

The Role of Induction in Utilitarianism: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract:

Utilitarianism is an important theme of normative ethics. It still contains application for more research to introduce a more rational and acceptable explanation though thinkers have talked much about it. They all agree in one point that is the cardinal end of life is to desire happiness but differ in using principles to judge happiness. In utilitarianism we regard the action as morally right if it provides pleasure and wrong when it tends to produce pain. The classical outlook of the theory adds the number of people with pleasure. It holds the view that our moral duty is to produce maximum pleasure for the maximum number of the society. However, the theory can be explained with different dimensions. It follows the inductive method to be constructed though the key spirit of the method conflicts with it. Despite this, there is no way to deny the significance of utilitarian principle in taking decision or judging action in our practical life.

Key words

Happiness, Intrinsic, Quantity, Quality, Cost-Benefit, Induction, Particular, General and Utilitarianism.

Introduction

Utilitarianism is a moral theory in the domain of knowledge. The concept of utilitarianism was introduced in the eighteenth century by some English moralists who emphasized on generosity or good conduct the objective of which is the greatest happiness for the greatest number that later became a slogan but the systematic account of it was flourished in the nineteenth century by Jeremy Bentham, James Mill and John Stuart Mill. In fact, the theory which is related to the standard of morality introduced by the said thinkers is known as utilitarianism. Though they followed different techniques to explain the concept but the identical goal of their explanation is to emphasize on universalistic pleasure in lieu of individualistic pleasure. They regard utility as the standard of morality and make us to desire the maximum happiness for the maximum number. They identify good with pleasure like Epicurious and emphasize on the maximization of the good.

Objectives of the Research

This paper first presents the historical background of utilitarianism and then explains its classical approach from different point of view. It also presents the theory with different dimensions. The key purpose of this paper is to show the role of induction in utilitarianism.

Research Methodology

The paper is basically a qualitative research. It has been carried out through the analysis of the views given by different thinkers. In this study, inductive method has been devised

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to establish the utilitarian principle which stands for the maximum happiness for the maximum number. Even the principle can be justified through the deductive method using in social life. Besides, in this paper different books and research articles have been followed as the secondary sources.

Utilitarianism

It is necessary to know the root of utilitarianism from where it originates. It comes from the term 'Hedonism' which considers pleasure as the cardinal end of life. It is the innate trait of human nature to desire pleasure though the maximum part of life is filled with pain. The philosophy of pain is meticulously explained in Buddhism where life is full of suffering (Chatterjee & Datta, 1984:119). We expect pleasure being influenced by the ignorance. Buddha at the same time indicates the path which leads to the cessation of sufferings. In fact, pleasure and pain are two trends of one life. We face of them equally in our ordinary life. Pleasure is discussed in hedonism which is of two kinds like psychological hedonism and ethical hedonism. The theory after which men always do seek pleasure is called psychological hedonism and men ought always to seek pleasure after ethical hedonism. Ethical hedonism is of two types like egoistic hedonism and altruistic hedonism the latter is also called utilitarianism. Since the paper is of utilitarianism therefore it can be discussed in details though all types of hedonism contain more or less significance.

Simply what utilitarianism means is clear to us. But the thinkers use the term from different points of view for which the ordinary people often become confused. Some early thinkers including Richard Cumberland and John Gay use the concept of utilitarianism in theological sense. They hold it is our duty to aggrandize happiness since God approves it. God makes a man happy or miserable. John Gay says since God desires the happiness of all mankind and fixes the criterion of virtue therefore we should obey and follow His will. It is stated that the happiness of mankind may be said to be the criterion of virtue, but once removed (SEP,2014:2). Likely William Paley also holds the view that general happiness is the summum bonum. God must desire the general happiness of all. But Hume, the most influential narrator of the theory, rejects such theological notion regarding utilitarianism in favor of naturalistic view of human nature. He holds that we do good action for others due to sympathetic engagement with them. What we do, do willingly. Nothing compels us to do better for others.

Utilitarianism may be characterized as a fact which judges actions as right or wrong on the basis of utility. By the principle of utility is meant that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever (Bentham, 1781:14). It will be easy to understand the nature of utilitarianism if we can grasp the meaning of Mill's view though it alone is not enough to make the concept clear and distinct to us. 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 pleaser, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure (Mill, 1863:10). It implies that every action can be judged on the basis of the criterion of utility whether that action is right or wrong. According to Quinton as a theory of ethics it provides a criterion for distinguishing between right and wrong action and, by implication, an account of the nature of the moral judgments that characterize action as right or wrong (Quinton, 1973:1). In fact, the thing which has utility must be morally meaningful, otherwise not.

