

POLITICAL & SOCIAL THOUGHT

Utilitarianism & Justice

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 5.)

Questions

1. In first few paragraphs from chapter 5, John Stuart Mill lays out “one of the strongest obstacles” (p. 216) for utilitarianism, which involves justice.
What is this obstacle, and what is Mill's strategy for overcoming it?
2. In paragraphs 14 & 15, Mill wants to explain how justice is distinguished from morality in general. To do this, Mill first explains how considerations of morality are different from those of expediency or prudence.
How are these considerations different? After that, Mill then makes a distinction between perfect and imperfect duties. How are these types of duties different? Finally, how does this distinction of duties explain the difference between justice and morality in general?
3. In paragraphs 16–23, Mill lays out the three major components of justice, two of which come from our sentiments (or emotions) and one of which comes from our intellectual capacities.
What are these components and how do they come together to compose justice?
4. In paragraphs 24–26 & 32–38, Mill attempts to resolve tensions between justice (in protecting individual rights) and utilitarianism (in promoting social utility).
How does Mill define a person's right? Why do considerations of security and liberty involve rights? Why does Mill believe that all this shows how utilitarianism supports, and is consistent with, our usual notions of justice?

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.