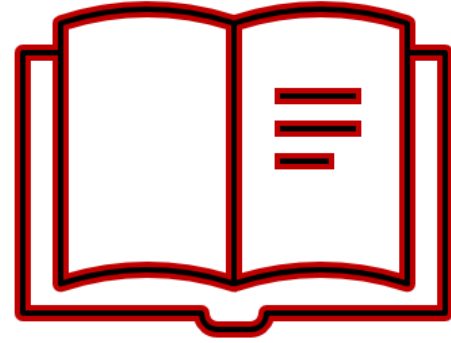
*It must be admitted, however, that utilitarian writers in general have placed the superiority of mental over bodily pleasures chiefly in the greater permanency, safety, uncostliness, etc., of the former—that is, in their circumstantial advantages rather than in their **intrinsic nature**. (...) It is quite compatible with the principle of utility to recognise the fact, that **some kinds of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others**. It would be absurd that while, in estimating all other things, **quality is considered as well as quantity**, the estimation of pleasures should be supposed to depend on quantity alone”*

(Chapter 2: 11)

*It is better to be a **human being dissatisfied** than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied.*

And if the fool, or the pig, are a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question. The other party to the comparison knows both sides





Reading Mill

Utilitarianism (1863)

Justifying the utility principle: Sympathy and Human Dignity

“A being of higher faculties requires more to make him happy, is capable probably of more acute suffering, and certainly accessible to it at more points, than one of an inferior type; but in spite of these liabilities, he can never really wish to sink into what he feels to be a lower grade of existence. We may give what explanation we please of this unwillingness; (...)

*But its **most appropriate appellation is a sense of dignity**, which all human beings possess in one form or other, and in some, though by no means in exact, proportion to their higher faculties, and which is so essential a part of the happiness of those in whom it is strong, that nothing which conflicts with it could be, otherwise than momentarily, an object of desire to them.”*

(Chapter 2: 12)



RECAP

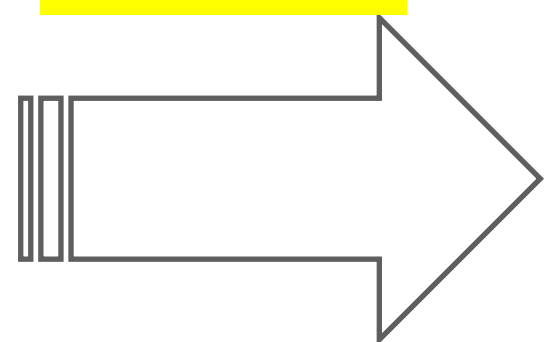
John Stuart Mill and Utilitarianism

How did JSM revise the utilitarian tradition of Bentham?
important counts:

Happiness as the ultimate end
As an “existence” -

Requires bodily functions, which is the exercise of lower faculties

Requires the enjoyment of activities that encourage intellect, moral sentiments and imagination -> **higher faculties**

