

It is now time to turn our attention away from meta-ethics and towards practical and *normative ethics*. Thus, we will now be examining the meaning of right and wrong and what counts as moral action. There are three main theories that we will be covering: *Utilitarianism*, the *Deontological (duty-based) Approach* (which we have, more or less, already covered) and *Virtue Ethics*.

So, what is *Utilitarianism*? There are a number of different versions (developed by different philosophers) but the basic idea is always the same: moral goodness should be equated with maximization of happiness and the minimization of pain; as such, the moral worth of an action is determined by its consequences.

Intuitively, Utilitarianism sounds pretty fair. Morality is meant to guide our actions and, provided we can show that the idea of the maximization of happiness and minimization of pain is morally plausible, we can use it as a kind of calculus of action. In other words, we can (rationally) determine which of our actions are going to result in the most happiness and the least pain, and act accordingly. Think about it as the “usefulness” moral theory (some of you may have utility rooms on your houses).

Utilitarianism is, on the whole, thought of as a *particularist* moral theory which means that the context of every situation is important in terms of understanding the right or wrong things to do. How we calculate what will result in the most happiness and least pain depends on the particular context in which we are acting. Again, this seems eminently commonsensical. Surely, doing the right thing depends on paying close attention to the particulars of a situation; not to do so would not only be morally insensitive, but make it almost impossible to properly calculate the consequences of our actions. After all, there are certain variables to every situation; not to take these into account is like omitting certain functions and terms from an equation.

Perhaps the only immediate question that springs to mind is: should we always equate pleasure and happiness to moral goodness? G.E. Moore thought not – he cast doubt on whether we could always equate pleasure and happiness with goodness. The Utilitarian would respond by saying that no one is suggesting that what is pleasurable is always good. – A person might get a great deal of pleasure from stealing something they have always wanted but couldn’t afford. This, according to the utilitarian, would not be a morally good act because, overall, it would result in more unhappiness. The victim of the theft would be unhappy, as would his friends and family. The utilitarian’s point is that it is overall maximization of happiness that is important, not just individual gratification – there is a definite element of social utility within the idea of utilitarianism. In order to examine the arguments for and against Utilitarianism in more detail, it is necessary to begin looking at the key Utilitarian thinkers.

It is often thought that Epicurus (341 – 270 BC) was the first utilitarian thinker. To an extent this is true but, for reasons that should become apparent in a moment, he should not be classed as a utilitarian as such. Epicurus’ moral philosophy supported the idea that we should pursue happiness through the elimination of mental and physical pain. He believed that mental suffering was worse, as physical pain either abates after a while, or can be controlled by the mind. Mental pain can continue indefinitely resulting in mental illnesses such as depression.

Although Epicurus is sometimes thought of as a hedonist because of his doctrine of pleasure seeking, it would be inaccurate to suggest that he advocated a life of debauchery. He realised that short-term gratification often led to longer-term pain and, as such, advocated the pursuit of wisdom as the highest pleasure and greatest virtue, since this would provide the means to distinguish which pleasures to seek and which to avoid. The reason wisdom and virtue are so important to Epicurus is because he sees them as able to deliver the consequences of absence of pain and maximization of happiness. We can see that Epicurus was, essentially, a consequentialist.

Why then, did I say that we should not understand him as being a utilitarian? To answer that question properly, it is necessary to turn to the philosophy of Jeremy Bentham (1748 – 1832).

Bentham is considered to be the father of utilitarianism. Although much of his thinking centres on the same themes as Epicurus’ philosophy, what makes him a utilitarian is that he tried to merge the idea of maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain into the fabric of collective (cultural and political) thought. Moreover, he specified what he believed to be the nature of moral motivation and moral psychology. Bentham (like Epicurus) believed that we are all subject to the motivating factors of pleasure and pain and that we all try (in one way or another) to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. This, he thought, was the basis for our moral framework. From this idea, Bentham developed the *Principle Of Utility* – that one ought to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. This idea, he believed, should be woven into all our political thoughts and social and legal institutions. Epicurus did not conceive of such a wide ranging application of the maximizing pleasure/minimizing pain mantra, which is why he can be classed as a consequentialist but not a utilitarian. He (Epicurus) held it to be something of concern chiefly to the individual. Perhaps he felt no need to develop the idea further on the grounds that if individuals followed his suggestions then wider social and legal practices would soon follow them. Whatever the case, Bentham was much more precise (as we shall see) in terms of specifying criteria for achieving the demands of the Principle of Utility. It is important to note at this stage that the Principle of Utility sometimes deems it necessary to create unhappiness if the overall long-term result is the creation of a greater amount of happiness.

