

Selections from John Troyer, ed., *The Classical Utilitarians: Bentham and Mill* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2003).

What Do Bentham and Mill Agree About?

"Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure*. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. ... The *principle of utility* recognises this subjection, and assumes it for the foundation of that system, the object of which is to rear the fabric of felicity by the hands of reason and of law. Systems which attempt to question it, deal in sounds instead of sense, in caprice instead of reason, in darkness instead of light." (**Bentham**, pp. 8-9)

"An action then may be said to conformable to the principle of utility, or, for shortness sake, to utility, (meaning with respect to the community at large) when the tendency it has to augment the happiness of the community is greater than any it has to diminish it." (**Bentham**, p. 9)

"All the grand sources, in short, of human suffering are in a great degree, many of them almost entirely, conquerable by human care and effort; and though their removal is grievously slow...yet every mind sufficiently intelligent and generous to bear a part...in the endeavor will draw a noble enjoyment from the contest itself...." (**Mill**, p. 106)

"It is true, the question 'What does violate the moral law?' is one on which those who recognize different standards of morality are likely now and then to differ. But difference of opinion on moral questions was not first introduced into the world by utilitarianism, while that doctrine does supply, if not always an easy, at all events a tangible and intelligible, mode of deciding such differences." (**Mill**, p. 115)

What Do Bentham and Mill Disagree About?

"Prejudice apart, the game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry. If the game of push-pin furnishes more pleasure, it is more valuable than either." (**Bentham**, p. 94)

"It is quite compatible with the principle of utility to recognize the fact that some kinds of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others. It would be absurd that, while in estimating all other things quality is considered as well as quantity, the estimation of pleasure would be supposed to depend on quantity alone." (**Mill**, p. 100)

"Of two pleasures, if there be one to which all or almost all who have experience of both give a decided preference, irrespective of any feeling of moral obligation to prefer it, that is the more desirable pleasure." (**Mill**, pp. 100-101)

"It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are of a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question. The other party to the comparison knows both sides." (Mill, p. 102)

Mill on Gender (1869)

"...the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes -- the legal subordination of one sex to the other -- is wrong itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and ... it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power or privilege on the one side, nor disability on the other." (Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, Chapter 1 [not in our textbook; see "<http://www.mdx.ac.uk/www/study/xmil1869.htm>" if you want to read more])

[Regarding the argument that certain occupations are unnatural for women]: "What women by nature cannot do, it is quite superfluous to forbid them from doing." (Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, chapter 1)

"But the true virtue of human beings is fitness to live together as equals.... To these virtues, nothing in life as at present constituted gives cultivation by exercise. The family is a school of despotism, in which the virtues of despotism, but also its vices, are largely nourished. ... The family, justly constituted, would be the real school of the virtues of freedom. ... What is needed is, that it should be a school of sympathy in equality, of living together in love, without power on one side or obedience on the other. This it ought to be between the parents. It would then be an exercise of those virtues which each requires to fit them for all other association, and a model to the children of the feelings and conduct which their temporary training by means of obedience is designed to render habitual, and therefore natural, to them." (Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, Chapter 2)

"Whatever has been said or written, from the time of Herodotus to the present, of the ennobling influence of free government -- the nerve and spring which it gives to all the faculties, the larger and higher objects which it presents to the intellect and feelings, the more unselfish public spirit, and calmer and broader views of duty, that it engenders, and the generally loftier platform on which it elevates the individual as a moral, spiritual, and social being -- is every particle as true of women as of men." (Mill, *The Subjection of Women*, Chapter 4)

What about Rights?

"The chief of these duties [toward others] is respect for the rights of others. It is our duty to regard them as sacred and to respect and maintain them as such. There is nothing more sacred in the wide world than the rights of others. They are inviolable. Woe unto

him who trespasses upon the right of another and tramples it underfoot! ... We have a holy ruler and the most sacred of his gifts to us is the rights of man.” (**Kant**, from Louis Infield, trans., *Lectures on Ethics*, reprint [Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1989], pp. 193-194.)

“We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed, by their Creator, with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed....” (**Declaration of Independence**)

“*Natural Rights* is simple nonsense: natural and imprescriptible rights, rhetorical nonsense, -- nonsense upon stilts. (**Bentham**, “Anarchical Fallacies.” Note: “Imprescriptible” means inviolable.)

“To have a right, then, is, I conceive, to have something which society ought to defend me in the possession of. If the objector goes on to ask why it ought, I can give him no other reason than general utility.” (**Mill**, in Troyer, *The Classic Utilitarians*, p.

Questions to Consider

Suppose a plan would decrease the salary of each of 200 professors by \$5,000, but would increase student scholarships for each of 2,000 students by \$500. Think *in detail* about how a utilitarian would decide whether this policy is morally obligatory, permissible or forbidden.. Would a Benthamite and a Millian utilitarian answer differently?

What is the logical relationship between happiness and rights according to the Declaration of Independence? What is their logical relationship according to Mill (and Bentham)?