

Raymundo, Jino

ITETHIC

Book: Contemporary Moral Problems

Title: Chapter 1: Ethical Theories (John Stuart Mill: Utilitarianism)

Internet Reference:

<http://www.amazon.com/Contemporary-Moral-Problems-James-White/dp/0534517242>

Learning Expectations:

To learn about the teachings of utilitarianism

To know the relation of utilitarianism to morality

---

Quote:

*"I have dwelt on this point, as being a necessary part of a perfectly just conception of Utility or Happiness, considered as the directive rule of human conduct. But it is by no means an indispensable condition to the acceptance of the utilitarian standard; for that standard is not the agent's own greatest happiness, but the greatest amount of happiness altogether; and if it may possibly be doubted whether a noble character is always the happier for its nobleness, there can be no doubt that it makes other people happier, and that the world in general is immensely a gainer by it."*

Book Review:

I have always enjoyed pleasure, well, who doesn't anyway. I enjoy relaxing on a cold night, being with my girlfriend, drinking with friends and having a family vacation. For John Stuart Mill, morality depends on how much happiness we can bring out by doing something. But we must also bear in mind that this happiness or pleasure should be for the benefit of the many. We must all think and act unselfishly to practice proper morality. Mill stated that "There is nothing originally more desirable about money than about any heap of glittering pebbles. Its worth is solely that of the things which it will buy; the desire for other things than itself, which it is a means of gratifying". This means that money could be a tool that leads to happiness. Lots of people nowadays try their lucks at the local Lottery. A huge amount of money is at stake. One only needs to get lucky. People don't desire to keep that money for a very long time; otherwise, they want to make full use of it as much as possible. Of course, a smart man will allot specific percentages to establish a business, buy wants and needs, education, and lots of other things. When people have the liberty and the capacity to buy and own what they want, they become happy and contented. Thus, they become morally "good", well at least to John Stuart Mill's perspective.

## What I have learned:

I have learned that thinking and acting for the benefit of others will bring out happiness to anyone. Contentment also plays a large role to finding own happiness.

## Integrity Questions:

1. What is happiness for you?
2. What is pain for you?
3. Are pleasure and absence of pain the things that make up happiness? Why or why not?

## Review Questions:

1. State and explain the Principle of Utility. Show how it could be used to justify actions that are conventionally viewed as wrong, such as lying and stealing.

- The Principle of Utility, according to Mill is, "Actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness". It says that Morality is determined by the happiness it gives to the person. It is right if a person do things that brings out happiness and wrong if it do not. Lying and stealing can only give happiness to the doer, not to the victim. Therefore, lying and stealing is wrong.

2. How does Mill reply to the objection that Epicureanism is a doctrine worthy only of swine?

- Mill stated that: "The comparison of the Epicurean life to that of beasts is felt as degrading, precisely because a beast's pleasures do not satisfy a human being's conceptions of happiness." Mill disagreed to Stoic teachings.

3. How does Mill distinguish between higher and lower pleasures?

- The higher pleasure according to Mill is: "...to which all or almost all who have experience of both (pleasures) give a decided preference irrespective of any feeling of moral obligation to prefer it..." The lower pleasure as stated by Mill is: "...those who are competently acquainted with both, placed so far above the other that they prefer it, even though knowing it to be attended with a greater amount of discontent, and would not resign it for any quantity of the other pleasure which their nature is capable of."

4. According to Mill, whose happiness must be considered?

- Mill noted that the happiness must be considered to every individual and the good of the whole. He said that Universal happiness is essential.

5. Carefully reconstruct Mill's proof of the Principle of Utility.

- The principle of utility states that happiness and contentment of the many is morally right.

### Discussion Questions:

1. Is happiness nothing more than pleasure, and the absence of pain? What do you think?

- For me, happiness is not just about pleasure and absence of pain, happiness embraces the virtue of contentment and humility.

2. Does Mill convince you that the so-called higher pleasures are better than the lower ones?

- No, because people must be always contented to what they have right now. Further looking for pleasure would only practice greed and hate.

3. Mill says, "In the golden rule of Jesus of Nazareth, we read the complete spirit of the ethics of utility." Is it true or not?

- No it is not. Mill said that it was the "complete spirit". I believe that morality has many other bases than with just the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth.

4. Many commentators have thought that Mill's proof of the Principle of Utility is defective. Do you agree? If so, then what mistake or mistakes does he make? Is there any way to reformulate the proof so that it is not defective?

- Yes he forgot to include that "contentment" is essential to happiness, not just pleasure.