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Pleasure versus Virtue Ethics in The Light of Aristotelians and the Utilitarianism of John Stuart Mills and Jeremy Bentham

Seraphine S. C Komu*

Abstract

The question of the end of morality is certainly as old as moral speculation itself. It is this question that prompted Aristotle speculating on moral or character virtue. Moral question is properly a human question since only human beings are expected to act in a given way and are subject to praise and reward or blame and punishment. We should remember that also God and angels are expected to act in a given way, but that would, strictly speaking, be the subject of moral theology and revelation, since without revelation depending only on reason, we cannot examine the acts of God and angels in order to determine how they should act. In short, it is only human beings who can be judged to act morally or immorally if we depend only on human reason, without the support of revelation. In the whole work, Stuart Mills and Jeremy Bentham stick on happiness, though each differ in approaches. Consequentialists are after the greatest happiness of the greatest number, by advocating on the struggle to that which may make man happy and avoid evil by all means. Aristotle on his side is on eudaimonism, where man is found to be happy but moral happy. Happiness for Aristotle should be reasonable, morally good and means should be maintained. This research is analytical by nature, where both qualitative and analytical methods have been implemented throughout the work. The work has been successful though some challenges could not be avoided. Finally, in doing or acting, man should observe virtue; and this is always doing good and avoiding evil.

Keywords: Pleasure, Virtue, Ethics, Aristotelians, Utilitarianism, Stuart Mills, Jeremy Bentham

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Introduction

This paper aims at examining morality. Utilitarian has this suggestion that utility is the only criterion of moral act. By utility is meant what the act provides to the agent whose interest is in question for happiness. John Stuart Mill discusses about right and wrong actions as utility principles. He said actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, and wrong if they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is meant intended pleasure and the absence of pain, and by unhappiness is meant pain and privation of pleasure.

Virtue ethics, tracing its origin to Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy, asserts that the end of one's acts should reflect a kind of person one has become, not what one desires or enjoys doing. It is an ethics which is agent centred rather than act centred, as concerned with being rather than doing, as addressing itself to the question who should I be? Or rather than to the question what sort of action should I do? This philosophy focuses on ethical concepts such as good, excellence and virtue as opposed to deontic concepts of right, duty, and obligation. Moreover, it strongly rejects the idea that ethics is codifiable in rules or principles that can provide specific action guidance.

The enigma in deciding which of the two ethical principles is to be preferred lies in the fact that even someone acting according to virtue might, to some extent have pleasure, praise or blame, reward or punishment as factors in play in his acting. Having the two philosophical connotations on morality/moral act, we find that man always strive for happiness. The difference to be noted is that utilitarians are after pleasure without any pain, and happiness has to be attained by all means. It can be through good or bad means. For them, end is what is important. Aristotle, on the contrary, proposes the means should justify the end. That means happiness is obtained in a good moral manner.

This paper is divided into four parts. Part one is concerned with virtue ethics and the end of human act. In this part, we shall see how Aristotle treated the issue of virtue, where he said doing good leads to virtue and its opposite, which is vice, is a result of doing wrong. In part two, we will focus on how John Stuart mills

advocated the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Here, Mills encourages the society to secure happiness, not in opposed to morality, but a good number or greatest number to secure happiness. Part three is on ethics of being versus the ethics of doing. Here, man in the society is seen a moral being. By moral being is meant doing all those things well and avoiding doing evil. The last part is on the weaknesses of utilitarianisms, where some weaknesses are identified which could lead to individualism.

Literature Review

In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle is of opinion that the moral agent should act out of virtuous motivation and act directed towards happiness or flourishing. Therefore, “in addition to performing outwardly approved actions, young people must be brought to see the point and value of such conduct and act as they do out of a conviction that it is a right and admirable thing to do.”¹ Children will need to be taught not just to do right because it is imposed upon them, but they will need to aspire it for themselves, as they turn their virtuous behaviour into habits. Another very important aspect of moral education is the cultivation of a child’s affective emotional life. Steutel and Spiecker were in line with the Aristotelian ethics when they explained that “[m]oral virtues are not only dispositions for choice and action but also dispositions towards feelings. It is with respect to how one feels and not merely to how one chooses and acts that one may be said to be virtuous.”² Emotion is thus an important moral motivator and essential in the decision making process. This results in the need for ‘emotional’ education, to teach the child to use its reason to control the irrational part of the soul where emotions are located, in order to find the proper means. This again emphasizes the need for practice and guidance by morally wise tutors. This leads to another important aspect of Aristotle’s ethics; that of individuality. A child

¹Colin Wrings, *Moral Education, Beyond the Teaching of Right and Wrong* (Netherlands Dordrecht: Springer Publication, 2006), 19.

