



Happiness and Individual

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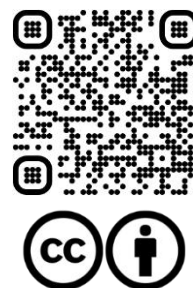
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Abstract— The term ‘Happiness’ is considered as an emotional state which is characterized by feelings of joy, satisfaction, contentment and fulfillment. According to Aristotle happiness comes in achieving all the goods regarding health, wealth, knowledge etc which leads to the perfection of human nature and to the enrichment of human life through the period of a whole lifetime. In this present paper, basically I shall attempt to concentrate on Mill’s concept of Utilitarianism. Utilitarianism is regarded as the Greatest Happiness Principle. It is one of the important theories of ethics. This theory emphasizes the greatest happiness of the greatest number as the ethical standard. According to this theory, an action is morally right if its consequences lead to happiness (absence of pain) and wrong if it ends in unhappiness (pain). It was Jeremy Bentham, who did most to systematize utilitarianism. Bentham’s disciple, J. S. Mill, was the next great utilitarian. This paper consists of three sections. The first section contains Mill’s view on individual liberty. In the second section, I have discussed Millian concept of utilitarianism in general and finally I conclude my discussion by raising the question whether Millian view of utilitarianism can ultimately be maintained consistently with his concept of individual liberty.



Keywords— Utilitarianism, Individual liberty, Pleasure, Distributive justice, Welfare

The term ‘Happiness’ is considered as an emotional state which is characterized by feelings of joy, satisfaction, contentment and fulfillment. Happiness is often described as involving positive emotion and satisfaction in life. While most of the human beings speak about happiness, actually they might be speaking about how they fill in the present situation or they might be indicating to a more general sense of how they feel about overall life.

Psychologists and other social scientists typically apply the term ‘Happiness’ as ‘subjective well-being’, when they speak about this emotional state. According to Aristotle happiness comes in achieving all the goods regarding health, wealth, knowledge etc which leads to the perfection of human nature and to the enrichment of human life through the period of a whole lifetime.

There are many different perspective of thinking about happiness. According to Aristotle mainly two types of happiness are considered. These are – 1) hedonia and 2) eudaimonia.

1) Hedonia: This type of happiness is deduced from pleasure. This is most often associated with doing what feels good, self-care, fulfilling desires, experiencing enjoyment and finally feeling a sense of satisfaction.

2) Eudaimonia: This kind of happiness is deduced from seeking virtue and meaning. Some significant components of eudaimonic well-being including feeling that one’s life has meaning, value and purpose. Eudaimonic happiness is more connected with fulfilling responsibilities, investing in vesting in long-term goals, concern for the welfare of other people and living up to the personal ideals.

According to Modern Eudaimonism virtue is accompanied by happiness. Happiness derives from the harmony of desires. Happiness is the feeling that accompanies the systematization of desires by reason. It is the feeling of self-realization. In this present paper, basically I shall attempt to concentrate on Mill’s concept of Utilitarianism and try to find out whether the million views of utilitarianism is ultimately consistent with his concept of individual liberty.

Utilitarianism is regarded as the Greatest Happiness Principle. It is one of the important theories of ethics. This theory emphasizes the greatest happiness of the greatest number as the ethical standard. According to this theory, an action is morally right if its consequences lead to happiness (absence of pain) and wrong if it ends in unhappiness (pain). Utilitarianism is a theory about rightness, according to which the only good thing is welfare (well-being or 'utility'). Welfare should, in some way, be maximized. Agents are to be neutral between their own welfare and that of other people and of other sentient beings¹.

It was Jeremy Bentham, who did most to systematize utilitarianism. Bentham's disciple, J. S. Mill, was the next great utilitarian. He was followed by Henry Sidgwick. One of the most recent versions of utilitarianism is that of R. M. Hare. Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill are the chief advocates of this theory. Bentham stressed on the quantitative aspect of utilitarian theory, while Mill stressed on the qualitative aspect of utilitarianism². This is the reason why Mill's ethical view is also known as refined utilitarianism.

