

Moral Philosophy: Mill

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Michaelmas Term 2023

LOGISTICS

Essays and Individual Tutorials: At individual tutorials, we will discuss your essays. Please confine your essays proper to 1000 words, maximum. If you wish to write more (e.g. to explore a complication or ask a question that doesn't fit in the main flow of the essay), that is great, but add in the extra as an appendix or in footnotes. Your 1000-word essay, without appendix or footnotes, should flow smoothly from start to finish. I highly recommend reading it out loud to yourself! A well-written essay will be a pleasure to hear as well as to read.

Please be sure to:

- 1) Send your essay to me as a PDF *over email by 9am* on the day of your tutorial.
- 2) *Title* your document as follows: Last Name, First Name - Week Number - Topic.
- 3) Also put your name, week number, and topic in the body of the essay so that I can tell which is which after they are printed.
- 4) Add *page numbers* to your document, and also *number each paragraph*. This makes it easier for us to find passages together during your tutorial.
- 5) *Bring two paper copies* of your essay to our individual tutorial meetings so that we can go over your essay line by line together.
- 6) If you were not able to write an essay for a given week, please send me an email to explain what went wrong and to let me know not to expect you at our individual tutorial. You are still welcome to attend the group tutorial, so long as you have done the primary reading and priority secondary reading for the week.

Group Tutorials: At group tutorials, we will have wide-ranging discussions of the readings and the philosophical questions they raise. We may or may not discuss that week's essay question, but we will not discuss individual student essays.

Please be sure to:

- 1) *Come prepared* for these discussions by having done at least the primary reading and priority secondary reading for the week; you owe this both to yourself and to your fellow students, since class discussion suffers enormously when participants have not done the reading.
- 2) Bring a paper copy of Mill.
- 3) If you were not able to complete the primary and priority secondary reading for the week, please send me an email to explain what went wrong and to let me know not to expect you at the group tutorial.

Revisions: We will meet in Trinity 2024, times TBD, for revisions. *It is your responsibility to prepare in advance to take advantage of these revision sessions.* Please come with specific questions and topics you would like to bat around. I will merely be serving as the sounding-board for your questions and brainstorm. This is your chance to think carefully about what your areas of clarity and confusion are and what you would like to learn more about as you head into Prelims.

Resources for this paper

Videos & handouts of MT 2021 lectures by Dr Jeremy Fix: https://canvas.ox.ac.uk/courses/170775/pages/moral-philosophy-mill-utilitarianism-mt21?module_item_id=1771180

Videos & handouts of MT 2020 lectures by Dr Jeremy Fix: https://canvas.ox.ac.uk/courses/170775/pages/moral-philosophy-mill-utilitarianism-mt20?module_item_id=1771194

Dr Tom Sinclair's syllabus, posted on his website, includes loads of additional resources—readings, brief abstracts of the readings writing exercises, and sample essay questions—that you are strongly encouraged to draw upon: <https://users.ox.ac.uk/~lady2916/readinglists/moralphilosophy.html>.

General resources for philosophy reading and writing

A number of my colleagues have prepared excellent guides to philosophy tutorial learning at Oxford, essay writing, etc., which are available on their websites. I particularly recommend Tom Sinclair's guides to [preparing for your tutorial](#), [tutorial essay writing](#), and [revising for exams](#); [Daniel Harkin's guide to writing commentaries](#); and Rachel Fraser's [philosophy gobbet exercise](#), [essay writing guidance](#), [advice about what not to do](#), [taxonomy of finals questions](#), and [sample first-class finals answer](#).

TOPICS AND READINGS

NB: Although our work this term will focus on Mill's utilitarianism rather than his liberalism, the two are deeply related, and neither should be understood in isolation from his career at the British East India Company, where he worked for 35 years. For a bit of background, I recommend the following short article:

Parekh, Bhikhu. 1994. Superior People: The Narrowness of Liberalism from Mill to Rawls. *Times Literary Supplement* 25: 11–13

Parekh explores the ways in which Millian ideas have been used to justify, not only outright colonial domination, but also contemporary neocolonial practices and attitudes.

Week 4. Act and Rule Consequentialism

Explain the 'collapse objection' to rule utilitarianism. (This requires you to first carefully but briefly explain what act utilitarianism is, what rule utilitarianism is, and why rule utilitarianism was developed as a response to certain objections to act utilitarianism.) Is the 'collapse objection' fatal to the project of developing a convincing rule-based alternative to act utilitarianism?

Primary reading:

Mill, Chapters 1-2 and 5.

Priority secondary reading:

Roger Crisp, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Mill on Utilitarianism* (Routledge, 1997), pp. 95–124.

J.J.C. Smart, 'An Outline of a System of Utilitarian Ethics', §§1, 2 and 7, in Smart & Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against*.

Bernard Williams, *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 82-98.

Revision reading:

Brad Hooker, 'Right, Wrong, and Rule-Consequentialism', in Henry R. West (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Mill's Utilitarianism* (Blackwell, 2006).

Wendy Donner, 'Mill's Utilitarianism', in John Skorupski (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Mill* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 278–82.

Richard Arneson, 'Sophisticated Rule Consequentialism: Some Simple Objections', *Philosophical Issues* vol. 15, no. 1 (2005).

Pieces by Urmson, Mabbott, Rawls, and Smart in Foot (ed.), *Theories of Ethics*.

Hare, *Freedom and Reason*, Chapter 7, §6.

Week 6. What is Happiness?

Well? What is it?

Primary reading:

Mill, Chapter 2.

Priority secondary reading:

Crisp, *op. cit.*, Chapters 2-3.

Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-81.

Smart, *op. cit.*, pp. 3-73.

Revision reading:

Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*, the essay on Mill.

Anthony Kenny, Happiness, in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* (1965-66).