²Jan Ben Steutel, "Cultivating Sentimental Dispositions Through Aristotelian Habituation," in *Moral Education and Development*, ed. Doret J. de Ruyter and Siebren Miedema (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2011), 15.

must be taught to individually examine any particular situation and the relevant moral issues. Nancy Sherman said: “A moral judge has an obligation to know the facts of the case, to see and understand what is morally relevant and to make decisions that are responsive to the exigencies of the case.”³ This increases the pressure to individual and again the need for guidance.

It is of utmost importance that the child develops its practical wisdom. Good moral choices are responsive to the circumstances in which an individual finds him or herself. An agent has a moral obligation to know the facts of the case. This does not preclude the use of general rules, but they are at best only rough guides, summaries of past actions, a part of our web of background knowledge useful in understanding a case. This quote emphasizes that it is crucial for a child to be taught about tradition, about society’s values.⁴ Because making moral decisions is such an individual process, the child needs to know about every aspect involved from general moral background to particular interests.

Moral life therefore appears to be a practical sphere of endless human enquiry and conduct, in which training and habituation have an important part to play. Furthermore, natural disposition or blind faith in tradition is not what constitutes virtue rather true virtue is a deliberate choice.⁵ Hence, the true virtue is a delicate equilibrium of assessing, practicing and habituating. This all starts with the appropriate value perceptions that must be communicated or taught by the wise representatives of the adult society, as part of the process of socialization. This is where Aristotle’s call for the reformation of politics comes in. In order to create the right role models that can, without indoctrination, guide children to

³Nancy Sherman, *Character Development and Aristotelian Virtue in Virtue Ethics and Moral Education*, ed. David Carr and Jan Steutel (London: Routledge, 2005), 28.

⁴Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Roger Crisp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 88.

⁵Georg Mchlean and Frederick Ellrod, *Moral Character in Philosophical Foundations for Moral Education and Character Development: Act and Agent* (Washington: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1992), 26.

become better people, the adults must first be released from their closed-minded ways.

Consequentialism, Utilitarianism Approach on the Moral Virtue

We usually engage in calculating what we should spend depending on what we earn, putting important needs first, and luxurious needs second, or third. This is what we call budgeting. Whether it is family, industry or company, budgeting is of foremost importance. Businesses generally tend to make profit. They engage in accounting and try to have their income exceed their costs of production. The same exercise is done by families and individuals, provided they earn an income.

A budget helps individuals plan the wise use of their money. Although it is not easy to weigh the desirability of a music lesson, for example, as compared to attending movies, or to weigh out going to a safari, as opposed to one's desire for new clothes, we know that people make these comparisons and choices. This common practice of calculating what one wants, balancing wishes with our resources, and comparing present versus long-range desires forms the basis of the utilitarian approach to ethics.

Utilitarianism therefore is an ethical theory, which holds that an action is right if it produces, or tends to produce the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of people affected by the action; otherwise it is wrong.⁶ Those who support this ethical theory believe that utilitarianism is according to ordinary rational way of acting. The theory systematizes and makes explicit what the defenders of the theory believe most of us do in our moral thinking, as well as in other ways of our thinking.

Utilitarians argue that, with other things being equal, "it is reasonable for rational beings, who are able to foresee the consequences of their actions, to choose those actions which produce more good than those which produce less

⁶Richard DeGeorge Thomas, *Business Ethics* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc., 1982), 19.

good.”⁷ Businesses usually reduce the concept of good to that of money, and reason out their plans according to how they enable them to earn more money and hence advance in their business. Since the aim of business is to earn money, those actions which tend to help the industry make money are good, and those that tend to make it lose money are considered bad.

Utilitarianism adopts a teleological approach to ethics and claims that actions are to be judged by their consequences. According to it, actions are not good or bad in themselves. Actions take on moral value only when considered in conjunction with the effects that follow upon them. That means that actions are only means to attain things which have value, but they do not possess any value by themselves. However, if we continue reasoning in terms of value as means and ends, we come to the point that the end of all value, as long as it is human value, is ourselves and other human beings. Here is where utilitarianism sticks to the point that something has value if it achieves the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people.

