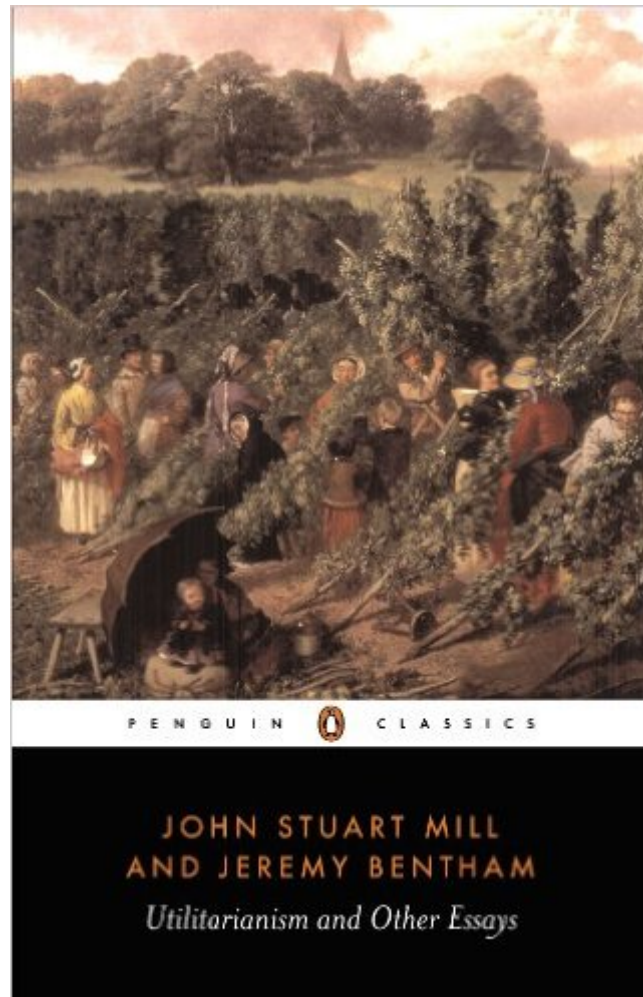


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Utilitarianism And Other Essays (Classics)



Synopsis

One of the most important nineteenth-century schools of thought, Utilitarianism propounds the view that the value or rightness of an action rests in how well it promotes the welfare of those affected by it, aiming for 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number'. Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) was the movement's founder, as much a social reformer as a philosopher. His greatest interpreter, John Stuart Mill (1806-73), set out to humanize Bentham's pragmatic Utilitarianism by balancing the claims of reason and the imagination, individuality and social well-being in essays such as 'Bentham', 'Coleridge' and, above all, Utilitarianism. The works by Bentham and Mill collected in this volume show the creation and development of a system of ethics that has had an enduring influence on moral philosophy and legislative policy.

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Customer Reviews

Jeremy Bentham is the father of the doctrine called Utilitarianism, and John Stuart Mill (son of the second-rank philosopher James Mill and a kind of mouthpiece for Jeremy) is his most known disciple. Â Â«Utilitarianism and other Essays Â Â» presents the reader some of the most important and exciting excerpts texts written by the two thinkers, who, despite outwardly embracing the same

doctrine, had to do a lot of theoretical gymnastics to accommodate each other points of view under the same ideological umbrella, thus demonstrating that sometimes the battle is fiercest, albeit muffled, inside than outside ideological headquarters. In hindsight, it seems that John Stuart Mill, who ran the rudders of the Economic doctrine of England until the 1860's, had some scores to settle with Jeremy, who was many years his senior and had been, by some, the person behind the culturally sophisticated (although stripped of any emotional and religious overtones) education John received as a boy, learning Greek at 3, Latin at 8 and revising at 15 (in French) the first volume of the book "Democracy in America", by Tocqueville. The outcome of all this is that Mill developed a type of melancholic character who almost pushed him to the depths of depression, only rescued by his second marriage in his mid-life, when he embraced a lot of libertarian and anti-establishment proposals. The writing styles of the two are blatantly different, James being the pragmatic dogmatist who accepted no exception to his utilitarian precepts, Mill, on the contrary, the soft-minded scholar who diligently tried to mend the many deficiencies of a theory so rigidly framed and which was supposed to answer to all demands of human action. This dogmatism by Bentham, forced Mill later in life to abscond that doctrine, although never converting himself to any religion creed. Worthy of mention is the superb introduction by Alan Ryan, being a book on utilitarianism in itself.

This is John Stuart Mill's restatement and qualification of the philosophical doctrine of 'Utilitarianism' - the doctrine that the aim of Society is to produce the "greatest happiness for the greatest number". The philosophy whose great inventor was Jeremy Bentham built itself upon the idea of a calculus of pleasures and pains, an almost mechanical measuring of feeling. However the complexity, contradictory quality of our inner life suggests that any calculation of this type has a certain shallowness and illegitimacy about it. In any case Mill's idea of utilitarianism does connect with his conception of Liberalism, and does have effect on his later thought even as he rejected most of it.

Mill's Utilitarianism is a very interesting and modern essay. It surely has endured the test of time so far and will continue to do so for many generations to come.

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