

THE EVOLUTION OF UTILITARIANISM: FROM BENTHAM'S FOUNDATIONS TO MILL'S REFINEMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an exploration of how the utilitarianism concept developed under Jeremy Bentham to John Stuart Mill. Utilitarianism is a moral theory that is founded on the virtue of maximum good conduct to maximum number of people. The version of Bentham focuses on the quantitative measurement of both pleasure and pain; he employs a method of hedonic calculus to define what actions are right or wrong and considers all the pleasures to be the same. Mill, in his turn, brings qualitative distinctions, and says that certain forms of pleasure are more valuable than the others, based on their inherent characteristic. By adopting a comparative philosophical view, this paper explores how Mill corrects and extends the model by Bentham in order to overcome its shortcomings especially on its perception of justice, individual rights and the depth of human experience. In this paper, it is claimed that the version offered by Mill is a significant change to the utilitarian concept, as it became more flexible and morally acceptable. Revealing this development, the work indicates that utilitarianism remains topical in contemporary philosophical and political ethics.

Keywords: Utilitarianism, Hedonic calculus, Justice

INTRODUCTION

Utilitarianism is a theory of ethics that judges an action and its morality as a result of its outcome. This perspective believes that the best course of action is one that brings happiness to the most people and causes minimized and less suffering to people. A moral course of action would achieve the most pleasure and the least pain to the majority (Bentham, 1789/1988; Mill, 1863/1998). Utilitarianism is a school of consequentialism that evaluates the morality of any action in terms of its outcomes, rather than the motives that inspired the action. Its modern incarnation is attributed to Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. Although the

concept of utility is presented in the modern language, its philosophical roots can be traced to the previous hedonistic philosophies. According to ancient philosophers such as Epicurus and the Cyrenaics, humans are inherently motivated to seek pleasure and avoid pain and consider pleasure as the highest good (Epicurus, 341270 BCE/2004). Their style, however, tended to put pleasure in line with personal benefit, instead of national interest (Irwin, 1995). Reason was the means of determining the benefits required in the quest of individual calmness yet psychological hedonism in itself is not a comprehensive moral machinery.

The early modern philosophy offered opposite developments. Thomas Hobbes was a

hedonist, who did not give much room to morality other than self defense (Hobbes, 1651/1994). In his turn, John Locke attempted to associate individuality with happiness in society by the means of divine providence (Locke, 1690/1988). Locke was also prone to making morality subservient to individual profit.

The reactions to these concerns were made by Bentham and Mill who developed utilitarianism, the system based on practical arguments. Under this way, the greatest happiness principle is used as a guide in moral choices as well as laws. Bentham believed that people are driven by the desire to get the pleasure and avoid pain. Though individuals tend to focus on their own interest, according to Bentham lawmakers were supposed to maximize the happiness of all the members of society (Bentham, 1789/1988). He proposed the hedonic calculus, a procedure which considers all pleasures to be equal but counted them by quantity. This concept was later refined by Mill who differentiated between higher pleasures such as intellectual and moral satisfaction and lower or physical pleasures and valued the former more (Mill, 1863/1998).

The idea behind this was to retain the attention to consequences as expressed by Bentham and yet also to address the perception that his thoughts were simplistic and did not take into account the full picture of justice, rights and the human experience. David Hume has significant proto-utilitarianism in his philosophy. Hume realised that pursuit of happiness is a universal human issue and that humanity tends to give a nod to what makes them feel good, irrespective of the beneficiary (Hume, 1739/2000). Rejecting strict psychological hedonism as proposed by Hobbes, Hume believed in the possibility of compassion in human beings, natural ability to be satisfied by happiness of other people. The foundations of moral sentiment are based on sympathy and they underlie the concept of duty, which is the achievement of the collective well-being without interest (Hume, 1751/1998). Although Hume did not state outright that pleasure is the only good, his interest in social advantage is very close to the ideals of utilitarianism.

Bentham admitted the place of sympathy, which was likely inspired by the explanation of Hume.

The general aspect that the paper is challenging is that, according to utilitarianism, its principles are derived only on the basis of the empirical statement that everyone desires his own happiness, an interpretation that runs the danger of committing the naturalistic fallacy (Moore, 1903/1993). Instead, utilitarianism is best seen as a liberal normative theory that is based on justice and the general well-being. The principle of utility, as affirmed by common sense, was self-evident, and persuasive in the process of moral as well as legislative thought, to both Bentham and Mill. Though critics believe that utilitarian ideal can be too ambitious to be used in ordinary practical life, it is a liberal concept that considers the value of happiness on an individual and the need of the community. This paper, therefore, aims to trace the development of utilitarianism with respect to the changes that Mill can implement on the quantitative hedonism developed by Bentham to the qualitative improvement, and how these changes can overcome the limitations of the model developed by Bentham, particularly in terms of justice, right of individuals, and the multifaceted nature of human well being.

