

A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF J. BENTHAM AND J. S. MILL'S
UTILITARIANISM

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İSTANBUL BİLGİ ÜNİVERSİTESİ

SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ

FELSEFE VE TOPLUMSAL DÜŞÜNCE YÜKSEK LİSANS PROGRAMI

KAAN ATALAY

2012

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UTILITARIANISM

J. BENTHAM VE J. S. MILL FAYDACILIĞININ ELEŞTİREL
ANALİZİ

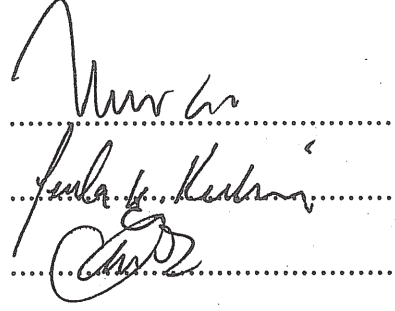
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Tezin Onaylandığı Tarih: 19.09.2012

Toplam Sayfa Sayısı: 154

Anahtar Kelimeler (Türkçe)

1. Fayda
2. Haz
3. Mutluluk
4. Erdem
5. Karakter

Anahtar Kelimeler (İngilizce)

1. Utility
2. Pleasure
3. Happiness
4. Virtue
5. Character

Thesis Abstract

Nevim Borçin, “A Critical Analysis of J. Bentham and J. S. Mill’s Utilitarianism”

This thesis aims to analyze and critically evaluate ‘utility’, the intrinsic good which is put forth and defended by J. Bentham and J. S. Mill. Utilitarianism, as a moral theory, has primarily been introduced and founded by Bentham, and then systematized and developed by Mill. The ethical accounts and works of those philosophers comprise the scope of this thesis. As an ultimate goal or principle which gives direction to human conduct, utility is understood by Bentham and Mill as the maximization of pleasure and minimization of pain. So the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain is ranked above all other moral notions such as duty, obligation and virtue, all of which are conceived by Bentham and Mill as derivatives of utility. Utilitarians think that not only moral but also all other fields of life such as legal or political ought to be organized and shaped according to the principle of utility—a position essentially based on their universal conception of human nature, according to which humans are self-directed/egoist beings who constantly pursue pleasure and shun pain. This thesis claims that utilitarianism and its rather narrow and restricted understanding of human nature create severe problems in its account of such issues as human conduct, collectivity and happiness. As an alternative to utilitarianism, ‘virtue ethics’ (based on Plato and Aristotle’s conceptions of *eudaimonia*, excellence, character) is claimed to provide a wholesomer and richer conception of good life and happiness. This work concludes that virtue ethics is capable of coping with almost all the conflicts and difficulties that utilitarianism grapples with.

Tez Özeti

Nevim Borçin, “J. Bentham ve J. S. Mill Faydacılığının Eleştirel Analizi”

Bu tez J. Bentham ve J. S. Mill faydacılığında ‘kendinde iyi’ olarak tanımlanan ‘fayda’ kavramını inceleyip eleştirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Faydacılık bir ahlak teorisi olarak Bentham tarafından geliştirilmiş ve daha sonra Mill tarafından işlenip sistemleştirilmiştir. Dolayısıyla bu iki düşünürün etik görüşleri ve eserleri bu çalışmanın kapsamını oluşturmaktadır. Bentham ve Mill’de insan edimine yön veren temel bir ilke olarak fayda, haz maksimizasyonu ve acının minimizasyonu olarak anlaşılmaktadır. Fayda kavramına ödev, zorunluluk ve erdem gibi ahlaki nosyonların üzerinde bir değer biçilmekte, bu ve benzeri kavramlar ‘fayda’nın bir türevi olarak ele alınmaktadır. Evrensel bir insan doğası varsayımı üzerine inşa edilen fayda kavramının sadece ahlak alanını değil, yasal veya siyasal tüm diğer alanları da düzenlemesi ve şekillendirmesi gerektiği ileri sürülmekte; fayda ilkesi sadece bir ahlak teorisi değil, yaşamın ve yaşamsal süreçlerin bütününe kapsayan bir teori olarak anlaşılmaktadır. Faydacılığa göre insan sürekli haz peşinde koşan bencil bir doğaya sahiptir. Bu çalışmada, bu türden bir insan doğası kavrayışının, insan ediminin doğası, insan kolektiviteleri ve mutluluğu gibi konuların doğru anlaşılması önünde ciddi engeller yarattığı ve en çok sayıda insanın en çok mutluluğu olarak anlaşılan fayda ilkesinin hayata geçirilmesini neredeyse imkansız kıldığı iddia edilmektedir. Bu tez faydacılık yerine Antik Yunan düşünürlerinden Platon ve Aristo’nun *eudaimonia*, mükemmellik, karakter ve benzeri kavramlar üzerinde yükselen ‘erdem etiği’nin daha sağlam ve derinlikli bir mutluluk ve iyi yaşam olanağı sağladığını savunmaktadır. Bu çalışmada ‘erdem etiği’ faydacılık yerine alternatif bir teori olarak tartışılmakta; Bentham ve Mill’in faydacılığının baş edemediği tüm çelişki ve zorlukların üstesinden kolaylıkla gelebildiği iddia edilmektedir.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor Kaan Atalay for sharing his expertise and philosophical insights with me. He provided great help and contribution to the creation of this work. I am grateful to him for treating this thesis as if it were his own and not withholding his time and effort whenever I needed.

I am also grateful to author Cengiz Gündoğdu whose lectures and works in the field of philosophy cultivated a strong desire in me for pursuing an academic interest in philosophy. The pleasure I got from art, philosophy and literature in his lectures inspired me to study philosophy and write this thesis.

Finally, I would like to thank my friend Ayfer Vardar who always helped me in acquiring the necessary books and materials I needed. Since I already spent most of my time working at a high school as a teacher, without her precious help my time would never suffice to visit the libraries.

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I. Introduction

Ethics, as one of the perennial fields of philosophy, as a theoretical/practical exploration centered around the alluring question of how to live a good life both individually and socially, has been a focal point of investigation for many ancient, modern and contemporary thinkers. Whereas some engage in ethical reflection as only one aspect of their philosophical outlook, for others such as Socrates and Plato ethical issues happen to be the basic and central concern of philosophy. Those philosophers' accounts of ethics encompass all their philosophical views. All the questions they grapple with are actually based on and/or directly or indirectly related to ethical issues. They attribute so much significance and value to the investigation of living the possible best life that no one else has been able to surpass their accounts in length and depth since then. That must be the reason why they were so influential in establishing the main directions of thought about right and wrong and good and bad throughout the subsequent thousands of years.

I am convinced by the Platonic view that ethics ought to be conceived as the fundamental basis of philosophy by the light of which other spheres of philosophy should be dealt with. It is this feature of ethics that caused me to realise that a valid and consistent ethical stance was lacking in common sense morality. This ordinary morality which pervades our everyday life is composed of various views which are contradictory not only with each other but also in themselves.

Utilitarianism, as a moral theory, is a critical and constituent element of this common sense morality. It has some inherent flaws and inconsistencies, which undermine the possibility of its success as an ethical account. It is also one of the prevalent views Plato and Aristotle frequently debate and object to. Though the full systematization of this moral standpoint took place in modern ages, one can still come across its modest opponents in

ancient philosophy. Plato and Aristotle criticize and reject this approach as a flawed ethical position. It would be an anachronism to state that these Greek philosophers specifically and comprehensively wrote about utilitarianism and treated it as a defective account. Yet, fragments of thought concerned with the utilitarian point of view can be found here and there in their corpus. Moreover, since their interpretation of ethical issues can easily overcome the difficulties utilitarianism grapples with, this dissertation benefits heavily from Plato and Aristotle's thought and founds its arguments on their findings.

Utilitarianism has remained a prevalent and influential, yet unmethodical moral standpoint since the early times of ancient philosophy. However, its full-blown theoretization and systematization as a moral doctrine was brought about by the enthusiastic support and appreciation it received in the modern era, probably because of the fact that the utilitarian approach to human happiness, conduct or society fits very well within the principles and logic of capitalism. The economical and social views of such utilitarian theorists as Hume, A. Smith, J. Bentham or J. S. Mill are regarded as critical contributions to and milestones in the development of capitalism. Utilitarianism, with its claim of the greatest happiness of the greatest number, stands as one of those theories that believes in the necessity of a shared conception of good life and promises its adherents a good and harmonious life. Nevertheless, upon close and comprehensive analysis, this claim reveals itself to be an abstract, empty and groundless promise. Exposing how and why utilitarianism fails even in its most basic prognostics constitutes the fundamental object of this dissertation.

Utilitarianism is a *consequentialist* moral theory. According to *consequentialism*, correct moral conduct is determined solely by a cost-benefit analysis of an action's consequences. An action is morally right if the consequences of that action are more

favorable than unfavorable.¹ Therefore, acts are right or wrong solely in virtue of the goodness or badness of their actual consequences. For consequentialism the principle or motive that underlies any sort of behaviour is not the key to the merits or flaws in that behaviour. Behaviour must be assessed independently of the agent concerned. The moral value of the behaviour must be judged solely by considering the obvious consequences of the action. Consequentialist principles require that one tallies the good and bad consequences of an action and then determines whether the total good consequences outweigh the total bad consequences. If the good consequences are greater, then the action is morally convenient; if the bad consequences are greater then the action proves to be morally improper.

Consequentialism does not itself say what kinds of consequences are good. Hence people can agree on consequentialism while disagreeing about what kind of outcome is good or bad. The most well-known consequentialist theory stands to be utilitarianism. Utilitarianism is the theory that judges acts by the net amount of pleasure or happiness they produce. Since pleasure or happiness is not the only possible intrinsic good, there can be consequentialists who are not utilitarian. Yet, the most traditional view among consequentialists is that the only kind of result that is good in itself is happiness.²

Utilitarianism has a long history and its roots as a moral theory go back to Hobbes, Locke, and even to Epicurus. In eighteenth and early nineteenth century, it had been invoked by British philosophers who transformed it into a full-fledged theory. J. Bentham was the first philosopher to fully formulate a systematic utilitarian position. Bentham proposed that one ought to tally the consequences of an action on a case by case basis and determine whether the action is morally proper or improper. For him the morality of

¹ James Fieser, *Ethics*, In *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 10.05.2009.
<http://www.iep.utm.edu/ethics/>

² William Haines, *Consequentialism*, In *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 24.04.2006.
<http://www.iep.utm.edu/coseque/>

actions should be assessed by the total amount of pleasure over pain produced. This shows that Bentham's utilitarianism is a *hedonistic* one. Thus happiness is equated by Bentham with the attainment of pleasure and the avoidance of pain.

The term "hedonism," from the Greek word ἡδονή (*hēdonē*) for pleasure, identifies pleasure and pain as the *only* important elements of morality. They are the sole ultimate ends that human actions pursue or eschew. Hedonists tend to focus on hedonistic theories of value, and especially of well-being (the good life for the one living it). As a theory of value, hedonism states that all and only pleasure is intrinsically valuable and all and only pain is intrinsically worthless. What Bentham declares in the very first sentences of his major work, *The Principles of Morals and Legislation*, plainly consecrates hedonism:

Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure*. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do.³

Though many ethical inferences may be derived from this short quotation, we will now simply limit ourselves by pointing to its hedonistic nature. It should be pointed out that hedonism doesn't start with the utilitarians. One can find its first representatives in ancient Greek philosophy. The Cyrenaics and the Epicureans are two well-known hedonist schools of the time. Though they attribute value and importance to pleasure, and derive rightness and goodness from it, two schools have distinctive features in their interpretation of happiness and their understanding of the nature of pleasure or pain.

Aristippus (c. 435-355 BCE), the founder of the Cyrenaic school of philosophy, sees happiness simply in maximizing pleasure, attaining as much of it as possible in as intense a form as possible. Just like Bentham, Aristippus preaches that pleasure is the natural goal of life—the only thing that the human beings innately and always pursue. People seek pleasure instinctively and without reflection. The Cyrenaics think that one should not delay the gratification of certain immediate pleasures to an uncertain future time. "Seize the

³ Jeremy Bentham, *The Principles of Morals and Legislation* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1988), p. 1.

moment” seems to have been the counsel of the Cyrenaics. They refuse to delay robust and intense immediate pleasures, especially of the body.⁴

The Epicurean account of pleasure seems more appealing and acceptable to a greater audience. The profligate life recommended by Aristippus is in fact denounced by Epicurus, the founder of Epicureanism. Yet, he acknowledges that pleasure is the alpha and omega of a blessed life and that pleasure is the starting point of every choice and aversion.⁵ Epicurus develops a view that has come to be called *negative hedonism*. By pleasure he means the absence of pain in the body and trouble in the soul. Happiness is the complete absence of bodily and especially mental pains.

Epicurus advised his followers to avoid towns, and especially marketplaces, in order to limit the resulting desires for unnecessary things. Once we experience unnecessary pleasures, such as those from sex and rich food, we will then suffer from painful and hard to satisfy desires for more and better of the same. No matter how wealthy we might be, Epicurus would argue, our desires will eventually outstrip our means and interfere with our ability to live tranquil, happy lives.⁶

Thus Epicurus recommends a way of life that removes both bodily and mental pains. He advocates avoiding excess and prefers a plain and modest life founded on the gratification of the natural and necessary pleasures. If one shuns from pleasures that are beyond his reach and be content with a simple and modest way of life, then he will avoid the many overt and covert threats to it. For Epicurus the magnitude of pleasure reaches its limit in the removal of all pain. To succeed this everyone should train themselves to desire only the basic needs and keep away from the social life which may provoke them for unnecessary and artificial desires.

In spite of the minute differences in their thought on the nature of it, the two schools still see the ultimate aim of moral life in happiness and identify happiness with the

⁴ Robert L. Arrington, *Western Ethics* (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), p. 95.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.97.

⁶ Dan Weijers, *Hedonism*, In The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 10.08.2011.
<http://www.iep.utm.edu/hedonism/>

promotion of pleasure and avoidance of pain. One initially stresses on the maximization of pleasure whereas the other stresses on the avoidance of pain.

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, when Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill develops utilitarianism as a full-fledged moral theory, they embrace hedonism as the core tenet of their utilitarian account of human nature and conduct. Whereas Bentham stresses on the quantitative dimension of pleasures, Mill focusses his attention on the qualitative dimension of pleasures. Mill, too denounces Bentham's hedonism as enjoining a profligate life, just as Epicurus denounces Aristippus'. However both Bentham and Mill introduce happiness—which consists of obtaining the maximum amount pleasure—as the ultimate end for all moral conduct. They assert that pleasure is the only thing which has an intrinsic value for morality and all other motivations of human conduct are different guises of promotion of pleasure and avoidance of pain. All they conceive of happiness is concerned with pleasure and its promotion in life.

This dissertation will try to demonstrate that the hedonist account of happiness of utilitarianism is an arbitrary and contingent theory of human conduct. The necessity and significance of designating an ultimate goal to direct and affect human actions will be illustrated through a discussion of the Ancient Greek ethics, and specifically, of the conception of *eudaimonia*. The utilitarian notion of pleasure as an intrinsic good cannot be proven to be the best thing in life for human kind to pursue. Aristotle and Plato's ethical views will be evaluated in the following chapters in order to establish that pleasure is only one component of human happiness and well-being. It will also be argued that since pleasure can be true or false, pure or impure, it cannot be regarded to have an intrinsic value.

Though there have been several other influential successors to Bentham and Mill such as Sidgwick and Moore, I chose deliberately to work on these two, since this

exposition aims to put forth arguments to refute utility as an intrinsic good, rather than inquiring different accounts of utility that strive to amend the deficiencies of classical utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill. Since their followers suffice with minute alterations—the inquiry of which is beyond the scope of this work—and conceded the basic premises of utilitarianism, I find it methodologically more plausible to study the founders of utilitarianism and analyze their first premises.

However, rejecting utility as an intrinsic good requires an extensive and thorough reading and understanding of the entire corpus of Bentham and Mill. Since they define and treat utilitarianism as a theory of life, one has to appeal to their views concerning social, political, economical and psychological issues. Therefore, including various dimensions of their thought becomes an imperative to make an objective and fair critical analysis of their moral standpoint.

In the first and second chapters, Bentham and Mill's versions of utilitarianism are presented and critically evaluated in terms of their consistency and coherence. The first two chapters follow the same thematic order of the issues. The analysis is centered around four basic themes: First, their interpretation of utility; second, the evidence they use to justify utility principle; next, their account for the nature of human conduct, and finally, their views concerned with the nature and justification of political states, and thence the position of the utility principle to overcome various conflicts and contrasts in an imagined utilitarian society.

I start with presenting what each philosopher conceives of utility principle. After a comprehensive introduction of the utility principle I reveal that this principle is interpreted as the greatest happiness of the greatest number for both thinkers, and happiness is understood as the maximization of pleasure and minimization of pain. Secondly, I point to the fact that both philosophers try to justify utility principle by appealing to the view that

utility understood simply as pleasure is an external, objective and scientific element the reality of which cannot be denied by any rational being. I argue that Bentham and Mill found their notion of pleasure on human nature and make a direct jump from psychological sphere into morality. They assert that as human nature is governed by pain and pleasure, this evidence is sufficient to declare promotion of pleasure and avoidance of pain as the ultimate criterion of all morality. My response to this interpretation of human nature and thus, to derivation of utility principle from that interpretation of nature constitutes one of my primary objection to utilitarianism. I criticize the hedonistic conception of human nature and claim that human existence with its infinite possibilities cannot be explained by and reduced to a universal conception of human nature that depicts men in constant pursual of pleasure.

Next, I inquire the Benthamite and Millian accounts of human conduct. How do people prefer to behave in certain ways? What kind of motives give spring to their action? What are the stages of human action? What are the roles of deliberation, intention and motivation in decision-making? Do character traits and dispositions affect the occurrence of our actions or not? Those are some of the questions that are investigated in the sections about human conduct. I argue that both philosophers conceive human conduct in *consequentialist* terms, attributing morality solely to the consequences of human actions. Whether one has a good or bad character is of no importance insofar as one produces the most amount of pleasure by his conduct for himself and for the people affected. I object to this consequentialist assessment of human action, which morally regards 'acts' as separate or isolated units and attribute all moral value to their effects. I will point to other springs of actions which ought to be regarded at least as crucial for morality as consequences of the individual acts. I criticise utilitarianism for oversimplifying moral conduct by considering just one dimension important and ignoring the other dimensions whose importance may

even outweigh the consequences. I claim that disqualifying the dynamics which affect the causes of actions such as motivations, dispositions or character traits constitutes another vital flaw of utilitarianism.

The final aspect of my critical analysis is centered on the social dimension of utilitarianism. Here, I build my argument on the social, political and economical views of Bentham and Mill. Such a section seems obligatory since the social sphere is the litmus paper of utilitarianism. An account regarding the ambiguities and complexities in social life and the challenging aspects of social relations and affairs is the difficult gorge that every ethical theory has to pass in order to prove its validity and success. With the previous objections in mind I argue that the social account of utilitarianism is too problematic and build my argument on Bentham and Mill's theory of state which itself is based on the Hobbesian conception of society and sovereignty. Bearing in mind the other objections, I finish my critical analysis of Bentham and Mill's utilitarianism by pointing to the handicaps that undermine the greatest happiness principle in social sphere.

Having scrutinized and revealed the drawbacks and shortcomings of Benthamite and Millian utilitarianism in two chapters, I go on to propose an alternative view in chapter three on ethics which is called *virtue ethics*. I discuss virtue ethics in the context of such Ancient Greek philosophers as Plato and Aristotle. *Arete* is the notion that I believe to stand as the kernel of Ancient Greek ethics. By *arete* Greeks refer to 'excellence', a word which echoes in every inch in their conception of good life. By appealing to the fundamental notions such as *eudaimonia*, *arete* and *polis* I try to present the fundamental traits of Platonic and Aristotelian ethics, underlining their emphasis on the 'virtuous character' and I discuss their understanding of the nature and function of 'desire', in order to make clear what happy and good life consists of.

I conclude my dissertation by arguing that virtue ethics include and constitute a comprehensive critique of utilitarianism. I claim that Platonic and Aristotelian virtue ethics, being more robust and wholesome than any form of utilitarianism, provides a very profound understanding of the factors and reasons behind the shortcomings of utilitarianism, and thus make it possible to explain comprehensively why this moral theory can't do away with the difficulties and handicaps it historically grapples with.

II. Bentham and the Emergence of Modern Utilitarianism

Jeremy Bentham is considered the founding figure of modern utilitarianism. Benthamite utilitarianism is an ethical theory, according to which the measure of right and wrong is ‘the greatest happiness of the greatest number’⁷. While Kant condemns happiness as a conditional end which embraces material aspects and thus precludes the autonomous action of the rational agent, Bentham praises just the reverse, arguing that happiness is the ultimate goal of mankind. He defends happiness as the most valuable end that human conduct ought to pursue, and asserts that happiness of the agent is the only good which must be attained through individual and public effort.

Bentham’s ethical theory is shaped around a very specific psychological theory concerning motives, intentions or dispositions of human conduct. His account of human nature introduces that human conduct pursues maximization of pleasure and minimization of pain. He asserts that people aim at personal interest or good by their actions. In as much as Bentham equates good with interest and interest with pleasure, it follows that all mankind seek pleasure and follow actions that will produce pleasure. Thus all motives, intentions or dispositions that will contribute to that end gain value and importance as psychological components of human conduct. After laying down such a universal conception of human nature, Bentham proceeds to establish his moral ideas on this psychological groundwork. In other words what Bentham envisages of human psychology delineates his ethical thought.

Bentham argues that we must build our understanding of things on the deliverances of the senses, avoiding all metaphysical and religious claims that go beyond the bounds of

⁷ The principle was first used by Beccaria which originally was ‘la massima felicità divisa nel maggior numero’. Bentham was deeply influenced by his ideas on legislation and human nature.

sense experience. Thus human beings are to be understood in terms of actual experience of senses rather than in terms of philosophical speculations about the powers of reason, conscience, ultimate purposes, and the like.

Bentham is a *reductive empiricist* in terms of his analysis of happiness. He defines happiness as the sensational state of pleasure or absence of pain, and reduces such moral conceptions as happiness, good, right to pleasure.⁸ In *The Principles of Morales and Legislation*⁹, Bentham construes pleasure and pain as the moral and natural determinant of each and every human action.

Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure*. It is for them alone to point out what ought to do, as well as determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think: every effort we can make to throw off our subjection, will serve but to demonstrate and confirm it. In words a man may pretend to abjure their empire: but in reality he will remain subject to it all the while.¹⁰

Since nature has put mankind under the subjection of pain and pleasure as two sovereign masters dictating not only what he ought to do but also what he shall do, then sustaining lives in accordance with this nature is the rational option that should be followed by all clear-minded people. In his analysis of rationality, Bentham finds ‘will’ as the more powerful and outstanding ‘faculty’, as opposed to ‘understanding’. Bentham’s account of the events and activities of human mind includes several concepts such as will, understanding, sense, judgement and so on. Human conduct is determined by and through the relationship between will and understanding:

A standard account of this relationship, available to Bentham from Hume, is that the understanding, or ‘reason’, is ‘cool’ and can only motivate actions in conjunction with desire.¹¹

⁸ Robert L. Arrington, *Western Ethics* (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), p. 319.

⁹ This work will shortly be called ‘*Principles*’ hereafter.

¹⁰ Jeremy Bentham, *The Principles of Morales and Legislation* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1988), p. 1.

¹¹ Ross Harrison, *Arguments of the Philosophers: Bentham* (Florence, KY: Routledge, 1999), p. 202.

Bentham's discussion of these faculties indicates that, in terms of human action, understanding is subservient to will, providing the 'perceptible' means for the end will has legislated:

the understanding is not the source, reason is of itself no spring of action, the understanding is but an instrument in the hand of the will: it is by hopes and fears that the end of action is determined; all that reason does is to find and determine upon the means.¹²

For Bentham, the springs of actions are the natural causes of actions, which are none other than pain and pleasure. So, fears and hopes, namely pleasures/pains or interests, influence the will prior to a 'will and understanding relationship'. This sets the ends of action, which reason then works out the most efficient means of achieving. Thus, reason becomes a faculty that only works in the service of the will and does what the will instructs. Bentham, after pointing out that "the understanding is but the servant—the very slave to the will"¹³, concludes that having a good life is achieved by acting in pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain. If our conduct is in accord with this standard of action, then it's consistent with human nature. The pain-pleasure pair determines the direction of our actions and sets some ends to our volition to follow. What is left to reason is only to determine the most effective and influential means to attend the ends instructed by the will.

Bentham's dissection of rationality reveals that the function he ascribes to reason is a rather restricted one: it is confined merely to the collection and computation of empirical data. Prohibited from any direct access to and legislation over desires and values, reason is assigned the role of an "efficiency calculator", processing its material in terms of, and in accordance, with the pre-determined goals set by the will so as to find the most efficient means of achieving them. In this account of rationality, one can easily see that right conduct is primordially determined by such psychological components as pain and pleasure. Bentham resolutely defends his position about springs of action and the role of

¹² J. Bentham, *Fallacies*, cited from Ross Harrison's *Arguments of the Philosopher: Bentham*, p. 202.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

reason because explaining human action in this way provides an objective and universal ground, hence a scientific aspect to his moral theory. Such an account enables Benthamite utilitarianism to declare itself a kind of science, and turns the moralist, the Benthamite utilitarian, into a scientist who prescribes beneficial medicine. His psychological view presents that human action is and ought to be based on maximization of pleasure and minimization of pain in each occasion.

In other words, since Bentham, in his theory of *psychological hedonism*, asserts that all human behavior can be explained by reference to the two primary motives of pleasure and pain, to the ‘throne’ of which are fastened not only ‘the chain of causes and effects’, but also ‘the standard of right and wrong’, it can be inferred that Bentham is a hedonistic utilitarian.

Related to this fundamental hedonism is Bentham’s view of the individual as exhibiting a natural, rational self-interest—a *psychological egoism*. Fundamental to the nature and activity of individuals is their own well-being, and reason—as a natural capability—is subservient to this end. Bentham believes that human nature can be adequately described without mention of social relationships. He deems the idea of relation a fictitious entity. Therefore, community, for him, is a fictitious body, consisting of the sum of the interests of the members who compose it. Thus, what the term “individual” denotes is no greater and no less than the biological entity. The individual—the basic unit of the social sphere—is an “atom” and there is no “self” or “individual” greater than the human individual. A person’s relations with others are not essential and describe nothing that is necessary to its being what it is.¹⁴

In *Principles*, after critically examining several alternative/opposing moral theories, Bentham notices that all of them make morality arbitrary and subjective because they

¹⁴ William Sweet, *Jeremy Bentham*, In *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 23.12.2008
<http://www.iep.utm.edu/bentham/#H4>

adopt *inner factors* as their standards for human conduct. Although they all claim that their principles are infallibly true and self-evident, none of them actually provides an ‘external standard’ for human conduct. Neither ‘moral sense’ nor ‘common sense’, neither ‘reason’ nor the doctrine of ‘sympathy’ establishes an objective and scientific basis for morality. Pain and pleasure, however, are facts that are peculiar to all human kind. Furthermore, if “the expectation of pain or pleasure determines the conduct”, then “it must be the sole determinant of conduct”¹⁵. Bentham believes he thus transforms morality into a science—an objective enterprise which investigates human conduct in terms of such facts as pain and pleasure only to discover that the single scientific, external, objective principle of all human conduct is utility.

II.I. The Principle of Utility: The Regulator

The principle of utility is the standard that’s put forth by Bentham to extend his psychological theory into an ethical ground. His axiom declaring that all human actions pursue maximization of pleasure and minimization of pain turns out to be a moral axiom as well, and Bentham suggests that all human action ought to pursue this end, which he calls ‘the utility principle’. According to this principle, an ethically right action must promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number because

. . . it is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong.¹⁶

The utility principle should not only govern individual acts, but also those of the government as well. Therefore it’s not only the ultimate principle of morality, but also of legislation. It is the task of morality to promote happiness, and in order to do that, it should

¹⁵ Sir Leslie Stephen, *The English Utilitarians: Volume I: Jeremy Bentham* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley Publishers, 1968), p. 241.

¹⁶ Jeremy Bentham, *A Fragment on Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 3.

dictate both individuals and governments that they act according to the principle of utility, thus promoting happiness with their each and every action.

By the principle of utility is meant that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency which it appears to have augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question: or, what is the same thing in other words, to promote or to oppose that happiness.¹⁷

Bentham defines utility as that property in any object, whereby it tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, interest, good or happiness, (all this comes to the same thing) or (what comes again to the same thing) to prevent the happening of mischief, pain, evil or unhappiness to the part whose interest is considered.¹⁸ Utility principle enjoins us to produce through our behaviour the maximum amount of pleasure, and the minimum amount of pain.

Bentham doesn't deny the existence of such moral conceptions as virtue, duty, ought and obligation. However none of them has a value in themselves so long as they're thought apart from the utility principle. Determining our conduct according to utility is our true duty. He condemns moral theories that advise to act in accordance with principles and duties other than utility as speculation, superstition and metaphysical nonsense. Only the utility principle which refers to the greatest happiness of the greatest number renders the majority's happiness possible.

Bentham defines virtue as a moral notion subordinate to utility. Virtue is that which enables us to know our true interest in terms of utility. Its meaning and function is derived from utility, so is the meaning and function of duty and obligation. He claims that "the foundations of all virtue are laid in utility"¹⁹.

Virtue has been represented as opposed to utility. Virtue, it has been said, consists in the sacrifice of our interests to our duties. In order to express these ideas clearly; it is necessary to observe, that there are interests of different orders, and that different interests are in certain circumstances incompatible. Virtue is the sacrifice of a smaller to a greater interest -

¹⁷ Bentham, *Principles*, p. 2.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹⁹ Bentham, *Fragment*, p. 51.

of a momentary to a permanent interest - of a doubtful to a certain interest. Every idea of virtue, which is not derived from this notion, is as obscure as the motive to it is precarious.²⁰

The utility principle is, indeed, a fundamental maxim for Bentham. It's the standard of right conduct both for individuals and legislators. Consequently, right, wrong and ought are also meaningful notions as far as they refer to utility.

Of an action that is conformable to the principle of utility one may always say either that it is one that ought to be done, or at least that it is not one that ought not to be done. One may also, that it is right it should be done; at least that it is not wrong it should be done. that it is a right action. When thus interpreted, the words *ought*, and *right* and *wrong*, and the others of that stamp, have a meaning: when otherwise, they have none.²¹

However, one may complain that considering utility in every occasion will erode morality. The constant calculation of utility (therefore interest/pleasure/advantage) will undermine the obligations and duties. Besides, there might be objections to utility, as people have moral values and beliefs which may contradict with utility. People may appreciate being honest while utilitarianism deals with the amount of pleasure produced by a certain attitude. One may argue that there are some duties which may produce pain to an agent but still have to be carried out.