An aside: it is still possible to meet Jeremy Bentham (or at least most of him) even though he died in 1875. He can be found in a glass case in the foyer of the entrance to

University College London (UCL) on Gower Street. Each year, he is wheeled in as a guest at an annual dinner the college holds. The reason I said you could meet most of him is that, some years ago, his head fell off and had to be replaced with a wax equivalent. His head still exists but is now kept separately in a basement somewhere under the university.



The Principle of Utility is closely related to Bentham's *Hedonic Calculus*. The Hedonic Calculus contained seven concepts that Bentham regarded as criteria for pursuing pleasure. Used in the correct proportions, fulfilment of the criteria would (Bentham believed) yield the best possible moral outcome. In other words, they should be used to predict the total amount of happiness and pain produced by a particular action. The criteria are: *intensity, duration, certainty, extent, remoteness, richness and purity*.

An action should be considered morally good if the aggregate of everyone's pleasure is greater than that of everyone's pain. In other words, a morally good outcome has been achieved if the sum of happiness outweighs the sum of pain. The hedonic calculus applies to justice as well. The amount of punishment for a crime can be calculated in proportion to the amount of pain created by that crime. In other words, punishment should be carefully calculated against the amount of pain created by the crime *and* the amount of overall happiness expected to result from the punishment.

Bentham's approach is quantitative and predictive. It is obviously quantitative because it needs to measure the amount of pleasure and pain in order to have any predictive possibilities.

What problems are there for Bentham's calculus? Well, first we might want to ask: what counts as pleasure? Different people find different things pleasurable and, given that pleasure is a fundamentally individual phenomenon, it would seem problematic to assume the possibility of a collective pleasure that everyone experiences in the same way. For example, some people enjoy particular arts more than others – some prefer classical music, others sculpture, others theatre and so on. One might suppose that to take away any one of these art forms from a culture is at least

morally questionable (because you've taken away a source of pleasure from some people). However, according to Bentham, if by taking any one of them away you increase overall pleasure - e.g. by using the money from the abolished art form to fund more popular kinds of art then, although you will have made some people very unhappy, the overall aggregate of happiness is still increased. Thus, the outcome is morally good.

Secondly, there seems to be at least a question mark over just how predictive one can be. If it is not possible to precisely quantify pleasure, then it becomes infinitely more difficult to predict the overall consequences of one's actions. Thirdly, Bentham makes no distinction between kinds of pleasure; they all seem to be worth the same amount. Yet, we do value certain pleasures more highly than others (this is a problem that Mill tried to address). Fourthly, the question of whether goodness and pleasure are as closely tied as Bentham makes out, goes virtually unquestioned. Are there not times when what is pleasurable comes into direct conflict with what is the right or good thing to do (think about the bases for more than a few divorce cases in this respect)? Finally, Bentham never distinguishes between pleasure and happiness; the two concepts are used more or less interchangeably throughout his book *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*. What is pleasurable can, after all, make one very unhappy. So it would seem that one cannot say that to experience pleasure is to be happy. Sometimes we seek distracting pleasures because we are unhappy – experiencing those pleasures does not always cure our unhappiness.

John Stuart Mill

John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) is perhaps the most famous of all utilitarian philosophers. He was given a vigorous education by his father (who was, incidentally, a friend and admirer of Bentham) and, at the age of three, had learned to speak Greek fluently. By his teenage years he was assisting his father in his political and economic research but, at the age of 21, suffered a nervous breakdown – perhaps as a result of his intense education at the hands of his father.

Utilitarianism (published in 1861) together with *On Liberty* are the best known contributions that Mill made to philosophical and political thought respectively. The former was written in response to criticisms made of his father's philosophical position (which largely followed Bentham's). However, Mill also recognised weaknesses within Bentham's system – one of which was that he (Bentham) treated all pleasures and pains equally. Mill suggested that some pleasures are more important than others – we'll look at this in more detail presently.

