

# Moral Belief on Utilitarianism toward Misused Approach to Moral Evaluation

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## *Introduction*

As it is generally maintained by philosophers and many sociologists, ethics investigates those principles which regulate human actions in terms of their being good or bad, right or wrong, and proper, or improper. Furthermore, philosophers and sociologists argue that the ethical field is also concerned with uncovering these principles and, at the same time, with the study of normative issues incorporating value judgments. People are always interested in what we mean when we use ethical terms such as: right, wrong, good, bad, duty, obligation, and so on, and how ethical terms should be used. Obviously such a broad topic as ethics cannot be adequately covered by a single paper, so we shall have to narrow our focus. Our aim is merely produce a general view of some of the most important issues of an ethical idea known as utilitarianism which according to it, our moral actions can be considered as such due to the consequences they produce. This moral theory has changed over the course of time and has developed new forms of interpretation which have kept it still alive. Of course, utilitarianism has both its strong defenders and opponents. It is the object of paper to show and argue how utilitarianism alongside other ethical theories can conduct our personal morality and actions. The paper is not, however, going to judge whether utilitarianism is something good or bad, because this leads to difficulties that we wish to avoid. In addition, we hope to elaborate some of the initial interpretations manifested in classical utilitarianism, some kind of new approaches to its view, as well as some basic difficulties of the implementation of this view recognized by contemporary supporters of utilitarianism. Should our moral beliefs, in modern societies, be based on the utilitarian principle of securing the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people? In order to answer the question, first of all it is necessary to clarify what utilitarian principle is according to the main authors of ethics. Here we are going to give our point of view identifying some the problems of utilitarianism today, including its contradicting rules.

One of the major players in ethical theories has long been the concept of utilitarianism, the main concept of Utilitarian or Happiness theory by John Stuart Mill<sup>1</sup>. Utilitarianism states that in general the ethical rightness or wrongness of an action is directly related to the utility of that action. "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". (Mill, 1863) So it is more specifically defined as a measure of the goodness or badness of the consequences of an action (Mill, 1879). For the purposes of this paper, utility will be considered to be the tendency to produce happiness. There are two types of utilitarianism; these are 'act' and 'rule'. An act utilitarian uses thought processes associated with utilitarianism to make all decisions, this requires a lot of thought and careful calculation.

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<sup>1</sup> UTILITARIANISM by John Stuart Mill (1863), <http://www.utilitarianism.com/mill1.htm>.

Social behavior and people's actions have always been great concerns of societies in order to maintain order and guarantee a kind of security. Every society has its rules, morals, principals, and ideas about what is right and wrong, proper and improper, fair and unfair. On the other hand, rules and various standards are ways of the presence of regulations in a certain society. Our actions are always conditioned to such norms, which are rules and standards, of the society we live in. It is significant the fact that we are not indifferent toward the actions and behavior or, in other words, we do not merely ascertain or say what we are, but we try to interpret and evaluate our actions and behavior. Moreover, we attempt even to give meaning to an event, action, or behavior. We, at the same time, establish institutions to try to guide our people in order to do what is right according to our society's standards. A significant role here is played by education, family, and a number of other actors. Of course, if we follow certain norms which are standard to all members of a given society, it is always possible to achieve or support certain values which will be common to all members of the same society. Besides, our every-day life is related to obligations and responsibilities we are obliged to fulfill. In his careful explanation of the role of actions in our everyday activities John Stuart Mill states: "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 does not condemn them." (in Alan Ryan, 1987, p. 289). As it can be seen, all we do is not necessarily linked with duties and obligations only. People behave in different ways and according to different motives either because they feel to do so or because they take pleasure to some actions.

### *Rule Utilitarianism- Its Basic Principle*

Utilitarianism was founded by Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832)<sup>2</sup>. He lived at a time of great change. With revolutions in France and America, demands were being made for human rights and greater democracy. Bentham worked on legal reform. Utilitarianism is associated with the principle of utility. Utility means the amount of satisfaction or pleasure that somebody gains from consuming a commodity, product, or service, i.e. useful. At the time both Bentham and Mill put forward the theory, utilitarianism was instrumental. It changed the way society was run and the way society now thinks for the better. It dramatically made changes to the poverty in Britain positively.