This paper consists of three sections. The first section contains Mill's view on individual liberty. In the second section, I have discussed Millian concept of utilitarianism in general and finally I conclude my discussion by raising the question whether Millian view of utilitarianism can ultimately be maintained consistently with his concept of individual liberty.

The subject of Mill's Essay - 'ON LIBERTY' is mainly focused on so-called Liberty of the will. Here he considers the nature and limits of the power which can be legitimately exercised by society over the individual³.

The object of his book is to state one very simple principle, which should be entitled to govern absolutely the dealings of society with the individual in the way of compulsion and control, in the form of legal penalties, or the moral coercion of public opinion⁴. That principle is that the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any other is self-protection. That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant. Another person can not rightfully be compelled to do or forbear because it will be better for him to do so. There may be other good reasons for remonstrating with him or reasoning with him, or persuading him, or entreating him, but not for compelling him, or making him face any evil in case he does otherwise. Mill makes the remarkable observation that the

only part of the conduct of any one, for which he is amenable to society, is that which concerns others. In the part which merely concerns himself, a person's independence is absolute. Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign.

It is perhaps hardly necessary to say that this doctrine of individual liberty is meant to apply only to human beings in the maturity of their faculties. According to Mill, we are here not speaking of children or of young persons below the age which the law may fix as that of manhood or womanhood. Those who are still in a state to require being taken care of by others, must be protected against their own actions as well as against external injury.

Liberty as a principle has no application to any state of things anterior to the time when mankind has become capable of being improved by free and equal discussion. As soon as mankind have attained the capacity of being guided for their own improvement by conviction or persuasion, compulsion, either in the direct form or in that of pains and penalties for non-compliance, interference is no longer admissible as a means to their own good. It is justifiable only for the security of others.

Mill very clearly forgoes any advantage which could be derived for his argument from the idea of abstract right, as a thing independent of utility. Mill regards utility as the ultimate appeal in all ethical questions. But it must be utility in the largest sense, grounded on the permanent interest of a man as a progressive being. Those interests, Mill contends, authorize the subjection of individual spontaneity to external control, only in respect to those actions of each, which concern the interest of other people. But if one does an act hurtful to others, there is a *prima facie* case for punishing him, by law, or where legal penalties are not safely applicable, by general disapprobation. According to Mill, liberty of the individual must be limited by considerations of others. He must not make himself a nuisance to other people.

In the opinion of Mill, it is a blunder to suppose that those who stand up for utility as the test of right and wrong, use the term in that restricted and merely colloquial sense in which utility is opposed to pleasure⁵. From Epicurus to Bentham, those who accepted the theory of utility, meant by it, not something to be contradistinguished from pleasure, but pleasure itself, together with exemption from pain.

The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, utility or the Greatest Happiness Principle holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as 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. Mill admits qualitative differences between different kinds of pleasure. That is why for him, mental pleasure is more desirable than physical pleasure. From this point of view Mill acquires a different position from Bentham, who admits only quantitative difference between different kinds of pleasure. According to Mill, it is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied. He points out that it is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a full satisfied.

Mill had dwelt on this point, as being a necessary part of a perfectly just conception of utility or happiness, considered as the directive rule of human conduct. The idea behind the standard is not the agent's own greatest happiness, but the greatest amount of happiness altogether. And if it may possibly be doubted whether a noble character is always the happier for its nobleness, there can be no doubt that it makes other people happier and that the world in general is immensely gainer by it. Therefore it may be argued that utilitarianism would only attain its end by the general cultivation of nobleness of character, even if each individual was only benefited by the nobleness of others and his own, so far as happiness is concerned, were a sheer deduction from the benefit. So according to Mill the happiness which forms the utilitarian standard of what is right in conduct, is not the agent's own happiness, but that of all concerned. As between his own happiness and that of others, utilitarianism requires a person to be a strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator.

According to the greatest happiness principle, as above explained, the ultimate end, with reference to and for the sake of which all other things are desirable (whether we are considering our own good or that of other people), is an existence exempt as far as possible from pain and as reach as possible in enjoyments, both in point of quantity and quality. The test of quality and the rule for measuring it against quantity, being the preference felt by those who in their opportunities of experience, to which must be added their habits of self-consciousness and self-observation, are best furnished with the means of comparison.

