

УДК 17:2-463

**EFFECTIVELY CREATING CHANGE:  
ONE STEP AT A TIME**

**Beshenich C.**

The article explores the idea of people coming together in order to effectively make changes in their communities, countries, and world. The research problem focuses on the issue of how to unify people to more succinctly solve problems together and facilitate change from the individual's perspective to the universal. The proposed efforts are based on the utilitarian philosophy and refer to John Stuart Mill's works. Following a theoretical discussion, the article offers three proposals for providing adequate clothing to individuals in need across the levels of analysis.

**Keywords:** relief, charity, proportionality, utilitarianism, recycling.

**ЭФФЕКТИВНОЕ ВНЕДРЕНИЕ ИЗМЕНЕНИЙ:  
ШАГ ЗА ШАГОМ**

**Бешенич К.**

В статье исследуется идея объединения людей с целью проведения эффективных изменений в своих сообществах, странах и мире. Исследовательская задача сосредоточена на вопросе о том, как объединить людей, чтобы они сообща более эффективно решали проблемы, и способствовать переходу от индивидуализма к универсализму. Предлагаемые усилия основаны на утилитарной философии и отсылают к работам Джона Стюарта Милля. После теоретического обсуждения на разных уровнях анализа в статье выдвигаются три предложения по обеспечению необходимой одеждой нуждающихся.

**Ключевые слова:** помощь, благотворительность, пропорциональность, утилитаризм, вторичная переработка.

The 21st century seems to have discovered several solutions for many critical problems. For instance, tuberculosis, once a death sentence can now be treated or

polluted water can also be treated and distributed for consumption, waste can be recycled in order to manufacture new products. Simultaneously, extreme poverty and hunger exist in this incredible world where a consumer can order food to be delivered to their homes without ever having to leave. In the modern age, parents struggle to feed their children. Children struggle to obtain the education they need to improve their lives. The world's oceans are cluttered by litter. With no shortage of governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations expending funds and efforts to relieve these problems, one might wonder what is going wrong. Why is there relief available, yet suffering still riddles the world's populations? This article does not propose to answer these questions. Rather, it chooses to focus on another – how can one's close and distant neighbours cooperate in such a way as to create a global community that affects grassroots change? To solve this problem, the article will turn to utilitarian thinker John Stuart Mill and explore his thinking to consider how utilitarianism could be implemented into community action. The discussion will show how, by coming together, individuals can be united by caring for their neighbours and so foster the common good by forming a worldwide “community”.

The research question asks about change. To develop different methods to affect the needed change, first the change should be defined. What kind of change is needed – what are the effects it hopes to achieve, who should it impact, how will the change be overseen in the long run to ensure its continued impact? The change this article looks for is in how individuals cooperate to help those impacted by poverty. The first point in creating this change is by giving the altruistically-thinking individuals an overarching goal – the goal used here is “the common good”. The common good may be seen as “...those facilities – whether material, cultural or institutional – that the members of a community provide to all members in order to fulfil a relational obligation they all have to care for certain interests that they have in common” [2]. All people share certain interests – such as safety, health, and education. The facilities enabling these could be infrastructure, clean water, publicly funded schools. John Stuart Mill's projection of the common good as “the act of placing the community before the individual” therefore complements this study, as it

brings like-minded individuals together in pursuit of the community. The community, however, must be projected as something even more overarching than one's town or municipality. The community proposed by this article is the world's peoples.

Within his work, John Stuart Mill's proportionality doctrine offers a method of increasing the individual's scope of care. By expanding the understanding of who one's neighbour is, and who one owes care; one's sphere is opened to their far-distant neighbours. By practicing utilitarian ethics in one's approach to providing aid to those in need, one promotes the common good on a greater scale by fostering a sense of worldwide "community". After having accepted that one's scope of care goes beyond their family, their neighbourhood, and their community – the individual accepts humanity as their family, their neighbours, and their community. This accepts fosters bonds of care that can propel altruistic actions to a larger scale – thereby achieving a greater degree of good.

Mill's proportionality doctrine says actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote *overall* human happiness. With this idea, Mill focuses on the *consequences* of actions to determine if they are correct – not on rights or ethical sentiments. Mill reminds the thinker that no "...person is an entirely isolated being; it is impossible for a person to do anything seriously or permanently hurtful to himself, without mischief reaching at least to his near connections, and often far beyond them. If he injures his property, he does harm to those who directly or indirectly derived support from it, and usually diminishes, by a greater or less amount, the general resources of the community" [3]. Each person lives – to some extent – within proximity to another person. People tend to congregate within communities – be they families or societies. In consideration of this point, a person who wishes to make a good decision cannot make this decision based only on his happiness. Communities must include that which brings them happiness (in effect, a *common* happiness) in their calculations, as they live with these people and their actions affect them as well.

