

1 **UTILITARIANISM**

2 **by**
3 **John Stuart Mill**
4 (1863)

5 **Chapter 1**
6 **General Remarks.**

7 Public domain text at: <http://www.utilitarianism.com/mill1.htm>

8
9 Chapter 1

10 ...The truths which are ultimately accepted as the first principles of a science, are really the last
11 results of metaphysical analysis, practised on the elementary notions with which the science is
12 conversant; and their relation to the science is not that of foundations to an edifice, but of roots to a tree,
13 which may perform their office equally well though they be never dug down to and exposed to light. But
14 though in science the particular truths precede the general theory, the contrary might be expected to be the
15 case with a practical art, such as morals or legislation. All action is for the sake of some end, and rules of
16 action, it seems natural to suppose, must take their whole character and colour from the end to which they
17 are subservient. When we engage in a pursuit, a clear and precise conception of what we are pursuing
18 would seem to be the first thing we need, instead of the last we are to look forward to. A test of right and
19 wrong must be the means, one would think, of ascertaining what is right or wrong, and not a consequence
20 of having already ascertained it.

21 The difficulty is not avoided by having recourse to the popular theory of a natural faculty, a sense or
22 instinct, informing us of right and wrong. For- besides that the existence of such- a moral instinct is itself
23 one of the matters in dispute- those believers in it who have any pretensions to philosophy, have been
24 obliged to abandon the idea that it discerns what is right or wrong in the particular case in hand, as our
25 other senses discern the sight or sound actually present. Our moral faculty, according to all those of its
26 interpreters who are entitled to the name of thinkers, supplies us only with the general principles of moral
27 judgments; it is a branch of our reason, not of our sensitive faculty; and must be looked to for the abstract
28 doctrines of morality, not for perception of it in the concrete. The intuitive, no less than what may be
29 termed the inductive, school of ethics, insists on the necessity of general laws. They both agree that the
30 morality of an individual action is not a question of direct perception, but of the application of a law to an
31 individual case. They recognise also, to a great extent, the same moral laws; but differ as to their
32 evidence, and the source from which they derive their authority. According to the one opinion, the
33 principles of morals are evident a priori, requiring nothing to command assent, except that the meaning of
34 the terms be understood. According to the other doctrine, right and wrong, as well as truth and falsehood,
35 are questions of observation and experience. But both hold equally that morality must be deduced from
36 principles; and the intuitive school affirm as strongly as the inductive, that there is a science of morals.
37 Yet they seldom attempt to make out a list of the a priori principles which are to serve as the premises of
38 the science; still more rarely do they make any effort to reduce those various principles to one first
39 principle, or common ground of obligation. They either assume the ordinary precepts of morals as of a
40 priori authority, or they lay down as the common groundwork of those maxims, some generality much
41 less obviously authoritative than the maxims themselves, and which has never succeeded in gaining
42 popular acceptance. Yet to support their pretensions there ought either to be some one fundamental
43 principle or law, at the root of all morality, or if there be several, there should be a determinate order of
44 precedence among them; and the one principle, or the rule for deciding between the various principles
45 when they conflict, ought to be self-evident....

46

1 **Chapter 2**
2 **What Utilitarianism Is.**
3

4 A PASSING remark is all that needs be given to the ignorant blunder of supposing that those who stand
5 up for utility as the test of right and wrong, use the term in that restricted and merely colloquial sense in
6 which utility is opposed to pleasure. An apology is due to the philosophical opponents of utilitarianism,
7 for even the momentary appearance of confounding them with any one capable of so absurd a
8 misconception; which is the more extraordinary, inasmuch as the contrary accusation, of referring
9 everything to pleasure, and that too in its grossest form, is another of the common charges against
10 utilitarianism: and, as has been pointedly remarked by an able writer, the same sort of persons, and often
11 the very same persons, denounce the theory "as impracticably dry when the word utility precedes the
12 word pleasure, and as too practicably voluptuous when the word pleasure precedes the word utility."
13 Those who know anything about the matter are aware that every writer, from Epicurus to Bentham, who
14 maintained the theory of utility, meant by it, not something to be contradistinguished from pleasure, but
15 pleasure itself, together with exemption from pain; and instead of opposing the useful to the agreeable or
16 the ornamental, have always declared that the useful means these, among other things. Yet the common
17 herd, including the herd of writers, not only in newspapers and periodicals, but in books of weight and
18 pretension, are perpetually falling into this shallow mistake. Having caught up the word utilitarian, while
19 knowing nothing whatever about it but its sound, they habitually express by it the rejection, or the
20 neglect, of pleasure in some of its forms; of beauty, of ornament, or of amusement. Nor is the term thus
21 ignorantly misapplied solely in disparagement, but occasionally in compliment; as though it implied
22 superiority to frivolity and the mere pleasures of the moment. And this perverted use is the only one in
23 which the word is popularly known, and the one from which the new generation are acquiring their sole
24 notion of its meaning. Those who introduced the word, but who had for many years discontinued it as a
25 distinctive appellation, may well feel themselves called upon to resume it, if by doing so they can hope to
26 contribute anything towards rescuing it from this utter degradation.*

27 [* The author of this essay has reason for believing himself to be the first person who brought the word
28 utilitarian into use. He did not invent it, but adopted it from a passing expression in Mr. Galt's Annals of
29 the Parish. After using it as a designation for several years, he and others abandoned it from a growing
30 dislike to anything resembling a badge or watchword of sectarian distinction. But as a name for one single
31 opinion, not a set of opinions- to denote the recognition of utility as a standard, not any particular way of
32 applying it- the term supplies a want in the language, and offers, in many cases, a convenient mode of
33 avoiding tiresome circumlocution.]