We have already noticed that by his concept of individual liberty, John Stuart Mill wanted to emphasize upon individual freedom, individual welfare and individual right. But in his concept of utilitarianism he focused on the Greatest Happiness Principle; this means, the utilitarian standard, according to Mill, is not the agent's own greatest happiness, but the greatest amount of happiness altogether. Now the question is – are we able to trace a compatibility between the million view of individual liberty and his concept of utilitarianism? This is because while one

concept is concerned with the individual, the other concept is about the maximum number of people. Here the mere individual, with his own free projects can never violet the utility principle. Unfortunately the cost involved is individual liberty itself.

However it may be argued that the two principles are compatible with each other. This we may illustrate with the case of distributive justice in mind. The Utilitarian aims for a principle of distribution that benefits the maximum number of people. It may be argued that individual liberty helps in having proper distributive justice. One may argue that the exercise of rights to certain regions of decision – making is instrumental in promoting the attainment of distributive justice. The argument is based on the observation that much information in any society is only privately known; indeed, no single individual or decision making unit can feasibly know the some total of all information. From this observation it is possible to argue that the goal of distributive justice is best served in an environment where individuals are encouraged to exploit some of their private information; or in other words that except for certain very extreme circumstances some form of decentralization in decision making is desirable. In particular, this implies that a pure command system is almost never an optimal mode of organization even from the point of view of distributive justice, let alone from the vantage point of the innate rights that individuals may process to private decision making.

Society is a co-operative venture among individuals for mutual advantage and some form of centralized authority is required for coordinating the activities of the members of society. To be sure classical criteria of social welfare, such as utilitarianism, require for their furtherance a central authority whose activities far exceed the provision of the limited number of public services, such as the enforcement of contracts and the protection of persons or groups against force, theft and fraud that delineate the activities of the minimal state. The claims of distributive justice would, as a minimum require that this central authority be engaged in addition with the task of redistributing purchasing power among individuals via taxes and subsidies⁶.

It is also noted that the welfare optimum can be attained via a complete command system as well. But then the information that the state is assumed to possess is awesome in amount. It is assumed to know the preferences and endowments of each and every member of society. This observations alone suggest that individual right to certain private decisions may not only be a moral imperative, but may at once be a necessary prompted by the fact that the state processes incomplete information.

One supposes that there are certain pieces of information that are known (or which will be known) only by the individuals in question; that is they are costly (or in the extreme, case impossible) to monitor publicly this private pieces of information presumably include i) an individual's personal characteristics (e.g. his preferences and personal endowments); that is, what kind of person he is, ii) the action that he takes (e.g. how hard he works at a give task); that is, what he does, and iii) localized pieces of information about the state of the world or certain aspects of specialized technological possibilities. One supposes as well that there are certain pieces of information that are publicly known or which can be publicly observed at relatively little cost. There may be precise pieces of information (e.g. the amount of pollution emitted by a firm) or they may be statistical information (e.g. the age distribution in a give society at a given moment of time). Thus we are invited to consider organizations in which the outcome (i.e. an allocation of goods and services) is a function of private decisions that are based on private information and public decisions that are based on publicly known information. And we are invited to choose among them on the basics of their outcomes as measured by the chosen criterion of social welfare.

This is a difficult task. But it may first be asked why the state does not require of individuals to make their private information available to it – the point being that if it were to collect all the private information it could implement the full optimum. There are at least two answers to this question and quite clearly both are valid in the world we know. The first is that, if an individual know how the answers will be translated into social action he may have an incentive to lie with a view to tilting the social outcome more towards his favor than the full optimum would allow. The second is that even if all individuals are morally committed to the chosen criterion of social welfare and are truly prepared to act always with a view to maximizing this common criterion, the cost of communication – i.e. the costs in transmitting such messages – may be too high⁷.

