

# Mill's *Utilitarianism*

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## 1 Overview

Week	Topic
1	Higher and Lower Pleasures
2	Varieties of Utilitarianism
3	Alternatives to Utilitarianism
4	The Sanctions of Morality
5	Mill's Proof of Utilitarianism
6	Utilitarianism and Integrity
7	Justice
8	Freedom

*Utilitarianism* by John Stuart Mill sets out to do three things. It seeks to tell us what happiness is. It seeks to tell us how we ought to act. And it seeks to tell us how morality and happiness are related to one another. Mill's *Utilitarianism* is one of the best-known works of moral philosophy. It provides a framework for understanding some of the most important debates in moral philosophy and in this course, we will be looking to set a foundation for future work in moral philosophy.

During this course, we will take Mill's discussion as our starting point. Understanding Mill's view will be important to each week's discussion, but rather than going over Mill's text and giving a blow-by-blow account, we will concentrate primarily on understanding the main contours of the debate and the arguments that can be made on each side. The exact topics we will be looking at from this list depend on the type of course you're doing. If you're a classicist and therefore taking eight tutorials, then we'll do all of them. If, on the other hand, you're only taking three tutorials on Mill's *Utilitarianism*, then we will be taking classes 1, 2 and 6.

## 2 Website

I'll post the materials for these tutorials on my website as we go along. They can be downloaded at:

[www.stephenwrightphilosophy.com](http://www.stephenwrightphilosophy.com) on the right-hand side of the page under the 'Mill's *Utilitarianism*' link. Just make sure that you use the one for 'Trinity 2015' since the material is liable to be different year-on-year!

## 3 A Note on the Reading List

For each class I've identified two different types of reading. Readings marked as required are exactly that – they're readings you just have to do. Some of these are hard, but don't worry, we can discuss anything that you don't understand in tutorials. After this, there are some further readings. These you will want to look at in your own time, possibly after the tutorial (or maybe before) and they will

help develop your thinking on these subjects further. For the purposes of the tutorial essay, however, I'd like you to focus particularly carefully on the readings that I've identified as required for the class. This is *not* to say that all of the readings for each week will be relevant to every essay for that week. You'll have to use (and develop) your judgement for working out what is and isn't useful in each case. But it is to say that you should read those required readings particularly carefully because I'll be expecting you to know about them in advance of the tutorial.

† denotes required reading.

\* denotes background reading.

Lastly, don't be shy about asking me if you find any of the readings hard to get hold of. If you can't find any of the readings, I'll either email you a PDF of it or else replace it on the reading list with something that can be found or sent.

## 4 Doing Philosophy

During your time doing philosophical work, you'll want to read things that aren't on the reading lists. And it's really important that what you read is good quality. It's very easy to waste a lot of time and energy in philosophy reading stuff that just isn't helpful. If you read stuff from poor sources, you're liable to wind up confused or misinformed. You want to be reading things that are written by people who have, at the very least, more philosophical experience than you. In the case of several sources, though, there's no filtering or checking to make sure that this is the case. Obviously, the reading lists provided by the faculty are a great place to look. But even they don't contain *everything*. With that in mind, here are some guidelines for you to get you started. As always, do get in touch and ask me if you find yourself in any doubt at all.

Some good places to start your reading are:

The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy at <http://plato.stanford.edu> is an excellent resource. It gives you an overview of some of the topics that we'll be working on and also comes with a useful bibliography, all of which is of an appropriate quality for you to be using.

The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy at <http://www.iep.utm.edu/> is another excellent online philosophy encyclopedia. Like the Stanford Encyclopedia, its entries are reviewed before they are published and also have useful suggestions for further reading.

Philpapers at <http://www.philpapers.org> is an online collection of philosophy articles that can be searched by category. There are some excellent articles on here and the site is a useful way of finding things to read. This site requires some caution, though. Unlike the above two, anyone can add their papers, regardless of whether or not they have actually been published in journals, or are ever going to be! As a rule of thumb, if you can't see publication details for a paper on this site, then proceed with caution. This notwithstanding, it is an excellent and important source.

