

J. S. Mill Utilitarianism

J. S. Mill (1806 - 1873) was the most influential political thinker of the nineteenth century. Mill's transformative criticism of Benthamite utilitarianism was one of his greatest contributions to political thought. He argued that the principle of greatest happiness of the greatest number was defensible only if a distinction was made between happiness and pleasure. He also replaced the quantitative approach of Bentham by a qualitative one.

Mill criticized and modified Bentham's utilitarianism by taking into account "factors like moral motives, feeling, sympathy and a new concept of justice. He asserted that the chief deficiency of Benthamite ethics was the neglect of individual character, and hence stressed on the cultivation of feelings and imagination as part of good life. Poetry, drama, music, painting were essential ingredients, both for human happiness and formation of character, he made happiness and the dignity of man are not the principle of pleasure, the chief end of life. ~~He~~

Mill defined happiness to mean perfection of human nature, cultivation of moral values, aspirations, total control over one's appetites and desires, and recognition of individual and collective interests.

Mill retained the basic premise of utilitarianism but distinguished between higher and lower pleasures, and that greater human pleasure meant an increase not merely in the quantity but also in the quality of goods enjoyed. He insisted that human beings were capable of intellectual and moral pleasures, which were superior to the physical ones that they shared with animals.

Mill pointed out that every human action had

three aspects: (i) the moral aspect (ii) the aesthetic aspect (iii) the sympathetic aspect. Mill also stated that pleasures could not be measured objectively. He says that utilitarianism based on the permanent interests of the individual as a progressive being.