

PHIL 167: Contemporary Political Philosophy
Fall 2005; David O. Brink
Paper #1

Write a paper approximately 4-5 pages long on one of the following topics. The paper is due in class on Friday, October 14. If necessary and with suitable explanation, you can get an extension on the paper. But the extension must be arranged in advance of the due date. Otherwise, late papers will be penalized as described on the Course Description. Before starting, consult the Writing Guidelines handout on the course website. Students are welcome to discuss their topics and drafts with me.

1. Mill on Higher Pleasures. After explaining what the doctrine of utilitarianism stands for in Chapter ii of Utilitarianism, Mill goes on to consider the objection that it is a doctrine fit only for swine. What is the objection? What is Mill's reply, and how does the doctrine of higher pleasures figure in that reply? Explain the doctrine of higher pleasures and how it relates to the sort of quantitative hedonism that Bentham defended. What does the higher pleasures doctrine imply about hedonism, and how plausible do you think that doctrine is?

2. Mill on Duty. Act utilitarianism tells agents that their duty is to perform the best action available. Why might this seem like a demanding moral claim? Does Mill's account of duty in terms of sanctions in Chapter v of Utilitarianism address this worry? How plausible is the sanction theory of duty?

3. Mill on Freedom of Expression. In defending individual liberties in On Liberty, Mill appeals to freedom of expression, because he thinks that the importance of these liberties is fairly uncontroversial and that when the justification of these liberties is understood we will better appreciate the importance of other liberties. What reasons does Mill offer for opposing censorship? Are these equally good arguments for freedom of expression? How, if at all, does Mill's defense of freedom of expression appeal to perfectionist assumptions about human happiness? How plausible do you find Mill's defense of free speech?