

AN INTRODUCTION
TO THE
PRINCIPLES
OF
MORALS AND LEGISLATION

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CHAPTER I.

OF THE PRINCIPLE OF UTILITY.

I. NATURE has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure*. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think : every effort we can make to throw off our subjection, will serve but to demonstrate and confirm it. In words a man may pretend to abjure their empire : but in reality he will remain subject to it all the while. The *principle of utility*¹ recognises

Mankind
governed
by pain and
pleasure.

¹ Note by the Author, July 1822.

To this denomination has of late been added, or substituted, the *greatest happiness* or *greatest felicity* principle : this for shortness, instead of saying at length *that principle* which states the greatest happiness of all those whose interest is in question, as being the right and proper, and only right and proper and universally desirable, end of human action : of human action in every situation, and in particular in that of the functionary or set of functionaries exercising the powers of Government. The word *utility* does not so clearly point to the ideas of *pleasure* and *pain* as the words *happiness* and *felicity* do : nor does it lead us to the consideration of the *number*, of the interests affected ; to the *number*, as being the circumstance, which co tributes, in the largest proportion, to the formation of the standard here in question ; the *standard of right and wrong*, by which alone the propriety of human conduct, in every situation, can with propriety be tried. This want of a sufficiently manifest connexion between the ideas of *happiness* and *pleasure* on the one hand, and the idea of *utility* on the other, I have every now and then found operating, and with but too much efficiency, as a bar to the acceptance, that might otherwise have been given, to this principle.

this subjection, and assumes it for the foundation of that system, the object of which is to rear the fabric of felicity by the hands of reason and of law. Systems which attempt to question it, deal in sounds instead of sense, in caprice instead of reason, in darkness instead of light.

But enough of metaphor and declamation : it is not by such means that moral science is to be improved.

Principle of
utility,
what.

II. The principle of utility is the foundation of the present work : it will be proper therefore at the outset to give an explicit and determinate account of what is meant by it. By the principle¹ of utility is meant 'that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency which it, appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question : or, what is the same thing in other words, to promote or to oppose that happiness. I say of every action whatsoever ; and therefore not only of every action of a private individual, but of every measure of government.

Utility,
what.

III. By utility is meant that property in any object, whereby it tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness, (all this in the present case comes to the same thing) or (what comes again to the same thing) to prevent the happening of mischief, pain, evil, or unhappiness to the party whose interest is considered : if that party be the community in general, then the happiness of the community : if a particular individual, then the happiness of that individual.

A principle,
what.

¹ The word principle is derived from the Latin principium : which seems to be compounded of the two words *primus*, first, or chief, and *cipium*, a termination which seems to be derived from *cipio*, to take, as in *municipium*, *municipium* ; to which are analogous, *auceps*, *forceps*, and others. It is a term of very vague and very extensive signification : it is applied to any thing which is conceived to serve as a foundation or beginning to any series of operations : in some cases, of physical operations ; but of mental operations in the present case.

The principle here in question may be taken for an act of the mind ; a sentiment ; a sentiment of approbation : a sentiment which, when applied to an action, approves of its utility, as that quality of it by which the measure of approbation or disapprobation bestowed upon it ought to be governed.