Here then we see that people are the centres of value and what satisfies their needs is what they consider valuable. Therefore, it is human satisfaction that is valuable in itself; money and goods are the means to achieve this satisfaction.⁸ In that sense, harm, pain, or unhappiness become terms of disvalue. This theory, seen from the point of view of business, becomes even more complicated, as compared to simply philosophical utilitarianism. One question becomes important, namely: In business we calculate consequences in terms of dollars, or money, how do we calculate non-monetary consequences? Is there any non-monetary denominator, in terms of which we can calculate the consequences of businessmen actions?

A number of answers have been proposed to answer these two questions, one of which is called hedonistic utilitarianism, which holds that the basic human

⁷Ibid., 33.

⁸Sirkku Kristiina Hellsten, *Distributive Justice, Theories of Encyclopaedia of Applied Ethics* (New York: Academic Press, 1998), 1: 42.

values are pleasure and pain (sometimes named simply as absence of pain). According to hedonistic utilitarianism, anything that is enjoyable or beneficial to human beings is reduced to pleasure, and the opposite of it is termed pain.⁹ The calculation here, though difficult, is possible because we are dealing with one denominator, or unit of the same kind. This view has been criticized on the basis of pleasure; pleasure is not constantly measured and cannot be taken as constant.

Eudaimonistic utilitarianism then comes as the second proposal or attempt to an answer. Here the basic value on which calculation is based is *eudaimonion*, which is well-being or happiness. Those who oppose the hedonistic utilitarianism propose that pleasure is not a purely human value, and also pleasure has categories, like animal pleasure, lower human pleasure and higher human pleasure, hence the famous saying: it is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied.¹⁰ Here we come to the point that actually businesses also have to evaluate their actions, and ask themselves, as to whether they act to achieve happiness or pleasure. However, the society seeks well-being, therefore obliging businesses also to work for happiness.

The third approach is called ideal utilitarianism. It maintains that what has to be calculated is not only pleasure or happiness, but all intrinsically valuable human goods, which also include friendship, knowledge, and a lot of other valuable goods in themselves. The problem is that, utilitarianism actually touches what every human being feels and knows to be important, but then finds that they still are not valuable in themselves. Things such as knowledge, beauty, or friendship are valuable; rather not for their own sake, rather that they produce pleasure or happiness.¹¹

⁹Michael Sandel, *Public Philosophy: Essays on Morality in Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 50.

¹⁰Daniel Wueste, *Professional Ethics and Social Responsibility* (Lanham: Roman & Littlefield, 1994), 25.

¹¹Earl Winkler and Jerrold Coombs, *Applied Ethics: A Reader* (Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell, 1993), 31.

Utilitarianism as is in line with Aristotelian ethics, which explored a lot about what is to be morally good and bad and had their own standing. In most cases, both the consequentialism and utilitarian had it that any action is good provided that it gives good results. But for an action to be good, it should also yield virtues of temperance, wisdom and justice just as it is with Aristotle's views on a good mode of life.¹² The basis of the doctrine of consequentialism is that an action is determined as good or bad according to its consequences. However, this doctrine leaves open what can be counted as a good or a bad consequence. Utilitarian theorists, based on this first principle, developed various approaches explaining what should be perceived as good consequences. Classical utilitarians believe that the ultimate good is something that most people actually desire, such as happiness or pleasure. Specifically, the doctrine of ethical hedonism and most of the modern utilitarians take pleasure as the ultimate goal for which we should aim.

John Stuart Mill in his utilitarian theory reject the argument that actions have an inherent moral basis and therefore cannot be determined as good or evil on their own. However, utilitarians may agree with some of the principles of other ethical theories, but only at the level of their ability to promote the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. Another theory that underlies the utilitarian theory of Mills is psychological hedonism. The core idea of this theory is that all people have the same need to desire their own pleasure and to avoid pain. According to this, one's actions may include the pleasure of others too, but only because it gives him or her pleasure in the end.