Bentham, however, believes that since some obligations that have disutility in particular instances have a greater utility such as esteem, probity in general, people will abstain from not obeying their dictates. When considered indirectly there appears again the utility principle underwriting, under a different guise. Even though keeping a promise may produce more pain to someone on a particular case, the general utility produced by his action will be more in general. That's a larger consideration of utility which brings about good reputation, future advantage etc. The agent will see that acting according to obligations is not in contrast to his interest:

Men are not always held by the particular utility of a certain engagement; but in the case in which the engagement becomes burdensome to one of the parties, they are still held by the general utility of engagements—by the confidence that each enlightened man wishes to have

²⁰ Cited by Arrington, In *Western Ethics*, p. 322.

²¹ Bentham, *Principles*, p. 4.

placed in his word, that may be considered as trustworthy, and enjoy the advantages attached to probity and esteem.²²

Bentham thus concludes that neither obligations nor virtues are threatened by the principle of utility. On the contrary they are deemed reasonable as far as they are derived from it.

People may have various motives when they act in certain occasions but those motives can be called only the causes of the actions, not more. Being the reason of an action doesn't render that reason an 'ought' which implies that motives are neutral reasons of actions and those reasons have no moral value. Only the utility is the right ground/reason for an action that 'ought to' exist. The other motives prior to actions should always be regulated by the utility principle so as not to cause any mischief and pernicious consequences.

Antipathy or resentment requires always to be regulated, to prevent its doing mischief: to be regulated by what? Always by the principle of utility. The principle of utility neither requires nor admits of any other regulator than itself.²³

As a regulatory principle all other motives of actions should appeal to utility before actions derived from them. That is the procedure a reasonable person should apply.

II.II. Utility: The Earth That We Stand Upon

What Bentham appears to expect is that readers who clear their minds of prejudice will see that there is no real competitor to the principle of utility: a principle, the truth of which, he claims, is both impossible and unnecessary to prove. He asks whether utility is susceptible of any direct proof and replies that it should seem not,

since which is used to prove everything else cannot itself be proved and a chain of proofs must have their commencement somewhere. Therefore giving such a proof is as impossible as it is needless.²⁴

²² Cited by Arrington, In *Western Ethics*, p. 323.

²³ Bentham, *Principles*, p. 23.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Despite the fact that the principle of utility cannot be proven for it is the basis of the truth itself, and that it is the fundamental notion from which the validity of everything else is derived, Bentham, nevertheless, attempts to provide some indirect proofs: First, he claims that people mostly appeal to utility in their ordinary life even if they may not be aware of it. Second, he argues its validity by exclusion and elimination of existing moral principles such as moral sense, common sense. Finally, he defends it by enunciating the objectivity of utility as being something measurable.

He claims that even stupid and perverse people appeal to this principle in their ordinary life. That's the case because human nature and conduct is governed by pain and pleasure. Even those who claim they don't aim at utility do actually pursue it unconsciously:

Not that there is or ever has been that human creature breathing, however stupid or perverse, who has not on many, perhaps on most occasions of his life, deferred to it. By the natural constitution of the human frame, on most occasions of their lives men in general embrace this principle, without thinking of it: if not for ordering of their own actions, as well as of those of other men.²⁵

In short, for Benthamite morality, based on and derived from a psychological theory of pain/pleasure, utility is the ultimate end and fundamental maxim from which all other moral conceptions derive. If one tries to examine other ends in human life such as health, virtue, knowledge, etc., he should posit the utility principle in the centre of all other ends and make inferences from there. Bentham does not believe that there can be any other plausible alternative ultimate ends. If anyone attempts to put forward an alternative notion, this concept would be nothing but some other appearance of utility. If anyone attempts to refute utility logically, he, most probably, would be misapplying the utility principle.

Bentham defends that many opponents of the principle of utility, who view it as leading to evil, do so only because they take note of improper applications of the principle.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

It is true that many individuals under the influence of passion pursue immediate pleasures without a proper awareness of the considerable pains that are consequent in doing so. Likewise, in acting to benefit herself, a person may do things that bring unimaginable harm to others. Such actions, however, do not impugn the principle of utility, for they involve incomplete and inadequate consideration of the consequences of acting in these ways:

If a man calculate badly, it is not arithmetic which is at fault, it is himself.²⁶

Actually, for Bentham, this characteristic feature of being calculable is what renders utility an objective and scientific principle. Whether utility is really measurable will be addressed in the following section, but, regardless of the answer, one must bear in mind that commensurability and objectivity of utility is the kernel of Benthamite morality.

As mentioned before, Bentham tries to converting morality into a science, and science, according to him, must rest upon facts. It must apply to real things, and a common measure. Pains and pleasures are real. If happiness, or utility, is ascertained as the ultimate end human conduct aims at, and, if utility is measured by the pain/pleasure produced, it will mean that there is always a common measure applicable in every formula for the estimation of conduct. Hence, both moral thinkers and legislators must appeal to that scientific calculation of utility and contribute to shape the human conduct accordingly in the direction of utility, otherwise their optimistic efforts will inevitably result in arbitrariness and extreme subjectivity.²⁷

Insisting on a 'moral science', Bentham convicts all other moral theories as speculation and nonsense for they don't rely on scientifically observable basis like pleasure/pain. Moral sense, common sense, law of nature, understanding, fitness of things, doctrine of election, natural justice, natural equity, law of reason, good order are the theories he enumerates, all of which, Bentham claims, can be reduced to the principle of

²⁶ Cited by Arrington, In *Western Ethics*, p. 322.

²⁷ Stephen, *Utilitarians*, pp. 241-243.

sympathy and antipathy (or the principle of caprice) since “one account may serve for all of them.”²⁸

All those theories are inconsistent with the principles of utility; that’s why they are condemned by Bentham, and reduced to only one sense denominated as the principle of caprice: a principle that approves or disapproves of certain actions not on account of their tending to augment the happiness, nor yet on account of their tending to diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question, but merely because a man finds himself disposed to approve or disapprove of them, holding up that approbation or disapprobation as a sufficient reason for itself, and disclaiming the necessity of looking out for any extrinsic ground.²⁹ Hence, for Bentham, such a principle is not founded on an objective and extrinsic ground, and it will cause a kind of relativism which results in as many ‘rights’ as the number of people exists.

Bentham insists that there is no sufficient ground for deciding whether an action is morally right or wrong if the moral right depends on people’s sentiments and mere say-so, on how things just appear to them. People’s unfounded sentiments are never sufficient enough to be a test of rectitude. Those who pretend to have a different principle in fact offer nothing more than their unfounded feelings. Since they don’t offer any concrete, empiric, observable principles, all of them are destined to extreme relativism. It’s only the utility principle which creates universal objectivism in terms of moral right and wrong. Hence, by elimination and exclusion of other principles, for they aren’t scientific in his terms, Bentham attempts to prove utility principle indirectly.

Even Mill, one of his closest disciples, complains that Bentham is altogether too quick and too casual on this point. He says that it is one thing to claim that we can only argue about the rightness and wrongness of actions if we adopt some calculable standard

²⁸ Bentham, *Principles*, p. 17.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

such as the principle of utility; it is quite another to claim that ‘right’ means ‘conformable to utility’. Similarly, it is one thing to claim that argument and the achievement of consistency are only possible if we adopt the principle of utility, and quite another to claim that nobody really accepts any other principle. As Mill points out, it is all too apparent that many people do accept other principles. It is one thing to claim that if people are clear-headed they will come to adopt utility as their guide, and quite another to claim that unless they accept it they are talking literal nonsense.³⁰

To conclude, we find that Bentham describes utility as a scientific, quantitative and objective principle that is unique and fundamental to morality. Its intrinsic good is so obvious that even stupid and perverse can’t deny its dominion in their life. Whereas there have been many theories of first principles in morality throughout history, utility is the only one possessing an objective and universal basis. Common sense, moral sense, law of nature all result in relativism in morality, while the utility principle provides an objective ground for anyone at any time. Bentham is so convinced of the certainty and infallibility of his theory that he depicts utility as “the earth that we stand upon”, and asks whether it is “possible for a man to move the earth”. His answer, reflecting his confidence, as well as his vanity, is quite short and simple:

Yes; but he must first find out another earth to stand upon.³¹

II.III. Hedonic (Felicific) Calculus

If utility is something objective and scientific, then it should be measurable as well. That’s why Bentham’s hedonism is called a quantitative one. By examining the consequences of his possible actions, one can determine the quantity of pain and pleasures

³⁰ Cited by Alan Ryan, “Introduction,” In *Utilitarianism and Other Essays* (London: Penguin Books, 1987), pp. 26-27.

³¹ Bentham, *Principles*, p. 5.

produced by them and thereby determine which of the options open to him would bring about the greatest balance of pleasure over pain, or the smallest possible amount of pain. This convinces Bentham that it is possible to develop a “hedonic calculus”, which his analysis proves to be a quasi-mathematical system to measure the amount of pleasure and pain brought about by an action, a system that determines the utilities that should guide our decisions to do one thing rather than another.³²

According to Bentham’s calculus, each pain or pleasure has different aspects in terms of their quantity. Some pleasures can be mild whereas the others are intense. They may vary in duration, while some other may vary according to their certainty and uncertainty. So if one wants to decide between two alternatives of actions open to him, he can make a mathematical calculation of possible utility of consequences of each action and find out which action is more valuable in terms of the utility (pleasure/pain) they produce.

To a person considered *by himself*, the value of a pleasure or pain considered *by itself*, will be greater or less, according to following circumstances:

1. Its *intensity*.
2. Its *duration*.
3. Its *certainty* or *uncertainty*.
4. Its *propinquity* or *remoteness*.³³

These are the criterions evaluated in case of possible actions. In addition to measuring the pleasures and pains consequent upon an action in their four dimensions enumerated above, there are two other aspects which affect the value of pleasures and pains:

5. Its *fecundity*, or the chance it has of being followed by sensations of the *same* kind: that is, pleasures, if it be a pleasure: pains, if it be a pain.
6. Its *purity*, or the chance it has of *not* being followed by sensations of the *opposite* kind: that is, pains, if it be pleasure: pleasures, if it be a pain.³⁴

So there are six dimensions to be assessed for every action. What one has to do then, is to

³² Arrington, *Ethics*, p. 329.

³³ Bentham, *Principles*, p. 29.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

Sum up all the values of all *pleasures* on the one side, and those of the pains on the other. The balance, if it be on the side of pleasure, will give the *good* tendency of the act upon the whole, with respect to the interests of that *individual* person; if on the side of pain, the *bad* tendency of it on the whole.³⁵

Finally there is another dimension necessary for the utility principle which is about other people existing around. With that dimension Bentham makes an attempt to extend his calculation to a broader social ground and include other people living around the agent who's spending time measuring sum total of his pleasures and pains. This last parameter to be assessed in every action is:

7. Its *extent*; that is, the number of persons to whom it *extends*; or (in other words) who are affected by it.³⁶

Bentham also provides computational directions for this seventh criterion:

Take an account of the number of persons whose interests appear to be concerned; and repeat the above process with respect to each. Sum up the numbers expressive of the degrees of good tendency, which the act has, with respect to each individual, in regard to whom the tendency of it is good on the whole: do this again with respect to each individual, in regard to whom the tendency of it is bad upon the whole: Take the balance, which, if on the side of the pleasure, will give the general good tendency of the act, with respect to the total number or community of individuals concerned; if on the side of pain, the general evil tendency, with respect to the same community.³⁷

So moral actions should be assessed taking into consideration seven dimensions stated above. After calculating all these seven aspects a decision can be made about what action with the greatest amount of pleasure over pain to follow. Although Bentham accepts that it's not so practical to apply this calculation case by case, nevertheless he advises that it should be kept in view each time. He alleges that it is the ideal decision procedure that should be appealed when necessary.

It is not to be expected that this process should be strictly pursued previously to every moral judgement, or to every legislative or judicial operation. It may, however, be always kept in view: and as near as the process actually pursued on these occasions approaches to it, so near will such process approach to the character of an exact one.³⁸

Bentham asserts that it is not unwarranted to say

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.31.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 31

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

“in all of this there is nothing but what the practice of mankind, wheresoever they have a clear view of their own interest, is perfectly comformable to”³⁹.

In short, when we act rationally for our own good and community’s good, we already act consistently with the principle of utility and apply a kind of hedonic calculus. But there are certain problems in Bentham’s calculus. For example, when we compare pleasures in terms of intensity we find that we’re devoid of a precise determination to compare them. There is no obvious scale for determining the degrees of intensity. Yet, let’s suppose we were capable of determining an approximate degree but what about the intensity of pleasure and pain other people sense, how can we know and ascertain the intensity of their sensations? Is there an objective way to compare our pleasure/pain with that of other people? What about duration? Is an intense pain that lasts ten minutes twice as valuable as one lasting only ten minutes? Or a pain lasting ten minutes simply twice as bad as one lasting five minutes? Or, how can we compare the values of different aspects of pleasures/pains? Do degrees of intensity have the same relative weight as the degrees of duration? For instance, do the degrees of intensity of ‘two degrees’ have the same value as duration of ‘two minutes’?⁴⁰

Bentham appeals to money for he is himself aware of the difficulties of measuring sensations of pain and pleasure. He sees money as the means of quantifying pain and pleasure. He offers that money can be ascertained as the value equivalence of pleasures. The amount of money one is willing to pay for a pleasure may be thought of as giving the measure of the value of the pleasure for that person.

The thermometer is the instrument for measuring the heat of the weather: the barometer for measuring the pressure of the air. Those who are not satisfied with the accuracy of these instruments must find out others that shall be more accurate, or bid *adieu* to Natural Philosophy. Money is the instrument for measuring the quantity of pain and pleasure. Those who are not satisfied with the accuracy of this instrument must find some other that shall be more accurate, or bid *adieu* to Politics and Morals.⁴¹

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁴⁰ Arrington, *Ethics*, p. 332.

⁴¹ Jeremy Bentham, *Bentham’s Political Thought*, edited by Bikhu Parekh (London: Croom Helm, 1973), p. 123

He asserts that money has an objectivity that sensations of pleasure do not seem to have. It's a 'common measure' of value in terms of which interpersonal financial interactions take place and by no means of which interpersonal comparisons of utility can be made.⁴² But, how can money have an interpersonal objectivity? Do 'ten dollars' have the same value for a rich and a poor person? On the other hand, do 'ten dollars' always have the same quantity of value for even the same person? Hardly. Finally, can every pleasure be bought with money or every pain be avoided?⁴³

Bentham lived in an age which was ascertained as the beginning of 'commercial society'⁴⁴, or 'market society' as we call it today. Market society was something new and different for almost all thinkers of the eighteenth century.

It was in this century that a large number of thinkers came to believe that a fundamentally new kind of society was coming into existence in Western Europe, and undertook the project of making sense of the changes that were taking place.⁴⁵

Bentham was an active participant in the disputes and debates about the economic and politic laws of the new market society. Whatever their understanding of the age was, the common notion to most thinkers was human motivation based on self-interest.

Bentham, James Mill, and Ricardo, whatever their other differences, analyzed political and economic affairs by assuming that any agent is motivated by his own particular interests as he conceives them.⁴⁶

Adam Smith's explanation of how rational self-interest leads to economic well-being expressed the same ideal:

Man has almost constant occasion for help of his brethren, and it is vain for him to expect it from their benevolence only. He will be more likely to prevail if he can interest their self-love in his favour, and show them that it is for their advantage to do for him what he requires

⁴² Arrington, *Ethics*, p. 333.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

⁴⁴ "This concept was given its canonical formulation by Adam Smith, but it can reasonably be considered a collective product. It was one of the great intellectual achievements of the eighteenth century, and it continues to dominate mainstream economic thought". Ross Poole, *Morality and Modernity*, (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 2.

⁴⁵ Poole, *Morality*, p. 1.

⁴⁶ Jonathan Riley, "Mill's Political economy: Ricardian Science and Liberal Utilitarian Art," In *The Cambridge Companion to Mill*, edited by John Skorupski, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 293.

of them. Whoever offers to another a bargain of any kind, proposes to do this. Give me that which I want, and you shall have this which you want, is the meaning of every such offer; and it is in this manner that we obtain from one another the far greater part of the good offices that we stand in need of. It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our necessities but of their advantages.⁴⁷

The passage above explains brilliantly the nature of human relations in market society. An individual propensity for self-interested behaviour is only one of the elements of the new era. Social division of labour and a legal framework of private property and contract are the other outstanding elements from which many other characteristic features are derived. Although these features are not only peculiar to modern age, it is in and through modernity that they become so central and pervasive. After the institution of private property rights was well established, the division of labour for various items and subsistence goods came to existence. The institution of private property meant that the goods were not directly available to satisfy the wants of those who did not own them. The problem was resolved through the market. Individuals exchanged goods which they own but did not want for goods which they wanted but did not own. Thus goods became commodities. Money as a medium of exchange gained importance more than ever. It both measured the exchange value of all other commodities and was directly exchangeable with them.⁴⁸

In modern world, individual, whose main motivation of action is self-interest, participates in the market society so as to maximize his profit (pleasure) and minimize his effort (pain) involved in the action. It is not surprising that utilitarianism is the moral theory most readily associated with the market. The utilitarian conception of pain/pleasure relation is directly analogous to the profit/loss conceptions of market transactions. To recall what Bentham thought of goals of human action, happiness, which implied nothing

⁴⁷ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, edited by R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), vol. I, book I, ch. ii, pp. 26-27.

⁴⁸ Poole, *Morality*, p. 3.

but the state of having pleasure is correspondent to the state of having profit in an economic sense. It becomes, then, reasonable in his sense to establish an analogy between money and happiness, and to appoint money as an objective and common measure for happiness. Thus interpreted, all items of possession and property has a value for Bentham as indicators of the extent of happiness, since all items of possession and property have an exchange value measured by money in market transactions.

An article of property, an estate in land, for instance, is valuable, on what account? On account of the pleasures of all kinds which it enables a man to produce, and what comes to the same thing the pains of all kinds which it enables him to avert. But the value of such a property is universally understood to rise or fall according to the length or shortness of the time which a man has in it: the certainty or uncertainty of its coming into possession: and the nearness or remoteness of the time at which, if at all, it is to come into possession. As to the *intensity* of the pleasures which a man may derive from it, this is never thought of, because it depends upon the use which each particular person may come to make of it; which cannot be estimated till the particular pleasures he may come to derive from it, or the particular pains he may come to exclude by means of it, are brought to view. For the same reason, neither does he think of the *fecundity* or *purity* of those pleasures.⁴⁹

Property, specifically private property, has a central role in Bentham's thought. Concepts such as 'power,' 'right,' 'security', 'interest' and 'happiness' must be all defined in relation to property. Meanwhile an individual's adequacy in life is only measured by his capacity to acquire and joy property. So one can infer that a "happy" person is one who has private property and and who derives pleasure out of its possession.

For Bentham property was the offspring of desire, as basic to a man as the exercise of his own will. . . He virtually identified property with human feelings – pleasure, security, expectation.⁵⁰

Determining money or private property as the measure of happiness, however, has some adverse implications Benthamite morality has to deal with. For example, if the general happiness is to be the *summum bonum* of morality, how will it be possible to reconcile the self-directed individual behavior in the market society with the public interest?

⁴⁹ Bentham, *Principles*, p. 32.

⁵⁰ D. G. Long, "Bentham on Property," In *Theories to Property: Aristotle to the Present*, edited by Anthony Parel and Thomas Flanagan (Waterloo, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1979), pp. 225-256.

The causal link between self-interested behaviour and overall social well-being is only maintained so long as self-interest operates within the limits set by private property and contracts. However, it is not clear that individuals who are ruthlessly self-interested as we have supposed them to be will respect those limits. They will, one would assume, steal or break contracts just as soon as it is in their interest to do so, i.e. when the probability of gain outweighs that of loss.⁵¹

Moreover, when the so called invisible hand which operates in the market independent of the individual intentions, produce advantageous results for certain classes of people and disadvantageous ones for other classes, how will the general welfare be achieved? Even if the individuals were supposed to have fellow feeling and care about the well-being of others, the invisible hand that produces unintended consequences of individual actions would preclude benevolent feelings in the society.

Hence, emphasis on money, consequently, on the commodities and properties the exchange value of which are measured by money; defining happiness as a quantitative entity which is limited to satisfaction of pleasures; moreover, supporting an economic theory which is based on people's self-directed motivations/behaviours and the existence of an 'invisible hand' seem to contradict with the greatest happiness principle of Benthamite utilitarianism. It seems impossible to bring individual and public good together in this conception of economic affairs and human motivation. (The economic implications of Bentham's thought will be evaluated in the final section.)

Besides, the application of utility principle and hedonic calculus assume that all pleasures and pains have common qualities susceptible to measurement by an identical metric. Bentham and his calculus presuppose that all pleasures and pains are sensations. Elsewhere Bentham himself talks about different kinds of pleasures such as pleasures of skill, pleasures of reputation, and pleasures of amity. Can we claim that they are all sensations, and that this is their common quality? Are pleasures of taste or of smell and pleasures of sympathy or religion from the same kind, that is, sensations? Certainly not. So

⁵¹ Poole, *Morality*, p. 10.

how can we calculate pleasures and pains caused by skill, reputation or amity, all of which have a different nature than sensational ones?

Another difficulty Bentham's hedonic calculus bears is the difficulty of case-by-case calculation. Even if we accept that utility is the litmus test of right actions and the canons of his calculus provide human beings with the greatest happiness of the greatest number, it's not so easy and practical to measure every case in terms of all conditions, circumstances and consequences in order to get the most benefit accordingly. In ordinary life, we often don't have enough time to contemplate on the actions we are going to take. Even if we can have the opportunity to know certain aspects of our actions and their consequences, it is not always possible to measure all the consequences and effects they will produce on a broader extent.

Such a calculus tends to exclude the previous experiences of human beings and their habits; thus requires a new and fresh measurement each time before choosing an action. It also refuses any moral intuitions that occur to agents when faced with alternative actions; for example, when someone is in a dilemma as to decide whether he should keep his promise or break his promise, moral intuitions directly dictate to keep one's promises whereas Bentham's quantitative hedonism enjoins the agent to calculate several factors and then decide about his action. One may break his promise if the consequence of his action produces more pleasure/utility/advantage over the pain/evil/disadvantage it may cause.

Some tried and accepted rules, dispositions and certain character traits that follow certain rules are overlooked by the case-by-case calculation of Benthamite utilitarianism. Whether one may lack information about the probable consequences of various acts and cannot estimate the consequences, or whether his limitations and biases may prevent to be an accurate calculator of the expected overall consequences is of no importance for

Bentham because he believes that so long as one knows what pain and pleasure mean—which all human beings do—one knows how to deal with them in decision-making:

Pain and pleasure at least are words which a man has no need, we may hope, to go to a lawyer to know the meaning of.⁵²

II.V. Motives and Consequences

Bentham doesn't accept "motive" as something that can establish the ground of rightness for the justification of action. It is only what moves us to act.

By a motive in the most extensive sense in which the word is ever used with reference to a thinking being is meant any thing that can contribute to, give birth to, or even to prevent any kind of action.⁵³

When we act according to certain motives it connotes that we act with the prospect of certain desirable consequences. By stating that "a motive is substantially nothing more than pleasure or pain, operating in a certain manner"⁵⁴, Bentham implies that the prospective consequences of motives are nothing but the principle of utility. Describing motives as good or bad in terms of their consequences means that they may yield good consequences at certain times whereas yield undesirable ones at other times.

The only right ground of action, that can possibly subsist, is, after all, the consideration of utility, which, if it is a right principle of action, and of approbation, in any one case, is so in every other. Other principles in abundance, that is, other motives, may be the reasons why such and such an act *has* been done: that is, the reasons or causes of its being done: but it is this alone that can be the reasons why it might or ought to have been done.⁵⁵

As there is nothing good in itself except pleasure and bad in itself except pain, and since pleasure and pain as "the only good and the only evil"⁵⁶ are produced consequent to actions, it is implausible to claim that certain motives are good or bad in themselves.

Now, pleasure is *itself* a good: nay, even setting aside immunity from pain, the only good: pain is in itself an evil; and, indeed, without exception, the only evil; or else the words good

⁵² Bentham, *Fragment*, p. 28.

⁵³ Bentham, *Principles*, p. 97.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

and evil have no meaning. And this is alike true of every sort of pain, and every sort of pleasure. It follows, therefore, immediately and incontestably, that *there is no such thing as any sort of motive that is in itself a bad one*” and also any sort of motive that is in itself a good one. “No motives,” he says, are “constantly good or constantly bad.”⁵⁷

If motives are good or bad, it is only on account of their consequences: good, on account of their tendency to produce pleasure or avert pain: bad, on account of their tendency to produce pain, or avert pleasure.⁵⁸ In *Principles*, Bentham gives a catalogue of motives and tries to show that in each case it’s the effect/consequence of the motive that denotes the epithet of good or bad to motives. In one of his examples, he discusses two radically different cases. In the first one, in order to gain a place in administration, one poisons the man who occupies it. In the second case, one proposes a salutary plan for the advancement of the public welfare. Bentham declares that the motive is the same in both cases. Yet in the first case it is accounted criminal and abominable; in the second case allowable, and even laudable.⁵⁹

Again, the desire of wealth may lead one to kill a man’s enemy or to plough his field for him; the fear of God may prompt to fanaticism or to charity; ill-will may lead to malicious conduct or may take the form of proper ‘resentment’, as, for example, when one secures the punishment of his father’s murderer. Though one act, he says, is approved and the other condemned, they spring from the same motive, namely, ill-will.⁶⁰ Yet, Bentham admits that, some motives are more likely than others to lead to ‘useful’ conduct, and thus arranges them in a certain ‘order of pre-eminence’. It is obvious that ‘goodwill’, ‘love of reputation’, and ‘desire of amity’ are more likely than others to promote general happiness.⁶¹

However, goodness or badness cannot with any propriety be predicated to motives. The only way, it should seem, in which a motive can, with propriety and safety, be styled

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

good or bad is with reference to its effects in each individual instance and principally from the intention it gives birth to: from which arise the most material part of its effects. A motive is good when the intention it gives birth to is a good one; bad, when the intention is a bad one: and an intention is good or bad, according to the material consequences that are the objects of it.⁶²

Bentham thus concludes that all actions of reasonable beings imply the expectation of consequences. The agent's intention is defined by the consequences actually contemplated. The cause of action is the hope of the consequent pleasures or the dread of the consequent pains. Indeed, motives are the causes of intentions; and, dispositions are the sum of intentions. Both motives and the intentions they give birth to are denoted good or bad with the effects they produce. The case is likewise for dispositions:

Is there nothing than about a man that can properly be termed good or bad when on such or such an occasion, he suffers himself to be governed by such or such a motive? Yes, certainly: his *disposition*. Now disposition is a kind of fictitious entity, feigned for the convenience of discourse, in order to express what there is supposed to be *permanent* in a man's frame of mind, where on such or such an occasion, he has been influenced by such or such a motive, to engage in an act, which, as it appeared to him, was of such or such tendency.⁶³

It is with disposition as with everything else; It will be good or bad according to its effects, according to the effect it has in augmenting or diminishing the happiness of the community.⁶⁴

In Benthamite system all human traits and dispositions are considered according to the influence they have on the agent's own happiness or on the happiness of others. Consequently, even the dispositions and human traits are evaluated with the service they give to happiness; in other words, they are assessed with the extent they contain pleasure for the agent himself and for the others.

Some object to Bentham for saying that the motives from which men act are morally indifferent; whereas some others defend him, for they also believe it is the material consequences what one ought to evaluate on moral issues. According to the latter view,

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

what Bentham means by saying motives are morally neutral is that any kind of desire may be the cause of either good or bad intentions. A man may desire to eat, and to satisfy his hunger he may either get food from his own larder or he may steal it from his neighbour's. The desire in either case is the same, but the two actions prompted by it are quite different. So they claim that when Bentham says that a motive is morally neutral, he is thinking of a naked desire without taking into account the circumstances in which it arose or the intention to which it gives birth.⁶⁵

Meanwhile, the former view argues that, even though his account of motives may not arise much problem in legal affairs, it constitutes difficulties in the sphere of morality. Leslie Stephen emphasizes the fact that the doctrine that morality depends upon 'consequences' and not upon 'motives' became a characteristic utilitarian dogma:

. . . it was both a natural and, I think, in some senses, a correct view, when strictly confined to the province of legislation. For reasons too obvious to expand, the legislator must often be indifferent to the questions of motives. He cannot know with certainty what are man's motives. He must enforce the law whatever may be the motives for breaking it.; and punish rebellion, for example, even if he attributes it to misguided philanthropy...he depends, therefore, upon 'external' sanctions; sanctions that is, which work mainly upon the fears of physical pain; and even if his punishments affect the wicked alone, they clearly cannot reach the wicked as wicked, nor in proportion to their wickedness.⁶⁶

According to Stephen, the danger of ignoring motives of actions doesn't appear in the framework of legislation. It is the province of morality that it may cause trouble:

It shows also that the analogy between the positive and the moral law is treacherous. The exclusion of motive justifiable in law may take all meaning out of morality. The Utilitarians...were too much disposed to overlook the difference, and attempt to apply purely legal doctrine in the totally uncongenial sphere of ethical speculation.⁶⁷

Therefore Stephen claims that the morality of an action cannot be independent of the motive from which it is derived. What is more concerning is that, though Stephen's argument seems more plausible—for all dimensions of action should be included in its evaluation of rightness—there still remains deeper problems in the interpretation of

⁶⁵ John Planematz, *The English Utilitarians* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1958), p. 78.

⁶⁶ Stephen, *Utilitarians*, pp. 257-258.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

morally right actions in terms of motive, intention and so on. The problem here seems to be the exclusion of rational processes in deciding the right conduct and the reduction of many factors to some psychological entities such as pain and pleasure. Bentham may object that reason (understanding) is at work when the agent is confronted with several alternatives of action. He may explain that reason assists the volition via calculating the possible amount of benefit and utility one may derive from different choices.

Hume, however, whose moral philosophy had a profound influence on Bentham, upon stating that “reason of itself is impotent”, and therefore “the rules of morality . . . are not conclusions of our reason”, explains how reason can affect our actions:

Reason . . . can have an influence on our conduct only after two ways: Either when it excites a passion by informing us of the existence of something which is a proper object of it; or when it discovers the connection of causes and effects, so as to afford us the means of exciting passions.⁶⁸

So, according to Hume, it is not our reason but our emotions that prescribe the ends we are to pursue. We can not expect reason to prescribe to us what we ought to desire for its own sake. When Hume and Bentham are compared in terms of their conceptions of rationality, their basic disagreement seems to arise in their construal of to what reason is subservient: Hume places it at the service of emotions and passions, whereas, in Bentham, reason is at the service of pains and pleasures. Both thinkers approve of the faculty of will as a mediator operating between reason and emotions (Hume)/sensations (Bentham).

One can see that evaluating morally right conduct in terms of motives, intentions and dispositions indicate the approbation of only some psychological components in the process. While there’s an appeal to reason in order to determine the most effective means to achieve the given end, reason has a subordinate and secondary function in the affair. Though Benthamite utilitarianism stresses that the main goal of human kind is the greatest happiness of the greatest number, delienating reason as an impotent faculty—subservient

⁶⁸ Cited by Plamenatz, *Utilitarians*, p. 24.

to will and its instructions—renders the theory weak and impotent. His desire to render morality a science by providing an objective psychological ground to all human affairs and their value, instigates a perception of human nature condemned and confined to a “mindless” search for pleasure-satisfaction and pain-avoidance. Moreover, explaining human conduct only in terms of some motives and intentions with reference to pain and pleasure depicts human beings as machines which receive some input and produce some output after some inner processes.

