

Mill's Utilitarianism Based on Empiricism and Its Limitations

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Abstract: In modern times, the utilitarian school as an ethical theory had a great influence on contemporary human thought. The utilitarian argument is based on empirical epistemology. Take Mill's utilitarianism as an example, Mill argued that happiness is the ultimate goal of people's desire because people actually want it. The component of happiness or the means to achieve happiness in experience is what people actually desire. This confuses the difference between purpose and means. Experienced people judged the quality of happiness, higher happiness is better than lower happiness. Denying the goodness of a behavior is proportional to the amount of happiness that produces it. The inner binding force of the utilitarian principle is formed by experience and acquired education, and the concept of deontology is used to make utilitarianism harmonizing.

Keywords: Utilitarianism, Mill, Empiricism.

1. INTRODUCTION

In ancient Western countries, the widely accepted ethical argumentation is the argumentation of the natural law school. Its main point is that the rules of human behavior come from the natural law promulgated by God. In modern times, the rise of empirical epistemology laid the foundation for the utilitarian school in ethics and social sciences. All the choices of knowledge must resort to the daily experience of human beings rather than to human reason or God's authority. Ethical and moral arguments are no exception.

Utilitarianism is an ethical theory based on actual efficacy or interests. Its basic viewpoint is extremely simple - ethical behaviors or institutions should be able to promote "the most happiness of most people." Bentham and Mill are the main representatives of the utilitarian school. Bentham believes that sensory experience is the most fundamental and true basis for all knowledge, including moral knowledge. Therefore, ethics must also be based on humankind's pursuit of nature and self-interest. Bentham used utilitarianism in political and legislative theories, negating abstract assumptions such as social contract, natural rights, and natural law. He believes that these things are all fictions and illusions that violate the facts of experience and cannot be used to explain the basis of state and politics.

On the basis of Bentham, Mill made a comprehensive of Utilitarianism, and at the same time corrected some defects of Bentham's utilitarianism, such as qualitative differentiation of happiness, emphasizing that spiritual happiness is greater than the physical sense of happiness.

2. IN AN EMPIRICAL SENSE, HAPPINESS IS THE ULTIMATE GOAL OF PEOPLE'S DESIRE.

Mill believes that to prove anything worthwhile, the only possible evidence is that people actually want it. "The only proof that capable of being given that an object is visible is that people actually see it. T The only proof that a sound is audible is that people hear it; and so of the other sources of our experience." [1] Utilitarianism argued that happiness is a worthy desire of purpose, and the only purpose worthy of desire; if other things are worth desire, then simply because they can be used as a means to achieve happiness. However, in daily experience, in addition to desire for happiness, people also desire virtue, desire for health, and even desire for power, money, and fame. Mill believes that the desire for power, money, and fame is stronger for some than for other desires. Power, money, and fame have become a part of happiness as a means to obtain happiness. If they have this means, or if they think they already have it, they will feel happy. Without this means, they will feel pain and misfortune. Power, money, and fame satisfy our primitive desires and become the source of happiness.

According to utilitarianism, people did not originally desire virtue, but because virtue is associated with pleasure and suffering, it is conducive to happiness and in particular to against suffering. People will feel that virtue itself is a kind of good and pursues this Goodness is as strong as other goodness. In this way, virtue is changed from a tool for the pursuit of happiness to the purpose of happiness itself. Appreciating and needing the cultivation of virtues is the primary condition for public happiness. Therefore, no matter what people desire, if it does not regard it as a means to achieve happiness outside itself, it is to turn it into a part of the purpose of happiness itself.

