

## KEY IDEAS OF J.S.MILL'S *UTILITARIANISM* [FONTANA EDN, ED. M.WARNOCK]

<u>Item</u>	<u>Idea</u>	<u>Page</u>
1.	Utilitarianism was proposed by Socrates, but the basic principles of morality are still in dispute.	251
2.	Most human activities are unsure of basic principles, but it matters less in maths and science.	251-2
3.	Instinct (or <b>intuition</b> ) doesn't guide us in particular cases, only in very general principles.	252
4.	Neither a priori nor empirical approaches ever seem to offer practical guidance.	253
5.	These principles can't give us the single self-evident principle we need.	253
6.	In practice morality has been fairly consistent because of an unacknowledged 'greatest happiness principle'.	254
7.	<b>All philosophers admit that happiness is a crucial factor in morality.</b>	<b>254</b>
8.	Even <b>Kant</b> , with his a priori categorical imperative, needs utilitarianism.	254
9.	Kant's rule ('follow the universal rational law') can be used to justify wickedness. [see also p.308]	254
10.	Some proof of utilitarianism is possible, but ends like health and pleasure can't be proved.	255
11.	We are not concerned with the popular use of 'utilitarian' to mean 'practical'.	256
12.	<b>The theory says actions are right in so far as they promote pleasure and reduce pain.</b>	<b>257</b>
13.	<b>Pleasure and freedom from pain are the only desirable ends.</b>	<b>257</b>
14.	The theory has been criticised as "mean and grovelling" and as "worthy only of swine".	258
15.	<b>For humans the aim is not swine-like pleasures, but more 'elevated' ones.</b>	<b>258</b>
16.	Even Epicureans preferred pleasures of intellect, feeling, imagination and morality.	258
17.	We prefer pleasures for their quality as well as their quantity.	259
18.	<b>More 'desirable' pleasures are those preferred by the majority of those experienced in the varieties of pleasure.</b>	<b>259</b>
19.	In practice experienced people prefer non-animal pleasures which engage their 'higher' faculties.	259
20.	<b>People prefer 'higher' existence, even involving discontent ("better Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied").</b>	<b>259-60</b>
21.	This is because we have a 'sense of dignity' which is seen as essential to human happiness.	260
22.	It is objected that people may knowingly pursue lower pleasures, but this is just weakness of character.	260-1
23.	People often abandon higher pleasures as they age, but this is because they lose feeling and become incapable.	261
24.	<b>The aim of giving all beings the best quantity and quality of pleasure applies to "the whole of sentient creation".</b>	<b>263</b>
25.	It is objected that happiness is actually unobtainable, and that moral good consists of <i>renouncing</i> happiness.	263
26.	<b>Utilitarianism doesn't aim at a life of rapture, and normal happiness is obtainable, through education and reform</b>	<b>264-6</b>
27.	<b>It is virtuous to renounce happiness, but only if it increases the happiness of others - otherwise it is pointless.</b>	<b>267</b>
28.	Utilitarianism requires moral agents to be totally impartial between their own happiness and that of others.	268
29.	It is objected that the theory sets standards which are too high for us, but ethics is <i>supposed</i> to tell us our duties.	269
30.	<b>"The motive has nothing to do with the morality of the action, though much with the worth of the agent".</b>	<b>270</b>
31.	<b>Utilitarians are accused of being cold and unsympathising, but that opinion is about persons, not about actions.</b>	<b>271</b>
32.	Utilitarians may well neglect beauties of character while pursuing goodness, but it is better that way round.	272
33.	It is labelled a "godless doctrine", but God is thought to desire our happiness, and utilitarianism may be God's will.	273
34.	The theory is called "expedient" because it is unprincipled, and will allow us, for example, to tell convenient lies.	274
35.	<b>The principle of truthfulness is vital for happiness; we should tell rare 'white lies', for the sake of happiness.</b>	<b>274-5</b>
36.	<b>Critics say we lack time for utilitarian calculations, but we have always agreed most of the means to happiness.</b>	<b>275-6</b>
37.	It is said utilitarians will actually be selfish, but all theories have that problem; hard standards are better than none.	277
38.	It is hard to see <i>why</i> a new theory of morality should be adopted, when only conventional morals seem obligatory.	279
39.	All theories have this problem before they are taught, but then an external or internal sense of duty backs them.	280
40.	External pressures could support utilitarianism, and our internal consciences could also be trained that way.	281
41.	<b>Our internal sense of duty is a group of religious and social pressures, which gives morality a mystical quality.</b>	<b>281</b>
42.	Believing that morality is eternal and external to us makes us more obedient, but we are still capable of evil.	282
43.	He believes morality is acquired, but even if it is innate it needs interpretation, and is equally natural in both cases.	283
44.	<b>Nothing is so wicked "that it may not be made to act on the human mind with all the authority of conscience".</b>	<b>284</b>
45.	We can easily accept it as a duty because social feeling is "a natural basis of sentiment for utilitarian morality".	284
46.	Society is progressing towards greater equality and mutual respect, and this unity can be "taught as a religion".	285-6
47.	<b>Only happiness is desired; "the sole evidence...that anything is desirable is that people actually do desire it".</b>	<b>288</b>
48.	<b>Everyone wants their own happiness; "general happiness, therefore, is a good to the aggregate of all persons".</b>	<b>289</b>
49.	<b>People do desire other things such as virtue, but people love virtue (quite disinterestedly) for utilitarian reasons</b>	<b>289</b>
50.	We can actually make virtue part of our happiness, just as we can with music or health (or money, power or fame).	290
51.	Virtue contributes more to general happiness than any other aim, and is only desirable if it is part of happiness.	292
52.	Observation of ourselves and others shows that it is impossible to desire anything unless we think it pleasant.	292-3
53.	<b>Critics say we can desire one thing, but will another, but will is just a steady habit of mind produced by desire.</b>	<b>293-4</b>
54.	A major objection has been that we love justice, but justice needn't be right, even if it is a forceful instinct.	296-7
55.	Justice is found in the case of <i>legal rights</i> , though these can be forfeited, or be based on bad (i.e. unjust) laws.	298