The Principle of Utility, as we've seen, seems deceptively simple - it is however, a little more complex than that. It is actually a combination of three ideas. 1. In determining what to do, we should be guided by the expected consequences of our actions. 2. In determining which consequences are best, we need to give the greatest possible weight to the happiness or unhappiness that would be caused. 3. The Principle of Utility assumes that everyone's happiness and pain is as

important as everyone else's. Note here, that this does not equate to saying that all pleasures are equal to one another.

The utilitarian movement created a good deal of controversy when it first appeared, not least because an upshot was that it had no use for absolute moral rules (such as, "one must not kill" or "one should never break a promise" and so on). Although the utilitarian would say that such rules are constructive because they generally result in the best consequences, they are not absolute, since there could be circumstances in which not to break a promise would result in greater unhappiness than happiness. Put another way: whenever breaking a promise results in overall greater happiness, then that rule (of keeping a promise) should be broken; it is morally right to break the rule. Similarly, the rule against killing can be challenged in relation to voluntary euthanasia, for example. This, of course, brought utilitarianism into direct conflict with the church. Conventional moral thought, up to that point, largely reflected the views of protestant Christianity, and the Utilitarian, by trying to undermine the possibility of absolutism, caused a good deal of controversy. Utilitarians were often accused of being godless. To this accusation Mill replied: "*The question depends upon what idea we have formed of the moral character of the deity. If it be a true belief that God desires, above all things, the happiness of his creatures, and this was his purpose in their creation, utility is not only not a godless doctrine, but more profoundly religious than any other.*" (Mill. J.S. 2002. p68). The controversy, at least in this respect, has nowadays dropped away; the church no longer has the same moral influence as it once did.

Before focusing wholly on Mill's text, there are a couple of further points that need to be made in relation to the doctrine as a whole. Punishment, according to the utilitarian, should not be understood as making perpetrators "pay" for their crimes; such a "payback" for committing the crime only heaps misery on misery. Put another way, "payback" could be construed as a form of revenge; and revenge often breeds further unhappiness rather than promoting happiness. Instead, the utilitarian response to crime and punishment should take three forms. The first is to identify and deal with the cause(s) of the criminality; the second, to reform the perpetrators of the criminality making them into "productive" citizens and the third to punish criminals only to the point where it is necessary to deter others from similar behaviour. This is quite a liberal thought; indeed, today's political and cultural climate has been transformed by it, not just in terms of crime and punishment but in many other closely related ways too. For example, utilitarians, by insisting that everyone's happiness is similarly important, challenged a number of established social norms. For instance, they argued that race, sex (and sexual orientation), or class (however construed) made no difference to one's moral status and, in that respect, argued strongly for the emancipation of women. Mill's work was extremely influential and popular amongst those involved in the suffragette movement. Moreover, traditional Christian attitudes towards same-sex relationships were fairly hostile. These attitudes resulted in deep misery for many;

utilitarianism implies that such creation of misery and sacrificing of happiness is morally wrong.

Thus far, we have only really described the moral views of utilitarians; we need however, to justify the doctrine itself. As we've seen, Utilitarianism argues that it is our moral duty to promote general happiness and minimize pain on the grounds that, ultimately, every human being seeks to maximize such happiness and minimize pain. The question is: why should we do that? What makes promoting the general happiness a good thing to do? – Well surely, the answer must be that it is because happiness is increased and pain minimized. That however, does not answer the question. What makes doing those things good or morally right? And why not be selfish and just look after one's own happiness?

Mill puts the question thus: "*I feel that I am bound not to rob or murder, betray or deceive; but why am I bound to promote the general happiness? If my own happiness lies in something else, why may I not give that the preference?*" (Mill.J.S. 2002. p.73)

Firstly, what are the chief differences between Bentham and Mill? As should be clear by now, whilst the general Principle of Utility is the same, there are some important distinctions. The most salient of which is that, while Bentham treats all pleasures equally, Mill classes them into two kinds: higher and lower pleasures.

