

Reading Questions: Utilitarianism - Jeremy Bentham, Selections from *Fragment on Government* and *Introduction to Principles of Morals and Legislation*

1. Does Bentham's claim that human beings are governed by pain and pleasure mean that they *ought* to be governed in this way?
2. Is Bentham right that the interests of the community are nothing more than the sum of the interests of its members? Does the community have no unique interests of its own, like national greatness or glory?
3. When does the principle of utility recommend an action?
4. How does Bentham interpret the ideas of right and wrong? How does this compare to Kant?
5. Can the word "right" have any meaning without reference to utility, as Bentham insists? Think here about Kant's categorical imperative.
6. What is asceticism according to Bentham? How is it a misapplication of the principle of utility, according to Bentham? Why is asceticism a problem for utilitarianism?
7. What is the principle of sympathy and antipathy? Why does Bentham think it is fallacious? What does Bentham's discussion of this principle make you think about Hume?
8. Does Kant confound the "motive or cause" of an action with "the ground or reason which warrants a legislator, or other by-stander, in regarding that act with" approval (25), as do those who view antipathy as a just ground of action? Why does Bentham think this is a mistake?
9. What is the business of government according to Bentham? How does this compare with other accounts of the proper ends of government we've seen?
10. Does Bentham agree with Kant that only intentions matter for actions to have moral worth? Why or why not?
11. On what basis are acts to be judged? Do you agree with Bentham on this point?
12. How does Bentham define ethics?
13. Why do people act for the good of others, despite self-interest being the only reliable spring of individual action? What motives do such actions draw upon?
14. How does the aim of private ethics and that of legislation differ?
15. What question does Bentham think the social contract makes us ask when we consider disobeying the government? What question does this one replace? Do you think this latter one is the proper question to ask regarding political obligation and disobedience?