

Final Exam Essay

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2. If you ask me, Mill can't decide whether he is an act or rule utilitarian. Explain the controversy. You won't be able to settle it, but you can try.

John Stuart Mill was one of the rockiest people of the 19th century. He knows the ancient Greek language. In his childhood, he was an excellent logician and economist. He had already learned the ancient Greek language before he was three years old. At the age of eight, he was reading an old geographer in Latin. Mill married his sweetheart when he was 45. He got brutal education from his father, and that things led to his career growth. He became an antislavery writer, an eminent philosopher, political thinker, Member of Parliament, and cultivator of third-degree sideburns (Norman Adam, Blackboard Learn). So Mill is constantly trying to come up with only one rule that makes everyone happy. He believed in making everyone happy, not only ourselves. He is trying to find the rule that makes everyone most happy. He believed that good actions and rule makes people happy. His philosophy is called "utilitarianism". He can not decide whether he is with act or rule utilitarianism. In this essay, I will explain the controversy between his act or rule utilitarian point of view.

His greatest happiness principle is, Actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness and wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. Happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure (Norman Adam, Blackboard Learn). So, in short, He thinks that good action leads to most benefits and towards the way of happiness. Bad action leads to maximum harm. That is utilitarian ethics. It is a very important principle in philosophy. For example, giving candies to the children makes you happy and the children happy. Giving some funds to the charity makes trust happy and people happy. Another example, paying taxes makes people and you happy because all the funds will be spent for us. So this is the one rule that he comes up with. But he can not keep it straight. So then he ends up with two rules which are Act Utilitarianism and Rule Utilitarianism.

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Begin with Act Utilitarianism, which says, Actions are good if they lead to happiness (Norman Adam, Blackboard Learn). It means good actions make people the happiest, and bad actions lead to harm and unhappiness, which is true. Also, it is not only about you, but it is also about everyone. for example, imagine many children suffering from some illness and all their parents do not have enough money to support all of these expenses. So one charity recognizes all these problems and thinks to support all these children whose parents are underprivileged. So there is a guy who also recognizes these issues, and he also has not enough money to support them. Then he decided to steal little money from many rich person's bank accounts by doing some hacking. And provide all the funds to the charity to support the children. So from Mill's point of view, it is a good decision because it will make people most happy. Children and their parents become happy. Rich people do not get much unhappy because it is a very little amount taken from them. So, it is called Act Utilitarianism. Do things that make most people happy. Do not do those things that make people the most unhappy. Do not worry about the actions as long as your action makes good and spreads happiness in people.

In contrast, in Rule Utilitarianism, Rules are right if they tend to make the most happiness (Norman Adam, Blackboard Learn). It means that as long as a rule is right and makes people most happy, then it is a good rule. So, by taking my earlier example on stealing money to support children from recovering from illnesses, it is not a good decision to steal money. Because "do not steal" is a rule which makes people most happy. So the Rule Utilitarianism says it is against the rule. It focuses more on rules that make most people happy, which is also true. For instance, "it is good to keep working" is a rule, but if a family member is in hospital and that time, it is not a good thing to keep working. That time family time is required to support family members in recovering.

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In both cases, both are right and wrong. Because in some situations, Act Utilitarianism is right.

However, sometimes Rule Utilitarianism is right. But they both are right and wrong in their own situation. For example, If you steal little things to provide happiness to someone, then it is good in terms of Act Utilitarianism, but it is not good from Rule Utilitarianism's point of view. Mill like to stay on both sides. He had not specified that he believed in Act or Rule Utilitarianism. he can not decide. He believes that, do things which make most people happier and do not do those things which make people unhappy.

To conclude, John Stuart Mill is a great philosopher. he comes up with one rule. He says, do things which are good for everyone. This means, spreading happiness among the people. But there are also two rules Act and Rule Utilitarianism. Both rules are right and wrong in their own situations. "Do not steal" is a rule, but sometimes it is wrong when there is some emergency like anyone is very hungry and can not live without food. At that time, it is good to steal food in terms of Act Utilitarianism. So Mill can not decide which rule is good or bad in both of them. However, He believed only one thing, if you are doing that action which makes most people happy, then do it. It is a good thing as long as you spread happiness to most people. However, He can not decide whether he is on Act or Rule Utilitarianism side.

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References:

Norman, Adam. *Phl102 Week 4.1*, <https://learn.senecacollege.ca/>. Accessed 17 June 2022.