Mill came to this conclusion by confusing the difference between purpose and means, so that the use of the concept of purpose and means, inevitably there is a logical confusion. In particular, virtue has also become the purpose of people's desire. Due to the different nature of virtue and happiness, happiness is not the only purpose that people desire. Mill believes that the purpose of virtue as happiness is that people should seek morality for virtue itself, that is, ethical pursuit of virtue. [2]

Utilitarianism uses human experience or the opinion of most people to prove that the ultimate goal that life should pursue is the most happiness of most people. Mill believes that since everyone believes that it is a fact that happiness is to be obtained within the scope of happiness, it can be proved that happiness is a kind of good, everyone's happiness is a good thing for him. Public happiness is a collective good for all people. There are two flaws in this inference. The first is that what is actually desired is not something that is worthwhile, that is, in the sense of experience it is impossible to introduce "value" from "facts". The second is that the pursuit of happiness to avoid suffering is human nature. We cannot directly introduce everyone to pursue

the happiness of the greatest number of people from everyone's pursuit of their own happiness. People's pursuit of personal interests cannot explain everyone's pursuit of public happiness. To make up for the second issue, we must add "reasonable love" instead of relying solely on "self-interest".

Based on the utilitarianism of Bentham, Mill joined the concept of "benevolent spectator" to distinguish utilitarianism from legitimate egoism. "As between his own happiness and that of others, utilitarianism requires him to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator." [1] In Bentham's utilitarianism, he believes that individual happiness and public happiness are consistent under the premise of personal happiness. As long as each person truly pursues his own greatest happiness, the result must be the greatest happiness of the most people. Personal happiness is the foundation of public happiness, and social interests are the synthesis of personal interests. [3]

In Mill's view, the distinction between desire for virtue and desire for power, fame and money emerged in the face of public happiness. "The utilitarian morality does recognize in human beings the power of sacrificing their own greatest good for the good of others. It refuses only to admit that the sacrifice is itself a good. A sacrifice which does not increase, nor tend to increase, the sum total of happiness it considers as wasted. The only self-renunciation which it applauds is devotion to the happiness, or to some of the means of happiness, of others; either of mankind collectively, or of individuals within the limits imposed by the collective interests of mankind."

[1] Mill esteems this utilitarian self-sacrifice and distinguishes it from the pure morality of self-sacrifice. Pure morality and self-sacrifice, for example, Zhu Xi's thought of "starving to death is small and misfit is big", and utilitarianism is the idea of "to do as you would be done by" and "loving neighbors as yourself".

In Mill's view of utilitarianism and happiness, there is a view that the individual happiness and the social happiness are unified. However, there is a clear contradiction between the idea of self-sacrifice and this view. The sacrifice made for the happiness of others or for the well-being of others is actually a moral obligation, and personal happiness is the natural purpose of individual behavior. On the basis of experience, by observing the relationship between purpose and interest, there can be no complete solution to the conflict between the two.

3. JUDGING SPIRITUAL HAPPINESS IS HIGHER THAN THAT OF PHYSICAL SENSE ON THE BASIS OF EXPERIENCE.

In the view of utilitarianism, the "suffering" and "pleasure" caused by behavior are the sole basis for judging the good and evil of behavior. In Bentham's view, the difference in suffering and pleasure produced by different behaviors is only the difference in quantity. The pleasure that a child gets in a pushpin game is the same as the pleasure that an adult gets from poetry. Treating different qualities of happiness as the same thing is the basic point of view of Bentham's happiness principle. Bentham's method of calculating suffering and pleasure is based on this calculation of the sum of the pleasure and suffering caused by the behavior and

the pursuit of maximum utility. If the value of pleasure is greater than the amount of painful value, then this behavior is “good”, and vice versa is “evil”.

Mill made further improvements in Bentham's point of view. He proposed that happiness has a distinction between low-level pleasure and high-level pleasure, and put forward the concept of happy “quality”. The so-called “pleasure” or “happiness” of Mill’s utilitarianism does not refer to the pleasure of animal nature, but to the happiness of man, the pleasure of reason, the pleasure of feelings and imagination, and the pleasure of moral emotions. Regarding the difference in the quality of pleasure, Mill thinks that “Of two pleasures, if there be one to which all or almost all who have experience of both give a decide preference, irrespective of any feeling of moral obligation to prefer it, that is the more desirable pleasure.” [1] For people who have experienced or are more familiar with both kinds of happiness, using sensory experience to judge that mental happiness is higher than another physical happiness. On the other hand, the relative amount of happiness has become less important.

