

Introduction to Philosophy

The Nature of Morality: Eudaimonistic 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

- John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*.
- E. F. Carritt, "Criticisms of Utilitarianism".

Background

Like Bentham, John Stuart Mill believes that happiness alone has intrinsic value, and that our fundamental moral obligation is to produce as much happiness as we can. Unlike Bentham, however, Mill believes that the quality of the happiness produced is of more importance than its simple quantity. The short essay by E. F. Carritt presents a catalogue of common criticisms against utilitarianism (both Bentham's and Mill's versions).

Questions

1. How does John Stuart Mill define the "principle of utility"? He also claims that pleasures can be distinguished by quality as well as quantity. He then gives a test by which pleasures can be separated into higher and lower kinds. How does the test work? What makes the higher pleasures higher and the lower ones lower (apart from being the result of the test)? How does this justify the assertion that it is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a pig satisfied?
2. How would you describe Mill's conception of happiness? Is happiness a subjective mental state or something else? Based on your answer to this question, is it subject to the Nozick's "experience machine" criticism?
3. E. F. Carritt's claims that "in short, utilitarianism has forgotten rights". How does he justify this claim?
4. Given that they reach different conclusions, Mill and Carritt cannot both be right. Where exactly in their respective arguments do they disagree? Which position is supported by the strongest and most compelling argument?