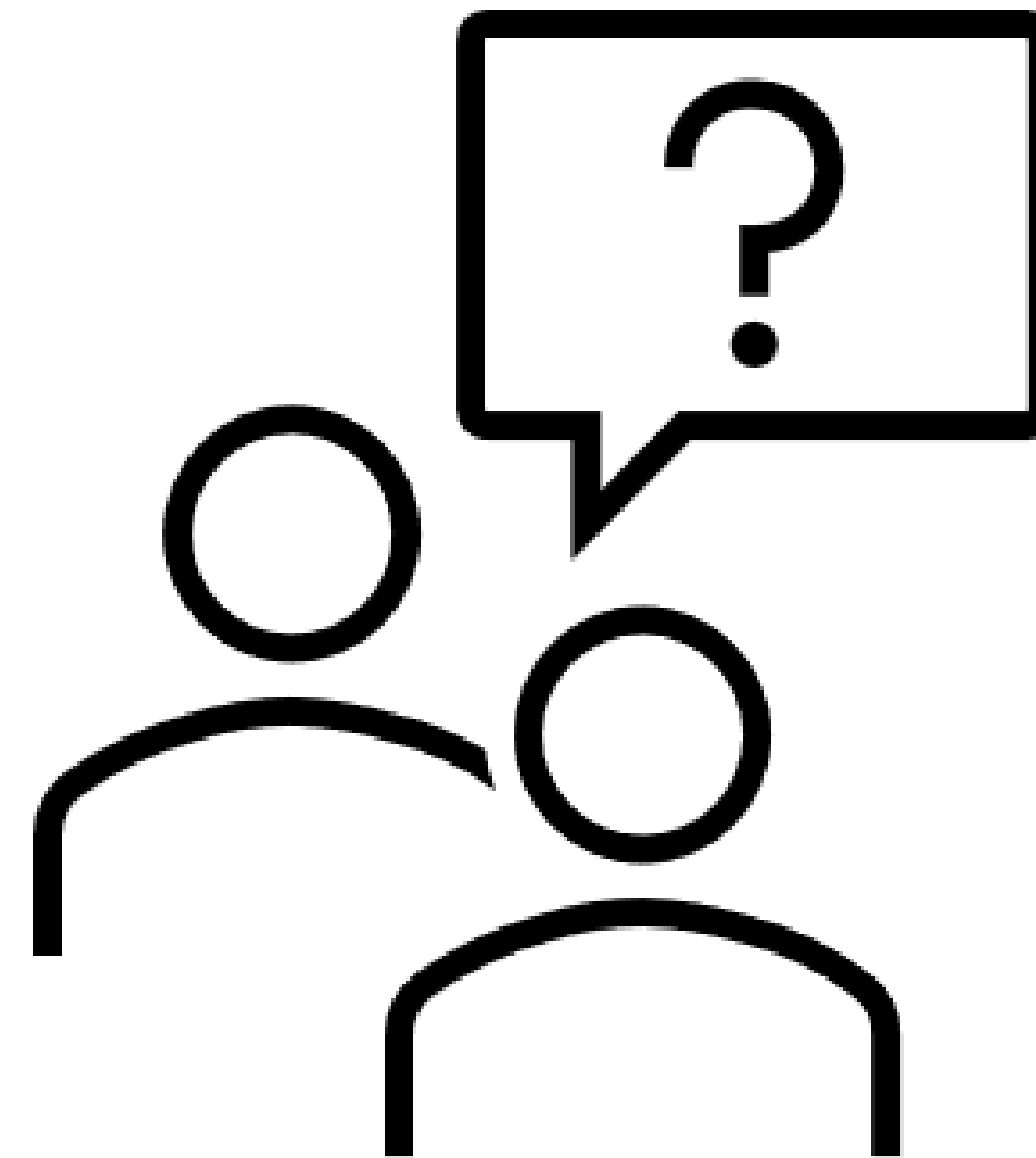


We require more higher faculties activities, because of our **human dignity**

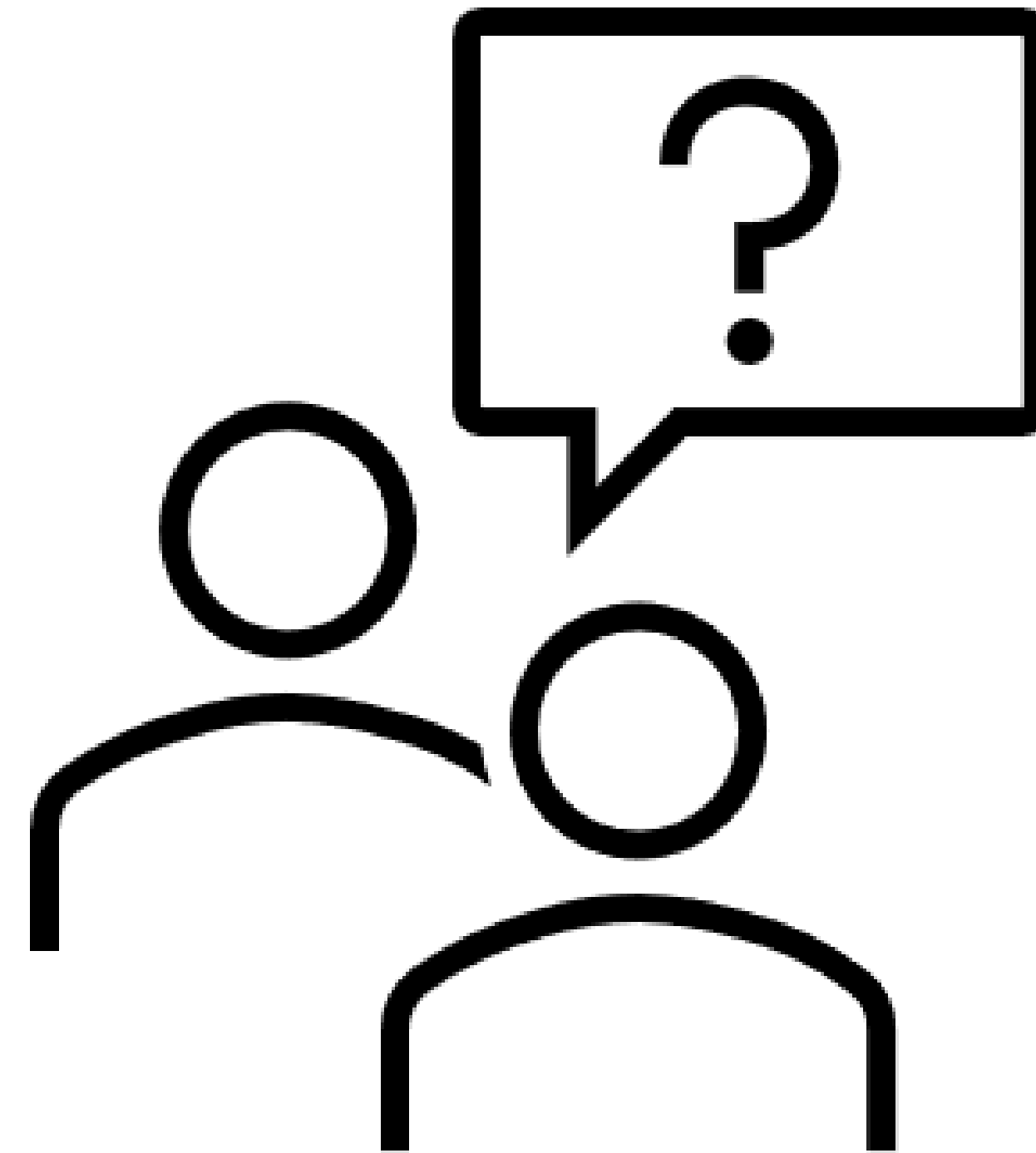
1. Pleasures are rated according to quantity, but also **quality**.
1. Our way of life is guided by the principle of utility, but our choice of higher faculty activities is a result of our sense of dignity (new principle?)
1. The state should have a more positive (active) role, in cultivating our self-regarding concerns (our happiness depends on others being happy too), but also cultivating and providing the means for enjoying higher faculties' activities.