Google Scholar at <http://scholar.google.co.uk/> is a relatively recent research

tool and one that's extremely useful. The best thing that you can use Google Scholar for is finding papers that are relevant to what you've been reading. If you run a search for a paper that you've just read, Google Scholar will help throw up any papers that have cited the paper you searched for. This is extremely useful for helping you figure out where to go next. As with PhilPapers, however, there's no quality filter, so if you are in any doubt about what you've found (as with any of the above resources) feel free to ask me first. Lastly, note that this *is* an acceptable use of Google's resources, where searching for philosophers or themes and then reading what you find absolutely is *not*. Likewise, stay off looking for things on Wikipedia.

## 5 Preliminary Reading

For this course, it would be a good thing if you managed to read the following before we get started:

J.S. Mill (1861). *Utilitarianism* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Roger Crisp (1997). *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Mill on Utilitarianism* London: Routledge.

It's also useful to read Mill's work *On Liberty*, if you're likely to be taking more than three tutorials on Mill's moral philosophy.

## 6 Tutorial 1 – Higher and Lower Pleasures

An important part of Mill’s moral theory is the distinction between higher and lower pleasures. There are some things that bring about pleasure in us in different ways. Mill seeks to distinguish between higher pleasures, such as those that come from reading Shakespeare and lower pleasures, such as those that come from food and sex. An important part of Mill’s view is the idea that higher pleasures are more valuable than lower pleasures. In this tutorial, we will think about what kinds of things are worth having in life and what sorts of things make someone’s life go well.

### 6.1 Readings

- † J.S. Mill (1861). *Utilitarianism* Oxford: Oxford University Press, Chapters 2 and 4.
- † Robert Nozick (2013). ‘The Experience Machine’ in Russ Shafer-Landau (ed.), *Ethical Theory: An Anthology* 2nd Edition pp. 264-265.
- † Thomas Carson (2013). ‘Rationality and Full Information’ in Russ Shafer-Landau (ed.), *Ethical Theory: An Anthology* 2nd Edition pp. 277-285.
- † Derek Parfit (2013). ‘What Makes Someone’s Life Go Best?’ in Russ Shafer-Landau (ed.), *Ethical Theory: An Anthology* 2nd Edition pp. 294-298.
- \* Rex Martin (1972). ‘A Defence of Mill’s Qualitative Hedonism’ *Philosophy* 47 (180):140-151.
- \* Joseph Raz (2004). ‘The Role of Well-Being’ *Philosophical Perspectives* 18 (1):269-294.
- \* Roger Crisp (1997). ‘Raz on Well-Being’ *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 17 (3):499-515.
- \* Shelly Kagan (2009). ‘Well-Being as Enjoying the Good’ *Philosophical Perspectives* 23 (1):253-272.

*Question: What, if anything, does what is pleasurable have to do with what is moral?*

## 6.2 Study Questions

- (1) Can pleasures and pains be quantified in the way that Bentham imagines?
- (2) How might Bentham seek to promote poetry over push-pin?
- (3) Would you rather be Haydn or an oyster that could live forever?
- (4) What does it mean to say that happiness is desirable *as an end*?
- (5) How does Mill conceive of pleasure?
- (6) Is there a difference between the pleasurable and the enjoyable?
- (7) How does Mill propose to distinguish between higher and lower pleasure?
- (8) Can we cogently distinguish between higher and lower pleasures?
- (9) Does conjoining hedonism with a distinction between higher and lower pleasures yield a dilemma?
- (10) Can Mill give any good account of what about higher pleasures makes them more valuable?
- (11) Why is disagreement among ideal judges unproblematic?
- (12) Do concerns over the impartiality of judges yield a problematic elitism?
- (13) Is there any objective fact about which activities should be thought of as more valuable?
- (14) 'Mill's distinction falls apart in extreme cases, but it is generally plausible in ordinary situations.' Discuss.
- (15) What might a competing moral theory use in place of pleasure in Mill's theory?

