1. **The Utilitarian Approach** to cyber ethics has its roots in two 19th Century thinkers, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. Research both and briefly describe how their theories have been applied to cyber ethics.

*The Utilitarian Approach*

The principle of utilitarianism can be traced to the writings of Jeremy Bentham, who lived in England during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Bentham, a legal reformer, sought an objective basis that would provide a publicly acceptable norm for determining what kinds of laws England should enact. He believed that the most promising way of reaching such an agreement was to choose that policy that would bring about the greatest net benefits to society once the harms had been taken into account. His motto was "the greatest good for the greatest number."

Over the years, the principle of utilitarianism has been expanded and refined so that today there are many variations of the principle. For example, Bentham defined benefits and harms in terms of pleasure and pain. John Stuart Mill, a great 19th century utilitarian figure, spoke of benefits and harms not in terms of pleasure and pain alone but in terms of the quality or intensity of such pleasure and pain. Today utilitarians often describe benefits and harms in terms of the satisfaction of personal preferences or in purely economic terms of monetary benefits over monetary costs.

Utilitarians also differ in their views about the kind of question we ought to ask ourselves when making an ethical decision. Some utilitarians maintain that in making an ethical decision, we must ask ourselves: "What effect will my doing this act in this situation have on the general balance of good over evil?" If lying would produce the best consequences in a particular situation, we ought to lie. Others, known as rule utilitarians, claim that we must choose that act that conforms to the general rule that would have the best consequences. In other words, we must ask ourselves: "What effect would everyone's doing this kind of action have on the general balance of good over evil?" So, for example, the rule "to always tell the truth" in general promotes the good of everyone and therefore should always be followed, even if in a certain situation lying would produce the best consequences. Despite such differences among utilitarians, however, most hold to the general principle that morality must depend on balancing the beneficial and harmful consequences of our conduct.

*Problems With Utilitarianism*

Perhaps the greatest difficulty with utilitarianism is that it fails to take into account considerations of justice. We can imagine instances where a certain course of action would produce great benefits for society, but they would be clearly unjust. During the apartheid regime in South Africa in the last century, South African whites, for example, sometimes claimed that all South Africans—including blacks—were better off under white rule. These whites claimed that in those African nations that have traded a whites-only government for a black or mixed one, social conditions have rapidly deteriorated. Civil wars, economic decline, famine, and
unrest, they predicted, will be the result of allowing the black majority of South Africa to run the government. If such a prediction were true—and the end of apartheid has shown that the prediction was false—then the white government of South Africa would have been morally justified by utilitarianism, in spite of its injustice.

If our moral decisions are to take into account considerations of justice, then apparently utilitarianism cannot be the sole principle guiding our decisions. It can, however, play a role in these decisions. The principle of utilitarianism invites us to consider the immediate and the less immediate consequences of our actions. Given its insistence on summing the benefits and harms of all people, utilitarianism asks us to look beyond self-interest to consider impartially the interests of all persons affected by our actions.