

# Assessing John Stuart Mill's Principle of Utility: Barrier or Bridge to Equality?

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.8090163>

Received: 12 September 2024; Accepted: 18 September 2024; Published: 10 October 2024

## ABSTRACT

Amidst the historical and ongoing struggle for equality, this article explores the intricate relationship between the principle of utility and equality, focusing on John Stuart Mill's views. It critically evaluates whether Mill's version of utilitarianism serves as a barrier or a bridge to achieving equality, particularly within the context of movements like the United Nations' 2030 Agenda, which addresses social, political, and economic inequalities. The methodology involves a comprehensive critical analysis of Mill's utilitarianism alongside other theoretical perspectives, including Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism and contemporary critiques. The analysis is structured around three key areas: social, political, and economic contexts. In the social domain, Mill's utilitarianism supports substantive equality by advocating for universal rights and access to essential resources such as education. Politically, however, utilitarian principles are critiqued for potentially justifying inequalities and infringing upon individual rights. Economically, utilitarianism's emphasis on maximizing overall happiness suggests that resource allocation should consider marginal utility to promote equitable outcomes. The findings indicate that while Mill's utilitarianism has the potential to foster equality in specific areas, its application is complex and context dependent. The article concludes that although Mill's nuanced approach to utilitarianism can promote equality, it also possesses inherent limitations, necessitating careful application to avoid exacerbating inequalities and to ensure that principles of justice and individual rights are upheld.

**Keywords:** Utilitarianism, Ethics, Equality, John Stuart Mill, Political Philosophy

## INTRODUCTION

Discussions of equality inevitably confront the issue of discrimination, as equality inherently involves addressing inequalities. Engaging with discrimination can be challenging due to its sensitive nature and the strong emotions it provokes, while also striving for objectivity (Karst, 1982). Humanity has pursued equality for centuries, with historical records documenting this ongoing struggle. Major political movements like the abolitionist movement, women's suffrage, civil rights, labor, disability rights, feminist, Indigenous rights, and anti-apartheid movements have sought to reform society toward fairness, inclusivity, and acceptance.

The United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its motto "leave no one behind," adopts a comprehensive approach to inequality, addressing factors such as gender, age, origin, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, class, and religion. While inequality between countries has decreased, the UN emphasizes that inequality within countries remains a significant concern, particularly due to its impact on individuals (United Nations, n.d.). Striving for a society that treats all its members equally may seem utopian. However, can continuous efforts reduce the prevalence of inequality? And who bears responsibility for achieving this equality—politicians, scholars, law enforcers, media, or ordinary citizens?

Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* (1949) captures a powerful sense of communal responsibility with the assertion, "... in truth, we are each responsible to all for all; it's only that men don't know this. If they knew it, the world would be a paradise at once." This statement challenges the reader, raising the question of individual responsibility within society. Similarly, British philosopher John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) argues that if an

individual's actions harm others, society has the right to intervene. Mill outlines four criteria for responsible membership in a community: providing evidence in a court of justice, contributing equitably to collective defense, fulfilling shared social responsibilities, and engaging in acts of personal goodwill (Struhl, 1976). But on what moral basis do Dostoevsky and Mill ground their assertions of social responsibility?

This paper will focus on Mill's perspective. In each section, we will relate the discussion to Mill's principle of utility, as his writings are foundational to understanding the relationship between utilitarianism and equality. Mill's contributions in *On Liberty* and *The Subjection of Women* are particularly relevant to this analysis. Throughout this paper, "she" will be used as a gender-neutral pronoun to maintain consistency and inclusivity.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Ethics and Social Judgments

The maxim "no one is self-sufficient" encapsulates the idea that individuals rely on one another to navigate societal existence. Participation in communal life inherently involves making judgments that affect both the individual and the wider society. This section delves into the frameworks guiding such judgments, particularly within ethical considerations in both individual and collective settings.