34 The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds
35 that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the
36 reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain,
37 and the privation of pleasure. To give a clear view of the moral standard set up by the theory, much more
38 requires to be said; in particular, what things it includes in the ideas of pain and pleasure; and to what
39 extent this is left an open question. But these supplementary explanations do not affect the theory of life
40 on which this theory of morality is grounded- namely, that pleasure, and freedom from pain, are the only
41 things desirable as ends; and that all desirable things (which are as numerous in the utilitarian as in any
42 other scheme) are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in themselves, or as means to the promotion of
43 pleasure and the prevention of pain.

44 Now, such a theory of life excites in many minds, and among them in some of the most estimable in
45 feeling and purpose, inveterate dislike. To suppose that life has (as they express it) no higher end than
46 pleasure- no better and nobler object of desire and pursuit- they designate as utterly mean and grovelling;
47 as a doctrine worthy only of swine, to whom the followers of Epicurus were, at a very early period,

1 contemptuously likened; and modern holders of the doctrine are occasionally made the subject of equally
2 polite comparisons by its German, French, and English assailants.

3 When thus attacked, the Epicureans have always answered, that it is not they, but their accusers, who
4 represent human nature in a degrading light; since the accusation supposes human beings to be capable of
5 no pleasures except those of which swine are capable. If this supposition were true, the charge could not
6 be gainsaid, but would then be no longer an imputation; for if the sources of pleasure were precisely the
7 same to human beings and to swine, the rule of life which is good enough for the one would be good
8 enough for the other. The comparison of the Epicurean life to that of beasts is felt as degrading, precisely
9 because a beast's pleasures do not satisfy a human being's conceptions of happiness. Human beings have
10 faculties more elevated than the animal appetites, and when once made conscious of them, do not regard
11 anything as happiness which does not include their gratification. I do not, indeed, consider the Epicureans
12 to have been by any means faultless in drawing out their scheme of consequences from the utilitarian
13 principle. To do this in any sufficient manner, many Stoic, as well as Christian elements require to be
14 included. But there is no known Epicurean theory of life which does not assign to the pleasures of the
15 intellect, of the feelings and imagination, and of the moral sentiments, a much higher value as pleasures
16 than to those of mere sensation. It must be admitted, however, that utilitarian writers in general have
17 placed the superiority of mental over bodily pleasures chiefly in the greater permanency, safety,
18 uncostliness, etc., of the former- that is, in their circumstantial advantages rather than in their intrinsic
19 nature. And on all these points utilitarians have fully proved their case; but they might have taken the
20 other, and, as it may be called, higher ground, with entire consistency. It is quite compatible with the
21 principle of utility to recognise the fact, that some kinds of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable
22 than others. It would be absurd that while, in estimating all other things, quality is considered as well as
23 quantity, the estimation of pleasures should be supposed to depend on quantity alone.

24 If I am asked, what I mean by difference of quality in pleasures, or what makes one pleasure more
25 valuable than another, merely as a pleasure, except its being greater in amount, there is but one possible
26 answer. Of two pleasures, if there be one to which all or almost all who have experience of both give a
27 decided preference, irrespective of any feeling of moral obligation to prefer it, that is the more desirable
28 pleasure. If one of the two is, by those who are competently acquainted with both, placed so far above the
29 other that they prefer it, even though knowing it to be attended with a greater amount of discontent, and
30 would not resign it for any quantity of the other pleasure which their nature is capable of, we are justified
31 in ascribing to the preferred enjoyment a superiority in quality, so far outweighing quantity as to render it,
32 in comparison, of small account.

33 Now it is an unquestionable fact that those who are equally acquainted with, and equally capable of
34 appreciating and enjoying, both, do give a most marked preference to the manner of existence which
35 employs their higher faculties. Few human creatures would consent to be changed into any of the lower
36 animals, for a promise of the fullest allowance of a beast's pleasures; no intelligent human being would
37 consent to be a fool, no instructed person would be an ignoramus, no person of feeling and conscience
38 would be selfish and base, even though they should be persuaded that the fool, the dunce, or the rascal is
39 better satisfied with his lot than they are with theirs. They would not resign what they possess more than
40 he for the most complete satisfaction of all the desires which they have in common with him. If they ever
41 fancy they would, it is only in cases of unhappiness so extreme, that to escape from it they would
42 exchange their lot for almost any other, however undesirable in their own eyes. A being of higher
43 faculties requires more to make him happy, is capable probably of more acute suffering, and certainly
44 accessible to it at more points, than one of an inferior type; but in spite of these liabilities, he can never
45 really wish to sink into what he feels to be a lower grade of existence. We may give what explanation we
46 please of this unwillingness; we may attribute it to pride, a name which is given indiscriminately to some
47 of the most and to some of the least estimable feelings of which mankind are capable: we may refer it to

1 the love of liberty and personal independence, an appeal to which was with the Stoics one of the most
2 effective means for the inculcation of it; to the love of power, or to the love of excitement, both of which
3 do really enter into and contribute to it: but its most appropriate appellation is a sense of dignity, which all
4 human beings possess in one form or other, and in some, though by no means in exact, proportion to their
5 higher faculties, and which is so essential a part of the happiness of those in whom it is strong, that
6 nothing which conflicts with it could be, otherwise than momentarily, an object of desire to them.

