

happiness at every turn, that suggests a different answer to our initial question: my obligation is to refrain from interfering forcibly with my friend's decision to smoke so long as his choice is autonomous, whether or not refraining maximizes happiness.

Bottom-up theorists not only generalize to principles from specific moral judgments, they also test possible principles against these judgments. For instance, we may challenge utilitarianism because it might dictate actions that seem plainly objectionable: e.g., it might demand incarcerating an innocent person to provide a scapegoat to mollify a massive, angry crowd.

John Rawls's method involves using concrete and abstract judgments in tandem, a hybrid of top-down and bottom-up approaches. Rawls regards "the nature of moral theory" as an effort to describe the foundations underlying our moral capacities and their application, just as the study of grammar describes the systematic rules underlying our fairly automatic application of our sense of grammar to the formation and recognition of well-formed sentences. To understand morality, we must understand our considered moral judgments about particular cases and identify unifying, rationally defensible principles that justify and illuminate these judgments. Rawls, a contractualist, conceives of these principles as those we would choose under fair conditions if we were choosing principles to regulate our interactions; so we must consider what constitutes fair choice conditions and whether our candidate principles would be chosen. If our principles and judgments conflict, then we must investigate whether the principles are flawed and need revision, or whether our judgments are mistaken assessments that upon reflection seem hasty, ill-considered, or to reflect an unreasonable favoring of one's own circumstances or interests. When the principles and our judgments harmonize, we occupy what Rawls calls a "reflective equilibrium," a theoretical position that provides a moral foundation for justifying, criticizing, and guiding conduct.

All ethical theories that use bottom-up approaches confront criticism about the use of our considered particular judgments about cases, otherwise referred to as *intuitions* or, in Elizabeth Harman's terms, "specific ethical claims." Our intuitions may merely reflect our upbringing, prejudices, or immediate gut reactions, rather than encapsulating sound reasoning. Further, different people's intuitions may conflict, suggesting that intuitions may not offer solid footing for a universal moral theory. Some intuitions must be mis-taken, rendering them unreliable calibration points. Harman offers a rousing defense of the use of intuitions in moral reasoning against these doubts.

Skepticism about Moral Reasoning

Friedrich Nietzsche provides a highly critical counterpoint to all these approaches, voicing skepticism about the widely shared presupposition that we can identify the content of morality through careful reasoning, whether top-down or bottom-up. Nietzsche not only strongly tilts against the substance of most

modern moral thought, he also writes in a markedly different style. He used the epigrammatic form self-consciously, declaring "it is my ambition to say in ten sentences what everyone else says in a book—what everyone else does not say in a book."³ Refreshing and stimulating to some while exasperating for others, his tone echoes the rebellious substance of his ideas.

Nietzsche contends that reasoning will not reveal morality's content because morality is a socially created set of rules designed to serve the interests of a particular group of people (of whom he is critical). Nietzsche champions the use of the **genealogical method**, a process of excavating the origins of conventional moral ideas to expose whose interests they serve, to discredit conventional moral principles. Among his surprising conclusions, contra Mill, is that pain and suffering are not morally special or particularly bad and that we do not have strong reasons to relieve others' suffering. Rather than investigating what respect for others requires, Nietzsche advocates fostering the greatest individual lives, lives akin to great works of art. As individuals, each of us should confront with unblinking honesty the truth about ourselves and endeavor to live joyfully and exuberantly.

John Stuart Mill (1806–1873)

Mill was born in London, England. He was educated by his father, James Mill, a distinguished Scottish philosopher, political theorist, economist, and historian. A utilitarian, empiricist, and important public thinker, Mill was author of *Utilitarianism*, *Considerations on Representative Government*, *Principles of Political Economy*, *Subjection of Women*, *System of Logic*, *The Autobiography of John Stuart Mill*, and, most famously, *On Liberty*. Apart from his writings, Mill worked at the East India Company (1823–58), served as a Member of Parliament (1865–68), and was Lord Rector of the University of St. Andrews (1865–68).

UTILITARIANISM

Chapter 1: General Remarks

There ought either to be some one fundamental principle or law, at the root of all morality, or if there be several, there should be a determinate order of precedence among them; and the one principle, or the rule for deciding between the various principles when they conflict, ought to be self-evident...

