

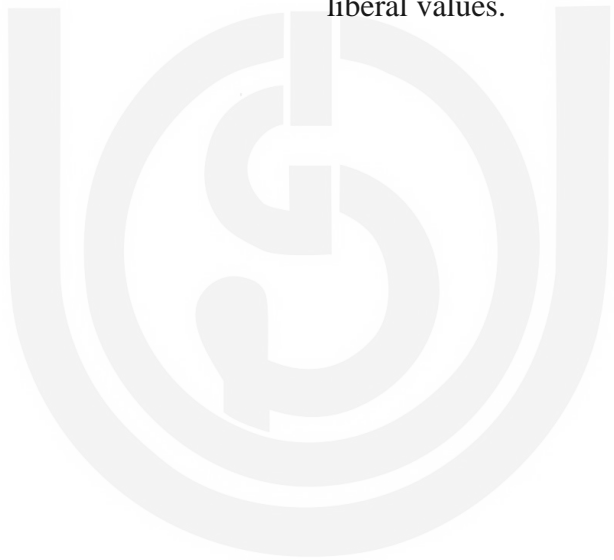
BLOCK IV

JOHAN STUART MILL

THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

This block discusses political philosophy of J S Mill whose ideas were based on classical liberalism arguing for respect and protection of individual rights. Mill's philosophy was a modified version of the utilitarian theory as he also favoured quality of pleasure experienced by human beings. Mill argued that utility cannot be measured merely in *quantity*, but in *quality* too. Mill combined the enlightenment reason with psychological and historical insights of romanticism. Mill thought that the enlightenment philosophers had reduced humanity to something much simpler than it was and it was also devoid of any emotion. He added a qualitative dimension to human happiness and injected enlightenment ideas with character and culture. Mill believed strongly that suffrage rights for women would allow for the eventual addressing of more specific areas of inequality including female employment rights, property rights or marital equality. He was the first to apply public principles of justice and equality to the private realm of the family. Mill stated that equality within the family would lead to a better and responsible society. He believed that utilitarian goals could be achieved only with state developing a good society, and facilitating promotion of liberal values.



ignou
THE PEOPLE'S
UNIVERSITY

UNIT 7 LIBERTY AND INDIVIDUALISM*

Structure

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Mill's Utilitarianism – A Precursor to the Idea of Individualism
- 7.3 Mill's Views on Individualism
- 7.4 Mill's Idea of Freedom and Defence of Liberty
- 7.5 Critical Analysis
- 7.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 7.7 References
- 7.8 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

7.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this unit is to familiarize the readers with the writings and thoughts of J.S. Mill on liberty and his views on individualism. After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand J.S. Mill's differences with Jeremy Bentham on Utilitarianism
- Explain J.S. Mill's thoughts on individualism
- Know J.S. Mill's views on liberty
- Critically analyze J.S. Mill's views

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The question of individualism and human liberty has always remained at the forefront of political thinking ever since the advent of humanist thought in early centuries that reached its zenith in the era of enlightenment from seventeenth century onwards. During this period, many political philosophers contributed their share of thought in enlarging the canvas of literature on individualism and liberty, but J.S. Mill's views on individualism and liberty expressed in his famous work *On Liberty* remains a contribution of interminable importance. Any contemporary political debate on the question of individual liberty with its connection to the larger society is incomplete without Mill. It is especially relevant in the present

*Dr. Apra Vaidya, Assistant Professor (Adjunct Faculty), Ambedkar University Delhi

atmosphere of increased global and the national level of state surveillance in the pretext of providing security which has not only led to redefining the very scope of political values like nationalism and democracy, but more importantly has larger implications on basic tenets of individualism and human liberty.

Mill's defence of individualism and liberty is an embodiment of his form of Utilitarianism. Mill, without withdrawing himself completely from his mentor Jeremy Bentham's version of utilitarianism sought its revision in ways which are instrumental in understanding the very idea and importance of individualism in its totality. His emphasis upon the need to assess the idea of happiness both in quantitative and qualitative is one of his remarkable contributions in political thought.

Thus, the following unit will shed light on Mill's views of individualism and his defence of individual liberty in the sphere of expression and action by drawing upon his utilitarian philosophy in difference with Bentham's version of utilitarianism.

7.2 MILL'S UTILITARIANISM – A PRECURSOR TO THE IDEA OF INDIVIDUALISM

Individualism and human liberty are two such values which are not only cardinal to the survival of democracy as an institution, but are significantly central for a vibrant society to flourish in terms of varying individual talents and skills. In view of such usefulness, Mill's understanding of individualism becomes imperative which flows from his version of utilitarianism. Mill's utilitarian philosophy has been viewed as a revision of Jeremy Bentham's moral philosophy - "greatest happiness of the greatest number." According to this philosophy, actions must be evaluated based upon their consequences. However, while adhering to this principle, Bentham did not just refer to the usefulness of the things or actions, but to the extent to which these things or actions promote the general happiness. In doing so, Bentham exclusively equated the concept of happiness with pleasure as he described in his celebrated work *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* which was published in 1789, "nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure." He further mentioned, "Take away all pleasures and all pain and you have no desire and without a desire there can be no action." This perception of human nature as essentially hedonistic limits Bentham in recognizing the fact that there are not only external but also internal sanctions that constraint the individuals in promoting general happiness, an implication of which essentially falls upon his version of liberty that is often referred to as 'negative' in nature – meaning freedom from external constraints and compulsion.

J.S. Mill's own thinking and writings were deeply coloured in Bentham's philosophy. He was of the opinion that Bentham had "remarkable endowments for philosophy" as well as amazing abilities at drawing correct conclusions from

premises, but *disagreed* with his general conception of human nature as essentially hedonist, which furnished Bentham with an unusually limited number of premises. Mill while devising his own perspective retained Bentham's method and principle, but hoped to enlarge the number of premises from which human nature was to be assessed. Without withdrawing himself from the Benthamite belief that humans were primarily (if not entirely) motivated by pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain, Mill took a more nuanced view of human nature. He called Bentham's philosophy as *one-sided* and attributed it to his lack of experience, imaginations and emotions. According to Mill, the chief problem with Bentham's philosophy was that it *neglected* the individual character. Hence, Mill laid stress on the cultivation of feelings and imagination as a part of good life. He held poetry, drama, painting, and music as essential ingredients, both for happiness and formation of human character. In short, Mill made *happiness* and the *dignity of man* and *not* the principle of pleasure as the chief end of life. He defined happiness to mean perfection of human nature, cultivation of moral virtues and lofty aspirations, total control over one's appetites and desires, recognition of individual and collective interests.

The basic premise of utilitarianism was retained by Mill but he *distinguished between higher and lower pleasures* and that greater pleasure meant an increase not merely in the *quantity*, but also in the *quality* of goods enjoyed. In his book on *Utilitarianism* which was published in 1863, he mentioned, "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are of a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question."

Moreover, he maintained that human beings were capable of moral pleasures as well as intellectual which were superior to the physical ones that they shared with animals. Mill pointed out that *every human action had three aspects*- First, *the moral aspect* of right and wrong; second, *the aesthetic aspect* (related to beauty) and third, *the sympathetic aspect* (loveable-ness). The first, moral aspect is that of approve or disapprove; the second, aesthetic addressed to admire or despise; and according to the third aspect sympathetic, it enabled one to love, pity or dislike.

He regarded individual's self-development and diversity as the ultimate ends, as important components of human happiness and he also considered it as the principle ingredient of individual as well as social progress. Mill endeavoured to reconcile the interest of the individual and the society. He spoke of nobility of character, a trait that was closely related to altruism, meaning that people did what was good for society, rather than for themselves. The pleasure they derived from doing good for society might outweigh the ones that aimed at self-indulgence, contributing to their happiness. According to Mill, pleasures could not be measured objectively and hence for him, felicific calculus was absurd; and judgement based on competent and wise was more crucial.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. What impression of individualism can be drawn about from Mill’s revision of utilitarianism?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

2. Mill pointed out that every human action had certain aspects. Explain.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

3. Why is it important to consider the difference between Mill’s and Bentham’s utilitarianism?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

7.3 MILL’S VIEWS ON INDIVIDUALISM

Mill carefully outlined the principles upon which his ethical system was to be based starting with ‘the principle of utility’ and expanding upon it until he arrives at his political conclusions.