But would you say it is right to enslave just 0,5% of the world's population to rise the vast majority's well-being?

And can we really know the consequences of our actions? Is this calculus/deliberation really possible?



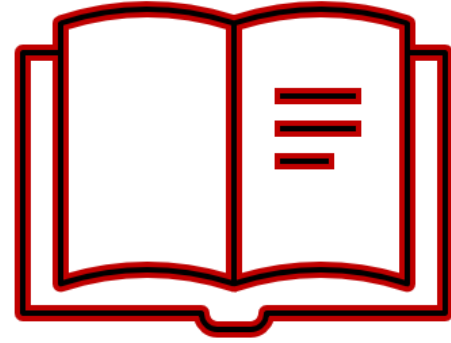
And what about human rights?



Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), reason and the unconditional value of humanity

- The supreme nature and unity of **Reason**
- The idea of the **Categorical Imperative** (CI), and a universal law of morality – derived out of his metaphysics
- His CI is formulated in the (1) universal law of morality, the (2) respect for persons and the (3) principle of autonomy of human beings as legislators of the moral law.
- Kant's CI is a **duty-based theory of ethics** (*deontological*)





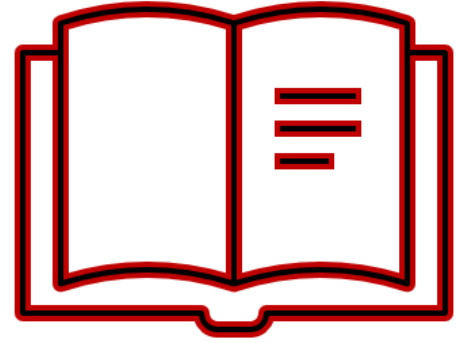
Reading Kant

His first works (1770) and ‘The Critique of Pure Reason’ (1781)

The role of reason and the denial of hedonism

*“So moral philosophy, in as much as it supplies the first principles of critical judgement, is only cognized by the pure intellect and itself belongs to pure philosophy. **And the man who reduced its criteria to the sense of pleasure or pain, Epicurus, is very rightly blamed**, together with certain moderns who have followed him to some extent afar, such men as Shaftesbury and his supporters.”*

(Inaugural Dissertation, 1770 395/59-60)



Reading Kant

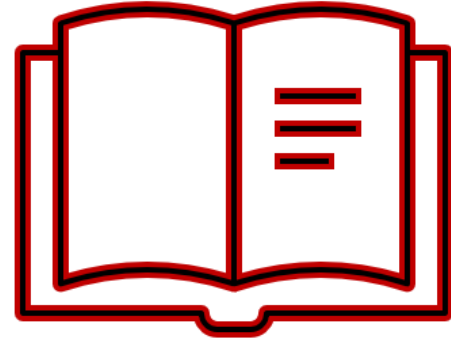
'Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals (1785)

The Hypothetical and the Categorical Imperative

*"Now, all imperatives command either **hypothetically or categorically**. The former represent the practical necessity of a possible action as a means to achieving something else that one wills (or that it is at least possible for one to will). The categorical imperative would be that which represented an action as objectively necessary of itself, without reference to another end.*