Rule Utilitarianism is associated with John Stuart Mill. Rule Utilitarianism focuses on general rules that everyone should follow to bring about the greatest good for that community. Rule Utilitarianism establishes the best overall rule by determine the course of action which, when pursued by the whole community leads to the best result. Utilitarianism doesn't have the flexibility of considering individual circumstances and moral values have no consideration in this theory. Utilitarianism is focused on quantity rather than quality. It seems rather a simple theory 'the greatest good, for the greatest number of people', however when you delve into the theory it becomes rather too complicated. For people to live by a theory it needs to be simple and clear. Alan Ryan (1987) writes that the ethical view known as utilitarianism was invented as a pattern for political action, and the father of this movement was Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) who

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<sup>2</sup> Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/bentham/>.

together with James Stuart Mill became representatives of an extremely influential group in Great Britain and even responsible for many social reforms in the 19th century.

Utility was concerned with calculating the consequences of an action in terms of the pleasures and pains it produced on every individual affected by that action. An adherent of the principle of utility would approve of any action which increased the overall happiness of all the individuals affected by the action in question, where more than one individual was affected. An adherent of the principle of utility would also approve of any action which increased the happiness of a particular individual where no other individual was affected by the action in question. In the former instance the extent was equal to the total number of individuals in question, and in the latter instance to one. It was only when extent was taken into account that an action could be judged to be morally right or wrong. The question as to whether an action was right or wrong, whether it would be approved of or disapproved of by an adherent of the principle of utility, was a question of fact- it would depend upon the value, understood in terms of quantity, of the pleasures and pains which would be brought into existence by the act in question. By the appearance of the second edition of *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* in 1823, Bentham had come to prefer the phrase 'the greatest happiness principle' to 'the principle of utility'. The term 'utility' did not sufficiently convey the idea of happiness. Moreover, the new formulation, unlike the original one, gave an indication of the number of the interests involved, for it was the number, stated Bentham, which was "the circumstance, which contributes, in the largest proportion, to the formation of the standard here in question; the standard of right and wrong, by which alone of propriety of human conduct, in every situation, can with propriety be tried" (Bentham & Engelmann, 2011, p. 455).

John Stuart Mill in his book 'Utilitarianism' makes a distinction between two different types of utilitarianism; act-utilitarianism and rule-utilitarianism. Rule-utilitarianism seems like a major advance over the simple theory of act-utilitarianism. But for all its added complexity, it may not actually be a significant improvement. This is proven when looking at the flaws in act-utilitarianism and relating them to the ways in which rule-utilitarianism tries to overcome them.

John Stuart Mill not only clarifies the utilitarian view, but also puts emphasis on its qualitative and quantitative distinctions. In order to fully understand the basic principle of utilitarianism, it is worth quoting the words of John Stuart Mill: "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 absence of pleasure. In his writings about utilitarianism, Jeremy Bentham tries to link what is good with only pleasure or happiness. In this sense, it seems that happiness is the final aim of our actions or behavior. Consequently, one can conclude that good is always equal to happiness or pleasure, or, in other words, anything is good if it contributes to human happiness, or pleasure. Without intending to neglect the whole interpretation given by Jeremy Bentham with regard to the relation existing between what is good and happiness, Mill tries to improve the narrow focus offered by Bentham by recognizing qualitative distinctions, and not only the quantitative ones. "It is quite compatible with the principle of utility to recognize the fact, that some kinds of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others. It would be absurd that while, in estimating all other things, quality is considered as well as quantity, the estimation of pleasures should be supposed