If one considers their actions as acts which can be performed in a correct way or a wrong way, he might ask what is the correct way to act, if he wants to promote the good of his neighbours. How can one *ethically* donate, provide help, or act in any

way so as to effect good? Regardless of whether the target of one's actions is a single person or a group of people, they might find Mill's "Proportionality Doctrine" to be an efficacious method of determining how to help others. To this end, Mill said: "The creed which accepts as the foundations of morals 'utility' or 'the greatest happiness principle' holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain and the privation of pleasure" [1]. One should therefore act in such a way as to happiness of their neighbour and to negate the unhappiness of themselves and their neighbours. The calculation must include both sides of the equation, as the individual and their neighbours form the community.

Mill's pursuit of happiness leads the concerned person to put forth his abilities to build a complete and consistent home [1]. The academic community, the work community, the spiritual community – each one is formed by individuals cooperating with each other. Together, they create the home within which they carry out the community's life functions and together, they work to promote the community's happiness. Mill indicate each person who believes general happiness is attainable desires his own, individual happiness. The pursuit of this happiness pushes him to support the common good, which is a way of assuring his individual goals for pleasure. By working for the *individual's* good, the individual will find himself also pursuing the *collective's* good – as the goodness of the collective facilitates his own happiness.

This idea might seem like a merry-go-round of words. In essence, if the community is happy and safe, the individual has an increased chance of also being happy and safe. Mill saw a foundation for the perpetuation of utility in the social emotions and feelings of mankind. Based on the commonly held feelings of people, a unity forms which brings together the members of the community. These common feelings form society, where the "...the interests of all are to be regarded equally. And since in all states of civilisation, every person, except an absolute monarch, has equals, everyone is obliged to live on these terms with somebody..." [4]. They seek it

out of habit. Mankind is pushed to forming society by his nature, which seeks the positive feelings, society brings. Society seeks that which brings it safety and utility. The people within this society seek that which is good.

The issue arising in this discussion of society and the common good is when not all members of society are able to achieve safety or goodness. If one believes the right mode of action is that which will bring good to the *community*, then they are just as obliged to act for those who are unable to as they are for themselves – no matter what the deterring factor is, they should try to mitigate the hindrance. If the concerned person looks at the community of *mankind* and realizes that we are all together united on this earth as a common family (the human race) with the common goal of happiness, then the person concludes they have an obligation to all members of humanity. The impoverished mother in Venezuela's happiness matters just as much as that of our parents. And if we are to act with proportionality, our actions, which have the potential to affect her happiness, should be considered just as carefully as the actions we use to consider how to please our families.

This issue introduces the question of who should be helped. Does the impoverished mother in Venezuela have a claim to my help, even if I cannot physically perceive her? Mill's proportionality doctrine can be reinforced with another Utilitarian principle: the principle of equal consideration of interests. According to this, "...the range of our moral duties extends to all beings holding moral status, which means that they are at least capable of suffering or their interests or preferences can be influenced by our actions" [5, p. 123]. Utilitarians do not believe in limiting the scope when it comes to happiness, therefore the principle of equal consideration of interests sees one person's need for water as holding the same weight as another person's. Both are people, both need water. It does not matter if one person lives in Paris and the other in the Sahel. What does matter, however, is that they both receive water. Preference should not be given to one person because they live closer, and we can *see* they need water – whereas the other is beyond my physical ability to encounter and therefore past my realm of belief.

Once it is understood that there are people in the Sahel, in South America, in poor regions of the United States who lack access to clean water, the principle of equal consideration of interests inspires the individual to consider their needs just as much as the needs of those in the local homeless shelter. And once one considers these needs, is there not an obligation to help these distant neighbours as well? In keeping the utilitarian perspective, one might even imagine it brings more good to help *these* people with one's five euros than it does to contribute five euros to a "save the trees" campaign drive in Germany, as one's five euros means more in poverty-stricken areas and will affect more good to people who will be more greatly influenced by the giver's help. Together, this means we have a real potential to do something good with the resources we have. After asking who can we consider to be our neighbour, the question then becomes – how to help these neighbours?