*Since every practical law represents a possible action as good and thus as necessary for a subject practically determinable by reason, all imperatives are formulae for the determination of action that is necessary in accordance with the principle of a will which is good in some way. Now, if the action would be **good merely as a means to something else the imperative is hypothetical**; if the action is represented as **in itself good, hence as necessary in a will in itself conforming to reason, as its principle, then it is categorical**"*

(GMM, Section II: 25)



Reading Kant

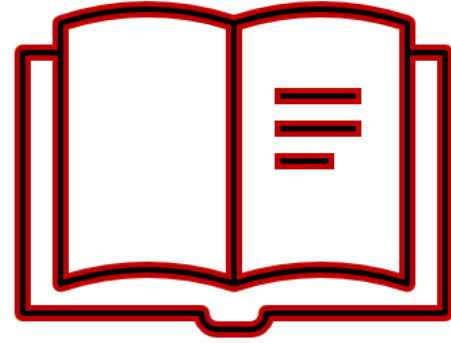
‘Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals (1785)

The three formulations of the Categorical Imperative

(1) “Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time **will that it should become a universal law.**” (GMM, Section II: 31)

(2) “So act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the **same time as an end, never merely as a means.**” (GMM, Section II: 38)

(3) “from this there follows now the third practical principle of the will, as supreme condition of its harmony with universal practical reason, the idea of the will of every rational being as a **will giving universal law**” (GMM, Section II: 39)



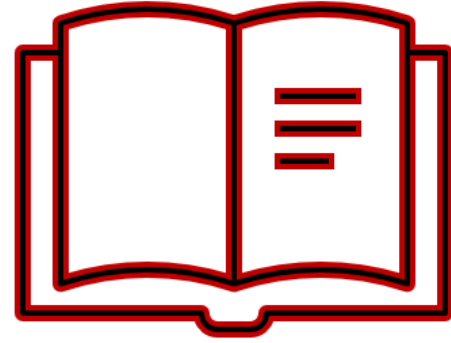
Reading Kant

'Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals (1785)

What sort of obligations do we have to follow?

Duties of **Justice** and Duties of **Virtue**

1. **Perfect duties** to oneself to preserve and **respect the humanity** in one's own person
2. **Imperfect duties** to oneself, to develop one's humanity **intellectually and physically**
3. Duties of **love for others**, to promote their happiness; and
4. Duties of respect for others, including **respect for their rights**.

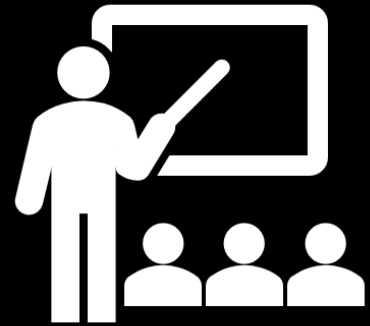


Reading Kant

'Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals (1785)

"This principle of humanity and of every rational creature as an end in itself is the supreme limiting condition on the freedom of the actions of each man [and it is not borrowed from experience]"
(GMM, Section II: 39).

- **Good will** and one who acts because of 'indirect inclination'
- Duty as law ; **universality of law** for rational beings
- **Categorical imperative** is a result of **reason**
- Kant's categorical imperative as a **deontological** theory



RECAP | IN SUMMARY (I)

Consequentialist and Deontological Theories

They share some similarities – kind of a 'natural' result of what had come before

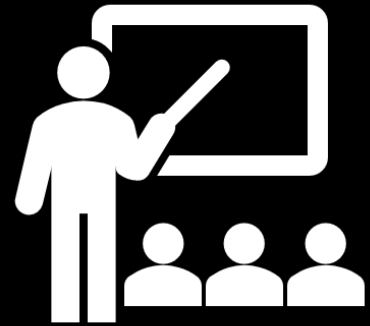
Individual as a rational nature and the agent of morality

Morality derives from reason

Unapologetically liberal – freedom as supreme value – of the will, autonomy of the agents

But... Utilitarianism is a significant break with the existing tradition in Ethics, and with Kantian ethics too!

It's about what is the **best outcome of an action**



RECAP | IN SUMMARY (II)

Consequentialist and Deontological Theories

They differ in important aspects of their views:

The content and grounding for reason.

The principles of morality.

The status of morality – as a sanction?

The status of happiness – unconditional or conditional value

For next class

Read

- The selected excerpts from Aristotle, John Rawls, Amartya Sen, Robert Nozick, Thomas Hobbes, and John Locke on the class slides.
- The selected parts from Michael Sandel's Justice (starting with "The Minimal State" for the chapter on Libertarianism and starting with "Imagining the Perfect Contract" for the Rawls chapter).
- To get more context about Hobbes and Locke, read the three pages from A. MacIntyre's A Short History of Ethics further below (Chapter 12, "The British-Eighteenth Century Argument").