to depend on quantity alone.” (Ryan, 1987, p. 279). Thus, unlike Bentham, Mill introduces the qualitative measure of pleasure. This is a very valuable finding of Mill, because it provides ground for distinguishing between two pleasures. In order to further dwell on this issue, Mill claims: “On a question which is the best worth having of two pleasures, or which of two modes of existence is the most grateful to the feelings, apart from its moral attributes and from its consequences, the judgment of those who are qualified by knowledge of both, or, if they differ, that of the majority among them, must be admitted as final”. (Mill, p. 282). It seems as if this statement is a fundamental position for accepting the utilitarian standard which, in itself, constitutes the greatest amount of happiness, but it is quite unclear and ambiguous the fact that which of two pleasures, for example, is qualitatively better one. Is it possible to ask everyone who has experienced both pleasures to choose between them, and tell us which of the two, is the best. This is, in my opinion, what is missing in Mill's elaboration of this issue. Furthermore, as a moral theory utilitarianism tells us what we ought to do and, according to its basic principle which is clearly described by John Stuart Mill (in Al Ryan, 1987), we ought to do that which creates the greatest happiness or pleasure. But do people have the same evaluation about what is considered to be the greatest pleasure? For example, we can tell somebody something else or some other ways that make him/her happier than he/she is, because we are capable of assessing better, and vice versa. It is difficult, in other words, to differentiate qualitative differences between what can be considered higher and lower pleasure. So, Mill's contribution to the qualitative measure of pleasure or happiness, though useful, is still not complete and convincing. As well one must look at the obstacles that rule-utilitarianism has on its own as a theory. By adding the branch of rule-utilitarianism to the utilitarian tree, Mill tries to compensate for some of act-utilitarian's flaws but as seen rule-utilitarianism has its own objections and does not improve on the simple of act-utilitarianism thought out by previous philosophers.

As it can be seen, utility principle or greatest happiness principle tends to give us the greatest pleasure. One question can easily be raised here about whose this pleasure is. An important point about this lies in the extension of the principle of utilitarianism made by Mill, and other utilitarians. According to them, the greatest happiness principle belongs to the majority of people, and that actions are of crucial importance. In their careful analysis of the place of utilitarianism in ethical theories, David Stewart and H. Gene Blocker (1987) present a very clear distinction of utilitarian views. They conclude that utilitarians make use of two concepts: act utilitarianism, and rule utilitarianism. Act utilitarianism is, according to them, the view that we evaluate what is right if someone through his/her own actions performs something wrong with the aim of encouraging the greatest happiness for the greatest number, that is, the majority. Rule utilitarianism, on the other side, tells us that we use the greatest happiness principle not to direct each act but to arrive at general rules which, if kept throughout society, will increase the total amount of happiness. Let it now give an example in order to show how the distinction works. Suppose that one is an act utilitarian and is tempted to kill people. If killing does not seem to decrease the pleasure of others but increases one's pleasure, based on act utilitarianism it would seem to be all right to kill people. On the other hand, a rule utilitarian, however, would argue that the rule ‘do not kill’ if made a general rule of society, contributes to the general happiness and increases the happiness for everyone.

Rule utilitarianism, therefore, would say that killing is wrong, because of the rule that was formed on utilitarian principles. In this respect, it seems to me that this example

(though given on the basis of the definition of act and rule utilitarianism) casts doubt on the possibility and capability of the implementation of utility principle in reality, because what lacks in its content is the presence of established institutions which regulate normative issues and ethical norms in a society. Mill did not prove a justification for what happiness is to the whole. We do not think everyone has the same desire for happiness. We each share similarities but all have different ideas of what happiness means. Mill does have some good points but really avoided justifying his theory. This leads me to my conviction that utility principle remains on a dogmatic level and it is merely a propaganda made in terms of moral obligations, but which does not ensure a full commitment to real pleasure or happiness.

Further flaws and difficulties will appear if we deeply analyze the content of the utility principle. If we all support the greatest happiness principle, that is, the greatest happiness for the greatest number, it is quite easily then to deprive ethnic groups which are considered as minority groups of basic rights. History shows that there have always been ongoing tensions and conflicts between minority and majority group of people, and ethnic conflicts are still present today in our modern world which, according to Karl Polanyi (1957) prides itself on its utilitarian rationality. How can a society be happy and peaceful, if it does not extend liberty to all its members or small groups? Everyone accepts that the violation of human rights is morally wrong, and it threatens the harmonious coexistence of various ethnic groups in a multi-national society. Thus, we can say that utilitarianism does not constitute a strong argument, no matter how much happiness may result from it. It is necessary then to have another principle in addition to the greatest happiness principle. This principle was made possible by John Rawls who discovered the fairness principle. However, what are your criteria for saying that a result is good? How do you evaluate the results of an action? John Rawls (in Stewart & Blocker, 1987) introduces such a principle to his theory of justice, pointing out that some actions are wrong regardless of the happiness they bring. It seems to me that careful analyses show that there are always sources of disagreements with the principle of utility which offers various contradicting rules. Moreover, there is also another difficulty in how to prove that utilitarianism is true. According to Mill, the only evidence which shows that anything is desirable is that people do desire it. This argument of Mill creates a kind of confusion with regard to its explanation. According to Stewart and Blocker (1987) 'desirable' means something else in a moral context. We should remember that the principle of utilitarianism is that we ought to act in accordance with the greatest happiness principle. So, 'desirable' is what one ought to desire, and it does not mean capable of being desired. In that sense, both Stewart and Blocker argue that a sufficient proof that something is capable of being desired is that people in fact do desire it. It is clear, however, that there are some concerns with the principle of utility.