³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, from *The Portable Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufman (Viking Press, 1976), p. 556.

On the present occasion, I shall, without further discussion of other theories, attempt to contribute something towards the understanding and appreciation of the Utilitarian or Happiness theory. . . .

I shall offer some illustrations of the doctrine itself; with the view of showing more clearly what it is, distinguishing it from what it is not, and disposing of such of the practical objections to it as either originate in, or are closely connected with, mistaken interpretations of its meaning. . . .

Chapter 2: What Utilitarianism Is

. . . The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure. To give a clear view of the moral standard set up by the theory, much more requires to be said; in particular, what things it includes in the ideas of pain and pleasure; and to what extent this is left an open question. But these supplementary explanations do not affect the theory of life on which this theory of morality is grounded—namely, that pleasure, and freedom from pain, are the only things desirable as ends; and that all desirable things (which are as numerous in the utilitarian as in any other scheme) are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in themselves, or as means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain.

Now, such a theory of life excites in many minds . . . inveterate dislike. To suppose that life has (as they express it) no higher end than pleasure — no better and nobler object of desire and pursuit — they designate as utterly mean and grovelling: as a doctrine worthy only of swine, to whom the followers of Epicurus¹ were, at a very early period, contemptuously likened. . . .

The Epicureans have always answered, that it is not they, but their accusers, who represent human nature in a degrading light; since the accusation supposes human beings to be capable of no pleasures except those of which swine are capable. . . . Human beings have faculties more elevated than the animal appetites, and when once made conscious of them, do not regard anything as happiness which does not include their gratification. . . . There is no known Epicurean theory of life which does not assign to the pleasures of the intellect, of the feelings and imagination, and of the moral sentiments, a much higher value as pleasures than to those of mere sensation. . . .

If I am asked, what I mean by difference of quality in pleasures, or what makes one pleasure more valuable than another, merely as a pleasure, except its being greater in amount, there is but one possible answer. Of two pleasures, if there be one to which

all or almost all who have experience of both give a decided preference, irrespective of any feeling of moral obligation to prefer it, that is the more desirable pleasure. If one of the two is, by those who are competently acquainted with both, placed so far above the other that they prefer it, even though knowing it to be attended with a greater amount of discontent, and would not resign it for any quantity of the other pleasure which their nature is capable of, we are justified in ascribing to the preferred enjoyment a superiority in quality, so far outweighing quantity as to render it, in comparison, of small account.

Now it is an unquestionable fact that those who are equally acquainted with, and equally capable of appreciating and enjoying, both, do give a most marked preference to the manner of existence which employs their higher faculties. Few human creatures would consent to be changed into any of the lower animals, for a promise of the fullest allowance of a beast's pleasures; no intelligent human being would consent to be a fool, no instructed person would be an ignoramus, no person of feeling and conscience would be selfish and base, even though they should be persuaded that the fool, the dunce, or the rascal is better satisfied with his lot than they are with theirs. They would not resign what they possess more than he for the most complete satisfaction of all the desires which they have in common with him. If they ever fancy they would, it is only in cases of unhappiness so extreme, that to escape from it they would exchange their lot for almost any other, however undesirable in their own eyes. A being of higher faculties requires more to make him happy, is capable probably of more acute suffering, and certainly accessible to it at more points, than one of an inferior type; but in spite of these liabilities, he can never really wish to sink into what he feels to be a lower grade of existence. . . .

Whoever supposes that this preference takes place at a sacrifice of happiness — that the superior being, in anything like equal circumstances, is not happier than the inferior — confounds the two very different ideas, of happiness, and content. It is indisputable that the being whose capacities of enjoyment are low, has the greatest chance of having them fully satisfied; and a highly endowed being will always feel that any happiness which he can look for, as the world is constituted, is imperfect. But he can learn to bear its imperfections, if they are at all bearable; and they will not make him envy the being who is indeed unconscious of the imperfections, but only because he feels not at all the good which those imperfections qualify. It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question. The other party to the comparison knows both sides. . . .