Utilitarianism in simplest form states that in any situation where there is a moral choice, the right thing to do is that which is likely to produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people or the least harm to the world as a whole. Therefore, everyone ought to obey the laws that ensure the balance between the good for the individual and for the society as a whole. However, the

¹²Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 41.

different meanings of the notion of happiness complicate the rationale of utilitarianism in our efforts to practice ethical decision making. Besides, laws that are historically controversial and do not always ensure happiness also complicate the rationale of utilitarianism. According to Clark, the utilitarian approach on ethics provides a very important justification, that of utility however it fails as a single principle to examine the ethicality of human actions.¹³

On Morality and Society

Aristotle also discussed about societies and he had this to say; no matter how small it is, have a legal system that is a system of rules that applies to all persons in the society and that most of them use to guide their behaviour and to make judgements about behaviour of others.¹⁴ I suspect that many people would call these simple legal and moral systems and that is why they claim that different societies have completely different moralities. Legal system is not a public system. Ignorance, even completely justified ignorance of law, sometimes does not exempt one from legal judgements. A legal system can be based on authority, for example a rule can be a law because the ruler or God is thought to have authorized it. Legal rule needs to have the kind of content that would allow a rational person to favour it being part of public system that governs the behaviour of all those to whom it applies. A moral system must be a public system; that is it must be understood by all those to whom it applies and it cannot be irrational for any of them to use the system as a guide for their actions.

Most literary works show that most people agree that morality at least in the sense that is of philosophical interest is a public system, so that it is confusing and misleading to call a legal system, even of the kind I have been describing, moral system. Even those, who do not agree that morality applies to all rational persons, recognize that all moralities are public systems. I do not claim that all

¹³Chris Clark Asquith, *Social Work and Social Philosophy, Conceptual Issues in African Thought* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1993), 30.

¹⁴Bernard Gert, *Morality, its Nature and Justification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1998), 52.

people in all societies actually use a public system that even applies to all people in their society in making their decisions or judgements about moral matters. In many small societies, most people make their decisions and judgement about moral matters based upon their society's legal system. These legal systems do not have the bureaucratic characteristics in large industrialized societies, but in fundamental ways, they resemble these legal systems in large industrialized societies.

Failure of many people or societies to make moral decisions and judgements is not due to lack of knowledge, but rather lack of sufficient interest in a public system that applies to all people in their society. Many people, even in large modern societies, make personal legal decision and judgement about moral matters, especially when a legal system on which they are basing incorporate religious beliefs. Many people are more concerned with the system of conduct derived from their religious or metaphysical beliefs about the nature of the world and their place in it than with a public system that applies to all rational beings. Many people care seriously only about a limited group of people and are no more concerned with those not in this group, even members of their own society. The only system of governing behaviour between people is morality and can be followed by all people.

Moral responsibility

Man, as an intellectual being is morally responsible. Now since moral goodness is concerned with feelings and actions, those that are voluntary receive praise and blame, whereas those that are involuntary receive pardon and sometimes pity too. Actions are regarded as involuntary when they are performed under compulsion or through ignorance. An act is compulsory when it has an external origin of such a kind that the agent or patient contributes nothing to it. Sometimes the act is performed through fear of something worse. The term voluntary and involuntary should be used with reference to the time when actions are performed.

Virtue Ethics and the End of Human Acts

In regards to the question of moral end, virtue ethics go back to Aristotle's belief that moral act, not according to raw desire as David Hume would want us to believe, "but from reason in the form of choice."¹⁵ This argument is developed by Aristotle in the fourth chapter of his second book of Nicomachean ethics, where Aristotle asserts that virtuous acts should be guided by how a virtuous person would have acted.¹⁶

Virtue ethicists argue that a virtuous man does not act only because it is his duty or because an act is commanded by an authority but because he has learned to set in a given way as a choice originating in his being. According to Hursthouse, a virtuous person acts virtuously by choosing a given act "for its own sake, and thinking that it has to be done because it is right."¹⁷ This is the point which marks the difference between virtue ethics and utilitarianism. The new virtue ethicists do not stress the ultimate end like Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas; they see virtue as being end in itself. Virtue ethicists believe that one who has become a virtuous person will do virtuous acts for their own sake, while utilitarians, presupposing human beings to exclusively eudemonistic, argue that pleasure is the motive behind every human choice. John Stuart mill attempts to cover the selfish aspect of utilitarianism by proposing the greatest happiness of the greatest number, but basically he remains in the conviction that, even if an individual acts for the good of the community, the reason behind such acting is the fact that this common happiness includes the agent's own happiness.