## 7 Tutorial 2 – Varieties of Utilitarianism

Act utilitarianism takes the view that we should perform those acts that maximise utility. Rule utilitarianism takes the view that we should perform those actions that line up with rules such that, if they were enforced, would maximise utility. In this tutorial, we will think that the differences between these two types of utilitarianism. We will consider which theory more closely lines up with Mill's views on utilitarianism as well as what considerations can be brought to bear in support of or in opposition to the different types of utilitarianism.

### 7.1 Readings

- † J.S. Mill (1861). *Utilitarianism* Oxford: Oxford University Press, Chapters 2 and 5.
- † Brad Hooker (1995). 'Rule-Consequentialism, Incoherence, Fairness' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 95:19-35.
- † Thomas Carson (2010). *Lying and Deception: Theory and Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapters 4&5.
- \* J.J.C. Smart (1956). 'Extreme and Restricted Utilitarianism' *Philosophical Quarterly* 6 (25):344-354.
- \* Frances Howard-Snyder (1993). 'Rule Consequentialism Is a Rubber Duck' *American Philosophical Quarterly* 30 (3):271-278.
- \* Brad Hooker (1994). 'Is Rule-Consequentialism a Rubber Duck?' *Analysis* 54 (2):92-97.
- \* Ben Eggleston (2014). 'Act Utilitarianism' in Ben Eggleston and Dale E. Miller (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Utilitarianism* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press pp. 125-145.
- \* Dale E. Miller (2014). 'Rule Utilitarianism' in Ben Eggleston and Dale E. Miller (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Utilitarianism* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press pp. 146-165.

*Question: Is Mill an act or rule utilitarian and which version of utilitarianism is altogether preferable?*



## 7.2 Study Questions

- (1) What is the common idea behind utilitarianist theories?
- (2) How does utilitarianism differ from consequentialism?
- (3) What is the difference between act and rule utilitarian theories?
- (4) Is *probabilism* altogether more plausible than *actualism*?
- (5) Can act utilitarianism make any sense of the idea that some acts are intrinsically wrong?
- (6) What does *single-level* utilitarianism mean?
- (7) Is act utilitarianism either self-refuting or self-effacing?
- (8) How does rule utilitarianism preserve our considered moral judgements?
- (9) What is the difference between the status of rules according to contractualism and the status of rules according to rule utilitarianism?
- (10) Can rule utilitarianism avoid collapsing into act utilitarianism?
- (11) Is rule utilitarianism unable to make sense of how we should behave when faced with the possibility of a particular moral disaster?
- (12) Can any version of utilitarianism offer a plausible account of *supererogation*?
- (13) Does utilitarianism rule out a legitimate bias towards one's own friends or family?
- (14) How does a *multi-level* utilitarian theory differ from a *single-level* utilitarian theory?
- (15) Does Mill's theory represent act or rule utilitarianism?

## 8 Tutorial 3 – The Sanctions of Morality

Following on from what grounds morality, we will think about why it is that we are compelled to be moral. It seems that there are some things that are entirely optional to us. We ought, in some sense, to go to work rather than sitting at home and we ought to use our cutlery in the conventional fashion. But these are in some sense optional. Morality is, in some important sense *not* optional. We will think about what it is that binds us to being moral by considering what someone who didn't feel the pull of morality would be missing.

### 8.1 Readings

- † J.S. Mill (1861). *Utilitarianism* Oxford: Oxford University Press, Chapter 3.
- † David O. Brink (1992). 'A Puzzle About the Rational Authority of Morality' *Philosophical Perspectives* 6:1-26.
- † Bernard Williams (1993). *Morality* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press pp. 3-13.
- \* James Lenman (1999). 'The Externalist and the Amoralist' *Philosophia* 27 (3-4):441-457.
- \* Elizabeth Radcliffe (1994). 'Hume on Motivating Sentiments, the General Point of View, and the Inculcation of Morality' *Hume Studies* (20):37-58.
- \* Peter Railton (2006). 'Humean Theory of Practical Rationality' in David Copp (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory* pp. 265-281.
- \* R. Jay Wallace (2006). 'Moral Motivation' in James Dreier (ed.), *Contemporary Debates in Moral Theory* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing pp. 182-196.
- \* Sigrun Svavarsdottir (1999). 'Moral Cognitivism and Motivation' *Philosophical Review* 108 (2):161-219.