When individuals reflect on their past actions with regret, two simultaneous thoughts emerge: the factual recount of what happened and the normative reflection of what should have happened. This latter reflection falls within the realm of normative ethics, where ethical theory begins. Normative ethics establishes the rules for evaluating actions based on what ought to have occurred (Forcehimes, 2017). However, regret alone is not always a reliable measure for moral action. Ethical dilemmas can present scenarios where, even when making the "right" choice, regret may persist due to competing moral desires (Kaptein & Wempe, 2011).

In communal contexts, ethical dilemmas grow even more complex, as they often involve groups with divergent belief systems. Moral standards vary significantly across cultures, raising the question of whether universal ethical norms can exist (Rachels, 1997). For example, while a Hindu bride avoids wearing white during her marriage ceremony, a Christian bride follows a tradition of wearing white. Similarly, cultural practices such as the Buddhist preference for vegetarianism and the Muslim practice of *Qurban* highlight how ethical norms can differ profoundly across societies. These examples demonstrate the challenge of finding shared ethical foundations in a diverse world.

David Hume's perspective provides insight into this complexity, suggesting that morality is rooted in human sentiment and is often shaped by collective consent. The social utility of the group, Hume contends, frequently dictates moral standards. Since morality is contingent upon societal consent, humans typically ascribe objective values to morally assess actions. Those actions that deviate from established moral guidelines are often deemed as beyond the bounds of human nature (Rayner, 2005). Consequently, scholars have long engaged in studying and analyzing methodologies for making sound moral judgments. Within the expansive domain of philosophy, ethics or moral philosophy is a distinct body of inquiry, which branches into four primary categories: normative, descriptive, meta-ethical, and applied ethics (Dennis, 2020). The following is a brief explanation of each category.

Normative ethics concentrates on the criteria necessary for an action to be deemed morally acceptable or unacceptable. Its central concern is the establishment and validation of fundamental moral principles (Britannica, 2023). Unlike descriptive ethics, normative ethics does not describe what has happened but rather explores what *should* have occurred. It is also distinct from behavioral ethics, which seeks to explain why individuals act as they do, and from legal rules, which determine permissibility based solely on adherence to law (Gustafson, 2021). Normative ethics addresses the "what ought to happen" dimension, emphasizing that ethical inquiry is primarily concerned with what ought to be, or what is right, good, or one's duty (Sidgwick, 2000, p. 59). Meta-ethics, by contrast, delves into the underlying reasons why an action is considered ethical or unethical. It addresses the origins of ethical reasoning, the foundation upon which moral judgments are built, the justification for engaging in moral discourse, and the appropriate context for such discussions. Meta-ethics ultimately seeks to provide the philosophical justifications for moral decisions (Allan, n.d.).

Descriptive ethics is concerned with the objective analysis of moral principles, focusing on how these principles are applied in real-world scenarios. It encompasses the study of moral beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors, offering an empirical perspective on how individuals and societies behave, rather than prescribing how they *should* behave (Khatibi & Khormaei, 2016). In essence, it explains the “what” and “how” of human conduct (Valdez-Martinez et al., 2006). Lastly, applied ethics engages with practical issues and strives to resolve real-world moral dilemmas. It cannot operate in isolation, as it is inherently interconnected with normative ethics. Applied ethics focuses on the practical application of moral principles, often within specific fields such as education, healthcare, or law. Its significance lies in its ability to foster moral awareness and to promote ethical behavior in professional and personal contexts (Kuzior, 2021).

Among the various ethical frameworks, utilitarianism is regarded as one of the most significant in the tradition of normative ethics. Its primary concern is determining the moral value of actions based on their outcomes, specifically the balance between pleasure and pain. In the following sections, utilitarianism’s intersection with the concept of equality will be examined, particularly in the social, political, and economic realms.

