Savannah

John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism

Introduction to Philosophy

30 October 2019

Introduction to Philosophy: Ethics

The reading from John Stuart Mill’s “Utilitarianism” is a chapter from a larger work (Mill). In the section we are reading, Mill attempts to respond to and correct some misunderstandings about utilitarianism. Below are some questions to answer to guide your reading and understanding of Mill's version of the utilitarian moral theory.

**1. What is the Greatest Happiness Principle according to Mill, and what does it have to do with the way Mill connects “desirable ends” to the standard of morality? (see p. 140-141)**

In pages 140- 141 of his essay Utilitarianism, Mills tries to reply to what he considers to be misunderstandings about utilitarianism, trying to bring the theory into the mainstream process. Mill has a different viewpoint regarding Utilitarianism as compared to other people. He believes that utility does not stand in opposition to pleasure. It terms the concept as General Happiness Principle. He believes that both the pleasure and absence of pain are the basic desire in every human inherently. Any events that happen are directly or indirectly connected to the pursuit of pleasure is deemed as "Good", otherwise, it is considered bad. Another criticism that he makes during his argument is that it is demeaning to reduce the role of seeking pleasure in one's lifetime. He believes that seeking pleasure is the basic animalistic desire embedded deep within our conscious. In my opinion, that does not make us selfish or immoral. But it should be noted that utilitarianism focuses on both the quantity and quality of the pleasure that we seek from any action.

**2. What is Mill’s point when he says, “It is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied?” (see p. 143), and what does it have to do with Mill’s point about higher and lower pleasures?**

There is an utter misunderstanding regarding the concept of utilitarianism that happiness is the road to contentment. We can easily observe that people with higher abilities are often less happy with themselves. The golden example that is cited against this situation is the famous Greek Philosopher Socrates. The man who was declared the wisest man of the time by the oracles of Delphi remained dissatisfied throughout his life due to his ability to think outside the box. Mill holds him in high esteem. His reference to him better than a "fool satisfied" speaks volumes. He also thinks that the level of pleasure in a man is different and superior to that of animals due to his superior senses. It is simply because the man has a superior sense of judgment regarding pleasure.

**3. How does Mill attempt to demonstrate that only happiness is desirable as an ultimate end?**

Mills upholds not only that happiness is to be wanted, but it is to be wanted impartially. Whatsoever may be the view of utilitarian philosophers as to the original circumstances by which happiness is made important, that certain activities are only righteous because they lead to another conclusion besides virtue, yet this being decided, not only place happiness and pleasure at the center of things which are good as means to the ultimate end, but they also identify as a spiritual fact the likelihood of its being, to a person, a good feeling in itself, without looking to any end beyond it. He argues that the mind is aligned with the state relatable to Utility, not in the state most favorable to the point of contentment unless it does love virtue in this manner.

# Works Cited

Mill, John Stuart. *Utilitarianism*. 1861.