II.V. Individual Interest vs. Public Interest

For Bentham ethics is defined as the art of directing men’s actions to the production of the greatest possible quantity of happiness, on the part of those whose interest is in view.⁶⁹ After asking what actions can be in man’s power to direct, he replies that they must be either his own actions, or those of other agents. Other agents under the influence of man’s direction include other human beings and other animals. This distinction gives rise to another distinction in Bentham’s analysis of ethics as the art of regulation and control:

So ethics, in as far as it is the art of directing a man’s own actions, may be styled the *art of self-government*, or *private ethics*.⁷⁰

As to other human beings, the art of directing their actions to the above end is what we mean, or at least the only thing which, upon the principle of utility, we *ought* to mean, by the art of government: which, in as far as the measures it displays itself in are of a permanent nature, is generally distinguished by the name of *legislation*: as it is by that of *administration*, when they are of a temporary nature, determined by the occurrences of the day.⁷¹

After distinguishing the two arts about human actions he clarifies the content of ethical duties. Since man’s happiness depends, in the first place, upon parts of his behaviour as none but himself are interested in, and in the next place, upon the parts of it as may affect the happiness of those about him, Bentham defines two different kinds of duty:

⁶⁹ Bentham, *Principles*, p. 310.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 311.

The agent's duty to himself and to others. He calls the quality manifested through 'duty to himself' as 'prudence', and through duty to others as 'probity' and 'beneficence'. By discharging his duty to other people, i.e. his '*duty to his neighbour*'⁷², in a negative way the agent is considered to forbear to diminish the happiness of his neighbour and in a positive way to study to increase it. Probity is the former and beneficence is the latter.

For Bentham, the only interests which a man at all times and upon all occasions is sure to find adequate motives for consulting are 'his own'. On the other hand he admits that there are also some other motives for consulting the happiness of other men. Sympathy or benevolence, love of amity and love of reputation are the social motives which someone has on occasions for other humans. So Bentham believes that human beings mostly act to promote their own interest/happiness/advantage/pleasure. Accordingly, he argues that legislators should assume that their fellow citizens will act out of self-interest and that they should design laws taking this fact into consideration.

Some claim that, in Bentham's thought, there's a distinction between 'is' and 'ought' in terms of morality and legislation. They argue that what we do is something whereas what we ought to do is something else, that is, in Bentham's moral view 'is' can be defined as 'self-interest' that motivates all human conduct and 'ought' as acting to promote the 'general interest' of the community. On the other hand, Bentham believes that community is a fictitious entity composed of individuals. This matter of 'fictitious' and 'real' refers to Bentham's ontological ideas. In his work called *Ontology* he distinguishes 'real entities' from 'fictitious entities', a distinction which he first learned from d'Alembert.

Real entities are individual perceptions, impressions and ideas whereas fictitious entities don't raise up in the mind any correspondent images. He states that fictitious entities owe their existence to the necessities of language and without employing such

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 312.

entities, the language of man could not have risen above the language of brutes. However he stresses that they are not unreal or fabulous entities. He only means that they are not tangible, weighable, or measurable, like sticks and stones, or like pains or pleasures. Fictitious entities are predicaments of the real entities. One cannot really conceive the fictitious entities apart from the concrete/real things qualified and related.⁷³

Bentham capitalizes on this doctrine in his moral and political speculations. He proclaims that pains/pleasures are real, as their existence is a matter of universal and constant experience, and whatever other various names such as obligation, virtue, justice, vice, etc. denote are fictitious. He believes accordingly that individuals are real whereas community is fictitious. Because they are the real entities which the moral philosopher and the legislator take into consideration and study, it is the individual not the community that ought to be the subject matter of political sphere. Taking individual as subject matter is sufficient for considerations of the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

Community is only a fictitious name indicating the aggregate of the individuals. Thus, when we talk of serving the interests of community, we are actually talking of promoting the interests of the individual members of the community. Since community is a fiction whereas the individual members are real, the interests of the community is simply “the sum of interests of the several members who compose it”⁷⁴. What is left of this reduction is that each person follows his own interest as a fact derived from his nature; however, he ought to act so as to promote the general interest/happiness of the community which means nothing more than ‘pursuing his own interest again’ since community is a fiction and consequently its interests/advantages are also fiction.

By pursuing his own good and avoiding his own evil one indirectly contributes to the sum total good of the community. This is an individual based point of view which,

⁷³ Stephen, *Utilitarians*, pp. 247-249.

⁷⁴ Bentham, *Principles*, p. 3.

Bentham claims, not only recognizes and protects but also favors the well-being of others as well. But Bentham fails to give a proper account of this. His system lacks reliable and effective ties that bind individuals to the community. How is it possible, in Bentham's utilitarian scheme, to motivate someone to consult the happiness of others? What makes one behave in a way to forbear to diminish or study to increase his neighbour's happiness? And why should someone obey the dictates of probity and beneficence?

Bentham's answer to all these questions resorts to a single and simple solution: law and legislation. The method Bentham offers for reconciling self interest with general interest, that is, interests with duties/obligations is through punishment and reward, which, he argues, is the task and function of legislation.

The business of government is to promote the happiness of the society, by punishing and rewarding.⁷⁵

Bentham sees legislator as the manager of an organization, and his task as one of devising means for attaining the general happiness, which, at the same time, will serve the personal interests of individual citizens, or the members of the organizations.

Helvetius was one of the important figures having great effect on Bentham's thought. Bentham was deeply influenced by Helvetius' theory of law. In Helvetius' *De l'Esprit* Bentham finds the answers to the basic questions he asks himself. The most engaging question was how the conflicting interests in the society could joint together. Helvetius pointed to the sphere of legislation for the answer, and that idea gave much inspiration to Bentham for the thoughts he afterwards developed.

All men tend only towards their happines, that it is a tendency from which they can not be diverted; that the attempt would be fruitless, and even the success dangerous; constantly, it is only by incorporating personal and general interest that they can be virtuous. So, the ought, can only be achieved by so designing a system so that each person following his own interest will in fact do what will result in general utility. Hence morality is evidently no more than a frivolous science, unless blended with policy and legislation.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁷⁶ Cited by Harrison, *Bentham*, p. 114.

So the legislator by his artifice or construction makes self-interest coincide with the general interest, in other words, keeping interest in line with duty. While carrying out this task the legislator should know the human nature and the motives that give birth to his conduct. Once he knows that (avoiding) pain and (obtaining) pleasure are the motives and the ultimate end of human beings, it remains to construct a legal system accordingly to coincide self- interest with general interest. In *Fragment on Government*, Bentham gives his definition of what constitutes a political society.

When a number of persons (whom we may style subjects) are supposed to be in the habit of paying obedience to a person, or an assemblage of persons, of a known and certain description (whom we may call governor or governors) such persons altogether (subjects and governors) are said to be in a state of political society.⁷⁷

This is a definition adopted by many subsequent utilitarian theories.⁷⁸ But also quite a problematic one: Why do people feel a need or an obligation to come together and form a collective body? How are some persons assigned to govern while the others are obliged to pay obedience? What are the justifications of ‘a governor’ or ‘an assemblage of governors’?

The justification Bentham offers for the constitution of a political society and sovereignty, i.e. state, government, is based on the contractarian framework provided by Hobbes, who argues that “in the state of nature men interfere with one another, and this interference makes their lives intolerable. They therefore set up a political society, which substitutes a milder, and more orderly and economical interference for the repeated, brutal and incalculable shocks to which they were previously exposed. Like a house in which travelers shelter from the storm, society protects men much more than it limits their freedom.”⁷⁹

The final cause, end, or design of men (who naturally love liberty and dominion over others) in the introduction of that restraint upon themselves, in which we see them live in

⁷⁷ Bentham, *Fragment*, p. 137.

⁷⁸ Plamenatz, *Utilitarians*, p. 65.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

Commonwealths, is the foresight of their own preservation, and of a more contented life thereby; That is to say, of getting themselves out from that miserable condition of war which is necessarily consequent.. to the natural passions of men when there is no visible power to keep them in awe, and tie them by fear of punishment to the performance of their covenants, and observation of these laws of nature..⁸⁰

Bentham similarly believes that government is something necessary, even in the case of 'evil' governments and governors. He even concedes that "all government is in itself one vast evil"⁸¹ but it also excludes the worst evil, namely rolling back into the state of nature, where there is no society, no government, no law and order, only uncertainty, disorder and pain.

In other words, both Hobbes and Bentham think that a political society and government is necessary because there's more evil and trouble at its absence. Since people are self-interested, and mostly act for their own benefits, in the absence of law and government's limitations, one part of the people may benefit a lot while the other part may suffer various pains. So in order to avoid more evil, Bentham concludes, 'subjects' must obey the government and its sanctions

so long as the probable mischiefs of obedience are less than the probable mischiefs of resistance . . . Taking the whole body together, it is their duty to obey, just as long as it is their interest, and no longer.⁸²

In short, government is evil because it causes coercion, coercion causes pain, and pain is evil; but its coercive action creates less pain than it prevents. Thus by forming a government and obeying it, it seems that people benefit more. What is beneficial for the whole body of people is compatible with the interests of individuals.

All this justification shows a lack of consistency in Bentham's views. He claims that people are in fact selfish creatures while he also defends that their 'ought' in life is the principle of greatest happiness, according to which people ought to care for the well-being/interest of others and look out for the greatest happiness of people affected by their

⁸⁰ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, *Istanbul Bilgi University Ebrary Academic Complete E-Books* <http://0-site.ebrary.com.library.bilgi.edu.tr/lib/bilgi/docDetail.action?docID=20001972&p00=leviathan>

⁸¹ Cited by Stephen, *Utilitarians*, p. 287

⁸² Bentham, *Fragment*, p. 160.

conduct. All governmental devices, legislation, moral and political sanctions are established so as to ensure to reconcile and consolidate individual interest with the general interest.

Bentham's justification of state/government seems to be incompatible with the basic tenets of his moral theory. He justifies government by claiming that it causes evil to prevent more evil. So, it serves the interest of individual persons to live together, form governments, obey rules and contribute to the happiness of the majority. This way, individuals attain security, and serve their own interest. This, however, implies nothing other than the self-interest of individuals: respect and protect the general interest, because it will serve to your individual interest. Hence 'the greatest happiness/utility principle' can not be an end in itself but only an instrument, means to the interest of individuals.

This argument of Bentham's is hardly consistent with his frequent assertions that the greatest happiness of the greatest number is an ultimate end, for what nobody desires except as a means can hardly be an ultimate end.⁸³

Not only Bentham but other English Utilitarians such as Hume, Hobbes, A. Smith try to solve that conflict concerning the incompatibility of self-interest with general interest, but to no avail. Hume, for example, thinks that the only way to join personal self-interest with general happiness, i.e. inclination with duty, is by altering the direction of self-interest. The only possible restriction on self-interest must be self-interest itself.

There is no passion . . . capable of controlling the interested affection, but the very affection itself, by an alteration of its direction...For whether the passion of self-interested be esteemed virtuous or vicious, 'tis all of a case'; since it alone restrains it.⁸⁴

His explanation seems to imply that the apparent conflict between duty and inclination, self and general interest is the conflict between long term and short term self-interest. But it doesn't explain how the individuals will sacrifice, for example, their interest on an occasion of great obligation. That sacrifice may be asked from the citizens of a

⁸³ Plamenatz, *Utilitarians*, p. 84.

⁸⁴ Cited by Poole, *Morality*, p. 11.

country in a state of war, or in a state of natural disaster. Will the person think that he'd better, for instance, share his property with the sufferers of the disaster, because he may also be in need of such a help one day? Hume's probable answer to this question would be 'yes'. Then, one can make a similar inference from what Hume proposes that general interest/happiness is not an end in itself but only a means to personal self-interest. This is a conclusion not far different than what Hobbes and Bentham comes up with, and suffers the same inconsistency.

Adam Smith invokes virtue as a way out of this difficulty. His account of virtue demands a readiness to override self-interest in the name of the public good.⁸⁵ On the other hand, Smith is the trumpeter of economic liberalism, free trade and the government non-intervention in the economy. His ideas are based on a theory of the natural division of labor and consequent natural system of economic exchange.

In laboring and exchanging what their labor produced for the products of others' labor, human beings were simultaneously pursuing their own interests and benefitting the community of which they were a part... Predominant in his thought was the belief that there was a natural convergence of interests and that in pursuing his own best interests, each person was benefitting others.⁸⁶

Yet, in cases of conflict of interests, Smith asks the individual to give way to the public benefit and watch for the general happiness. In his account of morality, he calls this kind of altruism 'virtue'. However, his human conception and economic theory precludes such an altruism. If everyone is concerned with his own needs, wants, desires and happiness more than anything else, asking for such an altruism is completely irrational in this sense. To demand virtue of such an individual is to ask for a quite inexplicable altruism. Moreover, while free market and division of labour was defended by him as the unique ways to produce the greatest amount of happiness, is it reasonable to expect self-

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁸⁶ P. Gomberg, "Self and Others in Bentham and Sidgwick," In *Jeremy Bentham Critical Assessments*, Edited by Bhikhu Parekh, Volume II(London: Routledge, 1993), p. 501.

sacrifice from individuals accordingly? The glory of market society would militate against the practice of virtue.

The division of labour would limit the vision and concerns of those subject to it, and the inequalities which were its natural consequence would create envy and hostility. These would all work against the development of a concern for the public well-being.⁸⁷

So, altruism doesn't provide a sufficient motive to create harmony between the interest and benefit of individuals and public. As long as human beings' motivations are presupposed to be self-directed, and their politic and economic activities are thought to be concerning their own needs, wants and expectations, prior to public well-being, all attempts to converge part and whole, individual and public will be useless.

This matter isn't handled differently by Bentham, a close disciple of Adam Smith.⁸⁸

His explication of the conflicting interests is almost the same as Smith's. He believes that

there was a natural *tendency* for pursuit of enlightened self interest to promote the community welfare and this tendency could be developed and perfected by enlightened legislation and moral teaching.⁸⁹

His emphasis on a developed and perfected legislative sphere is what may distinguish him from Adam Smith. As stated before, Bentham divides ethics into two parts: private ethics and legislation. While ethics in general is defined as the art of directing men's actions to the greatest possible quantity of happiness, private ethics is the art of directing one's own actions and legislation is concerned with directing the actions of others. Private ethics commands individual to pursue not only his own happiness but community's happiness as well. However, for Bentham, the only interests which a man at all times and upon all occasions is sure to find adequate motive for consulting are his own. Nevertheless, people have some motives for consulting the happiness of others, but the former is more dominant as a motivation in their lives. Thus, primary aim of private ethics is agent's own happiness.

⁸⁷ Poole, *Morality*, p. 13.

⁸⁸ Halévy, Cited by Gomberg, *Jeremy Bentham*, p. 500.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 501.

Bentham's formulation of the content of private ethics seems also quite problematic. The sphere of private ethics includes both individual's self-concern and his concern for others, but it is agent's own interest that private ethics primarily aims at. Cases of conflicting interests become a problem again. Here Bentham resorts to legislation, the part of the ethics which regulates the individual and public affairs, and deals with probable conflicts and incompatibilities. He believes that the problem of conjuncting interests is only a matter of time, progress and developed legislation.

However, what seems to preclude such a conjunction of interests is his conception of individual and society. He thinks that a political society is a body that is composed of individuals who are supposed to be in the habit of paying obedience to a person or an assemblage of persons. The motivation that brings people together to form a society is to avoid the evil/pain/disorder/danger/anarchy of the state of nature. Therefore, people form societies for their security/interest/utility, which otherwise would be completely meaningless, for society is a body which produces coercion/pain on individuals. Founding a political society is justified by the belief that society protects and promotes individual's utility. It is shown above that such an explanation concerning the origins of society renders the principle of greatest happiness of greatest number meaningless. If everyone's conduct is self-directed and forming a political society is for the sake of ensuring personal interests, then urging the greatest happiness of the greatest number turns out to be an illusion or a baseless motto.

Bentham's society is no more than the simple aggregate or sum total of the individuals who are its members. His society doesn't have any corporate identity over or above the individual members, and doesn't include any social reality that is in some sense more or greater than the sum of society's parts. One must add together all the individual pleasures or happiness in the society, and the total that one arrives at will be the social

happiness or pleasure at which legislation should aim.⁹⁰ If there be any deviation of pleasures/interests or any offences to that aggregate happiness than it is the task of the legislators and judges to interfere and procure the security and happiness again.

It can be concluded, after this lengthy discussion, that what renders the matter of conflicting interests insoluble is Bentham's depiction of society and individual. He believes that society is only good for protecting and extending individual's utility. Otherwise, it is completely evil, as it produces coercion on individuals. One may argue that Bentham emplaces society and individual in two different worlds that are metaphysically incompatible and therefore seem to be radically ruptured from each other in the sense that there exists no possibility of any concrete mutual relations between them. Bentham would probably object to that criticism, claiming that his views about economical and political activities of individuals include some sort of interaction with society.

The truth is, Bentham's individual is an agent whose needs, wants, interest and happiness are decided by himself alone. The fundamental motive of all his activities is a subjective, psychological one, that is, promotion of pleasure. Such a conception implicitly isolates individual from society by rendering him—not even him, his utility expectation—the only determinant of his conduct. This individual's actions are governed by such psychological processes as motivation, intention, above all, pleasure and pain. On the other hand, the most elemental, yet complex and powerful function of his being, namely his ability to think, is given only the subordinate role of deciding the appropriate means to attend more pleasure, thus demoted and confined to the subserviency of mindless search for utility maximization. As our critical analysis of Benthamite utilitarianism suggests, this “individual” happens to be the primary obstacle to the convergence of individual and general interests, and therefore, to the promotion of general happiness.

⁹⁰ Narendra Vermani, *50 Greatest Political Thinkers* (Chandigarh, Global Media, 2008), p. 140.

Finally, the utilitarian individual, whose economical activities are reduced to only producing what market commands him to produce, and therefore who cannot envision, understand or exercise the much broader breadth of interrelations that exist, or may exist, between labour, community and happiness, is ruled by market laws which he cannot fully comprehend. Since he can't penetrate into the market rules (indeed there is no such rule; free trade and competition are its only features) he can not have a control on his economical activities. Because his access to and possession of the means to attain a good life is mostly determined by market and its contingencies, to be happy becomes a matter of chance.

III. Mill and the Attempt to Reform Benthamism

James Mill, a close friend of Jeremy Bentham, was also from a utilitarian tradition which determined all his economical, political, psychological and moral ideas. Young Mill received a remarkable education:

He was taught Greek at three, read the Roman historians before he was ten, embarked on logic at twelve and in his early teens learned economics by assisting his father in the composition of his *Elements of Political Economy*.⁹¹

Though his father's desire was to leave behind him an ambitious follower, strictly adhered to Benthamism, young Mill made a few modifications in this utilitarian position. Whether these are radical changes is not the subject matter of this exposition, but our investigations through his corpus reveals that in spite of his efforts to go beyond Benthamite utilitarianism, Mill hasn't been able to get rid off its constraints, and the fundamental premises of Benthamite utilitarianism, as well as its associated problems, recur in Mill's thought.

On the other hand, one must admit that Mill's utilitarianism is much more comprehensive, rich, sophisticated and inspiring than his predecessor's. Bentham attempts to defend utilitarianism via law and legislation while Mill appeals to a variety of subjects such as economy, politics, and literature. Bentham was the first to systematize utilitarianism as a moral and political doctrine, though its origin can be dated before him, whereas Mill was the one to develop it into a sophisticated and more thorough theory, definitely deserving to be regarded as a major figure in the history of modern utilitarianism. It's the contribution of Mill to the doctrine that rendered utilitarianism more attractive to a larger audience rather than Bentham's.

⁹¹ Alan Ryan, "Introduction," In *Utilitarianism and Other Essays: John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham*, Edited by Alan Ryan, (London: Penguin Books, 1987) , p. 10.

Mill's best known work in ethics—perhaps the best known of all his works—is a short book called *Utilitarianism*. It was not written as a scholarly treatise but as installments in a magazine called *Fraser's Magazine* in 1861 and published as a book in 1863. Many defenders of Mill's utilitarianism urge to take this fact into consideration. They state that the essay was written in a magazine for a general audience and arguments put forward there shouldn't be handled in isolation from his other works.⁹² Despite this fact *Utilitarianism* is his only work which deals thoroughly with all aspects of that ethical theory.

III.I. The Greatest Happiness Principle

Utility, or the principle of greatest happiness, as a standard of conduct, has an immense significance and impact in Mill's philosophy as in Bentham's. Utility is not only a simple matter of morality for Mill, but also a comprehensive principle valid for all spheres of life: Mill considers utilitarianism not only an ethical theory but a theory of life as well. In an essay called *Of the Logic of Practice, or Art*, Mill states that utility is not itself the end of all actions or even of all rules of action, but it ought to be the controller of all the ends in life.⁹³

In the same essay, Mill makes a distinction between arts and sciences. He expresses that though it's usually termed as moral knowledge or moral science, the field which deals with human conduct or duties should be termed as 'art' but not 'science'. Morality is an art, as it has an imperative mood. Whatever speaks in rules or precepts, not in assertions respecting matters of fact, is art. After an elaborate inquiry about the domain and methods of art and science, he declares that

⁹² Wendy Donner and Alan Ryan can be recalled in that sense.

⁹³ John Stuart Mill, "Of the Logic of Practice," In *Mill's Ethical Writings*, Edited by J. B. Schneewind (New York: Collier Books, 1965), p. 168.

though the reasonings which connect the end or purpose of every art with its means belong to the domain of Science, the definition of the end itself belongs exclusively to Art, and forms its peculiar province. Every art has one first principle or general major premise, nor borrowed from science. . . A scientific observer or reasoner. . . is not an adviser for practice. His part is only to show that consequences follow from certain causes and that, to obtain certain ends, certain means are the most effectual.⁹⁴

This can also be read as his view about human reason and desires. Like Bentham, Mill believes that human desires and affections, not reason, determine the ends in life. Though reason is not completely impotent, it has only a subordinate function to find out the causes and effects, and to ‘obtain certain ends’ which ‘means are the most effectual’. So Mill, just like Bentham, subordinates reason to human desires. When an end or purpose is required, the address of inquiry is human pleasures and pains, not reason. Purposes originally arise from feelings of pain or pleasure. Consequently, reason cannot provide an end for human conduct or morality. However it can “show that consequences follow from certain causes, and that to obtain certain ends, certain means are the most effectual”⁹⁵. Mill’s definition of utility, the principle which constitutes the core of his doctrine, sounds very much like Bentham. Its first sentence appears to endorse utilitarianism, while the second sentence appears to endorse a hedonistic conception of utilitarianism:

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 pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure.⁹⁶

Thus establishing the moral standard, Mill expresses that utilitarian theory includes the exigencies for a ‘theory of life’ which can essentially be put forth as

pleasure, and the freedom from pain, are the only things desirable as ends; and... all desirable things (which are as numerous in the utilitarian as in any other scheme) are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in themselves, or as means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 165-166.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.166.

⁹⁶ John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* (London: The Electric Book Company, 2001), pp. 13-14.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

So, both of Mill's utility principle and conception of happiness is in parallel with his predecessor's views. Though he tries to develop and render the theory more attractive to public and its opponents, the fundamental notions of the doctrine remains unchanged:

Mill never abandoned the basic Utilitarianism which he had been taught as a child. He did not go in search of a new first principle.⁹⁸

Some of his exponents praise Mill with creating a distinctive form of utilitarianism. But this can be easily disputed, for the general framework of Mill's doctrine which is expressed by the creed that 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number is the ultimate end of all human conduct, and by happiness intended pleasure and privation of pain' is identical with Bentham's. It's true that Mill has introduced some alterations in the details of the doctrine, which will be discussed in the following pages, however they are not sufficient to claim that Mill has redefined utilitarianism, inasmuch as the fundamental aspects of the doctrine remain untouched.

Mill, like Bentham, asserts that the principle of utility has an influence on other ethical theories, even on the ones that reject utility severely:

whatever steadiness or consistency these moral beliefs have, attained, has been mainly due to the tacit influence of a standard not recognised. Although the non-existence of an acknowledged first principle has made ethics not so much a guide as a consecration of men's actual sentiments, still as men's sentiments, both of favour and aversion, are greatly influenced by what they suppose to be effects of things upon their happiness, the principle of utility, or as Bentham latterly called it, the greatest happiness principle, has had a large share in forming the moral doctrines even of those who most scornfully rejects its authority.⁹⁹

In a very long essay titled *Whewell on Moral Philosophy*, Mill defends Bentham and his utilitarian first principle against a Cambridge scholar, a well-known intuitionist of the time, William Whewell. This essay is quite significant as Mill argues against and criticizes the prevailing theory of the time, namely, intuitionism. His comparative analysis of intuitionism and utilitarianism in terms of their first principles brings out a rich and

⁹⁸ J. B. Schneewind, "Introduction," In *Mill's Ethical Writings*, Edited by J. B. Schneewind (New York: Collier Books, 1965), p. 17.

⁹⁹ Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p. 8.

exhaustive debate that reveals considerable insight about the utility principle. It is here that Mill accuses most moral standards, specifically the intuitionist principle, of being 'hybrid'.

Whewell's intuitionism derives its standard of right action from legal rights and law, and when the legal rights are insufficient or bad, the moral rights determine the legal rights. Mill argues that this intuitionist definition of morality is trapped in a 'vicious circle'. Whewell, on the other hand, calls utilitarianism a 'dependent theory' based on an external/material standard of utility or pleasure, whereas he describes his theory as an 'independent' one based on an internal principle. Independent moral standards are emancipating the moral agent since they rely on reason, intuition or conscience, all of which are immaterial notions. Mill, on the contrary, dismisses all theories which impose conformity to intuition or conscience as completely subjective and unreliable, since they move in a vicious circle without an egress. He thinks this is actually the case with all defenders of intuitionism. According to intuitionism, moral principles are necessary, self-evident and true *a priori*. Mill objects to this doctrine that no truth about the world is *a priori* or self-evident.

Mill complains about philosophers who encourage people to believe that they cannot be in error about anything they feel strongly enough about. He defends that feelings, conscience and intuitions are not sufficient to render human conduct moral. He does not deny the significance of these moral concepts; on the contrary, he acknowledges that they might even be useful in determining right. However, Mill thinks that, independently, they cannot provide a foundation for morality as they are not innate or static, but artificial and products of culture. Consequently relying on one's feelings, intuitions, or conscience never constitutes an objective or unambiguous principle for human beings, since the content of those notions would constantly change from one person to another, and even within the same person.

Moreover, though intuitionists severely reject utilitarianism as a ‘pig philosophy’ (they depict utilitarianism as ‘pig philosophy’ due to the value attributed to pleasures by utilitarians), they still justify their intuitionist morality with public utility; and this, according to Mill, renders it a ‘hybrid’ theory. He reprehends Whewell and other intuitionists for building their morality on two different foundations:

Of this Hybrid character is the ethics of Dr Whewell’s *Elements of Morality*. And in this he resembles all other writers of the intuitive school of morals. They are none of them frankly and consistently intuitive. To use a happy expression of Bentham in a different case, they draw from double fountain—utility and internal conviction; the tendencies of actions, and the feelings with which mankind regard them.¹⁰⁰

Whereas intuitionism has a hybrid character, utilitarianism is unique and independent.

Utility, as a standard is, capable of being carried out singly and consistently; a moralist can deduce from it his whole system of ethics, without calling to his assistance any foreign principle.¹⁰¹

No school of ethics can refuse

to admit that the influence of actions on happiness is a most material and even predominant consideration in many of the details of the morals.¹⁰²

Kant is one of those philosophers who receives severe objection from Mill. Kant’s attempt to derive all morality from the famous formula that one must act so that the rule on which he acts may be law for all rational beings sounds completely unhelpful to morality. Kant tries to deduce all morality from reason, and this enterprise, for Mill,

. . . really proves at most . . . the formula truth that laws must be consistent, but it fails almost grotesquely in showing which consistent laws are right. Absolute selfishness or absolute benevolence would equally satisfy the formula.¹⁰³

Mill seems to consider Kant’s theory not only useless, but also ethically hazardous, on the grounds that it ‘grotesquely’ authorizes the universal adoption of ‘the most outrageous immoral rules’.

¹⁰⁰ John Stuart Mill, “Dr. Whewell on Moral Philosophy”, In *Mill’s Ethical Writings*, Edited by J. B. Schneewind (New York: Collier Books, 1965), p. 261.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 261-262.

¹⁰² Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p. 8.

¹⁰³ Sir Leslie Stephen, *The English Utilitarians: Volume III: John Stuart Mill* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley . Publishers, 1968), p. 302.

. . . when [Kant] begins to deduce from this precept any of the actual duties of morality, he fails, almost grotesquely, to show that there would be any contradiction, any logical (not to say physical) impossibility, in the adoption by all rational beings of the most outrageously immoral rules of their universal adoption would be such as no one would choose to incur.¹⁰⁴

Surprisingly, Mill turns out to be critical, to a certain extent, of Hume's conception of morality as well. Hume has a great influence on utilitarians, as stated in the previous chapter. One of his influences on Bentham as well as Mill, is his views concerning reason's role in the process of moral judgment. For Hume, ethics is not a matter of reason but a matter of moral sense, which is a faculty of the human mind. Furthermore, Mill appears to be in accord with Hume on the subject of nature and function of moral judgements and feelings.

It is a fact in human nature that we have moral judgements and moral feelings. We judge certain actions and dispositions to be right, others wrong; this we call approving and disapproving them. We have also feelings of pleasure in the contemplation of the former class of actions and dispositions—feelings of dislike and aversion to the latter; which feelings, as everybody must be conscious, do not exactly resemble any other of our feelings of pain and pleasure.¹⁰⁵

What Mill rejects in Hume is his account of morality being a property in the acts themselves, which we can perceive by our senses, as we perceive colours by sight, and his claims concerning the existence of a moral sense which perceives morality of human conduct on its own. Mill, following Bentham's footsteps, does not hesitate to label all those moral theories as theories of sympathy. Moral sense, common sense, and intuitionism are all denoted alike. He points out that Bentham describes those

as followers of the 'principle of sympathy and antipathy'; not because they had themselves generalized their principle of judgement, or would have acknowledged it when placed undisguised before them; but because, at the bottom of what they imposed on themselves and others as reasons, he could find nothing else; because they all, in one phrase or another, placed the test of right and wrong in a feeling of approbation or disapprobation, thus making the feeling its own reason and its own justification.¹⁰⁶

Mill, as an empiricist, wants to found morality on concrete and material grounds rather than on such obscure and unmanageable abstractions as conscience, reason, public

¹⁰⁴ Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p. 9.

¹⁰⁵ Alan Ryan, "Introduction," In *Utilitarianism and Other Essays: John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham*, Edited by Alan Ryan, (London: PenGuin Books, 1987), p. 18.

