as in other areas of inquiry, Habermas remains committed to the secular and the supranational to achieve moral ends. The central value of a critical approach to bioethics may first lie in its ability to illuminate the indirect adherence to value-free scientific capitalism itself as a confused moral sentiment, and to equip a US public sphere to talk about the higher interests of the ‘we the people’ in the bioethical realm.

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Henry R. West rightly treats utilitarianism as a major ethical theory, and Mill’s essay Utilitarianism as the most widely read account of that theory. He gives a detailed and sympathetic interpretation of the essay, defending most of it and the utilitarian doctrine against numerous objections. Mill’s essay is placed in its proper context, with an account of rival ethical theories and of Mill’s life and philosophical background. West also draws on Mill’s correspondence and other works, wherever relevant, and he succeeds in conveying some of the underappreciated force of his views and arguments.

West discusses all the central issues raised by Mill: the distinction between higher and lower pleasures, act- and rule-utilitarianism, Mill’s account of sanctions and moral motivation, his notorious attempt to provide a ‘proof’ of the principle of utility, and the relation between justice and utility. On each issue, West makes valuable contributions. For example, his account of the qualities of pleasure is remarkably clear and concise, and gets to the heart of the central problems. It provides an effective basis for understanding and evaluating the many objections which have been directed at Mill.

West defends Mill against the charge that if one pleasure is to be preferred to another as qualitatively superior, and not because it gives quantitatively greater pleasure, then it must be in virtue of some non-hedonic feature of the experience. West points out that those who reject the view that there are qualitative differences between pleasures claim that it is the nonpleasure aspects of the experiences which are of different kinds, whereas the pleasure feeling is the same in all cases, or else they claim that pleasure is the attitude that one adopts toward the different non-pleasure aspects of the experiences. Mill, on the other hand, believes that there are different pleasure feelings. Introspection tells us that sometimes the same sensation is less pleasurable at one time than at another. The sensation is liked because it is pleasurable, rather than it being the case that it is pleasurable because it is liked. Pleasures which differ qualitatively are all still pleasures because they have ‘family resemblances’.

Mill also believes that some pleasures are qualitatively more valuable than others, and that the qualitatively superior pleasures involve the distinctively human faculties. The test of qualitative superiority is the preference of competent judges, who have experienced the pleasures to be compared. West points out that an individual’s
preference may change over time, and it is difficult to know whether the preference is for quality or quantity. If the preference change is permanent, then it is more likely to be based on quality. But it is also difficult to separate the intrinsic value of a pleasure from its instrumental and moral value.

On the superiority of the pleasures associated with the employment of the distinctive human faculties, West points to some ambiguities in Mill’s view. He does not attribute to Mill the absurd view that the slightest distinctively human pleasure would be preferred on every occasion by competent judges to the greatest quantity of the pleasure from animal appetite. He quotes Leslie Stephen’s telling remark, ‘There are times when even a saint prefers a glass of water to religious musings’ (p. 64 n. 15). Mill’s test seems to be based on a different consideration, namely whether one would be more willing to do without one pleasure than another for the rest of one’s life. But now, the answer might depend on the scope of the respective pleasures. One might not be willing to forgo all the ‘bodily’ pleasures for any amount of the intellectual pleasures. But even when the pleasures are reduced in scope, competent judges might, for example, prefer the pleasure of playing with their children, a pleasure shared with animals, to pleasures involving the employment of the higher human faculties. But West thinks that Mill is right in maintaining that a sense of dignity affects the experience of pleasures. He explains this with an account of ‘second-order’ pleasures, based on the self-image that accompanies a first-order pleasure. The two levels of pleasure, when combined, give a qualitatively different experience from the first-order pleasure by itself.

West’s attempt to adjudicate the issue of whether Mill is an act- or a rule-utilitarian is illuminating. But I am not sure that some of the evidence he cites really supports his attribution to Mill of a complex form of utilitarianism, neither act- nor rule-, but embracing aspects of both. He declares bluntly, ‘it is clear that Mill is not an act-utilitarian’ (p. 3). An act-utilitarian judges the rightness or wrongness of each act by its consequences. Certainly, there is evidence that Mill does not propose that on every occasion we should calculate the consequences of a particular act, relative to the consequences of alternative acts. But this is quite compatible with his being a sophisticated act-utilitarian who distinguishes between the criterion for evaluating actions, and the decision procedure to be adopted by the agent. To be an act-utilitarian one does not have to directly calculate whether an act will maximize utility. It is likely that sometimes acting in conformity with certain rules is more likely to maximize utility. West in fact appeals to this distinction, but not in order to show that Mill is such a sophisticated act-utilitarian. Instead, his interpretation ‘is not just that Mill has a multilevel view of decision making’, but also that he has ‘a multilevel view for right action as well’ (p. 78). What are his reasons for not regarding Mill as an act-utilitarian?

West acknowledges that Mill sometimes treats moral rules as mere ‘rules of thumb’, which are not intrinsically authoritative, but which are to be followed in order to expedite the calculation of consequences. This would be quite compatible with act-utilitarianism. However, West believes that there are occasions on which Mill treats moral rules as more important than rules of thumb. Thus he speaks of the enforcement of moral rules when they are taught to the young. He also distinguishes between morality and simple expediency, confining morality to the observance of those rules which can be enforced by sanctions. He also points out