## Lecture 1: Utilitarianism

“Why do all of these theories assume that anything is good?”

* Moral nihilism

“Do any theories are counterexample-free?”

* Utilitarianism and Kantian ethics are pretty solid (more readily defensible than divine command theory and moral relativism)

Utilitarianism: there is an ultimately good thing – happiness – and actions are right or wrong dependent on whether they promote happiness

No customs, traditions, orders

Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill

Promoting general happiness is **necessary** and **sufficient** for actions to be right

Utilitarianism is all about consequences.

It is one form of consequentialism (only outcomes matter)

What is happiness?

* “intended pleasure, and the absence of pain” – Mill
  + Life full of pleasurable experiences, and lacking in painful ones
  + Quantitative interpretation (amount of pleasures)
* Hedonism – a life is valuable/desirable to the extent that it is made up of pleasurable experiences
  + Swine Morality objection
    - If simple pleasures (eating, drinking, sex) are happiness, then the life of an animal would be more desirable
    - Mostly people don’t want to live as animals
    - Therefore, hedonism is false
    - Mill: **intellectual pleasure** is better than “animal pleasure”
    - Arising question: do intellectual people live better lives?
    - Possible answer: no, intellectual people experience higher pleasures, but also more extreme pain
    - Intellectual pleasure answer invites elitism
* Other-regarding, not egoistic. Happiness for as many beings as possible (including oneself, but not exclusively)

Why think that only happiness is ultimately good (and what does “ultimately good” mean)?

* **Instrumentally good**: temporary, valuable only because it gets other things (like money)
* Utilitarianism includes lots of instrumentally good things: food, freedom, etc
* **Ultimately** (intrinsically) **good**: good for its own sake
  + Only happiness is this
* We desire things (a cat/house/friend) for happiness, but only happiness for itself
* Asking “why we want to be happy” seems weird because everyone wants to be happy
* J.S. Mill’s proof:
  + P1: We have evidence that a thing is good if and only if people desire it
    - Plausible: friendship, achievement, security are all wanted
    - Not plausible:
  + P2: The only thing that people desire for its own sake is happiness
    - Plausible:
* Moore’s critique of hedonism
  + An example: beauty, independent of pleasure induced from the beauty
  + Not all pleasure has intrinsic value: sadism, for example