I. Classical Utilitarianism
   A. The heart of utilitarian thinking: we are morally obligated to produce the most happiness we can and reduce suffering and unhappiness.
   B. Utilitarianism and Liberalism:
      (1) social policy: thought the same principle (the utilitarian principle) should be employed in social morality as is employed in personal morality. Hence legislation should be directed towards producing the most happiness while reducing suffering in the populace.
      (2) democratic: social policy ought to work for the good of all persons and not just for the upper class.
      (3) progressive: willing to change the status quo, or existing state of affairs. (compare with conservatism: anything but minimal change threatens the stability of society)
      (4) optimistic: human wisdom and effort can improve the lives of everyone.
         (compare with the pessimism of conservatism: we are ignorant of the effects of policy and the implications of change so effort should be minimal.

II. The Utilitarian Principles:
   A. Two simplified versions:
      (1) The Principle of Utility: The morally best alternative is that which produces the greatest net utility, where utility is defined in terms of happiness or pleasure.
      (2) The Greatest Happiness Principle: We ought to do that which produces the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people.
   B. This is a form of consequentialism: whether an action or rule is right or wrong is to be determined solely by looking at its consequences, (as opposed to looking at its motive or the nature of the act itself).
      1. e.g. death penalty: Utilitarian asks: do the consequences of implementing the death penalty maximize the happiness of those in society? Utilitarians do not focus on the nature of the action--they do not ask: is the act of killing another human being itself wrong? Nor do they focus on its motives--they do not ask: can it ever be permissible to act out of revenge?
      2. e.g. saving a person from drowning: the utilitarian believes that saving a person from drowning would be morally right even if he was motivated by the hope of being paid for the sacrifice. The person’s motives do not factor in to the morality of his actions at all, for we ought to look only at the consequences of the action.

III. Cases that Support Utilitarianism
   A. Emergency Room Doctor
   6 accident victims are brought in the e.r. one of whom is worse off then all the others. You can save the one bad case if you put all your effort in, letting the other five die. Or you can let the one bad case die while saving the other 5 who require less attention. Obviously, we would let the bad case die. In so doing, we would be making use of the greatest happiness principle: we’d be maximizing the happiness for those affected by the courses of action. Now, if the bad case had just discovered a cure for cancer, and we needed him alive to learn it, then I think we’d choose to save the bad case. Once again, though, we’d be acting according to the greatest happiness principle.

   C. Happiness: the only intrinsic good
1. Intrinsic goods: classical utilitarians believe that only one thing is valued for its own sake, or valued even though it is not a means to an end: happiness. Thus, we call happiness an intrinsic good, meaning that it is a good in itself and not because it is a means to an end. To the utilitarian, all other things such as education, wealth, friendship etc. are valued because they lead to happiness.

2. Instrumental goods: since all other things which we value are valuable only in so far as they produce happiness, we call them instrumental goods; i.e. they are good because they are instruments for obtaining happiness. (e.g. money, fame etc.)

3. The Governance of Pleasure and Pain: Bentham thought that human beings, along with other creatures, seek pleasure and avoid pain by nature. Hence it is pain and pleasure that is the only source we have for pointing out what we ought to do.

III. How to determine the morally best course of action: The Utilitarian Calculus:
-for any set of possible actions or rules we are to determine which action or rule maximizes the happiness of the most amount of people. After doing so we are morally obligated to take that action or follow that rule. To determine which action or rule maximizes happiness, we must consider the following:
(1) Intensity: the more intense the happiness caused by an action, the better. (cheating on your wife might be a more intense pleasure than remaining faithful in an unenthusiastic relationship).
(2) Duration: the longer lasting the happiness, the better. (cheating on your wife is a short-lived pleasure, while remaining faithful to her is more durable).
(3) Fruitfulness: a happiness which will open up opportunities to experience future happiness is to be preferred over a happiness which yields no such opportunities. (getting an education will open up future opportunites for happiness while selling drugs yields little or no such future opportunities).
(4) Likelihood: in trying to predict which action will yield happiness for the greatest number, we must factor in the likelihood of that consequence. (it may be that an action A could yield certain very favorable consequences, yet it would be unlikely to do so; hence we ought to choose another action, B, whose favorable consequences are less favorable than A’s but more likely to occur. For example, suppose your kid needs an operation but you need more money to pay for it. You could go to Vegas and try to make all the required money at the blackjack tables or you could work overtime for a week or so and put the remainder on credit. While winning in Vegas would be the more favorable happiness (no extra work or debt), it is much less likely than the alternative.

