

HUMANITIES SEMINARS PROGRAM, FALL 2013

Utilitarianism: the Greater Good?

October 3 to December 12

Thursdays, 1-3pm

Instructor

Michael Gill, Department of Philosophy

gillm@email.arizona.edu

Office phone: 520 621 5046

Cell phone: 520 271 1442

Course topic

Utilitarianism — the idea that one ought to perform those actions that produce the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers — is one of the most important views of morality ever developed. In this course we will explore Utilitarian's philosophical origins, its influence on modern politics and literature, and recent attempts to show that contemporary neuroscience and psychology vindicate its validity. We will look at classic texts in 18th and 19th century moral philosophy, selections of novels by Dickens, Dostoevsky, and Nick Hornby, contemporary work in social psychology, and recent articles from the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*.

Texts

The Classical Utilitarians: Bentham and Mill. Edited by John Troyer. Hackett Publishing Company.

Readings posted to the Course materials page of the HSP website:

<http://course.hsp.arizona.edu/>.

Reading schedule

All readings are either from *The Classical Utilitarians* or will be posted on the course website. We may change the schedule somewhat as we go through the course.

Oct 3: Peter Singer, "The Life You Can Save"
Dylan Matthews, "Join Wall Street. Save the World."
David Brooks, "The Way to Produce a Person"

- Oct 10: Hume, "Of Justice" (from *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*)
Bentham, "Principles of Morals and Legislation," pp. 1-12 of *Classical Utilitarians*
- Oct 17: Mill, "Utilitarianism," pp. 95-115 of *Classical Utilitarians*
Dickens, selections from *Hard Times* and *Bleak House*
- Oct 24: Mill, "Utilitarianism," pp. 115-127 of *Classical Utilitarians*
Williams, "Critique of Utilitarianism"
- Oct 31: Arthur, "World Hunger and Moral Obligation"
Wolf, "Moral Saints"
Hornby, selections from *How to Be Good*
- Nov 7: Mill, "Utilitarianism," pp. 127-145 of *Classical Utilitarians*
Dostoevsky, selections from *Crime and Punishment*
- Nov 14: Hare, "What is Wrong With Slavery?"
Kagan, "The Limits of Morality"
- Nov 21: Ursula Le Guin, "The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas"
Hill, "Autonomy and Benevolent Lies"
Kant, selections from *The Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*
- Dec 5: Greene, "The Secret Joke of Kant's Soul"
Nagel, "You Can't Learn About Morality from Brain Scans: the Problem with Moral Psychology"
- Dec 12: Haidt, "When morality opposes justice: conservatives have moral intuitions that liberals may not recognize"
Haidt and Bjorkland, "Social intuitionsist answer six questions about moral psychology"