

Reading Mill Seriously

The aim of this paper is to encourage a re-reading of Mill. I intend to take his writings seriously and place his proposals in context, in order to be fair to one of the most important philosophers ever to make an innovative contribution to ethics. I argue that Mill's moral philosophy advances a concept of happiness which, although in debt to Plato in some respects, is entirely original.

The stress is put on answering two criticisms. The first refers to the naturalistic fallacy, as denounced by G.E. Moore in 1903 in his *Principia Ethica*, and claims that Mill committed it. According to the second criticism, which more or less constitutes the prevailing view in the last and the present century, Mill's normative ethics generates immoral results in that it sacrifices considerations of human rights to considerations of welfare.

Against the first criticism, I argue that Mill did not believe that whatever is desired is desirable, but that he grounded the desirable on qualified —that is, enlightened— desire. Against the second criticism, I argue that Mill took justice and rights seriously. He gave them a solid ground by attaching to them the great value they have in virtue of their capacities to promote the good life in a happy, co-operative society.

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