Mill’s idea of individualism is based on the principle of *ethical hedonism* which though places his individualism in the binaries of pleasure and pain, yet is wider in scope as compared to Bentham’s idea of “individualism” and “the greatest happiness of the greatest number.” In Mill’s version of individualism, individuals are arbiters of their own actions. By virtue of possessing reasoning faculty (which is not present in other animate beings), they are elevated above wants and desires

of mere brutish beasts, as he said, “Human beings have faculties more elevated than the animal appetites, and when once made conscious of them, do not regard anything as happiness which does not include their gratification.” He denied the possibility of any such philosophy which is purely hedonistic in a sense that it did not assign pleasures of intellect, or the feelings and imagination, and of the moral sentiments, a much higher value as pleasures than to those of mere sensations.

That is to say, men have the capability to experience higher degree of pleasure like appreciating art, theatre, philosophy, poetry and so on and so forth which no beast is capable of experiencing. This capability of human beings brings Mill’s individualism in qualitative difference with those where individuals go about seeking their own pleasure at the expense of others. Here, Mill meant that men do find pleasures in the pleasures of others and thus other’s pleasure is as important as one’s own pleasure.

For Mill, to act towards the betterment of the larger society, one’s attainment of the captaincy of his destiny is a “pre-requisite” by which Mill indicated, “None but a person of confirmed virtue is completely free.” Here, individualism finds expression in pursuit of attaining mastery over ones habits, temptations and desires to the extent that if even he yields to them, he is in the position of resisting them.

Mill recognized the fact that individuals are diverse in their needs and capacities for happiness. Since the person was the best judge of his own interests, therefore, he must be given the conditions for the fuller development of his character. Such diversity of individual characters is good in itself and other beings equal must be encouraged for the larger good of the society. It is perhaps because of this reason he was an ardent champion of liberty against the tyranny of majority of social norms and political oppression and saw it as imperative to protect an individual’s ability to act freely and just as passionately about the likelihood that government’s interference in the lives of citizens will do more harm than good, regardless of its intent.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. Explain Mill’s take on Individualism.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

7.4 MILL'S IDEA OF FREEDOM AND DEFENCE OF LIBERTY

Mill's idea of freedom and his defence of liberty are conceptually linked to his views on individualism. One can easily make out about his ideas on individualism from the way in which he defined freedom. To Mill, freedom meant individual's ability to direct formation of one's character and not some metaphysical quality of mind that is distinct and separate. He believed that it is the feeling of directing one's own life.

In his famous work *On Liberty*, Mill stated the principle that governed the actions of society and individuals in way of compulsion and control. "The sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number is self-protection ... the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others..." mentioned by him. According to Mill, it is only in the case of *self-preservation* that an individual can be coerced. Otherwise, individuals must be granted largest and greatest amount of freedom because it is imperative for the pursuit of individual's creative impulses and energies and for self-development. Such was the importance of individual freedom for Mill that he even went to the extent of mentioning that if there was a clash between the opinion of the individual and that of community, it was the individual who was the ultimate judge, unless the community could convince him without resorting to threat and coercion. "The only part of the conduct of anyone, for which is amenable to society, is that which concerns others. In part which merely concerns himself, his independence is, of right, absolute. Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign," he stated. Here in this quote, Mill laid the grounds for justifiable interference in the liberty of the individual. Any activity that pertained to the individual alone represented the space over which no coercive interference, either from the government or from other people, was permissible. The realm which pertained to the society or public was the space in which coercion could be used (hard or soft) to make the individual conform to some standard or conduct. This is the *distinction of self-regarding and other's regarding* sphere of human actions.

Mill essentially defended the liberty of action in self-regarding sphere of action because of his belief that coercion could be detrimental to self-development. He listed four reasons in this context.

1. Evils of coercion far outweighed the good achieved.
2. Individuals were so diverse in their needs, and capacities for happiness that coercion would be futile. Since the person was the best judge of his own interests, therefore, he had the information and the incentive to achieve them.
3. Since diversity was in itself good, other things being equal, it should be encouraged.

4. Freedom was the most important requirement in the life of a rational person. He contended that positive liberty i.e. autonomy and self-mastery, were inherently desirable and it was possible if individuals were allowed to develop their own talents or invent their own lifestyles i.e. great deal of negative liberty.

In addition to this liberty of action in sphere of self-regarding actions, Mill also argued for the *freedom of speech* as extremely significant for encouraging fuller development of the individual's own character as well as well for social utility. One of his famous quotes in *On Liberty*, Mill brought forth the most important aspect of his views on liberty. He mentioned, "If all mankind minus one were of one opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person than, he if he had the power would be justified in silencing mankind." According to him, freedom of speech and expression is not just a right of individual to express an opinion but also includes the right of individuals to hear opinions expressed. Mill enumerates four reasons in the favour of freedom of expression-

1. If an opinion is suppressed as against the prevailing notion and the suppressed opinion is right, then humankind is deprived of its benefit. And, even if it is the prevailing notion that is right, suppression of the 'wrongs' deprives humankind of the opportunity to reinforce what is right. Therefore, freedom of expression is required to facilitate the opinions, true or false, that are against the prevailing notions in society
2. In the field of social and political belief, truth rather than being of one view or the other emerges from the conflict of two or more opposing views. It is only freedom of expression that facilitates the airing out of several views.
3. Freedom of expression can throw up right views as well as wrong. But even views that are wrong or false should not be suppressed as they may contain elements of truth. If freedom of expression is not exercised, such "elements of truth" may be lost to humankind.
4. Even prevailing views that are true and right need opposition to reinforce their truth and to prevent themselves from being frozen into inert clichés. Indeed, it is only by being exposed to contradictions that views become reliable guides for actions.

According to Mill, it is the clash of views facilitated by freedom of expression that provides the intellectual impetus for thought, discussion and progress. He was convinced that without such freedom society finds itself enfeebled by dogma. Beliefs held by such society degenerate into prejudices and opinions lack a rational foundation.

Since Mill valued each and every individual opinion be it wrong or right, he saw no difference in suppression of majority opinion by one or suppression of an individual opinion by majority as in both the cases, according to Mill, society would be devoid of something valuable.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. What is Mill’s defence of the right to individuality in self-regarding sphere of actions?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

2. Explain Mill’s views on freedom of speech and expression.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

3. Discuss Mill’s defence of Individual freedom and individuality.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

7.5 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Mill’s individualism and his defence of liberty drawn from his revised utilitarian philosophy of Jeremy Bentham is seemingly broader in its scope and usefulness, yet it is not free from critical purview. The major criticism leveled against his defence of liberty comes from *Sir Earnest Barker*. Sir Ernest Barker regarded Mill as a prophet of empty liberty and abstract individual because of the absolutist statements made by Mill on liberty like right of one individual against the rest. Mill, he writes, “separated the inseparable.” The conduct of any person was a single whole and there could be nothing in it that concerns himself and did not concern others. Every action of a person affects others and the demarcation between self-regarding and other’s regarding spheres of action did not hold good.

7.6 LET US SUM UP

To sum up, Mill's views on utilitarianism have been a precursor to the idea of individualism. Mill endorsed the Benthamite principle of the greatest happiness of the greatest number, but at the same time he made a significant departure from the Benthamite assumption by arguing that this principle could be defended if one distinguished *happiness* from *pleasure*. He retained the basic premise of utilitarianism, but distinguished between higher and lower pleasures. With regard to this, Mill argued that utility cannot be measured merely in *quantity* but in *quality* too. Mill mentioned that every human action had certain aspects and in this context, he stated, the moral aspect of right and wrong; the aesthetic aspect (related to beauty) and third, the sympathetic aspect (loveable-ness). In addition, individual's self-development is one of the major components of happiness and for the overall social progress. Also, Mill valued each and every individual's opinion, be it wrong or right, he saw no difference in suppression of majority opinion by one or suppression of an individual opinion by majority, as in both the cases, Mill believed that the society would be devoid of something valuable.

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

- Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. Give a critical account of Mill's individualism and defence of liberty.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

7.7 REFERENCES

- Bhargava, Rajeev and Acharya, Ashok (ed.) (2008). *Political Theory: An Introduction*. UP: Pearson.
- Collini, Stefan (ed.). (1989). *On Liberty and Other Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cowling, M. (1963). *Mill and Liberalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gray, J. (1983). *Mill on Liberty: A Defence*. London: Routledge.
- Gauba, O.P. (2019). *Western Political Thought, 4th Edition*. New Delhi: National Paperbacks.

- Heydt, Colin. *John Stuart Mill (1806—1873)*. Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. URL: <https://iep.utm.edu/milljs/>.
- Macleod, Christopher. *John Stuart Mill*. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. URL: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mill/>.
- Mill, John Stuart (1993). *Utilitarianism*. New York: Bantum Classics.
- Mukherjee, Subrata and Ramawsamy, Sushila. (2011). *A History of Political Thought: Plato to Marx*. New Delhi: PHILearning Pvt. Ltd.
- Riley, Jonathan (1998). *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Mill on Liberty*. London: Routledge.

