

Mill's *Utilitarianism*

These eight lectures will cover much the same ground as previous lectures on *Utilitarianism* given by Dr Crisp and Dr Tasioulas, but in a somewhat different order and with a somewhat different slant. Previous reading lists will remain very useful as a resource, and everyone is encouraged to download them and make use of them. Because this will be for many students their first exposure to moral philosophy, these lectures will be particularly concerned with Mill's own view of what he was doing in writing *Utilitarianism*, and with placing the work in the context of the work of his predecessors and opponents. They are less concerned with the standard puzzles about the concept of utility, utility-maximization, 'utility-monsters' and the like. Part of the reason for this is that Mill was the author of *On Liberty* as well as *Utilitarianism*, and a somewhat neglected subject is that of the way in which these two works relate – or were intended by Mill to relate – to one another.

- 1. Mill's Programme; Utility Before Utilitarianism: Aristotle and Hume** Mill as a propagandist; the polemical character of *Utilitarianism*; what Mill thought morality was. The place of happiness in earlier ethical theories – Aristotle and Hume as examples; why they were not utilitarians, and why Mill believed that Aristotle was one.
- 2. Mill's Opponents: Kant, Whewell, Intuitionism and Moral Sense Theories** Mill's argument for a hedonistic theory of value: morality must have a purpose; the Art of Life and morality's place within it; the anti-utilitarians – Kant and Whewell and duty for duty's sake; what's wrong with intuitionist and moral sense theories.
- 3. Moving on from Bentham: Quantity and Quality** Bentham and the invention of utilitarianism; the felicific calculus; Mill's introduction of considerations of quality as well as quantity: Socrates and the fool; should Mill have worried about the puzzles raised by 20th Century critics?
- 4. The 'Proof' of the Principle of Utility** Does the idea of proving a moral principle make sense? What does Mill's proof really attempt to achieve? The analogy between 'visible' and 'seen' on the one hand and 'desirable' and 'desired' on the other; alternative renderings of Mill's proof.
- 5. Utility and Obligation: Why we should be moral.** Why was Mill so concerned with the 'sanctions' of morality? Mill's understanding of morality once more; Mill's opponents and their doubts about the efficacy of utilitarian reasoning; Mill's response. Does Mill confuse motivation and obligation?
- 6. Utility and Justice** The conflict between aggregative and distributive values; can justice be reduced to utility? Mill's understanding of the issues at stake. Mill's analysis in terms of security; and his analysis in terms of individual interests. Is he more nearly right than his critics?
- 7. Utility and Rights** The utilitarian analysis of rights: Mill versus Bentham; natural rights, moral rights, and 'nonsense going on stilts.' How far can Mill get in analysing rights on a utilitarian basis: which rights are more resistant than which others? Kant again.

8. Beyond morality: from *Utilitarianism* to *On Liberty*

Morality as only one aspect of the Art of Life; duty vs the supererogatory; personal excellence as a non-moral goal; making the world safe for more important values than moral values. *On Liberty* and self-development. Is the whole system coherent?

Reading:

Texts:

Roger Crisp (ed), *Utilitarianism*, (OUP, 1988) has a very useful commentary and notes
Alan Ryan (ed), *Utilitarianism and Other Essays* contains Mill's essay on Bentham and his critique of Whewell's moral philosophy, as well as extracts from Bentham's *Principles of Morals and Legislation* and a long introduction

Commentary:

Roger Crisp, *Mill on Utilitarianism* (**nb.** not the same as the book above)

John Skorupski, *John Stuart Mill*, ch 9

Wendy Donner, 'Mill's Utilitarianism' in John Skorupski, ed *The Cambridge*

Companion to John Stuart Mill (Cambridge UP, 1997) pp 255-292

Fred Berger, *Happiness, Justice and Freedom*

E.C. West, ed, *Blackwell Companion to Mill's Utilitarianism* (contains Mill's texts as well as some biographical and analytical essays.)

Essential Reading:

Bernard Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*

Bernard Williams and JJC Smart, *Utilitarianism, For and Against*

John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*

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