### Equality in Social, Political, and Economic Contexts

Equality has traditionally been approached through the process of categorization, where distinctions between individuals are generalized to maintain social order. This process serves several functions. First, it enables the identification of issues that require equal treatment by standardizing solutions. Second, it helps assimilate individuals into social roles, ensuring they conform to societal expectations. Third, it facilitates mutual understanding within groups, acting as a guide for expected behaviors. Fourth, these classifications are crucial for maintaining effective communication, as shared norms, morals, and rituals create a common framework. Lastly, categorization shapes personal interests and concerns, as it molds how individuals perceive their roles in society (Schutz, 1964). For example, Sheila, in her role as a mother, may advocate for free education for all, but as a politician or businessperson, her views on the same issue might differ. The issue remains constant, but the perspective shifts according to social role.

However, while categorization aids social function, it also perpetuates inequality. Inequality manifests in the privileges of certain groups while systematically depriving others of equal access to opportunities (Horton & Patapan, 2004). This inequality is evident across various domains, including politics, the economy, education, and employment. Although the nature of inequality has evolved over time—from issues of land ownership and social class to more complex forms resulting from globalization and economic shifts—the impact on society remains significant. Inequality continues to affect individuals, communities, and nations, contravening the principles of equity and social justice, which have become central tenets of modern democratic societies (Koh, 2020).

John Stuart Mill, a strong advocate for equality, presents a nuanced perspective on this issue. In *The Subjection of Women* (1869), Mill argues for “perfect equality” between men and women, asserting that no man should have dominance, nor should any woman be relegated to a subordinate position. For Mill, equality is a fundamental principle necessary for the advancement of humankind, much like justice and democracy are essential to societal progress (Morales, 1996). Despite Mill’s passionate arguments for equality, he also acknowledges that inequality is sometimes necessary. In *Principles of Political Economy* (1848), he states that “... inequality of remuneration is necessary to produce equality of attractiveness.” To support his statement, he then says, “We trust our health to the physician, our fortune and sometimes our life and reputation to the lawyer and attorney. Such confidence could not safely be reposed in people of a very mean or low condition. Their reward must be such, therefore, as may give them that rank in society which so important trust requires.” (Mill, 1884, pp. 477-478). This raises complex questions: Under what circumstances can unequal treatment be justified? How does this align with Mill’s broader vision of equality?

Receiving an appropriate wage for the responsibilities of one’s work is deemed justifiable. The justification for unequal wages among workers is similarly defensible because not all individuals perform the same volume of work or bear the same level of accountability. Therefore, the question arises: can unequal treatment be considered acceptable under certain contextual shifts? If so, which form of equality deserves priority? (Hansson, 2022). To determine which form of equality society should prioritize, there must first be a consensus that one form holds

greater significance than others. As outlined in the Introduction, history has witnessed countless movements and protests globally aimed at establishing, defending, and promoting equality.

While equality is often held in high regard, there is ongoing debate over why it should be prioritized and what exactly should be equalized. Individuals pursue equality across a wide spectrum: freedom, entitlements, political influence, abilities or competencies, social standing, access to resources, opportunities, the distribution of essential goods, distribution of wealth, outcomes or achievements, recognition, consideration, and ultimately, the equal valuation of individual interests. Despite the varying motivations behind these pursuits, the principle of impartial treatment remains widely accepted, stemming from the belief that all individuals are fundamentally equal in key respects, particularly in terms of moral worth or dignity (Rashbroke, 2013, pp. 79-80).

In reference to Mill's conception of perfect equality, it becomes clear that he perceives no essential difference between men and women; both should be afforded equal opportunities, given their comparable intellectual capacities. Consequently, this article focuses on equality in the realms of social, political, and economic opportunities. However, the central challenge in ensuring equal opportunity lies in the fact that such opportunities do not arise naturally but are crafted by certain individuals. They exist because individuals have invested their efforts to create them. This raises a critical question: why should those who have worked to create opportunities be obligated to extend them to others? (Narveson, 2002). Must individuals be held accountable for the actions of everyone in society? This harkens back to the fundamental question posed in the Introduction: on what moral grounds can one justify holding individuals responsible for the well-being of others in their community? Can utilitarianism serve as a safeguard for equality, or does it ultimately undermine it?

