Utilitarianism

I. Mill’s *Utilitarianism*

A. Utility (Ch. 2, 1-5)

1. How does Mill define “utility” or, as he also puts it, “the Greatest Happiness Principle”? (2)

2. How does Mill answer the charge that the principle of utility is “a doctrine worthy only of swine”? (2)

3. How does Mill propose to defend the view “that some kinds of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others”? (3-5)

B. The Virtue of Sacrificing Our Happiness (Ch. 2, 5-7)

1. How does Mill acknowledge the sacrifice of one’s own happiness as “the highest virtue which can be found in man” in a way consistent with the principle of utility? (5-7)

2. What is the concern of those who find fault with Utilitarianism for setting a standard “too high for humanity”? How does Mill attempt to answer their concern? (7)

C. Happiness as the Ultimate End of Life (Ch. 4, 8-12)

1. How does Mill argue that happiness is an end of life? (8)

2. How does Mill admit that there are other things different from happiness, in particular, virtue, which are also desirable while maintaining his utilitarian commitment to happiness as the sole ultimate end of life? (7-10)

3. How does Mill strengthen his claim for happiness as the sole ultimate end of life by suggesting “that to think of an object as desirable . . . and to think of it as pleasant, are one and the same thing”? (10-11)

4. Should we be just even when doing so no longer promotes the general happiness? (Discussed in lecture as a question posed to Mill, not in Mill’s text itself.)

II. Smart’s “Extreme and Restricted Utilitarianism”
A. What is the difference between “extreme” and “restricted” utilitarianism? (344-346)

B. What reasons would an extreme utilitarian have for guiding his conduct by rules? How does this make it possible for the extreme utilitarian to “praise actions which he knows to be wrong” (such as rescuing Hitler from drowning)? (346-348)

C. How does Smart argue that restricted utilitarians are wrong to think we should obey rules which, for the most part, promote utility even on occasions when they don’t promote utility? (348-351)

D. How does Smart argue that the presence of a rule by itself (such as the rule to drive on the right hand or left hand side of the road in a country) does not, by itself, provide a reason to obey it? What does he think is the proper reason why we respect rules like the ‘rules of the road’? (352-353)

E. How does Smart respond to the objection that an action might be rational and still morally wrong (or not rational and still morally right); that the restricted utilitarian is concerned with morality rather than rationality? (353-354)