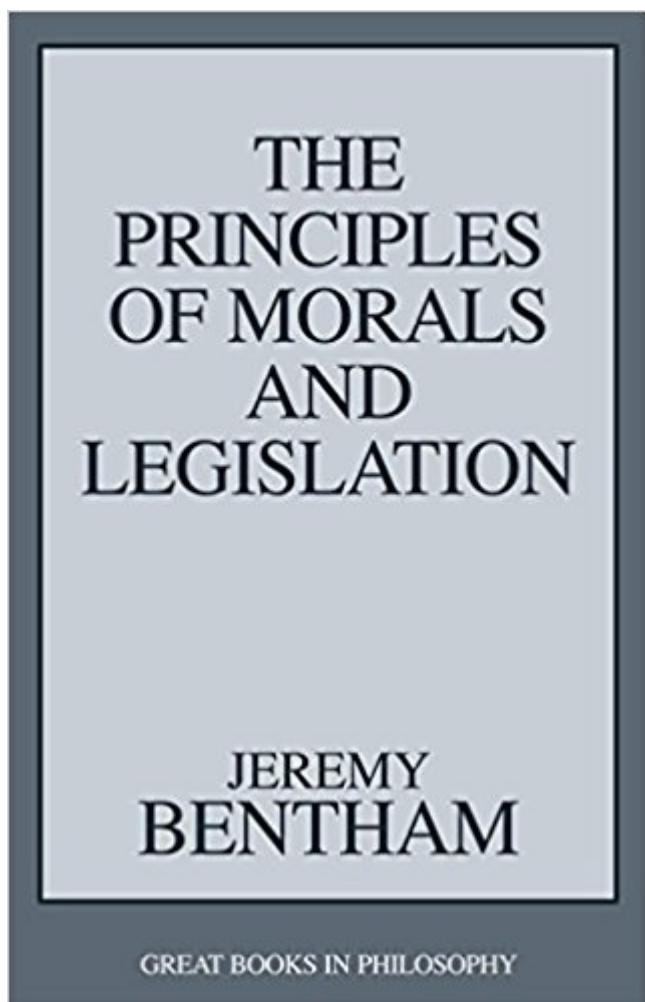


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# The Principles Of Morals And Legislation (Great Books In Philosophy)



## Synopsis

Jeremy Bentham's work on *The Principles of Morals and Legislation* emerges from its historic roots in hedonism and teleology as a scientific attempt to assess the moral content of human action by focusing on its results or consequences. Proceeding from the assumption that human beings desire pleasure (and avoid pain), Bentham's unique perspective, known as utilitarianism, is used to construct a fascinating calculus for determining which action to perform when confronted with situations requiring moral decision-making the goal of which is to arrive at the "greatest happiness of the greatest number." Toward this end, he endeavors to delineate the sources and kinds of pleasure and pain and how they can be measured when assessing one's moral options. Bentham supports his arguments with discussions of intentionality, consciousness, motives, and dispositions. Bentham concludes this groundbreaking work with an analysis of punishment: its purpose and the proper role that law and jurisprudence should play in its determination and implementation. Here we find Bentham as social reformer seeking to resolve the tension that inevitably exists when the concerns of the many conflict with individual freedom. *The Principles of Morals and Legislation* offers readers the rare opportunity to experience one of the great works of moral philosophy, a volume that has influenced the course of ethical theory for over a century.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

JEREMY BENTHAM was born in London on February 15, 1748, to a family of comfortable means.

His was the life of a child prodigy who read Latin at three years of age and at twelve was enrolled in Oxford University, where he received his undergraduate degree at the age of sixteen. Thereafter, he studied law at Lincoln's Inn, Westminster. Inheritances from his parents afforded Bentham the opportunity to pursue a life of study and writing. While in his mid-forties, he dedicated himself to the critical analysis and reform of moral, political, religious, legal, educational, and economic institutions as they existed in England. Though he found the judicial system to be hypocritical and corrupt, Bentham's fascination with the fundamental ideals of the law steered him toward philosophy and science in an effort to develop standards that could ground the social order. His reformist tendencies proved to be a significant factor in the development of his now famous system of ethics known as utilitarianism, wherein human action was to be judged by the amount of pleasure and pain it produced. Bentham's published works include: *A Fragment on Government* (1776), *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1781), *The Rationale of Judicial Evidence* (edited by John Stuart Mill in 1825), and two volumes on *Constitutional Code* (ca. 1830). Bentham died in London on June 16, 1832.