From this verdict of the only competent judges, I apprehend there can be no appeal. On a question which is the best worth having of two pleasures, . . . the judgment of those who are qualified by knowledge of both, or, if they differ, that of the majority among them, must be admitted as final. . . .

1. Epicurus (341–270 BCE) was an Ancient Greek philosopher whose complete works have not survived. His fragments and the works of his followers suggest that he contended that a good life involved attaining pleasure and avoiding pain.

for that standard is not the agent's own greatest happiness, but the greatest amount of happiness altogether; and if it may possibly be doubted whether a noble character is always the happier for its nobleness, there can be no doubt that it makes other people happier, and that the world in general is immensely a gainer by it. Utilitarianism, therefore, could only attain its end by the general cultivation of nobleness of character, even if each individual were only benefited by the nobleness of others, and his own, so far as happiness is concerned, were a sheer deduction from the benefit....

According to the Greatest Happiness Principle, as above explained, the ultimate end, with reference to and for the sake of which all other things are desirable (whether we are considering our own good or that of other people), is an existence exempt as far as possible from pain, and as rich as possible in enjoyments, both in point of quantity and quality; the test of quality, and the rule for measuring it against quantity, being the preference felt by those who in their opportunities of experience, to which must be added their habits of self-consciousness and self-observation, are best furnished with the means of comparison. This, being, according to the utilitarian opinion, the end of human action, is necessarily also the standard of morality; which may accordingly be defined, the rules and precepts for human conduct, by the observance of which an existence such as has been described might be, to the greatest extent possible, secured to all mankind; and not to them only, but, so far as the nature of things admits, to the whole sentient creation.

Against this doctrine, however, arises another class of objectors, who say that happiness, in any form, cannot be the rational purpose of human life and action; because, in the first place, it is unattainable....

Something might still be said for the utilitarian theory; since utility includes not solely the pursuit of happiness, but the prevention or mitigation of unhappiness; and if the former aim be chimerical, there will be all the greater scope and more imperative need for the latter.... If by happiness be meant a continuity of highly pleasurable excitement, it is evident enough that this is impossible. A state of exalted pleasure lasts only moments, or in some cases, and with some intermissions, hours or days, and is the occasional brilliant flash of enjoyment, not its permanent and steady flame. Of this the philosophers who have taught that happiness is the end of life were as fully aware as those who taunt them. The happiness which they meant was not a life of rapture but moments of such, in an existence made up of few and transitory pains, many and various pleasures, with a decided predominance of the active over the passive, and having as the foundation of the whole, not to expect more from life than it is capable of bestowing. A life thus composed, to those who have been fortunate enough to obtain it, has always appeared worthy of the name of happiness....

... The main constituents of a satisfied life appear to be two, either of which by itself is often found sufficient for the purpose: tranquillity, and excitement. With much tranquillity, many find that they can be content with very little pleasure: with much excitement, many can reconcile themselves to a considerable quantity of pain. There is assuredly no inherent impossibility in enabling even the mass of mankind to unite both since the two are so far from being incompatible that they are in natural alliance, the prolongation of either being a preparation for, and exciting a wish for, the other.... When

people who are tolerably fortunate in their outward lot do not find in life sufficient enjoyment to make it valuable to them, the cause generally is, caring for nobody but themselves. To those who have neither public nor private affections, the excitements of life are much curtailed, and in any case dwindle in value as the time approaches when all selfish interests must be terminated by death; while those who leave after them objects of personal affection, and especially those who have also cultivated a fellow-feeling with the collective interests of mankind, retain as lively an interest in life on the eve of death as in the vigour of youth and health. Next to selfishness, the principal cause which makes life unsatisfactory is want of mental cultivation. A cultivated mind — I do not mean that of a philosopher, but any mind to which the fountains of knowledge have been opened, and which has been taught, in any tolerable degree, to exercise its faculties — finds sources of inexhaustible interest in all that surrounds it; in the objects of nature, the achievements of art, the imaginations of poetry, the incidents of history, the ways of mankind, past and present, and their prospects in the future....

