



UCDAVIS

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[Week 8]

UTILITARIANISM

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That action is best, which procures the greatest happiness.

Francis Hutcheson
[Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue, p. 128]

That **property** in any **object**, whereby it tends to **produce** benefit, advantage, pleasure, good or happiness ... or ... to **prevent** the happening of mischief, pain, evil, or unhappiness.

Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two **sovereign masters**, **pain** and **pleasure**. It is for them alone to point out **what we ought to do**, as well as to determine what we shall do.

The **principle of utility** is the foundation of the present work...
By the principle of utility is meant that principle which **approves** or **disapproves** of every **action** whatsoever, according to the tendency which it appears to have to **augment** or **diminish** the **happiness** of the party whose interest is in question...

Jeremy Bentham
[An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation, p. 130-131]

A passing remark is all that needs be given to the ignorant blunder of supposing that those who stand up for **utility** as the **test** of right and wrong, use the term in that restricted and merely colloquial sense in which **utility** is opposed to **pleasure**.

The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, **Utility**, or the **Greatest Happiness Principle** ... that actions are **right** in proportion as they tend to promote **happiness**, **wrong** as they tend to produce the **reverse of happiness**.

By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain... The **moral rules** which **forbid** mankind to hurt one another (in which we must never forget to include wrongful interference with each other's freedom) are more vital to human well-being than any **maxims**, however important, which only point out the best mode of managing some department of human affairs.

John Stuart Mill
[Utilitarianism, p. 131]

It appears from what has been said, that **justice** is a name for certain **moral requirements**, which, regarded **collectively**, stand higher in the **scale of social utility**, and are therefore of more paramount **obligation**, than any others; though particular cases may occur in which some other **social duty** is so important, as to **over-rule** any one of the **general maxims of justice**.

To have a **right**, then, is, I conceive, to have something which **society ought to defend** me in the possession of. If the objector goes on to ask **Why it ought?** I can give him no other reason than general utility. ... There goes to the composition of the sentiment, not a **rational** only, but also an **animal** element, the thirst for retaliation; and this thirst derives its intensity, as well as its moral justification, from the extraordinarily important and impressive kind of utility which is concerned.

The utilitarian doctrine is, that **happiness is desirable**, and the only thing desirable, as an **end**; all other things being only desirable as **means to that end**. ...

Each person's happiness is a good to that person, and the **general happiness**, therefore, a good to the **aggregate of all persons**.

John Stuart Mill

[Utilitarianism, p. 132, p. 133, p. 129]