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper employs a document analysis approach to assess whether John Stuart Mill's version of utilitarianism promotes or hinders equality. The primary data sources include Mill's works that detail his utilitarian principles, supplemented by writings from other relevant scholars such as Jeremy Bentham. These documents are analyzed using content analysis, specifically following Krippendorff's (2019) critical examination framework. The analysis will explore Mill's utilitarianism and its relationship to equality from social, political, and economic perspectives.

## DISCUSSION

### Utilitarianism: Hinders or Promoters of Equality?

*"Men serve the interest of no creature except himself."* (Orwell, 2003).

We believe the above phrase is self-explanatory and Thomas Hobbes' statement, *that human nature is inherently selfish and driven by a desire for power* places mankind in an unpleasant position especially to practice utilitarian values. Four core values act as a driving mechanism to differentiate moral theories from utilitarianism. They are consequentialism which focuses on good outcomes, welfarism that prioritizes the well-being of people, impartiality that holds highly on inclusivity when determining the good of action, and lastly 'aggregationism' which emphasizes considering all parts of well-being to identify the rightful actions (MacAskill, Meissner & Chappell, 2022). Each section has its root of foundation and justifying reason to consider as a practical concept to judge and identify rightful actions.

Despite carrying several definitions, utilitarianism is a concept that assesses the result of actions using certain units as judgment tools (*acts, rules, practices, attitudes or institutions*) to identify whether the actions are good or bad (Miller & Williams, 1982) and in most of the scenarios the opinions of the majority, rules. Additionally, one common assumption that all utilitarians share is the existence of intrinsic goods that could serve as an evaluator of decisions (Kaptein & Wempe, 2011).

The argument against utilitarians' maximization of happiness is, that if maximization is the criterion, then, any act that maximizes happiness/goodness is permitted under the moral umbrella. Therefore, institutions are allowed to conduct any action or sanction any policies that they believe to maximize the good and utilitarians have no

moral ground to object to the actions (Crossley, 1990).

Jeremy Bentham (1748 -1832) was the first utilitarian who established a methodical approach to the theory of utilitarianism but the central concept stimulating the theory took place even before Bentham. The concept that stimulates the theory is a general understanding that morally acceptable actions will not bring unhappiness but instead, they amplify happiness or ‘utility’ (Driver, 2014).

If one is to practice Bentham’s utilitarianism, then the following would be the possible outcome of the ways a state function.

- i. An action will be considered as a crime if it does not promote the greatest happiness for the majority.
- ii. The extent of punishment will also be determined by measuring happiness.
- iii. An act that causes unhappiness needs to be balanced by another act of unhappiness.
- iv. The rights of an individual depend on felicity calculus instead of considering the rights as an end in itself (Conklin, 1976).

It does not matter which way we try to understand Bentham’s utilitarianism, we would say the possible conclusion that can be drawn from his writing is that the majority wins over the minority. However, is it right to protect the happiness of the majority if it brings unhappiness to the minority? The action of emphasizing the greatest happiness for the greatest number might pave the path to discrimination.

The difference between Mill and Bentham is, in Mill’s point of view, substantive moral values are the gist of utilitarian ethics but for Bentham, utilitarian values are extended only to accommodate pleasure, and, in his opinion, pleasure only brings goodness when it is viewed without its consequences (Morales, 1996, p. 55).

In John Stuart Mill’s point of view, the term utility is often misunderstood, and he expresses his dissatisfaction with using the term falsely. He states utility is “... ignorantly misapplied solely in disparagement, but occasionally in compliment; as though it implied superiority to frivolity and the mere pleasures of the moment” (Mill, 1879, p. 9). In his *Utilitarianism*, he emphasizes that it is possible to classify pleasures and identify the most qualified pleasure among them. Qualified pleasures according to him are the pleasures that satisfy humans’ higher faculties, and he is confident that men will never choose a pleasure that will produce feelings of *a lower grade of existence*. We would say Mill is the only utilitarian who is capable of understanding utility almost perfectly because he brought the definition beyond the quantification of happiness; he gives importance to answering what type of happiness it is; he understood the subjectivity of happiness and wisely articulated that not all happiness is the same.