7 Whoever supposes that this preference takes place at a sacrifice of happiness- that the superior being, in
8 anything like equal circumstances, is not happier than the inferior- confounds the two very different ideas,
9 of happiness, and content. It is indisputable that the being whose capacities of enjoyment are low, has the
10 greatest chance of having them fully satisfied; and a highly endowed being will always feel that any
11 happiness which he can look for, as the world is constituted, is imperfect. But he can learn to bear its
12 imperfections, if they are at all bearable; and they will not make him envy the being who is indeed
13 unconscious of the imperfections, but only because he feels not at all the good which those imperfections
14 qualify. It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied
15 than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are a different opinion, it is because they only know their
16 own side of the question. The other party to the comparison knows both sides.

17 It may be objected, that many who are capable of the higher pleasures, occasionally, under the influence
18 of temptation, postpone them to the lower. But this is quite compatible with a full appreciation of the
19 intrinsic superiority of the higher. Men often, from infirmity of character, make their election for the
20 nearer good, though they know it to be the less valuable; and this no less when the choice is between two
21 bodily pleasures, than when it is between bodily and mental. They pursue sensual indulgences to the
22 injury of health, though perfectly aware that health is the greater good.

23 It may be further objected, that many who begin with youthful enthusiasm for everything noble, as they
24 advance in years sink into indolence and selfishness. But I do not believe that those who undergo this
25 very common change, voluntarily choose the lower description of pleasures in preference to the higher. I
26 believe that before they devote themselves exclusively to the one, they have already become incapable of
27 the other. Capacity for the nobler feelings is in most natures a very tender plant, easily killed, not only by
28 hostile influences, but by mere want of sustenance; and in the majority of young persons it speedily dies
29 away if the occupations to which their position in life has devoted them, and the society into which it has
30 thrown them, are not favourable to keeping that higher capacity in exercise. Men lose their high
31 aspirations as they lose their intellectual tastes, because they have not time or opportunity for indulging
32 them; and they addict themselves to inferior pleasures, not because they deliberately prefer them, but
33 because they are either the only ones to which they have access, or the only ones which they are any
34 longer capable of enjoying. It may be questioned whether any one who has remained equally susceptible
35 to both classes of pleasures, ever knowingly and calmly preferred the lower; though many, in all ages,
36 have broken down in an ineffectual attempt to combine both.

37 From this verdict of the only competent judges, I apprehend there can be no appeal. On a question which
38 is the best worth having of two pleasures, or which of two modes of existence is the most grateful to the
39 feelings, apart from its moral attributes and from its consequences, the judgment of those who are
40 qualified by knowledge of both, or, if they differ, that of the majority among them, must be admitted as
41 final. And there needs be the less hesitation to accept this judgment respecting the quality of pleasures,
42 since there is no other tribunal to be referred to even on the question of quantity. What means are there of
43 determining which is the acutest of two pains, or the intensest of two pleasurable sensations, except the
44 general suffrage of those who are familiar with both? Neither pains nor pleasures are homogeneous, and
45 pain is always heterogeneous with pleasure. What is there to decide whether a particular pleasure is worth
46 purchasing at the cost of a particular pain, except the feelings and judgment of the experienced? When,

1 therefore, those feelings and judgment declare the pleasures derived from the higher faculties to be
2 preferable in kind, apart from the question of intensity, to those of which the animal nature, disjoined
3 from the higher faculties, is susceptible, they are entitled on this subject to the same regard.

4 I have dwelt on this point, as being a necessary part of a perfectly just conception of Utility or Happiness,
5 considered as the directive rule of human conduct. But it is by no means an indispensable condition to the
6 acceptance of the utilitarian standard; for that standard is not the agent's own greatest happiness, but the
7 greatest amount of happiness altogether; and if it may possibly be doubted whether a noble character is
8 always the happier for its nobleness, there can be no doubt that it makes other people happier, and that the
9 world in general is immensely a gainer by it. Utilitarianism, therefore, could only attain its end by the
10 general cultivation of nobleness of character, even if each individual were only benefited by the nobleness
11 of others, and his own, so far as happiness is concerned, were a sheer deduction from the benefit. But the
12 bare enunciation of such an absurdity as this last, renders refutation superfluous.

13 According to the Greatest Happiness Principle, as above explained, the ultimate end, with reference to
14 and for the sake of which all other things are desirable (whether we are considering our own good or that
15 of other people), is an existence exempt as far as possible from pain, and as rich as possible in
16 enjoyments, both in point of quantity and quality; the test of quality, and the rule for measuring it against
17 quantity, being the preference felt by those who in their opportunities of experience, to which must be
18 added their habits of self-consciousness and self-observation, are best furnished with the means of
19 comparison. This, being, according to the utilitarian opinion, the end of human action, is necessarily also
20 the standard of morality; which may accordingly be defined, the rules and precepts for human conduct, by
21 the observance of which an existence such as has been described might be, to the greatest extent possible,
22 secured to all mankind; and not to them only, but, so far as the nature of things admits, to the whole
23 sentient creation.

24 Against this doctrine, however, arises another class of objectors, who say that happiness, in any form,
25 cannot be the rational purpose of human life and action; because, in the first place, it is unattainable: and
26 they contemptuously ask, what right hast thou to be happy? a question which Mr. Carlyle clenches by the
27 addition, What right, a short time ago, hadst thou even to be? Next, they say, that men can do without
28 happiness; that all noble human beings have felt this, and could not have become noble but by learning
29 the lesson of Entsagen, or renunciation; which lesson, thoroughly learnt and submitted to, they affirm to
30 be the beginning and necessary condition of all virtue.

