

Lecture 2 Reading Questions

“Classical Utilitarianism”

Readings:

“An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation:
The Collected Works of Jeremy Bentham.”

Edited by J.H. Burns and H.L.A. Hart.

Chapters 1, 4, 13, 17 (Section 1 only).

- (1) What is the principle of utility, or greatest happiness principle?
- (2) “[O]n most occasions of their lives men in general embrace this principle, without thinking of it.” Do you agree?
- (3) Bentham tries to “reconcile” his opponents to the fact that they have no alternative to the principle of utility. Ask yourself Bentham’s questions—is he right to think that the standard of utility is at the very bottom of our moral deliberations?
- (4) How does Bentham propose to “take exact account ... of the general tendency of any act, by which the interests of the community are affected”?
- (5) What does Bentham mean when he says that punishment can sometimes be “unprofitable”? What makes it “unprofitable”?
- (6) Which of the following laws would it be “unprofitable” to enforce:
 - (i) a law forbidding prayer,
 - (ii) a law forbidding drunkenness,
 - (iii) a law requiring easy rescues of people in danger?

Bentham, Jeremy. *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*. This work is in the public domain.

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