

Reading Guide #5: Utilitarianism

This reading guide is provided to assist you in your reading. I encourage you to read the material through, first, then go back to answer the questions. You are not expected to submit written answers. You are expected to have responses ready for class discussion. Only the boldfaced questions will appear on exams. Page numbers refer to Louis Pojman, *Moral Philosophy*, 3rd ed., Hackett.

John Stuart Mill, "Utilitarianism," pp 141-146.

- 1. What is the Greatest Happiness Principle?**
 - 2. Why do some critics consider utilitarianism, "A doctrine worthy only of swine" (141)? How does Mill respond to this objection?**
 - 3. How does Mill propose to determine which of two pleasures is more desirable? Why is this important to do?**
 - 4. "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied." (143) Explain.**
 5. Would utilitarianism be refuted if none of my good ("noble") actions served me directly? Explain.
 - 6. What is the ultimate goal of utilitarianism?**
 - 7. Why might utilitarianism provide too high a standard for morality? How does Mill respond?**
 - 8. How does Mill say that you can prove that some thing is desirable? How does this relate to utilitarianism?**
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Jeremy Bentham, "Classical Hedonism," pp 113-115.

1. How should we decide how to act?
 - 2. Describe each of the seven measures of pleasures and pains.**
 - 3. How does the utilitarian measure the value of acts which affect more than one person?**
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Robert Nozick, "The Experience Machine," pp 124-125.

- 1. What does the experience machine provide?**
- 2. What kinds of things do we want to do? Can the experience machine facilitate these things?**
- 3. Does the experience machine allow us to be what we want to be? How is plugging in to the machine like suicide?**
- 4. What do we want out of life, besides experiences? What does this mean for the experience machine?**

Kai Nielsen, "Against Moral Conservatism," pp 147-156.

- 1. What is conservatism? How does it oppose utilitarianism?**
 - 2. What is consequentialism? How does it seem to have intolerable implications?**
 - 3. Why does a utilitarian object to torturing innocents? Be specific.**
 - 4. What problems arise for the conservative, like Anscombe, in justifying war?**
 5. Are people who kill innocents always morally corrupt? Explain.
 - 6. How does a conservative evaluate the case of the innocent fat man? What does a consequentialist say?**
 - 7. How does a conservative evaluate the case of the magistrate and the threatening mob? What does a consequentialist say?**
 - 8. How might the consequentialist magistrate rely on precedent to avoid framing an innocent?**
 9. How does the utilitarian oppose the conservative's claim that moral rules should hold in all possible worlds?
 10. For the utilitarian, in what sense are moral claims a priori? Do specific moral rules hold in all possible worlds?
 - 11. Do we ignore the fat man's interests if we kill him to save the others?**
 - 12. How might the anti-consequentialist be more inhumane than the utilitarian?**
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Sterling Harwood, "Eleven Objections to Utilitarianism," pp 179-192.

- 1. How do utilitarian responses to criticism lead to different forms of the theory?**
- 2. How is utilitarianism a consequentialist theory?**
3. How is utilitarianism monistic, rather than pluralistic?
4. Distinguish hedonistic, preference-satisfaction, ideal, negative, and welfare utilitarianism.
5. How does utilitarianism appear overly demanding? Need it be?
6. Does utilitarianism have a problem of lacking room for supererogation? Explain.
- 7. How is utilitarianism criticized for violating demands of retributive justice?**
- 8. How is utilitarianism criticized for violating demands of distributive justice?**
- 9. How might preference utilitarianism avoid problems of promises?**
- 10. Should a utilitarian who breaks a promise in order to produce a greater good regret the broken promise? Explain.**
11. How does average utilitarianism suffer from the problem of addition by subtraction?
12. How does total utilitarianism suffer from the problem of the population boom?
- 13. How is rule utilitarianism redundant, or extensionally equivalent to act utilitarianism?**
14. How does utilitarianism allow, "[V]alue to be radically and objectionably disconnected from how things are in the world external to the subjects." (188)
15. How is eudaimonistic utilitarianism incompatible with monism? What does this mean for the interests of animals?
- 16. Why do bigots and sadists pose a problem for preference utilitarianism?**
17. Does utilitarianism have a problem making interpersonal comparisons of utility?
18. How might our inability to know what will make us happy be a problem for utilitarianism?