Now there is absolutely no reason in the nature of things why an amount of mental culture sufficient to give an intelligent interest in these objects of contemplation, should not be the inheritance of every one born in a civilised country. As little is there an inherent necessity that any human being should be a selfish egotist, devoid of every feeling or care but those which centre in his own miserable individuality. Something far superior to this is sufficiently common even now.... Genuine private affections and a sincere interest in the public good, are possible, though in unequal degrees, to every rightly brought up human being. In a world in which there is so much to interest, so much to enjoy, and so much also to correct and improve, every one who has this moderate amount of moral and intellectual requisites is capable of an existence which may be called enviable; and unless such a person, through bad laws, or subjection to the will of others, is denied the liberty to use the sources of happiness within his reach, he will not fail to find this enviable existence, if he escape the positive evils of life, the great sources of physical and mental suffering — such as indigence, disease, and the unkindness, worthlessness, or premature loss of objects of affection.... Most of the great positive evils of the world are in themselves removable, and will, if human affairs continue to improve, be indefinitely reduced in dimensions by good physical and moral education, and proper control of noxious influences; while the progress of science holds out a promise for the future of still more direct conquests over this detestable foe. And every advance in that direction relieves us from some, not only of the chances which cut short our own lives, but, what concerns us still more, which deprive us of those in whom our happiness is wrapt up. As for vicissitudes of fortune, and other disappointments connected with worldly circumstances, these are principally the effect either of gross imprudence, of ill-regulated desires, or of bad or imperfect social institutions....

Unquestionably it is possible to do without happiness; it is done involuntarily by nineteen-twentieths of mankind, even in those parts of our present world which are least deep in barbarism; and it often has to be done voluntarily by the hero or the

martyr, for the sake of something which he prizes more than his individual happiness. But this something, what is it, unless the happiness of others or some of the requisites of happiness? It is noble to be capable of resigning entirely one's own portion of happiness, or chances of it; but, after all, this self-sacrifice must be for some end; it is not its own end; and if we are told that its end is not happiness, but virtue, which is better than happiness, I ask, would the sacrifice be made if the hero or martyr did not believe that it would earn for others immunity from similar sacrifices? Would it be made if he thought that his renunciation of happiness for himself would produce no fruit for any of his fellow creatures, but to make their lot like his, and place them also in the condition of persons who have renounced happiness? ...

The utilitarian morality does recognise in human beings the power of sacrificing their own greatest good for the good of others. It only refuses to admit that the sacrifice is itself a good. A sacrifice which does not increase, or tend to increase, the sum total of happiness, it considers as wasted....

The happiness which forms the utilitarian standard of what is right in conduct, is not the agent's own happiness, but that of all concerned. As between his own happiness and that of others, utilitarianism requires him to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator. In the golden rule of Jesus of Nazareth, we read the complete spirit of the ethics of utility. To do as you would be done by, and to love your neighbour as yourself, constitute the ideal perfection of utilitarian morality. As the means of making the nearest approach to this ideal, utility would enjoin, first, that laws and social arrangements should place the happiness, or (as speaking practically it may be called) the interest, of every individual, as nearly as possible in harmony with the interest of the whole; and secondly, that education and opinion, which have so vast a power over human character, should so use that power as to establish in the mind of every individual an indissoluble association between his own happiness and the good of the whole; especially between his own happiness and the practice of such modes of conduct, negative and positive, as regard for the universal happiness prescribes; so that not only he may be unable to conceive the possibility of happiness to himself, consistently with conduct opposed to the general good, but also that a direct impulse to promote the general good may be in every individual one of the habitual motives of action, and the sentiments connected therewith may fill a large and prominent place in every human being's sentient existence....

[Some] objectors to utilitarianism . . . sometimes find fault with its standard as being too high for humanity. They say it is exacting too much to require that people shall always act from the inducement of promoting the general interests of society. But this is to mistake the very meaning of a standard of morals, and confound the rule of action with the motive of it. It is the business of ethics to tell us what are our duties, or by what test we may know them; but no system of ethics requires that the sole motive of all we do shall be a feeling of duty; on the contrary, ninety-nine hundredths of all our actions are done from other motives, and rightly so done, if the rule of duty does not condemn them. . . . He who saves a fellow creature from drowning does what is morally right, whether his motive be duty, or the hope of being paid for his trouble; he who betrays the friend that trusts him, is guilty of a crime, even if his object be to serve another friend to whom he is under greater obligations.