BENTHAM'S CONCEPT OF UTILITY AS THE FIRST PRINCIPLE OF MORALITY

Utilitarianism by Jeremy Bentham is developed based on the concept of utility which he acknowledges to be the universal yardstick of ethical and political measurement. According to Bentham, two masters have sovereignty in human behavior pleasure and pain (Bentham, 1789/1988, p. 1) these are dictators of actions as well as ethical responsibilities. Morality according to Bentham lies in objective assessment of pleasure and pain which points to benefit, happiness or harm. Utility refers to the goodness of a course of action that leads to happiness or averts unhappiness to people who are involved. Bentham indicates that this principle is applied in the making of personal morals as well as in the ways in which the public policies and laws are

made. The legal systems, institutions, and political systems must also be evaluated by the way they assist in maximizing happiness. In this view, Bentham reevaluates morality as the concept having social implications and shifts it out of metaphysics or religion (Bowring, 1927; Birks, 1874).

Bentham was trying to establish the apparent position of utility as the major moral principle. He argued that the opponents of the principle need to give an alternative but all the rival theories, including those grounded on divine command, natural rights, or social contract are unable to present objective or universal standards (Bowring, 183843). Therefore, utility provides the background on which other moral principles are based.

THE FELICIFIC CALCULUS

Felicific or Hedonic calculus is one of the main concepts of Bentham. The approach aids in quantifying pleasures and pains to make decisions. According to Bentham (1789/1988), the calculus considers the strength, duration, certitude or proximity of a given pleasure or pain, its tendency to cause subsequent pleasure or pain, its purity and the number of persons affected. As an example, individuals tend to appreciate a longer lasting and stronger pleasure than a short lived and milder one. With this concept, individuals and politicians are able to make choices that enhance happiness in general. Bentham felt that the felicific calculus provided a rational and scientific method of dealing with morality, and that the aim of moralizing in this manner would be to make morality more scientific, and more focused on the well being of society. Other critics, however, objections that quantification of pleasure is oversimplifying moral experience (Davidson, 1957; Cowsill, 1968).

MILL'S REFINEMENT: QUALITATIVE DIMENSIONS OF PLEASURE

Bentham surely treated all pleasures as equal, but John Stuart Mill improved utilitarianism by showing that pleasures have different qualities. Moreover, Mill's approach recognized that some pleasures are higher and more valuable than others. In his work "Utilitarianism" (1861/1998), Mill accepts Bentham's ideas but argues further that all types of happiness do not have equal value. He believes that happiness itself has different levels of worth. Moreover, he says that higher pleasures like thinking, enjoying beauty, and being moral are only better than lower pleasures such as physical satisfaction. We are seeing that intellectual activities are superior to simple bodily pleasures. Mill argues that it is better to be an unhappy human than a happy pig and further states that being Socrates dissatisfied is better than being a satisfied fool. This shows that intellectual pleasure itself is more valuable than simple physical satisfaction. As per his belief, human dignity and reasoning require accepting that some pleasures are qualitatively better than others. This statement highlights his view regarding the superiority of certain pleasures. As per Mill's approach, utilitarianism focuses more on human values and answers the problems regarding Bentham's pleasure-based theory. This version still keeps the idea of greatest happiness as the main moral rule. Further, Mill places virtue at the core of his ethical system itself. He argues that virtue surely becomes an essential part of personal well-being, not just a way to achieve happiness. Moreover, virtue itself contributes directly to one's overall wellness and life satisfaction. We are seeing that Mill makes a difference between good qualities that are useful for results and those that are only valuable by themselves. He says that developing noble qualities like courage, kindness, and self-sacrifice leads to higher pleasures (Berger, 1969; Mill, 1861/1998).

Comparative Analysis: Bentham and Mill

Aspect	Bentham	Mill
Nature of pleasures	All pleasures are equal, measurable by felicific calculus	Pleasures differ in quality; higher pleasures take precedence
Ethical foundation	Psychological hedonism	Human dignity and rational capacities
Application	Universal application in legislation and policy	Emphasis on moral and cultural development
Focus	Quantitative maximization	Qualitative flourishing and virtue

Bentham and Mill both support the principle of utility, but they apply it differently. Bentham offers a clear method for shaping laws, although it may oversimplify ethics by looking only at pleasure. Mill's approach makes utilitarianism appear more ethical, but it is less precise because it depends on judgments that are hard to measure (Crisp, 1997).

