Abstract

From Utilitarianism To Kantism:
Climbing the Same Mountain

José de Sousa e Brito

Universidade Nova de Lisboa

According to Richard Hare: "the formal, logical properties of the moral words, the understanding of which we owe above all to Kant, yield a system of moral reasoning whose conclusions have a content identical with that of a certain kind of utilitarianism". More recently, Parfit said that "Kantian Contractualism implies Rule Consequentialism" and that, therefore, Kantians, Contractualists and Consequentialists "are climbing the same mountrain on different sides". This paper invites to take the same road in opposite direction: from Utilitarianism to Kantism.

Bentham has given different formulations of the principle of utility and also tried in different ways to prove it. In his later writings, some of them unpublished, he makes a distinction between two senses of the principle of utility: the exegetic or expository and the deontological or censorial. They are indeed two different principles leading to different results, one egoistic, altruistic the other. The legislator ought to make them artificially coincide by using the proper sanctions. Mill's "proof" of the principle is a misleading attempt to derive the deontological from the expository sense. We find in Bentham three types of proof of the deontological principle of utilitarianism: a trancendental, an ideal social contract and an impartial arbiter one. They bring Bentham closer to Kant than usually admitted.