

## 8. CHAPTER 8: THE DEBATE OVER UTILITARIANISM

### 8.1. The Resilience of the Theory

Classical Utilitarianism -- the theory defended by Bentham and Mill -- can be summarized in three propositions:

First, actions are to be judged right or wrong solely by virtue of their consequences. Nothing else matters. Right actions are, simply, those that have the best consequences.

Second, in assessing consequences, the only thing that matters is the amount of happiness or unhappiness that is caused. Anything else is irrelevant. Thus right actions are those that produce the greatest balance of happiness over unhappiness.

Third, in calculating the happiness or unhappiness that will be caused, no one's happiness is to be counted as more important than anyone else's. Each person's welfare is equally important.

### 8.2. Is Happiness the Only Thing That Matters?

As Mill put it, "The utilitarian doctrine is that happiness is desirable, and the only thing desirable, as an end; all other things being desirable as means to that end."

The idea that happiness is the one ultimate good (and unhappiness is the one ultimate evil) is known as Hedonism.

Hedonism misunderstands the nature of happiness. Happiness is not something that is recognized as good and sought for its own sake, with other things appreciated only as means of bringing it about. Instead, happiness is a response we have to the attainment of things that we recognized as good, independently and in their own right.

### 8.3. Are Consequences All That Matter?

Utilitarianism is incompatible with the ideal of justice.

Utilitarianism is at odds with the idea that people have *rights* that may not be trampled on merely because one anticipates good results.

The only kinds of considerations that the theory holds relevant to determining the rightness of actions are considerations having to do with the future.

### 8.4. The Defense of Utilitarianism

In order to determine the appropriate action in a specific instance the Rule-Utilitarian would ask "What general rules of conduct tend to promote the greatest happiness?"

In shifting the emphasis from the justification of acts to the justification of rules, the theory has been brought into line with our intuitive judgments to a remarkable degree.