

Ethics of Leadership

Utilitarianism & Justice

As you read the material for the next class, keep the questions below in mind. To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages. Keep in mind that there are two basic kinds of information that you need to look for in the readings:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible conclusion about an issue, rather than another.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently to these issues in the next class meeting.

Reading

- John Stuart Mill, "On the Connexion Between Justice and Utility" (PDF on webpage).

Background

John Stuart Mill was very concerned by criticisms that utilitarianism does not have room for justice and rights. For instance, Mill was well aware of accusations that utilitarianism would permit the harming of innocents in order to promote the greatest happiness for the greatest number (e.g., recall this is a crucial point made by Ursula Le Guin's story, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas"). In this reading, Mill directly responds to such concerns by attempting to resolve apparent tensions between utilitarianism and justice, showing how a notion of justice can be derived from utilitarianism.

Questions

1. In the first few paragraphs of "On the Connexion Between Justice and Utility", John Stuart Mill lays out "one of the strongest obstacles" (p. 216) for utilitarianism, which involves justice. What is this obstacle, and what is his strategy for overcoming it?
2. In paragraph 14 & 15, Mill wants to explain how justice is distinguished from morality in general. To do this, Mill first explains how considerations of morality are different from those of expediency or prudence. How are these considerations different? After that, Mill then makes a distinction between perfect and imperfect duties. How are these types of duties different? Finally, how does this distinction of duties explain the difference between justice and morality in general?
3. In paragraphs 16–23 of chapter 5, Mill lays out the three major components of justice, two of which are based in our sentiments and one of which is based in our intellectual capacities. What are these components and how do they together come to compose justice?
4. In paragraphs 24–26 & 32–38, Mill attempts to resolve tensions between justice and utilitarianism. How does Mill define a person's right? Why do considerations of security and liberty involve rights? How does all this allow Mill to finally connect utilitarianism to justice?
5. By the end of the chapter, what is Mill's considered definition of justice? How should such a notion of justice influence the decisions of a leader? Do you agree?