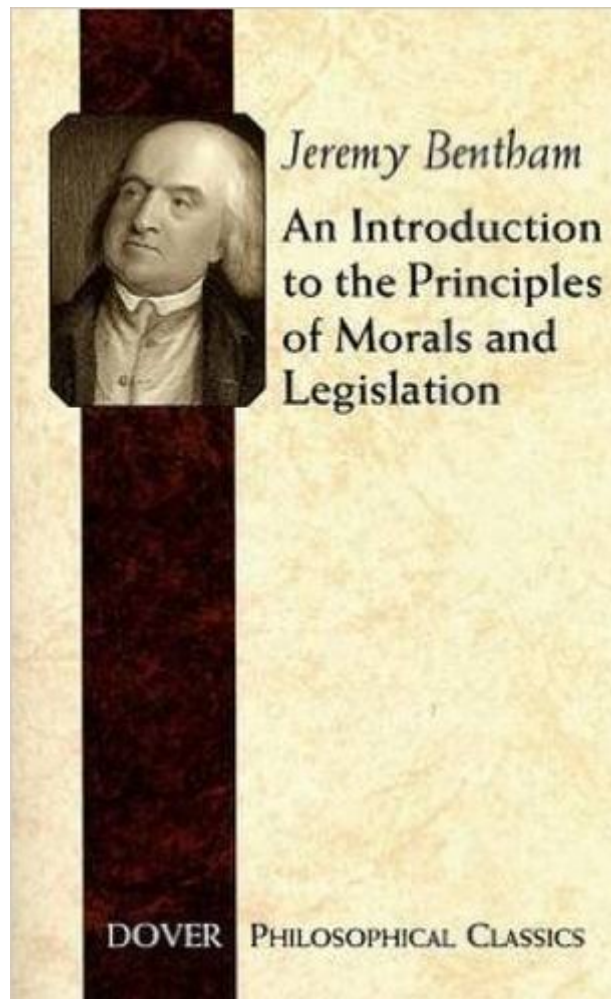


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An Introduction To The Principles Of Morals And Legislation (Dover Philosophical Classics)



Synopsis

First published in 1789, Jeremy Bentham's best-known work remains a classic of modern philosophy and jurisprudence. Its definitions of the foundations of utilitarian philosophy and its groundbreaking studies of crime and punishment retain their relevance to modern issues of moral and political philosophy, economics, and legal theory. Based on the assumption that individuals seek pleasure and avoid pain, Bentham's utilitarian perspective forms a guide to moral decision-making. With the "greatest happiness of the greatest number" as his objective, the author attempts to identify the sources and varieties of pleasure and pain as well as the ways in which they can be measured in assessing moral options. Considerations of intentionality, consciousness, motives, and dispositions support Bentham's arguments. The text concludes with his survey of purpose and the role of law and jurisprudence, a fascinating exercise in the theory of social reform that explores conflicts between the interests of the majority and individual freedom.

Book Information

Series: Dover Philosophical Classics

Paperback: 416 pages

Publisher: Dover Publications (June 5, 2007)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0486454525

ISBN-13: 978-0486454528

Product Dimensions: 5.7 x 0.9 x 8.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 13.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (17 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #465,668 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #18 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Movements > Utilitarianism](#) #127 in [Books > Law > Philosophy](#) #270 in [Books > Law > Legal Theory & Systems > Jurisprudence](#)

Customer Reviews

Jeremy Bentham's Bentham Utilitarianism is essentially based on his desire to move away from the moral philosophy of Judeo-Christian ethics, or the deism of Adam Smith, and move toward a philosophy that could underpin an atheistic perspective. Bentham wants to come up with a decision making calculus which is simultaneously applicable to issues in economics (politics) and ethics (morals). Bentham claims that for all actions there are two distinctly measurable outcomes, pain and pleasure. Bentham comes up with a Principle of Utility (p.1). This essentially boils down to the

observation that positive utility(pleasure) is generated by activities that generate sensations of pleasure while negative utility(pain) is generated by activities which generate sensations of pain. One can approve or disapprove of any action to the extent that it increases happiness(pleasure) or decreases pain. Approve, in Bentham's system, translates as good or right. Disapprove, in Bentham's system, translates as bad or wrong. How is this system implemented? Bentham claims that there are lots(units) of pleasure and pain that all decisionmakers can calculate precisely and exactly. The value of the lots will be more or less depending on the duration, intensity, and certainty of the pleasure. All actions are equally good if the sum of the amounts of pleasure resulting from each action is equal. This is where economists come up with their indifference curve analysis and hedonic calculus. Unfortunately, Bentham fails miserably in his attempt to demonstrate that human decision makers have the capacity to calculate exactly in quantitative terms. He never answers the question, "How do humans actually make the quantitative calculations?", upon which Bentham's entire edifice of decision making is so precariously balanced. He merely asserts it: "...

Jeremy Bentham's ideology on human pursuit of pleasure contains many strengths and weaknesses. Bentham's essay, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, separates the two root drives of human essence into categories of pleasure and pain. Bentham stresses the duality of the human mind's pursuit of pleasure, continuing from subjugation of others for ultimate attainment. He states that humans should not be grouped, due to personal conviction and perspective. Although the individual is part of a community, the individual's own pursuance of pleasure categorizes them as a utility; resulting in the term 'utilitarianism.' Several principles are listed by Bentham to support his argument that humanity has a distinct set of motives to create happiness or malcontent amongst the masses. Bentham relates these principles with empowered political bodies and why they continue to rule. One of Bentham's principles, the principle of sympathy and antipathy, praises the human ability to generally accept certain actions as an impersonal blow. Thus, if a utility does not feel threatened or in error, why relate consequences of actions to personal welfare? In turn, should that individual measure out the consequences of others' actions fearing for their own external welfare? Bentham's perspective on human methodology as a strict functioning environment of social cues has many flaws. Determination of values as 'right' or 'wrong' does not review the complexities of human social environment. Empowerment was not an anti-puritanical event that occurred in society; but a constitution of human need for order.

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