

Ethical Theory

Mill's Theory of Well-Being

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

- *Utilitarianism*, chapter 1, entire, and chapter 2, paragraphs 1–17 (pp. 181–194 in *Utilitarianism and On Liberty*).

Questions

1. What does John Stuart Mill mean when he says (in chapter 1, paragraphs 1 and 2) he is looking for the *summum bonum*? What does he think it is? What objections to this position does he address in the first two chapters of *Utilitarianism*?
2. In his discussion of pleasure (especially chapter 2, paragraphs 2–17), Mill 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? Mill also gives a test 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?
3. Based on your answers to these questions, how is Mill's formulation of utilitarianism different from the classical version of Jeremy Bentham? Be clear which differences apply to the level of factors, and which apply at the level of foundations.