

Bailey

Utilitarianism, Institutions, and Justice

This compelling book advances utilitarianism as the basis for a viable public philosophy, effectively rebutting the common charge that, as moral doctrine, utilitarian thought permits cruel acts, justifies unfair distribution of wealth, and demands too much of moral agents. James Wood Bailey defends utilitarianism through novel use of game theory insights regarding feasible equilibria and evolutionary stability, elaborating a sophisticated account of institutions that real-world utilitarians would want to foster. If utilitarianism seems in principle to dictate that we make each and every choice such that it leads to the best consequences overall, game theory emphasizes that no choice has consequences in isolation, but only in conjunction with many other choices of other agents. Viewing institutions as equilibria in complex games, Bailey negotiates the paradox of individual responsibilities, arguing that if individuals within institutions have specific responsibilities they cannot get from the principle of utility alone, the utility principle nevertheless holds great value in that it allows us to identify morally desirable institutions. Far from recommending cruel acts, utilitarianism, understood this way, actually runs congruent to our basic moral intuitions. A provocative attempt to support the practical use of utilitarian ethics in a world of conflicting interests and competing moral agents, Bailey's book employs the work of social scientists to tackle problems traditionally given abstract philosophical attention. Vividly illustrating its theory with concrete moral dilemmas and taking seriously our moral common sense, *Utilitarianism, Institutions, and Justice* is an accessible, groundbreaking work that will richly reward students and scholars of political science, political economy, and philosophy.

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