... It is a misapprehension of the utilitarian mode of thought, to conceive it as implying that people should fix their minds upon so wide a generality as the world, or society at large. The great majority of good actions are intended not for the benefit of the world, but for that of individuals, of which the good of the world is made up; and the thoughts of the most virtuous man need not on these occasions travel beyond the particular persons concerned, except so far as is necessary to assure himself that in benefiting them he is not violating the rights, that is, the legitimate and authorised expectations, of any one else. The multiplication of happiness is, according to the utilitarian ethics, the object of virtue: the occasions on which any person (except one in a thousand) has it in his power to do this on an extended scale, in other words to be a public benefactor, are but exceptional; and on these occasions alone is he called on to consider public utility; in every other case, private utility, the interest or happiness of some few persons, is all he has to attend to. Those alone the influence of whose actions extends to society in general, need concern themselves habitually about so large an object. In the case of abstinences indeed—of things which people forbear to do from moral considerations, though the consequences in the particular case might be beneficial—it would be unworthy of an intelligent agent not to be consciously aware that the action is of a class which, if practised generally, would be generally injurious, and that this is the ground of the obligation to abstain from it. . . .

The same considerations dispose of another reproach against the doctrine of utility, founded on a still grosser misconception of the purpose of a standard of morality, and of the very meaning of the words right and wrong. It is often affirmed that utilitarianism renders men cold and unsympathising; that it chills their moral feelings towards individuals; that it makes them regard only the dry and hard consideration of the consequences of actions, not taking into their moral estimate the qualities from which those actions emanate. If the assertion means that they do not allow their judgment respecting the rightness or wrongness of an action to be influenced by their opinion of the qualities of the person who does it, this is a complaint not against utilitarianism, but against having any standard of morality at all; for certainly no known ethical standard decides an action to be good or bad because it is done by a good or a bad man, still less because done by an amiable, a brave, or a benevolent man, or the contrary. These considerations are relevant, not to the estimation of actions, but of persons; and there is nothing in the utilitarian theory inconsistent with the fact that there are other things which interest us in persons besides the rightness and wrongness of their actions. . . . Utilitarians are quite aware . . . that a right action does not necessarily indicate a virtuous character, and that actions which are blamable, often proceed from qualities entitled to praise. When this is apparent in any particular case, it modifies their estimation, not certainly of the act, but of the agent. I grant that they are, notwithstanding, of opinion, that in the long run the best proof of a good character is good actions; and resolutely refuse to consider any mental disposition as good, of which the predominant tendency is to produce bad conduct. . . .

Utility is often summarily stigmatised as an immoral doctrine by giving it the name of Expediency, and taking advantage of the popular use of that term to contrast it with Principle. But the Expedient, in the sense in which it is opposed to the Right, generally means that which is expedient for the particular interest of the agent himself. . . . When it means anything better than this, it means that which is

expedient for some immediate object; some temporary purpose, but which violates a rule whose observance is expedient in a much higher degree. The Expedient, in this sense, instead of being the same thing with the useful, is a branch of the hurtful. Thus, it would often be expedient, for the purpose of getting over some momentary embarrassment, or attaining some object immediately useful to ourselves or others, to tell a lie. But inasmuch as the cultivation in ourselves of a sensitive feeling on the subject of veracity, is one of the most useful, and the enfeeblement of that feeling one of the most hurtful, things to which our conduct can be instrumental; and inasmuch as any, even unintentional, deviation from truth, does that much towards weakening the trustworthiness of human assertion, which is not only the principal support of all present social well-being, but the insufficiency of which does more than any one thing that can be named to keep back civilisation, virtue, everything on which human happiness on the largest scale depends; we feel that the violation, for a present advantage, of a rule of such transcendent expediency, is not expedient, and that he who, for the sake of a convenience to himself or to some other individual, does what depends on him to deprive mankind of the good, and inflict upon them the evil, involved in the greater or less reliance which they can place in each other's word, acts the part of one of their worst enemies. Yet that even this rule, sacred as it is, admits of possible exceptions, is acknowledged by all moralists; the chief of which is when the withholding of some fact (as of information from a malefactor, or of bad news from a person dangerously ill) would save an individual (especially an individual other than oneself) from great and unmerited evil, and when the withholding can only be effected by denial. But in order that the exception may not extend itself beyond the need, and may have the least possible effect in weakening reliance on veracity, it ought to be recognised, and, if possible, its limits defined; and if the principle of utility is good for anything, it must be good for weighing these conflicting utilities against one another, and marking out the region within which one or the other preponderates.