To act virtuously, Hursthouse proposes four conditions that the agent should fulfil; these are: the agent does a certain sort of action, the agent must know what she is doing, the agent acts for a reason and also for the right reason, and lastly the agent has the appropriate feelings or attitudes when she acts.

Reason is central to the virtue ethics approach. One acts virtuously basing one's on the agent's rational nature and following what the agent reasons to be the

¹⁵Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 14.

¹⁶Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1/2:1105b,5.

¹⁷Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 123-36.

way a virtuous person is supposed to act. According to virtue ethicists, acts according to virtues, such as justice and courage, should be done regardless of what would be the results of such acts. One, who has become virtuous, has learned to see the value of virtue and act accordingly.

John Stuart Mill's Solutions to Acting Morally

John Stuart Mill wrote in order to defend the principle of utilitarianism, which was put forward by his father James Mill and Jeremy Bentham. He insisted that pleasure and freedom from pain are the only things desirable as ends, and that all desirable things are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in themselves or as means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain.¹⁸

John Stuart Mill, unlike Bentham is aware of the criticism according to which human beings cannot be considered as having no higher end other than pleasure. He knows the criticism against Epicurus that only swine could act only for pleasure.¹⁹ His reply to such criticism is that there is a great difference between what gives pleasure to human beings and what pleases animals because human beings have faculties more elevated than animals' appetites, and when once made conscious of them, do not regard anything as happiness which does not include their gratification.²⁰

Human pleasure therefore is higher than animal pleasure since "it is better to be human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied, better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied."²¹ Hence, every human being acts to attain pleasure, but a higher quality of pleasure, a pleasure worthy of humans.

In fact we face another problem; that is how to determine what is pleasurable and hence desirable by human beings since even Stuart Mill, by preferring to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied indicates that among human beings we still have different appreciation of different things and the

¹⁸John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism: Liberty and Representative Government* (London: Dutton, 1925), 6.

¹⁹Ibid., 7.

²⁰Ibid., 8.

²¹Ibid., 9.

pleasure they give. He said acts such as taking care of orphans and feeding the hungry express the desire that the one who performs them want to be happy with others by living in a society that has no people suffering. He, however, does not give an explanation of how someone, using his resources for the care of orphans living in a faraway country and in a minority community, would attain this happiness. This leads us to show the way Stuart Mill explains how the greatest happiness of the greatest number is attained.

On the Happiness and Achievements

For Stuart Mill, even if one is doing an act which basically would profit others, the agent's happiness or reduction of his pain is not irrelevant. As to the relationship between one's happiness and that of others, Mill proposes neutrality invoking Jesus of Nazareth. One should be as strictly impartial as disinterested and benevolent spectator. In the golden rule of Jesus of Nazareth, we read the complete spirit of the ethics of utility. To do as you would be done by, and to love your neighbour as yourself constitutes the ideal of perfection of utilitarian morality.²²

Mill argues that every education should aim at making all people act to achieve the happiness of all. This he considers covering everything that any other moral theories could propose as the end of moral acts. Mill does not go to the extent of proposing that, "all other principles than that of utility must be wrong,"²³ as Jeremy Bentham had suggested before him, but he believes that everyone is utilitarian, even without publicly confessing to be so.

Even though Mill thinks that one should act thinking of the happiness of society at large, he does not find this easily accomplished. The multiplication of happiness is, according to the utilitarian ethics, the object of virtue. The occasions on which any person has 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

²²Ibid., 16.

²³Jeremy Bentham, *An introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (New York: Hafner Publishing, 1948), 8.

is called on to consider public utility. But in every other case, it is considered a private utility, which is the interest or happiness of some few persons that the person has to attend to.²⁴ It is clear however that there are hardly acts we do that do not touch other individuals in some way, even the most private ones.

Character Versus Utility

Utilitarianism differs from virtue ethics on the insistence given either to the act to be done and its ability to bring about pleasure or the importance of the conscience or personality of the one which performs the act. For utilitarianism, moral acts are performed from sentiments, either of pleasure or pain. Virtue ethics, on the other hand, insist on the person performing the act rationally, since acts done by a good person are necessarily good and most of the times result in the good of individual, as well as that of the society. Virtue ethics try to approach morality from the cultivation of an individual and believe that when an individual is morally good, he will consequently choose acts that are good. For utilitarianism, what is important is not what we could call the quality of person, but only the motive for acting and this motive always is pleasure.