¹⁰⁶ Mill, *Dr. Whewell*, p. 240.

opinion or moral sense. He believes that all human acts, just like phenomenal events, have causes—psychological, of course. Mill, concurring with the doctrine of Necessity, thinks that human volitions and actions are necessary and inevitable:

Volitions do, in point of fact, follow determinate moral antecedents with the same uniformity, and (when we have sufficient knowledge of the circumstances) with the same certainty, as physical effects follow their physical causes. These moral antecedents are desires, aversions, habits, and dispositions, combined with outward circumstances suited to call those internal incentives into action.¹⁰⁷

He stresses that “all these again are effects of causes; those of them which are mental being consequences of education, and of other moral and physical influences.”¹⁰⁸ So not only moral feelings but also intuitions and conscience are all outcomes and products of outward influences, such as education, culture, etc. Building moral standards and principles on constantly changing notions results in moral subjectivity and ambiguity. Utility, on the other hand, is in the service of human kind with its concrete, material, external and objective foundations. Relying on human nature, it stands incontrovertible in most cases; and with regard to situations where it happens to be insufficient, Mill points out that not only utilitarianism but all moral theories admit exceptions.

Mill builds his morality, like Bentham, on a certain conception of human nature, which enables utility to be an external, concrete and objective first principle. However, his definition of human nature differs from his predecessor’s in its alleged “broadness”. Mill accuses Bentham of giving a degrading account of human nature. His main objection is to the preponderant status of selfishness and its domination over motives of sympathy, conscience and duty.

Man is conceived by Bentham as a being susceptible of pleasures and pains, and governed in all his conduct partly by the different modifications of self-interest, and the passions commonly classed as selfish, partly by sympathies, or occasionally antipathies, towards other beings.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ John Stuart Mill, “On the Freedom of the Will,” In *Mill’s Ethical Writings*, Edited by J. B. Schneewind (New York: Collier Books, 1965), p. 230.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

¹⁰⁹ John Stuart Mill, “Bentham,” In *Utilitarianism and Other Essays: John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham*, Edited by Alan Ryan, (London: Penuin Books, 1987), p. 152.

Mill does not seem to think very highly of Bentham's conception of human nature. He reproaches Bentham for excluding some significant human motivations from his table of springs of action. Though Bentham includes sympathy in his list of motives, he omits conscience and the feeling of duty. However, this seems to be quite a consistent move on Bentham's part. As discussed before, Bentham distinguishes entities as fictitious and real ones. Real entities are individual perceptions, impressions and ideas, whereas fictitious entities don't evoke in the mind any corresponding images. Fictitious entities owe their existence to the necessity of language: this doesn't mean that they are unreal or fabulous; they are just not tangible, weighable, or measurable. This seems to be the reason why Bentham excludes such entities as duty, conscience from his table of motives: on the grounds that they are fictitious. It should be noted that his theory of utilitarianism is based entirely on 'measurable, weighable, tangible' real entities such as pain and pleasure.

Mill, on the other hand, despite acknowledging the sovereignty of pain and pleasure as the sole governor of human conduct, tries to establish, by making minute alterations in human psychology, that certain altruistic motives of action are possible. He rejects the idea

that all our acts are determined by pains and pleasures *in prospect*, pains and pleasures to which we look forward as the *consequences* of our acts. . . The pain or pleasure which determines our conduct is as frequently one which *precedes* the moment of action as one which follows it.¹¹⁰

For example, when someone plans to commit a crime, he may be deterred by his dread of punishment, or by remorse which he fears he may have to endure after the guilty act; he may also recoil from the thought of crime by feeling his case so painfully that he cannot dwell upon it long enough to have even the physical power of committing the crime. Mill concludes, after this exposition, that the pain felt by this person is one preceding the act, not one expected to follow the act.

¹¹⁰ John Stuart Mill, "Remarks on Bentham's Philosophy," In *Mill's Ethical Writings*, Edited by J. B. Schneewind (New York: Collier Books, 1965), p. 55.

This argument enables Mill to incorporate virtue, duty and altruistic motives into his moral psychology. Bentham can't find a proper place for those concepts in his theory because he takes into account only the pleasures and pains that are consequent to action. He assumes, accordingly, that when one plans to self-sacrifice his interest in a case, he feels pain, regarding his condition, after the act. This does not need to be the case, Mill detects, for it is possible that a person feels pleasure of acting in an altruistic way preceding his act. The pleasure he feels regarding his altruistic conduct makes the agent decide his acts. In other words, Mill justifies altruistic motives by modifying the relative temporal position of pains and pleasures with regard to action.

Once Mill, through a critique and modification of Bentham's moral psychology, justifies these moral concepts which make it possible to incorporate the interest and utility of others into utilitarianism, it becomes simpler for him to assert that humans are, in fact, social beings:

The social state is at once so natural, so necessary, and so habitual to man, that, except in some unusual circumstances or by an effort of voluntary abstraction, he never conceives himself otherwise than as a member of a body.¹¹¹

He argues that, though the social side of a person causes him pain after certain benevolent acts, the pleasure prior to his acts of having benevolence for his fellow creatures determines his conduct. In other words, if one accepts pain and pleasure as feelings preceding human actions, it becomes possible to depict men as social beings with regard for interest/utility/advantage of his fellow creatures.

III.II. Crisis, Character, Utility

Mill suffers a profound intellectual and emotional crisis at the age of twenty, probably incited by the extremely demanding education he received from his father and

¹¹¹ Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p. 48.

from his father's closest friend, Bentham—a strictly intellectual education shaped strictly around utilitarian principles. In a letter written to one of his friends in 1833, Mill recalls those days in grief:

I was then, and had been for one year, in an intermediate state, a state of *reaction* from logical-utilitarian narrowness of the very narrowest kind, out of which after much unhappiness and inward struggling I had emerged, and had taken temporary refuge in extreme opposite.¹¹²

As Mill emerges from his depression, believing that his training ignored his emotional needs and development, he becomes more concerned with the development of well-rounded individuals and with the role of feeling, culture, and creativity in the happiness of individuals. Though Mill never renounces the utilitarian tradition and mission, his mental crisis and recovery greatly influences his interpretation of this tradition. Mill's departure from the views of Bentham and James Mill leads his father to view him as a defector from the utilitarian cause.

After his 'crisis', seeing the grave deficiencies of his education, Mill decides that arid, emotionally unappealing, cold, analytical and critical Benthamism, though may be useful in managing the business of life efficiently, can not help men find a meaning in life. Discovering in the most painful way that he was brought up to be a calculating machine, that the analytical side of his nature is over-developed and the poetic side starves, Mill concludes that he was left without a character of his own.

This significant period in his life motivates him to develop a broader point of view on life and its matters. Mill boasts with benefitting from other minds, while he accuses Bentham of not reading anyone else. He complains that

Bentham failed in deriving light from other minds.¹¹³

¹¹² John Stuart Mill, "Two Letters," In *Mill's Ethical Writings*, Edited by J. B. Schneewind (New York: Collier Books, 1965), p. 63.

¹¹³ Mill, *Bentham*, p. 148.

He also blames Bentham for not including any notions such as character, perfection in his moral thinking:

Man is never recognized by him as a being capable of pursuing spiritual perfection as an end; of desiring, for its own sake, the conformity of his own character to his standard of excellence, without hope of good or fear of evil from other source than his inward consciousness.¹¹⁴

His depression brings about a vivid attention on the moral education and self-culture of the moral agent. He does not abandon utilitarianism; but he underlines the importance of developed characters in moral life. He argues that if competent and experienced, that is, self-cultured and morally developed agents exist, then the morality of human conduct does not have to rely just on hedonic calculations introduced by Bentham. In other words, case-by-case consequence analysis and calculation can't be the only way to decide the utility of actions. Common sense of the human kind gains an importance in Mill's morality, the treatment of actions with respect to consequent amount of pleasure is no more the only component of moral judgement.

His emphasis on the moral development of agents is a result of the fact that he doesn't want to rely solely on the interest coincidence conception of Benthamism. Bentham stresses on the necessity of joining interests of individuals and public by enforcing moral and legal sanctions both of which are external sanctions. He believes that human kind has a selfish/self-interested nature which results in a Hobbesian kind of state-of-nature-chaos unless it is constrained by law and government. Punishment and reward is the only way to guarantee the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Different interests of different classes of people can only be harmonized via external sanctions.

Mill, however, disagrees this time. On the matter of external sanctions, he observes that Bentham ignores the morality of the agent, inasmuch as his only focus is on the action and greatest happiness of the people affected by those actions. Mill finds internal sanctions

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

more affective to ensure the greatest happiness of both individuals and the public. External sanctions include the fear of punishment from either God, or other fellow beings. People are supposed to confront punishment when they don't follow the general good, or right conduct. However, alongside external sanctions, human societies should be united by internal sanctions developed and imposed by the agent. These are usually inner feelings that accompany the wrong actions of the agents. When someone violates his duties and obligations, or infringes any of the rules he ought to pursue, the inner feelings reveal themselves in the form of remorse. The internal sanction of duty is

a feeling in our own mind; a pain, more or less intense, attendant on violation of duty.¹¹⁵

This feeling forms the essence of conscience. This complex phenomenon

is encrusted with collateral associations, derived from sympathy, from love, and still more from fear, from all forms of religious feeling; from the recollections of childhood and of all our past life; from self-esteem, desire of the esteem of others, and occasionally even self-abasement.¹¹⁶

This peculiar emotion and its extreme complexity is what accompanies human beings when they consider how to act. This doesn't mean that human beings 'naturally' act out of the principle of utility, and conscience forces them to feel obligation to care for the happiness of others. Mill points out that conscience can be educated in almost any directions. This weird feeling can be strengthened and enhanced by education and social acculturation. Although there isn't a natural base to feel sympathy for fellow creatures, still one can find the natural tendency in the human mind to associate the feeling of moral obligation with actions that are conducive to the greatest happiness of the greatest number:

This firm foundation is that of the social feeling of mankind; the desire to be in unity with our fellow creatures, which is already a powerful principle in human nature, and happily one of those which tend to become stronger, even with express inculcation, from the influences of advancing civilization.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p. 43.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

As conscience is a subjective faculty which has been constituted out of a mass of feeling, and as human kind has a natural tendency to pursue the happiness and well-being of his fellow-creatures, then what remains is a well-organized social order and educational system which will enhance the individuals to develop a moral life and existence. Mill believes that all types of moral feelings are acquired and cultivated in individuals during life processes, via education and culture. So it's nonsense to claim that utility principle can't be implanted in human beings because it's not natural but artificial. It may be criticized to have an arbitrary relation with duty; Mill justifiably replies that not only utility but also all other moral standards are arbitrary.

III.III. The Proof for Utility

Mill, like Bentham, claims that the ultimate ends aren't amenable to proof in the ordinary acceptance of the term. He thinks that this is a common characteristic of the first principles of knowledge as well as human conduct. Though it's impossible to prove a first principle, still considerations can be given to sway the mind in favour of the claim that happiness is the only end of all human action.

Mill proposes a very controversial proof, which, since then, has been subjected to countless philosophical interrogations. He has a two-step argument. First of all, he points out that

Questions about ends are, in other words, questions what things are desirable. The utilitarian doctrine is, that happiness is desirable, and the only thing desirable, as an end; all other things being only desirable as means to that end.¹¹⁸

If ends are desirable, then happiness is also a desirable end. The well-known justification for this claim is as follows:

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

The only proof capable of being given that an object is visible, is that people actually see it. The only proof that a sound is audible, is that people hear it: and so of the other sources of our experience. In like manner, I apprehend, the sole evidence it is possible to produce that anything is desirable, is that people actually desire it. If the end which the utilitarian doctrine proposes to itself were not, in theory and in practice, acknowledged to be an end, nothing could ever convince any person that it was so. 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. This, however, being a fact, we have not only all the proof which the case admits of, but all which is possible to require, that happiness is a good to that person, and the general happiness, therefore, a good to the aggregate of all persons.¹¹⁹

The fundamental weakness of this argument stems from the fact that Mill wrongfully supposes ‘desirable’ stands to ‘desired’ as ‘visible’ stands to ‘seen’. Visible means capable of being seen while desirable means worthy of being desired. Whereas a thing’s being seen proves it visible, being desired is not a proof of being desirable, that is, being worthy of being desired. One can see that Mill introduces moral valuation in an estimate of facts. He disregards the fact that ‘desirable’ as ‘that which is desired’ and ‘desirable’ as ‘that which ought to be desired’ are not synonymous. ‘Desirable’ is not to say that ‘it can be desired’ but rather that it ‘ought to be desired’. So, the fact that people desire happiness is not an evidence that happiness is desirable.¹²⁰

Another fallacy inherent to the argument seems to arise from Mill’s conception of human collectivity. In the quoted passage above, he asserts that individuals desire their own happiness, and since each person desire his, the general happiness thus means to be desired by the aggregate of all persons. By that assertion Mill is seen to be presupposing that the ‘whole’ of something is simply the aggregate of its ‘parts’. This fallacy is also committed by Bentham. He, too, claims that human society is simply an aggregate of individual persons. If each person attains his own happiness, then society consequently attains general happiness. Mill makes the same mistake by asserting that each desiring his happiness implies the aggregate desiring the general happiness. It can be inferred from that

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

¹²⁰ John Planematz, *The English Utilitarians* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1958),p. 139-141; Stephen, *Utilitarians*, pp. 306-307; Robert L. Arrington, *Western Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998) , pp. 343-344

assertion that, something is true of the whole since it is true of the parts. Does it make sense to claim that, an elephant is small since its parts are small? No, indeed. Thus, it isn't possible to suppose that, general happiness is desired by the aggregate of all persons because each desires their own.¹²¹

Even if one accepts Mill's proof of the utility principle, it is still possible to ask whether utility is the only thing that human beings desire. Mill himself is aware of this fact, that his proof of the principle of utility also requires him to demonstrate that happiness is the only end in itself. To prove utility as the only end desired in itself, he appeals to 'virtue' as another significant component of morality. He acknowledges that men desire virtue and the absence of vice, no less than the pleasure and absence of pain. However, he refuses to believe that virtue, the disposition to do what is right is originally an end desired for itself. Here, Mill appeals to some psychological explanations so as to prove that virtue or some other human desires are basically instruments to happiness, rather to be ends in themselves.

He declares that men originally and basically desire not only virtue, but also money, health, power, etc. to ensure another end. Those notions aren't actually ends but instruments to be happy as a result. It is a psychological fact that people, eventually, as a matter of habit, tend to ignore the real end beyond those things, and attempt to desire them disinterestedly for themselves. They thus turn into components of the end itself, instead of being means to a specific end. Therefore, Mill thinks that virtue, power, money, health, etc. are all components of happiness—and happiness is the sum total of those components:

They are desired and desirable in and for themselves; besides being means, they are a part of the end. Virtue, according to the utilitarian doctrine, is not naturally and originally part of the end, but it is capable of becoming so, and in those who love it disinterestedly it has become so, and is desired and cherished, not as a means to happiness, but as a part of their happiness...Happiness is not an abstract idea, but a concrete whole.¹²²

¹²¹ Arrington, *Ethics*, p. 344.

¹²² Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p. 55.

The fact that human conduct includes such components as virtue, self-sacrifice, health and power doesn't change the fact that happiness—the psychological state to have pleasure and avoid pain—is the ultimate principle of all morality.

Some may object that Mill ignores the faculty of 'will' and overvalues 'desire' and explains everything in terms of pains and pleasures. However, after acknowledging that some people may pursue some other ends other than utility, Mill explains the relation between 'will' and 'desire' and underlines the fact that will is an originally offshoot from desire which may in time take root and detach itself from desire.

. . . Will, the active phenomenon, is a different thing from desire, the state of passive sensibility, and though originally an offshoot from it, may in time take root and detach itself from the parent stock; so much so, that in the case of an habitual purpose, instead of willing the thing because we desire it, we often desire it only because we will it. This, however, is but an instance of the familiar fact, the power of habit, and is nowise confined to the case of virtuous actions. Many indifferent things, which man originally did from a motive of some sort, they continue to do from habit.¹²³

That men will from habit what they no longer desire, or desire only because they will it, doesn't alter the original motive of actions.

It is not less true that will, in the beginning, is entirely produced by desire; including in the term the repelling influence of pain as well as the attractive one of pleasure...Will is the child of desire, and passes out of its dominion of its parent only to come under that of habit. That which is the result of habit affords no presumption of being intrinsically good.¹²⁴

Consequently, virtue, as well as all other human ends, have no reason to be accounted as intrinsically good and evaluated independent of pain and pleasure. Though virtue can be defined as a component of happiness, its justification may only be seen in its productivity of pleasure before it starts to be acted out of habit.

Moreover, since it is possible, according to Mill, that one feels pain and pleasure preceding his actions, the feelings he senses don't have to rely on the consequences of actions which may be painful as well. That is, one may feel pleasure regarding his action prior to its occurrence, though it may produce undesirable, painful results. So, the motive to

¹²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

do certain acts may be virtue, moral obligation or self-sacrifice. It doesn't change the fact that whatever the motive of an action may be, it is the pleasure produced which renders the act moral. Motives have no value of rendering an act morally right.

III.IV. Qualitative Hedonism

One of the most controversial aspects of Mill's utilitarianism is his views concerning the nature of pleasures, which are radically different than Bentham's ideas on the subject. That's why Bentham is called a 'quantitative hedonist' whereas Mill's position is referred to as 'qualitative hedonism'.

In Bentham, utility is identical with pleasure, advantage, interest and happiness. All these concepts have very similar meanings and implications in his theory. He is a reductive empiricist because he derives all moral notions from utility, which is the promotion of pleasure and avoidance of pain. Pleasure is something sensual, the amount of which can be calculated prior to the actions open to the agent. Hence, Bentham prescribes that everyone should apply some type of hedonic calculus and choose the most appropriate felicitic option that deems him advantageous and happy, whenever he has to act. There remains only one problem: how to reconcile these individual interests with the general interest so that men live peacefully altogether. So moral philosophy, says Bentham, should concentrate on and be interested in demonstrating how public utility and individual interest can coincide.

In Mill's theory, the utility principle essentially remains the ultimate end of all human actions and the standard of morality. He, too, believes, like Bentham, that utility must be the sole criterion for all spheres of human conduct, and that all moral notions should be derived from it. He once again agrees with Bentham that the greatest happiness

of the greatest number is the sacred formula, according to which happiness is the maximization of pleasure and minimization of pain. However, he diverges radically from Bentham in his conception of 'pleasure'.

He believes Bentham degraded utilitarianism to a piggish level with his emphasis on sensual/bodily pleasures. Though Mill doesn't deny the existence of sensual/bodily pleasures and the exigency to gratify them in human life, he defends that human beings have also more elevated pleasures:

If the sources of pleasure were precisely the same to human beings and to swine, the rule of life which is good enough for one would be good enough for the other.¹²⁵

He finds such a comparison quite degrading on the grounds that the pleasures of a pig do not satisfy a human being's conception of happiness, and that human beings have faculties more elevated than carnal appetites.

A being of higher faculties requires more to make him happy, is capable probably of more suffering, and certainly accessible to it at more points, than one of inferior type; but in spite of these liabilities, he can never really wish to sink into what he feels to be a lower grade of existence.¹²⁶

Consequently, he introduces a distinction concerning the nature of pleasures to discriminate bodily, material, sensual, inferior pleasures from mental, immaterial, superior pleasures. He defines superior pleasures as

the pleasures of the intellect, of the feelings and imagination, and of the moral sentiments, a much higher value as pleasures than to those of mere sensation.¹²⁷

What renders these pleasures superior, according to the ancient Epicureans, is their greater "permanency, safety, uncostliness"¹²⁸. These pleasures are also quantitatively greater in the long run than the sensuous pleasures of the moment. Mill accepts this distinction but objects to its merely quantitative criterion. He proposes that human

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 15.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 15.

pleasures can be distinguished from their beastly counterparts not only in quantity, but in quality as well. He argues that if one of these two pleasures is

by those who are completely acquainted with both, placed so far above the other that they prefer it, even knowing it to be attended with a greater amount of discontent, and would not resign it for any quantity of the other pleasure which their nature is capable of, we are justified in ascribing to the preferred enjoyment a superiority in quality, so far outweighing quantity, as to render it, in comparison, of small account.¹²⁹

He thus concludes that some kinds of pleasures are more desirable and valuable than others. Human beings are capable of attaining those more desirable and valuable pleasures. The characteristics of the happiness of a fool and of a noble or highly endowed person should not be deemed similar. A dissatisfied life would be better when compared with a piggish life.

It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be a Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied.¹³⁰

He adds that nobody would choose voluntarily a life full of lower pleasures if they were conscious and capable of preferring the higher ones.

Men lose their high aspirations as they lose their intellectual tastes, because they have not time or opportunity for indulging them; and they addict themselves to inferior pleasures, not because they deliberately prefer them, but because they are either the only ones to which they have access, or the only ones which they are no longer capable of enjoying.¹³¹

By asserting that human beings are capable of more refined or superior pleasures Mill sees himself as moving beyond Bentham's overly narrow conception of human nature. He is convinced that there are large deficiencies and gaps in Bentham's scheme of human nature. He criticizes Bentham for ignoring immaterial pleasures, who insists that as far as they're measured to be the same amount by felicific calculus, one pleasure is as good as another. Since it is a matter of quantity, all pleasures are deemed to be of the same 'kind':

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

. . . the game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry. If the game of push-pin furnishes more pleasure, it is more valuable than either.¹³²

Mill disputes Bentham's conclusion, defending that quality should also be taken into account, as well as quantity, in all investigations concerning human pleasures, since human nature is capable of qualitatively higher or superior pleasures. Which pleasures are, then, superior and worth purchasing? According to Mill, experienced, competent judges/agents are the appropriate consultants to apply in the case of evaluating pleasures and pains.

On a question which is the best worth having two pleasures, or which of two modes of existence is the most grateful to the feelings, apart from its attributes and from its consequences, the judgement of those who are qualified by knowledge of both, or if they differ, that of majority among them must be admitted as final. And there needs be the less hesitation to accept the judgement respecting the quality of pleasures, since there is no other tribunal to be referred to even on the question of quantity. What means are there of determining which is the acutest of two pains, or the intensest of two pleasurable sensations, except the general suffrage of those who are familiar with both? Neither pains, nor pleasures are homogeneous, and pain is always heterogenous with pleasure. What is there to decide whether a particular pleasure is worth purchasing at the cost of a particular pain, except the feelings and judgement of the experienced? When, therefore, those feelings and judgement declare the pleasures derived from the higher faculties to be preferable *in kind*, apart from the question of intensity, to those of which the animal nature, disjoined from the higher faculties, is susceptible, they are entitled on this subject to the same regard.¹³³

In this long excerpt from *Utilitarianism*, one can see three major characteristics of Mill's qualitative hedonism that distinguish it from Bentham's quantitative hedonism. There is, first of all, Mill's recognition of qualitatively superior and inferior pleasures. The second trait, which breaks away with the Benthamite felicific calculus, is his recognition of heterogeneity. Once Mill propounds that pains and pleasures aren't homogeneous but heterogenous, he does away with the possibility and foundations of a hedonic calculation. If pleasures and pains aren't homogeneous, then calculation and comparison of their quantities become impossible and all we can calculate remains to be the frequency and order of men's preferences. The final characteristic, an inevitable outcome of the second one, is the subject matter of competent/experienced judges. When Mill abolishes the

¹³² J. Bentham, "Push-Pin and Poetry," In *Ethics*. Edited by Peter Singer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 200.

¹³³ Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p. 19.

foundations of a hedonic calculus, he brings competent judges into play to become the tribunal of moral decisions.

However, despite the fact that it is almost impossible to measure the quantity of ‘heterogenous’ pleasures and pains, Mill seems quite adamant to keep the Benthamite way of calculating pleasures and pains, alongside the experienced/competent judges:

. . . Mill’s theory does have more dimensions of value to contend with and is more complicated. Applying Mill’s procedure, after intensity and duration have been synthesized, the resulting scale of quantity must in turn be integrated with that of quality to form an overall judgement of value. Some kinds or qualities of pleasurable experience are judged to be more valuable and thus placed higher on the scale of quality by competent agents. Competent agents rank pleasurable experiences on scales that measure their value. Their preferences represent a judgement of value of the experiences resting on . . . properties of quantity and quality.¹³⁴

Thus interpreted, Mill seems to admit the hedonic calculus for measuring quantities of pleasures and pains. It is the stage of assessing qualities when competent agents are appointed to have an influence in the process. By underlining the significance of competent judges and morally developed agents, he challenges and refutes the criticism about the difficulty of case-by-case calculations of moral actions. If human experience and common sense have proved some moral obligations and rules to be useful, than one must be fool to ignore them and appeal to a new measurement in each case.

. . . defenders of utility often find themselves called upon to reply to such objections as this – that there is not time, previous to action, for calculating and weighing the effects of any line of conduct on the general happiness. This is exactly as if any one were to say that it is impossible to guide our conduct by Christianity, because there is not time, on every occasion on which anything has to be done, to read through the Old and New Testaments. The answer to the objection is, that there has been ample time, namely, the whole past duration of the human species. During all that time, mankind have been learning by experience the tendencies of actions; on which experience all the prudences, as well as all the morality of life, are dependent. People talk as if the commencement of this course of experience had hitherto been put off, and as if, at the moment when some man feels tempted to meddle with the property or life of another, he had to begin considering for the first time whether murder and theft are injurious to human happiness.¹³⁵

At this point, Mill welcomes moral duties and rules that are actually common to people for a long period of time into his utilitarian morality. Moral rules encapsulate the

¹³⁴ Wendy Donner, “Mill’s Utilitarianism,” In *The Cambridge Companion to Mill*, Edited by John Skorupski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 268.

¹³⁵ Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p. 37.

accumulated experience of many generations about which kinds of actions will have good or bad consequences. Mill speaks of moral rules as ‘landmarks and direction-posts’, and defines them as ‘corollaries’, ‘secondary principles’ derived from the fundamental principle of utility. Truth-telling, keeping promises are secondary principles the utility of which has been revealed after centuries of experience. Given that they are based on longstanding experience of many people and ages, we can use them with confidence, so that there is no need to calculate the utility involved in each case we undertake. The secondary rules are at hand to give us guidance in deciding what we ought to do.

Mill’s attempt to incorporate moral duties and rules into utilitarianism as secondary principles, as derivatives of the greatest happiness principle, turns out to be quite a controversial move, in the face of the fact that Bentham completely excludes anything that belongs to common sense morality from his system. Some call his position ‘rule-utilitarian’ whereas some call it ‘act-utilitarian’. Act-utilitarianism is the view that an act is right if its consequences are at least good as those of any alternatives. Rule-utilitarianism, on the other hand, defends that, one should be guided by a moral rule because it’s the one which would produce the best consequences. The former counts on the consequences of the actions whereas the latter on the consequences of the rules. Mill’s account for moral rules and their utility justifies to call him a rule-utilitarian. However, rule-utilitarianism doesn’t allow exceptions in rule-following. Even in some particular situation where a rule cannot produce the most amount of utility, it should be followed since its utility has been proven in general. If generally followed, it would produce the best consequences. Mill allows exceptions, though. He tries to justify the utilitarian use of exceptions as obligatory and inevitable:

It is not the fault of any creed, but of the complicated nature of human affairs, that the rules of conduct cannot be so framed as to require no exceptions, and that hardly any kind of action can safely be laid down as either always obligatory or always condemnable. There is no ethical creed which does not temper the rigidity of its laws, by giving a certain latitude,

under the moral responsibility of the agent, for accommodation to peculiarities of circumstances.¹³⁶

Mill even argues that it is sometimes right to violate general ethical rules. There may be cases when, breaking promises, telling-lies or even murdering and torturing can be justified with respect to the utility they provide. Rule-utilitarians find such cases morally unacceptable, and accuse act-utilitarians for justifying them, only because they show greater utility on particular occasions. Mill's attitude to exceptions of rules implies as if he adheres to act-utilitarianism. Moral rules or secondary principles, in other words, have no independent authority and cannot impose on people obligations that go counter to the highest principle. They merely result from generalizations of the teaching of experience about the consequences of a given type of action, and predictions that future instances of that type of action will have similar consequences.¹³⁷ Thus, when needed, violation of moral rules are acceptable for the sake of greater utility it provides.

It is a matter of debate whether Mill is an act or rule-utilitarian, and most probably he wouldn't make such a distinction for his position. The more important question is whether his arguments are adequate to strengthen the greatest happiness of the greatest number, the principle which he and all utilitarians strictly adhere to. In order to enhance the inquiry into Mill's utilitarian theory and reveal whether he gives a sufficient account of the greatest happiness of the greatest numbers, one needs to investigate Mill's interpretation of 'human action'.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹³⁷ J. B. Schneewind, "Introduction," In *Mill's Ethical Writings*, Edited by J B. Schneewind (New York: Collier Books, 1965), p. 32.

III.V. Consequences or Morally Developed Agents

After dealing with so many objections directed to utility principle in *Utilitarianism*, Mill pays attention to those who find utility principle ‘too high for humanity’:

The objectors to utilitarianism cannot always be charged with representing it in a discreditable light. On the contrary, those among them who entertain anything like a just idea of its disinterested character, sometimes find fault with its standard as being too high for humanity. They say it is exacting too much to require that people shall always act from the inducement of promoting the general interests of society. But this is to mistake the very meaning of a standard of a morals, and confound the rule of action with the motive of it. It is the business of ethics to tell us what are our duties, or by what test we may know them; but no system of ethics requires that the sole motive of all we do shall be a feeling of duty; on the contrary, *ninety-nine hundredths of all our actions are done from other motives*, and rightly so done, if the rule of duty doesn’t condemn them.¹³⁸

It is clear that, though Mill has more emphasis on the morality of the agents compared to Bentham, he still thinks that it is the consequences what renders an action right or wrong. If one needs to check the morality of an action, he’d rather inquire the consequences. Like Bentham, he believes that

the motive has nothing to do with the morality of action.¹³⁹

His well-known example on the matter is that, when someone saves a fellow creature from drowning, whether his motive be duty or the expectation to be paid for it, has nothing to do with the morality of the action. He did the morally right action and the spring of his action doesn’t matter. According to Mill, the morality of actions depends on intentions rather than motives. The intention is what the agent wills to do, and the motive, the feeling which makes him will so to do doesn’t make any difference in the action and in the morality.

This point is one of the confusions Mill seems to have. While he occasionally disregards the significance of moral agents and sets a greater value on actions and their consequences, he still attacks Bentham for ignoring the moral agent. He states that the

¹³⁸ Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p. 29. Italics belong to me.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

gravest error of Bentham is that he confounds the principle of utility with the principle of consequentialism:

[Bentham] has habitually made up his estimation of the approbation or blame due to a particular kind of action from a calculation of solely of the consequences to which that very action, if practised generally would itself lead.¹⁴⁰

Bentham ignores the significance of character that would contribute to the greatest happiness or that would cause great pain to those affected by the actions. According to Mill, applying the greatest happiness principle would require a much deeper insight into the formation of character, and knowledge of the internal workings of human nature.

However, Mill argues that no ethical standard decides an action to be good or bad because it is done by a good or bad man. He thinks that these estimations are relevant, not to the estimations of actions but to the estimations of persons. Mill only partially recognizes the importance and function of the morality of agent when he says that ‘motive has nothing to do with the morality of the action, though much with the morality of the agent’. He acknowledges the quality of persons to be significant in moral sphere, but referring to the Stoic concern with ‘virtue’ he clearly states that utilitarianism doesn’t require everyone to live lives intensely full of virtuous actions.