Week 7. Justice

'That a feeling is bestowed on us by Nature, does not necessarily legitimate all its promptings. The feeling of justice might be a peculiar instinct, and might yet require, like our other instincts, to be controlled and enlightened by a higher reason. If we have intellectual instincts, leading us to judge in a particular way, as well as animal instincts that prompt us to act in a particular way, there is no necessity that the former should be more infallible in their sphere than the latter in theirs: it may as well happen that wrong judgments are occasionally suggested by those, as wrong actions by these.' Discuss.

Primary reading:

Mill, Chapter 5.

Priority secondary reading:

Crisp, *op. cit.*, Chapter 7.

John Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, Chapter 1.

Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, Chapter 7, Section 1.

Revision reading:

H.L.A. Hart, 'Natural Rights: Bentham and John Stuart Mill' in his *Essays on Bentham*.

H.L.A. Hart, 'Are There Any Natural Rights?', in *Philosophical Review*.

David Lyons, *Rights, Welfare and Mill's Moral Theory*, Chapters 3 and 5.

L.W. Sumner, 'Mill's Theory of Rights', in West's *Blackwell Guide to Mill's Utilitarianism*.

Joseph Raz, 'Right-based Moralities', in Waldron (ed.), *Theories of Rights*.

Jo Wolff, *An Introduction to Contemporary Political Theory*, Chapters 5 and 6.

Week 8. Integrity and Alienation

'A subject relates to her values, projects, interests, and cares differently in deliberation than she does to those of anyone else.' Is that so? Is it a problem for consequentialism?

OR: What is 'integrity'? Does utilitarianism threaten it? Is that a bad thing?

Priority secondary reading:

Bernard Williams, 'A Critique of Utilitarianism', sections 3–5, in Smart & Williams, *op. cit.*

Peter Railton, 'Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality', in *Philosophy & Public Affairs* (1984).

Crisp, *op. cit.*, Chapter 5 (starting at the section on 'levels of moral thinking'), Chapter 6.

Revision reading:

Samuel Scheffler, *The Rejection of Consequentialism*, revised edition (Oxford, 1994), pp. 1–22, 55–70

Wendy Donner, 'Mill's Utilitarianism', in John Skorupski (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Mill* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 287–9

Neera Badhwar Kapur, 'Why It Is Wrong to be Always Guided by the Best: Consequentialism and Friendship', *Ethics* vol. 101, no. 3 (1991)

Some additional readings and practice questions for topics we didn't cover**Pleasure, Utility, and Welfare.**

Explain Mill's distinction between higher and lower pleasures. Does the distinction hold up?

Does Crisp's example of Haydn and the Oyster succeed in making the point it is supposed to make? What might someone say who thought it failed?

'Pleasure is subjective, so Mill's attempt to categorise human activities into higher and lower pleasures is mistaken.' Discuss.

Mill, Chapters 1, 2, and 4

Crisp, Roger. Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Mill on Utilitarianism (Routledge, 1997), Chs. 2 and 3.

Connie S. Rosati, 'Persons, Perspectives, and Full Information Accounts of the Good', *Ethics* vol. 105, no. 2 (1995)
 Elizabeth Anderson, 'John Stuart Mill and Experiments in Living', *Ethics* vol. 102, no. 1 (1991)
 Joseph Raz, *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford, 1986), chapter 12

Moral Realism and Mill's "Proof".

Does Mill's 'proof' of the principle of utility prove anything?

'Questions of ultimate ends are not amenable to direct proof.' What does this mean? How well does Mill get round the problem?

Mill, Chapter 4.
 Crisp, *op. cit.*, Chapter 4.
 Moore, *Principia Ethica*, Chapter III, esp. §A.
 Stevenson's and Moore's pieces in Foot (ed), *op. cit.*
 Mackie, *Ethics*, Chapter 6, §5.
 Williams, *op. cit.*, the chapter on 'good'.
 Harrison, 'The Only Possible Morality', in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Soc. Supp. Vol.* (1976)
 Henry R. West, 'Mill's "Proof" of the Principle of Utility', in Henry R. West (ed.), *The Blackwell Guide to Mill's Utilitarianism* (Blackwell, 2006)
 David Brink, *Mill's Progressive Principles* (Oxford, 2013), ch. 5
 James Seth, 'The Alleged Fallacies in Mill's "Utilitarianism"', *The Philosophical Review* vol. 17, no. 5 (1908), pp. 469–488
 D. Daiches Raphael, 'Fallacies in and about Mill's "Utilitarianism"', *Philosophy* vol. 30, no. 115 (1955), pp. 344–357
 Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, 'Mill's "Proof" of the Principle of Utility: A More than Half-Hearted Defense', *Social Philosophy & Policy* vol. 18, no. 2 (2001), pp. 330–360

Non-Consequentialist Moral Theories

Mill thinks that we have rights, and that these can be justified. How?

Williams' contribution to Smart and Williams, *op. cit.*, esp. §§1 - 5.
 Crisp, *op. cit.*, Chapter 6.
 Mackie, *Ethics*, Chapter 7.
 Acton, *Kant's Moral Philosophy*, esp. Chapters III - VIII.
 Foot's piece in Honderich (ed), *Morality and Objectivity*.
 Moore, *Ethics*, Chapter 5.
 Williams's piece in Altham and Harrison (eds), *World, Mind and Ethics*, pp. 210 - 216.

Self-Defeat

Is utilitarianism self-defeating?

Williams, *Morality*, last chapter

Singer, 'Is Act-Utilitarianism Self-Defeating?', in *Philosophical Review* (1972).

Mackie, 'The Disutility of Act Utilitarianism', in his *Persons and Values*.

Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, Chapter I

Williams's contribution to Smart and Williams, *op. cit.*, §6