*Question: Does strategic egoism offer a viable account of why we should be moral?*

## 8.2 Study Questions

- (1) What is meant by a sanction on morality?
- (2) What is Brink's puzzle about the sanctions of morality?
- (3) How does Harman argue for relativism?
- (4) In what way(s) might a sophisticated egoist theory seek to avoid claiming that a con-man is acting in line with his moral obligations?
- (5) Could this approach be successful?
- (6) What are externalist theories of moral motivation?
- (7) Can externalist theories respect the idea that morality has any sort of special rational authority?
- (8) What are agent-neutral accounts of moral motivation?
- (9) Can agent-neutral theories make sense of the idea that it could be rational for me to do something that is of not benefit at all to me?
- (10) What is the difference between an amoralist and a psychopath?
- (11) What is the difference between customary morality and morality?
- (12) How does Mil distinguish between *internal* and *external* sanctions of morality?
- (13) What are the two strategies Mill gives for deriving moral motivation?
- (14) Where do these situate Mill's theory in terms of the framework provided by Brink?
- (15) Might it be the case that we simply have no good reason to be moral?

## 9 Tutorial 4 – Mill’s Proof of Utilitarianism

This is one of the tutorials in which we will pay particularly close attention to Mill’s text. We will be interested in his so-called “proof” of the utilitarian principle. Considering Mill’s argument in support of the utilitarian principle throws up interesting issues. We will meet with the *naturalistic fallacy* and consider whether Mill’s proof commits this mistake. We will also consider the idea behind *naturalism* in moral philosophy more generally and G.E. Moore’s famous *Open Question Argument* against it.

### 9.1 Readings

- † J.S. Mill (1861). *Utilitarianism* Oxford: Oxford University Press, Chapter 4.
- † G.E. Moore (1903). *Principia Ethica* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Chapter 3.
- † Nicholas Sturgeon (2006). ‘Ethical Naturalism’ in David Copp (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*. Chapter 3.
- \* Jonathan Dancy (2006). ‘Non-Naturalism’ in David Copp (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Ethical Theory*. Chapter 4.
- \* J.L. Mackie (1977). *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* London: Penguin. Chapter 6.
- \* R. F. Atkinson (1957). ‘J. S. Mill’s ”Proof” of the Principle of Utility’ *Philosophy* 32 (121):158-167.
- \* A. T. Fyfe (2011). ‘Mill’s Proof of Utilitarianism’ in Michael Bruce & Steven Barbone (eds.), *Just the Arguments: 100 of the Most Important Arguments in Western Philosophy* London: Wiley-Blackwell. 223-228.

*Question: How does Mill seek to prove utilitarianism and does he succeed?*

## 9.2 Study Questions

- (1) What does Mill seek to achieve in Chapter 4 of *Utilitarianism*?
- (2) What would a proof of any particular moral theory look like?
- (3) How does Mill set about trying to offer a proof of utilitarianism?
- (4) What is Moore's *Open Question Argument* and how does it connect up with Mill's theory?
- (5) In what way does Mill's proof that happiness is desirable relate to a proof that the Ship Street Building is visible?
- (6) Even if we might desire undesirable things, might the fact that we seem to desire happiness provide some sort of evidence for the view that happiness is desirable?
- (7) How does *egoistic hedonism* differ from *universalistic hedonism*?
- (8) What is the *impartiality assumption* and what role does it play in the second stage of Mill's proof?
- (9) Is the impartiality assumption plausible, or does the happiness of some people count for more than the happiness of others?
- (10) What is the *teleological assumption* and what role does it play in the second stage of Mill's proof?
- (11) Is the teleological assumption plausible, or should a moral theory respect the idea that some things are right/wrong regardless of their consequences?
- (12) How does Mill seek to connect up virtue to happiness?
- (13) What role does *associationism* play in this theory?
- (14) Does Mill successfully explain why what is desired is not merely virtue but the enjoyable experience of being virtuous?
- (15) Is Mill's appeal to desires the downfall of his proof?