7.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1. Your answer should highlight the following points:
 - Mill's views about higher and lower pleasures
 - Pleasure meant an increase not merely in the quantity but also in the quality of good enjoyed.
2. Your answer should highlight the following points:
 - First, the moral aspect; second, the aesthetic aspect; and third, the sympathetic aspect.
3. Your answer should highlight the following points:
 - Mill's version of utilitarianism is central to his idea of individualism and liberty.
 - Mill's differentiation between lower and higher pleasures widens the scope of individuality.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1. Your answer should highlight the following points:
 - Individuals are arbiters of their own actions
 - Men have the capability to experience higher degree of pleasure like appreciating art, philosophy.
 - For Mill, other's pleasure is as important as one's own pleasure.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

1. Your answer should highlight the following points:

- Mill believed coercion could be detrimental to self-development
- List the reasons
- Importance of positive liberty

2. Your answer should highlight the following points:

- Freedom of speech and expression also includes the right of individuals to hear opinions expressed.
- Liberty is needed for development of the individual's own character.
- It is needed for social utility.
- Reasons in favour of freedom of expression

3. Your answer should highlight the following points:

- In self-preservation, an individual can be coerced.
- Individuals must be granted largest and greatest amount of freedom.

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

1. Your answer should highlight the following points:

- Sir Ernest Barker views on Mill's perspective

UNIT 8 SUFFRAGE AND THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN*

Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 Mill's Writings and 'The Subjection of Women' (1869)
- 8.3 Mill on Importance of Individual Liberty
- 8.4 Rights of Women and Gender Equality
- 8.5 Political Rights and Women's Suffrage
- 8.6 Critical Analysis
- 8.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 8.8 References
- 8.9 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

8.0 OBJECTIVES

In this unit, we study about J S Mill as a feminist philosopher and his views on subjection of women by men in a society. We will attempt to examine Mill's philosophical arguments for gender equality and equal political rights for women as partners in any society. The aim of this unit is to familiarise you with the ideas of suffrage and women's rights and what Mill says about the liberty and political rights of women and its usefulness.

After studying this unit, you should be able to discuss:

- Mill's views on subjection of women in a society
- Relation between Mill's idea of individual liberty and equal rights for women
- Mill's arguments for demanding women's suffrage

8.1 INTRODUCTION

J.S. Mill's writings on women and the family are central to contemporary philosophical debates about how liberalism should best conceptualize and work

*Dr Priya S. Mital, HOD, Department of Political Science, Bhavan's H.S. College, Mumbai

towards justice. Mill's landmark work titled *The Subjection of Women* made clear that a decent liberal conception of justice implied equal justice for women as well as men. Mill's views on women's rights were public knowledge in his own day and have continued to be studied exhaustively. J S Mill served as a Member of Parliament from 1865 to 1868, as a radical member from Westminster, during which he advocated *three* main reforms: suffrage for women, the interests of labourers, and land reform in Ireland. The publication in 1869 of Mill's *The Subjection of Women* gave rise to philosophical and political responses beyond Western Europe on the relationship between westernization and women's rights in developing, colonial, and post-colonial countries.

In arguing for women to enjoy the same freedoms as men—the freedom to vote, to attend university, to go to work, to do what they willed with their earnings—Mill linked up the idea of freedom to other ideas important to him, that is, the ideas of equality, democracy and utility. He believed that only when women accessed the same privileges as men, would democracy be strengthened. Mill was not saying that the democratic project was incomplete because half the population was not being allowed to participate in the project of self-government. Rather, his claim was that without the reform of the patriarchal family, even the men would not know how to be truly democratic. Democracy in the political and public sphere would remain faulty, unless democratic citizens were brought up and created in egalitarian families. In his famous work '*The Subjection of Women*', Mill declares that equality, liberty and democracy are bound up together.

8.2 MILL'S WRITINGS AND 'THE SUBJECTION OF WOMEN' (1869)

John Stuart Mill (1806–873) was the most influential political thinker of the nineteenth century. Mill was born in 1806, in London, as the oldest son of the Scottish historian and philosopher, *James Mill*. From a very early age, Mill began studying logic and mathematics, and soon mastered the political economy of Smith and Ricardo. By the time he was 10 years old, he had read many of *Plato's* dialogues, logic and history. He was familiar with the writings of *Euripides*, *Homer*, *Polybius*, *Sophocles* and *Thucydides*. All of Mill's education was supervised by his father and his father's philosopher friend, *Jeremy Bentham*, who had a major influence on his philosophical thought. Under Bentham's influence Mill became a utilitarian philosopher. Mill neither went to a regular school and nor to a university, but he was so well read that, while still in his teens, he began contributing articles to the *Westminster Review*, the journal of the Philosophic Radicals. In 1827, he began working for the British East India Company and continued to work for the company for three decades. It was during these years that he wrote many of his famous works.

In 1851, Mill married his long time companion *Harriet Taylor*. Unfortunately, she died not long after their marriage, in 1858. Mill acknowledged her influence on his writings in several places. Mill in the initial stages of the women's

emancipation movement was influenced greatly by his spouse *Harriet Taylor*. The Westminster Review essay, "Enfranchisement of Women," (1851) was more the work of his wife Harriet Taylor than of J S Mill. Mill was a prolific writer, producing work in several disciplines. His work *A System of Logic*, which he wrote in 1843, was followed by *Principles of Political Economy* in 1848. In 1859, he wrote *On Liberty*. In 1861, he wrote *Considerations on Representative Government* followed by *Utilitarianism* in 1863. *The Subjection of Women* was published in 1869, while *Autobiography* and *Three Essays on Religion* were published posthumously in 1873 and in 1874, respectively. He made important contributions to every aspect of political theory. His *System of Logic* (1843) tried to elucidate a coherent philosophy of politics. His essays *On Liberty* (1859) and *The Subjection of Women* (1869) were classic elaborations of liberal thought on important issues like law, rights and liberty. From 1865 to 1868, Mill as a member of the British Parliament sought to push through legislation granting women's suffrage and worker's rights. From the training that John Stuart received at home, he was convinced that nurture more than nature played a crucial role in the formation of character. It also assured him of the importance of education and the role it could play in transforming human nature and society.

The clearest expression of Mill's views on women appears in his work *The Subjection of Women* (1869). In *The Subjection of Women*, John Stuart Mill sets forth what has often been viewed as a progressive theory espousing equality for women in society. Mill argues that social and legal conditions which restrict the liberty of women serve as one of the "chief hindrances to human improvement." Mill likens the position of women in society and particularly their position in the marital relationship in the nineteenth century to that of *slaves* subject to the will of their masters. It means that Mill argues that marriage is the legal equivalent of slavery. Mill argues that numerous benefits will follow from allowing women the liberty to control their own destiny and the freedom to hold an equal position in society. Among these benefits are: improved conditions for women in marital relationships so that they are no longer legally subject to the will of a cruel husband but are, instead, equal partners in the marriage; the removal of the 'self worship' instilled in men who believe they are better than women merely because of their gender and not for any substantive reason; the creation of the family as a model of the "virtues of freedom"; and most importantly, the promotion of human progress and the greatest happiness for all through the addition to society of new and diverse intellectual forces which will result from improved and equal education and opportunities for women.' Mill argues that the subjection of women has been justified by the claim that is natural for men to dominate women. Women, so the claim goes, are naturally inferior to men. Mill, on the other hand, argues that it is impossible to know the true nature of women. Mill argues that women's subordinate position in society is a remnant of the past practice of the rule of the physically strong over the weak. The practice of men dominating women has since become customary and has been mistaken as the "natural" order. Women are believed to be naturally inferior because of the unquestioning acceptance of this order and a resulting socialization process which creates

women who will act in such a way to fill these inferior positions. Mill argues that we cannot claim to know the true nature of women based on their behaviour because this behaviour is a product of social forces that have conditioned women to behave in a certain way and have thus hidden and suppressed their true natural inclinations. How should we understand John Stuart Mill's feminism? The dominant answer is that Mill was a liberal and a feminist, invested primarily in equality of opportunity and the removal of barriers to the public realm for women, and so he must be a liberal feminist.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. Describe about the major influences on Mill and his philosophy.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

2. Write a note highlighting the views of Mill in 'The Subjection of Women'.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

8.3 MILL ON IMPORTANCE OF INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY

Mill's emphasis on individual liberty is consistent with his insistence, almost *unique* in the canon of Western political thought, that women must also enjoy the right to individual liberty. Why does Mill hold the value of liberty so dear? Why is it so important to him that the liberty of individuals, including that of women, be protected? Mill believed that when individuals are free to make their own choices, they use many of their faculties. He observed that the human faculties of perception, judgement, discriminative feeling, mental activity, and even moral preference, are exercised in only making a choice. Individuals, who act in a certain fashion only because they have been told to do so, do not develop any of these faculties. Mill argued that improvement of the mental and moral faculties of individuals, for both men and women will take place, when they exercise *three* specific liberties: the liberty of thought and expression, including the liberty of speaking and publishing; the liberty of action and the liberty of association. The

point of liberty then seems to be the 'improvement' of the 'moral and mental powers' of human beings.

