Utilitarians have formulated their theory/principle/doctrine in different ways. Here are the formulations of several prominent utilitarians (in chronological order, by date of birth):

1. **Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746).** “In comparing the moral qualities of actions, in order to regulate our election among various actions proposed or to find which of them has the greatest moral excellency, we are led by our moral sense of virtue to judge thus; that in equal degrees of happiness, expected to proceed from the action, the virtue is in proportion to the number of persons to whom the happiness shall extend; (and here the dignity, or moral importance of persons, may compensate numbers) and in equal numbers the virtue is as the quality of the happiness, or natural good; or that the virtue is in a compound ratio of the quantity of good, and number of enjoyers. In the same manner, the moral evil, or vice, is as the degree of misery, and number of sufferers; so that, that action is best, which procures the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers; and that, worst, which, in like manner, occasions misery” (Francis Hutcheson, *An Inquiry Concerning the Original of Our Ideas of Virtue or Moral Good* [1725], sec. 3, par. 8, quoted in Marcus G. Singer, “Actual Consequence Utilitarianism,” 68).

2. **Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832).** “6. An action then may be said to be conformable to the 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. **10.** Of an action that is conformable to the principle of utility, one may always say either that it is one that ought to be done, or at least that it is not one that ought not to be done. One may say also, that it is right it should be done; at least that it is not wrong it should be done: that it is a right action; at least that it is not a wrong action. When thus interpreted, the words *ought*, and *right* and *wrong*, and others of that stamp, have a meaning: when otherwise, they have none” (Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* [1789], chap. I, pars. 6 and 10 [italics]
in original]).

3. **John Stuart Mill** (1806-1873). “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” (John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* [1863], chap. II, par. 2 [first published 1861]).

4. **Henry Sidgwick** (1838-1900). “By Utilitarianism is here meant the ethical theory, that the conduct which, under any given circumstances, is objectively right, is that which will produce the greatest amount of happiness on the whole; that is, taking into account all whose happiness is affected by the conduct” (Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th ed. [1907], bk. IV, chap. I, § 1 [1st ed. published 1874]).

5. **George Edward (G. E.) Moore** (1873-1958). “To sum up, then: The answers which this theory gives to its first set of questions is as follows. A characteristic which belongs to all right voluntary actions, and only to those which are right, is, it says, this: That they all cause at least as much pleasure as any action which the agent could have done instead; or, in other words, they all produce a maximum of pleasure. A characteristic which belongs to all voluntary actions, which *ought* to be done or which it is our *duty* to do, and only to these, is, it says, the slightly different one: That they all cause more pleasure than any which the agent could have done instead; or, in other words, among all the possible alternatives, it is they which produce the maximum of pleasure. And finally, a characteristic which belongs to all voluntary actions which are wrong, or which ought not to be done, or which it is our duty not to do, and which belongs only to these, is, in all three cases the same, namely: That they all cause less pleasure than some other action which the agent could have done instead. These three statements together constitute what I will call the first part of the theory; and, whether we agree with them or not, it must, I think, at least be admitted that they are propositions of a very fundamental nature and of a very wide range, so that it would be worth while to know, if possible, whether they are true” (G. E. Moore, *Ethics* [1912], chap. I [“Utilitarianism”] [italics in original]).
6. **Richard Booker Brandt (1910-1997).** “Let us then state the thesis of act-utilitarianism as follows: ‘If doing A has, among all the things X can do, the maximum net expectable utility, then it is X’s objective duty to do A’” (Richard B. Brandt, *Ethical Theory: The Problems of Normative and Critical Ethics* [Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1959], 382).

7. **Richard Mervyn (R. M.) Hare (1919-2002).** “Utilitarianism is a combination of consequentialism (the doctrine that acts are to be judged in the light of their consequences, what is judged being the total difference made to the history of the world by doing the act; the act itself is the bringing about of this difference) and welfarism (the view that what counts in assessing consequences is the good that they bring to those affected). . . . The simplest form of consequentialism is act-consequentialism, engendering act-utilitarianism, which enjoins us to do that act, out of all the alternatives, which has at least as good consequences as any of the others” (R. M. Hare, “Utilitarianism,” in *The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, ed. James F. Childress and John Macquarrie [Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986], 640-3, at 641 [italics in original; asterisk omitted; ellipsis added]).

8. **John Jamieson Carswell (J. J. C.) Smart (1920-2012).** “Roughly speaking, act-utilitarianism is the view that the rightness or wrongness of an action depends only on the total goodness or badness of its consequences, i.e. on the effect of the action on the welfare of all human beings (or perhaps all sentient beings)” (J. J. C. Smart, “An Outline of a System of Utilitarian Ethics,” in *Utilitarianism: For and Against*, by J. J. C. Smart and Bernard Williams [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973], 1-74, at 4).

9. **Peter Singer (born 1946).** “Consequentialists start not with moral rules but with goals. They assess actions by the extent to which they further these goals. The best-known, though not the only, consequentialist theory is utilitarianism. The classical utilitarian regards an action as right if it produces as much or more of an increase in the happiness of all affected by it than any alternative action, and wrong if it does not” (Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics*, 2d ed. [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993], 3).

10. **Shelly Kagan (born 1954).** “The most famous consequentialist theory is *utilitarianism*, which is the result of
combining consequentialism with welfarism. Since consequentialism holds that an act is right if and only if it leads to the best consequences, and welfarism holds that the goodness of an outcome is ultimately a matter of the amount of individual well-being, counting everyone equally, it follows that utilitarianism is the view that an act is right if and only if it leads to the greatest total amount of well-being” (Shelly Kagan, *Normative Ethics* [Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998], 61 [italics in original]).

11. **David O. Brink (born 1958).** “[A]n action is right just in case it contributes to human welfare at least as much as any alternative action available to the agent” (David O. Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989], 237).