Stuart Mill believes that education and the feeling of sympathy are important in inducing people to take the greatest happiness of the greatest number as their end in acting.²⁵ But he does not indicate how sympathy and education themselves should give interest to someone if they are not learned for having their value in themselves. Acts like paying taxes spontaneously, which do not arouse any sympathy, since no particular individual is directly involved and which do not lead to any pleasure, I find, could not get a way of being done willingly. In such cases, virtue ethics insists on the formation of conscience or cultivation of personal quality through rational deliberation. “The virtuous Aristotelian moral

²⁴Mill, *Utilitarianism: Liberty and Representative Government*, 17.

²⁵Josephat Muhoza, *Class Notes on the Utilitarianism, Jordan University College* (Tanzania: East Africa, 2015), 4.

agent does not characteristically act from that principle of movement we share with the animals, as a child does, but from reason (logos) in the form of choice.”²⁶

The Ethics of Being Versus the Ethics of Doing

Virtue ethics emphasizes the importance of being a good moral agent. The proponents of virtue ethics believe that when one chooses to be a good person, he necessarily chooses good acts. As already indicated above, acting virtuously means choosing an act for its own sake and acting because one thinks it is right to act in that way.²⁷ However, virtue ethics do not fall in the trap of Platonism that has been in doctrines like that of ethics of value nor does it follow Kant in insisting in the existence of categorical imperative that should guide all men to act in a given way. A moral agent does not act because there exist some ideal entities that one should conform to, but because one has developed the ability to figure out what is to be done in a given particular situation, under the guidance of the quality (virtues) he has developed as a person. Hence Aristotle speaks of the interdependence between the virtue of prudence and other moral and intellectual virtues and shows prudence to be the only virtue that identifies the good life of a given human being.²⁸ The moral agent as a whole develops an inclination from which he acts morally. If there is choice, we can say, it is a choice to form one’s conscience and from the conscience develop a cultivated moral agent who acts according to reason. Here we come to the question of what really pushes one to act morally.

The Interdependence Among Virtues for Achievement of Happy Life

There is a close interdependence between virtues to make an act and to be really human. Human free acts are those that proceed from the cooperation of

²⁶Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 121.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 131.

²⁸Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140b, 6.

both intellect and will. St. Thomas Aquinas speaks of freedom of exercise.²⁹ This is very important in human act and here we can say that, the whole human person is involved and the acts that result from such choice are assumed in one responsibility. Here we are involved in “whether and how we can validate particular views about which character traits are the virtues.”³⁰ Unlike utilitarian, virtue ethicists are not concerned with list of things that should be chosen by moral agents for the ability those things could bring happiness; nor are they interested in trying to establish rules, which, if followed, would indicate the morality of one who follows them, like deontologists suggest.

Virtue ethics is about how virtues interrelate in the life of a moral agent, to lead him to choose what is morally right, and moral agent finds happiness in choosing acts that are morally right. The problem with virtue ethics seems to be its inability to justify why virtue is something good in itself. The justification depends on rationality of those who hear the argument. Therefore, virtue ethics appeal to rationality for justification of virtue as enough criterion for judging the goodness of one’s actions.

Weaknesses of Utilitarian Morality

We come to the point now where we are going to analyze the weakness of utilitarianism. The first manifest weakness is that the principle points out pleasure as the end of any moral choice without looking at the type of person the moral agent has become. This indicates that for utilitarian, human beings are selfish, calculating and most inept in their choices. In other words, there is no act that is evil or good in itself. If pleasure were the only motive for our choices, then it would be next to impossible to justify purely altruistic acts, since many of such acts involve no pleasure to the agent. Heroes, who expose themselves to pain and danger for saving others or relieve others’ pain, would be seen as the most stupid of humanity.

²⁹Libertas exerciti, referring to the function of specification of the will as efficient cause oriented to the end and freedom of specification operating as formal cause and oriented to the intellect.

³⁰Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, 164.