Utilitarianism is also the basis of the techniques of economic cost-benefit analysis (Mishan, 1973:14-17). This kind of analysis provides us knowledge to understand the nature of business and makes us alert about the investment in business. No company can run properly without taking into consideration the factor of cost-benefit. In the competitive market consumers favor those companies who provide the product with cheap price. Therefore each company produces the product considering its monetary benefit. For example, if the monetary benefits of a soap produced by a company exceeds the monetary costs and no other company can make it with less cost, the said company should be undertaken to produce the soap. Here the key factor is the benefit of the product which must outweigh the cost of that product.

The principle can also be explained in terms of policy making. The society or any authority takes into consideration those policies which ensure the most benefits for the most people. If a policy fails to ensure the most benefit can't be termed as good policy after utilitarian principle. So it will be wise to think about the consequences of the policy before implementation. Thus, it is seen that the utilitarian principle helps us to take proper policy in individual or social life.

It is also remarkable that in utilitarianism pleasure and happiness are used in identical meaning though there is a little difference between these two. Pleasure is usually associated with the sensory or perceptual level of experience, whereas happiness is associated with the thought or conceptual level of experience (Titus, 1954:153). The rational end of conduct is to produce happiness. Nothing is good except happiness. Happiness is intrinsically good. Other things may be considered to have intrinsic value if they are used as means to attain happiness.

The classical approach to utilitarianism has been developed by many influential thinkers including Bentham, Mill and Sidgwick. We all know Bentham and Mill as legal and social reformer who emphasize on the maximum pleaser of the maximum member of the society instead of self-pleaser to determine the rightness or wrongness of an action. But they differ in that the former admits of the quantitative distinction of pleaser and the later admits of the qualitative distinction of pleaser. To explain the classical approach of utilitarianism it will be consistent to mention Sidgwick's view that stands for maximum pleaser of maximum number of the society. He says we are bound to seek our own greatest pleasure, and yet we are bound also to seek the greatest pleasure of the aggregate of sentient beings

(Mackenzie, 1929:175). However, a brief overview on utilitarianism of the said thinkers can be presented here.

Jeremy Bentham

Jeremy Bentham, the most influential stalwart of utilitarianism, develops it in a clear and systematic manner. He holds that utility is the moral standard of an action. An action whether right or wrong depends on its utility. Nothing is meaningful without utility. He explains human nature in a different way. It is the tendency of sentient being to seek pleasure and avoid pain. Therefore it is said that man is a pleasure-seeking, pain-avoiding animal (Titus, 1954:155). He also says nature has placed mankind under the governors of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what to do, as well as to determine what we shall do (Bentham, 1781:14). We should perform such actions which must produce pleasure. It is our moral duty to maximize pleaser since the rightness or wrongness of an action depends on the quantity of pleaser. The key message of Bentham's view is that if the actions tend to produce the maximum pleaser of maximum number then they are right if not then they are wrong. In fact, he stands for altruistic hedonism in lieu of egoistic hedonism because the former contains the interest of later. Therefore it is not one's duty to produce his own good rather his moral duty is to produce pleasure for all.

Pleaser or pain can't be differentiated in terms of quality after Bentham. He holds that the difference is of quantity in pleaser or pain. To estimate the quantity of pleaser or pain he used seven criteria like intensity, duration, certainty, propinquity, fecundity, purity and extent. According to him, we should desire those actions which provide us maximum pleaser and never desire those actions which tend to produce less pleaser. It can be said after the said parameters that between two actions the pleaser of which is more intense should be desirable. Similarly between two actions the pleaser of which is more durable should be desirable. Likely the parameters mentioned above can be used in order to estimate the quantity of pleaser or pain of actions.

It may seem difficult even time consuming to estimate the quantity of pleaser of each action using the said parameters. Therefore Bentham holds that the quantity of pleaser or pain of ordinary actions can be measured by our experience. We need not use the said parameters in estimating the value of pleaser or pain of all actions. For instance, the pleaser of kicking someone is generally outweighed by the pain inflicted on that person so such calculation when confronted with a temptation to kick someone is unnecessary. So it will be wise to judge it wrong on the basis of past experience.

John Stuart Mill

John Stuart Mill, the son of James Mill who also supports Bentham's utilitarianism holding that the state should strive for the maximum pleasure of the maximum people, is a great philosopher, economist and politician. Though he accepts the basic tenets of Bentham in explaining utilitarianism yet he makes some amendments. Mill, like his predecessor, takes

the concept of utility in the meaning of happiness though ordinary people regard both of them as contrasted. People, of course, have a logical ground to identify them from different point of view since they use different criterion to judge happiness.

