ETHICS OF LEADERSHIP

Classical Utilitarianism

As you read the material for our 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 reading:

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 about these issues at our next class meeting.

Reading

- Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction Concerning the Principles of Morals and Legislation*.
- Robert Nozick, "The Experience Machine".

Background

Jeremy Bentham was an eighteenth century British philosopher who argued that happiness alone has intrinsic value, and that the fundamental moral obligation of a leader is to produce as much happiness as he or she can. But here the focus is not just on the leader's own happiness; rather, in the famous utilitarian phrase, "everybody is to count for one and nobody for more than one". This places priority on achieving the "greatest happiness for the greatest number", another utilitarian motto, and thus locates the virtue of beneficence at the heart of leadership. In particular, Bentham advocates a form of utilitarianism (now known as **classical utilitarianism**) that equates happiness with pleasure and the absence of pain. Robert Nozick, however, challenges the idea that happiness and pleasure constitute the proper foundation for all morality, using his famous example of the "experience machine".

Questions

1. How does Bentham justify that happiness, understood as pleasure and absence of pain, ought to be at the root of morality? How would you formulate Bentham's "calculus" of pleasures that a leader is supposed to use when making a decision?

2. Bentham maintains that a leader's actions should be evaluated by the net pleasure of all involved, and not just by the amount of pleasure the leader receives by performing it. What argument could Bentham have to reject ethical egoism? Does this mean leaders must also care about non-group members as well as non-human animals, since they also experience pleasure and pain?

3. Nozick claims that "we learn that something matters to us in addition to experience by imagining an experience machine and then realizing that we would not use it" (p. 44). What is his argument for this claim? How does this argument about experience critique Bentham's claim that "it is from [pleasure and pain] alone to point out what we ought to do" (p. 17)?