31 The first of these objections would go to the root of the matter were it well founded; for if no happiness is
32 to be had at all by human beings, the attainment of it cannot be the end of morality, or of any rational
33 conduct. Though, even in that case, something might still be said for the utilitarian theory; since utility
34 includes not solely the pursuit of happiness, but the prevention or mitigation of unhappiness; and if the
35 former aim be chimerical, there will be all the greater scope and more imperative need for the latter, so
36 long at least as mankind think fit to live, and do not take refuge in the simultaneous act of suicide
37 recommended under certain conditions by Novalis. When, however, it is thus positively asserted to be
38 impossible that human life should be happy, the assertion, if not something like a verbal quibble, is at
39 least an exaggeration. If by happiness be meant a continuity of highly pleasurable excitement, it is evident
40 enough that this is impossible. A state of exalted pleasure lasts only moments, or in some cases, and with
41 some intermissions, hours or days, and is the occasional brilliant flash of enjoyment, not its permanent
42 and steady flame. Of this the philosophers who have taught that happiness is the end of life were as fully
43 aware as those who taunt them. The happiness which they meant was not a life of rapture; but moments of
44 such, in an existence made up of few and transitory pains, many and various pleasures, with a decided
45 predominance of the active over the passive, and having as the foundation of the whole, not to expect
46 more from life than it is capable of bestowing. A life thus composed, to those who have been fortunate

1 enough to obtain it, has always appeared worthy of the name of happiness. And such an existence is even
2 now the lot of many, during some considerable portion of their lives. The present wretched education, and
3 wretched social arrangements, are the only real hindrance to its being attainable by almost all.

4 The objectors perhaps may doubt whether human beings, if taught to consider happiness as the end of life,
5 would be satisfied with such a moderate share of it. But great numbers of mankind have been satisfied
6 with much less. The main constituents of a satisfied life appear to be two, either of which by itself is often
7 found sufficient for the purpose: tranquillity, and excitement. With much tranquillity, many find that they
8 can be content with very little pleasure: with much excitement, many can reconcile themselves to a
9 considerable quantity of pain. There is assuredly no inherent impossibility in enabling even the mass of
10 mankind to unite both; since the two are so far from being incompatible that they are in natural alliance,
11 the prolongation of either being a preparation for, and exciting a wish for, the other. It is only those in
12 whom indolence amounts to a vice, that do not desire excitement after an interval of repose: it is only
13 those in whom the need of excitement is a disease, that feel the tranquillity which follows excitement dull
14 and insipid, instead of pleasurable in direct proportion to the excitement which preceded it. When people
15 who are tolerably fortunate in their outward lot do not find in life sufficient enjoyment to make it valuable
16 to them, the cause generally is, caring for nobody but themselves. To those who have neither public nor
17 private affections, the excitements of life are much curtailed, and in any case dwindle in value as the time
18 approaches when all selfish interests must be terminated by death: while those who leave after them
19 objects of personal affection, and especially those who have also cultivated a fellow-feeling with the
20 collective interests of mankind, retain as lively an interest in life on the eve of death as in the vigour of
21 youth and health. Next to selfishness, the principal cause which makes life unsatisfactory is want of
22 mental cultivation. A cultivated mind - I do not mean that of a philosopher, but any mind to which the
23 fountains of knowledge have been opened, and which has been taught, in any tolerable degree, to exercise
24 its faculties- finds sources of inexhaustible interest in all that surrounds it; in the objects of nature, the
25 achievements of art, the imaginations of poetry, the incidents of history, the ways of mankind, past and
26 present, and their prospects in the future. It is possible, indeed, to become indifferent to all this, and that
27 too without having exhausted a thousandth part of it; but only when one has had from the beginning no
28 moral or human interest in these things, and has sought in them only the gratification of curiosity.

29 Now there is absolutely no reason in the nature of things why an amount of mental culture sufficient to
30 give an intelligent interest in these objects of contemplation, should not be the inheritance of every one
31 born in a civilised country. As little is there an inherent necessity that any human being should be a selfish
32 egotist, devoid of every feeling or care but those which centre in his own miserable individuality.
33 Something far superior to this is sufficiently common even now, to give ample earnest of what the human
34 species may be made. Genuine private affections and a sincere interest in the public good, are possible,
35 though in unequal degrees, to every rightly brought up human being. In a world in which there is so much
36 to interest, so much to enjoy, and so much also to correct and improve, every one who has this moderate
37 amount of moral and intellectual requisites is capable of an existence which may be called enviable; and
38 unless such a person, through bad laws, or subjection to the will of others, is denied the liberty to use the
39 sources of happiness within his reach, he will not fail to find this enviable existence, if he escape the
40 positive evils of life, the great sources of physical and mental suffering- such as indigence, disease, and
41 the unkindness, worthlessness, or premature loss of objects of affection. The main stress of the problem
42 lies, therefore, in the contest with these calamities, from which it is a rare good fortune entirely to escape;
43 which, as things now are, cannot be obviated, and often cannot be in any material degree mitigated. Yet
44 no one whose opinion deserves a moment's consideration can doubt that most of the great positive evils of
45 the world are in themselves removable, and will, if human affairs continue to improve, be in the end
46 reduced within narrow limits. Poverty, in any sense implying suffering, may be completely extinguished
47 by the wisdom of society, combined with the good sense and providence of individuals. Even that most
48 intractable of enemies, disease, may be indefinitely reduced in dimensions by good physical and moral
49 education, and proper control of noxious influences; while the progress of science holds out a promise for

1 the future of still more direct conquests over this detestable foe. And every advance in that direction
2 relieves us from some, not only of the chances which cut short our own lives, but, what concerns us still
3 more, which deprive us of those in whom our happiness is wrapt up. As for vicissitudes of fortune, and
4 other disappointments connected with worldly circumstances, these are principally the effect either of
5 gross imprudence, of ill-regulated desires, or of bad or imperfect social institutions.