When it comes to liberty of action, Mill asserted that 'the sole end for which mankind are warranted, individually or collectively, in interfering with the liberty of action of any of their number, is self-protection. The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant'. Mill stated that every individual must be allowed a say in controlling the government and thus given an opportunity to protect his or her interests. It is on this basis that Mill demanded that women be given the right to vote. He advocated that barring those who were illiterate, did not pay taxes or were on parish relief, everyone be allowed to vote.

'*The Subjection of Women*' begins with the revolutionary statement that 'the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes—the legal subordination of one sex to the other—is wrong in itself, and one of the chief hindrances to human improvement...it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality'. What Mill found paradoxical was that in the modern age, when the principles of liberty and equality were being espoused, these rights were being denied to women. No one believed in slavery anymore, yet women were sometimes treated worse than slaves. Mill wanted to explain this resistance to women's equality in the context of the general acceptance of the principles of equality and liberty.

Mill argued all men had an interest in women's subordination. This is what made women's subordination so difficult to resist. Men wanted to hold on to it because they benefited from it, as they could control the labour and resources of another human being. Attacking every defence of women's inequality, Mill went on, in *The Subjection of Women*, to marshal further arguments for why the oppression of women should be resisted. Mill described how the society would benefit if women were to be granted equal rights, as follows:

1. The first advantage would be that the family would no longer be 'a school of despotism'. According to Mill, the patriarchal family compels all its members to live in hierarchical relationships, since all power is concentrated in the hands of the male members. The women, children and servants do not have any freedom and have to obey the patriarch. Individuals who live in such families cannot be good democratic citizens because they do not know how to treat another citizen as an equal. For women to be free, they must enjoy an equal legal status with men, and have an equal access to education and employment. In the interests of democratic citizenship then, it was necessary to obtain equality for women in the family.
2. Mill pointed out that another advantage of women's equality would be the 'doubling of the mass of mental faculties' available to society. Society would benefit not only because there would be more doctors, engineers,

teachers and scientists, but men in the professions would also perform better, because of competition from their female counterparts. Mill describes this benefit as *the benefit of the stimulus* that would be given to the intellect of men by the competition.

3. Thirdly, Mill observed that women enjoying equality would have a better influence on mankind. According to Mill ‘under relations of subordination, women have to resort to perverse means to assert their will. If women are treated equally, they will no longer need to do this’.
4. Finally, Mill argued, by giving women equal rights, their happiness would be increased manifold and this would satisfy the utilitarian principle of the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

Equality as a legal right between the sexes was Mill’s main concern. Mill’s ‘*The Subjection of Women*’ is considered as one of the first essays to discuss the inequality of women as a political problem and to consider its sources and solutions in a scholarly manner. It condemns the legal inferiority of women in Victorian England. He criticised the lack of freedom of choice for women, and contended that equality should be the ordering principle of societal and personal relationships.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. How will society benefit by granting equal rights to women?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

8.4 RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND GENDER EQUALITY

Mill pointed out that opposition to sexual equality was not based on reason. For Mill, equality was a genuine moral sentiment that ought to govern all relationships. Such a sentiment could be instilled and nurtured within a family that had been justly constituted. Mill acknowledged the family as the real school for learning the virtues of freedom and liberation, yet it was here that sentiments of injustice, inequality and despotism were taught. A just family would nurture feelings of sympathy, equality and love, rather than subordination and command. Mill desired a transformation of the family to suit the temperament and spirit of the modern age, namely the spirit of equality and justice, and in the process bring about a moral regeneration of humankind. Mill believed that the relationship between a man and a woman in marriage should be based on mutual respect and

mutual love, giving due regard to one another's rights. This would make them self-reliant and self-sufficient. Mill stated that 'unless the equal and just worth of every human being was recognized, he could not enjoy equal rights nor realize his full potential'. A life of rational freedom devoted to the release of their full creative potential was as much a requirement for men as for women'.

Mill's commitment to equalizing power relations between men and women led him to argue that justice was not possible without restructuring the family and transforming conventional gender roles. Mill argued that men should not be trusted with absolute power. Such absolute power within the family and marriage only led to brutalization of women. Mill defended the right of individual women who wanted the opportunity to choose a life other than that of motherhood and marriage. He did believe that most women would not make that choice, but he certainly did not want *to force* women into marriage by not offering them alternatives. According to him, 'the subjection of women to men being a universal custom, any departure from it quite naturally appears unnatural'. He believed that ordinary men and women were slaves to custom, and it was necessary to remove the legal barriers which restricted women's opportunities.

Mill pointed out that if women were allowed to exercise their faculties freely and fully, the real beneficiary would be society, for it would be able to draw from a larger pool of mental resources. If women were properly educated it would not only brighten their lives but also enhance society in general. He understood the important point that *equal opportunities in education* meant equal opportunities in *employment*. Like *Wollstonecraft* and *Margaret Fuller*, Mill articulated and defended the right of women to be considered as free rational beings capable of choosing the life they would like to lead for themselves, rather than being dictated by what society thought they *should* be or do. Mill believed that women were as bright and gifted as men, and once granted the same 'eagerness for fame', women would achieve the same success. Moreover, a judgement regarding capacities and talent in women could be made only after generations of women benefited from equal opportunities for education and employment.

Mill's argument for gender equality, his critics maintain might have been radical for its time. Much of the debate about Mill's feminism hangs on the role of the state in effecting change. Mill defined a limited role for the state in propelling change. Mill's critics focus on his minimal legal prescriptions to ensure women's equality, arguing that this shows he had largely indifferent views regarding social and moral life. Mill also pleaded for women's political rights to vote and to participate in government as administrators and as rulers. Mill's supporters, pointing to his strong commitments to equality and how much he expected gender roles and the family to change, usually assume the state would play a key part in bringing about this change.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. What reasons does Mill give for demanding gender equality for women?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

8.5 POLITICAL RIGHTS AND WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE

All contemporary discourse on the issue of civil and political rights of women dates back to J. S. Mill's 'On Liberty'. Political rights and liberties cannot be thought of in terms of specific laws and statutes. Rather, they are ideologies that one believes ought to be valued and respected. Mill tried to reconcile the principle of political equality with individual liberty. He accepted that all citizens, regardless of their status were equal and that only popular sovereignty could give legitimacy to the government. Democracy was good because it made people happier and better. In the *Representative Government*, Mill commented that difference of sex could not be the basis of political rights. Citing examples like *Joan of Arc, Elizabeth* and *Margaret of Austria*, he argued that these women had proved that women were as competent as men to participate and manage political offices. He desired that the subjection of women be ended not merely by law alone, but by education, opinion, habits, and finally a change in the family life itself. Mill believed that through the rights of *citizenship*, an individual became a social person and acquired both political freedom and responsibility. It was for this concern with the public realm that Mill defended women's civil and political rights. In granting the right to vote, Mill hoped that women would be able to bring about legislation to remedy their numerous problems, such as, domestic violence etc. He objected to women being prevented by law to compete and contribute to society.

Women's suffrage refers to the right of women to participate in democratic processes through voting on the same basis as men. In the medieval and early modern periods in Europe, the right to vote was severely limited for all people by factors such as age, ownership of property, and gender. Mill looked upon equal voting rights, universal suffrage, democracy and liberty as conditionally good. They had to be conferred only on those who had the character for self-control, and the ability and interest in using them for the public good. Mill argued that the policy of a government in franchise reform should be to make participation in political rights the reward for mental improvement.

Mill believed that citizens developed intellectual qualities of reason and judgement only through political participation. “Civil participation enhances autonomy and altruism: autonomy from self-government; altruism from judging the interests of the community”. He recommended *compulsory elementary education*, for that would make individual citizens wise, competent and independent judges. In, *On Liberty* Mill recommended education to be established and controlled by the state. Mill could perceive clearly that the problems women faced were not merely those of misconception or false social notions, but of *systematic domination*, which was why he constantly used the language of justice, freedom and slavery to improve their lot.

