

# Reconsidering the Practical Significance of Mill's Utilitarianism

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## Abstract

**In the long history of the development of Britain, utilitarianism has a dominant position and a high influence. People regard its basic moral principle -- happiness principle as the basic principle on which they live. From early theological utilitarianism, to secular utilitarianism, to political utilitarianism, the idea of utilitarianism takes hold, and Mill is arguably the master of utilitarianism. He believed that happiness was the only goal of human beings, that virtue was a means to happiness, and that the highest moral standard of society was the happiness of the greatest number of people.**

## Keywords

Mill, utilitarianism, happiness.

## 1. From Hedonism to Happinessism

Bentham, before Mill, advocated a "principle of pain and pleasure" based on hedonism, believing that pleasure and the expectation of pain relief are the motivation and ultimate goal of human behavior, while simple pleasure and complex pleasure are only quantitative differences. From this, the consequence theory is extended: the appropriateness is judged by whether the consequence can promote happiness to the greatest extent, and even seven calculation factors are proposed, which holds that the behavioral evaluation is based on the objective and universal basis. Mill argues that if in Bentham's opinion, the happy life as the highest purpose, not a thing is better than happiness more and noble, morality not only obviously v. happy number, so on the basis of Bentham, Mill in the first place to the distinction between quantity and quality of happy, think that people should pursue more enjoyment of life on the quality and quantity, and promoting advanced happiness, namely, the pursuit of happiness. Mill once said, "It is better to be an unsatisfied man than to be a contented pig, and it is better to be an unsatisfied Socrates than to be a fool.

Another point that is completely different from Bentham's is his introduction of the concept of happiness and his discussion of happiness as the ultimate standard of morality. The concept of happiness is central to Mill's theory, so the components of happiness and the means to achieve it are desirable. In his book *Utilitarianism*, Mill argues that "the doctrine that recognizes utilitarianism as the moral basis, in other words, maximalism, holds that behavior is proportional to its tendency to promote happiness; The right and wrong of an action is in proportion to its tendency to unhappiness. Happiness is pleasure and relief from pain; Unhappiness is pain and loss of pleasure. A great deal more must be said to make a clear observation of the moral standards established by this doctrine." On the subject of happiness, Mill argues not that it is unrealistic, as many people say, but that it is within the power and possibility of every human being to be happy. And it rebukes those who hold that virtue can be acquired by abandoning happiness, and therefore self-sacrifice which does not increase the total quantity of happiness, or which does not increase the tendency to increase the total quantity of happiness, is a futile and wasteful and unnecessary sacrifice in the eyes of the Kilometers. This transformation of happiness theory plays an important role in the development of utilitarianism.

## 2. Liberty and Utilitarianism

In his broad utilitarian conception of happiness, Mill particularly emphasizes individual liberty and the development of the self, the combination of which forms the gist of Mill's complete conception of liberty. The essence of individual freedom is not to be forced by the outside world, according to their own conditions to choose their own goals of life. For Mill, "The only freedom that is actually named is the freedom to pursue our own good in our own way, as long as we don't want to deprive others of their freedom, not to hinder them from achieving it. Everyone can decide his or her own health, and can supervise and protect his or her body, whether it is a healthy body, a healthy mind, or a healthy spirit. If people can tolerate everyone living the way they want to live, they will surely gain much more than forcing others to live the way they think is good." Such freedom is limited, of course, that's not hinder the freedom of others, only in relation to anyone that part is must be responsible to the society, on the part of the self, the individual is supreme sovereign, the meaning of this freedom is mutual restriction between individual freedom and social control, and to maintain a minimum of freedom.

The process of self-development is not only the process of individual fully realizing his socialization and moralization, but also the process of individual maintaining and giving full play to his individual freedom. It plays an important role in the concept of happiness. It is also an important component of happiness and a source of happiness. Just as the happiness of children is different from the happiness of adults, children cannot experience the happiness brought by adults' creativity, autonomy and sociality. The other is that he believes that self-development is a prerequisite for an individual to become a qualified moral person. There is no denying that the concept of self-development is the bridge between Mill's theory of happiness and his theory of freedom.

Self-development is a concept of development, and the importance of self-development in the theory of happiness is reflected in the importance of the free development of personality. Mill's view of the value of judging society and happiness in terms of personality development and personal well-being. Mill's freedom theory is consistent with his utilitarianism, Mill thinks free theory and utility maximization principle has its conflict, in certain cases, to preserve a person's freedom doesn't mean you're a utilitarian, and limit the freedom of a person is likely to produce more social welfare. In this regard, Mill believes that the value of freedom can be affirmed from the perspective of utilitarianism. This is true of freedom in the negative sense and freedom in the positive sense.

## 3. Conscience

For why people to act according to the theory of utilitarianism, Mill's theory of sanctions in the external sanctions with early utilitarian way of thinking, not to resort to person's inner moral consciousness or moral feelings, but also think that in addition to the external force of sanctions that force people to follow the way beyond, also have let people heart follow final push and root source, that is the conscience.

Conscience, as Mill puts it, "is the very essence of conscience, if it be free from partiality, if it be associated with the pure idea of duty, and not merely implicated in some duty or any circumstance of attachment." It is by its very nature a rather intense suffering that accompanies a breach of duty. When we act contrary to our conscience, our innermost feelings are replaced by regrets, and the more virtuous the man, the more intense the pain that goes with it. Conscience is not innate, but a learned ability, and "if it is cultivated, it can be highly developed." In daily life, conscience is caused by association and social emotion. Because association, ideas and things can be linked together, when we accept something, our likes and dislikes of a certain thing are correspondingly transferred to that thing. Social emotion is closely related to social

life, psychological association and educational environment. Individuals in social life naturally assume themselves to be part of the society, and people gradually develop the habit of considering others in such an environment. At least they will not harm the interests of others for their own interests, and the purpose of themselves and others will gradually become unified, and they will even feel that the interests of others are their own interests. It is also under this mechanism that the sanction of conscience functions. This combination of external sanctions and conscience sanctions is the highlight of Mill sanctions, and also becomes an effective binding force to realize the principle of utilitarianism.

#### 4. Modern Utilitarianism

Now about judgment of utilitarianism, there are two most basic question: if the first is a moving train in front suddenly above five people standing on the track, if, in accordance with the original rail travel will be killed in the five, but if the transformation direction will kill a person, to the problem of how to choose, according to the principle of the greatest happiness is necessarily sacrifice a few lives rather than most people's lives. There is also an important proposition, if five people are in urgent need of organ transplants, and there is a healthy person, if you kill the person you can save the five people, if you are a doctor, will you choose to kill the healthy person and save the five sick people? These two questions of utilitarianism are now the key to deciding whether or not you are a utilitarian, but the fact is that many people do not agree on the choice between the two questions. The choice of the former seems to be utilitarianism, but the choice of the latter is not, which makes utilitarianism have new research value in the new era.

In Mill's time there was a debate about justice and utilitarianism. Mill once believed that justice must be subordinated to the needs of social security, that the core of justice is rights, that the essence of the concept of justice is the concept of individual rights, and that the feeling of justice originates from the sense of justice and develops in line with the direction of public welfare. As a secondary moral code, justice is subordinate to utilitarianism. Equality, as the simplest standard of justice, has different requirements in different times and is included in utilitarianism. In terms of its essence, mill's view of justice from the social point of view of the overall security and interests, he didn't fully respond to critics argue that utilitarianism, allows even sacrifice the rights and interests of the minority in exchange for the greatest happiness of most people, so utilitarian view will always receive criticism of philosophers.

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