IV. Quantity and Quality of Pleasure
Suppose that a group of people--call them “A”--gets as much pleasure from bowling together as a group of people (“B”) gets out of poetry readings. Suppose, that is, that A’s pleasures are just as intense, durable, fruitful and likely as B’s pleasures. Should B’s pleasures be preferred over A’s simply because of what they are doing to obtain pleasure? Bentham thought that the only thing that mattered was the quantity of pleasure. Hence B’s pleasure is not to be preferred over A’s pleasure. Mill, on the other hand, thought that the quality of pleasure counted as well. He would think, therefore, that B’s pleasure is to be preferred over A’s pleasure because of its higher quality. In general, Mill thought that intellectual and aesthetic pleasures were to be preferred over sensual (physical) pleasures. He argued that most people would choose living a human life over living the life of a pig-- even though the human life was riddled with frustration-- because human beings were capable of experiencing the sophisticated pleasures that Mill preferred. This
presumably shows that we all implicitly agree with Mill that sophisticated pleasures are more desirable than sensual pleasures— that is, that we naturally consider the kind of pleasure and not just the quantity.

V. Criticisms of the Theory
1. Application of the Principle: we could not consider all of the variables that the utilitarian wants us to. Applying the principle is therefore too complex and difficult.
2. Personal Integrity: the theory does not allow us to give precedence to our own happiness or the happiness of those we love. If sacrificing our own interests and well-being would maximize happiness, then we are obligated to do so. This is offensive to our personal integrity since it does not allow us to consider ourselves to be important from our own point of view. At times, we would not be allowed to look out for our own interests.
3. The Ends Justify the Means: Utilitarianism could justify any action if it had positive consequences. This could include anything from killing or punishing the innocent to breaking the law or cheating on your wife. Emergency room case. Torture planet.

V. Act vs. Rule Utilitarianism: These are the two versions of utilitarianism. Many people find rule utilitarianism to be the superior version since it tends to escape the 3rd objection given just above.

A. Act Utilitarianism: considers the consequences for people affected by a particular action. If the consequences of the action maximize happiness over other alternatives, then that action is morally preferable. Suppose, for example, that Jones wants to cheat on his wife. He has no conscience about infidelity and is positive his wife will never find out. Moreover, he and the person with whom he cheats will receive a great amount of pleasure. The act utilitarian asks whether the consequences of this action maximize the happiness of the parties affected by the action. In this case, it seems that cheating would be the morally preferable thing to do.

B. Rule Utilitarianism: considers the consequences of people generally following the rule presupposed by a particular action. In this case, the rule presupposed by the action would be: have an affair in a monogamous marriage. The rule utilitarian asks whether the following of this rule by everyone would maximize happiness over alternative rules. The answer would seem to be “no” given that the institution of monogamous marriage would be undermined. The rule utilitarian would then conclude that Jones shouldn’t cheat on his wife since the rule under which his action falls would not maximize happiness.

C. The Insight Behind Rule Utilitarianism: many people believe that act utilitarianism misses one crucial feature of our moral thinking—that the morally acceptable course of action is one that we would willingly have others do in similar circumstances. If this insight is correct, then we ought to generalize a course of action—that is, formulate a rule— and then ask whether we would willingly have others follow that rule. How do we determine whether we would have others follow that rule? Well, the utilitarian is intent on maximizing happiness. Hence we should ask whether following that rule in general would maximize happiness.

VI. Contemporary Utilitarianism: Preference Utilitarianism
A. Happiness or Preferences?: many critics have complained that it is far too difficult to calculate the amount of happiness and unhappiness an action causes. Moreover, there exists the unresolved dispute over whether intellectual pleasure is to be preferred over sensual pleasure. This has led some philosophers to construe utility as preference satisfaction. Hence, according to
this version of utilitarianism, the morally best action is one that satisfies the most preferences or desires.

B. Are all preferences equal?: not all preferences can be treated equally, however. A serial killer has a desire to kill innocent people and a medical student has a desire to give people medical assistance, but the satisfaction of the latter desire would lead to the satisfaction of the desires of many others, while the satisfaction of the former desire would decrease the preference satisfaction of many others--those that he kills. So preferences should be ordered in importance as follows:
(1) Preferences whose satisfaction contributes to the preference satisfaction of others
(2) Preferences whose satisfaction is neutral to the preference satisfaction of others.
(3) Preferences whose satisfaction decreases the preference satisfaction of others.

Moreover, we ought to factor in the strength of preferences or desires. Clearly, all else being equal, the satisfaction of a strong desire should outweigh the satisfaction of a mild desire.