## 10 Tutorial 5 – Utilitarianism and Integrity

One worry about utilitarianism is that being good utilitarians has the potential to detach us from our feelings. We might think that we have particular duties to our friends and family, for instance, but according to utilitarianism, these are just considerations in a bigger picture of the overall maximisation of welfare. In this tutorial, we will think about the idea of being alienated from our desires and from morality and consider how far utilitarian theories can respond to this apparent difficulty.

### 10.1 Readings

- † Philippa Foot (1985). 'Utilitarianism and the Virtues' *Mind* 94 (374):196-209.
- † Peter Railton (1984). 'Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 13 (2):134-171.
- † Bernard Williams (1973). 'Integrity' in J.J.C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* pp. 108-117.
- \* Jonathan Bennett (1966). 'Whatever the Consequences' *Analysis* 26 (3):83-102.
- \* Philippa Foot (1967). The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of Double Effect. *Oxford Review* 5:5-15.
- \* Jonathan Bennett (1980). *Morality and Consequences*. Available at [http://tannerlectures.utah.edu/\\_documents/a-to-z/b/bennett81.pdf](http://tannerlectures.utah.edu/_documents/a-to-z/b/bennett81.pdf).
- \* T. M. Scanlon (2000). 'Intention and Permissibility' *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 74 (1):301-317.

*Question: 'The motive has nothing to do with the morality of the action, though much to do with the worth of the agent.'* [MILL] Discuss.

## 10.2 Study Questions

- (1) What is the difference between *subjective* and *objective* consequentialism?
- (2) How does this connect to Mill's distinction between *customary morality* and the place of utilitarianism?
- (3) Which version of consequentialism does Railton seek to defend?
- (4) Why might one think that good consequentialists cannot be good friends?
- (5) Is the problem of alienation a distinctively consequentialist problem?
- (6) Is there a way for someone to reason in line with utilitarian principles in a way without alienating people?
- (7) Would it be a problem if someone who engaged in the reasoning of Railton's sophisticated consequentialist did not bring about the best overall state of affairs?
- (8) If utilitarianism only offers us a standard of what is right, can it still bring a decisive reason to act in a particular way?
- (9) Does treating utilitarianism as a standard rather than a decision-making procedure yield problematic alienation between the individual and what makes the action morally right?
- (10) Is morality made for man or the other way around?
- (11) Does someone's deservingness of moral credit depend on the kind of maxim that they act under?
- (12) Can a physical theory but not an ethical theory be removed from how to act?
- (13) Does ought imply can?
- (14) How plausible is the idea that we can only ever be under obligations to *try* to do something, rather than to actually do something?
- (15) Might judgements of remorse at unforeseen consequences be similar in kind to judgements about natural disasters?

## 11 Tutorial 6 – Justice

On the face of it, utilitarianism appears to offer no consideration for justice. There might be cases in which doing the utilitarian thing conflicts with doing the just thing and in such cases, utilitarianism gives no weight at all to considerations of justice. In this tutorial, we will consider how far these kinds of considerations make difficulties for utilitarianism and in particular, we will consider Mill's response to the problem of justice for utilitarianism.

### 11.1 Readings

- † J.S. Mill (1861). *Utilitarianism* Oxford: Oxford University Press, Chapter 5.
- † John Rawls (1958). 'Justice as Fairness' *Philosophical Review* 67 (2):164-194.
- † John Harris (1975). 'The Survival Lottery' *Philosophy* 50 (191):81-87.
- \* Alan Ryan (1998). *The Philosophy of John Stuart Mill* Oxford: Oxford University Press, Chapter 12.
- \* John Skorupski (1989). *John Stuart Mill* London: Routledge, Chapter 9.
- \* Robert Nozick (1974). *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, Chapter 7.
- \* Robert Nozick (2000). 'On the Cross of Mere Utility: Utilitarianism, Sacrifices, and the Value of Persons' *Utilitas* 12 (1):1-24.
- \* Brad Hooker (2014). 'Utilitarianism and Fairness' in Ben Eggleston and Dale E. Miller (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Utilitarianism* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press pp. 280-302.