### *New Approaches to Utilitarianism*

Should you consider only the immediate happiness that an action brings, or should you rather look to its long-term consequences? For the utilitarian theory today, the greatest happiness principle does not have to do with the search of happiness, but, at the same time, the prevention of unhappiness. Mill did not prove a justification for what happiness is to the whole. We do not think everyone has the same desire for happiness. We each share similarities but all have different ideas of what happiness means. Karl



Popper (in J.J. C. Smart & Bernard Williams (1973) suggests that we should concern ourselves not so much with the maximization of happiness as with the minimization of suffering, otherwise the doctrine becomes vague and unclear. J.J.C. Smart (1973) maintains that we should develop a sort of position by means of the minimization of sorrows and pains, and this should also be our own ethical principle. In addition, Smart says: "The doctrine of negative utilitarianism, that we should concern ourselves with the minimization of suffering rather than with the maximization of happiness, does seem to be a theoretically possible one." (Smart, 1973, p. 29).

In dwelling on this issue, Smart adds those disagreements between utilitarian arises whether we should try to maximize the average happiness of human beings or whether we should try to maximize the total happiness or goodness. Smart argues that the most effective way to increase the entire happiness is to increase the average happiness, and vice versa. In the same year, Bernard Williams (1973) makes a critique of classical utilitarianism by pointing out that such utilitarianism offers an incomplete solution to the way of maximizing either total utility, or average utility. According to him, this problem remains unclear, as well. Besides, Williams comments: "The fathers of utilitarianism thought of it principally as a system of social and political decision, as offering a criterion and basis of judgment for legislators and administrators." (Williams, 1973, p. 135). While Bernard Williams offers a critique of utilitarian assumptions, at the same time, he finds insufficient the theory of action which is strongly supported by utilitarianism. He emphasizes that utilitarianism fails to deal with the real problems of ethics, especially with that of human happiness. On the other hand, Smart (1973) advocates a version of classical utilitarianism which is more modern. He tries to dwell on the problem of the right and wrong actions which, according to him, are based on their aftermaths and in particular their effects for the total human happiness.

Let us consider the theory of utilitarianism. What one does here is judged from a threshold that measures how one's act will affect the majority. What brings joy/happiness to the majority can therefore be considered to be morally acceptable. In applying this utilitarianism theory, we can argue that contacting his uncle (to help in securing the concerned employment) will be morally unacceptable. Looking at it closely, when such system of favoring particular people apart from merit is encouraged, it means that efforts put to hard work (by competitors for opportunities) will be redundant (West, 2004). It is like a race where the best do not win; therefore, limiting inspiration for hard work. The majority of people would therefore stop to work hard seeing no reason in it; thus, creating a system that does not stimulate peoples' talents to better the majority of our society. Moreover, eliminating competitors for particular positions on the basis of favoritism will mean that companies will be hiring less competent persons for available positions; thus, automatically lowering output and productivity from the concerned organization. Since, companies deliver their productivity to the society, the situation above means that the majority of the society will get poor services from a company with preferential hiring (West, 2004).

There have been some changes and new applications of the content of classical utilitarianism especially in its recent developments. According to Sen & Williams (1982, p. 21) "Utilitarianism was born of a distinctive psychological theory and, to some extent, a distinctive attitude to politics, though even in its earlier developments there were divergent conservative and radical applications of it. It is strange but very striking fact that in its more recent existence as contributing to moral and economic theory it has lost its connections with psychological and political reality."