SCHOLARLY CRITIQUES AND DEBATES

Despite the significant contribution made by Bentham and Mill on philosophical thinking, they are subject to constant criticism.

In 1974, Robert Nozick created the experience machine thought experiment in order to challenge utilitarianism. To him, the consideration of utility alone does not take note of other significant human values such as autonomy and authenticity. John Rawls (1971) believes that the majority can be seen to jeopardize the rights of the minorities as well since he posits that utilitarianism will just look at the happiness of the majority. Instead, he suggests justice as fairness as a more powerful one. By arguing that utilitarianism undermines personal integrity, Bernard Williams (1973) argues that people who espouse utilitarianism must abandon their

individual commitments at any given time, so long as utility dictates it. The utilitarian argue that these objections fail to recognize the inherent flexibility of the utilitarian thought. Such utilitarian's as Peter Singer (1993) apply this principle to global issues, and attempt to reduce suffering and enhance well-being internationally. Such instances reveal that the utilitarian ethics can be seen as flexible and applicable nowadays (Skorupski, 1989).

CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE

Utilitarianism still influences such fields as ethics, law, economy and government policy. Maximization of well-being has been behind cost benefit analysis and is fundamental to the discussions concerning climate change, animal welfare, and global equity (Singer, 2011).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, policymakers frequently resorted to the utilitarian concepts in making healthcare decisions, lockdown decisions, and the allocation of vaccines. They balanced what would be best to the community with safeguarding the rights of the individual.

Utilitarianism promotes the idea of democracy because it aims at enhancing the welfare of the entire population, as opposed to that of

certain groups. Even though it may prove to be a challenge to gauge both well-being and respect individual rights simultaneously, this is a useful approach both in theory and practice when it focuses on happiness and decreased sufferings (Donner, 1991; Berger, 1984).

CONCLUSION

This study explored the utilitarian philosophy of John Stuart Mill, paying a lot of attention to his theory of happiness and the central place of the notion of virtue in his moral philosophy. Utilitarianism of Mill is far better than the primitive hedonism commonly associated with classical utilitarianism, in that it provides a complex understanding of happiness taking into consideration the qualitative distinctions between better and worse pleasures (Mill, 1861/1998). The intellectual, moral and emotional activities are taken to be more rewarding than mere physical gratification. This perspective extends the idea of utilitarian ethics and provides a more holistic perspective of human well being (Crisp, 1997).

The concept of virtue held by Mill is also important because he regards it as the means of happiness and its element. Virtue not only helps to bring happiness in pragmatic terms but it is also a major component of well-being per se (Mill, 1861/1998; Berger, 1969). Mill claims that the development of such virtuous traits as valour, good-naturalness, self-sacrificing among others is related to more advanced forms of pleasure and more beneficent to the social welfare in general. Comparing the virtuous and non-virtuous qualities and highlighting the unstable character of the happiness, Mill accentuates the connection between the ethical growth and good of the society (Skorupski, 1989). The development of the utilitarianism, which started with quantitative act utilitarianism by Bentham and then progressed to the qualitative approach of utilitarianism by Mill, is an indication of the development of ethical philosophy. Bentham proposed the concept of utility and the felicific calculus to assist in the assessment of actions in accordance to the degree to which they

contribute to the happiness (Bentham, 1789/2007). Mill develops the concepts of Bentham basing on the greater pleasures and ethic nature. Such alterations respond to criticisms against the methodology of Bentham, though, continue to make maximization of the happiness the primary ethical end (Donner 1991).

The theory of utilitarianism remains an influential tool through which the morality and politics of the contemporary world are evaluated. Its emphasis on maximizing well being plays an influential part in the debate over bioethics, environmental policies, equitable distribution of resources and government decision making (Singer, 2011).

With the additional pleasures and the aspect of virtue, Mill adds an ethical component that presents human dignity, intellectual development, and moral uprightness to the forefront of working towards attaining the common good (Crisp, 1997). To conclude, the utilitarianism as developed by Mill offers a complex and well-developed theory of ethics incorporating the idea of happiness and virtue into the moral growth of the individual. The philosophical approach developed by Mill remains a lively system of ethics affecting greatly the process of moral reasoning and the decisions taken in the society as it introduces the element of virtue into the definition of utility and the personal dimensions of human wellbeing. It provides theoretical advice as well as practical solutions to modern-day ethical dilemmas

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