Utilitarians are quite aware that there are other desirable possessions and qualities besides virtue, and are perfectly willing to allow to all of them their full worth. They are also aware that a right action doesn’t necessarily indicate a virtuous character, and that actions which are blameable, often proceed from qualities entitled to praise.¹⁴¹

Mill, however, seems to think, at the same time, that the morality of the agent is a necessary condition for an act to be good:

An action is moral in so far as it implies a character thoroughly ‘moralised’ or fitted to play the right part in society. The distinction between the morality of the conduct and the morality of the agent vanishes. A good act is that which a good man would perform. If a bad man, under compulsion, acts in the same way, he acts from fear, and his act is therefore morally neutral, and to call him good on account of his action is therefore a mistake.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Mill, *Remarks*, p. 48.

¹⁴¹ Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p. 32.

¹⁴² Stephen, *Utilitarians*, p. 311.

Mill looks really confused on this issue. There are, on the one hand, his remarks concerning the necessity of self-development and morally developed agents; and on the other, one can still find him defending fiercely that only consequences of actions can be the standard of estimating morality.

Moreover, his account of human action does not reflect in any way his concern and insistence on the necessity of morally developed agents with highly qualified motives and virtues. Mill construes actions as productions of a psychological inner machinery. His description of human action depicts an agent who is isolated from external relations or world when he's to interpret his circumstances and produce a relevant action. This person has an insight into his desires and affections, and his expectation of maximum pleasure determines his choices, rather than a wider consideration of existing sentient beings or outward circumstances. Since he acts in a limited sphere regarding his desires and affections alone, limited human potentialities become adequate in the case of decision-making.

Mill, like his predecessors Bentham and Hume, reduces the process of decision making to a one-sided-state: he defines psychological components as determinants of human action and excludes rational processes. For example, virtue is a component of happiness as far as it's acquired as a result of reinforcement and habit. A virtuous act initially—before the act—gives pleasure; even if it may eventually produce pain. After a period of practice, virtue can be cultivated, via reinforcement and habit, as a part of happiness.

This explication clearly demonstrates that, for Mill, despite all his insistence on the necessity of morally developed agents with highly qualified motives, morality is still just a matter of pains and pleasures, still revolves around those arbitrarily chosen psychological

states of the isolated individual, and still disregards the significance and function of the faculty of reason in human conduct.

Mill's effort to "utilize" the utility principle in the field of rights and justice is worth inquiring because it reveals his understanding of society and social processes. It is fundamentally in the social sphere that utilitarianism's failure to establish a pervasive state of happiness manifests itself. Even if one assumes that Mill's interpretation of happiness is a valid one, this modified account of utilitarianism, as will be demonstrated in the following section, turns out to be as ineffective as, as big a fiasco as its Benthamite predecessor in providing a sustainable ground for and reasonable explanation of creating and maintaining happiness in society through an 'efficient' and 'manageable' reconciliation/convergence of the utility of individuals and society.

III.VI. Individual Rights vs. Public Rights

Justice, "considered by many to be the Achilles heel of the appeal to utility"¹⁴³, is quite a controversial issue for Utilitarianism. Some claim that even the "concept" of justice isn't consistent, compatible with the principle of utility. Mill, Bentham and Hume, who were all aware of this problem, try to devise a solution by distancing themselves from any idea of absolute and natural justice.

There are two fundamental criticisms directed against utilitarianism on the matter of justice. The first one states that the appeal to utility is a consequentialist one, while considerations of justice are backward-looking; that is, utilitarianism goes to the consequences produced by actions and assesses the effects of actions, whereas justice requires other factors rather than utility. If one promises to do something, he *ought to* keep

¹⁴³ Arrington, *Ethics*, p. 350.

his promise as a moral obligation, and the other person has a right to expect it to be fulfilled. But the objectors of utilitarianism claim that the utility principle doesn't always require whether it should be fulfilled or not. Because, sometimes the utility of keeping a promise might be outweighed by the utility of not keeping it. Since utility changes from case to case, and ignores a static conception of right and justice, it may at various cases be inconsistent with the idea of justice.

The second objection addressed to utilitarianism on the subject of justice is about the distribution of benefits and punishments. The benefits and prizes resulted in a case should be fairly distributed among the persons who deserve it. Likewise, the punishment of violation of a duty/obligation or offence should similarly be applied to the violator or offender who really deserves it. This camp of objectors set a value on the notion of 'desert', either in the case of distributing benefits or punishments. They claim that, 'desert' isn't appraised by the utilitarian consequentialist idea of justice; on the contrary, the benefits or punishments are distributed according to a utilitarian calculation. Hence, they find the utility principle inapplicable to the idea of justice with respect to fair distribution of rewards and punishments.

Mill thinks that both arguments are defective because their conception of justice is wrong. He reproaches them for seeing some inherent quality in justice, treating it as an *a priori* or an absolute notion independent of any empirical ground. Instead, they should acknowledge that justice, like all other moral conceptions such as duty, obligation or virtue is a derivation from the utility principle. To prove this, Mill discusses and answers all the related objections in *Utilitarianism*. He first goes through all distinct conceptions of justice prevalent among people in order to show how various and unmanageable these notions are, so that he can later argue for the necessity and urgency to subsume them all under one fundamental principle, and hence conclude that justice is, and should be, derived from the

principle of utility. However, he carries out this analysis specifically on the common considerations of injustice and refers to justice only indirectly.

In the first place, it is mostly considered unjust to deprive any one of his personal liberty, his property, or any other things which belongs to him by law...it is just to respect, unjust to violate, the *legal rights* of any one.

We may say,.. that a second case of injustice consists in taking or withholding from any person that to which he has a *moral right*.

Thirdly, it is universally considered just that each person should obtain that (whether good or evil) which he *deserves*; and unjust that it should obtain good, or be made to undergo an evil which he does not deserve.

Fourthly, it is confessedly unjust to *break faith* with any one: to violate an engagement, either express or implied, or disappoint expectations raised by our conduct, at least if we have raised those expectations knowingly and voluntarily.

Fifthly, it is, by universal admission, inconsistent with justice to be *partial*; to show favour or preference to one person over another, in matters to which favour and preference do not properly apply.

Nearly allied to the idea of impartiality is that of *equality*; which often enters as a component part both into the conception of justice and into the practice of it, and, in the eyes of many persons, constitutes its essence.¹⁴⁴

Mill believes that among all those diverse applications of the term justice, it is quite difficult to seize a mental link which holds them together. It is also quite difficult to found them on an explicit moral sentiment which would render them unambiguous and manageable. Unless its foundations are demonstrated by a comprehensive inquiry, the idea of justice cannot be seized reasonably and explicitly. Therefore, Mill makes a detailed inquiry into the origins of justice and thence, tries to link it to the principle of utility.

After exploring the etymological origins of the word, Mill infers that justice, as a concept, always had an intrinsic connection to the notion of conformity to the law. He also adds that, since they took into account the bad laws, ancient Greek and Roman thinkers made a connection to the laws that *ought to exist*, that is, to moral laws. Though the word has such implications, today people don't expect justice regulated from only the sphere of law. They, neither, desire law to interfere to all the details of private life. Still, Mill observes, it gives people pleasure and chime in with their feelings of fitness when an unjust act is punished:

¹⁴⁴ Mill, *Utilitarianism*, pp. 64-68.

Thus the idea of legal constraint is still the generating idea of the notion of justice, though undergoing several transformations before that notion, as it exists in an advanced state of society, becomes complete.¹⁴⁵

He believes that when one calls an action wrong, he usually implies that a person ought to be punished. Whether the punishment comes from law, public opinion or the person's conscience doesn't matter, which in Mill's understanding, indicates an essential connection to the notion of 'duty':

Duty is a thing which may be *exacted* from a person, as one exacts a debt. Unless we think that it may be exacted from him, we do not call it his duty.¹⁴⁶

Thence, Mill divides duties, or moral obligations, into two categories. Duties of 'perfect obligation' are those duties in virtue of which a correlative right resides in some person or persons whereas duties of 'imperfect obligation' are those which do not give birth to any right. The notion of 'right' and the 'violation of right' are the keywords to the understanding of justice. Perfect duties, which are obligatory, consequently include the consideration of justice whereas imperfect duties refer to the voluntary, optional duties such as 'beneficence', 'generosity', etc.

Mill warns that one mustn't extend the notion of justice so as to include the whole sphere of morality. One should be bound to conform to the perfect obligations and when he ignored them, he should confront some punishment. The other duties resulting from our sympathies to our fellow creatures, in which no right resides, shouldn't be accounted as the cases of justice. Those duties of generosity, charity or beneficence are up to people's choices. No philosopher should blame anyone who doesn't feel bound by imperfect obligations.

If a moralist attempts, as some have done, to make out that mankind generally, though not any given individual, have a right to all the good we can do them, he at once, by that thesis, includes generosity and beneficence within the category of justice... Wherever there is right, the case is one of justice, and not of the virtue of beneficence: and whoever does not place

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

the distinction between justice and morality in general, where we have now placed it, will be found to make no distinction between them all, but to merge all morality in justice.¹⁴⁷

After distinguishing the sphere of justice from other parts of morality, Mill tries to split the sentiment of justice into its ingredients. His purpose is to reveal whether the sentiment of justice includes any notion of utility. He claims to have found two constituent elements in the sentiment of justice: the desire to punish someone who has done harm to some persons, and the knowledge or belief that there is some individual or individuals to whom harm has been done. Then, he detects that the desire to punish a violator or an offender is a 'spontaneous outgrowth' from two natural sentiments: the impulse of self-defence and the feeling of sympathy. He finds it quite natural to resent, repel or retaliate any harm done to us or against those with whom we sympathise. However, justice is not a natural sentiment but a moral outgrowth from the unity of self-defence and the feeling of sympathy. Here is how Mill generates the 'moral' conception of justice from its 'natural' sentiments:

All conduct which we class as wrong or criminal is, or we suppose it to be, an attack upon some vital interest of ourselves or of those we care for (a category which may include the public, or the whole human race); conduct which, if allowed to be repeated, would destroy or impair the security and comfort of our lives. . . We are therefore prompted to retaliate by inflicting pain on the person who has inflicted or tried to inflict it upon ourselves. We endeavor, as far as possible, that our social institutions shall render us this service. We are gratified when, by that or other means, the pain is inflicted, and dissatisfied if from any cause it is not. The strong association of the idea of punishment and the desire for its infliction . . . is not in itself a moral sentiment . . . This impulse to self-defense by the retaliatory infliction of pain, only becomes a moral sentiment when it is united with a conviction that the infliction of punishment in such a case is conformable to the general good, and when the impulse is not allowed to carry us beyond the point at which that conviction ends.¹⁴⁸

In other words, justice becomes a moral concept when such natural sentiments of justice as the desire to self-defense, retaliate, punish meet and unite with the idea of general good and social well-being. This is where the notions of perfect obligation, duty and right re-emerge, and consequently lead to the concept utility.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

¹⁴⁸ John Stuart Mill, "On the Moral Sentiments," In *Mill's Ethical Writings*, Edited by J. B. Schneewind (New York: Collier Books, 1965), pp. 273-274

Mill, as discussed before, insists on the notion of right and violation of right as the essence of justice and injustice, and a right is the claim of a person on society to protect the possession of it; either by the force of law or by that of education and opinion. If the society has guaranteed him the possession of something, then the person is supposed to have a sufficient claim to have it. So society is accountable for the security of the rights of the individuals. The necessary measures should be taken to ensure the security of rights of its members.

For instance, a person is said to have a right to what he can earn in fair professional competition; and no one should be allowed to hinder him from accomplishing it. According to Mill, this is the exact point where everyone is bound to one another in promoting the general utility. One can notice the general interest of society in securing the rights of one another. By securing others we secure ourselves.

All other earthly benefits are needed by one person, not needed by another; and many of them can, if necessary, be cheerfully foregone, or replaced by something else; but security no human being can possibly do without on it we depend for all our immunity from evil, and for the whole value of all and every good.¹⁴⁹

Justice therefore possesses the most basic utility of all. Having claimed security, we not only 'ought to' but also 'must' promote justice. That is, the obligation of promoting justice doesn't only fall inside the sphere of morality but also fall inside the legal field, as well. All attempts of individuals to violate the rights of their fellows should be confronted by punishment. One should know that if he violates a right, other people will necessarily and naturally desire that he would be punished. Since humans have a social nature, they would shrink from pursuing a line of conduct which would make his ends, wishes and purposes habitually conflict with other fellow beings.

To sum up, Mill construes justice as a conception based on rights. Rights reside in 'perfect obligations' that all members of a society should conform to. 'Imperfect

¹⁴⁹ Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p. 79.

obligations' which include other duties as beneficence or generosity, fall outside of the sphere of justice since no one can be held accountable for neglecting any beneficence to his fellow beings. Hence, justice is about obligatory conduct, and not about volunteer conduct. Its moral justification is the security of rights, which is directly a utilitarian implication. For the well-being, comfort and happiness of the society as a whole, justice is an inevitable notion. No one should be hampered when intended to increase his wealth or property which is the product of his own hands and labour. If people aren't guaranteed the possessions of their labour, their belief and expectation in a secure and happy society will vanish. Thus, social institutions, education or public opinion must constantly inculcate respect for others' rights and cultivate the sentiment of justice in each and every member of the society.

One may wonder whether Mill's account of justice contributes positively to his claims concerning the principle of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. When justice is simply construed as a derivative of 'perfect duties', is it possible to fill the gap between the interests of distinct individuals? There may exist an injustice in the distribution of properties and wealth, which may result in unjust opportunities for the enjoyment of life. Few people may have vast privileges while many may be even deprived of goods for subsistence. Does conforming simply to the rights of one another create a social harmony of interests and increase the aggregate happiness? What if, the social and economical circumstances are in such an order that render happiness and well-being of the people a matter of complete accident and contingency? Is it, then, 'just' to ask people simply to conform to the moral or legal rights in order to be 'just' and enhance an abstract well-being/happiness of the greatest number?

Individuality is a central notion in Mill's moral, political and economical account. He handles all the difficulties inherent in these fields through underlying the significance of

developing independent individualities. Economic development, which according to Mill will make the human kind prosperous in the end, essentially depends on the free activity of the individual. Free market and competition are keys to stifle poverty, and they provide opportunity for all individuals to take their share from life. Material well-being is not the end-all of life, but it is the begin-all. If we want to develop our full potentials as human beings, we must first adequately satisfy those material needs. According to Mill, nothing hinders individuality more than poverty.

Consequently no government should interfere with the economic transactions of its subjects. Free market and competition motivate individuals to develop their entrepreneurial skills. If they aren't discouraged by any state interference, and disappointed by the insecurity of what they strive to possess, human beings' potentialities of production may result in an enormous abundance of wealth which may then resolve all the inequalities of conditions between the rich and the poor. Mill's understanding of the contradiction between the rich and the poor seems to be a matter of progress in the economical sphere. He also finds over-population as a hindrance to progress. If the population can be kept under control and commercial/capitalist society brings about abundance of production in a future time, then the problem of inequality will be somehow solved, and the interests of different classes of people will eventually reach a harmony.

Mill is against an absolute notion of liberty. He believes that absolute liberty would mean anarchy in the society. The state, government or public's only interference to the individual sphere should be due to 'self-protection'. It must be the only justification for the interference of society with the individual. That means a demand of maximum liberty, rather than an absolute or complete freedom for the individual. When a man's liberty restrains the liberty of another man, one may demand interference to his condition.

Non-interference principle is one of Mill's main arguments/remedies for the matters or conflicts of economic, political and ethical spheres. If the state, laws and social arrangements or institutions

place the happiness, or (as speaking practically it may be called) the interests of every individual, as nearly as possible in harmony with the interests of the whole; and . . . education and opinion, which have so vast a power over human character, . . . use that power to establish in the mind of every individual an indissoluble association between his own happiness and the good of the whole¹⁵⁰

there remains no need to restrain the individuals' economic, political or ethical conduct, since they will learn to regard the others' happiness, interest or well-being out of habitual motives of action imposed by the social machinery.

How can this be possible? Mill defends, on the one hand, non-interference to the sphere of individual liberty so long as he doesn't restrain another's liberty; and, on the other, he requires the social machinery to shape its members' characters so well that they would never disregard the misery, poverty, unhappiness or disutility of their fellow creatures. If one defines the liberty of an individual as a sphere where there occurs no harm or injury to anyone else and thus into which no one has the right to interfere, how can law or education be justified to enforce cooperation, social unity, or the equality of conditions? Citizens may refuse to share with others the fruits of their labour, or the properties they inherited from their ancestors. By doing so they may not be simply giving harm to anyone else. However, the inequality of conditions may be so vast that a great majority of people may be starving while the few flourish in luxurious conditions. Mill's remedy is that if individuals are let free in the economical, political and ethical fields of life, their entrepreneurial skills being strengthened by the positive motivation of society (out of regard for others' happiness), the society will eventually accomplish prosperity/welfare and as a result of free market/trade/competition, production will be so abundant that, in the end, the harmony of interests will be inevitable.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

Another significant notion for general happiness is property. Mill believes it to be essential for civilization and prosperity:

The magic of property turns sand into gold. . . Give a man the secure possession of a bleak rock, and he will turn it into a garden; give him a nine-year's lease of a garden, and he will convert it into a desert.¹⁵¹

Like Bentham, he dismisses the 'natural rights' argument about property. According to this argument, because no man made the land, private property is simply robbery.¹⁵² Mill is fiercely against this notion of property. Security of possessions is the kernel of all morality and civilization. Nobody would feel an obligation to conform to law or moral rules unless they think that they would get the fruits of their labour. However, Mill doesn't provide a specific justification for this claim, which he seems to argue just for the sake of strengthening his theory of justice.

Mill's understanding of society is very similar to, and therefore shares the same problems as Bentham's: it is simply the aggregate of all its individual members. Consequently, the general happiness is equal to the sum of individuals' happiness. If every individual pursues what is best for himself, he will have forwarded the general good/happiness which utilitarianism claims one ought to pursue.

Though I hold the good of the species (or rather of its separate units) to be the ultimate end (which is the alpha and omega of my utilitarianism), I believe with the the fullest belief that this end can in no other way be forwarded . . . namely, by each taking for his exclusive aim the development of what is best in *himself*.¹⁵³

Mill simply believes that society consists of a number of independent individuals bound together by legal or quasi-legal sanctions. Each independent individual knows his needs and desires better than anyone else, so liberty and individuality are obligatory for each person to meet his needs and desires as he likes. When every individual accomplishes and attains his own interests and happiness, the general happiness will have been

¹⁵¹ John Stuart Mill, *Principles Of Political Economy*, Edited by Donald Winch (London: Penguin Books, 1970), p. 274.

¹⁵² John Robson, "Civilization and Culture as Moral Concepts," In *The Cambridge Companion to Mill*, Edited by John Skorupski (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 359.

¹⁵³ Mill, *Two Letters*, p. 67.

consequently attained. By commanding people to be impartial and to have a regard for the general happiness of all, utilitarianism asks no more than each individual's own share:

The great majority of good actions are intended not for the benefit of the world, but for that of individuals, of which the good of the world is made up; and the thoughts of the most virtuous man need not on these occasions travel beyond the particular persons concerned, except so far as is necessary to assure himself that in benefiting them he is not violating the rights, that is, the legitimate and authorised expectations, of anyone else. The multiplication of happiness is, according to the utilitarian ethics, the object of virtue: the occasions on which any person (except one in thousand) has it in his power to do this on an extended scale, in other words to be a public benefactor, are but exceptional; and on these occasions alone is he called on to consider public utility; in every other case, private utility, the interest or happiness of some few persons, is all he has to attend to.¹⁵⁴

The problem with Mill's utilitarian depiction of the individual self and the society, and their interrelationship, seems to originate from the fact that, though his theory enjoins general happiness, this transition to general happiness from Bentham's egoism requires more than Bentham's isolated self. It seems not fair, reasonable—and theoretically possible—to expect an individual, who doesn't have any fundamental moral capacity other than knowing, obeying and attaining his own needs, desires, interests and thus maximizing “his own happiness”, to establish unconditional moral ties to his peers; therefore to a collective assumed simply to be consisting of their “total sum”; hence, to general happiness. This individual has no non-mediated, non-random, non-arbitrary, non-subordinate way to relate to something that is not-his-self. All his possible relations with something other than his self have to be meditated, calculated, regulated and determined by this self that consists of mere self-interest conducting a necessary, incessant and mindless search for utility.

Mill tries to “exact” from this “self-interest”, which, because of its incapability to unilaterally initiate an unconditional access to its exterior, can only “annex” that is not his, the ability to establish mutual, reciprocally determining relations with his peers and with the society as a whole—an enterprise doomed to failure. In order to overcome this impasse,

¹⁵⁴ Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p. 31.

Mill needs to take into account that there are socially conditioned relations among individuals that unite them as a social whole:

Individual acts and experiences are not isolated occurrences, but get their significance from their place in the context of an organized life. . . . As self is not simply the sum of the individual actions, so also the society is not just the sum of individuals, but is actively and fully present in each of them; it is constitutive of the individuals, so that they cannot exist without society, but neither can it exist except through them.¹⁵⁵

So if Mill really cares about general happiness, his depiction of the relationship between self and society should allow mutuality, which requires both to be reciprocally determined. But then neither society nor individual can be regarded as the independent parties of a pre-determined relation: individuals and society should be taken as interdependent components which define reciprocally each other's identity, needs and wants. Perhaps then Mill wouldn't have to count on laws, education or other social institutions to converge the conflicting interests in a society, and general happiness would not have to be postponed to an indeterminate future when abundance would reign.

¹⁵⁵ Richard Norman, *The Moral Philosophers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 112.

IV. Virtue Ethics and Multi Dimensional Moral Agents

The primary objective of this dissertation, as yet, has been to reveal and critically evaluate the basic flaws intrinsic to the nature of modern utilitarianism. The moral theories of Bentham and Mill seem incapable of attaining their fundamental goal: the greatest happiness of the greatest number. The principle of utility turns out to be an empty and self-deceiving slogan: a promise doomed to failure, a dystopia—fortunately—impossible to be fulfilled. Defining happiness as maximization of pleasure and avoidance of pain, and as the ultimate end of all human conduct demotes all other moral concepts such as virtue, duty, obligation to mere derivatives of utility. Reducing morality and the infinity of human capacities to a mere pursuit of pleasure seems to undermine the greatest happiness principle itself.

If a more comprehensive analysis, understanding and explanation of the tribulations of utilitarianism is to be presented, an immanent critique would not suffice. The tragedy of utilitarianism, its *aporia*, lies not in the interrelation of concepts, principles, rules and systems necessary to the production of this theory, but in its *theoria*, in the utilitarian gaze itself. Therefore it seems not only reasonable but also imperative to look for and explore alternative approaches to human nature, human conduct and happiness, if this critical analysis of utilitarianism is to be explained not only how, but also why it fails. One of those alternative perspectives may be carved out from the outlook and landscape presented by the Ancient Greeks: this is a vision that is radically and fundamentally different than utilitarianism, a holistic practice aimed at understanding, transforming and creating life processes so as to constitute an ethical space and way of living that would enable man to lead a perfectable/perfected, therefore good and happy life: life as an actualization and exercise of freedom.

Locating man in the infinite totality of his relations to endless cosmic possibilities brings out a completely different picture, which contains this unique, and in a sense, unsurpassed depiction of human nature, human conduct and happiness: this is an ethics based on, and destined to freedom, not a morality founded on and consisting of arbitrary relations of necessity; not a theory whose imagination, grammar and output is confined to relations of domination and submission, but a way of living as man's autonomous exercise of his limitless creativity. Hopefully, seeing what man was capable of in the Ancient Greek mind will help us perceive the deficiencies of utilitarianism in such a way that would clarify not only its inner tensions and conflicts but also explain why they are there, why they inevitably arise.

IV.I. A 'Whole'some Conception Of Happiness: *Eudaimonia*

What good life consists of has been one of the major questions of philosophy. Since people call their actions good or bad, right or wrong, since some actions bring about harmful or beneficial consequences, some motivations of conduct are identified as virtuous or vicious, and since some acts are expected by fellow beings as duty and obligation, there must be a rational description of what good life is.

For some philosophers to attain good life is to become happy. Happiness, thus, is the very ultimate purpose of life. The motivation for all human conduct should be happiness, since it is the only thing desirable in itself. Utilitarian philosophers, too, regard happiness as the ultimate end of all human actions. Nevertheless, what they depict as happiness is radically different than what Ancient Greek philosophers conceive as happiness. Seeking pleasure is the way to happiness for utilitarians. Bentham sees no qualitative difference in the nature of pleasure and concludes that its value does not depend on whether it is bodily

or mental, whereas Mill ranks pleasures according to their qualities, deeming mental ones more valuable. Their common view, however, is that happiness is a matter of getting as much pleasure as possible and avoiding as much pain as possible in life. One's personality, business, relations and interests in life ought to be organized so well that they bring him the most amount of pleasure over pain, because what happiness consists of, what determines one's happiness is this hedonic efficiency. All other moral obligations, virtues or duties should harmoniously contribute to that goal so as to maximize one's pleasures and minimize his pains.

Defining good life as the maximization of pleasures, is not something peculiar to modern utilitarians. Even in Ancient Greece, there are proponents of this view. Hedonists of the classical period, that is, the 5th and 4th centuries BC, ambitiously defend pleasure as the key to happiness or good life. The Epicureans and the Cyrenaics are two schools of philosophy in the Hellenistic period¹⁵⁶ with considerable hedonist inclinations. In Greek philosophy, one usually encounters individual representatives of hedonism, rather than its schools. Nevertheless, even then, hedonism must have been a popular and problematic point of view: both Plato and Aristotle discuss it extensively and unveil, with great toil, its paradoxes, shortcomings and implications in their analysis and description of what good life is.

In Plato's dialogues, pleasure is treated as a component of ethical debate. Some dialogues such as *Philebus* and *Phaedrus* are particularly devoted to that matter. Actually both Plato and Aristotle's account of good life is, to a great extent, based on the distinction between true and false pleasures, true ones constituting one's true happiness. One's pleasures and pains are reflections, as well as expressions, of his character; character

¹⁵⁶ The 'Hellenistic' age begins with the demise of Alexander the Great's empire (on his death in 323 BC) and ends with Augustus' inauguration of the Roman Empire, notionally in 27 BC. These three centuries were a time of major geo-political upheaval in the Greek-speaking world, due first to the growing power of eastern kingdoms and later to that of Rome. (Jacques Brunschwig and David Sedley, *Hellenistic Philosophy*, in *Greek and Roman Philosophy*, 2003, Cambridge University Press, p. 151.)

formation being one of the central notions of Plato and Aristotle's philosophy. *Eudaimonia*, which is translated, until recently, as "happiness" by most modern scholars, is the goal that each human being must pursue in order to attain a good life. Even though the term isn't used by Plato as frequently as Aristotle, they both share the view that what distinguishes human beings from other animated beings is their ability to lead a life in pursuit of *eudaimonia*. However, *eudaimonia* has quite a unique etymological background, very complex meaning and much broader metaphysical connotations in Greek philosophy than the modern concept of happiness may ever account for or signify.

Oh dear Pan and all the other gods of this place, grant that I may be beautiful inside. Let all my external possessions be in friendly harmony with what is within. May I consider the wise man rich. As for gold, let me have as much as a moderate man could bear and carry with him.¹⁵⁷

Socrates' prayer at the end of *Phaedrus* reveals some of the significant dimensions of Plato's ethical account. One of the most important aspects of ancient Greek philosophy is known to be its emphasis on the merits of living a good life. Not only Plato, but also Aristotle point to the necessity of pursuing goodness, rightness or truth in life which stands as the framework of morality for them.

Whatever be the differences in their account, still much is shared by both. When Socrates prays gods for the 'beauty of his soul', one should regard this idea as a shared conception not only by Plato, but by Aristotle as well. Hence, the goodness or beauty of one's soul might be said to be the central theme in ancient morality.

¹⁵⁷ Plato, *Phaedrus* 279c, Translated by Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff, in *Plato Complete Works*, , Edited by John M. Cooper (Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company, 1997). In *Phaedrus* dialogue, Socrates offers a prayer to the gods before he and Phaedrus leave the place they have been to.

IV.II. Plato, Wisdom and *Arete*

Hence, most of Plato's work evolves around the idea of 'developing good souls'. It appears to be the most crucial aspect of all human affairs for the philosopher. Nevertheless, he constantly refers to the hardship and troubles that's included in such an activity. One can urge that all Plato's dialogues are devoted to the questioning of the possibilities of developing good souls. Yet, what Plato conceives of goodness of the soul mustn't be confused with the modern implications of goodness such as being a good citizen, paying taxes, obeying rules and not poking one's nose into others' affairs. Goodness can truly be comprehended in Plato's ethics in its relations to the conceptions of excellence (Gr.*arete*) and wisdom, without which a fair and true grasp of its meaning would be impossible.

Wisdom is a fundamental feature of Platonic ethics. In Socrates' prayer, 'May I consider the wise man rich' tersely reveals the importance given to wisdom by Plato. Therefore it is another vital constituent of a good life.

'Having a good/beautiful soul', 'being wise' and also 'being moderate' are three conceptions that make up the backbone of Plato's ethics. However for a better understanding of these terms, one must investigate their relations with each other and with other Platonic notions so as to reveal their specific functions in Plato's conception of a good and happy life.

As has already been stated above, the Greek word *eudaimonia* (Gr. εὐδαιμονία) which has been translated by contemporary scholars as 'happiness' is used by Plato as well as Aristotle, with a completely different conceptual framework. Actually, by the time this section on Plato and Aristotle ends, only then this work will have accomplished to give an overall understanding of its meaning and implications. Yet, as an introduction, it will be beneficial to point it out that *eudaimonia* is radically different than what modern

philosophy conceives as happiness. Such notions included in the modern interpretation of happiness as affluence, ease and comfort are alien to *eudaimonia*. Nor it has any kinship with the utilitarian interpretation of happiness as pleasure.

In *Gorgias* where Socrates and his interlocutors mainly deal with the issues of sophism and oratory Socrates is questioned by Polus about whom he sees worth to be depicted as a *eudaimon*. Polus himself offers Archelaus, the ruler of Macedonia, to have reached *eudaimonia*. Nevertheless, Socrates refuses to concede Archelaus as a *eudaimon* and explain his reasons:

Socrates: . . . for I do not know how he stands in point of education and justice.

Polus: Why, does happiness entirely consist in that?

Socrates: Yes, by my account, Polus; for a good and honorable man or woman, I say, is happy, and an unjust and wicked one is wretched.¹⁵⁸

Socrates's response includes several components or aspects of Platonic understanding of human happiness, namely *eudaimonia*. These components are 'justice,' 'education,' 'good' and 'honorable', all of which have distinct importance and role in his ethics.

According to Plato, happiness is not a simple and short-term end in life. Though majority of people desire to attain happiness, they fail to conceive it in all its dimensions. Many misunderstand happiness and overvalue the things which in fact has little function in pursuit of it, such as the gratification of bodily desires or acquiring wealth. The most common misconception of happiness is the view which confuses it with pleasantness. Since taking pleasure out of pleasant things is a natural desire in human beings, instead of questioning the nature of pleasures and pains and their influence in attainment of a good and happy life, humans simply choose to pursue pleasure and shun from pain as if they are the ends in a truly happy life.

