

# John Stuart Mill on Epicurus

**Post by “Pacatus” of September 8, 2022 at 5:36 PM**

I remember Mill only from my days as an economics student – Mill being classified as a utilitarian. “Utility” in economics means – not some measure of particular usefulness (e.g., a serviceable crescent wrench) – but a measure of pleasure or satisfaction (or alleviation of the opposites on a continuum).

Although, in terms of utilitarian social ethics, generally expressed as “the greatest good for the greatest number,” it really would mean the greatest happiness/pleasure/satisfaction for the greatest number. But that is not really subject to a strict formulation/calculus. (And I have suggested that Rawls’ theory of justice might provide a useful addendum.)

Modern neoclassical microeconomics followed Mill in its pursuit of “utility maximization.” But Herbert Simon, with his theory of “satisficing” (as opposed to maximizing) behavior, I think comes closer to Epicurus. (As I tried to address briefly in the thread “Natural Wealth and Natural Goods in Epicureanism”.)

The French philosopher Michel Onfray, in his book *A Hedonist Manifesto*, links Epicurus to the utilitarians (i.e., Bentham and Mill) to move from a personal to a social ethics.