6 All the grand sources, in short, of human suffering are in a great degree, many of them almost entirely,
7 conquerable by human care and effort; and though their removal is grievously slow- though a long
8 succession of generations will perish in the breach before the conquest is completed, and this world
9 becomes all that, if will and knowledge were not wanting, it might easily be made- yet every mind
10 sufficiently intelligent and generous to bear a part, however small and unobtrusive, in the endeavour,
11 will draw a noble enjoyment from the contest itself, which he would not for any bribe in the form of
12 selfish indulgence consent to be without.

13 And this leads to the true estimation of what is said by the objectors concerning the possibility, and the
14 obligation, of learning to do without happiness. Unquestionably it is possible to do without happiness; it
15 is done involuntarily by nineteen-twentieths of mankind, even in those parts of our present world which
16 are least deep in barbarism; and it often has to be done voluntarily by the hero or the martyr, for the sake
17 of something which he prizes more than his individual happiness. But this something, what is it, unless
18 the happiness of others or some of the requisites of happiness? It is noble to be capable of resigning
19 entirely one's own portion of happiness, or chances of it: but, after all, this self-sacrifice must be for some
20 end; it is not its own end; and if we are told that its end is not happiness, but virtue, which is better than
21 happiness, I ask, would the sacrifice be made if the hero or martyr did not believe that it would earn for
22 others immunity from similar sacrifices? Would it be made if he thought that his renunciation of
23 happiness for himself would produce no fruit for any of his fellow creatures, but to make their lot like his,
24 and place them also in the condition of persons who have renounced happiness? All honour to those who
25 can abnegate for themselves the personal enjoyment of life, when by such renunciation they contribute
26 worthily to increase the amount of happiness in the world; but he who does it, or professes to do it, for
27 any other purpose, is no more deserving of admiration than the ascetic mounted on his pillar. He may be
28 an inspiring proof of what men can do, but assuredly not an example of what they should.

29 Though it is only in a very imperfect state of the world's arrangements that any one can best serve the
30 happiness of others by the absolute sacrifice of his own, yet so long as the world is in that imperfect state,
31 I fully acknowledge that the readiness to make such a sacrifice is the highest virtue which can be found in
32 man. I will add, that in this condition the world, paradoxical as the assertion may be, the conscious ability
33 to do without happiness gives the best prospect of realising, such happiness as is attainable. For nothing
34 except that consciousness can raise a person above the chances of life, by making him feel that, let fate
35 and fortune do their worst, they have not power to subdue him: which, once felt, frees him from excess of
36 anxiety concerning the evils of life, and enables him, like many a Stoic in the worst times of the Roman
37 Empire, to cultivate in tranquillity the sources of satisfaction accessible to him, without concerning
38 himself about the uncertainty of their duration, any more than about their inevitable end.

39 Meanwhile, let utilitarians never cease to claim the morality of self devotion as a possession which
40 belongs by as good a right to them, as either to the Stoic or to the Transcendentalist. The utilitarian
41 morality does recognise in human beings the power of sacrificing their own greatest good for the good of
42 others. It only refuses to admit that the sacrifice is itself a good. A sacrifice which does not increase, or
43 tend to increase, the sum total of happiness, it considers as wasted. The only self-renunciation which it
44 applauds, is devotion to the happiness, or to some of the means of happiness, of others; either of mankind
45 collectively, or of individuals within the limits imposed by the collective interests of mankind.

1 I must again repeat, what the assailants of utilitarianism seldom have the justice to acknowledge, that the
2 happiness which forms the utilitarian standard of what is right in conduct, is not the agent's own
3 happiness, but that of all concerned. As between his own happiness and that of others, utilitarianism
4 requires him to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator. In the golden rule of
5 Jesus of Nazareth, we read the complete spirit of the ethics of utility. To do as you would be done by, and
6 to love your neighbour as yourself, constitute the ideal perfection of utilitarian morality. As the means of
7 making the nearest approach to this ideal, utility would enjoin, first, that laws and social arrangements
8 should place the happiness, or (as speaking practically it may be called) the interest, of every individual,
9 as nearly as possible in harmony with the interest of the whole; and secondly, that education and opinion,
10 which have so vast a power over human character, should so use that power as to establish in the mind of
11 every individual an indissoluble association between his own happiness and the good of the whole;
12 especially between his own happiness and the practice of such modes of conduct, negative and positive,
13 as regard for the universal happiness prescribes; so that not only he may be unable to conceive the
14 possibility of happiness to himself, consistently with conduct opposed to the general good, but also that a
15 direct impulse to promote the general good may be in every individual one of the habitual motives of
16 action, and the sentiments connected therewith may fill a large and prominent place in every human
17 being's sentient existence. If the, impugners of the utilitarian morality represented it to their own minds in
18 this its, true character, I know not what recommendation possessed by any other morality they could
19 possibly affirm to be wanting to it; what more beautiful or more exalted developments of human nature
20 any other ethical system can be supposed to foster, or what springs of action, not accessible to the
21 utilitarian, such systems rely on for giving effect to their mandates.

