

Case study on mills utilitarianism

[Experience](#), [Belief](#)



Philosophy

John Stuart Mill writes in his Utilitarianism: “ It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; 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 to the comparison knows both sides.” First, summarize the main ideas of the theory of Utilitarianism. Then, explain this quote and discuss its significance in Mill’s Utilitarian account of pleasure and pain.

John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), in his “ Utilitarianism” (1879/2004), defined a good action as the greatest happiness for the greatest number of individuals (also known as the principle of utility). For him, any moral action is good when the consequences that ensue are more pleasurable, favorable or beneficial than inaction. He asserted that most actions might lead to either happiness or sadness. Nonetheless, in any context wherein there are various alternative courses for an action, what is morally right thing to do should lead to the overall increase in happiness of most, if not all, people. Hence, an individual’s worth may either be lesser or greater in consideration with the majority of people. Some of the strengths of Mill’s Utilitarianism are: (1) it is morally worthwhile and highly influential in its approach to ethics because a moral agent aims for the maximum happiness for most, if not all, people; (2) it provides a utilitarian referential point wherein any ethical questions may be given an answer; and, (3) it takes pleasure or happiness seriously, implying total happiness whenever possible. However, utilitarianism has not without objections, such that: (1) it is so demanding. In extreme utilitarianism, analyzing every course of action would quickly and easily bring

each human activity to a stop (which is hypothetically true); (2) it does not offer a consensus regarding the intersubjective measure of pleasure or happiness; (3) it is inconsistent whenever there is a choice between positive consequences and a moral agent's integrity; and, (4) it will create tyranny or promote lawlessness due to inequality in sharing benefit and cost for members of a community or group.

Concerning Mill's (1879/2004) statement that: " It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; 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 to the comparison knows both sides," he is of the idea that person should opt to use his/her better/higher human attributes, qualities and traits. For example, in choosing between intellectual and bodily pleasures, an individual should choose the former. The reason for this is the long-term pleasures (happiness) associated with exercising one's higher human faculties (e. g., reasoning and creative powers) for one's own advantage and for the rest of the majority (greatest number) of people. If a person chooses the lesser pleasures (human attributes), empirically, they will not last for a longer period considering that an individual's, not to mention all other people's, insatiable sensual desires are for the time being. Although people are also of the opinion that human beings' quest for knowledge cannot also be quenched, it simply cannot be equated with the value most people attach to intellectual abilities in a wide variety of contexts. As such, Mill put such a great emphasis on education because of the empirical value all or most people give to man's higher faculties, which are more preferable to any

lower faculties .

A person is a rational being, social, economic, spiritual, and so forth entity. A person can reason out, judge among alternatives, invent, etc. to his/her own satisfaction and for the benefits of society. Although, he/she may not always be victorious in all his/her attempts and endeavors in life, he/she learns from his/her experiences. Unlike a pig, he/she does not have the higher faculties similar to man. A pig only consumes his/her food until he/she is satisfied. The satisfaction he/she gets remains the same throughout his/her existence.

He/She does not even know that it is time for him/her to be eaten as food by man. In the same line of reasoning, a beautiful woman without discretion was even compared to a jewel of gold in a swine's snout (King James Version, Proverbs 11: 22) or directly to a pig that washed itself only to wallow in the mud (The Complete Jewish Bible, II Peter 2: 22).

The comparison made between Socrates dissatisfied and a fool satisfied is due to the fact that the former has a noble and lofty purposes/ ideals than a fool whose satisfaction is mostly ephemeral and carnal. It was even said in Proverbs 17: 12 that it is better to meet a bear whose cubs have been stolen from her than meet a foolish man acting stupidly. This is because there is a greater possibility that a foolish man can do. So, whether a pig or a fool, they are just the same; they do not really know the end-results of their actions and the greater harm it will cause to other people.

When Mill stated that “ the fool, or the pig is of a different opinion [] “ because they only know their own side of the question” means that they cannot even weigh the pros and cons of their decisions and actions in life. On the other hand, people who have learned to practice and exercise their

higher mental faculties consider most, if not all, sides of a question. Hence, the “ other party” are not one-sided, biased or prejudicial in their decisions, actions and inactions.

In recap, the significance of Mill’s quotation with his utilitarian account of pleasure is manifold. First, a wise person (like Socrates) should seek after the higher pleasures in life using one’s higher faculties even if the initial repercussions will make him/her dissatisfied in life. By implication, even if there is a need to sacrifice one’s happiness for the sake of the greatest number of people (like what martyrs do), it should be the case. Higher ideals cannot be bargained with lower pleasures in life. Most people who use their higher abilities should look for what is good in and for their fellow human beings. Satisfaction may not be evident at the onset, but what is truly important is knowing how to value and distinguish real pleasure from make-believe happiness. Thus, it can be inferred that a wise man’s dissatisfaction (oxymoronically, “ contentment” is a more satisfying pleasure or is more qualitatively better) than a foolish man’s satisfaction (self- or vested-interest) oftentimes resulting only to long lasting (or even, lifetime) sadness and regret. Thus, for my part, I would rather prefer a Socratic life than a life full of folly. As common sense dictates, a Socratic life is not always dissatisfaction because a person can strike a reasonable balance living a good life wherein he/she can enjoy moments of intense happiness and lasting pleasures .

Works Cited

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