To place this article's discussion into context, the discussion will propose how to approach a critical modern problem. These proposals are suggestions, starting points for the reader. They will be introduced, elaborated on, and then left for the reader to adapt and develop within the context of his or her own circumstances. Three proposals will be given – they are examples drawn from the local, national, and international contexts. For the sake of analysis, the proposal's tool of help will be a constant, what will change is the context within which the constant is used. This constant is a critical piece of human security – clothing.

Issues such as food security or potable water access frequently appear in humanitarian literature as they are critical to human existence. Something which might seem less urgent is the topic of adequate clothing. The discussion will look at how clothing can promote happiness (apart from a materialistic sense) and how to use one's resources to help their close and far distant neighbours gain this happiness. Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares: "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services..." [6]. Beyond being an expression of identity or an extension of

preferences, clothing is a human right. It is a critical part of human health and well-being, and all people are entitled to having proper clothing.

Proper clothing is more than wearing a suit for work. It keeps the wearer in good health by:

- Protecting the body temperature;
- Lowering the risk of infection;
- Protecting skin from environmental irritants;
- Preventing exposure to the elements.

These are just a few points. One can imagine for those living in hot, sunny climates, proper clothing prevents extensive sunburn. People living in a humid climate will appreciate having a sufficient supply of dry socks. Children residing in harsh, cold climates will benefit from sweaters and long-sleeve clothing that allow for layering and promote good health. So, it can be deduced that adequate clothing is necessary for all people and especially for those people at risk from the elements. Providing sufficient clothing to the impoverished will promote their good health and enable them to pursue their happiness and the happiness of their families. How to provide this necessary clothing to those who need it is the question.

On the local level, the altruistic giver may locate a shelter. The shelter might not have the infrastructure necessary to conduct a clothing-drive and gather donations on a large-scale. Assuming this, the giver could then consider where gatherings of people frequently occur. One such area is a school. After discussion with the necessary authorities, a container could be placed at the school for a short period of time (to prevent students no longer perceiving it as novel and so ignoring it). Students could be encouraged to donate used clothing from their home that is no longer needed.

This idea of “recycling” is known, and clothing donation bins are generally found in many towns. However! If one needs to drive in order to get the donation site, it may seem more convenient to simply throw away the used articles, rather than driving to donate them. Time is of the essence in modern society, and something that requires additional time can be ignored in order to promote personal priorities. By

placing the donation bin at a school, the altruistic person ensures that donating clothing items is now more convenient for parents as all they have to do is bag the unwanted clothing and give it to their children to donate sometime during the school day. Further, information could be sent in advance to families encouraging them to tell their friends of the specific donation period. Friends from outside of school can add their clothing articles to the donation – thereby expanding the collection the school takes. This avoids contributing to environmental waste, extends the use of the clothing, and brings clothing articles to people who may not otherwise have the ability to attain the proper clothing.

On the national level, it can be agreed that generally, the local level idea would also work. But this level has a greater reach, and therefore should have only a very targeted time to work, in order to use its weight effectively and not exhaust people. By utilizing trans-national education communication networks, a “call for garments” can be coordinated among school districts that are timed with the academic year. At the beginning of the academic year, unneeded coats/jackets can be donated. Of course, hats, gloves, and scarves are also to be welcomed. However, the main advertisement should be coats/jackets. The advertising efforts should make this the mental image people have of the donation campaign to associate their altruism with warmth – which will be certainly welcomed by many students and adults in the approaching winter season. The timing works is designed to meet children with clothing that fits them as they need it, before they “grow out” of it.

At the end of the school year, the coordinating bodies should orient their efforts towards “dress clothing” or nicer-than-usual clothing that parents-in-need might not want to spend money on immediately. However, it is important for children to have at least one good outfit for whatever academic/other occasions occur. Therefore, the formal drive will ensure this little step towards fostering confidence and success in student lives. These calls will come at convenient times for givers, ending of the school year is a time when parents are more likely to be sorting through clothing and looking for items that no longer fit or which their children no longer want to wear.



Importantly, the call “call for garments” and “dress clothing” should emphasize these drives are similar to the local level, in that the efforts are still going to help “our neighbours”. This noun identifies the people being helped as people who are close to us, thereby mentally reducing the gap between us and the other. Helping “the needy” or “those in need” can give the recipient a distant persona, someone remote. Whereas “our neighbour” is someone close by, someone we can relate to.

