

Honor 2103
Lecture Notes 1
John Stuart Mill

Brief Biography

- See introductory section of reading selection

Context of *Utilitarianism* (1863)

- A “scientific basis” for morality, grounded in natural human needs
 - Cf. Kant’s deontological moral theory, in the wake of Newton: universalizable moral laws, intrinsic nature of the action; duty.
- Bentham’s “pig philosophy” and politics
 - Pleasure and avoidance of pain, the common, universal human needs
 - Cf. Hobbes’: human self-interest and political structure requires social contract to stabilize trust; but creates Leviathan?
 - Cf. Class differences as ruling policy: laissez faire policies and competition as justifying inequitable distributions.
- Human nature:
 - Cf. Darwinian ideas, humans are part of nature/animal
 - No appeal to divine purpose or function, we are not above the fray

Content of *Utilitarianism* (1863)

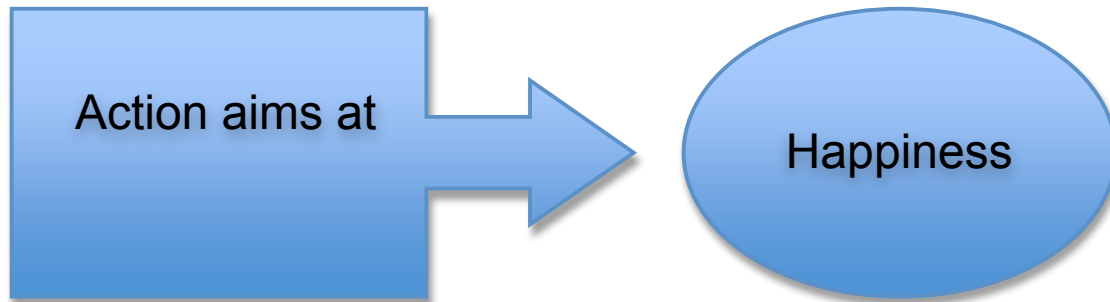
- Principle of Utility: an action is judged as good/bad in relation to it resulting in good/bad consequences
 - Good/bad consequences = happiness (and prevention of pain)
 - Only thing sought after intrinsically; ultimate ends of human action
- Objections: “pig philosophy” “base pleasure/happiness”
 - Bentham took happiness to = pleasure, hedonically calculated, quantity only. Period.
- Reply: happiness as pleasure must incorporate the quantity as well as quality.
 - Higher vs. Lower pleasures
 - Mental vs. Physical pleasures
 - How do we know this division, and why are the higher/mental pleasures preferable?: Ask those with experience in both.
- How do we know this: ask people, they are the final arbiters
- Greatest Happiness Principle:
 - Greatest happiness for the greatest number (Hedonic calculus)
 - Too much? Too high a standard? – same standard as any other system of morality, to consider the value of others.
 - Utility for all; All sentient beings?

- Proof: many first principles are incapable of proof by reasoning, but utility as the ultimate end of human action is open to observable confirmation; empiricism in morality. What other proof:
 - Individuals desire happiness
 - Social happiness is the collective happiness of individuals in a group

Compare Darwinian Ethics: social darwinianism and capitalist laissez-faire.

Model of moral principles

- What do people want? What do people prefer?
- Guide/Evaluate actions insofar as they achieve these ends.
- The individual and social happiness will thus be best served.



The general model is in need of clarification:

- What is the appropriate end? Are facts sufficient?
- Actions are evaluated in proportion as they increase happiness, or decrease pain.