

Mill and Davies on Motives and Intentions.

This paper discusses a controversial footnote in Chapter 2 of *Utilitarianism*. In this footnote, Mill addresses the objection, raised by John L. Davies, that utilitarianism does not make the moral evaluations of actions dependent on the *motive* of the agent. Davies considers this mistaken, since, for instance, saving someone from drowning motivated by the desire to brutally torture him should not, he thinks, be called morally right, while doing the same out of benevolence should.

Mill replies that Davies confuses motives and intentions. Davies is mistaken in identifying the *motive* as making a difference to the moral worth of the above action; Mill instead claims that it is the *intention* of the agent that does. Indeed, he goes so far as to say that "The morality of the action depends *entirely* upon the intention" (*U* II 19 fn. emphasis added). But this seems in open conflict with his earlier programmatic statement that "actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness" (*U* II 2).

In this paper I argue, against a recent paper by Jonathan Dancy (in *Utilitas* 12 (2)), and an editorial note by Roger Crisp, that there is no tension whatsoever in Mill's view. An action, according to Mill, is constituted by its effects and the agent's intentions (*System* I, iii, 5). The action's effects, and only they, *determine* the moral worth of an action (*U* II 2). However, as the effects themselves depend on the intention – what happens ordinarily depends a great deal, or even entirely, on what the agent wants to bring about – the moral worth also *depends on*, but is not determined by, the intentions of the agent (*U* II 19 fn). Different intentions may only alter the moral worth of an action by changing its effects. The motives of an agent, by contrast, do not impinge on the effects of any *particular* action in a direct way, though they influence which actions the agent undertakes.

I discuss Mill's view in relation to modern action theory, and different forms of modern utilitarianism (e.g. actual and probable consequence utilitarianism, motive utilitarianism).

Christoph **Schmidt-Petri**