

THE PROMOTION OF
GENERAL HAPPINESS

A UTILITARIAN ESSAY

BY

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We cannot expect to agree in our utilitarian estimates, at least without much debate. We must agree to differ, and though we are bound to argue fearlessly, it should be with the consciousness that there is room for wide and *bonâ fide* difference of opinion. We must consent to advance cautiously, step by step, feeling our way, adopting no foregone conclusions, trusting no single science, expecting no infallible guide.—
JEVONS: *The State in Relation to Labour.*

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PREFACE.

IN the following pages I have borrowed from Professor Henry Sidgwick the useful word "felicific," and doubtless I have in many passages been consciously or unconsciously influenced by the same writer. It would indeed have been impossible for me to read his *Methods of Ethics* for ten successive years in the ordinary routine of my Indian work, each year with increased admiration for the Aristotelian thoroughness of the discussions it contains, without having my opinions on many subjects, and my way of looking at all questions, considerably affected thereby.

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS.

CHAPTER I.

GENERAL REMARKS.—Even if happiness entirely depended on comparison of our own possessions with those of others, happiness might be increased (1) by discovery of a more miserable race of beings, (2) by spread of pessimistic ideas. So far as it depends on comparison with previous generations, it can be increased by the discovery of new sources of pleasure. So far as it depends on comparison with our own past state, it may be increased by sudden increase of production or discovery of new sources of pleasure. But happiness is not always due to comparison, and therefore other sources of happiness must be considered. Custom blunts our sensibility to pleasure and pain, but does not make it impossible to increase or decrease general happiness. We must assume, unless there is reason to the contrary, that the increase of any individual's happiness increases general happiness 1

CHAPTER II.

KNOWLEDGE AND EDUCATION.—Knowledge being imperfect cannot give mental satisfaction, nor can mankind by increase of knowledge gain happiness through a feeling of superiority, nor can greater knowledge of the world's condition be assumed to be productive of happiness unless we accept optimism. Increase of knowledge will direct aright utilitarian action, and will be expected by the utilitarian to lead to the more general adoption of utilitarianism. It will also prevent useless riots and rebellions. The spread of female education should be especially encouraged by the utilitarian as the best remedy for the infelicitic inequality between the sexes 12

CHAPTER III.

INVENTIVE KNOWLEDGE.—The power over nature given by knowledge being still imperfect gives no more mental satisfaction

than the less power possessed by the ancients. The mariner's compass, by increasing the population of the world, has had a doubtful effect on happiness, and the same may be said of free trade, steam engines, and other inventions whose chief effect has been to increase production and population. Printing increases happiness in some ways and diminishes it in others. Material comforts, though much improved by modern inventions, afford no more pleasure than the inferior luxuries of old times. Familiarity deprives them of their charm 22

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MEDICAL KNOWLEDGE.—Most medical inventions improve the health of the individual, but cannot improve the general health, unless their application is limited in a way that is practically out of the question. Anæsthetics, however, do promote general happiness 41

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AID TO NATURAL SELECTION.—The utilitarian should not encourage destructive agencies in order to eliminate the unhealthy. Such agencies improve the happiness of future generations at the expense of a probably equal amount of pain to the generation weeded out by their operation. Infanticide improves the average health and strength, but at the expense of a large amount of moral evil, productive of more misery than the happiness due to improved health and strength. War, in spite of its eventual good results, should be discouraged by the utilitarian, because it is such an extremely painful remedy, and is, owing to human passion, always likely to be excessively prevalent. Therefore, the utilitarian should encourage arbitration, extension of political aggregates, and, above all, the enrolment of large armies for purely defensive purposes. The industrial competition between Asiatic and European labour threatens such a vast amount of misery, that it should be prevented by the utilitarian, if he can devise any effectual means for the purpose 57

CHAPTER VI.

AMUSEMENTS.—Out-door sports. Hunting, though intensely enjoyed and though not inimical to the happiness of animals, is doubtfully felicitic owing to its injurious effects on sympathy. Other active out-door sports are decidedly felicitic. Amusement in admiration of the beautiful should be considered very felicitic by the pessimist utilitarian, moderately so by the utilitarian who is neither pessimistic nor optimistic. The

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optimist will be doubtful, as the cultivation of the beautiful decreases population	72

CHAPTER VII.

CHANGES IN LAW AND CUSTOM.—Happiness certainly may be and has been increased by legal and constitutional changes. Laws of a socialistic tendency and protection may be more reasonably supported by pessimistic than by optimistic utilitarians. Limitation of production by diminution of work would not increase the reward of labour. It would diminish population and so be approved by pessimists. Laws limiting labour of women and children seem productive of happiness. Strikes, trades unions, &c., do some good because the fear of them helps to keep wages up above the lowest limit. High wages add to happiness. High wages would not be permanently secured by confiscation of all landed property. The principal way in which wages may be permanently improved is by increased prudence among the working classes. Education may also do something to ameliorate their condition (1) by concurring to prudence, (2) by enabling them to calculate better. Mere diminution of taxation need not promote happiness. Happiness is diminished by unjust taxes, by taxes tempting to immoral conduct, and by unnecessary change of taxation. ... 87

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CHANGES IN LAW AND CUSTOM.—Oriental seclusion of women, child-marriage and enforced widowhood diminish happiness. Caste by its exaltation of some sections of the community and its degradation of others is inimical to happiness, and also by its encouragement of suttee. But caste does good by enforcing with great power obedience to ordinary moral rules. It would therefore be dangerous to overthrow it from without, and better to reform it from within by means of education ... 118

CHAPTER IX.

VEGETARIANISM AND TOTAL ABSTINENCE.—Vegetarianism can only be regarded as felicitous, if total abstinence which it promotes is felicitous. Total abstinence may be shown to be felicitous by the great amount of crime due to drinking. The chief danger of vegetarianism and total abstinence, the inability to diminish expenditure without suffering from want, must be avoided by raising the standard of comfort and encouraging the unproductive consumption of other luxuries than flesh and alcohol.

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The same object may be effected by life insurance, which is therefore, and, because it promotes equality of fortune, clearly felicific ...	139

CHAPTER X.

<p>THE MORAL VIRTUES AND RELIGION.—Utilitarian moral virtue of course promotes happiness or we should have a contradiction in terms. Utilitarians must determine praise and blame by the same standard as they apply to other acts. Unswerving truth and entire avoidance of deceit are probably more felicific than the slightest modification of truth by other considerations. Justice as understood by the utilitarian means distribution productive of general happiness, however contrary that distribution may be to ordinary ideas of justice. Benevolence in the form of charity is, as a rule, doubtfully felicific and needs careful limitation. In its other forms, including politeness, it is more clearly felicific as revealing and increasing sympathy. The increase of sympathy promotes happiness, but it is not easy to increase sympathy except by the instrumentality of religion, which may with great force promote, not only sympathy, but the highest utilitarian morality, and so add more than anything else can do to the happiness of the world ...</p>	163
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