22 The objectors to utilitarianism cannot always be charged with representing it in a discreditable light. On
23 the contrary, those among them who entertain anything like a just idea of its disinterested character,
24 sometimes find fault with its standard as being too high for humanity. They say it is exacting too much to
25 require that people shall always act from the inducement of promoting the general interests of society. But
26 this is to mistake the very meaning of a standard of morals, and confound the rule of action with the
27 motive of it. It is the business of ethics to tell us what are our duties, or by what test we may know them;
28 but no system of ethics requires that the sole motive of all we do shall be a feeling of duty; on the
29 contrary, ninety-nine hundredths of all our actions are done from other motives, and rightly so done, if the
30 rule of duty does not condemn them. It is the more unjust to utilitarianism that this particular
31 misapprehension should be made a ground of objection to it, inasmuch as utilitarian moralists have gone
32 beyond almost all others in affirming that the motive has nothing to do with the morality of the action,
33 though much with the worth of the agent. He who saves a fellow creature from drowning does what is
34 morally right, whether his motive be duty, or the hope of being paid for his trouble; he who betrays the
35 friend that trusts him, is guilty of a crime, even if his object be to serve another friend to whom he is
36 under greater obligations.

37 But to speak only of actions done from the motive of duty, and in direct obedience to principle: it is a
38 misapprehension of the utilitarian mode of thought, to conceive it as implying that people should fix their
39 minds upon so wide a generality as the world, or society at large. The great majority of good actions are
40 intended not for the benefit of the world, but for that of individuals, of which the good of the world is
41 made up; and the thoughts of the most virtuous man need not on these occasions travel beyond the
42 particular persons concerned, except so far as is necessary to assure himself that in benefiting them he is
43 not violating the rights, that is, the legitimate and authorised expectations, of any one else. The
44 multiplication of happiness is, according to the utilitarian ethics, the object of virtue: the occasions on
45 which any person (except one in a thousand) has it in his power to do this on an extended scale, in other
46 words to be a public benefactor, are but exceptional; and on these occasions alone is he called on to
47 consider public utility; in every other case, private utility, the interest or happiness of some few persons,
48 is all he has to attend to. Those alone the influence of whose actions extends to society in general, need
49 concern themselves habitually about large an object. In the case of abstinences indeed- of things which

1 people forbear to do from moral considerations, though the consequences in the particular case might be
2 beneficial- it would be unworthy of an intelligent agent not to be consciously aware that the action is of a
3 class which, if practised generally, would be generally injurious, and that this is the ground of the
4 obligation to abstain from it. The amount of regard for the public interest implied in this recognition, is no
5 greater than is demanded by every system of morals, for they all enjoin to abstain from whatever is
6 manifestly pernicious to society.

7 The same considerations dispose of another reproach against the doctrine of utility, founded on a still
8 grosser misconception of the purpose of a standard of morality, and of the very meaning of the words
9 right and wrong. It is often affirmed that utilitarianism renders men cold and unsympathising; that it chills
10 their moral feelings towards individuals; that it makes them regard only the dry and hard consideration of
11 the consequences of actions, not taking into their moral estimate the qualities from which those actions
12 emanate. If the assertion means that they do not allow their judgment respecting the rightness or
13 wrongness of an action to be influenced by their opinion of the qualities of the person who does it, this is
14 a complaint not against utilitarianism, but against having any standard of morality at all; for certainly no
15 known ethical standard decides an action to be good or bad because it is done by a good or a bad man,
16 still less because done by an amiable, a brave, or a benevolent man, or the contrary. These considerations
17 are relevant, not to the estimation of actions, but of persons; and there is nothing in the utilitarian theory
18 inconsistent with the fact that there are other things which interest us in persons besides the rightness and
19 wrongness of their actions. The Stoics, indeed, with the paradoxical misuse of language which was part of
20 their system, and by which they strove to raise themselves above all concern about anything but virtue,
21 were fond of saying that he who has that has everything; that he, and only he, is rich, is beautiful, is a
22 king. But no claim of this description is made for the virtuous man by the utilitarian doctrine. Utilitarians
23 are quite aware that there are other desirable possessions and qualities besides virtue, and are perfectly
24 willing to allow to all of them their full worth. They are also aware that a right action does not necessarily
25 indicate a virtuous character, and that actions which are blamable, often proceed from qualities entitled to
26 praise. When this is apparent in any particular case, it modifies their estimation, not certainly of the act,
27 but of the agent. I grant that they are, notwithstanding, of opinion, that in the long run the best proof of a
28 good character is good actions; and resolutely refuse to consider any mental disposition as good, of which
29 the predominant tendency is to produce bad conduct. This makes them unpopular with many people; but
30 it is an unpopularity which they must share with every one who regards the distinction between right and
31 wrong in a serious light; and the reproach is not one which a conscientious utilitarian need be anxious to
32 repel.

