

Utilitarianism, Book 5 - Critical Paper

In the fifth part of *Utilitarianism*, Mill argues that the only proof that something is desirable is the fact that people desire it, and thus the only proof that happiness is desirable is that people desire it. The argument can be laid out as follows:

1. One of the main points of utilitarianism is that happiness is desirable and everything else is desirable as a means to the end of happiness. (Assumption)
2. If (1), then to prove utilitarianism would be to prove that everyone desires happiness. (Assumption)
3. Therefore, one would have to prove that things can be desired. (from 1, 2)
4. The only proof that something is desirable is that people desire it. (Assumption)
5. Therefore, there can be no proof for why happiness is desired other than the fact that people desire happiness.

In my opinion, this argument is flawed. I think there could be an argument against premises (4) and (5). There might be ways to prove that something is desired without just using the fact that people want it. At least for physical things, one may say that the proof that people in Puerto Rico right now desire food and hygiene products is that they have physical needs for those things; they don't just desire to have them. As for less physical things or concepts like happiness, one may say that, for example, a person with depression may need a little bit of happiness to continue living. I think the reasons for wanting or desiring something may be relevant to how it is proved a thing is desired. I do not find this argument to be persuasive because I feel there could be many other ways to prove that an item, concept, or feeling is desired.

100 A Great job! Excellent reconstruction, good statement of disagreement, novel example.

Bradley Rettler 10/13/17 11:40 AM

Comment [1]: Good start!

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Comment [2]: This premise seems unnecessary.

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Comment [3]: (5) is the conclusion, and is supposed to logically follow from the premises. So the way to argue against (5) is to argue against one of the things from which it follows. So, confine yourself to arguing against (4).

Bradley Rettler 10/13/17 11:43 AM

Comment [4]: Interesting!