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Book review:

James E. Crimmins, ed., *The Bloomsbury Encyclopedia of Utilitarianism*

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James E. Crimmins, ed., *The Bloomsbury Encyclopedia of Utilitarianism*, New York, London, New Delhi, Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2013, pp. xx + 585.

This encyclopedia is the first such work devoted exclusively to the subject of utilitarianism. As the introduction by the editor James E. Crimmins informs us, it contains 220 entries written by 120 contributors. Each entry consists of an explanation of the topic, a bibliography of works on which the article draws, suggestions for further reading, the name of the contributor, and cross-references to other relevant entries. A helpful addition is the name index, which will ensure that the reader does not overlook any occurrence in the text of any particular individual that interests him or her. A mere perusal of the list of contributors will leave the reader in no doubt that this encyclopedia is a serious and authoritative contribution to utilitarian studies. The contributors appear to have made a special and welcome effort to avoid overly technical language, and this, of course, renders the encyclopedia as a whole wonderfully clear, and, of course, enhances its utility. The quality of the encyclopedia is a worthy reflection of the expertise of the contributors, and of the good sense of the editor and editorial committee in assigning the topics. The entries themselves are divided into two main classes: first, biographies of thinkers who belong within the utilitarian tradition, or of persons who have influenced those thinkers; and second, themes and concepts, including entries on the different versions of the utilitarian doctrine, on opposing traditions insofar as they offer criticism of or have contributed to the development of utilitarianism, and on subject-matters to which utilitarianism has itself made significant contributions.

Broadly speaking, the authors of the entries tend to adopt either one or other of two approaches, or sometimes both: the first is to expound the history of the utilitarian doctrine, both in terms of the factors that influenced its development and its own influence, for instance on philosophy, social science, or practical reform; and the second is to deal with the

problems and issues that characterize contemporary debates in the field of utilitarian studies. Not that these two topics are anything other than intimately related, since contemporary proponents or students of utilitarianism often (some would say not often enough) draw on the arguments of their predecessors in the utilitarian tradition, most notably the three great classical utilitarians Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, and Henry Sidgwick. Nor would it be correct to assume that the history is dealt with in the biographical entries and the philosophy in the thematic and conceptual entries. Jonathan Riley's excellent article on John Stuart Mill, for instance, gives both a historical account of Mill's life and career and assesses the philosophical value of his ideas. Frederick Rosen's entry on 'Utility' explains the historical development of the doctrine, while a series of articles on the varieties of utilitarianism—such as 'Act Utilitarianism' (Guy Fletcher), 'Indirect Utilitarianism' (Eric Wiland), and 'Rule Utilitarianism' (Brad Hooker)—give an exposition of the respective positions in question and an assessment of their strengths and weaknesses from the perspective of contemporary philosophy.

Starting at the beginning in a chronological sense (or almost at the beginning, since this is to ignore Daisuke Arie's delightful entry on 'Confucianism'), in the entry on 'Plato', Robin Barrow explores the links between Plato's *Republic* and the utilitarianism of John Start Mill, not from the point of view of showing how Mill was influenced by Plato (though Mill's debt to Ancient Greek thought is taken up in Jonathan Riley's entry on 'John Stuart Mill'), but assessing the extent to which Plato might be interpreted as a classical utilitarian. Barrow points out, for instance, the connection of the notion of *eudaimonia* with Mill's higher pleasures, and that the notion of *eudaimonia* in question is that of the city as a whole, and hence similar (one assumes) to the classical utilitarian concern with the community as a whole. For further elucidation, the reader is then invited to follow one of the cross-references, for instance to the article on 'Eudaimonia' (by Dylan T.L. Crimmins), which takes up a

similar theme to the ‘Plato’ entry, but from Aristotle’s perspective, that is it assesses the connections between Aristotle’s philosophy and utilitarianism, and again between the Aristotelian notion of *eudaimonia* and Mill’s higher pleasures, and how Aristotle’s ethics then inspired ideal utilitarianism. The reader can then turn to the detailed article on ‘Ideal Utilitarianism’ (by Anthony Skelton), where the ideal utilitarian theories of Hastings Rashdall and G.E. Moore are explained in the light of and as a response to the classical utilitarianism of Henry Sidgwick, whose hedonistic view of the good was regarded by them as too narrow. The article concludes with the criticisms of ideal utilitarianism put forward by H.A. Pritchard and W.D. Ross, the defence of ideal utilitarianism by A.C. Ewing and Oliver A. Johnson, and a final assessment of the plausibility of the theory. And once again, the cross-references suggest further entries that the reader might turn to, while the bibliography indicates further reading elsewhere. Hence, as well as using the encyclopedia for a particular entry, the reader is able to learn much by tracking a variety of different routes through the encyclopedia, a process made worthwhile by the coherence of the subject-matter.

Compiling an encyclopedia will always involve difficult decisions about which topics to include and which to exclude, and how many words should be devoted to each topic, but the editor and editorial committee are to be congratulated on striking an excellent balance in this respect. The encyclopedia forms a marvellous resource for both students and professional academics alike, although it is regrettable that the extortionate cost of the volume—which is no more than average in terms of its appearance—will mean that it may not find the place it deserves on the desks of all students of utilitarianism, but only on the shelves of the libraries of research universities.

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