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The value of pleasures as described by J.S. Mill

Toshinari MIZUNO

When Mill addresses the famous doctrine of quality of pleasures in “Utilitarianism”, he discriminates clearly between quality and value of pleasures. With regard to the value of pleasures, three questions emerge: 1) Does the quality of pleasures include the value of pleasures? 2) How do we measure the value of pleasures? 3) While Mill mentions a ‘sense of dignity’ in his reference to the evaluation of pleasures, how exactly does this sense of dignity relate to the evaluation of pleasures? In response to 1), Hoag suggests that the quality of pleasures is not evaluative but descriptive, while Donner argues that the quality of pleasures is both descriptive and evaluative. I criticize Hoag’s interpretation while supporting that of Donner. 2) Willey suggests that the value of pleasures is determined by the preferences of those who have experienced them, while Hoag suggests that the value of pleasures is not determined by these preferences, but rather recognized by us through those preferences. I disagree with their interpretations and argue that Mill asserts that the value of pleasures is measured by one’s own feelings or introspection. 3) The sense of dignity is not a criterion of the evaluation of pleasures or a feeling that evaluates pleasures, but rather a pleasant feeling (a pleasure) that accompanies the evaluation of pleasures.