

POLITICAL & SOCIAL THOUGHT

Classical 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 premises, assumptions, reasons, evidence, and other important considerations 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 and justify accepting the author's conclusions as opposed to other ones.

Reading

Bentham, J. (2017). *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (J. Bennett, Trans.). Early Modern Texts. Retrieved December 16, 2018, from http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/bentham1780_1.pdf. (Original work from 1780/1789/1823.)

(Excerpts are from chapters 1, 4, and 5.)

Questions

1. In chapter 1, Jeremy Bentham argues that happiness, understood as pleasure and absence of pain, ought to be at the root of all moral and political decision making.

What is this argument? What exactly does Bentham mean by "pleasure" and "pain"? (He tries to explain this in chapter 5.)

2. In chapter 4, Bentham introduces the elements of his "hedonic calculus" for legislation.

What are these elements? How does Bentham use this calculus to justify the existence of private property?

3. In chapter 4, Bentham clearly maintains that a person's actions should be evaluated by the net pleasure of all involved (this is his seventh circumstance of "extent"), and not just by the amount of pleasure that person receives by performing it.

What argument could Bentham have to defend this view and reject ethical egoism?

Does this mean that our governments should also care about foreigners as well as non-human animals, since they also experience pleasure and pain?

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 (unless you miss or are late to class, and must then submit a written reading question review).

You do need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting. You may, during the following class, be randomly selected to present answers to these if selected to do so for a verbal reading question review.