Mill uses the criterion of quality in estimating the value of action. All pleasures are equal in terms of quality and different only in terms of quantity after Bentham but Mill disagrees with this view holding that there is a difference of quality as well as quantity in pleasure and pain. It means that there is an apparent demarcation line between two pleasures in terms of quality. For instance, the pleasure that comes from sexual act is obviously inferior to the pleasure that an artist gets from his artistical work. The said instance indicates that intellectual pleasure is better due to its permanence, certainty than bodily one. One pleasure is, on this view, more desirable than another, not on account of its nature as pleasure, but on account of some other quality that it possesses beyond its mere pleasantness (Mackenzie, 1929:179). Even if the conflict arises to decide the better one between two then the opinion of the majority will be recognized. Mill says, on a question as to which is better worth having of two pleasures, or which of two ways of life is the more agreeable to the feelings, the judgment of those who are qualified by knowledge of both must be admitted as final-or, if they differ among themselves, the judgment of the majority among them (Mill, 1863:13-14). So significance should be given to intellectual pleasure. If divergence arises then the competent judges will decide which one is better than other.

Mill also says that there is a difference between the pleasure of lower being and that of higher being. The higher being contains sense of dignity for which it is capable of intellectual pleasure as well as sensual pleasure. Due to having sense of dignity the higher beings can't enjoy such pleasure that the lower being usually enjoy. But the lower being is capable of sensual pleasure only. Emphasizing on sense of dignity he says, it is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be a Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied (Mill, 1863:13). So, all beings are not equally capable of enjoying all pleasures. Only the higher beings can enjoy higher pleasures since they have the sense of dignity.

Mill stands for altruistic hedonism with arguments. In hedonism we use the principle utility as the criterion of determining the rightness or wrongness of action. It is used to determine the greatest happiness of the greatest number of the society not to determine the individual's greatest happiness. Mill stands for utility holding the view that standard is not the agent's greatest happiness, but the greatest amount of happiness altogether (Mill, 1863:14). The individual will work for the interest of all though his own interest lies in the interest of all. He will be satisfied with what he does for others. Here the individual can raise the question that if the supreme end of life is to desire own happiness why should he seek the interest of other? Mill answers that no reason can be given why the general happiness is desirable, except that each person, so far as he believes it to be attainable,

desires his own happiness. Each person's happiness is a good to that person, and the general happiness, therefore, a good to the aggregate of all persons (Mill, 1863:35-36). Pleasure itself is good and each person desires pleasure as good, therefore general pleasure as good should be desirable since the pleasure of all contains in it.

Now the question may arise why does each person desire pleasure for others? If we analyze the human characters it will be seen that by the influence of fellow-feeling or sympathy we desire better for others. It is the moral obligation of each individual to benefit others. If the individual benefits others then he also feels happy. Even individual pleasure is often sacrificed for the pleasure of all, thus egoism turns into altruism. The key factors which function to promote general pleasure are of two types, external and internal though Bentham first recognized external sanction which is of four types, like physical, social, religious and political. All these factors motivate the individual to promote the general happiness. But the key factor that motivates to promote general happiness is the conscience of individual. Mill calls it internal sanction. Being influenced by conscience the individual feels intense pleasure or pain for his action. Such feeling of pleasure or pain is active in the mind of individual by conscience. Mill says, this internal sanction is a feeling for the happiness of mankind, a feeling of regard for the feelings and pains of others-the social feelings of mankind, the desire to be in unity with our fellow creatures which if not innate are none the less natural (Sinha, 1947:138). So it is the tendency of human being to desire the general happiness due to moral obligation which comes from conscience.

Henry Sidgwick

Henry Sidgwick develops the doctrine explaining in different way and makes it more acceptable to us. us though his view is regarded as the reproduction of Butler. He emphasizes on the authority of conscience in explaining utilitarianism. According to him, morality directs us to place ourselves before reason. We should be impartial in judging anything since we are rational being. And if we become impartial then the judgment made by us on anything will be just. Partiality leads us to do unjust. Therefore as rational being we should refrain ourselves from doing that thing which determines us as partial, irrational or like this. Being influenced by conscience we desire nothing but happiness. Conscience directs to act in impartial way since it is the highest faculty of rational beings. Butler argues for the supremacy of conscience that conscience or the faculty that imposes moral rules is naturally supreme in man. It is therefore reasonable to obey conscience (Sidgwick, 1967:378).

