
This is an important contribution to the current discussion of utilitarianism. It includes sixteen papers of different lengths but all stimulating and of high quality. Even if the title seems to convey the idea that the book is a critique of the utilitarian theory, some papers offer good points in defence of one or another form of utilitarianism. The papers examine many problems that are centred around four different sections, each of which is introduced by a short explanation of the editors. A clear and general introduction by W.H. Williams is very useful for general readers and for undergraduate students. It is worth mentioning the bibliography of works on utilitarianism published roughly from 1930 to 1980, since it is probably the most complete of its kind on the subject. In particular it contains a remarkable list of many works published in different languages. This long appendix (pp. 253-299) is a good addition to an already valuable book.

The first section of the book is devoted to the principle of utility: Henry R. West offers an interesting attempt at defending the famous and much disputed "Mill's proof" of the principle of utility. He argues that Mill's psychological hedonism and his principle of evidence can withstand most of the familiar objections raised against the proof. In his short paper on the same subject, John Marshall accepts Mill's proof but rejects the standard account of it. According to him, "Mill's proof leads to a notion of general happiness that incorporates strong equalitarian demands on the distribution of happiness from the start" (41). He holds that there are textual supports as well as theoretical reasons for this nonutilitarian reading of the utility principle. David Lyons' paper on "Benevolence and Justice in Mill" is the longest article in the book and certainly a most interesting one. Lyons develops his acute reading of Mill and shows that Mill can provide a theoretical frame to account for the distinction between duties of justice and so-called "nonjustice duties". The paper is also an important attempt at "reconciling Mill's essays On Liberty and Utilitarianism" (44). The next two papers of this section, dealing with the problem of unconscious utilitarianism, will be considered in more detail later on in this review.

The second section is devoted to comparing utilitarianism and contractualism. Three out of four papers are defending contractualism or attacking utilitarianism. B.J. Diggs outlines a form of contractualism. A.E. Fuchs in "Fairness to 'Justice as Fairness'" suggests a modification of Rawls' contractarian theory of justification in order to remedy some alleged deficiencies of the rawlsian presentation. J. Narveson in "Rawls and Utilitarianism" defends utilitarianism from Rawls' criticisms showing that Rawls' two principles of justice can be easily defended from an utilitarian viewpoint. D. Gauthier tries to show that "the most subtle and sophisticated defence of utilitarianism as uniquely rational, that offered by John Harsanyi, fails" (144). This attempt is made in order to support his general point according to which "utilitarian ethical theory is incompatible with the accounts of value and rationality characteristic of modern economic and social thought" (144).

The third section is devoted to analyses of the concept of welfare. Richard B. Brandt distinguishes between utility as satisfaction of desires (or preferences) and utility as happiness. He defends the latter, more traditional, view. Mark C. Overvold in a short but compact paper clarifies the relationship between self-interest and getting what one wants. Thomas Schwartz criticizes the utilitarian conception of human welfare.

Section four is about "Utilitarianism and the Moral Community". Rolf Sartorius in "Benevolence, Collective Action and the Provision of Public Goods" holds that in large groups the act utilitarian, however reluctantly, should admit that "governmen-
tional regulation is required to bring about the changes in incentive structure that will lead both self-interested and benevolent individuals to act cooperatively” (216). L.C. Becker, on the contrary, argues that “rational maximizers, facing the free-rider problem, would not necessarily have to accept defeat” (218) either by accepting Sartorius’ conclusion or abandoning the effort to produce the public good. Instead the act utilitarian would embark on a project of moral education in order to defeat the free-rider. D.W. Brock in “Utilitarianism and Aiding Others” thinks that utilitarianism is a defective theory because it fails to provide a satisfactory theory of mutual aid. He tries to show that because “the implications of utilitarianism on mutual aid conflict with our considered moral judgments, this counts against the adequacy of the utilitarian account of aiding others, and in turn against the adequacy of utilitarianism as a general moral theory” (227). T.L. Carson on the other hand begins by observing that utilitarianism is a very demanding moral theory as far as aiding others is concerned. However, he shows that “the golden rule, Kant’s categorical imperative, and the framework of Rawls’ A Theory of Justice all have implications similar to those of utilitarianism for the question of our obligation to assist others” (244).

Alan Gibbard and John Simmons in two different papers discuss an interesting problem on which I want to make some brief comments. These papers deserve mention because the problem they deal with is, unfortunately, usually disregarded and should be more widely analyzed. It is about the so-called “Sidgwick’s thesis” according to which common sense morality is “inchoately and imperfectly utilitarian”. Gibbard clarifies that Sidgwick’s thesis is a psychological and sociological thesis about the development of common sense moral rules and says that he is interested in the normative relevance of the thesis. In fact he is convinced that “any account of the formation of moral conviction will raise the same kind of questions as does Sidgwick’s thesis... [and] in the absence of a well-supported sociopsychological theory of the formation of moral convictions, it may be useful to see what we conclude if a particular theory were well supported” (74). After detailed analysis, Gibbard’s conclusion is that “accepting Sidgwick’s thesis could turn us into rule utilitarians” (81).

On the other hand, Simmons wants to show that the “thesis of unconscious utilitarianism is... inconclusively supported (and very likely false)” (98). After a careful reading of Mill’s view on the same topic, Simmons observes that Sidgwick can claim the thesis of unconscious utilitarianism because common sense morality is in need of “a principle of synthesis, and a method for binding the unconnected and occasionally conflicting principles of common moral reasoning into a complete and harmonious system” (92). So the principle of utility constitutes such an ideal principle of synthesis. According to Simmons, however, to be persuasive, Sidgwick’s argument should be supported by additional evidence showing that common sense morality “always tended in the same [utilitarian] direction” (95) and that the synthesizing principle not only is broadly in accordance with common sense rules, but also “must somehow capture the spirit of the rules”. (95). But Sidgwick himself — Simmons remarks — ascribes to common sense morality only an imperfect tendency to conform to utilitarianism: in fact he “undertakes only to show that existing moral rules possess ‘some manifest felicific tendency’, not that the rules are ‘more conducive to the general happiness than any others’” (95). So for Sidgwick, existing rules are abandoned only when they have unhappy consequences, i.e. when they cease to be “merely useful” and not when they cease to be “maximally (or ideally) useful”. If so — Simmon says — we can for example, imagine that in a given society, a set of rules with nonutilitarian justification will continue to be followed if the rules have merely good consequences, even if they never have ideally good ones. Therefore, we have to