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Utilitarianism: 1st (First) Edition



Book Information

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Customer Reviews

John Stuart Mill was one of the most influential British philosophers and writers in the 1800s. His treatise on utilitarianism was written to explain the philosophical concept because he stated that it had been misutilized or mischaracterized by numerous influential people of his time. This version of his writings includes: Chapter 1. General Remarks Chapter 2. What utilitarianism is Chapter 3. Of the ultimate sanction of the principle of utility Chapter 4. Of what sort of proof the principle of utility is susceptible Chapter 5. Of the connexion between justice and utility While much of his writing can be lengthy and occasionally difficult to understand, I find his written arguments contribute greatly to the development of logical thought. Perhaps my favorite quote from John Stuart Mill is "In the golden rule of Jesus of Nazareth, we read the complete spirit of the ethics of utility. To do as you would be done by, and to love your neighbor as yourself, constitute the ideal perfection of utilitarian morality." And that ... "Happiness which forms the utilitarian standard of what is right in conduct, is not the agent's own happiness, but that of all concerned." This is a great introduction to utilitarianism and use of logic.

This is my first reading of anything by Mill. This book is on several lists of great works and I can clearly understand why it is. The author is explaining the theory of utility that attempts to explain the difference between good and bad, and justice and injustice. He explained his theory clearly and covered several difficult points in an elegant manner. This book is quite short, and it is amazing what he covered in such a concise, yet powerful manner. This is the free kindle edition and it worked out great for me. It has no table of contents or links, but in this short work I didn't find them necessary. The built in dictionary in the kindle came in handy since Mill used several words that I hadn't seen before. I highly recommend this book to anyone with an interest in philosophy. I'll have to read more of Mill's works.

JS Mill being one of the most brilliant thinkers of the 19th century posits his view of the moral philosophy of utilitarianism. While cutting edge in its day / 150 years later we have had the benefit of dozens of additional philosophers of morality and political science. Stimulating to read for the concepts and examples. The average sentence consists of 8 dependent clauses and 100 words. While lengthy and complex arguments are offered / each is structurally sound. Outstanding reading that merits a solid A. It is highly recommended that you reread this book every decade or so to gain additional insights.

Anybody hoping that this book will answer the challenges put to utilitarians today will be disappointed. There is no answer to questions such as whether a terrorist can legitimately be tortured to reveal the location of a bomb or whether an innocent life can be sacrificed to save many lives. What the book does have, however, is Mill's revised version of utilitarianism that is important because it plays a major role in his other works such as "Liberty" and "Representative Government". Most of the book explains and agrees with Bentham's version of utilitarianism that has no place for rights and replaces the concept of good/evil with pleasure/pain, but Mill's version of utilitarianism has an important difference - the claim that some pleasures are of higher quality than others, and if this is so then utilitarianism should strive to enable everybody to enjoy the superior pleasures. Mill defines utilitarianism as the "Greatest Happiness Principle" that judges "that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness." In this he is following Bentham's definition, but Bentham had devised a "felicific calculus" to determine the amount of pleasure (and hence moral worth) arising from any given action. It depended on things such as the intensity, duration and number of people affected. Bentham did not believe that one pleasure is in any way better than another except in terms of quantity. He wrote, for example, that "Prejudice apart, the game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry." Mill disagrees with this relativism, arguing that "some kinds of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others." In other words, quality is more important than quantity. Here we see the elitism that we find in all Mill's works. He asks how one can judge between the pleasure derived by two people from different actions and answers that the person of what he calls "higher faculties" is the one to judge, if he can understand the relative merits of both actions and the other person cannot. Translating to a modern context we might ask why Mill would believe a Shakespeare play to be "better" than a TV reality show. Mill would claim that the person of "higher faculties" who fully appreciated Shakespeare would be able to see the merits of both and hence judge, whilst the other person could only appreciate the reality show and

be unable to judge. Mill seems to ditch the pleasure principle almost entirely at one point when suggesting that those with higher faculties are likely to find it more difficult to be happy because they realize the world is imperfect. But that realization does not make them envy the happiness of those with lower capabilities. In Mill's famous words "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question. The other party to the comparison knows both sides." It follows for Mill that if some pleasures are superior to others then it would be a good thing if more people could enjoy the higher pleasures rather than the base pleasures. Mill believes that utilitarianism should aim at the general advancement of mankind for it can "only attain its end by the general cultivation of nobleness of character."

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