What philosophy egoism contains is just opposite to the philosophy of altruism. It is unnecessary to go in details about egoism since it has been explained above. The latter one is the key matter holding the view that the good of others is to be taken into consideration like the good of own self. It is either morally or benevolently we desire the better for others. Sidgwick says each one is morally bound to regard the good of any other individual as much as his own (Sidgwick, 1967:382). It contains the significance of altruistic philosophy

which stands for the interest of all. Though egoistic and altruistic both are hedonistic doctrines but the later are more acceptable hence it contains the interest of the former as much as its own. Therefore he says the pleasures of others are to be regarded as of equal weight with our own (Mackenzie, 1929:174).

Role of Induction

Inductive method plays a vital role to construct principles or theories. It is specially regarded as a part and parcel of scientific knowledge. We get the knowledge of universals through the inductive method. Science usually deals with several particular instances to make a general statement. If in all cases of premises the same cause causes the same effect then we draw the statement that similar cause always can produce the similar effect. Mill says induction may be defined, the operation of discovering and proving general propositions (Ryan, 1987:40). From the observation of some particular instances principles or theories are constructed which can be again verified through deductive method. In Utilitarianism we speak of pleasure especially maximum pleasure for the maximum number of the society. Now the question is how can we calculate the pleasure of maximum number? The answer is in brief, using inductive method we can calculate the pleasure of maximum number of the society.

In induction we make the general statement by observing particular statements. For example, we observe some swans all of which are white in color and from such observation we draw the general statement that all swans are white in color. Here we jump from some observed instances to a general statement in which we recognize those facts which are not observed yet. This jump is called inductive leap. The general statement, all swans are white, will remain as true till we experience at least one swan of different color. Though there is an epistemic risk in the inductive method yet scientists use it to generate knowledge since it is quite difficult to observe all phenomena.

Similarly the inductive method can be used to calculate the rightness or wrongness of an action. Suppose a society consists of one hundred members where taking alcohol is morally right if it produces pleasure for the maximum number. To make the said instance clear we can imply the fact of taking alcohol to each people of that society like A takes alcohol so A gets pleasure, B takes alcohol so B gets pleasure, thus it is seen that taking alcohol provides pleasure maximum people. Therefore we generalize that taking alcohol is morally right in that society since it provides pleasure for the maximum people. Reversely taking alcohol would be wrong if it provided pain for the majority. Thus we can determine the rightness or wrongness of an action by inductive method. The said instance contains the significance of inductive method since the general statement, taking alcohol provides pleasure, comes from several particular instances.

It is really difficult to define happiness since it is a relative issue varies from person to person. The action which provides one pleasure can be cause of pain for another. It also seems difficult and time consuming to measure pleasure with the parameters mentioned

above. Besides, the inductive method bears the significance in judging the rightness or wrongness of an action yet it has some limitations mainly its key spirit is sheer contradictory to utilitarianism. In induction we make the general statement on the basis of the observation of some particular instances in all of which same cause always produces the same effect. If any reverse instance is found then the generalization becomes wrong. But in utilitarianism we take into consideration the maximum pleasure for the maximum number of the society. It is not necessary to ensure the pleasure of all. If minority gets pain from taking alcohol thereafter it can be said that taking alcohol is morally right since it produces pleasure for the maximum people of the society which really attacks the spirit of induction. On the top of, the method contains an epistemic risk which can falsify the general statement.

Even the general statement that is taken as conclusion on the basis of the observation of some particular observed instances is always probable. Therefore the method can't generate certain knowledge which is more reliable than the knowledge of probability. In fact utilitarianism uses the inductive method to generalize an action though that generalization sharply contains drawbacks. Because in utilitarianism the general statement is taken as morally right in spite of having reverse instance which really keep the general statement under comments. Finally there is a big problem of the theory that many of the benefits and costs of an action cannot be reliably predicted, they also cannot be adequately measured (Velasquez, 2004:79). So benefits and costs mean exactly what is quite difficult to understand. Even all the phenomena beyond the feasible matters can't be measured in terms of neither quantity nor quality.

Conclusion

There is no denying the fact that, considering all the steps, the utilitarian principle plays a significant role in determining normative issues. The action which provides maximum utility for the individual who performs the action cannot be said right rather when it ensures the maximum utility for all including the individual performing the action will be right. Critics may raise several questions about the absolute fairness of the theory. But it is true that no principle is absolutely just from all sides. It is good one among the alternatives which benefits us more. Besides, the criteria proposed by the said thinkers can be relaxed for those which are beyond measurable. So we can use the utilitarian principle as the most ideal one in judging action or taking policy.

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