One of the major problems for Bentham's account is that it treats all pleasures equally – i.e. no distinction is made between forms of immediate pleasures such as alcohol consumption, and pleasures of the intellect such as reading an interesting book of philosophy. Why does this distinction matter? After all, provided we take into consideration the different ways in which either (or both) increase aggregate happiness and minimize pain, then surely this doesn't matter? Even if drinking alcohol only increases pleasure in the short term and results in greater pain later on, it still seems unclear as to why we should treat the quality of that pleasure as something integral to our calculations of aggregate happiness. Surely it is just a question of comparing the pleasure afforded to us by the alcohol in the short and long term, with the pleasure afforded to us by reading a book of philosophy in the short and long term? The qualitative differences between them seem irrelevant or, at least, only relevant insofar as they have an impact on our calculations in relation to maximizing happiness and minimizing pain. Bentham's *Hedonic Calculus* with its criteria of *intensity, duration, certainty, extent, remoteness, richness* and *purity* can be applied to pleasures of all qualities.

Nonetheless, there does seem to be a case for taking the qualitative aspects of pleasures into account. Part of that case revolves around comparing the likes and dislikes of different people. Some people will gain immense happiness from watching the team they support win matches. Others may gain great pleasure from reading the poetry of Yeats or Blake. But suppose that football team keeps losing matches and suppose that those who like the poetry of Yeats and

Blake loathe the poetry of many other poets? And, how do we compare the pleasure gained from seeing a football team win with that of going to a concert of Bach's Brandenburg Concertos? The problems of calculation seem so complicated as to render Bentham's calculus worthless. After all, when we are in circumstances in which a moral judgement needs to be made, it is frequently the case that such decisions have to be taken with some urgency. Were it possible to account for all variables relating to pleasure (qualitative differences, who prefers what etc.), the calculation would be so incredibly complicated that it would, doubtless, take some time to accomplish. Moreover, it is difficult to quantify the scope of any particular action. By that, I mean that it is difficult (if not impossible) to know where my action will stop having an effect on others. A few examples should help to make this clear: suppose the British plot to assassinate Hitler in 1944 had succeeded. This would doubtless have had an impact on the lives of many in the western world, and in ways that it would be impossible to calculate. Another (true) example of how we cannot know the scope of an action. My grandfather left me his pocket watch and watch-chain in his will. The watch is a very elegant timepiece but the chain has a Swastika on it. Naturally I don't want to be seen wearing it even though, as symbols, they predate use by the Nazis.¹ My watch chain was made many years before the Nazi party came into existence. However, the actions of Hitler have meant that I do not want to wear it and, because of that, I have recently sold it with a degree of reluctance (apparently, they are collector's items). In this case, the actions of Hitler have had a direct impact on me. Even if Hitler had cared, it would have been impossible for him to calculate the scope of his actions in relation to my watch chain when he adopted the Swastika as a Nazi symbol. One cannot take every consequence of an action into account when making a utilitarian calculation. As such, it is seemingly impossible to know how much unintended happiness or pain will be created. How far reaching can one's actions be?

There are (as we've seen) plenty of problems in relation to the viability of Bentham's Hedonic Calculus. Nevertheless, there also seem to be many benefits. In summary, Bentham's utilitarianism advocated the emancipation of women, acceptance of same-sex relationships as morally equal to heterosexual relationships, and animal rights. However, minimizing suffering is enough to bring animals into our moral vision. There are however, problems here too. How can we be sure what kinds of things result in sustained pleasure for animals? Consider carnivorous animals: does an eagle eating a rabbit give enough pleasure to the eagle to outweigh the pain inflicted on the rabbit? Presumably, for different species, there is a different weighting in terms of the ratio of pleasure and pain in such circumstances.

These objections led Mill to believe that, while the fundamental tenets of Bentham's theory were right, the theory itself lacked the necessary degree of sophistication to give the theory credibility.

¹ They were used by ancient Indian tribes as symbols of good fortune. Buddhism and Hinduism also use them. It should be noted that the Nazis reversed the symbol.

Mill's Utilitarianism was a good deal more sophisticated than Bentham's. In order see how, I'm going to take you through the important parts of Chapters 1 & 2.