The 2010 paperback is basically a photocopied version, which seems like it was done on a melting photocopier! Many of the pages are barely readable, and there are photocopied notes someone took, which aren't even helpful... I highly recommend purchasing the 1988 version instead! I don't know why such a version is being sold by .

Bentham is much more sophisticated in his thinking than many realize. He is the most important political philosopher of all time.

So a great book for Jeremy Bentham, and work about the utilitarianism system. Always Bentham works it is fantastic and formative.

As expected

**ABSOLUTELY PERFECT IN EVERY WAY**

The works speak for themselves over time, but it was great to be able to have a complete set of his works

Always fun to go back to the classics and see how economic thought has matured or not?? You be the judge of the neoclassics.

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 err, 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. Bentham suggests that "principle is something that points out some external consideration, as a means of warranting and guiding the internal sentiments of approbation and disapprobation"(75). Assertion of principle as influence on human external action suggests a strong moral power present in an individual's everyday life. Perhaps the rebellion of moral principle has an antipathic effect on moral judgement. The pleasure produced by rebellion of principle dictates a return to instinctual roots; excluding the 'civilizing' factor. Bentham's open acknowledgement that asceticism violates the nature laws of human government, and cannot be fully pursued, illustrates the ties between the Catholicism and enlightened despotism. The origin of Catholicism and despotism, according to Bentham, stems from an unrealistic aim to impose a standard of morality on the masses. His criticizing of saints best illustrates an open reaction to the weakness of asceticism. Bentham states that, "though many persons of this class have wielded the reins (sic) of empire, we read of none who have set themselves to work, and made laws of purpose"(73). Unfortunately, his touting of utilitarianism above the principle of asceticism, as a proper way to establish a governing body, is

only comparative with traditional social classification in the eighteenth century. Bentham proposed a new way to establish morality and just governmental action from traditional monarchical rule. The imposed Rule of Right, whereas kings justified rule as eternal over his people and empowered by God, was a shifting environment that came into question in Bentham's lifetime. Utilitarianism provided an answer to strategic social problems that came with new leadership apart from a monarchy. Moral advocating by reformers as something an individual instinctually knows is right, was a key concept in utilitarianism. Therefore, pursuance of pleasure above pain would produce just results in a newly formed government. Pleasure, in the strictest sense, took a prominent place in executive rule over a government. Bentham also writes that good tendency sometimes counteracts pursuance of pleasure in legislative and judicial matters. He best expresses this by writing, "It is not to be expected that this process should be strictly pursued previously to every moral judgement"(88). Considering the objective process of judicial decision as a moral and just environment was revolutionary. Morality, without the ties of asceticism, could and did exist in a ruling environment, ultimately usurping previous ideas that Rule of Right contained eternal, prophetic principle. Bentham's ideas set a cornerstone for other studies of social morality, thus contributing to the new field of sociology. Bentham's idea of human pleasure and pain being either simple or complex seems very generalistic in approach. He suggests that pleasure and pain are bound into simple and complex categories, therefore never transpiring into different classifications. The elementary view on pursuance of pleasure and pain seems vague for a study of the human condition. Bentham writes that, "the simple ones are those which cannot any one of them be resolved into more," creating a moral quandary (90). For example, Bentham's idea that "the end of the law is to augment happiness" is a just principle of government (97). Unfortunately, law must sometimes contain happiness to produce security. Duality of principle is discussed in his writings, but for every dark and light area there is a gray area. Jeremy Bentham pioneered root elements of human motivation and morality. He conceptualized a government that founded itself on pursuance of pleasure as just rule. Character of individuals is attained through positive motivation, but for every individual of good character lies the possibility of bad character. Corruption was possible, and presented itself in many forms throughout human history. Efforts to catalogue unpleasant and pleasant dispositions find that government that is founded on positive principle is always corrupted by human condition. Jeremy Bentham's approach in rediscovery of individual strains, through principles, shed a new light on morality.I hope you enjoy this work as much as I did.

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