

**CONTEMPORARY
ENGLISH
ETHICS, PP. 5-71**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649338832

Contemporary English Ethics, pp. 5-71 by Daniel Rees

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

DANIEL REES

**CONTEMPORARY
ENGLISH
ETHICS, PP. 5-71**

Fall Blue *13*

CONTEMPORARY

ENGLISH ETHICS.

17627

A DISSERTATION

PRESENTED TO THE

UNIVERSITY OF LEIPZIG

FOR THE

DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

DANIEL REES.

LEIPZIG,
PRINTED BY G. KREYSING.
1892.

TABLE OF CONTENTS AND BOOKS OF REFERENCE.

CHAPTER I. **Mill**: *Utilitarianism* (1864).

Contrast with Kant. Pleasure the end. Quantity and quality of pleasures. Passage to disinterestedness: psychologically through association: ethically.

CHAPTER II. **Darwin**: *Origin of Species* 6^o ed. 1882: *Descent of Man* 2^o ed. 1877.

Organism and environment. Variation. Natural Selection. Habit. Instinct—natural and domestic. Growth of moral sense. End of conduct.

CHAPTER III. **Spencer**: *Data of Ethics*; **Stephen**: *Science of Ethics* (1882).

§ 1. *Spencer*. A. Descriptive—from physical, biological, psychological and sociological standpoint. B. Normative: ultimate end happiness; immediate end distribution of means to happiness. Egoism. Altruism.

§ 2. *Stephen*. Conduct determined by feeling and reason. The individual and the race. Society an organism. The family the social unit. Contents of the Moral Law. Sympathy. Sanction of Morality.

CHAPTER IV. **Sidgwick**: *Methods of Ethics* 3^o ed. 1884; **Sorley**: *Ethics of Naturalism* (1885); **Alexander**: *Moral Order and Progress* (1889); **Muirhead**: *Elements of Ethics* (1892). Pleasure. Desire. Is desire always interested? Sidgwick's account of the end, criticised. Desiderata in the evolution theory.

CHAPTER V. **Martineau**: *Types of Ethical Theory* 2^o ed. 1886.

Perception and Conscience. Objects of Moral Judgment. Springs of action—psychological and moral order. Duty to God, to man, to self.

CHAPTER VI. **Green**: *Prolegomena to Ethics* 2^o ed. 1884.

Theory of knowledge. Want, impulse, desire. Desire and Intellect. Desire and Will. Intellect and Will. The Moral Ideal: its personal and formal character; its origin and development. Its application to Conduct.



CHAPTER I.

UTILITARIANISM.

"Kant, in the *Metaphysics of Ethics*, lays down an universal first principle as the origin and ground of moral obligation; it is this:—'So act, that the rule on which thou actest would admit of being adopted as a law by all rational beings'. But when he begins to deduce from this precept any of the actual duties of morality, he fails, almost grotesquely, to show that there would be any contradiction, any logical (not to say physical) impossibility, in the adoption by all rational beings of the most outrageously immoral rules of conduct. All he shows is that the *consequences* of their universal adoption would be such as no one would choose to incur."

So run the opening sentences of Mill's treatise on *Utilitarianism*. They point to an implied contrast in the views of the two writers, to a totally different standpoint. When dealing with the Practical Reason Kant alights upon a "factum" of consciousness: the moral law he regards as an indisputable fact of reason in its practical application. And just as the slightest admixture of the empirical, as a condition in a mathematical demonstration, would lower the value of the proof and do away with its universal cogency, so the slightest consideration of the pleasure or pain that might result as the consequence of any particular action would mar the worth of moral judgment, would, in fact, appeal not to the reason which is universal in man but to the sensibility of the individual, to what is ever changing in him, varying with every

variation in the conditions of his existence, external and internal. Mill maintains that the result of Kant's procedure ends in something only short of the grotesque. Ethics can not be thus formulated without regard to the conditions of organic life and the thousand considerations which arise in consequence of differences in the conditions which hem in the individual or assist him in his growth. Rather than proceed then from the consciousness of the individual regarded as free from the limitations of space and time—with unbounded indifference to the conditions of earthly existence —, Mill prefers to give the problem a complete turn, to take as his basis the firm ground of experience. 'Give me a *nov στω*', said the ancient Greek philosopher, contemplating the possibilities of the lever, 'and I will move the world'. Here at length we have a solid basis to work upon—the experience of past generations as represented in the institutions of to-day, and a never-failing power to work our machinery—the ever-present desire of the individual for pleasure and his aversion to pain. Not that we have here anything particularly new: we simply have forces old as the life of man, and carefully observed in their working ever since the ancient Greeks came to look at nature intelligently. We proceed to show, briefly, how Mill dealt with the materials at hand.

