

Paola Mercado

Dr. Dueck

PHI 101

04/27/2023

### Utilitarianism

Mill reveals to readers why he believes that actions regardless of if they are right or wrong are what matter. His whole theory is based on the happiness one might feel after doing the “right” thing. There is a list of viewpoints that can be discussed about in his theory. One of the viewpoints that brings up in his theory is the Greatest Happiness Principle. Another viewpoint would be quality of the pleasures. Lastly, another viewpoint is that rules are important, and that happiness is about everyone.

The Greatest Happiness Principle can be defined as the correct action being the one that promotes happiness. What Mill means behind this principle is that whatever the right action is it will lead to happiness. Of course, this includes the “right” choice that one might think is correct. This does have a lot to do with pleasure and pain. Mill states, “By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain and the privation of pleasure.” Happiness leads to pleasure without dealing with any pain. Now, the whole reason behind happiness being a pleasure is that people will chase after that feeling. No one will go after a feeling that won’t bring them any joy. The point of the Greatest Happiness Principle overall is to focus on what life can offer you, regardless of if it’s for your own good or for the good of others.

Now, as previously mentioned before pleasures are what make up happiness. Mill talks about the quality verses the quantity of what a pleasure may bring. He talks about how one

perceives when making a decision because one or the other could lead to giving more pleasure than the other. Mill states,

“Of two pleasures, if there be one to which all or almost all who have experience of both give a decided preference, irrespective of any feeling of moral obligation to prefer it, that is the more desirable pleasure. If one of the two is, by those who are competently acquainted with both, placed so far above the other that they prefer it, even though 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 out-weighting quantity as to render it, in comparison, of small account.

This is something that is regarded as important because Mill explains that if there is something that one doesn't necessarily need to do then they will be filled with great pleasure. If the decision is given a greater value in other words, it's made to be better than any other decision regardless of the disappointment it will be picked. When speaking about quality versus quantity in pleasure, quality will always take the win. It all comes down how a person takes the experience of pleasure. The one who wants superiority can't be satisfied at all and will always be looking for pleasure. This can also be said about a lowly person.

Happiness is something that people will do anything for even if it means breaking rules or hurting others along the way. Mill writes in his excerpt that happiness is not made out to be for one's happiness but for those around them. He even goes on to mention that Jesus tells us that we need to love others just as we love ourselves. Overall, Mill wants to make it clear that because there are rules, we do shouldn't feel like an obligation. We should do it just to do it. He also does state that many do certain things because they would like to benefit themselves and not for others.

An example of utilitarianism would be an immigrant family of 3 from Colombia trying to cross the border to the United States. Unfortunately, they get caught by immigration and all are separated. While going through their records and inspecting them, one of the officers realized

that the father was smuggling cocaine and has had a record of being caught with the substance back in Colombia. The officer has the decision to either deport back only the father and let the rest of the family go or let the entire family go together to the States. This becomes a conflict for the officer because he doesn't want to separate the family from one another. But on the other hand, he knows that he must complete his duty as an officer and arrest a potential criminal that could wreak havoc once he enters the States. It depends on the officer if he wants to get pleasure from seeing a family together or stick to the responsibilities of his job knowing what it could do to a family.

Upon learning about Mill's theory in my opinion it is something that I happen to agree with. I would like to focus more on the aspect of finding pleasure. I think there is conflict between picking the quality of those pleasures. When we look at it in the real world many people will find anything that will bring satisfaction. Mill makes it a point the quality of the pleasure is what's important. Another thing that I did agree with Mill's theory is looking out for one another. In the times that we live in now it's good to know that we have at least someone who is looking after us. It shouldn't be based on how we'll gain something from helping someone else, but that we just do it with a genuine heart despite the trouble that we get in. Now there is where the ethical question comes to mind, would we do the right thing even if it meant we were doing the wrong thing? In part there is a problem to that because as a Christian you could intentional be compromising your beliefs to help someone. I feel that it is important to do whatever is necessary to help people who need it.