With the battle between duty theory and utilitarianism, there is also room for compromise, and here is one possible approach. Perhaps moral duties are not permanently fixed in human nature, as Pufendorf and Kant (2007) maintained. Instead, maybe our duties are only social creations that are imprinted on our minds when young, and give us a sense of conviction that lasts throughout our lives. These duties feel permanent and instinctive, but are really not (Fieser, 2008). As society's preferences change throughout time, our duties occasionally need upgrading, and utilitarian reasoning comes in handy here. For example, we now recognize duties to the environment, partly because we see the negative consequences of environmentally damaging practices. Governments are now taking on the duties of paying health care costs, partly because we see the negative consequences of privately-funded systems. Thus, utilitarianism might serve as a mechanism for reforming the traditional duties that society imprints on us.

It is, therefore, quite obvious in their view, that utilitarianism, whether as a moral or as a social doctrine, lacks psychological and political influences, especially recent theory of utilitarianism. Both authors Sen and Williams (1982) claim that utilitarianism has always been discussed and is still discussed in two different roles: on the one hand as a theory of personal morality or rationality, and on the other as a theory of public rational choice. Charles Dickens's novel *Hard Times* critiques the use of extreme utilitarianism as an acceptable means to governing a society in which citizens are able to lead happy, productive, flourishing lives. 'Just the facts', 19<sup>th</sup> century English utilitarianism argued, are all one needs to flourish. Those answers that we can arrive at by way of mathematical, logical reasoning are all needed to live a full human life. *Hard Times* shows however that a 'just the facts' philosophy creates a community inhospitable to the needs of one another, a society nearly void of human compassion, and one lacking in morality. Underlying the novel's argument is the Aristotelian concept that the primary purpose of government is to correctly educate citizens in morality and, consequentially, to cultivate an upright social environment where all are inspired to flourish. As Nussbaum (2001, p. 431) says in her essay, Dickens does not call for a 'relativistic' approach to governance but one more in touch with the realities and complexities of being human.

It is interesting to note that not only supporters of classical utilitarianism reinforce the role of action through the theory of action, but also other contemporary utilitarian theorists as well. According to R.M. Hare (in Sen & Williams, 1982), one has to give the same emphasis to the interests and needs of everybody and when he/she is one of the people affected by the action, his/her own interests have to be given the same emphasis. Furthermore, a utilitarian suggests that total utility is equal, or seeks equality in terms of general benefits. But, as we have noticed, this does not necessarily mean that this equality is always fair. It is up to the justice to decide what is fair or unfair in distribution. The following statement of R.M. Hare will highlight the role of one's action in affecting the principle of utility: "Let us say, rather, that what the principle of utility requires of me is to do for each man affected by my actions what I wish were done for me in the hypothetical circumstances that I were in precisely his situation; and if my actions affect more than one man to do what I wish, all in all to be done for me in the hypothetical circumstances that I occupied all their situations". (in Sen & Williams, 1982, p. 26). It is, in my opinion, quite objective to refer to the approach offered by J.A. Mirrlees (in Sen & Bernard, 1982) in order to understand the real implication of utilitarianism nowadays. According to him, explains that utilitarianism implies that, in

general, in a society not completely identical, individuals should not have equal utility. An equal treatment based on the utilitarian approach does not guarantee equal effects. This, I suppose, sounds very actual today especially when we think of the tendency of communist societies to establish an ideal state of equal citizens, regardless of people's mental, physical, and intellectual differences. It prevented, at the same time, competition among people which then hindered the progress of society. But, Mirrlees condemns: "Utilitarianism can be extended to societies with non-isomorphic individuals, but in these cases it is likely to be necessary that some conventional method of compromise among different utility functions be used." (in Sen & Williams, 1982, p. 84).

