

ETHICS of LEADERSHIP

Eudaimonistic 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

- John Stuart Mill, "What Utilitarianism Is".
- Ursula K. Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas".

Background

Like Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill is a utilitarian who argues 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. (In fact, Mill's dad was close friends with Bentham, and Mill was Bentham's godson.) Unlike Bentham, however, Mill maintains that the *quality* of the happiness produced is of far more importance than its simple *quantity*. More pleasure is not always better. This means that Mill's conception of pleasure and happiness is radically different from that defended by Bentham, leading Mill's theory (now known as **eudaimonistic utilitarianism**) to diverge in some radical ways from classical utilitarianism. Even so, the short story from Ursula Le Guin raises some serious concerns for any system of morality predicated on the need to increase the overall happiness—even of the kind of happiness proposed by Mill—of a group.

Questions

1. How would you describe John Stuart Mill's conception of happiness? Is happiness a subjective mental state or something else?
2. In his discussion of pleasure, Mill repeatedly claims that pleasures can be distinguished by quality and well as quantity. What justifies the qualitative distinction of higher and lower pleasures? How does this distinction explain his claim that it is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a pig satisfied?
3. Mill also gives a test appealing to "competent judges" by which pleasures can be separated into higher and lower kinds. How does this test work? Why should we think that this is a reliable test?
4. Ursula Le Guin's story presents a fictional society wherein its overall happiness and flourishing comes at great cost. What is that cost? What problems with utilitarianism does this suggest?