... [Some object] that there is not time, previous to action, for calculating and weighing the effects of any line of conduct on the general happiness. This is exactly as if any one were to say that it is impossible to guide our conduct by Christianity, because there is not time, on every occasion on which anything has to be done, to read through the Old and New Testaments. The answer to the objection is, that there has been ample time, namely, the whole past duration of the human species. During all that time, mankind have been learning by experience the tendencies of actions on which experience all the prudence, as well as all the morality of life, are dependent. People talk as if the commencement of this course of experience had hitherto been put off, and as if, at the moment when some man feels tempted to meddle with the property or life of another, he had to begin considering for the first time whether murder and theft are injurious to human happiness. . . .

[Mankind must by this time have acquired positive beliefs as to the effects of some actions on their happiness; and the beliefs which have thus come down are the rules of morality for the multitude, and for the philosopher until he has succeeded in finding better. . . . The corollaries from the principle of utility, like the precepts of every practical art, admit of indefinite improvement. . . .

But to consider the rules of morality as improvable, is one thing; to pass over the intermediate generalisations entirely, and endeavour to test each individual action directly by the first principle, is another. It is a strange notion that the acknowledgment of a first principle is inconsistent with the admission of secondary ones. To inform a traveller respecting the place of his ultimate destination, is not to forbid the use of landmarks and direction-posts on the way. 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, or that persons going thither should not be advised to take one direction rather than another. . . . Nobody argues that the art of navigation is not founded on astronomy, because sailors cannot wait to calculate the Nautical Almanack.² Being rational creatures, they go to sea with it ready calculated; and all rational creatures go out upon the sea of life with their minds made up on the common questions of right and wrong, as well as on many of the far more difficult questions of wise and foolish. . . . Whatever we adopt as the fundamental principle of morality, we require subordinate principles to apply it by; the impossibility of doing without them, being common to all systems, can afford no argument against any one in particular. . . .

The remainder of the stock arguments against utilitarianism mostly consist in laying to its charge the common infirmities of human nature. . . . We are told that a utilitarian will be apt to make his own particular case an exception to moral rules, and, when under temptation, will see a utility in the breach of a rule, greater than he will see in its observance. But is utility the only creed which is able to furnish us with excuses for evil doing, and means of cheating our own conscience? They are afforded in abundance by all doctrines which recognise as a fact in morals the existence of conflicting considerations, which all doctrines do, that have been believed by sane persons. It is not the fault of any creed, but of the complicated nature of human affairs, that rules of conduct cannot be so framed as to require no exceptions, and that hardly any kind of action can safely be laid down as either always obligatory or always condemnable. There is no ethical creed which does not temper the rigidity of its laws, by giving a certain latitude, under the moral responsibility of the agent, for accommodation to peculiarities of circumstances; and under every creed, at the opening thus made, self-deception and dishonest casuistry³ get in. There exists no moral system under which there do not arise unequivocal cases of conflicting obligation. . . . If utility is the ultimate source of moral obligations, utility may be invoked to decide between them when their demands are incompatible. Though the application of the standard may be difficult, it is better than none at all: while in other systems, the moral laws all claiming independent authority, there is no common umpire entitled to interfere between them; their claims to precedence one over another rest on little better than

² To assist in navigation, a nautical almanac offers projections about the locations and distances of celestial bodies during a calendar year. The information could be calculated by sailors, *en route*, with difficulty, but Mills' point is that it is reasonable to rely on prior calculations.