All of the cases presented in utilitarianism and Mill's views are very vast. Utilitarianism begins as a philosophy for personal decision-making, but it functions for institutional decision-making as well. Mill does have some good points but really avoided justifying his theory. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with inherent and inalienable Rights; that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness..." This is one of the most famous phrases in the US Declaration of Independence and has become the underpinning of the dreams of millions of people around the world. Although the words are different, these sentiments are reflected in the political and economic policies of many democracies. Whilst the notion of 'happiness for all' seems like the obvious solution to many of our persistent problems, we inevitably encounter conflicts between our actions and our morals. "The state is based on [...] the contradiction between public and private life, between universal and particular interests. For this reason, the state must confine itself to formal, negative activities." (Marx, 1992, p. 59)

### *Basing Moral Beliefs on Utilitarianism*

Should our moral beliefs be based on the utilitarian principle of securing the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people? In order to answer the question above, first of all it is necessary to clarify what utilitarian principle is. The utilitarian principle is one of many theories to answer the ethical nature of human being. Being of the most influential western philosophy thoughts, the utilitarian approach is defined as an ethical theory that holds that an action is right if it produces, or if it tends to produce, the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of people affected by the action. Otherwise the action is wrong (Bowie, 1999, p. 59).

Utilitarianism is a philosophy which has been around for centuries, and is still active and popular in the modern world. It is important not only in philosophy itself, but also in areas such as economics, politics, and even people's daily life. To some people, Utilitarianism seems to be the only ethical philosophy which is obviously correct. To others, it seems to be quite misconceived, even wrong (Fieser, 2008). There have been many arguments raised about the utilitarian principle, amongst them, one of the most famous and influential theory, which is a contrasting thought to utilitarian, is argued by Kant, saying that the basic moral values should be applied universally, and the principle is that one will act in the way he expects everyone else to act. Should our moral beliefs be based on the utilitarian principle, or Kant's or the others? How has utilitarian principle been applied and what are the problems and critics of utilitarian view?

According to the definition, the utilitarian theory is an ethical theory that holds that an action is right if it produces, or if it tends to produce, the greatest amount of good for



the greatest number of people affected by the action. Otherwise the action is wrong. (Business Ethics, 1999) To put this more simply, it is a moral principle that when a course of action produces greatest balance of benefits over harms for everybody that are affected. Then, this action is morally right, otherwise, it is wrong. Therefore, utilitarianism focuses on the consequences of the course of action, rather than the process, and how the action is done. As a result, whether the good or benefits are produced by lies, manipulation and so on, will not be taken into account. It is argued that presently prevailing ethical theories can be largely dispensed with. Such theories are of limited use in solving ethical problems. They fail because they are 'reductionist'. They take an aspect of morality to be the whole of morality. Moreover, the very process of constructing, testing, and modifying them reveals that we already have that understanding of the nature of the ethical which they purport to provide us with. That prior understanding is the identification of morality with the common good. This, it is claimed, is all the understanding we need to approach problems within business ethics or any other branch of 'applied ethics'.

Many people often use this moral principle in making daily decisions. When people are asked to explain why they feel that they have a moral duty to make a decision, or perform some action, it is often been answered as they pointed out that there will be benefit come out from it, or the harm can be prevented. Business managers, governors, as well as the other professionals also use this theory when they are making decisions, for example, whether to employ new staff, whether to ban smoking in public places, or whether to invest in a new market (Bowie, 1999 ). It is clear that utilitarian principle is used widely and related closely to people's daily life. Before make a decision, people always weigh between positive or good outcomes and negative or bad outcomes, and more likely, the decision will be the one which will produce more positive outcomes. According to utilitarianism, if the good consequence is overall greater, then the decision is morally right. Otherwise it is morally wrong. It is natural for a person to focus his goals on things that will bring him happiness and pleasure, or at least less harm.

Now, should our moral beliefs be based on the utilitarian principle of securing the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people? This is not a question that can be simply answered yes or no. As a moral principle, it is inevitable of being criticized and questioned. Are those examples morally right? If not, what are the objections? While the utilitarian principle has been used widely and become popular, people often argue that it is not possible to depend on this one single principle when facing a moral decision. Kantianism is another philosophical theory regarding to human being's ethical behaviour. Being an opposite theory to utilitarianism, it requires people to do what they expect others to do. Therefore people's behaviour should be based on the universal law. The second aspect of Kant's theory is that focus on the motivation and willing, whereas utilitarian theory focus more on consequence. Looking back to the downloading illegal contents example, although the action can provide convenience and reduced cost to people, which is a good consequence overall. However, the intention of the action is wrong, therefore according to Kant's theory, the action is wrong. Comparing two theories, Kantianism seems to be more rational, where there is a universal law, e.g. people shouldn't lie, and organizations should treat workers well. Utilitarianism on the other hand has no universal law on which morality is bases, therefore each situation is judged individually.