The question for philosophy is not “do you agree with utilitarianism answer, rather do you really accept utilitarianism’s way of looking at the question?”³¹ In other words, what would be the lot of a world in which everyone acted for pleasure, be it sensual or intellectual? Would it be possible to agree on what is the greatest happiness of the greatest number, in the first place, given the difference between people on what gives pleasure of a given kind and which pleasure is to be preferred at a given time? Utilitarianism seems to have weakness in the basic question of morality that is the nature of the moral agent. Even Stuart Mill, who differentiates higher and lower pleasure, still falls in this trap of not recognizing an act that would be good in itself.

Another difficulty comes when we ask the question, how do I know that something brings the greatest happiness of the greatest number? Apart from the difficulties involved in measuring utility, we cannot easily answer the question of what benefits the majority of people in a given society and what would be the best course of action to take. History is full of examples where the majority were in error and only a few got it right. Holocaust stories, slave trade and colonialism are clear examples from human history to illustrate this fact. Utilitarianism seems not to care about the kind of action chosen, but only its results. In the end, justifies means morality. “Any kind of utilitarianism is by definition consequentialist,”³² according to which no action has intrinsic value, but an act should be judged based on its consequences. For utilitarians, the consequences should be pleasurable, for an act to be good, or painful, for an act to be evil.

Cultural differences and hence differences in taste, add complication to the determination of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. The possibility to measure utility can only be written in books or said in lectures than actualized in concrete life circumstances. What makes utilitarianism even weaker is the view of its proponents, especially Jeremy Bentham that, if the principle of utility be a

³¹John Jamieson Carswell Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and against* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 78.

³²*Ibid.*, 79.

right principle to be governed by, and that in all cases, it follows that whatever principle differs from it, in any case, must necessarily be a wrong one. This means that utilitarianism does not give space to any other explanation to supplement or to add to it.

Together with its weakness, it boasts to be a take it or leave it principle. As already implied above, if a given society happens to be made of criminal and sadists and in that society it is decided to exterminate some minority group, who cause displeasure to most members of the society, then according to utilitarianism this would be a morally correct decision since it would be an act that gives pleasure to the greatest number in that society, even if the majority are criminals. Together with its attractiveness and seduction, especially to minds inclined to claim being free; utilitarianism cannot be an important moral principle as it claims to be.

Methodology

This research is critical analytical by nature, where both qualitative and analytical methods have been implemented throughout the work. Findings taken from library have been critically discussed, compared and where there were similar ideas, everything was clearly elucidated. Analysis is a kind of thinking man often urged to do in life process. It is among the most common mental activities.³³ Through analytical method, collected data was clearly described throughout the work. Furthermore, the work is not empirical in nature, but descriptive and related concepts have been exhausted in its detail manner.

Critical analytical method is about breaking things into their parts, to their ‘puzzle pieces’, in order to better understand the way to put them back together more effectively.³⁴ The method helps to provide easy steps to improve research paper. It also makes the researcher explain and analyze facts based on concepts.

³³Reginald Heber Thomson, *Writing Analytical* (Boston: Cengage Learning Inc, 2003), 1.

³⁴Amy Rukea Stempel, *Compose Yourself: A Guide to Critical Thinking* (Indianapolis: Dog Ear, 2010), 17.

Conclusion

From the above considered traits of utilitarian principle and virtue ethics, it is manifested that the two principles approach the issue of the end of moral acts from clearly different perspectives, one pointing to pleasure and the other to personal virtues as the end of human moral choices. It also has to be noted that because of its influence in world political life, especially in English politics, there are constitutions which were written under the influence of utilitarianism. Whether such constitutions are rational or not, whether they are moral or immoral, it is not the undertaking of this paper to prove. My aim here has been to point out the plausibility of virtue ethics over utilitarianism, basing on what is important in moral choices of a mature and responsible moral agent.

Recommendation

- i) Man, as a rational creature, should follow his point of rationality in whatever actions; let us not follow what the instinct wishes.
- ii) As far as human being is after those things which are most desirable in life, the ethical means should be maintained.
- iii) Good life is to be happy, but the happiness we have to look for is the long lasting one and not the one which last shortly.
- iv) Man desires to be happy and when he achieves the desired goal, he celebrates. Aristotle said, a good society is that which accepts both of the sides, success and failure. Therefore, we are all supposed to be aware of the fact that not all the time we will find ourselves enjoying life, but rather let us also consider the second side and learn to solve whatever faults we face.
- v) Pleasure is really good and most people like it. But such pleasure should be achieved in an ethical manner such that pain should not be caused, which may retard the individual development and bring negative effects.

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