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UTYLITARYSTYCZNY LIBERALIZM
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Happiness and Liberty.
The Utilitarian Liberalism of John Stuart Mill

Summary

John Stuart Mill (1806–1873) is one of the undisputed classic authors of liberalism. Today, however, relatively little space is devoted to the intellectual background that gave rise to his original idea. This book attempts to identify links between Mill's liberalism and one of the most important aspects of this background, namely the tradition of classical utilitarianism, represented by Jeremy Bentham and James Mill – the father of John Stuart. This is all the more important as this tradition has become something of a shameful, unwanted heritage for contemporary liberal thought. This fact has also influenced the interpretation of Mill's reflections by his liberal successors such as Sir Isaiah Berlin. The author of this paper challenges the dominant interpretation of John Stuart Mill's liberalism and puts forward a provocative hypothesis that it refers to a subtle version of utilitarianism. This paper seeks to answer the question of whether such liberalism is theoretically consistent. At the same time, it attempts to reflect on whether nowadays it is an attractive ideological proposition, and what conditions would have to be met to revive it today (if at all possible).

These two main objectives, or threads, determine the division of this book into two parts. They are intertwined, though analytically separated in particular sections. Part I is more historical; it presents the views propounded by the advocates of classical utilitarianism and shows Mill's attempt to creatively transform this tradition. Part II is relates more to political philosophy and treats Mill's liberalism as a point of reference for current disputes between advocates of liberalism, as well as between liberals and their opponents.

The first few chapters focus on the reconstruction of the complex intellectual links between John Stuart Mill and his utilitarian predecessors/teachers. The main theme of the second chapter is the moral and political theory advocated by Bentham and James Mill. The third chapter presents the strengths and weaknesses of John Stuart Mill's strategy of simultaneous pluralization and hierarchization of happiness as the key concept of utilitarian moral philosophy. The fourth chapter is devoted to the analysis of Mill's most influential work entitled *On Liberty* and the controversy it has aroused from the very beginning. The ideal of individuality presented in this essay is obviously the core of Mill's liberalism. At the same time, however, it is difficult to reconcile this ideal with the assumptions of classical utilitarianism. It also contains perfectionistic and elitist threads that have proved to be problematic to Mill's liberal successors. The key questions posed in the fifth chapter concern the relationship between liberalism and communalism. As this issue is also the subject of heated debate today, e.g. as part of a dispute between liberals and communalists, the subsequent parts of the book focus on the second of the above-mentioned objectives. Mill's liberalism is compared to the views of such prominent representatives of liberal reflection in the second half of the twentieth century as Sir Isaiah Berlin, John Rawls and Richard Rorty. The final sections of the book are devoted to the theoretical and practical obstacles that any modern attempt to revive Mill's liberalism must encounter. They also consider the question of whether its integrity can be saved in the face of these challenges.

Questions considered in this book may be important not only from the perspective of the discussion on the condition of contemporary liberal democracy. Utilitarianism remains a poorly known doctrine in Poland. However, consciously or not, decisions taken in various areas of life are more often taken (or justified) based on utilitarian arguments. If it is our ambition to transfer solutions adopted by Western societies to Poland, we have every reason to believe that this process will only grow stronger. Therefore, studies on the history of utilitarianism can also help us understand ourselves, or at least realize that we are usually not even aware of the choices that we face.