¹⁵⁸ Plato, *Gorgias* 470d-e, In *Perseus Digital Library*,
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0178%3Atext%3DGorg.%3Asection%3D470d>

For Plato, in order to be happy¹⁵⁹ one needs to follow quite an arduous process which relies both on ‘theory’ and ‘practice’. Theory and practice of what? First of all, of one’s own soul (Gr. *psuche*) and then, of the *polis*, world, cosmos and so on. In *Phaedrus*, Phaedrus asks Socrates whether he believes the myth they were talking about is true or not, and Socrates replies him by pointing to the importance of knowing oneself, that is, his soul, before expending so much time and effort on the other spheres of knowledge.

. . . If anyone disbelieves in these, and with a rustic sort of wisdom, undertakes to explain each in accordance with probability, he will need a great deal of leisure. But I have no leisure for them at all; and the reason, my friend, is this: I am not yet able, as the Delphic inscription has it, to know myself; so it seems to me ridiculous, when I do not yet know that, to investigate irrelevant things. And so I dismiss these matters and accepting the customary belief about them, as I was saying just now, I investigate not these things, but myself, to know whether I am a monster more complicated and more furious than Typhon or a gentler and simpler creature, to whom a divine and quiet lot is given by nature.¹⁶⁰

The soul is the part of a person that feels, desires, suffers emotions, reasons and acts. Immortal or not, it is immensely important. Indeed the most important part of ourselves, for it is on the basis of what we do, what we think, what we feel, and what we desire that we are happy or not. Our soul seems to be the locus of goodness and happiness, or wickedness and unhappiness. As happiness and goodness are supremely valuable to us, we must take good care of where they reside, therefore our soul.

Taking care of one’s soul requires first of all knowing it. If one knows his soul well, that is, knows his feelings, desires, reasonings and so on, it’s only then that one will be able to examine and develop a self appropriate for the pursuit of a good and happy life.

¹⁵⁹ Plato often uses the term ‘good’ or ‘just’ instead of ‘happy’ and has specific reasons to prefer those concepts rather than ‘happiness’. Yet, one may come across ‘happy’ and ‘happiness’ in certain discussions like the one quoted from Gorgias above. This quotation is deliberately used in this context since it appeals to the term *eudaimonia* (εὐδαιμονία). Though Plato doesn’t appeal to the term *eudaimonia* as much as Aristotle, still he includes it in his conception of happiness.

¹⁶⁰ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 229e-230a, in *Perseus Digital Library*.
<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0174%3Atext%3DPhaedrus%3Asection%3D229e>

IV.III. Ancient Greek Depiction of Human Nature

Neither Plato nor Aristotle believes in a universal conception of human nature on which an ethical account may rise, like in utilitarianism. They don't regard human as such and such being. They depict human neither as an egoist or altruist nor a hedonist from birth. Humans, at most, may be depicted as beings composed of various capacities, beings composed of potentialities and aptitudes to act in certain ways. In order to actualize those potentialities, and develop them into skills and actions, one is to expend great effort on his soul and its capacities. Thus interpreted the goodness of one's soul could only be achieved after a great deal of effort and practice is exerted on one's soul and his potentialities.

Plato acknowledges that no one is, therefore, good or bad naturally. Nothing positive or negative is inherent to human nature. If that was so, he says, people would know the good and the bad, and protect the good more carefully than gold in order to benefit from them when they get mature enough to be useful to their communities.

. . . the good are not so by nature? . . . For if they were, this would follow: if the good were so by nature, we would have people who knew which among the young were by nature good; we would take those whom they had pointed out and guard them in the Acropolis, sealing them up there much more carefully than gold so that no one could corrupt them, and when they reached maturity they would be useful to their cities.¹⁶¹

Being good, then, is something 'acquired' rather than inherent to human nature. As a result of an arduous and lifelong practice, goodness of soul is attained, and thus one is called *eudaimon*, that is happy.

As stated above, the investigation one will undertake initially on his soul, and later, on the outer beings and the world consists both of theory and practice. Here, one discovers the ancient conception of *arete*¹⁶², which is translated until recently as 'virtue' by most contemporary scholars. Nonetheless, the word *arete* would more appropriately be

¹⁶¹Plato, Meno 89b, Translated by G. M. A. Grube, In *Complete Works*

¹⁶²Nevertheless, both 'virtue' and 'excellence' will be used as the translation of *arete* through this work.

translated as 'perfection' or 'excellence' if one wants to reach a better grasp of Platonic and Aristotelian ethics. Unless it is disposed of its modern moral or religious implications, the word 'virtue' can't be used to comprehend and explicate what Plato or Aristotle conceives of an ethical good life.

In *Meno* where Socrates and his interlocutors investigate whether virtue can be taught or not, Socrates is faced with the view that there are various sorts of virtues: of a man, woman, child, free man, slave and so on. Thus, he needs to make it quite clear that *arete* is actually 'one' and means 'excellence':

. . . even if they are many and various, all of them have one and the same form which makes them virtues.¹⁶³

Plato thinks that happiness is possible only through the exercise of a virtuous life. He believes that a virtuous life that aims at activating and fulfilling the latent human potentialities in an excellent way is the right kind of life which deserves to be called a happy one. Consequently excellence is a sort of thing that should be practised on one's own. It is a process of learning and acquiring rather than teaching and imposing. Each individual needs to devote his energy and time to such a theoretical and practical 'ascetic'¹⁶⁴ study on his own soul before he bounces his gaze to the outside world and his relations with others. This is the reason why Socrates rejects the idea to participate in the political life in his city in *Gorgias*, or refuses to know the whole series of stories and legends in *Phaedrus*. The point he remarks is that one should initially know and perfect his skills and potentialities (thus become virtuous) before he attempts to investigate, know and perfect the external beings and the world.

He thinks that living 'scientifically' isn't the key to happiness and goodness. It is rather the science of good and bad that helps to attain happiness. This is the idea that Plato ranks ethics above everything, and ethical knowledge above all other sorts of knowledge.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 72c.

¹⁶⁴ Asceticism (from the Greek: ἄσκησις, *askēsis*, "exercise" or "training")

In *Charmides* being annoyed by Critias' handling of their subject matter Socrates warns that

. . . all this time you have been leading me right around in a circle and concealing from me that it was not living scientifically that was making us fare well and be happy, even if we possessed all the sciences put together, but that we have to have this one science of good and evil. Because, Critias, if you consent to take away this science from the other sciences, will medicine any the less produce health, or cobbling produce shoes, or the art of weaving produce clothes, or will the pilot's art any the less prevent us from dying at sea or the general's art in war?¹⁶⁵

Hence he concludes that a life full of knowledge of other sciences is worthless if it is bereft of ethical knowledge and wisdom. Unless humans possess the knowledge of good and evil all other things they know won't suffice to deem their life happy and good.

As is obviously stated in this brief quotation, Plato doesn't disqualify such sciences and activities devoted to the gratification of human needs and desires as some criticize him as though he rejects them. He rather finds those sciences and arts necessary for human happiness and well-being. However, he ranks them below ethical knowledge—the knowledge of good and bad—and underlines the significance and necessity of ethics as the science of sciences.

Hence, learning to live well and happily requires philosophical knowledge on the nature of good and bad. However most people inaccurately believe that the pleasant is good and the pursuit of pleasure is the best thing to do. They think enjoying themselves is happiness. The truth, Plato believes, is completely different. He severely rejects the idea that pleasantness is what renders human good and happy. It may moderately contribute to goodness and happiness, yet the good isn't derived from the pleasant; on the contrary, pleasantness is derived from goodness.

He, instead, attributes goodness to the excellence of the soul and its activities. As *arete* is the key to happiness, humans would rather choose to practise excellence for the

¹⁶⁵ Plato, *Charmides* 174b-c, Translated by Rosamond Kent Sprague, In *Complete Works*

sake of happiness and goodness. That primarily requires knowledge and discipline of one's soul.

Is the pleasant the same as the good? It isn't. . . . Is the pleasant to be done for the sake of the good, or the good for the sake of the pleasant? The *pleasant* for the sake of the good. And pleasant is that by which, when it comes to be present in us, we feel pleasure, and *good* that by which, when it's present in us, we are good? That's right. But surely we are good, both we and everything else that's good, when some excellence has come to be present in us? Yes, I do think that that's necessarily so. . . . but the best way in which the excellence of each thing comes to be present in it, whether it's that of an artifact or of a body or soul as well, or of any animal, is not just any old way, but it is due to whatever organization, correctness, and craftsmanship is bestowed on each of them. Is that right? Yes, I agree. So it's due to organization that the excellence of each thing, is something which is organized and has order? Yes, I'd say so. So it's when a certain order, the proper one for each thing, comes to be present in it that it makes each of the thing that are good? Yes, I think so. So also a soul which has its own order is better than a disordered one? Necessarily so. But surely one that has order is an orderly one? Of course it is. And an orderly soul is a self controlled one? Absolutely. So a self-controlled soul is a good one.¹⁶⁶

As underlined before, Plato is opposed to acknowledge humans as beings endowed with certain natural traits. Since they are creatures solely composed of capacities and aptitudes, a truly happy life might chiefly be reached by the excellent actualization of the capacities of the soul. Humans ought not to suffice with what is shared naturally with other sentient beings. Gratification of appetites or similar desires ought not to determine their actions and transactions. Ensuing pleasure for the sake of a good life is at most an illusion. Happiness understood as felicity or pleasantness is an interpretation based on a restricted and degraded human nature. Only when one's soul doesn't suffice with the gratification of some natural instincts and desires may he explore his other potentialities. Realizing and fulfilling one's infinite potentialities excellently results in creating and building an elevated self which relies on knowledge and then, discipline of certain dimensions of one's soul.

However, all those things might sound plausible and applicable as long as one accordingly strives to acquire the necessary knowledge of the good and the bad. He ought to be a lover of learning and wisdom. It's only thanks to wisdom that virtue—understood

¹⁶⁶ Plato, Gorgias 506c-e, Translated by Donald J. Zeyl, in *Complete Works*, Here Socrates asks and answers his own questions as a revision of what he and his interlocutors have already debated.

as excellence—becomes a possibility. Without true knowledge contingent human actions are doomed to relativism and thus, failure.

Ignorance (Gr.*agnoia*) is an immensely significant subject matter in Plato's ethics. He believes that ignorance brings about unhappiness, injustice and domination. In *Lysis* where Socrates discusses the issue of friendship with his interlocutors, he infers from what they previously talked that knowledge simply frees people whereas ignorance causes subjection. If one knows and understands (thus turn their life into a potent one) things, he is the person to be recoured to, but if he lacks wisdom, he is the person to subject to.

. . . in those areas where we really understand something everybody—Greeks and barbarians, men and women—will trust us, and there we will act just as we choose, and nobody will want to get in our way. There we will be free ourselves, and in control of others. There things will belong to us, because we will derive some advantage from them. But in areas where we haven't got any understanding, no one will trust us to act as we judge best, but everybody will do their best to stop us, and not only strangers, but also our mother and father and anyone else even more intimate. And there we are going to be subject to orders of others; there things are not going to be ours because we are not going to derive any advantage from them.¹⁶⁷

Ignorance found in a soul, then, is one of the worst things, on the account of unhappiness, injustice and badness it causes. The problem is: plenty of people seem to deny their ignorance and believe to have known pretty much. However, for Plato, real wisdom is not knowing the stones and trees around, but rather knowing what is good and bad for the purpose of directing one's actions.

One of Plato's well-known claims is that no one virtually desires what is bad. People desire good things that they know that they are good. Only on the account of a lack of knowledge they may act in bad ways, the outcomes of which are to cause unhappiness and pain. Even if one appeals to evil things the reason is that he thinks to benefit from his evil act. Otherwise no one willingly and consciously desires what is bad for them.

It is clear then that those who do not know things to be bad do not desire what is bad, but they desire those things that they believe to be good but that are in fact bad. It follows that

¹⁶⁷ Plato, *Lysis* 210a-c, Translated by Stanley Lombardo, In *Complete Works*

those who have no knowledge of these things and believe them to be good clearly desire good things.¹⁶⁸

The reason why people ‘ignore’ their ignorance and thus cause unexpected and unintended results in their lives is that they may be confusing true knowledge with belief, which, Plato thinks, is devoid of truth. Here, Plato’s understanding of knowledge must be briefly gone through to comprehend what he precisely means by that.

For Plato, human beings have certain senses such as seeing, hearing, smelling and feeling which can virtually be named as perceiving. These are the natural skills that all creatures, men and animals alike, are born with. Even though humans can have experiences by means of perceiving, true knowledge (Gr. *episteme*) is not found in them but in the reasoning about them.

Nous is the concept used by Ancient Greek philosophers to refer to intellect or reason. For Plato, it is the faculty where being and truth is grasped instead of in sensual perception. Since human perception is bereft of certainty and truth the knowledge it provides can only be called ‘belief’ which is itself distinct from real knowledge. A belief may turn out to be true, though. But its truth is not inherent to it, but contingent. However real or pure knowledge is about the real beings and consequently is about which is certain, permanent and unchangable. In addition, pure knowledge isn’t affected by persuasion whereas belief is able to be affected and accordingly changed. So what is changed by persuasion is not called knowledge.¹⁶⁹

Humans usually tend to suffice with what they perceive for a true understanding. Their so called knowledge usually comprises beliefs they derive from sensual perception. However true knowledge requires a great deal of arduous work and practice of the *nous* (reason). As rational beings, they ought to benefit more from their *nous* and its activities so as to be able to learn and discover the good. *Arete* which is none but the excellent activity

¹⁶⁸ Plato, Meno 77d-e, In *Complete Works*

¹⁶⁹ In following section the issue of knowledge in Plato will be expanded.

of one's *psuche* chiefly requires the excellent activity of one's rational side so as to be able to grasp the truth and lead the other parts of the soul in accordance with the truth. In order to have an entirely excellent soul, the other parts of *psuche* such as appetite and spirit ought to be subject to *nous* and form a healthy unity in which all parts are aware of their true task and exercise excellent functioning. This, Plato believes, can be a temperate, disciplined and wise soul in which happiness, goodness and justice reside.

On the other hand, one whose soul is controlled by his appetites, bodily desires and emotions rather than his reason, and who lacks wisdom and is content with 'beliefs', is destined, on the contrary, to injustice, unhappiness and ignorance. In *Gorgias* where Socrates is accused by Callicles of not following his bodily desires and needs but rather prefer to lead a life devoid of any material goods and deal only with philosophical investigations like young boys instead of behaving as a mature old man, Socrates responds him with a long speech that a happy and content life is not one including material wealth or satisfaction of bodily desires but rather one pursued by wisdom and temperance.

. . . anyone . . . who desires to be happy must ensue and practice temperance, and flee from licentiousness, each of us as fast as his feet will carry him, and must contrive, if possible, to need no correction; but if he have need of it, either himself or anyone belonging to him, either an individual or a city, then right must be applied and they must be corrected, if they are to be happy . . . a man should fix his eyes throughout life; he should concentrate all his own and his city's efforts on this one business of providing a man who would be blessed with the needful justice and temperance; not letting one's desires go unrestrained and in one's attempts to satisfy them—an interminable trouble—leading the life of a robber. For neither to any of his fellow-men can such a one be dear, nor to God; since he cannot commune with any, and where there is no communion, there can be no friendship. And wise men tell us, Callicles, that heaven and earth and gods and men are held together by communion and friendship, by orderliness, temperance, and justice; and that is the reason, my friend, why they call the whole of this world by the name of order, not of disorder or dissoluteness.¹⁷⁰

Plato tends to think about the happiness of an individual soul and the city (Gr. *polis*) accordingly. Just as he finds happiness and justice of the soul in the excellent functioning and ordering of *psuche*, he emphasizes that the city, or community, one belongs to also ought to have order, discipline and wisdom in order to contribute to the exercise of justice

¹⁷⁰ Plato, *Gorgias* 507c-508, In *Perseus Digital Library*

and thus provide happiness for all. Essentially, it is only through this that goodness and happiness become possible.¹⁷¹

As underlined before, Plato's account of happiness is an entirely liberating one which provides one with the power to create—i.e. to know, act and be—through following wisdom and practicing excellence of one's various aptitudes and potentialities. Plato believes that humans should pursue a sort of craft in order to build and create their selves and be powerful. When they get powerful and wise enough they not only avoid doing injustice and evil but also prevent being wronged and subjected to injustice. Consequently, the craft of getting wise and excellent renders one happy, powerful and notably free whereas ignorance and licentious activity of a degraded self creates domination, subjection and thus, unhappiness. So long as one fails to elevate his self on the way of wisdom and excellence and actualize his capacity through an arduous study (Gr. *áskēsis*) on his soul, he is destined and doomed to subjection, domination and slavery. In such a case wishing things to be otherwise is futile inasmuch as ignorance and weakness in one's soul are indeed what must be rejected. After all one's effort and time is spent on the gratification of the endless wants and desires of the body and life is reduced to a sort of survival, suffering injustice and unhappiness is unavoidable.

Then of these two, doing and suffering wrong, we declare doing wrong to be the greater evil, and suffering it the less. Now with what should a man provide himself in order to come to his own rescue, and so have both of the benefits that arise from doing no wrong on the one hand, and suffering none on the other? Is it *power* or will? What I mean is, will a man avoid being wronged by merely wishing not to be wronged, or will he avoid it by providing himself with *power* to avert it? . . . So we should procure a certain *power* and craft against this, too.¹⁷²

Conceiving human soul in a multi-dimensional way, relating its excellent functioning with the knowledge of good and bad is the most significant aspect of Plato's ethics. The knowledge of good and bad doesn't only provide an internal direction for the individual

¹⁷¹ In the last section of this chapter, the *polis* notion and its relations with 'excellence' be gone through in more detail.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 509c-d. Italics belong to me.

but also an external direction which implies living in harmony with others and even with the cosmos. Knowledge of good and bad provides the individual with the requirements not only for tending his own needs, wants and desires, but also for having and sharing a happy and just life with others. His soul and its virtues are developed so harmoniously that he cannot isolate himself from others and lead an isolated life. His allegory of the cave is meaningful in that sense. Once one conceives the reality of the things, the truth and the good, that is, when one is enlightened with the knowledge of the truth, he is expected by Plato to come back and help the remained prisoners to get out of the cave. Though this is richly symbolic and conveys a number of Platonic messages, it still points to ‘the unity of the self-other theme’ in Platonic ethics. This collective side of his account, which is almost non-existent in Benthamite and Millian utilitarianism, will be discussed at the end of this chapter.

IV.IV. Aristotle and Human *Eudaimonia*

Just as Plato offers an ethical account which renders human truly happy, just and wise, and thus free and potent, so does Aristotle. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle shows after a series of analyses that the highest goal human beings pursue must be something self-sufficient and desirable in itself. Happiness fits that description because it is always worth pursuing in its own right; people choose pleasure, honour and other good things for what they contribute to living happily, whereas they choose happiness for nothing beyond itself. So happiness is the only perfect highest goal for human beings.¹⁷³

Happiness, yet, is not conceived as a certain disposition of character but rather described as a form of activity. Since activities are of two kinds, some merely means and

¹⁷³ Aristotle, 1097a15-b21 *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Translated by Harris Rackham (London: Wordsworth Classics of World Literature, 1996)

desirable for the sake of something else and others desirable in themselves, happiness is included among activities desirable in themselves.

Those activities desirable in themselves are the ones, for Aristotle, that are conforming with virtue. He believes that a life that conforms with virtue is a happy life. Happiness, hence, does not consist in pastimes and amusement but in activities in accordance with virtue.

Though Aristotle too, finds self-sufficiency as an end in *eudaimonia*, his interpretation of the notion is quite different than Plato. He shares the view that virtuous (excellent) activity is the key to *eudaimonia*. Nevertheless, he introduces two kinds of *eudaimonia*, only one of which is attainable for human beings.

. . . if happiness consists in activity in accordance with virtue, it is reasonable that it should be activity in accordance with the highest virtue; and this will be the virtue of the best part of us. Whether then this be the intellect, or whatever else it be that is thought to rule and lead us by nature, and to have cognisance of what is noble and divine, either as being itself also actually divine, or as being relatively the divinest part of us, it is the activity of this part of us in accordance with the virtue proper to it that will constitute perfect happiness; . . . this activity is the activity of *contemplation*.¹⁷⁴

Since intellect is the highest thing in human beings, and the objects with which the intellect deals are the highest things that can be known, contemplation of truth, then must be purported as the most excellent activity. Thus, the life comprising wisdom is the happiest life of all. However, Aristotle thinks that the pursuit of that sort of *eudaimonia* is beyond the human power, virtually unattainable by human beings.

Such a life as this however will be higher than the human level: not in virtue of his humanity will a man achieve it, but in virtue of something within him that is divine; and by as much as this something is superior to his composite nature.¹⁷⁵

Human soul is composed of a composite nature which contains both rational and irrational parts. Consequently, not only intellect but also other passions and desires determine the direction of human activity, which means that human beings are rational creatures restricted by external needs and necessities. Whereas pure intellectual activity

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 1176b. Italics belong to me.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 1177b22-1178a17.

includes contemplation, composite human nature is a hindrance in front of the most perfect function of the soul's divinest element, namely intellect.

. . . man's nature is not self-sufficient for the activity of contemplation, but he must also have bodily health and supply of food and other requirements.¹⁷⁶

So *eudaimonia* as the chief good is only possible through the pure activity of the intellect, and the contemplation of truth as the best and self-sufficient thing is something unattainable for human beings on account of their limited, finite and composite nature.

Yet, it doesn't mean that human beings lack a self-sufficient and desirable end which gives direction to their activities. As it has already been stated above, it is the rational activity in accordance with virtue. This, Aristotle believes, is the *eudaimonia* within the power of human beings. Though 'perfect wisdom', understood as the contemplation of truth is over man's power and beyond his reach, yet 'human wisdom' exists to be the best thing attainable for human. Human *eudaimonia* then, which is within man's power isn't supposed to demand many or great possessions. He believes that

it is possible to perform noble deeds even without being ruler of land and sea: one can do virtuous acts with quite moderate resources.¹⁷⁷

It seems that by excluding 'complete wisdom' as something beyond man's reach, Aristotle finds the inferior kind of happiness as something easier to attend. The point, however, is that humans are supposed to be beings endowed with certain potentialities. If contemplation is beyond human power, still a virtuous life is within man's capacity. So to pursue noble deeds, as uttered by Aristotle, one doesn't require to be ruler of land and sea; quite moderate resources are sufficient.

None of moral virtues are engendered in us by nature, for no natural property can be altered by habit. The virtues are engendered in us neither by nature nor yet in violation of nature; nature gives us the capacity to receive them, and this capacity is brought to maturity by habit...Moreover, the faculties given us by nature are bestowed on us first in a potential form; we exhibit their actual exercise afterwards.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 1178b11.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 1178b11.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 1103a14-b8. The concept translated as 'moral virtues' is not appropriate with Aristotle's ethics; I prefer to use 'virtues of character' instead.

A virtuous life, hence, is a possibility for humans who reveal and realize their infinite potentialities. This conception of human nature is implied by Aristotle when he refers to virtue as something cultivated by practice. He thinks, as well as Plato, that virtue is acquired by constant exercise and practice, underlining the capability of human beings to improve and expand their aptitudes and potentialities. So knowing the nature of virtue has no use inasmuch as this knowledge isn't applied in practice.

. . . to know what virtue is is not enough; we must endeavour to possess and to practice it, or in some other manner actually ourselves to become good.¹⁷⁹

If happiness is conceived to act in accordance with virtue, then the question of whether happiness is a thing that can be learned, or acquired by training, or whether it is bestowed by fortune will have been answered indirectly. The right response appears to be by 'training' and expending arduous effort on practising it.

. . . if happiness is not sent us from heaven, but is won by virtue and by some kind of study or practice, it seems one of the most divine things that exist.¹⁸⁰

After stating the difference between two sorts of *eudaimonia*, and excluding the complete or perfect happiness as something beyond human reach, the attainable one, namely human happiness, requires to be investigated. According to Aristotle, man is a rational animal, and he is at his best when he uses his reason in the best way. 'The guidance of the rational soul' is a conception shared both by Plato and Aristotle. Whereas Plato divides the soul into three parts, and defines reason as the guiding force, Aristotle divides it into two: rational and irrational parts. The rational part actually engages in thinking and reasoning. The irrational part consists of both the nutritive and appetitive dimensions of life. Though it is irrational because it is not itself engaged in reasoning, the appetitive part of the soul (consisting of appetites, feelings, desires, and emotions) can partake of reason to the extent of being influenced by it, following it, obeying it. The other function of the irrational part

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 1179b1.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 1099b14.

of the soul, the nutritive aspect, is beyond the reach of reason and plays no significant role in moral life.

If the supreme end and good for human beings is to be identified with the fulfillment of the distinctive human function (because nutrition, growth, and sense perception are shared with other creatures, Aristotle locates the distinctive aspect of human beings in reason and human function is some sort of life of action of the soul that has reason), it must involve the exercise of the distinctive human capacities. A human being's function and consequently his good (happiness) is identified with the actual exercise of reason in two ways: the activity of reasoning and the activity of obeying and following reason. Happiness, as stated before, must consist in 'activity' since life as activity is fuller than life as a mere 'capacity'.

We have found . . . that the human function (*ergon*) is the soul's activity that expresses reason as itself having reason or requires reason as obeying reason.¹⁸¹

The function of any kind of thing or person is the same as the function of an excellent example of that thing or person. The excellent thing (person) is one who performs its (his) function fine and well. Since reason sets human beings apart, excellence in reasoning constitutes the excellent performance of human function. *Arete* or virtue as excellence in an activity is, then, the notion that determines Aristotle's human good.

The human good (happiness) turns out to be the soul's activity that expresses virtue.¹⁸²

Here one can see that, the concept of rational life, shared both by Plato and Aristotle, is almost completely absent in the classical utilitarian account of happiness. Greek philosophers don't equate happiness (*eudaimonia*) with momentary or periodic feelings of contentment or pleasure. They rather link it with virtuous activity of the soul, the guiding constituent of which is reason.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 1098a5.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 1098a15.

We find Aristotle agreeing with both Socrates and Plato that happiness and virtue are extricably linked. Furthermore, all three of them link virtue and reason. The pursuit of virtue via the exercise of reason and the consequent attainment of happiness is the essential theme of classical Greek ethics.¹⁸³

However, neither Plato nor Aristotle defines *eudaimonia* as something acquired as a reward at the end of acting in a virtuous way. It's not a consequence but rather the process of acting virtuously itself procures happiness. So doing well or acting virtuously is in itself the end rather than being means to an ulterior end. Thus interpreted ancient Greek ethics cannot be defined to have a consequentialist nature. Moreover, it is a lifelong process which only ends when one's life is over. While they predicate virtue to all one does during his life, expecting happiness as a final attainment sounds implausible. So happiness is something exercised each moment one acts virtuously.

This activity must occupy a complete lifetime; for one swallow does not make spring, nor does one fine day; and similarly one day or a brief period of happiness does not make a man supremely blessed and happy.¹⁸⁴

Yet, Aristotle presents a quite sophisticated account for the cultivation and practice of virtue. To see what he means, one needs initially appeal to his interpretation of intellect and its functions. As discussed above, human soul comprises two parts, namely, rational and irrational parts. Irrational part also consists of two parts, one, the vegetative part which appears to be common to all living things and the other, appetitive or desiring part which combats and resists the reason. Though this part opposes and runs counter to reason, it still participates in the rational soul and obeys the behest of the reason.¹⁸⁵

. . . We see that the irrational part, as well as the soul as a whole is double. One division of it, the vegetative, does not share in rational principle at all; the other, the seat of the appetites and of desire in general, does in a sense participate in principle, as being amenable and obedient to it.¹⁸⁶

This division in the soul, hence, corresponds to the division in virtues. He defines one group of virtues as intellectual ones, and the other group as the virtues of character.

¹⁸³ Arrington, *Western Ethics*, p.70.

¹⁸⁴ Aristotle, *Ethics*, 1098a4.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 1102a26-b21.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 1102a26.

Intelligence, scientific knowledge, art and prudence or practical wisdom are intellectual virtues whereas bravery, temperance and magnificence are moral virtues.

Aristotle finds it proper to say that, by rationalization of the appetitive part of the soul, the rational soul appears also to be divided into two, one division having rational principle in the proper sense and in itself, the other obedient to it 'as a child to its father'.

Cultivating virtues of character in one's soul is, indeed a process of expanding rationality onto the appetitive part of the soul which is the 'seat of the appetites and desire'. The reason of the failure of the majority of people in attaining true happiness, Aristotle believes, is the belief that the pleasant is what constitutes the good.

It appears to be pleasure that misleads the mass of mankind; for it seems to them to be a good, though it is not, so they choose what is pleasant as good and shun pain as evil.¹⁸⁷

If the appetitive soul is put under control of the rational soul by inculcating a rational character to it, the question of conflicting drives of causes in human conduct may be resolved. Therefore, by being obedient and amenable to it, appetitive soul participates in rational soul.

The intellect, he thinks, comprises two faculties: One is the scientific and the other is the calculative faculty. The scientific faculty is concerned with invariable and eternal knowledge whereas the function of the calculative faculty is the deliberation of the practical and variable human affairs. What is of importance is that Aristotle thinks that both faculties of intellect function well when they attain truth. So the attainment of truth is the function of both intellectual parts of the soul. Consequently their respective virtues are those dispositions which will best qualify them to attain truth.¹⁸⁸

However, the calculative faculty is the part that engages in human conduct in general. There are three elements in the soul which control action and the attainment of

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 1113a30-1113b.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 1139b2-29.

truth. They are, sensation, intellect and desire. But since sensation doesn't originate action, desire and intellect exist as the originators of action.

As it has been stated, the function of both faculties of intellect is best achieved when they attain truth; thus, in the sphere of human conduct, it is again the intellect which provides the truth and right principles for action. The desire, then must obey and pursue the things that intellect enjoins. Aristotle calls the 'choice' (the cause of action) in practical thinking as 'deliberate desire' since a choice is desire and reasoning directed to some end. So a choice doesn't only involve the intellect but also the desire.

Choice may be called either thought related to desire or desire related to thought; and a man, as an originator of action, is a union of desire and intellect.¹⁸⁹

Aristotle thinks that desires that spring from the appetitive soul which is originally irrational can change into a rational character by pursuing and assisting intellect in producing choices. The virtuous actions, then, are only possible as long as this harmonious work of intellect and desire is attained. Thus understood, the virtues of character which are certain settled dispositions are the assurance of rationalized desires.

Pursuit and avoidance in the sphere of desire correspond to affirmation and denial in the sphere of the intellect. Hence, in as much as moral virtue is a disposition of the mind in regard to choice, and choice is deliberate desire, it follows that, if the choice is to be good, both the principle must be true and the desire right, and that desire must pursue the same things as principle affirms.¹⁹⁰

Whereas rightness in our choice of an end is secured by virtue, practical wisdom (*phronesis*) ensures the rightness of the means we adopt to gain those ends. To be able to lead a life with a virtuous character one needs to define and conduct his actions in reference to practical wisdom. Actually, by assistance of practical wisdom virtues of character become possible. It provides the means to attain certain dispositions.