In the empirical sense, there is no doubt that those who are equally acquainted with, and equally acquainted with appreciating and enjoying, both do give a most marked preference to the manner of existence which employs their higher functions. The pursuit of spiritual happiness is greater than physical happiness. “Few human creatures would consent to be changed into any of the lower animals for a promise of the allowance of a beast’s pleasures; no intelligent human being would consent to be a fool, no instructed person would be an ignoramus, no person of feeling and conscience would be selfish and base, even though they should be persuaded that the fool, the dunce, or the rascal is better satisfied with is lot than they are with theirs.”[1] This is similar to what Plato described in the cave metaphor. The free man who escaped from the cave saw the real world outside the cave. Prisoners trapped in caves, even the wisest ones of them, are merely poor creatures that can observe the regularity of images. Therefore, people who know the truth of things do not long for honors and rewards in caves, preferring to be a poor master outside, and not willing to return to the cave as an advanced prisoner. For this explanation of the pursuit of spiritual happiness and qualitative happy preference, Mill was attributed to the sense of dignity possessed by everyone in a certain form. This sense of dignity forms a certain proportion with the advanced functions possessed, but it is not a strict ratio. Human beings are naturally born with the nature and willingness to pursue a high level of happiness and a noble life. This nature and willingness form the foundation from which people can move from egoism to altruism, and Mill laid the foundation for distinguishing the quality and quantity of happiness. [4]

This kind of comparison is carried out among people who have experienced and are familiar with both types of happiness. Otherwise, only one of them is known. There is no way to make a comparison. It is an empirical comparison. Mill thinks what kind of happiness is more worthwhile to enjoy. What kind of survival method is more enjoyable? It is only the people who are familiar with the two that make judgments that it is the final adjudication and there is no other way. At the same time, Mill assumes that those wise people are fools first, those who are educated are ignorant first, and those who have conscience are once selfish and despicable.

“It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied.”[1] Because the fool only knows his own way of life, and Socrates understands both lifestyles. Even if a fool is more likely to get happy satisfaction than Socrates, Mill distinguishes the concepts of "happiness" and "satisfaction." The lower the hedonism of the being, the greater the possibility that the happiness he pursues will be satisfied. The presence of a high-level function and the pursuit of a high level of happiness would assume that any happiness he can pursue is imperfect. But the fool was not aware of this imperfection, and Mill stipulated that everyone had experienced the joy of the low-level animals during the demonstration process.

In addition, Mill proposes to distinguish happiness from quality and distinguish between low-level happiness and high-level happiness. However, Mill did not propose a standard that distinguishes these two kinds of happiness. There is no basis for any standards, and this distinction criterion should be something different from happiness. If we use high-level happiness itself to make distinctions from low-level happiness, this confuses the standards with the ones that use standards to distinguish them, forming an internal logic of confusion. Mill ruled with experienced people who are familiar with both kinds of happiness, including the division of cultural literacy and moral quality, but it is only an empirical distinction.

In Mill's view, a view that high-level happiness is superior to low-level happiness is included. If a pleasure is far more qualitative than another pleasure, even if the amount of the latter is greater, it is insignificant for the former. This is consistent with Bentham's view that the good and the evil of behavior only depend on the amount of happiness and pain caused by the behavior. Only focusing on the qualitative effect of behavior that brings happiness does not meet Bentham's theory of utilitarianism.

4. UTILITARIAN INTERNAL CONSTRAINTS ARE INFLUENCED BY EXPERIENCE AND EDUCATION

In order to put the best interests of the most people into practice, Bentham insisted on the principle of suffering and happiness. Since all people are subject to happiness and pain, there is a natural nature that seeks happiness to avoid suffering. It is necessary to find the forces that lead to suffering and happiness from nature, politics, and religion as a moral binding force, so Bentham insists on moral principles.

On the basis of insisting on the law of morality, Mill believes that the utilitarian moral standards have both external and inherent sanctions. The external sanctions are the hope of favor and the fear of displeasure from our fellow creatures or from the Ruler of the Universe, along with whatever we may have of sympathy or affection for them, or love and awe of him. Extrinsic rewards and punishments, whether spiritual or physical, whether out of sympathy for human beings or awe of God, are the driving forces and bindings of ignoring personal interests and pursuing the greatest happiness of most people. Therefore, heteronomy can promote the development of utilitarian morality.