The clothing will be sent to indicated national distribution points, which should function in cooperation with major charity organisations or NGO’s that distribute such items on a wide scale basis. Cooperation is critical, as these organisations will already have the infrastructure necessary to transport the clothing to areas where it is needed. They have the *means*, and via cooperation with them, individuals can ensure their individual efforts and collective efforts of the schools promote maximum utility amongst those who need it.

The international level of care may seem overwhelming. The experience gained from organizing clothing collections at the local and national levels, however, should level out this feeling. The idea is incremental care – not a sudden rush into a larger-than-life goal. The givers at this point have (theoretically) already cooperated to clothe their local and national neighbours in need. Now care is simply being extended to our further-away neighbours who are in a “tighter spot” and have greater need. As this need is greater, the effort – already concentrated on clothing and coats – should become even more concentrated. This will make it easier for people to help and create something momentous that stays in the human psyche.

The example created for this article and proposed for the international level is “1 million socks for 1 million friends”. As in 2023, there were over 41 million people in Poland, if only a half of them contributed a pair of socks, that would mean 20 million pairs of socks going to those in need. Considering 556 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa live in “multi-dimensional poverty”, this means every Polish person could donate 13 pairs of socks in order to help these distant neighbours. For this considerable effort, the approach could be to ask people to donate one pair of socks per month – plus one extra pair. Assuming every person in Poland would donate 13

pairs of socks to the movement is a rather big estimate. Therefore, the pool of help could be expanded, perhaps to the entire European Union. Then, the help would look different. Now, with 448 million people available to contribute resources, the burden would be less on each individual giver. Simply one pair of socks per person. Or more, if the giver wants to propel the movement more strongly forward.

By applying a similar approach to the local, national, and international levels, the organizer of such a giving movement can eliminate excessive uncertainty. A specific goal, achieved through specific means, formed by the help of a specific group, together allows the target to be achieved with more precision and clarity. At each level, the goal hopes to achieve a tangible impact. All children in the neighbourhood have a nice outfit to wear. All children in the country have a warm coat to wear. All people in the international region have a pair of clean socks. The idea is to utilize resources in such a way as to create tangible change in a specific area. This also avoids burning out the givers, as well as promoting repeat – giving by demonstrating actual results. These examples are not the only way to carry out the proposed idea. They are rather given as a foundation, and it is hoped that further development will emerge from them which can bring these ideas to life and achieve the author's ambition of helping people to achieve security, so they are able to, in turn, fulfil their purposes.

The discussion of giving structured by utilitarian inspirations emerged from the research question “how can one's close and distant neighbours cooperate in such a way as to create a global community that truly affects change?” John Stuart Mill was consulted to consider how utilitarianism could be implemented into community action that facilitates real assistance on local, national and international levels. Then, a brief overlook at who could be regarded as a neighbour to receive assistance was made. A hypothetical example of how such giving could be conducted was then indicated. The example provided three levels for helping those neighbours in need. This justified the hypothesis: individuals can be united by caring for their neighbours and so foster the common good by constructing a worldwide “community”. In this way, the research question is answered and the enactment of cooperation to help the

human community is demonstrated at various levels. It might not be possible for the lone-acting person from a small city to clothe everyone who is in need. However, it is possible for them to cooperate within their communities and through this cooperation to foster change one step at a time.

### **Bibliography:**

1. Brink D. Mill's moral and political philosophy [Web resource] // Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. 22.08.2022. URL: <https://goo.su/bWo9mw> (reference date: 10.12.2023).

2. Hussain W. The common good [Web resource] // Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. 26.02.2018. URL: <https://goo.su/RYvS> (reference date: 10.12.2023). 1

3. Mill J.S. On liberty [Web resource] // Project Gutenberg. 12.08.2019. URL: <https://goo.su/9Pva5> (reference date: 10.12.2023).

4. Mill J.S. Utilitarianism [Web resource] // Utilitarianism.com. 2023. URL: <https://goo.su/mSIutz> (reference date: 10.12.2023).

5. Synowiec J. Who is my neighbour? Effective altruism, the good Samaritan, and the opportunities of the 21st century // Effective altruism and religion. Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2022. P. 121-146.

6. Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 25 [Web resource] // United Nations. 04.12.2018. URL: <https://goo.su/4NXOg> (reference date: 10.12.2023).

### **Data about the author:**

Beshenich Caroline – Doctoral Candidate of Faculty of International and Political Studies, Jagiellonian University (Krakow, Poland).

### **Сведения об авторе:**

Бешенич Каролина – докторант факультета международных и политических исследований Ягеллонского университета (Краков, Польша).

**E-mail:** karolina.besenic@gmail.com.