All social organizations operate under a mixed system of commands and individual discretion. Even in a hierarchical structure of authority, such as a firm, each member is allowed a certain amount of discretion. As has been emphasized by Simon (1957)⁸ even an employment contract has built within it, the agreement that the employer will expect obedience from the employee for certain forms of command, such as the assignment of tasks. But in all cases the employee too an exercise a certain amount of discretion – in the manner in which he undertakes these tasks. A central reason why such discretion is desirable from the point of view of the goals

of an organization is the differences in the information that its members possess. When the goals of every member of the organization coincide there is an advantage in allowing for individual discretion. Further more, there is a case for individual discretion simply because an individual's genuine productivity may be weakened if he is under command. However, this argument is based on the primacy of maximizing welfare. Human freedom an initiative are valued because they sometimes are the medium through which welfare of all can be maximized.

Let us point out a few arguments against the compatibility of these two ideals (utilitarianism and individual liberty) which have been advanced by eminent thinkers like John Rawls.

We have seen that Utilitarians are concerned to maximize the net balance of satisfaction of the members of society. This means that some people have to suffer pain or loss in order to increase net social utility: an implication which in the view of the author of *A Theory of Justice*, is strongly in conflict with our usual intuitions of fairness. Rawls represents the problem as arising out of the maximizing strand in utilitarian thought. We are supposed to produce as much good as we can and not worry about who wins and who losses in the distribution process. It could be argued that the Rawlsian problem would not wholly disappear even on a version of the theory which merely told us to promote the good, without worrying about maximizing it. Making the most of the good we produce, would remain more important than distributing it equitably according to some non-utilitarian idea of equity. Allocation patterns would still be selected for their efficacy at releasing the good, rather than for their capacity to provide 'fair shares for all'⁹.

However, it could be argued more importantly that excessively heavy demands made by utilitarianism on the selflessness of individuals can be shown to involve a *reductio ad absurdum* of the theory¹⁰. This criticism has attained extra force in recent years as dissatisfaction has grown with the traditional praise of 'sainthood' which involves being indifferent to one's interest in any choice situation. Writers like Bernard Williams (1976^{11a}, 1985^{11b}), Thomas Nagel (1986¹²), and others have challenged the ideal of moral sainthood as intrinsically flawed. Moral saints are people who act as well as possible on every occasion, taking care never to be guided by thoughts of purely selfish advantage. The saint's perspective is a person – neutral one, from which everybody's interest, including his own count equally with him. As a result his life lacks what Scheffler calls the 'agent-centred prerogative' so jealously guarded in normal lives and which rests on the thought that one may permissibly

accord a special weighting to one's own concerns that would not be justified from a purely impartial standpoint. The complaint is that to reject the agent-centred prerogative in favor of moral sainthood is radically dehumanizing.

The saintly disregard of self is undoubtedly unsettling. Even where moral sainthood calls, as it sometimes must, for a heroic self sacrifice which is anything but bland, the fact that it is a sacrifice of self seems to make it too costly a goal for a rational individual to follow. Saints could be very different from ordinary people, yet fail to be distinctive among themselves. Becoming a saint seems to be less a matter of self-perfection than of self-replacement by an archangelical being an efficient do-gooder of the most anonymous kind. But how could it profit a man to aid the whole world yet suffer the loss of his own soul?

Utilitarian agents will be actual or prospective moral sense, with a colossal capacity for disengagement from their own interest. Williams sees it as a fatal objection to utilitarianism that it presses a demand for people to disregard their own deepest projects and commitments in order to serve the cause of the utility, impersonally considered, of the whole world of moral beings. This is a 'quite absurd requirement', because it robs a person of 'something which is a condition of his having any interest in being around in that world at all' (Williams 1976: 210). If he is not permitted to have a life of his own, he may as well be dead. Indeed unless people were allowed to have first – order projects, the 'general project of bringing about maximally desirable outcomes' would 'have nothing to work on, and would be vacuous' - because no one would have any personal desires to satisfy (Williams 1973:110). the utilitarianism demand is to make the agent into a channel between the input of everyone's projects, including his own, and an output of optimific decision; but this is to neglect the extent to which his actions and his decisions have to be seen as the actions and decisions which flow from the projects and attitudes with which he is most closely identified. It is thus, in the most literal sense, an attack on his integrity (116 – 17).

We thus see why the twin ideals of individual liberty and utilitarianism have an element of tension between them to be pursued together. On the other hand, if in the manner followed by Mill, the latter ideal is made the primary one; our intuition about the moral value of individual flourishing is gravely denied.

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