Mill believes that, like all other ethical standards, the inherent sanctions of the utilitarian moral standards is based on human inner feelings. This feeling, if it is impartial and unselfish, and is associated with a purely obligatory conception, and not associated with a particular form of obligation or any additional circumstances, is the essence of conscience. Experience has shown that conscientious feelings do exist. It is a human fact that can have a great effect on well-educated people.

Mill opposes the transcendentalist view. He believes that such moral feelings are not inherent but acquired, and are the result of acquired experience and education. Mill thinks that even if human beings have innate feelings, then this feeling is also a kind of feeling that pays attention to other people's suffering and happiness. Most morality depends on the consideration of the interests of our compatriots, and it is an intuitive moral obligation to pay attention to the suffering and happiness of others. This intuitionism has increased the effectiveness of internal sanctions and is more conducive to the realization of utilitarianism. Mill believes that the means may become part of the purpose. For example, power is only a means to achieve happiness, but people pursue power and turn power into purpose.

The foundation of conscience formation is the formation of moral connections. Due to the existence of external sanctions, people gradually formed the concept that suffering and happiness is related to the cause and effect of moral in the experience life. This kind of moral association constantly repeats and strengthens the final forming habits. If you follow your inner morality, you will be happy. If you don't follow morality, you will suffer. In this situation, the means gradually become part of the goal, and the sense of morality becomes a pure feeling in the human heart.

Education plays an important role in the formation of conscience. Marx thinks that man is the sum of all social relations. People are in a certain social relationship and cannot be separated from social relations. Man's survival and his ultimate purpose are inseparable from his society. The educational function of the external environment makes people understand the relationship between personal interests and social interests, and slowly produce social feelings. The social feeling is the desire to coordinate with our compatriots, demand that people act according to certain criteria, emotionally favor the welfare of others, or at least tend to actually consider the welfare of others to a greater extent. This social feeling has become a source of strength for utilitarianism. As people in society, it is their own natural needs to be in harmony with their compatriots in terms of their feelings and goals. Mill has obviously joined some deontological viewpoints to supplement the utilitarian deficiencies.

5. THE SIGNIFICANCE AND LIMITATIONS OF UTILITARIANISM

The premise of utilitarian argumentation is based on empirical epistemology, which is different from the basic spirit of Western traditional morality. The traditional moral spirit is based on the self-denial and altruism of the supremacy of God. There is a transcendent first principle as the origin and basis of the moral obligation. Kant said: "Your actions must be such that the rules of conduct on which he is based can be accepted by all rational people as a rule". However, in the

opinion of the empiricist school, the right and wrong of behavior, like the true and false of knowledge, must be judged by observation experience. The basic spirit of utilitarianism lies in the affirmation of personal interests in daily experience. This kind of interest is called "happiness". Empiricism puts out "value" based on "facts" and "to be" from "ought to be", but there are major problems in this process. Because experience will change at any time without an absolute principle, it is a relativist epistemology.

In his theory, Mill inherited the critical characteristics of Bentham's utilitarianism, including external constraints on personal behavior. At the same time, he also enriched Bentham's thinking and joined the internal sanctions of morality and the unity of personality development and happiness. [5] The unlimited play of personal potential is closely linked with happiness, so that utilitarian ethics takes into account both the social perspective and the free development of human beings, so that ethics covers a variety of academic backgrounds and is still widely used in various forms.

While enriching Bentham's thoughts, Mill supplemented utilitarianism with self-sacrifice and made utilitarianism have the characteristic of obligation theory, which brought harmony and balanced characteristics to utilitarianism. In addition, utilitarianism cannot fully explain justice. First, utilitarianism is the result of the application of legitimate egoism to society. It does not make a strict distinction between people. Second, utilitarianism belongs to teleology. It uses "good" to define "legitimateness," and justification is defined as the greatest increase in the good. This leads to the utilitarianism principle does not care about the distribution of the total amount among individuals and cannot explain the fairness of distribution.

Mill's utilitarianism has experienced the trials and criticisms of the times. The practical value and logical dilemmas coexist. The unique and abundant ideological connotation contained in it has important implications for the construction of our contemporary ethics system.

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