Though virtues of character are assigned a status secondary to the intellectual virtues, they occupy a larger part of Aristotle's ethics. Virtues of character pertain to appetites and

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 1139b2-29.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1139a11-1139b2.

desires, feelings and emotions, which make up the appetitive soul. Those drives are among the major causes of actions, consequently virtues of character have a close connection to action.

Virtues are certain states of character which make one a being of certain kind. A state of character is what one might call a disposition or habit to behave in certain ways. Thus, morality involves developing and manifesting virtuous dispositions of character. A virtue is a state that makes a human being good and makes him perform his function well.¹⁹¹ This can only be achieved through moral education and by habituation, hence, moral education must be central to moral life.

The virtuous actions that one will pursue must not be excess or deficient in nature. The doctrine of the mean is Aristotle's theory of right conduct. Instead of rashness or cowardice, one should act in a brave way, since bravery is the intermediate of two vice extremes. Instead of insensibility or intemperance, the virtuous way of acting is temperance. Aristotle thinks that 'the mean' may vary from one person to another:

The intermediate relative to us . . . which is neither too much nor too little and this is not one, nor the same for all.¹⁹²

The intermediate is not an absolute, arithmetic mean which would be same for everyone; rather, it is the mean relative to us. The mean varies in different circumstances with different individuals, but this doesn't mean that Aristotle is a relativist. If an action manifests virtue in the case of one individual, that it does so is an objective fact, moreover any other person who is in the same situation, have the same needs and is similar in relevant aspects would be required by reason to act in the same way. The intermediate is a matter of having feelings

at the right times, about the right things, towards the right people, for the right end, and in the right way.¹⁹³

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 1106a20.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 1106a26-27.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 1106b20.

Every virtue is in the middle between two vices, but this doesn't imply that vice is a matter of degree. For instance, all adultery and all assaults are wrong, even once in a while. A man with a virtue will always have the right response but not vice versa; a man with a vice will not always have the wrong response. For instance, a man who is good-tempered will never have too much anger; but there are many ways of being bad-tempered, and a bad-tempered man will not be bad-tempered on every occasion. A quick-tempered man becomes angry too quickly, a grumpy man gets angry at too many provocations, and a bitter man stays angry too long. These are all 'bad-tempered' men, but a grumpy man is not usually quick-tempered, nor is a quick-tempered man usually bitter. There is 'one way of being right', but there are 'too many different ways of being wrong'.¹⁹⁴

To determine the right action, at the right place and time, towards the right people, in the right way is not something easy. If we have a virtue we will have the right objective. But it requires an intellectual ability to know the right steps to take. A proper function of practical wisdom is to put into practice correct orientation of values, which the virtues of character provide. Indeed real wisdom involves knowing the right values, 'the things that are good or bad for man', as well as being able to put them into practice; so it is not possible to be really wise without having virtues of character as well. Likewise it is not possible to have a fully developed virtue of character without having practical wisdom as well.

If one has practical wisdom he will be able to have all the other virtues of character. In other words, practical wisdom is the insurance of virtues of character. If one is brave, it means that he has practical wisdom and once one has practical wisdom he is expected to have other character virtues, too.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1106b8-35.

The distinctions between classical Greek thought and utilitarianism are quite obvious. Mill and Bentham devise in their moral theory a specific sense of happiness which is radically different than Plato's or Aristotle's. Their account of happiness is based on the idea that pleasure is an intrinsic good, while Greek philosophers offer a fundamentally different and wholesomer conception of happiness. Though Plato and Aristotle's understanding of happiness is quite dissimilar in various aspects, their shared insistence is on the reason and its role in the attainment of *eudaimonia*. They point to human soul and its various parts which have accordingly different needs, wants and desires. They regard human beings as multi-dimensional creatures with different aspects.

The most significant divergence between Greek thought and utilitarianism lies in their interpretation of human nature. Whereas the utilitarian notion of human nature depicts man as a self-directed egoist who constantly pursues pleasure and avoids pain, the Ancient Greek philosophers describe man as a living being endowed with infinite capacities and potentialities. It's only when he exercises virtue (excellence) and fulfill his potentialities that he can be truly happy and good.

Regarding human beings as rational creatures and conceiving happiness as the excellent functioning of the soul under the guidance of reason is an approach completely foreign to Bentham and Mill. Ignoring this fundamental and critical capability, or relegating it to an inferior role, undermines the utilitarian project itself. Both Aristotle and Plato admit that the soul is composed of rational and irrational parts. Irrational part of the soul consists, in Aristotle, of appetitive and nutritive sides, and in Plato, of spiritual and appetitive parts. Nevertheless, while they are irrational parts of the soul, they can function rationally if they obey and follow the instructions of reason. It even seems possible to argue that, both in Plato and Aristotle, reason has its own desires such as desiring the knowledge of truth and the good. Consequently, becoming happy is not a consequence, a

reward brought about by the irrational pleasures of the soul; on the contrary it is itself an activity tied to and based on the rational desires of the soul.

Considering happiness as the maximization of pleasures, and excluding reason, excellence of character and the knowledge of the good; in other words, reducing human beings to creatures that consist only of some psychological motives and intentions functioning independently of reason dooms utilitarianism to failure.

IV.V. The Relegation of Pleasure

In *Philebus* Socrates discusses with Protarchus whether pleasure or wisdom (*phronesis*) is good. Socrates defends wisdom whereas Protarchus defends the hedonist view that pleasure is the only good. However at the end of the discussion, Socrates claims that the best life for a human being is a mixed one which includes both pleasure and wisdom. Although Plato to some extent ranks wisdom above pleasure he still says that pleasure is also a constituent of a good life. That doesn't mean that all kinds of pleasures are allowed in a good life since pleasures are divided by Plato as true and false. Plato's refusal of pleasure as something good in itself relies on this distinction:

Some pleasures are good and some bad. Is it not so? . . . And the good ones are the beneficial, the bad ones harmful? . . . Now is this what you mean: of the bodily pleasures—of eating and drinking, for instance—are not the good ones those that produce bodily health or strength or some other bodily excellence, the bad ones those which do the opposite? . . . Then pleasant actions, as well as others, should be done for the sake of the good, not the good for the sake of pleasure?¹⁹⁵

Plato also refers to such concepts as purity and impurity when he discusses the truth and falsity of pleasure and knowledge. In *Philebus* he argues that a morally good life is one filled with true and pure knowledge, but he also claims that true and pure pleasures are the other constituents of a good life. He specifies three kinds of knowledge, which are

¹⁹⁵ Plato, *Gorgias*, 499c6-500a3.

empirical disciplines (the medical arts, music, agriculture etc.), pure mathematical sciences, and dialectic knowledge (i.e. logic-cum-metaphysics—the purest of all sciences, which, among other things, contains the theories of those generic units of pleasure, knowledge, and the good). Here Plato links the purity of knowledge to clarity, accuracy, and to the truth itself. His idea seems to be that knowledge as such, aspires to obtain a clear grasp of the truth precisely and accurately. Despite their differences, all these forms of knowledge are assigned a place in the human good. They are all good in themselves, good because of what they are. However, Plato holds some of them to be of greater value than others. Thus he ranks empirical disciplines like music and carpentry below the pure mathematical sciences, and both of these below dialectic. Purity of knowledge is attained in any given subject area by the clear and accurate representation of the whole truth. So pure knowledge is that which do not combine knowledge with its opposite, with ignorance, but presents knowledge in an unadulterated form.¹⁹⁶

Just as he ranks knowledge as pure and impure, or true and false, he also ranks pleasure accordingly. But different types of pleasure aren't treated with the same appreciation as different types of knowledge. He thinks that all knowledge, dialectic, mathematical, and empirical are constituents of a good life since virtue is essentially connected to knowledge. Even though the extent of truth included in those three types of knowledge may change, they still are necessary for the attainment of good life. On the other hand, pure and impure, or true and false pleasures are not of the same worth.

Impure pleasures are identified as those in the constitution of which there is some essential link to pain. One knows that pain is the very opposite of pleasure. It is not just that the pleasure is normally or always accompanied by pain or facts stand purchasable only at the price of pain: the very experience that is enjoyed is enjoyed in part as being

¹⁹⁶ John M. Cooper, "Plato's Theory on Human Good in the *Philebus*," In *Oxford Readings in Philosophy Plato* Edited by Gail Fine (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp.815-818.

painful, or as involving pain in some way. Thus, bodily pleasures are impure, because they are mixed and inseparably entwined with pain. What is enjoyed in satisfying an appetite is something that combines pain (the appetite) with pleasure (relief). When someone eats because of hunger, an essential part of the pleasurable experience is the pain or distress of appetite. In pure pleasures, by contrast, what is enjoyed is something by its own nature fine and attractive. In the discriminating sensory awareness of geometrical designs, clear musical tones, pure colours, and fine smells, use of the senses is not linked to the satisfaction of appetites but is a direct response to the inherent fineness of the objects being enjoyed: pleasures of disciplined discovery and learning.¹⁹⁷

The pleasures that have a link to appetites, that is, impure bodily pleasures are not all discriminated as unnecessary pleasures. Plato divides them into two: normal and healthy appetitive ones, and unnecessary and unhealthy appetitive ones. The healthy impure pleasures are the ones which are necessary for a normal maintenance of life such as eating, drinking, having sex, etc. Although pleasures brought about by those appetites are identified as impure ones, they are still a component of good life since every human being needs to satisfy those normal and healthy needs and wants for the maintenance of life. The healthy satisfaction of normal bodily appetites yield pleasures which, though impure and false, are none the less good and deserve to be treated as permanent ingredients in the combination of things that makes a human life completely satisfying.

The impure and false appetitive pleasures that Plato excludes from a good life are the sudden, intense pleasures of the body. In many cases of bodily pleasure what is enjoyed is only or predominantly an experience of discharge of tension, and what is found attractive in these cases is the intensity of the experience of release. What a healthy and sober-minded person enjoys, it might be suggested, is not at all, or not especially, the experience

¹⁹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 817.

of release from tension. What he enjoys, or principally enjoys, is the activity of maintaining his physical substance and preserving his bodily health. So his interest isn't the experience of the intense and sudden release itself but the normal and necessary satisfaction of his appetites for the maintenance of a healthy life.¹⁹⁸

Plato, then declares that not all pleasures but only pure (true) pleasures and among the impure (false) ones, healthy appetitive pleasures contribute to the attainment of good life. Since not all types of pleasures contribute to the goodness of good life, then one cannot regard pleasure as something good in itself. On the other hand, even though knowledge is ranked with regard to its purity/impurity and truth/falsity, all three kinds of knowledge, dialectic (which enables to grasp the whole truth), pure mathematical sciences and empirical disciplines are all necessary for good life. That's why Plato insists that having wisdom is what renders someone virtuous. Real wisdom can also distinguish true and false pleasures and include the true ones as contributors to good life.

Plato's account of pleasure as a constituent of good life seems to refute the utilitarian claim that pleasure is the only good in itself which provides happiness. As for Plato, there are some true and necessary pleasures for happiness, there are also some false ones which are not indeed necessary for a virtuous person to maintain his life. So, how can an entity which can be pure or impure, true or false, be identified simply to be good in itself and regarded as the ultimate end human beings ought to pursue? Plato doesn't regard pleasure just an elation, a ripple that a soul undergoes; it is the kind and content of the pleasure that defines its nature. Someone may be falsely pleased because of his ignorance of the case. The pleasure, elation or ripple his soul experiences doesn't render the case a true pleasant one for him. Knowledge has a dominant role in attaining a happy life. Even to have the right pleasure depends on the knowledge of what is true pleasure and what is not.

¹⁹⁸ Plato, *Philebus* 62d-66, Translated by Dorothea Frede, In *Complete Works*.

But what if we notice that a pain or pleasure is mistaken in what is pleased or pained about, shall we then call it right or proper or give it other names of praise?¹⁹⁹

For Aristotle, too, pleasure is acceptable and also necessary for the attainment of *eudaimonia*. Nevertheless not all the pleasures are good for him. According to Aristotle the paradigm case of pleasure is being aware of something that holds our attention, e.g. listening to good music or understanding an elegant mathematical theorem. If our awareness is unimpeded and if what we are aware of is really interesting, then pleasure will perfect the experience. Pleasure is involved in any unfrustrated activity that exercises our natural capacities.²⁰⁰

Furthermore, whether a pleasure is good depends on whether the relevant activity is good. Generally he holds that knowledge and other kinds of awareness are good, although he ranks intellectual knowledge above sense perception, and seeing and hearing above tasting and touching. The pleasures of virtuous man are the proper pleasures. The truly virtuous person does not just achieve the relative intermediate in his feelings and actions, he also receives pleasure from doing so. Someone who is 'grieved' (unhappy about) abstaining from bodily pleasures (on the right occasions, in the right amount, etc.) is actually intemperate even if he abstains. A person who finds it painful to stand firm in terrifying situations, even if he succeeds in doing so, is nevertheless cowardly. One exercises the virtue of temperance only when one acts from the right state, this being indicated by the fact that the act brings pleasure to the agent.

As a successful and happy life is a life of activities excellently performed, it will also be a life full of pleasures, and it is right to weave pleasure into our ideal happy life. But the pleasures of the ideal life will come directly from serious and worthy activities, not from the frivolous amusements of the so called life of pleasure.²⁰¹ Just like Plato, who claims

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 37e.

²⁰⁰ Aristotle, *Ethics*, 1174b14-75a3.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 1152b25-33, 1175b24-76a29.

that some pleasures are false because they originate from bad sources or vice persons, or wrong knowledge, Aristotle also says that the pleasures of people of a corrupted nature are not proper pleasures. Right pleasures should arise from the activities of virtuous people and only then they will be identified as having a proper value over mere bodily or appetitive pleasures.

Despite having distinct accounts of virtue, both Plato and Aristotle argue that if being virtuous is the only possible way to be happy, and happiness is the very ultimate end for human beings, then pleasure cannot be intrinsically good. They never deny that some kinds of pleasures are good and constituent of a good life. In other words, they reject the hedonist (therefore utilitarian) idea that pleasure is the only or the highest good:

The many, the most vulgar would seem to conceive the good and happiness as pleasure, and hence they also like the life of gratification.²⁰²

Whereas Bentham and Mill ranks the consequent pleasure of the human conduct above all other things and value it as something good in itself, for Plato and Aristotle, one's pleasures cannot be regarded independent of what sort of a person he is, or what sort of pleasures they are. An ignorant person's pleasures may be false pleasures. A bad person's pleasures are inferior to a good person's pleasures. Thus interpreted, a man's pleasures are the expression of his character and his character is an insurance of his pleasures. Whereas false and true, valuable and worthless pleasures exist, how can one claim pleasure as the ultimate goal of a good life and the basic constituent of happiness?

IV.VI. Motivations of Human Action

Mill ranks mental pleasures above bodily ones. Nevertheless, he still insists that pleasure is the ultimate end for morality. A Platonic critical analysis of this utilitarian

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 1095b.

position would be to emphasize that hedonism needs to modify not only its understanding of the nature of pleasures, but primarily its very conception of the nature of human beings:

One of Plato's fundamental insights is that the human personality is a complex affair and each of its various dimensions has its own needs and desires. Failure of the self to fulfill the needs and ends of any one or more of its parts will invariably lead to discontent and a lack of fulfillment of the total person. In Plato's view, the problem with the ethical theories of his opponents—those who advocate the self-interested pursuit of pleasure, or fame, or power—is that they fail to recognize human complexity and the diversity of needs and desires entailed by it. A hedonistic ethics—one which singles out physical pleasures as only good—has an oversimplified view of human nature which is but a caricature of the human personality.²⁰³

Plato never denies that people desire pleasure, but he says that people also desire in varying degrees, knowledge, personal accomplishment, honour, and the esteem of their fellows. Unless one acknowledges all of these desires and constructs a way of living which allows for the fulfillment of them all, one will not have proposed an ethical system that will issue an overall human happiness.

Bentham and Mill see pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain as the mere motivaton for human conduct. For Bentham, all other moral notions such as virtue, self-sacrifice, duty are derivations of this principle, whereas Mill, to a certain extent, welcomes those notions of common sense morality. He rejects the idea that all our acts are determined by pains and pleasures *in prospect*, pains and pleasures to which we look forward as the *consequences* of our acts, and claims that the pain or pleasure which determines our conduct is as frequently one which *precedes* the moment of action as one which follows it. So if telling the truth to a friend may result in pain to the teller as a consequence, it will also make him feel pleasure preceding his action for being honest. That psychological alteration in the possible temporal position of pleasures and pains enables Mill to admit virtue, duty or moral obligations as valid concepts of common sense morality that contribute to happiness. But still the only ulterior motivation remains to be the pursuit of pleasure. According to Mill, even if one thinks that he acts in certain ways

²⁰³ Arrington, *Western Ethics*, p. 51.

with his free will and without the motivation of pleasure, his true—original—motivation is the desire to pursue pleasure, and as a result of repetition and habituation, he comes to think that he does those things for the sake of themselves or some other goals.

This utilitarian dogma that takes pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain as the mere motivaton for human conduct, as pointed out before, renders reason impotent, reduces it to a faculty, the only function of which is to determine the most effective means to certain ends that pleasure seeking agent desires. Since happiness as the ultimate end of human conduct consists of maximization of pleasure and minimization of pain, then reason as a calculating machine should ease the way to that very end. Not only utilitarian but also some contemporary views tend

to think of reason primarily as a formal ability to reason, as an ability to process data with which reason is provided from the outside, and to which, perhaps, it is neutral, in such a way as to calculate what it is reasonable to assume given certain assumptions, or as to calculate what it is reasonable to opt for given certain preferences. This is a gross over-simplification of how we tend to think of reason, and correspondingly of rationality.²⁰⁴

This modern view goes back to Hobbes, that a person's actions are the joint product of his (relevant) beliefs and desires and nothing else—desire providing the original motive force and belief factual information about how to act in order to satisfy desire. On this theory there are two sorts of determinants of action: belief and desire, one of which (desire) is the exclusive source of motivation while the other (belief) contributes only factual information, but no additional impulse to action.²⁰⁵

Plato's understanding of rationality, while displaying a prolific account for his own ethical framework, also incorporates a vital and profound critique of that modern idea of rationality. In Plato's theory all three parts of the soul, that is, reason, spirit and appetite, are independent sources of motivation. In *Republic* Socrates states that

²⁰⁴ Michael Frede, "Introduction," In *Rationality in Greek Thought*, Edited by Michael Frede and Gisela Striker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 5.

²⁰⁵ John M. Cooper, "Plato's Theory of Human Motivation," In *Oxford Readings in Philosophy Plato*, p. 671

there are three pleasures as corresponding to the three parts of the soul, one peculiar to each part, and similarly with desires and kinds of rule.²⁰⁶

Hence, there are desires of reason as well as of bodily appetites and impulses of a spirited nature. The desires of reason are thus implied to be strong impulses of some kind which we experience simply and directly because we possess the power of reason, the power to figure things out and know the truth. On this ground reason is conceived capable of deciding which ends are worth pursuing, and doesn't merely provide the means to, or work out some balance among, appetitively or otherwise given ends. The reason sometimes proposes an end on its own authority, and this is an additional motivating force above whatever other kinds of desire may also be operating. Plato claims that desire for the good is inherent in reason. If, spirit or appetite takes over the control and become dominant in one's soul, reason will fail to maintain its function of desiring the good.

This notion of desires of reason is a significant dimension of Plato's thought. He doesn't deny that the other parts of human soul, that is, spirit and appetites, have their own desires and needs to be satisfied, moreover he stresses that only when they demand a rational amount of gratification and only when reason, in accordance, functions its appropriate role by figuring things out and knowing the truth and consequently desires the good that the perfect harmony of soul will be accomplished. If one fails to satisfy these desires in balance, that will lessen the quality of his life.

That also means that Plato doesn't only see desires of spirit or appetites as the motivating forces for the human conduct, but also takes into consideration the reason and its inherent desires—in the sense of figuring things out, knowing the truth and the good—as motivating forces to pursue this or that kind of action. Just as eating, drinking, sex, loving or feeling honour are some needs and wants of the spirit and appetite, so searching the truth, understanding what happens and learning the facts are needs and wants of the

²⁰⁶ Plato, Republic, 580d7-8, Translated by G. M. A. Grube, In *Complete Works*

reason. Those three parts of the soul altogether decide one's decisions, preferences and likings in life. All people have within them appetites, spirit and reason. But each of them have a slightly different mixture of the three. There are people in whom appetites predominate, others in whom spirit is paramount, and some whose lives primarily revolve around intellectual activities. Plato's theory of ethics seems to wander around this distinction in human beings. Since soul is structured by these three constituents, the tyranny of whichever may result in miserable, unjust and unhappy lives: the true remedy is that all the parts should function excellently appropriate with their roles.

As for Aristotle, deliberation involves an interplay of reason and desire. The task of practical reason is to give guidance to the appetites, feelings and emotions of the irrational soul, to direct this soul to those feelings and actions that constitute the intermediate in particular situations.

A decision (or a choice) is neither an intention nor a desire nor opinion about what is best. A decision is defined as 'a deliberate desire to do something within the agent's immediate range of alternatives.' Aristotle calls it a deliberate desire because it is a desire formed after a process of deliberation, in which the agent considers how to put his objectives into practice. In the process of deliberating, one starts from some objective (e.g. health) and considers how to achieve it (e.g., better nutrition), and then how to achieve that (e.g., become a better cook), and then how to achieve that (e.g., enroll in a cooking school), reasoning backwards so to speak, until one reaches something that one can actually do. Decisions reveal the man because his decisions indicate his values and the quality of his practical thinking. His character determines his basic values, and his practical intellect determines how to put them into effect. Everybody pursues what he regards as good, although men with wrong values are mistaken about what actually is good.²⁰⁷

Theoretical reason which is concerned only with knowing the nature of things, doesn't move or motivate people to act. It consists of knowledge of universals rather than as is the case with practical reason, particulars (specific actions occurring at particular times and places). Scientific, theoretical knowledge aims at truth at demonstrating what the general nature of the things is. On the other hand, practical reason concerned as it is with action aims at the good, the object of intelligent desire and feeling. Consequently, as

²⁰⁷ D. S. Hutchinson, "Ethics," In *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, Edited by Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.210.

theoretical wisdom doesn't move one to act, practical wisdom motivates a person to action since it is driven by desire for an end.

There is a sort of natural virtue in people that inclines them towards virtuous actions, but natural virtue is not virtue in the fullest sense. Deliberation is required to attain the latter. Hence, deliberation contains an interplay of reason and desire. Reason, so, can prioritize ends and thereby realize desires. Deliberation leads to desire molded or directed by reason, and when a decision is reached, the resultant deliberative desire is what moves one to act. When the decision is excellent the reason is regarded true and the desire correct, so that what reason asserts is what desire pursues.²⁰⁸

Like Plato, who argues that reason has its internal desires and needs to move an agent to act in certain ways and direction, Aristotle thinks that reason involves desires of its own. Reason in them is desiderative.

It is the function of reason to determine the course of action we take, indeed the course of our life, by making us do what it wants us to do. Moreover, it is clear for reason to fulfill this function of guiding and determining our life well, it does have to have a certain knowledge or expertise.²⁰⁹

This way of understanding reason is completely in contrast with the utilitarian account of human motivation. For Bentham and Mill, desires ruled by pleasures are the basic motivation to action and human reason is just a faculty of calculating certain means to ends, whereas, for classical Greek philosophers, reason is a primary motivating drive in human soul. However, since human soul have various other dimensions with different desires, human reason plays a significant role in regulating those desires and give a certain direction to them within the light of pursuing good and avoiding the bad.

IV.VII. Virtuous Character and Conduct

To recall what utilitarianism thinks of character and its acts, this short paragraph by Mill will suffice:

Utilitarians are quite aware that there are other desirable possessions and qualities besides virtue, and are perfectly willing to allow to all of them their full worth. They are also aware

²⁰⁸ Aristotle, *Ethics*, 1139a20-25.

²⁰⁹ Michael Frede, "Introduction", pp. 11-12.

that a right action doesn't necessarily indicate a virtuous character, and that actions which are blamable, often proceed from qualities entitled to praise.²¹⁰

Mill claims that it doesn't matter much whether one is good or bad; what counts is whether his actions are good or bad. What moves someone to act isn't worth praise insofar as the consequence of his conduct results in the best utility. A virtuous character may do blamable actions and a vice person may cause good consequences. Not their motives of action, but the consequences that follow should be evaluated as moral or not.

In Plato's dialogues, Socrates' main concern is how to make a soul virtuous. He spends his time talking to Athenians about the meaning and course of their lives. His message is: an unexamined life is not worth living. He advises them to pay attention to the most important thing in life, their soul or character; to seek goodness and justice, for these alone benefit the soul. Inasmuch as soul is the animated part of people and via it that people feel, desire, know and become happy, it must be in the centre of their attention.

Plato argues that acting in a virtuous way can in no way be understood in isolation from being virtuous. Even its utterance would sound completely implausible and ridiculous. How can one produce beneficial and good actions without building a strongly harmonious and good self? How can human soul and its conduct can be evaluated not in unity but in separate senses? How can an ignorant (vicious) soul produce wise actions or a wise soul produce vicious actions? Though utilitarianism make way for that type of inconsistent and implausible possibilities of human conduct, Plato's theory of good life strictly rejects it.

Think of two men who try to follow a healthy and sufficient diet but have different reasons in doing so. One does so because he thinks a moderate diet which is sufficient for maintenance of a healthy life is the right thing to do, but the other does it because his wife admires him this way and he actually would do the reverse if he wasn't afraid to lose the

²¹⁰ Mill, *Utilitarianism*, p. 32.

respect of his wife for his virtuous action. Though both people might be said to perform a moderate action about appetite, only the first man seems to display a virtuous action and the second doesn't. To be moderate, to have a virtuous character as opposed to merely doing the virtuous thing, one needs to act from the appropriate motives; to do that one needs some understanding of the nature of morality.

For Plato a virtue is a state of a person. Virtue is not identified with a pattern of behaviour. A virtue is primarily a property of person, a state of soul. It was stated above that to have any virtue one must have the virtue of moral knowledge. Courage, for instance, as the control over fear becomes a virtue only when it is combined with a knowledge of good and bad, only when we control our fear in order to achieve what we know to be good ends and to avoid what we know to be bad ones. A person is just when the parts of his soul are in a perfect harmony, in the sense that each part of his soul fulfills its proper function. The rational part of a just person has the appropriate sort of knowledge or wisdom, and functions on behalf of the whole soul, in the light of its knowledge of what is appropriate for the goodness of the soul.

Plato declares in *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* that a just or happy person has the knowledge of what is good. When one knows what is good, he also loves it. When someone loves a person, he always wants to be with him and just similarly, when someone loves goodness, he wants to be surrounded by goodness. A soul that is examined and cultivated in this way can only cause accordingly virtuous actions. If one knows goodness only then he can strive to treat people well, to make the world as good as possible and to make good laws, good institutions and so on. He uses the God as a paradigm or a standard and says that when one behaves as much like god as possible he attains happiness.

Try asking any moderately well-educated citizen of the Roman empire to name the official moral goal, or *telos*, of each major current philosophical system. Among others, you will

hear that Plato's is *homoiosis theoi kata to dunaton*, 'becoming like god so far as is possible'.²¹¹

According to Sedley, god isn't regarded as creating the standards for morality: god perfectly embodies those standards, and hence constitutes for human moral action not only its proper overseer but also the one perfect exemplar. Hence, this mustn't be conceived as a religious outlook. Accordingly, as one becomes more like god, one becomes more moral. If happiness consists in becoming as much like god as possible, it consists in becoming as virtuous as possible. In *Gorgias*, Socrates points out that

. . . the temperate man who, as we have seen will be just and brave and pious, will be a perfectly good man, and the good man will act well and nobly in whatever he does, and he who acts well will be blessed and happy; and . . . he who is wicked and acts badly will be miserable.²¹²

This means that those who act well act from good motives and those who act badly from bad motives. It is not possible for someone good to act badly or for someone bad to act well. Moreover, a just action is an action which also promotes or preserves a just soul. A good action accordingly is one which promotes or preserves a good soul. The goodness of character and the goodness of actions inseparably entail each other. Only when this is attained, happiness/justice/virtue may be possible. Therefore moral evaluation of human conduct should include the agent and its character.

Aristotle's understanding of the significance and function of human character reflects very similar concerns. As stated before, Aristotle describes being virtuous as a state of character, which is what one might call a disposition or habit, a firm tendency to act in certain ways and to have certain feelings, desires and emotions. One develops a state of character or disposition by repeating similar activities, so

we become just by doing just actions, temperate by doing temperate actions, brave by doing brave actions.²¹³

It is also noted above that, for Aristotle, a brave person is

²¹¹ David Sedley, "The Idea of Godlikeness," In *Oxford Readings in Philosophy Plato*, p. 792

²¹² Plato, *Gorgias*, 507b8-c7.

²¹³ Aristotle, *Ethics*, 1103a30-1103b1.

. . . whoever stands firm against the right things and fears the right things, for the right end, in the right way, at the right time, and is correspondingly confident.²¹⁴

Only when one fulfills these requirements, he can be identified as brave. People sometimes may pretend to be brave or simulate bravery. They can stand firm even they are filled with fear; they can sometimes stand firm because they are forced by some external circumstances or their superiors. In all these cases, they are not acting with the virtue of bravery, even they seem from outside as brave as a virtuous person. A person can be called brave when he acts from the proper motive. A brave person chooses to stand firm or to fight because that is fine or because anything else is shameful.²¹⁵

Virtue is a state that ‘decides’, that makes a ‘choice’, and the virtuous state makes a choice or decision for the right reason. Besides acting with the right motive, a virtuous person must also get pleasure from doing so. This is only possible when one’s character is shaped in the right way through habituation. After a virtuous person’s character is shaped properly, he will have a unified and harmonious soul and won’t have to struggle with various conflicts involved in certain cases.

Aristotle also defines the conditions of moral weakness and vice. A vice is a condition of the soul in which an emotion is incorrectly adjusted, and the rational part doesn’t realize that anything is wrong. The emotion may be felt either too much or too little, but to the man himself nothing seems wrong. Incontinence—moral weakness—is similar to vice in that one’s emotions are out of adjustment and cause him to do the wrong things. The rational part however, is aware that he does wrong. Yet he still does it because the moral and rational side of that person is weaker than his emotional side. Aristotle, defines moral weakness and vice as different conditions despite the similar results they produce. Moral weakness is aware of its deficiency and regrets whereas vice is neither aware of itself nor regrets. Moral weakness is easier to cure because the vice cannot be

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1115b15

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1116a10

persuaded because of his false opinions. Hence, Aristotle defines moral weakness as partial badness but vice as complete badness.²¹⁶

He argues that virtues of character are the main concern of morality. Unless one builds a proper, firm and virtuous character, no good actions are to be expected from him. One cannot deny that ‘capacity’ is a central notion in Aristotle’s ethics, as much as ‘activity’. Acting properly and excellently requires excellent capacity as well. Consequently, actions cannot be separated from the motives which give rise to them. Evaluating actions in isolation from states of character and other emotions would relegate virtues, whereas virtues are constituents of an overall good life, or *eudaimonia*.