*Question: Does Mill solve the problems justice poses for utilitarianism?*



## 11.2 Study Questions

- (1) What is the *survival lottery* and in what way might it be a problem for utilitarianism?
- (2) In what way(s) is the problem posed by the survival lottery different to the problem of alienation?
- (3) Mill claims that the sentiment that we feel in this case is not indicative of any objective principle. Is this consistent with his general approach to providing a theory of morality?
- (4) What are the spheres of justice that Mill identifies?
- (5) How do negative and positive conceptions of rights differ?
- (6) In what way(s) are justice, obligations and rights connected, according to Mill?
- (7) How, is the idea that good should be met with good a fundamental principle for Mill?
- (8) Can justice or any other sense of rights be given an adequate utilitarian explanation?
- (9) Does it seem plausible to say that where stealing is moral we do not regard it as unjust?
- (10) Are all violations of rights violations of justice?
- (11) Are all violations of justice violations of rights?
- (12) Is it plausible to ground criminal justice in a notion of claims to things?
- (13) Do we have duties or rights to ourselves that are incompatible with utilitarian impartiality?
- (14) How does Mill seek to maintain that giving to charity breaches an imperfect duty rather than a perfect one?
- (15) Is it a problem for utilitarianism that it cannot bias towards the most needy where overall utility is enhanced by not doing so?
- (16) Which is more important, maximising utility, or fairness?

## 12 Tutorial 7 – Freedom

In this tutorial, we will turn our attention to consider the relationship between the utilitarian account of private morality that we have been looking at over the past weeks and a conception of public morality set forth in Mill's other work *On Liberty*. In doing so, we will consider the question of how far a government or state might legitimately restrict the freedom and liberties of an individual in the name of the collective good. Mill claims that state intervention is warranted only in cases of self-protection, but this seems at odds with the utilitarian principle. We will consider the initial appearance of a tension between Mill's views in *On Liberty* and his views in *Utilitarianism*.

### 12.1 Readings

- † J.S. Mill (1859). *On Liberty* London: Penguin.
- † Richard Wollheim (1973). 'John Stuart Mill and the Limits of State Action' *Social Research* 40 (1):1-30.
- † Gerald Dworkin (1972). 'Paternalism' *The Monist* 56 (1):64-84.
- \* Seana Shiffrin (2000). 'Paternalism, Unconscionability Doctrine, and Accommodation' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 29 (3):205-250.
- \* Jonathan Wolff (2006). *An Introduction to Political Philosophy* Oxford: Oxford University Press, Chapter 4.
- \* Isaiah Berlin (2006). 'Two Concepts of Liberty' in Robert Goodin (ed.), *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Anthology* (2nd Edition) London: Blackwell, pp. 369-386.
- \* Colin Bird (2006). *An Introduction to Political Philosophy* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Chapter 8.
- \* Quentin Skinner (2006). 'A Third Concept of Liberty' in Robert Goodin and Philip Pettit (ed.), *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Anthology* (2nd Edition) London: Blackwell, pp. 398-415.

*Question: Can there be a satisfactory utilitarian account of why freedom is valuable?*

## 12.2 Study Questions

- (1) What is Mill's central project in *On Liberty*?
- (2) What is the 'liberty principle'?
- (3) Can the liberty principle be reconciled with the Principle of Utility?
- (4) What is it to treat the liberty principle as a *secondary principle*?
- (5) How does Mill propose to oppose the legitimacy of censorship?
- (6) Does the fact that a government is democratically elected generate any justification for limiting the extent to which the government can intervene in the lives of its citizens?
- (7) Does the liberty principle appeal to actual harm or potential harm?
- (8) How does treating harm as a necessary but not sufficient condition help avoid the problems associated with paternalism?
- (9) In what sense is paternalism objectionable?
- (10) How plausible is the idea that we have no moral duties towards ourselves?
- (11) Why will interference not be justified when one does not violate a customary rule?
- (12) Does doing that which causes others displeasure license interference from the state?
- (13) How does Mill defend the freedom of speech?
- (14) Why doesn't Mill allow the suppression of opinion even when it is false?
- (15) Is knowing the truth an important part of welfare?
- (16) Does this suggest that more than conformity to the truth is required for a fulfilling life?

