

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

Deliberative Utilitarianism

Instructions

When doing the reading for this class, there are the two basic kinds of information you need to understand:

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 position on an issue, rather than another.

Reading

Mill, J. S. (2003). [Chapter 2 from *Utilitarianism*]. In M. Warnock (Ed.), *Utilitarianism and on liberty: Including Mill's 'essay on Bentham' and selections from the writings of Jeremy Bentham and John Austin* (2nd ed., pp. 185–202). Blackwell. (Original work from 1861).

Comment

In contrast to the Classical Utilitarianism of Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill maintains that the *quality* (or type) of the happiness produced is far more important than its simple *quantity* (or amount). More pleasure is not always better. Instead certain pleasures (even if in lesser amounts) may be more valuable to the extent that they come from the cultivation and exercise of the higher-order faculties possessed by humans. This means that Mill's conception of pleasure and happiness is radically different from that defended by Bentham, leading Mill's theory to diverge in some important ways from Classical Utilitarianism.

Mill's theory might then be called **Deliberative Utilitarianism**, and it consists of the following claims:

1. **Consequentialism:** The *overall* goodness of outcomes (that is, the goodness of the outcomes for *everyone* affected by those outcomes) is the only thing with intrinsic value.
2. **Welfarism:** The overall goodness of an outcome is measured solely by the *well-being* of everyone affected.
3. **Eudaimonism:** Well-being is nothing other than "happiness", understood as *the pleasure that comes from the cultivation and exercise of those higher-order capacities distinguishing human beings from other animals*.
4. **The Pluralistic Total View**, which has three claims:
 - 4A. **Quantitative Pluralism:** Individual well-being is measured *numerically*, and specifically, by a *vector* of numerical quantities. This vector may be called a vector of **Plural Utilities**. Some utilities in this vector have priority over others. That is, there are some utilities that are more valuable than other utilities.

4B. **Vector Sum Ranking:** Overall well-being is the *vector of aggregate utility* for the group. This involves two claims:

- i. Each person in the group has an *individual* vector of plural utilities associated with their own personal well-being, and
- ii. The vector of aggregate utility for the group is calculated by *summing up* these individual vectors of plural utilities.

4C. **Lexical Priority:** Optimize according to the highest-level (most valuable) utilities in the vector of plural utilities. If there are ties, then optimize according to the second-highest-level (second most valuable) utilities to break those ties. If ties remain, optimize according to the third-highest-level utilities, and so on. Apart from breaking ties, *no lower-level (less valuable) utilities may outweigh or override higher-level ones*.

Do not panic if this all looks frightening to you! I will walk you through this during class. One of the most important things to focus on when reading Mill is how he understands and measures "happiness" in terms of quality (not quantity) of pleasure and justifies this view. Do that, and you will be surprised how the complex seeming elements of Deliberative Utilitarianism all fit together.

Questions

As you read, keep these questions in mind:

1. How would you describe Mill's conception of happiness? How does this conception differ from Bentham's? In what other ways does Mill's theory differ from Bentham's?
2. In his discussion of pleasure, Mill repeatedly claims "some kinds of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others" (p. 1897). In other words, he argues that pleasures can be distinguished by quality and well as by quantity.
What justifies this qualitative distinction between higher and lower pleasures? How does this distinction explain his (famous) claim that it is "better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied" (p. 188)?
3. Mill also gives a test, appealing to "competent judges" (p. 189) to different pleasure, 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. Like Bentham, Mill is also a consequentialist (and not an ethical egoist). How does Mill seem to justify this? (Hint: this may be related to his distinction between higher and lower pleasures from question 2.)

To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages.

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.