The utilitarian principle requires that we first evaluate both the good and bad consequences of an action; then we determine whether the total good consequences is

greater the total bad consequences. If the good consequences are greater, then the action is morally right. If the bad consequences are greater, then the action is morally wrong. This process is more subjective and cannot be universally applied. Also, one's person determination of what produces the greatest consequence may not be same another person's, therefore this theory is inconsistent and a universal law cannot be applied from it (Bowie, 1999).

If we put all these pieces together, utilitarianism claims that the most moral action is always the one that produces the most total net happiness. The *net* happiness is the total happiness minus the total unhappiness. The more total net happiness an action produces, the better the action is. Except Kant's opposite theory to utilitarian theory, there are some other criticisms and objections. One of the most common criticisms of the utilitarian principles is that it sometimes produces consequence that is in contrast with people's 'common morality' (Fieser, 2008). This simply means an internal moral feeling of people, where sometimes people know what is right or wrong instinctively without any consulting or hesitating. Looking back to the examples, people will usually say that not attending a lecture is incorrect, and more morally, exploiting workers is wrong. In reality, when weighing the good and bad outcomes, it is often impossible to calculate all the consequences.

If all the above considerations are taken in to account, then the utilitarian principle is apparently not, and cannot be the single answer for people's moral beliefs. However, looking at all the examples mentioned above, should the student attend the lecture but dismiss his personal thing which may be important. This kind of questions is still hard to answer, but it is clear that the utilitarian principle definitely plays an important role in our moral decisions.

### *Conclusion*

Now, it is time to take a general look at the utility principle. What we are going to summarize will be less detailed but more concise, and we hope to form a clear idea of it. Let us refer to Charles Taylor: "Society was justified not by what it was or expressed, but by what it achieved, the fulfillment of men's needs, desires and purposes. Society came to be seen as an instrument and its different modes and structures were to be studied scientifically for their efforts on human happiness. This reached clearest expression in utilitarianism. But this modern theory has not provided a basis for men's identification with their society. In the intermittent crises of alienation which have followed the breakdown of traditional society, utilitarian theories have been powerless to fill the gap." (Taylor, 1975, p. 191). Why is then utility principle important? As Smart and Williams (1973) would argue, utilitarianism cuts across a number of philosophical polemics and combines a systematic description of meta-ethical problems with a distinctive moral stand.

Utilitarianism provides us an appropriate way when people face moral dilemmas. Nowadays, people are becoming more and more different from one to another, and more characterized. As a result, people may focus on considering themselves. However, this could not be the answer 'yes' to the question - Should our moral beliefs be based on the utilitarian principle of securing the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people? Based solely on the utilitarian principle, the answer is no. There is not a single answer to the question, as there is probably no one ethical theory that everyone can agree in the world.

In order to seek happiness, the opposite side should not be dismissed, instead of that, there must be a suitable balance between them, and also a balance between what is 'good' and what is 'right'. If a person performs an ethical action, but the intention is immoral, then more likely, the person is not considered as ethically correct, thus people must not only act right but also think right, in order to be true 'right'. As the utilitarian principle is being used, especially in dealing with complex problems, it is necessary to take careful and objective evaluation of the consequences; and it also remind us that we should not only consider ourselves, but always look beyond it to the good of all the people. Utilitarianism, far from being a self-serving approach to moral issues, demands careful, objective, impartial evaluation of consequences. It is a widely used – but often misused – approach to moral evaluation. A powerful tool of moral reasoning, this is a technique well worth mastering (Bowie, 1999).

To conclude, we would point out that if we do not have rational individuals in our society and institutions to help individuals develop, it would be difficult to match our ends and means in order to pursue a kind of happiness or pleasure. Otherwise we cannot satisfy the needs and interests of individuals, and certain groups of people. Selfishness, greediness, and irrationality are still present in our modern world. People are not yet so loving, social, and rational. The turmoil of various nations and nation-states today is a proof of this state of things. In dwelling on the utility principle we are fully convinced that there are other issues that might incite debates and further discussions. But, in this paper I tried to present some of the concerns of the principle of utilitarianism which result from its ambiguity, and the change of its content from classical utilitarianism up to a more modern version.

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