56.	Justice seems clearer in the case of <i>moral rights</i> , and even clearer in our idea that people <i>deserve</i> things.	299
57.	Justice also seems to involve <i>keeping faith</i> with people, being <i>impartial</i> , and treating people <i>equally</i> .	300-1
58.	'Justice' means 'conformity to ideal laws', and contains the idea that people should be forced to conform.	302-3
59.	Our whole idea of duty and moral right also contains this idea that people should be punished for their breach.	304
60.	Justice is 'perfect obligation' (involving rights and duties), but morality is 'imperfect obligation' (duties only).	305
61.	Benevolence is morality but not justice, because we ought to practise it, but no individual has a right to receive it.	305
62.	The desire to punish which we find in justice is based on feelings of self-defence and sympathy with the victim.	306
63.	Our basic instinct for revenge is not moral, but becomes moral when linked to sympathy with all sentient beings.	307
64.	<b>Justice is a natural desire to punish anyone who breaks a rule protecting the rights of a particular individual.</b>	<b>308</b>
65.	<b>A right contains the idea that there is a valid claim that society protect a person who possesses it. Why? Utility!</b>	<b>309</b>
66.	<b>The desires for rights and justice are so strong because they are based in our vital need for security.</b>	<b>310</b>
67.	Some say justice is more reliable than utility, but actually it involves great disagreements (especially punishments).	311
68.	<b>Punishment</b> is thought unjust as an example, or for the person's own good, or when people can't help their crime.	312
69.	Some invent a 'social contract' (which has been broken), or 'free will' in the offender, to justify punishment.	312
70.	Justice also leads to disagreement over punishing the guilty (when just retribution clashes with deterrence).	313
71.	Decisions over <b>fair wages</b> also have problems (reward skill or effort?), and utility helps decide where justice fails.	314
72.	Justice in <b>taxation</b> is torn between fixed or graduated percentages, and a flat poll tax, but utility is a better guide.	314-5
73.	<b>Justice on its own is not morality, but it is the single most important value for people's defence and well-being.</b>	<b>316</b>
74.	Justice requires that we return good for good, because of the vital institutions of friendship and promise-keeping.	317
75.	<b>Requirements of impartiality and equality in legal justice arise from the rule that "everybody to count for one".</b>	<b>318-9</b>
76.	When we feel called on to perform an apparent injustice, it still turns out to be justice by utilitarian standards.	320-1