J.S. Mill reiterated a similar sentiment like his mentor *Jeremy Bentham* with regard to his views about the rights and status of women. Bentham believed that education and suffrage would enable a woman to be a morally autonomous person and a politically enlightened citizen. Bentham argued for women’s right to vote and the right to participate as equals in the government. Bentham contended that women had equal claims to happiness as men, if not more. For Bentham, the question of autonomy—suffrage and divorce are two important issues that have an intimate link with women’s legal personality. The two belonged to the public and private spheres respectively of the individual, and were based on the premise that women were aware of their interests and the means to safeguard them. Bentham further claimed that the right to vote and the right to seek a divorce guaranteed and secured women’s interests independent of men. Bentham favoured women’s suffrage, but in *Constitutional Code* he realized that though there was nothing wrong with women’s suffrage, the time was not ripe for it. His reluctance was not because women lacked the capacity and rationality to vote, but because men would oppose it strongly. Finally, Bentham rejected the idea of women’s enfranchisement and participation in government on the grounds that men were immature and would refuse to allow women amidst them. This had nothing to do with the fact that women lacked either talent or ability. Bentham shelved his initial demand for enfranchisement of women and their political representation on the grounds of principle and practice. In practical terms, as pointed out, he realized that society was not yet receptive to his radical demand. In principle, he too believed that the home was the natural domain for the woman. Nevertheless, Bentham argues that if women are to have a say in the passage of legislation affecting their happiness, it follows, that they must have a hand in electing legislators. Their enfranchisement is consistent with the Utilitarian’s greatest-happiness principle.

The campaigns to secure women's right to vote faced resistance from different quarters. The reasons for this are many and varied. The most extreme resistance to women's campaigns demanding the right to vote has come from those who believe that women are constitutionally ill suited (by nature or by virtue of their limited education) to form rational judgments or to bear the responsibility of democratic decision making. Others have argued that while it might be reasonable for women to vote in local or municipal elections, which typically deal with

housing, education, or the care of children, national elections are concerned with matters of state, and in particular with war, which are not women's domain. Resistance to women's suffrage has also come from political activists who believed that women are inherently conservative, and thus that the extension of the franchise to women would inhibit broader progressive social and political reforms, or from those who argue that women's political authority would be contrary to core religious or social values. Mill wanted to elevate the importance of the family, as he believed that whoever runs the family has a central role in sustaining the political virtues of equality and justice. Mill believed that enfranchisement of women is thus justified in principle as well as in practice.

8.6 CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Mill was Eurocentric as he was willing to use different standards for judging similar practices, particularly on an issue like gender equality. Mill championed the cause of European, and in particular Victorian women, but felt that Asian women were not ready for equality, individuality and liberty. If Mill's vision was one of men and women improving themselves, and thereby making their society better by speaking out freely, acting freely and forming associations freely, then some problems remain in his writings. In *The Subjection of Women*, for instance, he claims that women choosing to marry are in effect choosing a career of taking care of their husband and children, and there seems to be no place for these women in the public sphere of associational life.

Many critics of Mill have also pointed out that his attempt to modify Benthamite utilitarianism to accommodate his own emphasis on liberty ultimately failed. Trying to link liberty with self-improvement, Mill had to introduce the distinction between the quantity and quality of pleasures. Given this distinction, who was to judge that a certain pleasure was qualitatively superior to another? The idea of differential competence among individuals became the basis of Mill's advocacy of *plural voting* in politics. This meant, however, giving up one of the valuable insights of utilitarianism: that each person had to be counted as of equal value. Mill's apparent defence of utilitarianism actually led him to reject some of its essential tenets.

Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869) continues to be cited as an authority by leading feminist theorists of justice. Mill's feminism turns on the role of the state in effecting moral and political change in society. Mill's critics focus on his minimal legal prescriptions, believing them to be insufficient for achieving justice and equality in any meaningful sense. His supporters point to how much he expected the rigidity of gender roles to weaken for the better, which, in their view, suggests Mill envisioned a large role for the state in bringing about this change. Both views overlook a central tenet in Mill's thought, which is that such shifts in values would come about only when the conditions for progress were in place. Although the state has an important role in creating requisite conditions, it could not itself impose moral progress on its citizens.

Mill's critics sometimes complained that he knew nothing about women. His approach to women's rights was highly abstract and intellectualized, based on concepts of legal and political equality. Mill stated that many people, especially women, did not seem to realize the power of the political process which "is by far the greatest that it is possible to wield for human happiness." This was always Mill's optimistic position on women's rights that once women had the franchise their political power would be sufficient to remedy other problems. The possession of political power, he was convinced, "is the only security against every form of oppression" and would cause men to regard women with more respect.

Social tyranny was exercised in subtle forms like customs, conventions and mass opinion, which did not make an individual stop and think where and how one had come to acquire these. Individuality, to Mill, was not mere non-conformism, but signified the act of questioning, the right to choice. Mill believed that it was only with moral and mental autonomy that there would be considerable variety of thought and behaviour. Individuality, to Mill, meant the power or capacity for critical enquiry and responsible thought. It meant self-development and the expression of free will. He stressed absolute liberty of conscience, belief and expression, for they were crucial to human progress.

Mill, unlike Bentham, believed that some forms of happiness were better than others, which relegated the pleasure principle to second place, behind some sort of notion of values. Mill's version of utilitarianism holds that allowing people to decide for themselves as much as possible increases the general happiness, thereby arriving at a philosophy arguing in favour of liberty of thought, speech and association. Mill as a utilitarian philosopher accepts that the greatest happiness of the greatest number is the goal of sound social policy.

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. What are the arguments extended by Mill for women's suffrage?
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
2. Give a critical account of Mill's feminism.
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

8.7 LET US SUM UP

Mill, the rationalist and the utilitarian, was also a philosopher of human liberation, individuality, equality and fulfilment. Mill regarded improvement in the position of women as a concern of the entire humankind and not one just restricted to women. *The Subjection of Women*, therefore, made a strong claim for equal status in three key areas: women's right to vote, right to equal opportunities in education, and employment. Mill wanted individuals to constantly better themselves morally, mentally and materially. Mill's ideal was improvement of the individuals. According to him, individual liberty was instrumental in achieving this ideal. Mill believed that individuals improving themselves would naturally lead to a better and improved society. Mill's work *The Subjection of Women* was far ahead of its time and in its application of the principle of liberty to the position of women. Mill in *The Subjection of Women* observed that after the fulfilment of primary necessities, freedom is the first and strongest want of human nature. Mill zealously advocated the liberty of women to promote development of a better society, which he believed would then lead to greatest happiness of the greatest number.

Mill believed strongly that winning suffrage rights for women would allow for the eventual addressing of more specific areas of inequality including female employment rights, property rights or marital equality. Mill was the *first* to apply public principles of justice and equality to the *private* realm of the *family*. Mill stated that equality within the family would lead to a better and responsible society. He was convinced that a good society was one which consisted of happy people, and happiness came out of self-reliance, rationality, tolerance, wide-ranging interests and a compassionate temper. Mill's thought and activism could be distinguished from those of his predecessors within the liberal tradition, because of his application of the principles of liberalism to the question of women. For Mill, improving women's position by giving them suffrage, education and employment opportunities was a stepping stone to progress and civility. Mill's ideas not only greatly influenced intellectuals in England in the 19th century, but some of his theories—his methodological individualism, his version of utilitarianism and his emphasis on liberty and democracy guide philosophical debates, even today.

8.8 REFERENCES

- Burns, J.H. (ed.) (1991). *The Cambridge History of Political Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Coleman, J. (2000): *A History of Political Thought*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers.
- Collini, Stefan (ed.) (1989). *On Liberty and Other Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Davidson, W.L. (1957). *Political Thought in England: The Utilitarians from Bentham to Mill*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Donner, Wendy. (1991). *The Liberal Self: John Stuart Mill's Moral and Political Philosophy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Gray, J. (1983). *Mill on Feminism*. London: Routledge.
- Gray, J. (1983). *Mill on Liberty: A Defence*. London: Routledge.
- Hayek, F.A. (ed.) (1951). *John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor: Their Correspondence*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Jha, Shefali . (2018). *Western Political Thought*. Chennai: Pearson India Education Services Pvt. Ltd
- Kelly, P (eds.), (2009): *Political Thinkers: From Socrates to the Present*, 2nd ed., Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Miliband, R.(1950). *Mill on Bentham and Coleridge*. London: Fontana.
- Miliband, R. (1976): *Utilitarianism: On Liberty and Considerations on Representative Government*. London:Fontana.
- Mukherjee, S. and Ramawsamy.S. (2011). *A History of Political Thought*. New Delhi: PHI Learning Pvt. Ltd.
- Ryan, A. (1970). *The Philosophy of John Stuart Mill*. London: Macmillan.
- Skorupski, J. (1998). *The Cambridge Companion to Mill*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tulloch, G. (1989): *Mill and Sexual Equality*. London: Blackwell.
- Vinod, M J and M Deshpande. (2013). *Contemporary Political Theory*. New Delhi: PHI Learning Private Ltd.