Most of chapter 1 is dedicated to outlining what his Utilitarianism is aiming to address, and the overall nature of it as a theory. Mill's theory, like Bentham's, is teleological (telos = purpose in Greek). "*All action is for the sake of some end, and rules of action, it seems natural to suppose, must take their whole character and colour from the end to which they are subservient*" (Mill. J.S. 2002. p.50). It is aiming to relate this to four main questions: 1. How should one live? 2. What is happiness? 3. What is the morally right way to live and act? 4. What is the relationship between happiness and morality? Mill answers questions 2, 3 and 4 in an attempt to provide an overall answer to 1. He suggests that happiness is pleasure, that the morally right way to act is to produce the greatest amount of happiness overall and that an individual's happiness will be satisfied by doing what is morally right. Thus far, this is similar to Bentham.

There are however, three aspects that we need to look at which are clearly distinct from Bentham's position and provide the level of sophistication that Mill believed was lacking in his predecessor's account. The first is the difference between higher and lower pleasures, the second is the difference between Act and Rule utilitarianism, and the third is the alleged 'proof' that Mill offers in support of his theory.

As we have seen, Bentham argued that pleasure could be equated with goodness. In this sense, we can say that one action is better than another if it gives a greater quantity of pleasure. Mill defends this view (with some qualifications). However, Bentham's system does not distinguish clearly enough between, for example, physical pleasures and pleasures of the intellect. This lack of distinction has led many to criticise Bentham on the grounds that his system allows for over-valuing of material and physical pleasures in relation to intellectual pleasures such as reading philosophy and listening to Bach. How does Mill precisely distinguish higher from lower pleasures? He begins this discussion at the beginning of the second paragraph of p.56:

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. J.S. 2002. p.56).

He continues: "*Few human creatures would consent to be changed into any of the lower animals, for a promise of the fullest allowance of a beast's pleasures; no intelligent human being would consent to be a fool, no instructed person would be an ignoramus...even though they should be persuaded that the fool...or rascal...is better satisfied with his lot than they with theirs...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 pig, is 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. J.S. 2002. p.56-7).

Higher pleasures it would seem are essentially pleasures of the intellect; pleasures that are only available to a human being and that distinguish him or her from other animals. Lower pleasures are those in which both human beings and animals can indulge in to a greater or lesser extent; they are pleasures not associated directly with the intellect. There is a curious problem for Mill here: by suggesting that it is better to be *Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied* (ibid.), he seems to be implying that happiness means a form of dissatisfaction. Can one be happy whilst simultaneously dissatisfied? What then does Mill mean by happiness? Obviously, it has to be something that avoids the charge levelled at Bentham; that his system allows for the over-valuation of instinctive physical and material pleasures. But why value higher pleasures more than lower pleasures?

Mill's implicit answer is that higher pleasures are not only qualitatively more satisfying but they are also sustaining in a way that lower pleasures are not. Consider that while physical and material pleasures may yield a good deal of intense pleasure (or happiness) they are, for the most part, transient. Intellectual pleasures, by contrast, can sustain an appreciation of the world and, as such, produce longer lasting happiness. Mill's own argument is that people who have experienced both pleasures and, as such, are able to know both sides of the comparison, will almost always opt for higher pleasures over lower pleasures. The problem with this is twofold. Firstly, some people (e.g. the former Tory defence minister Alan Clarke) indulged in what Mill would call higher pleasures – classical music, reading works of various kinds (historical, geographical, political, philosophical etc) but, nonetheless, seemed to spend an awful lot of their time indulging in lower pleasures. Secondly, if we are to maximize the good – i.e. maximize happiness – how is it possible to do this if one simultaneously insists that there are kinds of happiness that are qualitatively but not quantitatively superior? Mill does attempt to answer the second of these objections: "...the test of quality, and the rule for measuring it against quantity, being the preference felt by those who, in their opportunities of experience...are best furnished with the means of comparison." (Mill. J.S. 2002. p.59). Yet we can see this is not entirely satisfactory if we return to the example of someone who has experienced both higher and lower pleasures, but chooses a life of depravity instead of a life that embraces higher pleasures. I won't pursue this any further just now, as we need to examine the differences between Act and Rule Utilitarianism.

The essential differences between Act Utilitarianism and Rule Utilitarianism are as follows: **Rule Utilitarianism** lays down general rules regarding the sorts of action that, on the whole, result in greater aggregate happiness. **Act Utilitarianism** by contrast examines each case separately and tries to calculate (again, in each case) what kind of action is necessary in order to minimize pain and bring about the greatest aggregate happiness.

