Mill, *Utilitarianism*

Mill's theory is a species of a type of ethical theory called CONSEQUENTIALISM.

Consequentialism: The view that the moral status of an act is determined solely by its consequences.
Mill, *Utilitarianism*

**Question:** What kinds of consequences matter?

What do we want to *bring about* when we “do the right thing”?

**Mill's Answer:** We should promote pleasure, and avoid pain, wherever possible.
Mill, *Utilitarianism*

**Question:** What kind of pleasure, and whose pleasure, are we supposed to promote?

**P. 8:** We don't want it to be strictly physical pleasure.

“It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied.”

**P. 11:** I don't want to be strictly concerned with *my own* pleasure.

The standard we strive for is “not the agent's own greatest happiness, but the greatest amount of happiness altogether.”
Mill, *Utilitarianism*

**The Utilitarian Theory of the Right:**

An act is right if it produces the greatest possible amount of happiness in the world.

The aim of moral action is to bring about a world with the maximum possible amount of happiness.
Mill, Utilitarianism

Objection: Isn't it misguided to suppose that everyone can be happy?

Response: We can work to at least minimize pain in most cases.
Mill, *Utilitarianism*

Some key features of utilitarian ethics:

- Mill thinks our intentions have nothing to do with the value of an act. They reflect on the value of the *person*, but not on the *act itself*.

- We don't need anything like any external authority or rulebook to figure out what we should do. To find out what I should do, I just need to find out what will bring about the most happiness.