

Reading Guide #2: Utilitarianism

These reading guides are 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 hand in written answers. You are expected to have responses ready for class discussion. Only the boldfaced questions will appear on exams. Page numbers refer to Arthur, *Morality and Moral Controversies*, 7th ed.

John Stuart Mill, "Utilitarianism," pp 65-72.

1. Why can't Utilitarian or Happiness theory be proved? What will Mill provide instead of proof?
- 2. What is the Greatest Happiness Principle?**
- 3. Why do some critics consider utilitarianism "a doctrine worthy only of swine"? How does Mill respond to this objection?**
4. How does Mill propose to determine which of two pleasures is more desirable? Why is this important to do?
- 5. What are the "higher faculties"? How does Mill argue that they are better than the baser pleasures?**
6. Does utilitarianism see self-sacrifice as good in itself? What good is it?
- 7. Does Mill think that one's own happiness is more important than the happiness of others? Does he think it is less important?**
8. How does Mill deal with the objection that utilitarianism is godless?
- 9. Some critics of utilitarianism charge that it takes too much time. Why would it take a lot of time? How does Mill defend against this objection?**
10. "The proposition that happiness is the end and aim of morality does not mean that no road ought to be laid down to that goal..." (68) Explain.
11. How may secondary moral principles conflict? How are such disputes normally resolved? How does the utilitarian resolve such disputes?
12. How does Mill say that you can prove that some thing is desirable? How does this relate to utilitarianism? What more needs to be shown in order to establish utilitarianism as the sole standard of morality?
- 13. How does Mill respond to the allegation that people desire ends other than happiness?**
- 14. How does utilitarianism conflict with justice? (Note: the lecture notes will be more helpful than Mill himself on this question.)**
15. Describe the five different types of injustice Mill discusses.
16. What two characteristics does Mill find in all instances of injustice?
- 17. What is the relationship between justice and rights?**
18. What is a right? What does it mean to have a right?
- 19. Why, according to Mill, should we respect people's rights?**
- 20. How does the social contract justify punishment? How does Mill evaluate this justification?**

Richard B. Brandt, "The Real and Alleged Problems of Utilitarianism," pp 83-89.

1. Why is there a chaos of opinions in morality? How do philosophers attempt to introduce order?
 2. **Distinguish act utilitarianism from rule utilitarianism.**
 3. **What is a moral code? What role does it play in Brandt's definition of rule utilitarianism?**
 4. How do subgroups in a society present a puzzle for the rule utilitarian?
 5. **What kinds of goods does Mackie urge we should try to maximize? How is this a criticism of traditional utilitarianism?**
 6. What does the ideal utilitarian try to maximize? Why does Brandt reject ideal utilitarianism?
 7. **What does the interest-satisfaction (or "preference") utilitarian try to maximize? How does this "desire theory" solve some problems with hedonistic utilitarianism?**
 8. **What problems arise for the desire theory?**
 9. How does the doctrine of acts and omissions conflict with act utilitarianism? How does the rule utilitarian try to avoid the conflict?
 10. "The 'optimality' of a moral code encompasses both the benefits of reduced objectionable behavior and the long-term cost." (88) Explain how desires and dispositions reduce objectionable behavior and incur cost.
 11. **Does a moral code produce full compliance? Explain.**
 12. How might a lack of compliance with an optimal moral code make a utilitarian society dangerous? How does Brandt defend against this objection?
 13. **How does Brandt argue that we are required to act in accordance with an optimal moral code, even if that code is not currently accepted in society?**
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William Godwin, "Comparing Human Lives: The Archbishop and the Chambermaid," pp 240-241.

1. Why, according to Godwin, is a man worth more than a beast?
2. **"In the same manner the illustrious archbishop of Cambrai [Fenelon] was of more worth than his chambermaid." (240) Explain.**
3. How should considerations of the general good apply to one's evaluations of the worths of various lives?
4. Does Godwin's argument change if the chambermaid is your mother? Explain.
5. "Gratitude therefore, a principle which has so often been the theme of the moralist and the poet, is no part either of justice or virtue." (241) Explain.
6. **Which moral theory would Godwin prefer?**