## 13 Tutorial 8 – Alternatives to Utilitarianism

To round out our thinking about Mill's *Utilitarianism* and moral philosophy more generally, we will leave utilitarianism to one side with a view to getting a clearer view on the broader landscape of moral theories. We will build on the observations about the shortcomings of utilitarianism that we encountered in the previous tutorials and we will consider competing theories of morality and whether or not they can accommodate these concerns any more easily. At the same time, we will think about the ways in which the kind of approach to morality that utilitarian theories offer is altogether preferable to competing theories.

### 13.1 Readings

- † Julia Driver (2006). 'Virtue Theory' in James Dreier (ed.), *Contemporary Debates in Moral Theory* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing pp. 113-123.
- † Daniel C. Russell (2014). 'What Virtue Theorists can Learn from Utilitarianism' in Ben Eggleston and Dale E. Miller (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Utilitarianism* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press pp. 258-279.
- † Christine Korsgaard (2013). 'Kant's Formula of the Universal Law' in Russ Shafer-Landau (ed.), *Ethical Theory: An Anthology* 2nd Edition pp. 294-298.
- \* Jens Timmerman (2014). 'Kantian Ethics and Utilitarianism' in Ben Eggleston and Dale E. Miller (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Utilitarianism* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press pp. 239-257.
- \* Thomas Carson (2010). *Lying and Deception: Theory and Practice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Chapter 3.
- \* Philippa Foot (1985). 'Utilitarianism and the Virtues' *Mind* 94 (374):196-209.
- \* Judith Jarvis Thomson (1976). 'Killing, Letting Die, and the Trolley Problem' *The Monist* 59 (2):204-217.
- \* Philip Pettit (2006). 'Can Contract Theory Ground Morality?' in James Dreier (ed.), *Contemporary Debates in Moral Theory* Oxford: Blackwell Publishing pp. 77-96.

*Question: Is consequentialism the grain of truth in utilitarianism?*

## 13.2 Study Questions

- (1) What is the difference between consequentialist, deontological and virtue-based approaches to ethics?
- (2) How do Kant's three formulations of the Categorical Imperative go?
- (3) Is there a connection between Kant's Categorical Imperative and his account of when it is morally permissible to lie?
- (4) What does it mean to say that we must act only in ways that can be universalised?
- (5) What is involved in treating people as a means to an end?
- (6) Does motive matter for the morality of an action?
- (7) Is there a moral difference between killing someone and letting them die?
- (8) What, if anything, do trolley problems show about our moral thinking?
- (9) How do virtue theorists approach morality?
- (10) Does virtue theory collapse into consequentialism?
- (11) If virtue theory does collapse into consequentialism, might the latter theory still have any theoretical value over the former?
- (12) Can all virtues be understood in terms of a golden mean between vices of excess and deficiency?
- (13) Could it ever be morally right to let more people die?
- (14) Is there a problem for utilitarian theories that they can't make sense of supererogation?
- (15) Can consequentialist theories make sense of any kind of importance for issues of motive?

## 14 Revision Reading

Here are three books that I would recommend to get you started on your revision. They should help you get started in the process of remembering some of the issues involved and some of the things that we've been thinking about in discussing them. They won't go into the kind of levels of detail that you'll want to go into in your essays, but they will be useful to jog your memory. Obviously, in the process of revising this stuff, you will also want to be looking at the readings from during the course as well as your notes from tutorials and the essays that you've been writing on them. Nonetheless, here are three good books to get you started:

Julia Driver (2012). *Consequentialism* London: Routledge.

Julia Driver (2007). *Ethics: The Fundamentals* Malden: Blackwell.

Shelly Kagan (1998). *Normative Ethics* Boulder: Westview Press.