

Questions to help guide your reading of Chapter Two of Mill's *Utilitarianism*:

1. What is the 'greatest happiness principle' according to Mill?
2. What does Mill mean by 'happiness' and 'unhappiness'?
3. What does Mill claim are the only things desirable as ends? [Is Mill right about this?]
4. How are all things valuable, according to Mill?
5. On p. 7, Mill considers the first objection to utilitarianism, something that might be called the **Swine Objection**. How does this objection go? What is Mill's response to the Swine Objection?
 - What sort of pleasures does Mill contrast with the pleasures of "mere sensation"?
 - What is the distinction between higher pleasures and lower pleasures?
 - How does Mill think we can justify a claim that one pleasure is qualitatively superior to another pleasure?
6. What role does a sense of one's own dignity play in distinguishing between higher and lower pleasures? Explain what Mill means when he says that it is "better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied; And if the fool [... is] of a different opinion, it because they only know their own side of the question." Is Mill right about this?
7. In what way are the higher faculties like 'a tender plant' according to Mill? For what reason does Mill make this point? Is his claim sensible?
8. Mill is sometimes credited with expanding the sphere of moral standing from human beings to animals. Can you find a passage in which Mill indicates that animals are to be considered morally significant?
9. Mill considers the objection to utilitarianism that happiness cannot be the final end of human activity because "it [happiness] is unattainable". Mill uses this objection to clarify what he means by happiness. What DOES Mill mean by a happy life? That is, what are the components of a happy life, according to Mill?
 - What is the chief hindrance to this sort of life being enjoyed by nearly all persons, according to Mill?
 - What is the chief explanation for the failure by any particular individual who is materially well off to enjoy a happy life?
 - Does this suggest anything about what the nature of education ought to be for a utilitarian like Mill? Do you think this is a plausible basis for education?
10. Another objection to which Mill responds says that utilitarianism is flawed because humans become better persons when they learn to renounce the pursuit of their own happiness. Consequently, the objectors figure, happiness cannot be the highest good for humans or the final end of human behavior. Another way of expressing this objection would be that since we admire those who give up their own happiness (heroes or martyrs), we see that there is something more important to us than happiness. What is Mill's response to this objection? Does this reply make sense?
11. To whose happiness does the utilitarian standard refer? In what way is the utilitarian theory "strictly impartial"? What two major undertakings would be necessary to have society reflect the strict impartiality required by utilitarianism?

12. Another objection to utilitarianism Mill considers is the claim that it is too demanding—it is a standard of morality “too high for humanity”. In reply, Mill distinguishes between a “rule of action” which expresses the standard of morality and “the motive of action”. This is not always an easy distinction to make sense of, but it is very important to see Mill’s point here. [He also distinguishes between evaluating the moral worth of an action and evaluating the moral worth of a person or ‘agent’; we will not look at this second distinction.] The rule of action is simply the principle of utility—as a rule of action it states the criteria for determining whether an action is right or not. But this is a separate matter from what a person ought to have in mind when he or she acts—what it is by which a person should be moved to act (i.e., the motive). Mill’s view is sometimes referred to as a “two-level view” because of this distinction. One level is the standard of morality—what determines whether something is right or wrong. The other level is the level of agent psychology—what moral actors are motivated by when they act. What is the relevance of this difference? Well, Mill is saying that one might be effectively moved to do that action which is in fact morally correct according to the principle of utility even though the person does it for some reason *other than that it brings about the greatest utility*. Can you think of how this might be just what we would expect from a utilitarian view?
- What does Mill say about our motives for everyday action?
 - Are there any persons who might properly be motivated directly by the principle of utility (general utility)?
 - What do you suppose Mill has in mind when he draws the distinction between ‘public utility’ and ‘private utility’?
13. On page 19, Mill makes a remark that suggests he adheres to a particular interpretation of utilitarianism—what has come to be called “Rule Utilitarianism”. Rule utilitarianism states that an action is morally right insofar as it conforms to a rule whose general adoption promotes the greatest happiness for the greatest number. This is contrasted with what is called “Classical” or “Act Utilitarianism”. This latter version of utilitarianism is really just the direct application of the principle of utility to each individual action. How are the two different? In Rule Utilitarianism, the principle of utilitarianism is used to find a set of rules whose general observance will best promote overall utility, and persons ought to follow the rules that apply to their situation. This means, however, that occasionally one may face a situation wherein a rule that *generally* promotes overall utility applies to you but following that rule in that particular instance will NOT produce more utility. Can you find the passage in which Mill suggests he might be a Rule Utilitarian? Can you think of a particular situation in which a rule that is generally conducive to promoting overall utility might fail?
14. There is an interesting discussion by Mill about the connection between utilitarianism and God as the author of moral law. Mill’s discussion is not very clear here, but he essentially holds that there is no contradiction between the existence of God, even as a moral authority, and the doctrine of utilitarianism.
15. Examine what Mill says about lying. What is wrong with lying? It may help you to distinguish between the ‘case-specific’ consequences of lying and the ‘general’ consequences of lying. Given the general consequences of lying, does Mill think that we should never lie? What is the connection between the principle of utility and lying? Does this view make sense? How is this connected to Rule Utilitarianism (defined and discussed above)?
16. At one point, Mill remarks, “Nobody argues that the art of navigation is not founded on astronomy because sailors cannot to calculate the Nautical Almanac.” What is Mill’s point here? To what objection is he replying?
17. What do you suppose Mill has in mind when he talks about “subordinate principles”? Where do these come from? Are they infallible? Can you think of any rules that Mill might consider a subordinate principle? What is the connection between the supreme principle of morality (that is, the principle of utility) and subordinate principles?