8.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1. Your answer should highlight the following points:
 - Jeremy Bentham's utilitarian philosophy
 - Harriet Taylor's influence - justice, equality for women
2. Your answer should highlight the following points:

- progressive theory supporting equality for women in society
- denial of liberty and equality acts as hindrances to human improvement
- improved conditions for women in marital relationships and family
- promotion of greatest happiness for all through education and equal opportunities for women

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1. Your answer should highlight the following points:
 - justice possible with restructuring the family
 - doubling of the mass of mental faculties
 - this would have a better influence on mankind
 - satisfy the utilitarian principle

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

1. Your answer should highlight the following points:
 - equality a genuine moral sentiment that ought to govern all relationships
 - transformation of the family for moral regeneration, spirit of equality and justice
 - women as bright and gifted as men

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

1. Your answer should highlight the following points:
 - universal suffrage, democracy and liberty as conditionally good
 - recommended compulsory elementary education
 - citizen's develop intellectual qualities of reason through political participation
2. Your answer should highlight the following points:
 - Mill's approach was Eurocentric
 - distinction between the quantity and quality of pleasures
 - linked liberty with self-improvement
 - moral and mental autonomy

UNIT 9 THE PRINCIPLE OF UTILITY*

Structure

- 9.0 Objectives
- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 Mill's Critique of Bentham's 'Utilitarianism'
- 9.3 Mill's views on 'Utilitarianism'
- 9.4 The Reformation of Utilitarianism
- 9.5 Connection between Utility, Justice and Rights
- 9.6 Liberty, Democracy and Utilitarianism
- 9.7 Conclusion
- 9.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 9.8 References
- 9.9 Answers to Check Your Progress Exercises

9.0 OBJECTIVES

The aim of this unit is to familiarise you with the principle of utilitarianism. It will examine J S Mill's reformulation of Bentham's *Principle of Utilitarianism* and critically examine Mill's views on the principle of utilitarianism. After studying this unit, you should be able to:

- Understand the principle of utilitarianism
- Mill's Critique of Bentham's *Utilitarianism*
- Explain the ways in which Mill reformulates the utilitarian position
- Understand the difference in views of Bentham and Mill on the *principle of utility*
- Analyze the idea of utility in relation to justice and rights

9.1 INTRODUCTION

The principle of utilitarianism is one of the central tenets of J S Mill's political philosophy. Mill's father, James Mill, was the closest associate of Jeremy Bentham, the founder of utilitarianism. Mill was brought up by his father James Mill in Bentham's philosophy of utilitarianism. Utilitarianism was an attempt to

*Dr Priya S. Mital, HOD, Department of Political Science, Bhavan's H.S. College, Mumbai

make all decisions in morality, politics, and law by evaluating the comparative utility or usefulness of the alternatives to the good of society. It is, sometimes, summarized as seeking the ‘greatest good for the greatest number’. John Stuart Mill was a prolific writer of articles on many topics and also wrote several treatises. *Principles of Political Economy* applied his utilitarian ideas to economics. Dissatisfied with some aspects of Bentham’s theory, Mill introduced some new ideas into utilitarianism.

9.2 MILL’S CRITIQUE OF BENTHAM’S UTILITARIANISM

J S Mill’s essays on *Bentham* and *Coleridge*, written between 1838 and 1840, enabled him to critically dissect Benthamism. Mill’s transformative criticism of Benthamite utilitarianism was one of his greatest contributions to political thought. Mill retained the basic premise of Bentham’s Utilitarianism, but *distinguished* between higher and lower pleasures, and that greater human pleasure meant an increase *not* merely in the *quantity*, but also in the *quality* of goods enjoyed. Mill criticized and modified Bentham’s Utilitarianism by taking into account factors like moral motives, sociability, feeling of universal altruism, sympathy and a *new* concept of justice with the key idea of *impartiality*. He asserted that the *chief* deficiency of Benthamite ethics was the *neglect* of *individual* character, and hence stressed on the cultivation of feelings and imagination as part of good life. He insisted that human beings were capable of intellectual and moral pleasures, which were superior to the physical ones that they shared with animals. He succinctly summarized the difference in his famous and oft-quoted statement: “It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied, it is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool or the pig is of a different opinion it is because they only know their own side of the question. The other party in comparison knows both sides”.

In 1826, Mill experienced a *mental* crisis when he lost all his capacity for joy in life. He recovered by discovering the romantic poetry of *Coleridge* and *Wordsworth*. He also realized the incompleteness of his education, namely the lack of the emotional side of life. In his re-examination of Benthamite philosophy, he attributed its one-sidedness to Bentham’s lack of experience, imagination and emotions. He made use of Coleridge’s poems to broaden Bentham’s utilitarianism, and made room for emotional, aesthetic and spiritual dimensions. However, he never wavered from the fundamentals of Benthamism, though the major difference between them was that Bentham followed a more simplistic picturization of the human nature of the *French Utilitarians*, whereas Mill followed the more sophisticated Utilitarianism of *Hume*. The distinctive characteristic of Mill’s utilitarianism was that he tried to express a conception of moral character consonant with his own personal idealism.

Mill used the principle of utility, which he regarded as the “ultimate appeal on all ethical questions” to support his principle of *liberty*. But, it was utilitarianism

based on the permanent interests of the individual as a progressive being. He made a distinction between toleration and suppression of offensive practices. Mill observed that in case of offences against public decency, the majority sentiment would prevail. Beyond these, minorities must be granted the freedom of thought and expression, and the right to live as they pleased. Mill also tried to reconcile the interests of the individual and society. He spoke of *nobility* of character, a trait that was closely related to altruism, meaning that people did what was good for society, rather than for themselves. The pleasures they derived from doing good for society might outweigh the ones that aimed at self-indulgence, contributing to their happiness. Mill saw social feelings and conscience, as part of the psychological attributes of a person. He characterized society as being natural and habitual, for the individual was a social person. To be less than social was inconceivable. Mill emphasised that the more these social feelings were heightened, private good and public good coincided.

Mill made happiness and the dignity of man the chief end of life, and *not* the principle of *pleasure*. He defined happiness to mean perfection of human nature, cultivation of moral virtues and high aspirations. Happiness also referred to total control over one's appetites and desires, and recognition of individual and collective interests. According to him, poetry, drama, music, painting were essential ingredients, both for human happiness and formation of character. These were instruments of promoting human culture, and thus the state needed to develop these for the betterment of society. Mill also stated that pleasures could *not* be measured objectively. He described the state as an instrument that would bring about transformation of the human being. The state played a crucial role in shaping the ends of an individual through education, and the state could facilitate the self-realization of individuals, thereby promoting development of society.

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. What do you understand by 'utilitarianism'?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

2. Explain Mill's critique of Bentham's principle of utilitarianism.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

9.3 MILL'S VIEWS ON 'UTILITARIANISM'

J S Mill's famous pamphlet *Utilitarianism* (1863) endorsed the Benthamite principle of the greatest happiness of the greatest number, yet made a significant departure from the Benthamite assumption by arguing that this principle could *only* be defended if a distinction was made between *happiness and pleasure*. Happiness, for Mill, was the ability of the individual to discover his innate powers and develop these while exercising his human abilities of autonomous thought and action. In other words, happiness meant *liberty and individuality*. Liberty was regarded as a fundamental prerequisite for leading a good, worthy and dignified life. The contention of the essay *On Liberty* is that happiness so conceived is best achieved in a free society governed by the principle of liberty.

Mill pointed out that every human action had *three* aspects: (a) the *moral aspect* of right and wrong, (b) the *aesthetic aspect* (or its beauty); and (c) the *sympathetic aspect* (or its goodness). The first principle instructed one to approve or disapprove, the second taught one to admire or despise, and the third enabled one to love, pity or dislike. He regarded individual self-development and diversity as the ultimate ends, important components of human happiness and the principal ingredients of individual and social progress. Mill put forward the criteria of *utility* or, the *greatest happiness* principle as the basis of morality. That action is moral which increases pleasure and reduces pain. In defending utilitarianism, as mentioned earlier, Mill made a significant change from Bentham's position and stated that pleasure is to be counted not only in terms of quantity, but also in terms of *quality*. According to Mill, a qualitatively higher pleasure is to count for more than lower pleasures. Mill's utilitarianism differed from Bentham's by focussing on qualitative aspect of pleasures. According to Mill, in order to calculate the value of a pleasure, one has to factor in the nature of the activity from which that pleasure is being derived. Since the activity enters into the evaluation of the pleasure, utilitarianism is no longer about mental states, but about what we actually do.

