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3/10/20

QCQ10

Quotation:

“When actions are described as ‘unjust’, is there some one quality that is being attributed to all of them, a quality that marks them off from actions that are disapproved of but aren’t said to be ‘unjust’? If so, what quality is it? If some one common quality (or collection of qualities) is always present in everything that men customarily call ‘just’ or ‘unjust’, we can judge whether the general laws of our emotional make-up could enable this particular quality (or combination of qualities) to summon up a sentiment with the special character and intensity ·of the sentiment of justice or injustice·, or whether instead the sentiment ·of justice or injustice· can’t be explained, and must be regarded as something that nature provided independently of its other provisions” (p. 29)

Comment:

Mills argues that it is difficult to find what link together all the different applications of the concept of justice. This quote comes after Mills is trying to illuminate what it is that marks off justice or injustice as special. He asks whether there is an attribute that goes along with all things labeled as unjust, and thus the same would apply to all those things that are considered to be just. It’s a rather confusing quotation, but I think what he is trying to solve is whether the qualities that are present in that which we call “just” or “unjust” are enabled by our “emotional make-up” or whether the “sentiment” of either cannot be explained and must instead be understood as something that is independent. This is interesting because people often see and understand justice as a unified concept and do feel a sentiment of justice regardless of their understanding of it foundation. Mill also goes on to look at the history as he says that will help our understanding. This is also interesting as he came to the conclusion that in most languages, the word’s origin came from positive law and/or authoritative custom. The most “primitive” element of justice is the idea of conformity to law. Mill also acknowledges that the idea of justice is also applied to areas about which we may not necessarily want such legislation. I think these concepts are both fascinating and complicating as they bring to light the question of what is justice and who then decides.

Question:

How can utilitarianism be beneficial? How does it complicate how we view and understand justice?