

POLITICAL & SOCIAL THOUGHT

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 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

Mill, J. S. (2003). *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. 181–235). Oxford: Blackwell. (Original work published 1861.)

(Excerpts are from chapter 2.)

Questions

1. The moral philosophy of John Stuart Mill might be called **deliberative utilitarianism** because of the importance it places on the higher-order faculties possessed by humans. Because of this, Mill diverges from Jeremy Bentham's Classical Utilitarianism in some very important ways.
How would you describe Mill's conception of happiness? How does it 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 (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.