



Happiness, Democracy, and the Cooperative Movement: The Radical Utilitarianism of William Thompson (SUNY series in New Political Science)

Mark J. Kaswan

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Examines the political significance of ideas about happiness through the work of utilitarian philosophers William Thompson and Jeremy Bentham.

Happiness is political. The way we think about happiness affects what we do, how we relate to other people and the world around us, our moral principles, and even our ideas about how society should be organized. Utilitarianism, a political theory based on hedonistic and individualistic ideas of happiness, has been dominated for more than two-hundred years by its founder, Jeremy Bentham. In *Happiness, Democracy, and the Cooperative Movement*, Mark J. Kaswan examines the work of William Thompson, a friend of Bentham's who nonetheless offers a very different utilitarian philosophy and political theory based on a different conception of happiness, but whose work has been largely overlooked. Kaswan reveals the importance of our ideas about happiness for our understanding of the basic principles and nature of democracy, its role in society and its character as a social institution. In what is the closest examination of Thompson's political theory to date, Kaswan moves from philosophy to theory to practice, starting with conceptions of happiness before moving to theories of utility, then to democratic theory, and finally to practice in the first detailed account of how Thompson's ideas laid the foundations for the cooperative movement, which is now the world's largest democratic social movement.

"This is an original and impressive piece of scholarship that calls attention to an important but neglected figure (Thompson) and provides an innovative and timely reading of his work. In the author's hands, applied theory is given new life and new purpose." — Stephen Engelmann, editor of *Selected Writings: Jeremy Bentham*

"In this remarkable book, Mark Kaswan rescues and rehabilitates the reputation of a long-forgotten and unjustly neglected thinker—the radical Irishman, feminist, non-Benthamite Utilitarian, and a writer of remarkable range and power—William Thompson. In Kaswan, Thompson has finally found the expositor he so richly deserves. And we might in turn find in Thompson a vision of democratic possibilities that we so sorely need." — Terence Ball, author of *Reappraising Political Theory: Revisionist Studies in the History of Political Thought*

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