

Ethical Theory

Classical Utilitarianism

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.

Readings

- Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, chapters 1 and 4 (pp. 17–22, 41–43 in *Utilitarianism and On Liberty*).

Questions

1. Jeremy Bentham endorses what is known as classical utilitarianism. Recall (from *Normative Ethics*, section 2.6) that utilitarianism combines the following claims at the level of factors: (1) factoral teleology, (2) factoral consequentialism, (3) factoral welfarism, (4) a theory of well-being, and (5) the total view (which is a combination of (5A) quantitative monism, (5B) sum ranking, and (5C) optimization). In what ways does Bentham's moral calculus involve each of these factors?
2. When it comes to a theory of well-being, Bentham endorses one based on happiness. What exactly does he mean by happiness? Which theory of well-being (from *Normative Ethics*, section 2.2) does he seem to endorse?
3. How would you describe Bentham's foundational theory for justifying classical utilitarianism? In particular, how does Bentham justify that happiness (as he understands the term) ought to be at the very foundation of morality? In addition, Bentham's talk of the "extent" of happiness appears to reject foundational egoism, so what sort of argument might he make to justify foundational consequentialism?
4. What evaluative focal point(s) does Bentham appear to be using in formulating classical utilitarianism? The common assumption is acts. Do you agree? If so, where in the text do you see him endorsing it? If not, can he really justify factoral consequentialism without focusing on acts?