

Justice as a Higher Pleasure

The complex pleasure or enjoyment associated with the moral sentiment of justice is, I shall argue, located at the top of the hierarchy of different kinds of pleasures which Mill mentions in connection with his notorious doctrine of the higher pleasures. In his view, the sentiment of justice is a feeling of security that the individual acquires after living in a community where equal claim-rights and correlative duties are distributed and enforced as a matter of course. Moreover, for Mill, one kind of pleasure is said to be higher than another if and only if the one kind is experienced by competent individuals to be infinitely or indefinitely more intense (and thus more valuable) than the other kind. Once these crucial aspects of his peculiar version of hedonistic utilitarianism are clarified, we can see that justice in the sense of general security of equal rights takes indefinite priority over all competing social and political considerations within his utilitarian doctrine. Given the nature of the rights he recommends, in particular, the right of complete self-regarding liberty, I shall maintain that his doctrine is properly classified as a coherent and radical liberal utilitarianism or utilitarian liberalism.

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