33 If no more be meant by the objection than that many utilitarians look on the morality of actions, as
34 measured by the utilitarian standard, with too exclusive a regard, and do not lay sufficient stress upon the
35 other beauties of character which go towards making a human being lovable or admirable, this may be
36 admitted. Utilitarians who have cultivated their moral feelings, but not their sympathies nor their artistic
37 perceptions, do fall into this mistake; and so do all other moralists under the same conditions. What can
38 be said in excuse for other moralists is equally available for them, namely, that, if there is to be any error,
39 it is better that it should be on that side. As a matter of fact, we may affirm that among utilitarians as
40 among adherents of other systems, there is every imaginable degree of rigidity and of laxity in the
41 application of their standard: some are even puritanically rigorous, while others are as indulgent as can
42 possibly be desired by sinner or by sentimentalist. But on the whole, a doctrine which brings prominently
43 forward the interest that mankind have in the repression and prevention of conduct which violates the
44 moral law, is likely to be inferior to no other in turning the sanctions of opinion against such violations. It is
45 true, the question, What does violate the moral law? is one on which those who recognise different
46 standards of morality are likely now and then to differ. But difference of opinion on moral questions was
47 not first introduced into the world by utilitarianism, while that doctrine does supply, if not always an easy,
48 at all events a tangible and intelligible mode of deciding such differences.

1 It may not be superfluous to notice a few more of the common misapprehensions of utilitarian ethics,
2 even those which are so obvious and gross that it might appear impossible for any person of candour and
3 intelligence to fall into them; since persons, even of considerable mental endowments, often give
4 themselves so little trouble to understand the bearings of any opinion against which they entertain a
5 prejudice, and men are in general so little conscious of this voluntary ignorance as a defect, that the
6 vulgarest misunderstandings of ethical doctrines are continually met with in the deliberate writings of
7 persons of the greatest pretensions both to high principle and to philosophy. We not uncommonly hear the
8 doctrine of utility inveighed against as a godless doctrine. If it be necessary to say anything at all against
9 so mere an assumption, we may say that the question depends upon what idea we have formed of the
10 moral character of the Deity. If it be a true belief that God desires, above all things, the happiness of his
11 creatures, and that this was his purpose in their creation, utility is not only not a godless doctrine, but
12 more profoundly religious than any other. If it be meant that utilitarianism does not recognise the revealed
13 will of God as the supreme law of morals, I answer, that a utilitarian who believes in the perfect goodness
14 and wisdom of God, necessarily believes that whatever God has thought fit to reveal on the subject of
15 morals, must fulfil the requirements of utility in a supreme degree. But others besides utilitarians have
16 been of opinion that the Christian revelation was intended, and is fitted, to inform the hearts and minds of
17 mankind with a spirit which should enable them to find for themselves what is right, and incline them to
18 do it when found, rather than to tell them, except in a very general way, what it is; and that we need a
19 doctrine of ethics, carefully followed out, to interpret to us the will God. Whether this opinion is correct
20 or not, it is superfluous here to discuss; since whatever aid religion, either natural or revealed, can afford
21 to ethical investigation, is as open to the utilitarian moralist as to any other. He can use it as the testimony
22 of God to the usefulness or hurtfulness of any given course of action, by as good a right as others can use
23 it for the indication of a transcendental law, having no connection with usefulness or with happiness.

24 Again, Utility is often summarily stigmatised as an immoral doctrine by giving it the name of
25 Expediency, and taking advantage of the popular use of that term to contrast it with Principle. But the
26 Expedient, in the sense in which it is opposed to the Right, generally means that which is expedient for
27 the particular interest of the agent himself; as when a minister sacrifices the interests of his country to
28 keep himself in place. When it means anything better than this, it means that which is expedient for some
29 immediate object, some temporary purpose, but which violates a rule whose observance is expedient in a
30 much higher degree. The Expedient, in this sense, instead of being the same thing with the useful, is a
31 branch of the hurtful. Thus, it would often be expedient, for the purpose of getting over some momentary
32 embarrassment, or attaining some object immediately useful to ourselves or others, to tell a lie. But
33 inasmuch as the cultivation in ourselves of a sensitive feeling on the subject of veracity, is one of the most
34 useful, and the enfeeblement of that feeling one of the most hurtful, things to which our conduct can be
35 instrumental; and inasmuch as any, even unintentional, deviation from truth, does that much towards
36 weakening the trustworthiness of human assertion, which is not only the principal support of all present
37 social well-being, but the insufficiency of which does more than any one thing that can be named to keep
38 back civilisation, virtue, everything on which human happiness on the largest scale depends; we feel that
39 the violation, for a present advantage, of a rule of such transcendent expediency, is not expedient, and that
40 he who, for the sake of a convenience to himself or to some other individual, does what depends on him
41 to deprive mankind of the good, and inflict upon them the evil, involved in the greater or less reliance
42 which they can place in each other's word, acts the part of one of their worst enemies. Yet that even this
43 rule, sacred as it is, admits of possible exceptions, is acknowledged by all moralists; the chief of which is
44 when the withholding of some fact (as of information from a malefactor, or of bad news from a person
45 dangerously ill) would save an individual (especially an individual other than oneself) from great and
46 unmerited evil, and when the withholding can only be effected by denial. But in order that the exception
47 may not extend itself beyond the need, and may have the least possible effect in weakening reliance on
48 veracity, it ought to be recognised, and, if possible, its limits defined; and if the principle of utility is good
49 for anything, it must be good for weighing these conflicting utilities against one another, and marking out
50 the region within which one or the other preponderates.

