

# Mill's Liberal Utilitarianism

## HIS 'UTILITARIANISM' (1863)

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# Utilitarianism-Principle of Utility

- Utilitarianism is normative moral/ethical theory, developed by late 18th century English political Philosopher Jeremy Bentham, according to which an act is right if it tends to promote happiness or pleasure and wrong if it tends to produce unhappiness or pain-not just for the performer of the action but also for everyone else affected by it.
- Socio-economic and political decisions should be taken on the principle of **greatest happiness of the greatest number**(GHP Principle)
- Utilitarianism is a type **of consequentialism or teleological** (reverse deontological) principle-that actions should be judged on the basis of their consequences/result/outcome.
- Utilitarianism has evolved from '**Hedonism**' a general term for all theories of conduct based on 'pleasure'
- . **Examples:**
  - Deciding menu in a restaurant by the head of the family for the family
  - In public policy making, in making new laws where to build an airport?
- **Dilemmas in Utilitarianism:**
  - Should we kill one to save many lives?
  - Are all pleasures equal? Do we live only for pleasure? Then are we different from other animals?
  - Can we equate pleasure/pain of one person with other?

# Utilitarianism of J.S.Mills

- Mills claimed "happiness is the sole end of human action, and the promotion of it the test by which to judge of all human conduct"
- Mill's 'proof' of the principle of utility.
- **He argued by way of three subclaims.**
  - desirability: happiness is desirable as an end/goal of all human actions.
  - - exhaustiveness: nothing but happiness is desirable as an end
  - impartiality: each person's happiness is equally desirable.
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- Mill claimed that all desirable things are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in themselves, or as means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain
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- **His proportionality principle: "Actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness"**
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- Is happiness same as pleasure?

- \* Mill also made a distinction between pleasure and happiness.
- \* He argued happiness is superior to pleasure.
- \* Pleasure is materialistic and happiness is non materialistic.
  - For Mill; pleasure is satisfaction of appetite while happiness is satisfaction of soul.
- \* The ultimate happiness can't be achieved by physical pleasure, but through the development of personality for which 'Liberty' is essential.
- \* In fact Mill regarded Liberty as unique pleasure in itself and higher than any other form of pleasure.
- \* Thus, he quoted "He who has had taste of Liberty would never be prepared to exchange it for any other pleasure. He who has tested the water of Nile will not like any other water."
- \* Best on the above discussion, we can differentiate between utilitarianism of both Mill and Bentham in following point.

1. According to Bentham's utilitarianism action should be judged only on the basis of utility i.e. a wrong action can be justified, if it promotes pleasure and right it can't be justified if it promotes pain actions must be justified on utility rather morality and ethics. On the other hand; Mill argued that action must be also just based on morality and ethics along with utility.
2. Bentham's utilitarianism argues that pleasure only differs in quantity but according to Mill, pleasure also differs in quality along with quantity.
3. Mill differentiated between pleasure and happiness while Bentham has not made any such distinction.
4. According to Bentham's utilitarianism since pleasure does not differ in quality. Thus, persons also do not differ in quality hence in this sense Bentham is more democratic. While Mill argues that person differs in quality in this sense he creates some sort of inequality among individuals.

5. Bentham's utilitarianism oppose the state to intervene into life of individual.

According to Bentham; State should only intervene to secure "greatest happiness of greatest number". While Mill argued that state can intervene into the life of individual for promotion of general welfare.

6. For Bentham issues such as human development, honor and dignity of individual does not matter. But on the other hand these things matter for Mill.

7. Bentham's theory of Utilitarianism gives precedence to short term pleasures, while Mill's theory of Utilitarianism emphasize on long term pleasure. For example; watch TV over studying can give you pleasure in short span but it would be painful in long run. While studying might be painful in short span but will provide pleasure in long run.

# How Mill's Utilitarianism differed?

- Mill started with the position that Happiness is same as pleasure
- "By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain, by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure
- However, Mill departed from the Benthamite account, which holds that if two experiences/acts contain equal quantities( intensity and time) of pleasure, then they are thereby equally valuable.
- "It would be absurd that while, in estimating all other things, quality is considered as well as quantity, the estimation of pleasures should be supposed to depend on quantity alone.
- Mill held that pleasures "of the intellect, of the feelings and imagination, and of the moral sentiments"- mental/intellectual pleasures- are amongst the higher pleasures; For physical pleasures, pleasures gained in activity are of a higher quality than those gained passively
- He insisted that human beings were capable of intellectual and moral pleasures which was superior to the physical one that they shared with animals.
- it is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied, it is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied and if the fool or the Pig is of a different opinion it is because they only know their own side of the question the other party in comparison knows both side.
- Sabine's view: Mill's transformative criticism of classical utilitarianism was his greatest contribution to political thought. He differentiated between happiness and pleasure. He replaced the Quantitative approach of Bentham by a qualitative moral, ethical and human approach. He differentiated the public sphere regulated by law and the private sphere regulated by morality.

# Critical evaluation of Mill's Utilitarianism

- He seemed to have abandoned hedonism and therefore weakened the very foundation of Utilitarianism?
- Many critics claimed that Mill moves towards a Eudaimonistic or perfectionist account of happiness as given by Aristotle
- By happiness', they claim, Mill does not mean sensual pleasure, but rather the flourishing that is achieved in the realization of a ideal human character- virtuous, flourishing, good life
- Moral experts; Who to decide which is higher pleasure?
- Preferences of competent judges, the moral experts those who have experienced, and appreciated, both the types of pleasures being compared.
- Contradict with his Liberty principle( harm principle):
- How liberty and individual autonomy is not infringed by dictate of higher pleasure?
- How absolute liberty in the sphere of self-regarding actions not dilute GHP?
- Why liberty & individuality such vital human interests that none should harm it? Do they give utmost pleasure? Doesn't if contradict his basic tenet of utilitarianism?
- Nudging individuals towards higher pleasure is paternalistic, undermine autonomy choice, and may lead to slippery slope of state society guiding individuals to attain self-mastery, enjoy higher pleasure, guided by their higher-self- totalitarian tendencies.