Mill sought to defend the principle of greatest happiness of the greatest number by *distinguishing* happiness from pleasure. He also replaced the *quantitative* approach of Bentham by a *qualitative* one. Mill also convincingly argued for a *defence* of basic freedoms by *law*. According to him, the purpose of law was to maximize liberty, as it gave an opportunity for "self-realization". He made an important distinction between the public sphere regulated by *law*, and the private sphere regulated by *morality*. Mill saw the need for a liberal society as a basic precondition of a liberal state and government. He defended free speech and the right of individuality. Mill, unlike many contemporary liberals, championed *women's rights*, seeing sexual inequality as ethically and legally untenable. Mill updated Smith's ideas in his *Principles of Political Economy* (1848), in which he not only defended *laissez faire*, but also argued that a just and orderly economic development was possible if *trade unions* existed. The trade unions would restore a balance in the bargaining process between the capitalists and their employees.

His concern for *social justice* was reflected in his proposals for *redistribution* of wealth, mainly by *taxation*.

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

- Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.
ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. Explain Mill's principle of utility?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

9.4 THE REFORMULATION OF UTILITARIANISM

Mill carried forward the thinking of Jeremy Bentham in *Utilitarianism*, departing from Bentham in significant ways in an attempt to make utilitarianism more realistic and applicable to *real-world* political and legal issues and also traditions that embodied the historical experience of people. Mill's principle of utility is today embedded in most of what we do in science, business, and government. Utilitarianism represented the dream of making morals and politics *scientific*, with the morality of an action based on its consequences and the ability to predict them, rather than on motive or process. Mill acknowledged that the *strongest* criticism of utilitarianism was the *non-consequentialist* argument that morality is not based on consequences of actions, as utilitarians held, *but* is instead based on the foundational and universal concept of *justice*. Mill tried to explain the concept of justice in terms of utility. First, he argued that all moral elements in the notion of justice depend on social utility and that there are *two* such elements: punishment and the perceived violation of someone's rights. Punishment in turn derives from a combination of vengeance and social sympathy. Mill observed that social sympathy is equivalent to social utility and vengeance has no moral component. Mill stated that rights are claims one has on society to protect one, and the only reason society should protect one is because of social utility. Thus, both elements of justice, punishment and rights, are based on utility.

Mill's second argument was that if justice were foundational or fundamental, then justice would not be as debatable and puzzling as it is. The evidence for this are the disputes in the notion of justice, when examining theories of *punishment*, *fair distribution of wealth*, and *fair taxation*. Mill argued that these disputes can only be resolved by appealing to utility. Mill concludes that justice is a genuine concept, but we must see it as based on *utility*. Mill was convinced that a good society was one which consisted of happy people, and happiness came out of self-reliance, rationality, tolerance, wide-ranging interests and a compassionate

temper. For Mill, “coercion is logically at odds with the creation of such a character”. Self-development and moral progress were instrumental to such a good life, leading to the establishment of a meaningful life of the individual. This was only possible where coercion, in the name of either class or gender was eliminated.

Mill, the rationalist and the utilitarian, was also the philosopher of *human liberation*, individuality, equality and fulfilment. Mill *accepted* the Industrial Revolution, for it produced a class of energetic and acquisitive entrepreneurs with the sole aim of the profit motive and the accumulation of money. He feared mass democracy because of its collective mediocrity, which would destroy higher civilization. Mill was fearful of mass conformity and the effect it would have on individual freedom. He favoured a society based on *just meritocracy*. He was *not* appreciative of the destruction caused by the *French Revolution*, though he was happy about the decline of the monarchy and nobility. Mill was also happy at the reduction of the influence and role of the *Church*. He assigned an important role to the intellectual elite in shaping and making the attitudes and beliefs in a society, particularly in times of transition. He also insisted on the need to correlate political institutions with society. He was a fervent liberal political reformer, and in *The Subjection of Women* he advocated equality for women. According to Mill, the ‘Principle of Utility’ is the principle that happiness is the only thing desirable as an end.

9.5 CONNECTION BETWEEN UTILITY, JUSTICE AND RIGHTS

Mill observes that throughout history, one of the major barriers to the acceptance of utility has been that it does *not* allow for a *theory of justice*. Mill tries to address this challenge by determining whether the justice or injustice of an action is something *intrinsic* or *distinct* from questions of utility. Mill begins by trying to pin down the meaning of justice, by coming up with a list of those things that are commonly classified as just or unjust.

- First, it is considered unjust to deprive someone of his legal rights. However, this concept has *exceptions*. For example, a person may have legal rights, his rights may be the provision of a bad law. While people vary on whether bad laws can be justly disobeyed, all people agree that laws can be unjust. Therefore, law cannot be the ultimate standard of justice.
- A second form of injustice comes from depriving someone of something he has a moral right to possess.
- Third, it is considered just that a person receive what he *deserves*, and unjust that he obtain something that he doesn’t deserve; people are thought to deserve good things if they have done right, and evil things if they have done wrong.

- A fourth form of injustice is to violate an agreement with someone or disappoint expectations that one knowingly nurtured.
- Fifth, it is considered unjust to show favouritism and preference in inappropriate circumstances. However, it is *not* generally necessary to be *impartial*; for example, one doesn't have to be impartial in the selection of friends. The claim is rather that a person should only be influenced by those considerations that should apply in a given circumstance.
- Finally, the idea of equality is seen by many to be a component of justice; some people may have an exception for the sake of expediency, however.

Mill acknowledges that given so many different applications of the concept of justice, it is hard to find what links them all together, and on what concept the sentiment of justice is based. Nevertheless, he believes that people do see justice as a *unified* concept, and do feel a sentiment of justice regardless of whether they understand its foundation. Mill says that some help may come from looking at the *history of the word*. In most languages, the word's origin came from either *positive law* or *authoritative custom*. Thus, the most primitive element of justice is the idea of conformity to law. The Greeks and Romans realized that there could be bad laws, and thus justice came to be associated with only those laws that ought to exist, including those that should exist but do not.

Mill also recognizes, however, that the idea of justice is often applied to areas about which we would *not* want legislation.—The limitation on the scope of the state's right to punish in particular cases has to do with practical concerns about extending the state's power and not with a sense that the person should not be punished. Mill observes that something is considered wrong only when it is thought that the person should be punished either by law, opinion, or one's own conscience. Thus, moral obligation in general comes from the idea of duty, the idea that a person may rightly be compelled to do something. He argues that this concept of deserving or not deserving punishment is the essence of moral thinking in general. Mill has already explicitly identified the *Principle of Utility* with the *Greatest Happiness Principle*. It is natural to suppose that here Mill identifies both of these with the doctrine that actions are right or wrong in proportion as they tend to promote happiness or the reverse, and this in turn with what he calls 'theory of morality.'

Mill argues that justice can be distinguished from other forms of morality by looking at the difference between *perfect* and *imperfect* obligations. Imperfect obligations are those that no one person has the right to require of another, it involves the idea of a personal right. In cases of justice, the person who has been wronged has had his or her moral right encroached upon; it is thus his or her moral right to seek compensation. Mill responds to the claim that utilitarianism is *opposed* to justice. From Mill's perspective, justice is not an abstract concept so much as it is a sentiment about morality that many people share. In defining justice Mill looks to what other people mean by the term. He says that "justice exists because people believe it exists, and it means what they believe it to mean."

Starting from the popular conception of justice, Mill theorizes about what links a diverse set of ideas about justice. He argues that they are united by the concept of *rights*. This notion of rights, he introduces in his claims about perfect and imperfect obligations. For Mill, a right means that a person has a valid claim that society has to protect him against any violation. Many utilitarians dismiss the idea of rights as nonsense, and many debates on utilitarianism centre around the question regarding the existence of rights. Mill has a different perspective on this issue and he defends rights under a utilitarian framework.

Finally, the only objection that Mill took seriously was that justice, instead of utility is the foundation of morality. Mill's response was first to link justice with rights—an injustice is done when someone's rights are violated—and then to assert that rights are to be defended because of their utility. A society in which individuals are certain of enjoying their rights is the one, which according to Mill, is able to progress. Thus, rights do not replace the concept of utility, rather the existence of rights is a necessary condition for the realisation of utilitarian goals. For Mill, utility was the justification for rights.

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. Explain the concepts of justice and rights in relation to the principle of utility.

