



John Stuart Mill

(* 1806, London - † 1873, Aix-en-Provence)

John Stuart Mill wrote numbers of articles on a huge variety of philosophical, political, economic, and social subjects. In 1848 he published the "Principles of Political Economy", in order to show that economics was not the "dismal science" that its radical and literary critics had supposed. Mill reflected on the difference between what economics measured and what human beings really valued: leading him to argue that we should sacrifice economic growth for the sake of the environment, and should limit population in order to fend off the risk of starvation for the overburdened poor. The most important contribution was his "Utilitarianism" in 1863, which gave substantial contribution to the ethical theory. Utilitarianism is a moral theory according to which an action is right if and only if it conforms to the principle of utility. An action conforms to the principle of utility if and only if its performance will be more productive of pleasure or happiness, or more preventive of pain or unhappiness, than any alternative. Mill argued that we ought to aim at maximizing the welfare of all sentient creatures, and that welfare consists of their happiness. But the principle of utility could also be misused to justify illiberal systems. His essay "On Liberty" 1859 aroused greatest controversy, and the most violent expressions of approval and disapproval. Mill argued that he lived in a society where bold and adventurous individuals were becoming all too rare. He was frightened by middle-class conformism much more than by anything to be looked for from an enfranchised working class. He had picked up this fear from reading Alexis de Tocqueville's "Democracy in America". America was a prosperous middle-class society, and Mill feared that it was also a society that cared nothing for individual liberty.

Literature:

Information on Mill and especially his autobiography are available on the websites www.utilitarianism.com/jsmill.htm and www.utm.edu/research/iep/m/milljs.htm

Links:

www.utilitarianism.com

Peter Altmiks