

“Everybody to count for one, nobody for more than one”. The principle of equal consideration of interests from Bentham to Edgeworth

In *Utilitarianism* (1861), John Stuart Mill states that the principle of utility “is a mere form of words without rational signification, unless one person’s happiness, supposed equal in degree (...), is counted for exactly as much as another’s. Those conditions being supplied, Bentham’s dictum, ‘everybody to count for one, nobody for more than one’, might be written under the principle of utility as an explanatory commentary”.

This paper studies the changing meaning of the principle of equal consideration of interests from Bentham to Edgeworth. On the one hand, the origins of this principle are traced in Bentham’s writings and connected to his analysis of the measure of pleasures and pains. In *Essai sur la représentation* (1780), Bentham bases the indifference principle on the assumption that: “Faute de pouvoir déterminer le degré relatif de bonheur dont les différens individus sont susceptibles, il faut partir de la supposition que ce degré est le même pour tous”. On the other hand, in *Mathematical Psychics* (1881), Edgeworth assumes as a scientific truth that some individuals have either greater “capacity for happiness” or “capacity for work” than others, and that these characteristics are the product of evolution. He then concludes that these individuals should receive larger shares of any “*distribuendum*”, and that “In the general advance the most advanced should advance most”.

The implications of this transformation are discussed in the paper and the role of Mill’s revision of utilitarian ethics is examined.

Marco E.L. Guidi