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

9.6 LIBERTY, DEMOCRACY AND UTILITARIANISM

Bentham stipulated happiness, and not liberty, as the end of the state. Bentham was categorical that a government and a state had to be judged by their usefulness to the individual. The task of a sovereign was to harmonize different individual interests and promote social cooperation through legislation in the form of punishment, rewards, encouragement and incentives. Bentham defined liberty as absence of restraints and coercion. Fundamental to his concept of liberty was the idea of security linking his idea of civil and political liberty. A legislator established a framework of security through law, within which the individual enjoyed liberty. At the level of constitutional law, a legislator guaranteed against misrule, abuse and arbitrary exercise of power. Law, according to Bentham, had to be codified, simple, systematic and logical, based on the principle of the 'greatest happiness of the greatest number'.

Mill made certain modifications to the existing theory of utilitarianism, so that it would become consistent with his ideas of liberty and democracy. Mill's writings on liberty and democracy raise questions about the link between these two concepts and the idea of utility. While examining this, we must remember that Mill never gave up his self characterization as a utilitarian. For example, when he spoke about rights, he included rights under the concept of utility, defining rights as nothing else but some extremely important utilities. Mill also dealt with the important question as to why would individuals be interested in the happiness of others? Mill answered in terms of the 'social feelings of mankind; the desire to be in unity with our fellow creatures, which was a powerful principle of human nature.' Mill claimed that the social state is so natural and so habitual to man, that a human being's tendency of taking an interest in others' happiness is not surprising at all.

By making liberty the chief aim and objective of the state, he established the limits of legitimate interference by society and the state in areas that strictly and exclusively belonged to the individual. The early utilitarians in general and Bentham in particular, were concerned with the ascendancy of political democracy as a complement to the Industrial Revolution. The Reform Bill of 1832 was seen as securing a good government. Mill perceived the dangers inherent in such an extension: the tyranny of opinion and prejudices, the will of the majority overriding individuality and minority perceptions. He was no longer concerned about the suppression that authoritarianism resorted to. Instead, it was the preservation of individual and minority rights against the democratic state and public opinion. He could foresee the dangers inherent in *laissez faire* commercialism. It was not just the freedom to do as one pleased or willed, but freedom of thought, to think differently. In spite of his passionate advocacy of individuality and liberty for all, Mill remained intellectually an elitist.

Mill visualized the state as a moral institution concerned with the promotion of virtue and excellence in the individual citizen. He felt that a conception of good life was more important than a life devoted to the pursuit of pleasure. He pleaded for the removal of obstacles in the way of the individual's self-development that made life less mean and less intolerable for the masses. He, however, continued to see the state as a product of wills, though not of interests, and contended that to ignore the state as constituted by human wills was fallacious.

Mill, like *Coleridge* and *Burke*, regarded cultivation of culture as social and emphasized the need for institutions that would conform and constitute the individual's personal needs. Mill was essentially a critic of the complacency and conventions of Victorian English society, as evident from his three main tracts, *On Liberty*, *Representative Government*, and *The Subjection of Women*. Since an individual did not develop in isolation, Mill argued that for the flowering of a vibrant culture, healthy discourse, diversity and a concern for public affairs, liberty of expression assumed special significance. Mill rejected the natural distinction between men and women and dismissed women's nature as an

artificial thing, a product of what he described as “forced repression in some directions, unnatural stimulations in others”. He perceived the subjection of women as a conspiracy hatched by men to keep them ignorant and subordinate.

Mill was also convinced that advancement of democracy would depend on the spread of *education* and *schooling*. Following Rousseau, he advocated participation in public affairs as a means of counterbalancing human selfishness. Mill believed that participation maximized responsibility. His entire focus was on enlarging participation and the individual’s freedom of choice. Participation was integral to *political education*. An educated citizenry was vital to the creation of a healthy political system. The achievement of higher politics required, among other things, opportunities for personal growth, which entailed bringing more and better schooling, more civic participation, more material benefits, and more happiness within the reach of more and more people. Throughout his work, we can see him applying the standard of utility. For instance, one consideration for giving equality to women was that it would increase their happiness, and the principle of liberty was defended on the grounds of its social utility or social usefulness. Mill stated that social progress depended on individual liberty. A modified liberal democracy was characterized as the best form of government because of its usefulness in improving the quality of its citizens. According to Mill, political development, personal growth, and an increase in the total sum of human happiness were to move forward together.

Mill in his work *Utilitarianism* sought to answer all the objections that had been raised against this philosophy. By making liberty the chief aim and objective of the state, he established the limits of legitimate interference by society and the state in areas that strictly and exclusively belonged to the individual. Mill distinguished between the public sphere of law and the private sphere of morality, and the need to guarantee by law, basic human freedoms. He also established the relationship between law and liberty, whereby law as a system maximized liberty, namely self-development. He clearly saw the need to establish a large ambit of freedom, while emphasizing some restraints, both as a condition of social life, and for protecting freedom itself. He was not indifferent to conduct that fell short of accepted standards of private morality. He also advocated proportional representation as a device to protect the rights of the minorities, giving them an opportunity to share power.

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your progress with the model answer given at the end of the unit.

1. Explain if there is a link between liberty, democracy and utility.

.....
.....
.....

.....
.....
.....

9.7 LET US SUM UP

To sum up, it may be stated that the principle of utility refers to the principle that happiness is the only thing desirable as an end. J S Mill championed the right to express one's opinion, it being immaterial whether one was right or wrong. The important thing was free expression and articulation of contesting opinions. Mill humanized and broadened the ambit of liberalism as well as utilitarianism, and emphasised that a liberal state had the duty to empower the disadvantaged and the dispossessed. He also insisted that the state had to grant the means of self-protection to its people. Towards this end, he advocated women's enfranchisement, quality elementary education for the masses and land reforms for agricultural labourers. Mill applied liberal principles not only in the public sphere but also in the private realm, and was the only philosopher to emphasize the importance of fairness, equality and independence within the *family* as well as within the state. Mill's efforts to revise and modify classical Utilitarianism by emphasizing the social aspect of the individual, the need to assess happiness both quantitatively and qualitatively, stating that liberty and not happiness was the chief end of the state, and defining happiness to include liberty, individuality, self-development and self-control, paved the way for many of the changes that were initiated within English political thought and practice. Mill's most important concern was the preservation of liberty within a democratic society as an intrinsic good in itself, and looked down on majority tyranny and mass mediocrity as potent threats to individuality and liberty. Mill believed that utilitarian goals could be achieved only with the state developing a good society, and facilitating promotion of liberal values.

9.8 REFERENCES

- Barry, N.P. (1995). *Introduction to Modern Political Theory*. London: Macmillan.
- Collini, Stefan (ed.). (1989). *On Liberty and Other Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cowling, M. (1963). *Mill and Liberalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Donner, Wendy. (1991). *The Liberal Self: John Stuart Mill's Moral and Political Philosophy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Germino, D. (1972). *Modern Western Political Thought: Machiavelli to Marx*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Gettel, R.G. (1924). *History of Political Thought*. New York: Novell & Co.
- Gray, J. (1983). *Mill on Liberty: A Defence*. London: Routledge.
- Gray, J. (1986). *Liberalism*. London: Open University Press.
- Jha, Shefali. (2018). *Western Political Thought*. Chennai: Pearson India Education Services Pvt. Ltd
- McCloskey, H.J. (1971): *John Stuart Mill: A Critical Study*. London: Macmillan.
- Mukherjee, S. and Ramawsamy.S. (2011). *A History of Political Thought*. New Delh: PHI Learning Pvt. Ltd.
- Nagel, Thomas. (1970). *The Possibility of Altruism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Skorupski, John (ed.). (1998). *The Cambridge Companion to Mill*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Thompson, Dennis F. (1976). *John Stuart Mill and Representative Government*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

9.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress Exercise 1

1. Your answer should highlight following the points:
 - Utilitarianism as seeking the ‘greatest good for the greatest number’
 - Evaluating usefulness of the alternatives to the good of society
2. Your answer should highlight following points
 - Mill distinguished between higher and lower pleasures
 - Pleasure meant an increase not merely in the quantity but also in the quality of goods enjoyed
 - Intellectual and moral pleasures

Check Your Progress Exercise 2

1. Your answer should highlight the following points:
 - Happiness to mean perfection of human nature
 - Replaced the *quantitative* approach of Bentham by a *qualitative* one
 - Mill tried to explain the concept of justice in terms of utility

Check Your Progress Exercise 3

1. Your answer should highlight the following points:
 - List of things classified as just
 - Moral obligation and moral thinking
 - Diverse ideas about justice are united by concept of rights

Check Your Progress Exercise 4

1. Your answer should highlight the following points:
 - Liberty as the chief aim and objective of the state
 - Reasons for individuals being interested in the happiness of others
 - State as a moral institution