"The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure."¹⁾ We are to regard man, for ethical purposes, as a creature of impulses and desires. As an individual he is not self-sufficient, but related to the external world; it is there his impulses for the most part find their playground; it is thence his desires gain satisfaction. Desire is always for pleasure. Desiring a thing and finding it pleasant, aversion to it and thinking of it as

¹⁾ *Utilitarianism*, p. 9.

painful, are phenomena entirely inseparable: to desire anything, except in proportion as the idea of it is pleasant, is a physical and metaphysical impossibility. Accordingly desires would seem to allow of being arranged according to a graduated scale, or rather two scales—that of intensity and that of worth. "Utilitarian writers in general have placed the superiority of mental over bodily pleasures chiefly in the greater permanency, safety, uncostliness, &c., of the former—that is, in their circumstantial advantages rather than in their intrinsic nature. And on all these points Utilitarians have fully proved their case; but they might have taken the other, and, as it may be called, higher ground, with entire consistency. It is quite compatible with the principle of utility to recognise the fact that some *kinds* of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others."¹⁾ This distinction of quality among pleasures is essential—though perhaps suicidal—to Mill's system; it attracts in cases where simple quantitative happiness would be out of question; it surrounds pleasure with a certain halo of moral worth. It is this consideration that attests the reasonableness of employing the higher faculties: but its introduction only tends greatly to increase the difficulties of the hedonistic calculus. With these difficulties in the way of hedonism Mill does not busy himself: it is enough for him that the case is so. "The only proof capable of being given that an object is visible, is that people actually see it. The only proof that a sound is audible, is that people hear it: and so of the other sources of our experience. In like manner, I apprehend, the sole evidence it is possible to produce that anything is desirable is that people do actually desire it. Each person, so far as he believes it to be attainable, desires his own happiness. This being a fact we have not only all the proof which the case admits of, but all which it is possible to require that happiness is a good. Happiness has made out its title as *one* of the ends of conduct. But it has not, by this alone, proved itself to be the sole criterion."²⁾

¹⁾ Ibid. p. 12. ²⁾ p. 52.

So far we have kept well within the lines of egoism. How are we to make the passage to disinterestedness? Instead of following Hobbes' method and invoking the aid of the state for the maintenance of public morality, Mill prefers to make use of the psychological law elaborated by Hartley—the law of the "*association of ideas*". "Life would be a poor thing, very ill provided with sources of happiness, if there were not this provision of nature by which things originally indifferent, but conducive to, or otherwise associated with, the satisfaction of our primitive desires, become in themselves sources of pleasure more valuable than the primitive pleasures, both in permanency, in the space of human existence they are capable of covering, and even in intensity." This principle explains the miser's love of money: this is the spring whence flows the love of power or of fame. "Virtue, according to the utilitarian conception, is a good of this description. There was no original desire of it, or motive to it, save its conduciveness to pleasure, and especially to protection from pain. But through the association thus formed, it may be felt a good in itself, and desired as such with as great intensity as any other good; and with this difference between it and the love of money, of power, or of fame, that all of these may, and often do, render the individual noxious to the other members of the society to which he belongs, whereas there is nothing which makes him so much a blessing to them as the cultivation of the disinterested love of virtue. And, consequently, the utilitarian standard, while it tolerates and approves those other acquired desires, up to the point beyond which they would be more injurious to the general happiness than promotive of it, enjoins and requires the cultivation of the love of virtue up to the greatest strength possible, as being above all things important to the general happiness."¹⁾

From the *psychological* point of view, then, the barrier that separates self-interest from altruistic affection does not appear insurmountable: from the nature of the case I pursue my own

¹⁾ p. 57.