³ Casuistry is the ethical evaluation of particular cases, with a sensitivity to their distinguishing details. The term "casuistry" is sometimes used pejoratively to suggest the use of specious reasoning to make distinctions, often to serve one's own purposes.

sophistry, and unless determined, as they generally are, by the unacknowledged influence of considerations of utility, afford a free scope for the action of personal desires and partialities. We must remember that only in these cases of conflict between secondary principles is it requisite that first principles should be appealed to.

TEST YOUR UNDERSTANDING

- For Mill, is it better to be "a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied"? Is it better to be "Socrates dissatisfied" or a satisfied fool?
- For a utilitarian, happiness "forms the standard of what is right in conduct." Whose happiness counts?
- Mill claims that utilitarianism tells us what our duties are, but not what our motives should be in performing them. What is his example of the difference between the "rule of action" and the "motive of action"? What objection to utilitarianism does he use this distinction to answer?

NOTES AND QUESTIONS

- Mill on pleasure:** Mill responds to some critics of early forms of utilitarianism by rejecting simple hedonism. Mill does not equate "pleasure" with sensory experiences of pleasure. Moreover, he contends that not all pleasures are alike qualitatively, e.g., pleasure need not resemble the lovely feeling one gets when basking in the sun or enjoying an ice cream. Finally, he observes that not all pleasures are equally important. His more sophisticated view of pleasure may save his version of utilitarianism from the insult that it is a "doctrine worthy only of swine." Is his account open to the objection that one might fail to enjoy and even dislike what Mill counts as an episode of "pleasure"? Does that render his account of pleasure implausible and does it cast doubt upon his utilitarian theory?
- Is pleasure always good and is pain always bad?** Should we agree that pleasure and the absence of pain are always good? Consider the following criticisms: (a) The pleasure a sadist receives from contemplating another's (nonconsensual) suffering does not seem good in any way. (b) Further, the emotional pain of guilt that a criminal feels upon recognizing and regretting the wrong of her past actions is a good thing. Someone who has done something wrong but does not suffer painful pangs of guilt is defective and does not lead a better life.
- Pleasure is the only good.** Some critics agree with Mill that actions are right because of their consequences. They and Mill are **consequentialists**. Non-utilitarian consequentialists differ from Mill about how to characterize which consequences are valuable. They argue that pleasure is not the only good and that other individual and social

⁴ Harming innocents as a means to generating aggregate utility. Consider the following three scenarios:

- A super-sized stadium full of sadists gathers to witness the nonconsensual public flogging of an innocent child. Enough fervent sadists attend so that the aggregate utility, given their intense experiences of elation, would outweigh the disutility experienced by the victim and his sympathizers, even taking into account his absolutely awful pain, his feelings of betrayal, and subsequent trauma.
- Suppose if a child is privately tortured, that upon hearing his screams, his parent will reveal secret information that will assist the government in trade negotiations and raise the nation's standard of living a small amount, thereby generating enough positive utility for citizens that would, in the aggregate, outweigh (numerically) the terrific disutility experienced by the solitary victim, his parents, and the torturer.
- Suppose if a child is privately tortured, that his parent will reveal secret information that will prevent a terrorist bombing, save 1,000 innocent lives, and thereby generate more positive utility than the disutility experienced by the victim and his parent.

Is utilitarianism vulnerable to the objections that (a) it would require the child be tortured in all of these cases and (b) if the utility produced were equal in quantity, that it would not regard these cases as different and would not be sensitive to the reasons why utility was produced?

- The issues raised by these questions are crucial points of contention between consequentialists and some non-consequentialist critics who argue that, morally, we are sometimes prohibited from bringing about the best consequences. For instance, they claim that some courses of action are horrific in nature and must not be taken, even if they sometimes produce good consequences. Actions like torture, killing for sport, or scapegoating the innocent involve treating human beings in ways that are inconsistent with a core feature of morality: to show respect for each person. We must not treat any person with profound disrespect even if our purposes are otherwise good. This position represents an example of **deontology**, the view that, morally, there are certain sorts of actions we have duties to perform or to refrain from and these duties may be characterized by features other than the consequences they happen to bring about in particular circumstances. Some important discussions of the deontological criticism of utilitarianism may be found in Bernard Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism," in J.C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge