



JOHN STUART MILL  
1806-1873  
*UTILITARIANISM*

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Dr. Cindy Ausec

# STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- ◉ Define Utilitarianism
- ◉ Analyze the relationship between Epicureanism and Utilitarianism
- ◉ Comprehend what makes a happy life and the causes of dissatisfaction
- ◉ Differentiate “Greatest Good Principle” between the individual and society
- ◉ Describe the difference between Justice and Utility

# INFLUENCES

- ◉ Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832)  
Utilitarian
- ◉ Harriet Taylor (Wife)
- ◉ Father died 1837

# UTILITARIANISM - DEFINITION

*The philosophical doctrine that considers utility as the criterion of action and the useful as good or worthwhile, esp. the doctrine that all moral, social, or political actin should be directed toward achieving the greatest good for the greatest number of people. (The American Heritage Dictionary)*

# *UTILITARIANISM*

## CHAPTER I GENERAL REMARKS

- ◉ Little progress in establishing criterion of right and wrong
- ◉ No sense or instinct to inform us of right and wrong
- ◉ Moral faculty - branch of our reason, not of our sensitive faculty
- ◉ Goal to provide something to the understanding of the Utilitarian theory
- ◉ Ultimate ends are not amenable to direct proof

# CHAPTER II

## WHAT UTILITARIANISM IS

### ○ Utility = Pleasure

“Those who know anything about the matter are aware that every writer, from Epicurus to Bentham, who maintained the theory of utility, meant by it, not something to be contradistinguished from pleasure, but pleasure itself, together with exemption from pain” (Mill)

# CHAPTER II

## WHAT UTILITARIANISM IS

- ◉ *Greatest Happiness Principle* (Utility) holds that actions are:
  - Right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness (absence of pain)
  - Wrong as they tend to promote pain and deprivation of pleasure

# CHAPTER II

## WHAT UTILITARIANISM IS

- ◉ Human pleasures are superior to animalistic ones
- ◉ Lower vs. Higher quality pleasures
- ◉ Pigs may be highly satisfied with their lives - but most humans would not be satisfied with that life
- ◉ “Better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied”

# CHAPTER II

## WHAT UTILITARIANISM IS

### ○ Theory of morality

- Pleasure and freedom from pain are the only desirable ends
- All desirable things are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in themselves or as a means to the promotion of pleasure and prevention of pain

## CHAPTER II MORALITY -DEFINED

“ “The rules and precepts for human conduct” , by the observance of which an existence such as has been described might be, to the greatest extend possible, secured to all mankind; and not to them only, but, so far as the nature of things admits, to the whole sentient creation.” (Mill)

# CHAPTER II

## WHAT UTILITARIANISM IS

- ◉ Utilitarianism takes into account not just the quantity, but also the quality of the pleasures
- ◉ Objection: Happiness could not be the rational aim of human life - unattainable

# CHAPTER II

## WHAT UTILITARIANISM IS

- ◉ A happy life - an existence made up of few and transitory pains with many and various pleasures
- ◉ Main constituents of a satisfied life are: tranquility, and excitement
- ◉ Main causes of an unsatisfactory life
  - Selfishness
  - Want of mental cultivation
  - Great sources of physical and mental suffering - most could be alleviated by a wise and energetic society

# CHAPTER II - WHAT UTILITARIANISM IS UTILITARIAN MORALITY

- ◉ Recognizes the power of self sacrifice of ones own greatest good for the good of others
- ◉ Standard of right is not the agent's own happiness, but that of all concerned
- ◉ Considered Jesus of Nazareth's golden rule to be the complete spirit of the ethics of utility

# CHAPTER II - WHAT UTILITARIANISM IS UTILITARIAN MORALITY

- ◉ Education and opinion should establish - indissoluble association between his own happiness and the good of the whole
- ◉ Ethics should tell us what are our duties or by what test we may know them
  - No system of ethics requires that the sole motive of all we do shall be a feeling of duty

# CHAPTER II

## WHAT UTILITARIANISM IS

- Utilitarians are aware that there are other desirable possessions and qualities beside virtue
  - Aware that a right action does not necessarily indicate a virtuous character
  - Actions which are culpable often proceed from qualities entitled to praise
- Utilitarianism and God

# CHAPTER III - OF THE ULTIMATE SANCTION OF THE PRINCIPLE OF UNITY

- ◉ Principle of utility has all the sanctions which belong to any other system of morals
  - External: Hope of favor; fear of displeasure from our fellow creatures or from the Ruler of the Universe
  - Internal: The ultimate sanction of all morality is a subjective feeling in our own minds, these are more powerful than external sanctions

# CHAPTER III - OF THE ULTIMATE SANCTION OF THE PRINCIPLE OF UNITY

- Moral feeling are acquired
  - Natural for man to speak, to reason, to build cities, to cultivate the ground - even though these are acquired faculties
  - Moral feeling are not part of our nature, but is a natural outgrowth from it
  - Moral feelings are capable of being cultivated in almost any direction by external sanctions

# CHAPTER III - OF THE ULTIMATE SANCTION OF THE PRINCIPLE OF UNITY

- ◉ When the General Happiness is recognized as the ethical standard - Utilitarian morality
- ◉ Societies between human beings is impossible unless the interest of all are consulted
- ◉ The Greatest-happiness morality: Any mind of well-developed feelings works with and not against the outward motives to care for others

## CHAPTER IV - OF WHAT SORT OF PROOF THE PRINCIPLE OF UTILITY IS SUSCEPTIBLE

- The utilitarian doctrine is that happiness is desirable and the only thing desirable, as an end
  - The only proof that anything is desirable is that people do actually desire it (like the only proof that an object is visible is that people see it)
  - No reason can be given why the general happiness is desirable, except that each person desires his own happiness

## CHAPTER IV - OF WHAT SORT OF PROOF THE PRINCIPLE OF UTILITY IS SUSCEPTIBLE

- Virtue as ends of human action
  - Utilitarian doctrine - virtue is to be desired for itself
  - People desire virtue
    - The consciousness of it is a pleasure
    - The consciousness of being without is a pain
    - Both a pleasure and absence of pain
- Money & Fame as ingredients for happiness

# CHAPTER V - ON THE CONNECTION BETWEEN JUSTICE AND UTILITY

- ◉ The criterion of right and wrong had been drawn from the idea of Justice
- ◉ Unjust
  - ◉ To deprive anyone of his personal liberty, his property, or any thing which belongs to him by law
  - ◉ It is just to respect, unjust to violate the *legal rights* of anyone
- ◉ An individual may not have the legal rights
  - ◉ May have forfeited his rights
  - ◉ Bad laws might give a person rights he should not have

# CHAPTER V - ON THE CONNECTION BETWEEN JUSTICE AND UTILITY

## ○ Moral Obligations

- Ethical writers divide moral duties into two classes:
  - Duties of perfect obligation: those duties in virtue of which a correlative right resides in some person or persons
  - Duties of imperfect obligation: the particular occasion of performing it are left to our choice as in the case of charity or beneficence

# CHAPTER V - ON THE CONNECTION BETWEEN JUSTICE AND UTILITY

- ◉ Differences of opinion about what is just in a society
  - Different nations and individuals have different notions of justice
  - But in the mind of one and the same individual justice is not some one rule, principle, or maxim, but many, which do not always coincide

# CHAPTER V - ON THE CONNECTION BETWEEN JUSTICE AND UTILITY

- ◉ The interest of mankind collectively must be in the mind of the agent when conscientiously deciding on the morality of the act
- ◉ A rule which all rational beings might adopt with benefit to their collective interest