1 Again, defenders of utility often find themselves called upon to reply to such objections as this- that there
2 is not time, previous to action, for calculating and weighing the effects of any line of conduct on the
3 general happiness. This is exactly as if any one were to say that it is impossible to guide our conduct by
4 Christianity, because there is not time, on every occasion on which anything has to be done, to read
5 through the Old and New Testaments. The answer to the objection is, that there has been ample time,
6 namely, the whole past duration of the human species. During all that time, mankind have been learning
7 by experience the tendencies of actions; on which experience all the prudence, as well as all the morality
8 of life, are dependent. People talk as if the commencement of this course of experience had hitherto been
9 put off, and as if, at the moment when some man feels tempted to meddle with the property or life of
10 another, he had to begin considering for the first time whether murder and theft are injurious to human
11 happiness. Even then I do not think that he would find the question very puzzling; but, at all events, the
12 matter is now done to his hand.

13 It is truly a whimsical supposition that, if mankind were agreed in considering utility to be the test of
14 morality, they would remain without any agreement as to what is useful, and would take no measures for
15 having their notions on the subject taught to the young, and enforced by law and opinion. There is no
16 difficulty in proving any ethical standard whatever to work ill, if we suppose universal idiocy to be
17 conjoined with it; but on any hypothesis short of that, mankind must by this time have acquired positive
18 beliefs as to the effects of some actions on their happiness; and the beliefs which have thus come down
19 are the rules of morality for the multitude, and for the philosopher until he has succeeded in finding better.
20 That philosophers might easily do this, even now, on many subjects; that the received code of ethics is by
21 no means of divine right; and that mankind have still much to learn as to the effects of actions on the
22 general happiness, I admit, or rather, earnestly maintain. The corollaries from the principle of utility, like
23 the precepts of every practical art, admit of indefinite improvement, and, in a progressive state of the
24 human mind, their improvement is perpetually going on.

25 But to consider the rules of morality as improvable, is one thing; to pass over the intermediate
26 generalisations entirely, and endeavour to test each individual action directly by the first principle, is
27 another. It is a strange notion that the acknowledgment of a first principle is inconsistent with the
28 admission of secondary ones. To inform a traveller respecting the place of his ultimate destination, is not
29 to forbid the use of landmarks and direction-posts on the way. The proposition that happiness is the end
30 and aim of morality, does not mean that no road ought to be laid down to that goal, or that persons going
31 thither should not be advised to take one direction rather than another. Men really ought to leave off
32 talking a kind of nonsense on this subject, which they would neither talk nor listen to on other matters of
33 practical concernment. Nobody argues that the art of navigation is not founded on astronomy, because
34 sailors cannot wait to calculate the Nautical Almanack. Being rational creatures, they go to sea with it
35 ready calculated; and all rational creatures go out upon the sea of life with their minds made up on the
36 common questions of right and wrong, as well as on many of the far more difficult questions of wise and
37 foolish. And this, as long as foresight is a human quality, it is to be presumed they will continue to do.
38 Whatever we adopt as the fundamental principle of morality, we require subordinate principles to apply it
39 by; the impossibility of doing without them, being common to all systems, can afford no argument against
40 any one in particular; but gravely to argue as if no such secondary principles could be had, and as if
41 mankind had remained till now, and always must remain, without drawing any general conclusions from
42 the experience of human life, is as high a pitch, I think, as absurdity has ever reached in philosophical
43 controversy.

44 The remainder of the stock arguments against utilitarianism mostly consist in laying to its charge the
45 common infirmities of human nature, and the general difficulties which embarrass conscientious persons
46 in shaping their course through life. We are told that a utilitarian will be apt to make his own particular
47 case an exception to moral rules, and, when under temptation, will see a utility in the breach of a rule,

1 greater than he will see in its observance. But is utility the only creed which is able to furnish us with
2 excuses for evil doing, and means of cheating our own conscience? They are afforded in abundance by all
3 doctrines which recognise as a fact in morals the existence of conflicting considerations; which all
4 doctrines do, that have been believed by sane persons. It is not the fault of any creed, but of the
5 complicated nature of human affairs, that rules of conduct cannot be so framed as to require no
6 exceptions, and that hardly any kind of action can safely be laid down as either always obligatory or
7 always condemnable. There is no ethical creed which does not temper the rigidity of its laws, by giving a
8 certain latitude, under the moral responsibility of the agent, for accommodation to peculiarities of
9 circumstances; and under every creed, at the opening thus made, self-deception and dishonest casuistry
10 get in. There exists no moral system under which there do not arise unequivocal cases of conflicting
11 obligation. These are the real difficulties, the knotty points both in the theory of ethics, and in the
12 conscientious guidance of personal conduct. They are overcome practically, with greater or with less
13 success, according to the intellect and virtue of the individual; but it can hardly be pretended that any one
14 will be the less qualified for dealing with them, from possessing an ultimate standard to which conflicting
15 rights and duties can be referred. If utility is the ultimate source of moral obligations, utility may be
16 invoked to decide between them when their demands are incompatible. Though the application of the
17 standard may be difficult, it is better than none at all: while in other systems, the moral laws all claiming
18 independent authority, there is no common umpire entitled to interfere between them; their claims to
19 precedence one over another rest on little better than sophistry, and unless determined, as they generally
20 are, by the unacknowledged influence of considerations of utility, afford a free scope for the action of
21 personal desires and partialities. We must remember that only in these cases of conflict between
22 secondary principles is it requisite that first principles should be appealed to. There is no case of moral
23 obligation in which some secondary principle is not involved; and if only one, there can seldom be any
24 real doubt which one it is, in the mind of any person by whom the principle itself is recognised.

25