However, Rule Utilitarianism seems to avoid the problem of sometimes doing an injustice for the sake of creating greater overall happiness. For example, a Rule Utilitarian may say

that one should never try to persuade a terminally ill patient to end their life sooner than they wish in order to free up NHS resources. An Act Utilitarian may argue the opposite - if by ending that patient's life, such resources are freed up, thus creating more happiness for those who recover from their illnesses and less pain for the person who hasn't had to deal with the pain that accompanies the final stages of their terminal illness. A Rule Utilitarian would argue that, while such a scenario may seem to create greater happiness in a particular instance, if one were to legalize this kind of practice, it would result in greater aggregate unhappiness. This is because of the moral burden that the terminally ill patient would have to bear. The patient would know full well that people, who would otherwise make a full recovery, may die because of a lack of necessary medical resources. Surely, for greatest aggregate happiness to be achieved, all human beings should know that their right to life is wholly unconditional, and free of any form of possible moral burden such as the one just mentioned?

There are two final points that need to be addressed. The first is the problem of calculation that we touched on earlier, and the second is Mill's controversial "proof" of the Utilitarianism.

We have already seen that there is a practical problem with Bentham's system – namely, that (apart from anything else) it is impractical to calculate all possible consequences and, in any case, most moral problems require almost immediate response. Mill tries to circumnavigate this problem; he suggests that we have – through life – already acquired certain ideas about what makes people happy and unhappy: "*People talk as if the commencement of this course of experience had hitherto been put off, and as if, at the moment when some man feels tempted to meddle with the property or life of another, he had to begin considering for the first time whether murder and theft are injurious to human happiness.*" (Mill. J.S. 2002. p.70). Mill then follows this with an analogy: "*Nobody argues that the art of navigation is not founded on astronomy, because sailors cannot wait to calculate the Nautical Almanack. Being rational creatures, they go to sea with it ready calculated; and all rational creatures, go out upon the sea of life with their minds made up on the common questions of right and wrong, as well as on many of the far more difficult questions of wise and foolish.*" (Mill. J.S. 2002. p.70-1). In other words, we have many preconceived ideas about what will increase happiness and minimize pain, that we have learned through experience of life, often before we encounter situations in which we need to make a moral decision. The analogy is neat but whether it is a fair one is a different question. I'll leave you to think about that – suffice to say that the idea is that Mill's claim is that we already know many of the ways to react before we encounter moral dilemmas.

Finally, let's turn to Mill's "proof" of Utilitarianism. The detail of this "proof" is made in chapter 4. First, it is necessary to point out that this is not a deductive proof – i.e. the conclusion does not necessarily follow from the premises. For Mill this is not a problem. He is a great believer in inductive knowledge – i.e. knowledge that

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derives certain principles from a series of examples. Mill suggests that each of us will admit that we desire pleasure and happiness – pleasure and happiness become ultimate ends for us. Thus, according to Mill, this is enough to say that pleasure and happiness is good and desirable. But *why* maximize happiness? Mill's answer is that the ultimate purpose (telos) of human endeavour is to maximize happiness and minimize pain. Thus, it seems, that Mill is collapsing the question of “why maximize happiness” into a psychological question about what makes happiness desirable? Again, Mill uses an analogy to support his “proof”. If one says something is visible we can say so on the grounds of what can be seen. Similarly, if one says something is desirable, one can say so on the grounds that people desire it. Therefore, the thought goes, if happiness is the ultimate human goal and as such, what people desire most, then it must be the case (i.e. proved) that Utilitarianism is the principal moral doctrine. In other words, Utilitarianism aims at the greatest aggregate happiness and, as such, is in tune with the ultimate goal of humanity. I will leave you to think about objections to this proof!.

For all the criticisms we have encountered in relation to Utilitarianism, it has led to much improvement in the standards of living. Not only have we seen a transformation of our judicial systems in relation to the emancipation of women, same sex relationships and so on, but it has also resulted in an overall rise in living standards. Politicians, despite their dishonesty, tend to work on the mandate that they will get elected if they develop policies that will increase overall happiness; and, on the whole, we vote for that kind of thing even if the kinds of happiness that the politicians are promising are not those that Mill would have approved of (most people vote for politicians if they can see some material advantage in so doing – tax cuts and the like).

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