

Reading Questions: John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*

1. Mill discusses Kant twice in *Utilitarianism* (p. 134, p. 188). What does Mill say about Kant and his moral theory?
2. What is the aim of utilitarianism? What does a good life as judged by utilitarianism look like?
3. Is utilitarianism a philosophy “worthy only of swine?”
4. Are all enjoyments on an equal footing for Mill? Can, in other words, a large amount of an unsophisticated pleasure substitute for a smaller amount of a higher pleasure?
5. How can we come to know what pleasures belong in the higher and lower categories? Who is in a position to judge them? Is it true, as Mill claims, that those who have experienced both higher and lower pleasures give the higher a “marked preference?”
6. Do you think there is such a thing as higher pleasures in this sense? Can you think of examples? Do some pains belong in a special category because of their qualitative difference from others?
7. Why would a utilitarian think it important to cultivate noble character? Do you agree?
8. Does utilitarianism allow us to privilege our own happiness in deciding what to do, or must we weigh the happiness of others equally with our own? Do you think it is possible for human beings to do this?
9. Why is the fact that justice/injustice is connected to a strong and unique sentiment, or emotional reaction, such a challenge for Mill?
10. Why does Mill run through a series of concrete examples of justice and its etymology? What is his conclusion regarding the nature of justice?
11. What is the distinction between perfect and imperfect obligation and what is an example of each?
12. Of what is the emotional reaction side of Mill's account of justice made up? That is, what instincts or natural sentiments constitute the reaction people have to justice and injustice?
13. According to Mill, do principles of justice conflict? What examples does Mill discuss? If they do conflict, how are we to judge which of a set of conflicting principles of justice should guide our actions?
14. Why does Mill argue that justice is more basic or fundamental than other moral concerns? Is this truly utilitarian reasoning?