Furthermore, being moral is a matter not of following a set of rules imposed by some authority, but being a certain kind of person and expressing one’s moral character in words, feelings and deeds. Neither Plato nor Aristotle identifies morality with certain specific rules or duties. This is one of the most critical and distinctive elements of their ethics that separate it from modern theories of morality, in which

rules become the primary concept of the moral life. Qualities of character then generally come to be prized only because they will lead us to follow the right set of rules.²¹⁷

Hence, ancient Greek virtue ethics focuses mainly on inner character and/or motives rather than on rules for or consequences of actions. General rules or principles usually don’t encompass all the particular situations and actions. They can’t encompass all the specific and changing details of the circumstances of actions. Hence, one cannot rely on general rules to tell him what to do in particular cases. Instead of rules, an ‘eye’ is required for the changing details of circumstances, i.e., for seeing the details aright. Consequently, the virtuous person/character provides that ‘eye’ which is capable of that insight into the details of changing infinite situations and is the guarantee of comprehending the situations and acting aright.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1146a 31.

²¹⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007) p. 119.

IV.VIII. An Ideal City: *Polis*

The matter of joining and reconciling the interests/well-being/happiness of individuals or different classes of individuals is a primary concern and objective not only for modern philosophers but ancient thinkers as well. Plato's entire corpus can be viewed, actually and essentially, as a contribution to the overall goodness/happiness of both individuals and the community they live in. His main concern is the ethical sphere, but, for him, this is the ground of all human transactions and activities. Therefore, whereas one can encounter detailed investigations of economical or political issue and problems in other thinkers, Plato's views concerning these subject matters are usually expressed implicitly in his ethical investigations. That doesn't mean that he doesn't have much to say about those matters but rather that he finds ethics the kernel of all life processes, whether it be political or economical.

Nevertheless, he elaborates explicitly on some social/political/economical issues in *Republic*. Describing the human soul as an organic unity having three parts which should accord excellently, Plato argues that the city, or the human community, is analogous to the soul in that it also constitutes an organic unity, and should have a similar unity, harmony and balance among different classes of people it contains.

He defends that human soul has three parts, each one having a function corresponding to one of the functions of the three parts of the city (*polis*). The job of appetite is to provide for the bodily needs of a person; the job of reason is to know the truth and function in the light of it; and the job of spirit is to reinforce the demands of reason when they come in conflict with appetite. This harmony and balance of the soul is what Plato calls justice. Justice in the individual is the harmony of the soul, each part properly fulfilling its own function, not interfering the other functions of the other parts of the soul.

Accordingly, city consists of three parts, rational, spirited and appetitive parts to be named as rulers, brave soldiers and effective producers. Just as the excellent functioning of soul parts results in justice and happiness of the individual, similarly the excellent/harmonious functioning of the parts of the community, that is, justice of the city, would bring about the goodness of its constituents. Just as happiness is a result of perfect harmony of soul's parts each fulfilling their own specific desires in accordance with the knowledge of good and bad, the components of a city must also regulate their job and desires so that they don't conflict with what is good for them.

This explanation may be conceived to be devoid of any real understanding of human relations and their conventional conceptions of good, justice, happiness. Plato may be criticized for evading the real problems and difficulties human beings confront in real life. Nevertheless, Plato responds to these possible charges beforehand, in his analysis of some of the conventional conceptions of justice.

One of the questions put forward and discussed by Plato is whether such a harmonious or unified individual soul refrain from lying, cheating, or robbing others. Will his just soul lead a life suited to ordinary/conventional justice? Plato explicitly claims that the just soul will not engage in those actions towards others that we ordinarily label unjust, namely theft, treachery, breaking oaths and agreements, adultery. In *Republic* Socrates asks Glaucon:

Socrates: And would he have anything to do with temple robberies, thefts, betrayals of friends in private life or of cities in Public?

Glaucon: No, nothing.

Socrates: And he'd be in no way untrustworthy in keeping an oath or other agreement?

Glaucon: How could he be?

Socrates: An adultery, disrespect for parents, and neglect of the gods would be more in keeping with every other kind of character than his?

Glaucon: With every one.²¹⁸

²¹⁸ Plato, *Republic*, 443a.

Plato thinks the cause of those actions ordinarily labelled unjust is an imbalanced state of the soul, a state in which one part—usually one or more of appetites—is not doing its own business, not obeying the dictates of reason. In fact, much of the injustice in life flows from greed or, lust, which arguably are appetites out of control. Spirit too can be at fault, when the desire for glory and fame overwhelms reason and leaves numerous injustices in its wake. Spirit in that case will have abandoned its proper role. For Plato, the opposite of justice is *pleonexia*, a matter of having and wanting more than one is entitled to. When appetite or spirit pursues more than it is entitled to, the result is injustice.²¹⁹

A thoroughly unjust person is least free of all human beings because he is a slave to the worst parts of himself, his appetites...He is also always in need, for he is never able to satisfy his desires. . . . Such a person seems supremely unhappy. By contrast, a thoroughly just person leads the happiest of lives. A philosopher is the best judge of which kind of life is the most pleasant. Since he refers a life filled with the kinds of pleasures that dominates just person's life, a just person leads the most pleasant life...This is confirmed by the nature of pleasure itself. Pleasure is a process, either from a painful state to an intermediate state, or from an intermediate state to a positive one. Only the latter processes turn out to be genuine pleasures, and it is these that dominate the life of a just person. . . . Since the most pleasant life is the happiest life, a person will be better off just than unjust.²²⁰

Another conventional misinterpretation of justice tackled by Plato is the idea that justice consists of the sentiment of retaliation. It should be reminded that Mill identifies justice with the primitive sentiment of retaliation because human beings desire the violators of law or rights be punished either by law or by displeasure and ill offices of their fellow beings. Plato, not surprisingly, thinks this is not the case:

We should not return wrong for wrong nor do evil to a single man, no matter what he may have done to us . . . let this be our deliberation, that neither to do wrong nor to return a wrong is ever correct, nor is doing harm in return for harm done . . . I have held it for a long time and still hold it now.²²¹

Plato believes that to do evil to a person is to do injustice to him whatever harm he may have done. Since doing harm doesn't render a person better in soul but rather worse, even it's one's enemy, one shouldn't treat another badly and harm him:

²¹⁹ Arrington, *Western Ethics*, p. 58.

²²⁰ Norman O. Dahl, "Plato's Defence of Justice," In *Oxford Readings in Philosophy Plato*, p. 692

²²¹ Plato, *Crito*, 49c, Translated by G. M. A. Grube, in *Complete Works*.

. . . can those who are just make people unjust through justice? . . . In a word, can those who are good make people bad through virtue? . . . Then, . . . it isn't the function of a just person to harm a friend or anyone else, rather it is the function of his opposite, an unjust person If anyone tells us, then, that it is just to give to each what he's owed and understands by this that a just man should harm his enemies and benefit his friends, he isn't wise to say it, since what he says isn't true, for it has become clear that it is never just to harm anyone.²²²

So according to Plato, justice cannot consist in helping one's friends and harming one's enemies. He argues that harming anything—a dog, horse, or human being—renders that thing worse off, less excellent, by diminishing the virtue (*arete*) which makes it good or excellent thing of its kind. In *Republic*, Socrates is appealing to the equation of virtue and excellence. If one harms a human being, he will make that person worse in human virtue. This specifically human virtue is justice for Plato. So to harm someone is to make that individual worse off with respect to justice. For Plato, this is a conventionally mistaken understanding of justice. Since justice should be conceived as a psychic harmony of the soul and harmonious and balanced state of the city instantiating the good all the time, it cannot include harming people even if they act badly or in vicious way.

A just person or state's purpose must be behaving so that they promote and preserve justice all the time. Vengeance or retaliation is not only an injustice done to the wrongdoer, but it's also harmful to the perpetrator himself. Since a just person should never do any wrong, consequently he should never injure any man whatever injury one has suffered at his hands. Such an act would be harmful not only to the wrongdoer but to the soul of the perpetrator, too. That's why Socrates tells his judges in *Apology* that, killing him, banishing or disfranchising him as a punishment will harm them more than himself:

. . . I would say to you, men of Athens: "Whether you believe Anytus or not, whether you acquit me or not, do so on the understanding that this is my course of action, even if I am to face death many times." Do not create a disturbance, gentlemen, but abide by my request not to cry out at what I say but to listen, for I think it will be to your advantage to listen, and I am about to say other things at which you will perhaps cry out. By no means do this. Be sure that if you kill the sort of man I say I am, you will not harm me more than yourself. Neither Meletus nor Anytus can harm me in any way; he could not harm me, for I do not think it is permitted that a better man be harmed by a worse; certainly he might kill me, or perhaps banish or disfranchise me, which he and maybe others think to be great harm, but I do not

²²² Plato, *Republic*, 335b-e.

think so. I think he is doing himself much greater harm doing what he is doing now, attempting to have a man executed unjustly.²²³

Another conception of justice rebuked by Plato in *Republic* is the common view that justice prevents others to harm us since people wouldn't behave morally if they thought they could get away with behaving immorally. This is discussed in the context of the story of Gyges' Ring. As related by Glaucon, Gyges is a simple, modest, law-abiding shepherd who tends his flock, gets along reasonably well with his fellow shepherds, and generally stays out of trouble. One day while he is looking for one of his sheep, he finds a skeleton with a ring on his finger. He takes the ring and puts it on his own finger, and in quite a short time he realizes that upon turning the setting of the ring inside his hand he becomes invisible. He suddenly sees the advantage of it and leaves his simple life as a shepherd, with the help of the ring goes to the court, slays the king, seduces the queen, takes over the throne, and lives ever after with great wealth, fame and power.

So, Glaucon discusses, wouldn't everyone do the same if they had the Gyges' Ring? Wouldn't they commit injustice if they knew they would get away with what they did? Glaucon claims that justice cannot be regarded as something desirable in itself, but rather a burden for human being, as it really doesn't render people happy but just protect them from the harms that can be done to them. People tolerate it because it is lesser of two evils. Why should the just person continue to be just if he came to have the powers signified by Gyges' ring?

This view introduced by Glaucon resembles a well-known modern strain which justifies the state and community with the interests of its citizens. According to this view, which is also shared by utilitarians, state itself being an evil, can only be justified as ensuring the rights and security of its citizens, and constitutes a worse evil if not controlled by law and government. To avoid more evil people tolerate evil. If law and government

²²³ Plato, *Apology*, 30c-e, Translated by G. M. A. Grube, In *Complete Works*.

didn't exist, immorality or injustice would cause much more evil than state's mere pressure or burden. Hobbes is one the first modern proponents of this theory, which is adopted and defended both by Bentham and Mill. However, according Plato, an organized state or community comes into being as a means of satisfying human needs.

I think a city comes to be because none of us is self-sufficient, but we all need many things.²²⁴

People cannot satisfy their various needs of food, clothing, shelter on their own. By division of labour some people would contribute in some fields they have aptitude for, while the others in different fields. Their personal abilities, weaknesses and limitations would render it harder if they had to do everything on their own. Hence a state organized according to division of labour which is based on natural abilities and talents would be more succesful in satisfying human needs. As was stated above, justice becomes a matter of balance and harmony among the citizens and the activities of these citizens. When everyone does her own share, and does it well, we have balance and harmony.

Whereas Bentham and Mill conceive human community as the arithmetical aggregate of its individual members, and consequently regard general happiness and good of the community as the aggregate happiness of its individual members, Plato's community or city (*polis*) is one in which all its members' well-being, good and happiness rely on the community's as a whole. Both Bentham and Mill guarantee justice by law, legislation and governmental coercive machinery which are mostly 'external sanctions'. Rewarding and punishing are seen as the ensurance of individuals' obedience to the rules and respect for rights of others. However Plato's main concern is developing virtuous selves which requires one to behave rationally and excellently. Whereas justice and goodness of the self reside in the excellence of character, justice and goodness of the *polis* reside in the rational and excellence functioning of its members. Law or legislation as external sanctions do not

²²⁴ Plato, *Republic*, 369b.

assure the consolidation of conflicting interests but virtuous individuals are the guarantee of communal goodness and happiness.

Aristotle's views about the origins of a political community is not so much different than Plato's. Political community is not something external to individuals. As opposed to the modern idea of state as a coercive agent which brings, as a benefit to the society, limits and obligations to individuals in order to avoid insecurity or other pains, Aristotle asserts that *polis* provides individuals the possibility to achieve their individual good.

Aristotle's presuppositions are quite different. His fundamental concept is not that of obligation, but of human good; while in his way the role of state, so far from limiting the individual's freedom of action with the aim of securing a common good, is precisely that of enabling the individual to realize his or her potential to achieve his or her individual good, an achievement impossible unless in the context of the state.²²⁵

The distinctive feature of man is the rational part of his soul which requires expression in the context of a *polis*. Unless he fulfills that capacity and exercises it properly, human can not be marked out from other animals. The place of actualizing this potentiality is the *polis*. It cannot be done in isolation outside the *polis*. Not only that: since human good consists in the virtuous activity of the soul, which requires the individual to fulfill his capacities in an excellent way, *polis* seems to be the only possible place for this proper functioning. *Polis* also promotes the common good by providing its citizens the necessary space for the exercise of virtues of character and intellect. For the good of the individual is to live the life of character and intellectual virtue, which requires that the individual directs his life by his autonomous practical reasoning. But at the same time the social requirements of human nature are such that the best exercise of autonomous practical reasoning is the promotion of good life not for the individual in isolation, but for the whole community.²²⁶ Hence the good and interest of the individual is not independent

²²⁵ C. C. W. Taylor, "Politics," In *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle* Edited by Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) pp. 233-234.

²²⁶ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1278a-b5 in *Perseus Digital Library*.

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0058%3Abook%3D3%3Asection%3D1278a>

from the good and interest of the political organization. The good life is the life directed by practical wisdom—*phronesis*—and the most perfect exercise of *phronesis* is the application of that virtue to the common good of a community.

The good life, consequently, requires participation in the government of a self-governing community, i.e. *polis*. Someone who has no share in the government of his community has willingly or perforce, to surrender crucial aspects of his life to the direction of another, and thus abandons the task of *phronesis*, which is the key to *eudaimonia*.

According to Aristotle whereas family and village exist for the purpose of meeting daily life needs such as food, shelter, clothing and so on, cities don't only provide the bare necessities of life but also make it possible for people to live well.

The partnership finally composed of several villages is the city-state; it has at last attained the limit of virtually complete self-sufficiency, and thus, while it comes into existence for the sake of life, it exists for the good life.²²⁷

He thinks that an individual can fulfill his end—*telos*²²⁸—and be a moral and happy human being only within a well constructed political community. Though utilitarians tend to think of 'living well' as leading a life of comfort and satisfaction, what Aristotle means is a life of happiness and virtue, thus fulfilling one's capacities. Cities, Aristotle believes, don't exist for the sake of security, safety or wealth but rather for the sake of pursuing virtue and happiness of its people.

. . . the object of a state is the good life . . . a state is the partnership of clans and villages in a full and independent life, which in our view constitutes a happy and noble life; the political fellowship must therefore be deemed to exist for the sake of noble actions, not merely for living in common.²²⁹

He thinks that the constituents of the best life, thus, are not contested goods such as wealth or honours, which have to be distributed, but virtues of character and intellect. He

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 1252b.

²²⁸ *Telos* means purpose, or goal, or final end. According to Aristotle, everything has a purpose or final end. If we want to understand what something is, it must be understood in terms of that end. Thus, the *telos* of human being must be 'living happily,' and 'living happily' requires a life of virtue. Someone who is not living a life that is virtuous, or morally good, is also not living a happy life, and hence, not fulfilling his *telos*.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1280b-1280a.

assumes that the best state is that in which every citizen is given the opportunity to achieve complete excellence in these respects.

. . . it is clear that the best constitution is the system under which anybody whatsoever would be best off and would live in felicity.²³⁰

As to the concerns of practical life which give rise to conflicts and injustices, what Aristotle can offer is already expressed in his doctrine of the mean with respect to virtues of character. Just as external rules don't work much for Plato's ethical views, they don't benefit the moral conduct in Aristotle. Aristotle's response to the conflicting matters of life is a successfully shaped virtuous character which will be the guarantee of all concerns. He claims that people cannot rely on general rules to tell them what to do. Since general rules don't encompass all the specific and changing details of the circumstances of action, one cannot rely on them to do the morally right thing.

Practical reason, however, is concerned with particular situations and particular acts. Whereas the rules are 'mechanical', and concern only general outlines of the action, practical reason provides a deeper and safer 'eye' into the particulars. For instance, the just outcome is a mean between unfair gain and unfair loss. If you have less than is fair of what is good, then you have been unjustly treated. If you have more than is fair of what is good, then you have benefitted from injustice. If you have caused yourself to benefit in this way, then you have committed an act of injustice. If you deliberately choose to benefit from injustice, then you are an unjust and wicked man. Being just is more than simply knowing the provisions of law; you need to know how to apply them in particular cases, which is the difficult part that requires practical reasoning.²³¹

Moral education, thus plays an important role for attainment of a moral and good life. Aristotle points to the importance of developing the right habits, 'right from youth'. Moral education, then is, absolutely central to the moral life. Unless one educates his

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1324a.

²³¹ D. S. Hutchinson, "Ethics," pp. 222-223.

children morally and thereby molds their characters in the right way, he cannot expect them to lead flourishing, happy lives later on. The emphasis one finds in the ethics of Aristotle is never on defining what is right or identifying what our duty is; the emphasis is always on what a good person would do. The right thing, therefore, is defined via virtue rather than virtue via right conduct.

IV.IX. Conclusion: Utilitarianism and its Irredeemable Defects

Our critical and comparative analysis of the ethical views of such ancient Greek philosophers as Plato and Aristotle indicates that the fundamental problems of utilitarianism, both in the case of Bentham and Mill, spring up from the unconvincingly narrow, reductionist, metaphysically onerous accounts these philosophers present and defend regarding human nature, human conduct, human happiness and finally human collectivity/society.

Though Mill and Bentham's understanding and depiction of utilitarianism differ in various aspects, the fundamental premises of the doctrine remain unchanged. The ultimate end of human conduct, which is good in itself, is happiness for both thinkers. Both define and discuss happiness in terms of maximization of pleasure and minimization of pain. Utility, the greatest happiness principle, which is deemed to be the core of utilitarianism, is a shared conception by both Mill and Bentham.

Mill attempts to render utilitarianism a more sophisticated and attractive theory to a greater audience and value the common sense morality and intuitions by making minute, nevertheless critical, alterations in Bentham's understanding of human psychology. However, his efforts to provide a utilitarian grounding to such moral concepts as virtue, duty and obligations turn out to be a simple case of wishful thinking: Mill's handling of

these moral concepts prove that they can be included in a utilitarian framework only if they are reduced to mere derivatives of utility.

Another feature that distinguishes Mill from Bentham is Mill's qualitative hedonism, according to which pleasures are divided as higher and lower pleasures. Higher or superior pleasures are the pleasures of intellect, of the feelings and imagination, and of the moral sentiments whereas the lower or inferior ones are bodily, material or sensual pleasures. In spite of the fact that Mill's view concerning the nature of pleasures requires more appreciation, conceiving promotion of pleasure and avoidance of pain as sole determinants of human conduct and excluding any other springs of actions demote Mill's so called higher qualifications.

The utilitarian understanding and treatment of the intricacies of human condition brings forth and exacts quite a confined and constrained, in that sense, a severely oppressive depiction of morality: human beings are self-directed creatures who are ruled by pains and pleasures. Because nature has put mankind under the subjection of pain and pleasure as two sovereign masters dictating not only what he ought to do but also what he shall do, sustaining lives in accordance with this nature is the right option that should be pursued. However, this conception of human nature, based on and defined in terms of psychological egoism, cannot provide a sufficient foundation and justification for the utilitarian claim concerning the greatest happiness of the greatest number, i.e. the utility principle.

Our exposition and analysis of how Plato and Aristotle conceive such ethical notions as human action, virtue, happiness, good life demonstrate that human beings are understood as multi-dimensional beings with infinite capacities and potentialities by these Ancient Greek thinkers. The pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain are indeed critical elements included in their conception of good life. Nevertheless, pleasure and pain are

never taken to be the sole determinant of human nature and the sole spring of action, especially when the possibility of an ethical human conduct and good life is in question. Instead, man is discussed as a being capable of pursuing a good and happy life by the guidance, not of some mere psychological entity such as pain/pleasure, but of his ‘reason’, which has a peculiar meaning in ancient Greek philosophy, a meaning almost incompatible with the content of the modern variant of the term. Both in Plato and Aristotle, the faculty of reason has a central place and immense significance which renders their ethical thought still vital, critical and influential in the context of our discussion of modern utilitarianism. For both philosophers reason is a faculty having its own desires which can be briefly and roughly explained as knowing the truth, and searching for the appropriate ends for human conduct to pursue. Here they devise reason so well that it plays a pervasive role in directing and guiding human conduct in order to be happy and good. Though human ‘soul’ have such inclinations as appetites, emotions, etc., which are elements of its irrational part, the happy/just/good soul is the one which manages a harmony between those parts—a harmony which can be achieved only with the guidance of reason.

In utilitarianism, however, the quite restricted understanding of human nature undermines the doctrine’s own account of personal and social happiness, defined as the most valuable end. Once human beings are described as psychological machineries which admit only pleasant actions/decisions/duties/obligations as the components of a happy and good life, a very distinctive human faculty—namely, reason—is denied an autonomous, decisive, deliberative function in such critical matters of morality as determining what is good, what is virtuous. Moreover it is subordinated to the “real” springs of action such as pleasures, emotions and the faculty of will. Our critical and comparative analysis of utilitarianism in the context of Ancient Greek ethics shows that this modern conception of rationality, which relegates ‘reason’ to a merely computational status by defining it as a

faculty capable only of the calculation of the most efficient means to ends already decided by pleasure/emotion or will is a hindrance rather than a facility for attainment of a happy and good life.

The extremely restricted utilitarian conception of human nature that relies on the governance of pain/pleasure is doomed to failure: once human nature is confined to such limited causes of action, what necessarily follows is a purely hedonist point of view in ethical sphere. Though Mill's views about the nature of pleasures are relatively more refined than Bentham's, he still believes that under whatever guise it may appear, human conduct is—and therefore ought to be—directed by the promotion of pleasures and the avoidance of pain in all spheres of life. He, thus, conceives utility not only as a psychological principle but also as a first principle from which a whole theory of life is elicited. Virtue, duty or obligation, all diverse motives of actions are mere derivatives of utility. Mill concludes that if pleasure is something which is desired by human beings, then it is something good in itself and desirable as well. This proof is rather problematic and has a logical error since 'desired' isn't equal to 'desirable'. When something is desired it can't be concluded simply that it is something desirable, i.e., an 'ought'.

Moreover, both Bentham and Mill equate pleasure with utility/happiness/advantage/interest. Identifying happiness with pleasure and offering a hedonist conception of happiness as the best thing in life, that is, the ultimate end for all human action and behaviour, constitutes the second fundamental flaw of Benthamite and Millian utilitarianism. Our investigation into the Ancient Greek understanding of human nature and action reveals that pleasure or pain are just two elements in human psychology which give birth to human behaviour; and there is theoretically and practically quite compelling evidence that they don't necessarily have to be the sole determinants of human conduct. Both Plato and Aristotle defend convincingly that pleasure, which can be false or

true, valuable or worthless, cannot be asserted as the ultimate goal of a good and happy life. Therefore the utilitarian dogma that pleasure is intrinsically good turns out to be an unfounded, arbitrary and random assumption. It may be defended that further arguments can be presented—but since pleasures can be both true and false, valuable and worthless, i.e., cannot even be proven to be unconditionally true and valuable, this seems to be an apparently impossible feat utilitarianism does not even attempt to perform.

As opposed to the utilitarian conception of happiness, which unavoidably subsumes all human activities under a mindless search for as much pleasure as possible, the ancient Greek notion of *eudaimonia* offers a rationally elevated life—a life which enables each and every practicing human being to fulfill his infinite capacities and follow ‘excellence’ (*arete*) as a compass for his conduct. *Eudaimonia*, for Greek philosophers, is not a matter of inherent pleasures of certain acts or states, but a matter of life-long contentment and harmony not only with one’s own soul but also with the remaining outward beings. Exercising excellence in all human activities, under the rule of reason (with the excellent functioning of reason, as well), is the key to the best possible life for human beings. A happy life is the one in which rational and irrational elements of human soul act harmoniously under the light of the knowledge of what is good and wholesome, and in which happiness is a matter of life-long excellent activity of the soul rather than the temporal feelings of pleasure.

Reducing human beings to creatures that consist only of some psychological motivations and intentions functioning independently of reason and the knowledge of what is good and just, ignores various dimensions of human soul and its infinite capacities. Thanks to this limited and relegated conception of human nature and happiness, the utilitarian point of view offers not much more than mindless and blind agents whose conduct eventually does and should regard only their own needs, wants and desires. This

dependence of the utilitarian conception of happiness on the inevitable satisfaction of inevitable individual needs and desires constructs and justifies a moral realm caused, dominated and governed by the subjective necessities of an arbitrarily and randomly erected human psychology—a moral realm in which freedom turns out to be only a matter of gratifying enough pleasures and avoiding as much pain as possible.

This utilitarian understanding of human nature and happiness demands non-interference of both of a desiderative reason which may affect the choices of an individual (in the Greek sense) and of any outward factors which may also affect those choices. Thus interpreted, the individual is conceived to be free and independent when released from the guidance of reason and from any other social bounds. Leading a hedonistic life benefitting only one's own self and self-interest while disregarding all other personal and social dynamics, puts the self under the domination of some randomly chosen psychological states deemed to be the "real" springs of action, and thus makes it almost impossible to attain a more elevated, harmonious life—an elevation and harmony only obtainable through reason, virtue and the good, and when obtained, manifests itself as one's unique exercise of power, freedom, and excellence, all created and acquired through one's fulfillment of his capacities.

Moreover, as a consequentialist moral theory utilitarianism conceives and evaluates goodness as a property only attributed to the results of the actions of the moral agents. Though they appreciate a character formation that bears the most possible hedonistic outcomes, their actual emphasis is on the consequences of individual actions and the amount of pleasure they produce. Such an approach to human behaviour remarkably undermines the expectation of human happiness and goodness even in the utilitarian sense. Relying only on the effects of human conduct and undervaluing the states of character that give spring to actions compose a 'one-sided' point of view to morality of conduct.

Utilitarianism doesn't have much regard for whether one is good or bad; what counts is whether his actions are good or bad (the consequences of the actions, indeed). But Plato and Aristotle rightfully claims that human soul and its activities, therefore human conduct, cannot be evaluated as separate entities; on the contrary, they are the virtuous states of soul that give birth to virtuous, just and good actions. A just action can only spring from a just soul, and only just actions promote or preserve a just soul. The goodness of character and the goodness of actions inseparably entail each other. Moral evaluation of human conduct can't rely on the effects caused by arbitrary motivations of agents; on the contrary, it should be based on the deliberately formed and developed states of the soul that demonstrate such qualities as stability and consistency, i.e. character traits such as courage, temperance, wisdom, justice. Since a rational and virtuous life includes choices preceding actions, those choices could only be made by virtuous characters and accordingly those characters mutually contribute to virtuous actions.

A moral theory which ignores the virtuously (referring to *arete* as excellence) developed characters is doomed to failure in its claim of happiness in both the individual and social spheres. Yet the *aporia* of utilitarianism appears more strikingly in its depiction of human collectivity, a conception built entirely on and deduced from the basic tenets of its moral theory. On the basis of this correlation and the idea that ethics is the kernel of all life processes, and therefore all human activities including those categorized as social, political, economic, might as well be included in the domain of ethics, it became an academic discretion to include in our discussions those problems arising from the utilitarian understanding of human collectivity, despite the fact that this dissertation is concerned with the shortcomings of 'utility' as an intrinsic good and deals with the implications of this notion in the sphere of ethics.

Once Bentham and Mill define human nature on the basis of psychological egoism and hedonism, their understanding of society and state is inevitably shaped accordingly; since society is nothing but the sum total of its individual members. Influenced by Hobbes, both Bentham and Mill justify the existence of political states with the necessity to assure the security and protection of the individual members of *the body politic*. Since humans are thought to be selfish in nature whose only concern is a self-directed life in pursuit of pleasure/advantage/interest, the law and government is justified by utilitarians to be the controller of the violators of the rights of its citizens. Hence, the application of justice is reduced to the sphere of legal rights where mainly the protection and security of property rights are assured. Since Bentham and Mill conceive human society as the arithmetical aggregate of its individual members, they consequently regard general happiness and the good of the society as the aggregate happiness of its individual members.

However, such an understanding of the relation between man and society is susceptible to irredeemable conflicts of interests, wants and needs. An isolated individual whose focal point is his self and his own good and happiness, whose wants and needs are determined by some arbitrary springs of actions, namely, pleasures and pains, tends to lose his bonds and relations with the community of people he lives with. Though Bentham and Mill regard this as the freedom of the individual and as something necessary for the attainment of happiness both on the individual and collective level, distinguishing those two in separate terms, independent from one another entails the separate identification of arbitrary needs, wants, and expectations of each side, all of which may contrast and conflict and cause insoluble problems. The ‘non-interference’ of the society to the individual moral, economical or political spheres doesn’t render the individual and society free and happy but creates two sides which are unaware of their life exigencies and necessities, and which are devoid of any understanding of one another’s self, identity and

priorities. As opposed to the utilitarian idea of political community as a coercive agent which brings benefit to the society, limits and obligations to individuals in order to avoid insecurity or other pains, Ancient Greeks assert that *polis* provides individuals the possibility to achieve their individual good. It is this public arena that makes it possible for individuals to fulfill and exercise their capacities, improve them and thus become virtuous and happy. In other words, *polis* is the critical factor which makes good life and happiness possible, both on the individual and collective level.

This interdependence of self and others is a dominating theme in Ancient Greek thought and provides a great insight about the possible relations between individuals and political community. The utilitarian understanding of human nature, conduct and happiness necessarily leads to an understanding of human society in which happiness remains as a matter of chance and contingency. The utilitarian account for the greatest happiness of the greatest number becomes an empty wish which is devoid of any rational and practical ground. Relying on unfounded and apparently untenable premises about human nature, conduct, happiness and society, utilitarianism provides not a remedy to but a misconception of those issues.

In this dissertation my purpose was to present a comprehensive analysis, understanding and explanation of the tribulations of the Benthamite and Millian utilitarian moral theory. Since an immanent critique wouldn't suffice, I discussed Plato and Aristotle's views on ethics in order to show not only how but also why utilitarianism fails. This radically and fundamentally different account of ethics aided us to understand the flaws inherent in utilitarianism. Though Ancient Greek outlook and landscape offers much for a more profound understanding of human happiness and goodness, still more is required to be added for a theory encompassing all the modern conflicts and hindrances in front of human happiness and goodness. However in this dissertation I restricted myself to

the exposition, analysis and critical evaluation of the reasons for the failure of utilitarianism. Putting forth a new account was out of the scope of this thesis, but I strongly and convincingly urge that a theory devoted to the means and tools for a good and happy life must bear in mind the ancient Greek interpretation of happiness and goodness.

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