Not only that, but Mill’s utilitarianism also is favorable to equality. He states “. . . *utilitarian standard of what is right in conduct, is not the agent’s happiness, but that of all concerned*” (Mill, 1879, p.21). To what extent utilitarian principles can guide decisions that result in inclusivity? Can inclusivity which contributes to equality be seen in social, political, and economic contexts if utility or utilitarianism is practiced?

The following section will unveil the relationship between the principle of utility and equality in social, political, and economic contexts. Social context includes culture, norms, rights, and individualistic aspects; political aspect includes the role of government, policymaking, distribution of power, law, and legislation; economic covers property, wealth, resources and income distribution.

## A. Social

Mill places a significant appreciation of substantive equality in his *Utilitarianism*. To him, the principle of the greatest happiness includes substantive equality as a moral criterion and a civilized society is inclusive of social equality and acceptance of interest (Varouxakis & Philp, 2019, p. 208 & 212). Mill’s utilitarianism has opposing values to John Rawls’s, yet it compliments Rawls’s criticism of utilitarianism. In this case, utilitarianism is based on the principle of individualism and subjectivism. While protecting individualism, one would be able to

secure collective good because individual welfare is not just gathering material luxury, but it is also about having a good relationship, acquiring knowledge, feeling of belonging and other aspects of non-material values (Page, 1979). For example, Mill would argue that education should be accessible to all regardless of social status, ethnicity, gender, or race. Education is not a material luxury, yet providing education to all will promote the betterment of society by securing qualified leaders who will articulate impactful policies. So, access to education shall be considered as a right.

The allocation of rights may vary depending on the issue being discussed. Quoting Mill again, certain forms of inequality are accepted if they promote better utility. Sometimes additional rights are allocated to minorities, which results in overall well-being. Policies, Mill would agree to instate. In other words, affirmative action policies are in favor of greater societal utility (Harel & Segal, 2014). Rawls (1997) shares a similar perspective regarding affirmative policies. In his *The Basic Liberties and Their Priority*, he emphasizes protecting the basic liberties for all members of society and if the situation requires the society to articulate policies that help the one in need, then it should be welcomed as it can safeguard the society from extreme inequalities in money and power. On the other hand, if someone desires to have more, then having more of that person should in some ways improve the lives of others, especially those at a disadvantage. Rawls is firmly against utilitarianism because he believes that utilitarianism does not provide a sufficient safeguard against justice. After all, it fails to uphold the basic rights and interests of individuals (Mathis, 2009).

However, Mill suggests that society is bound to provide and secure at least a certain extent of fundamentals of welfare, including freedom, protection, sustenance, and education. He believes that these are the inherent rights of members of society and rights are necessities for the betterment of society. The rights of individuals in a society are similar to the nutrients that the body receives. They both need to be provided and secured by the responsible party, and they are necessary for the overall goodness (Edwards, 1986).

On the other hand, Woodard (2019) acknowledges the setbacks of utilitarianism, and he writes extensively on six objections against utilitarianism in his *Taking Utilitarianism Seriously*. They are, first, utilitarianism is demanding as it requires individuals to consider everyone. Next, it overlooks other significant values such as justice, fairness, and individual rights over general enjoyment. Not only that, but it is also overly impartial by not considering an individual's natural sympathies or interpersonal ties. The ideas that utilitarians promote are harder to practice as they require calculating total happiness which is subjective. Fifth, the concept places a higher value on total satisfaction than individual rights or the allocation of resources, and lastly, utilitarianism is criticized for forcing society to place general interest over self-interest and compromises individual autonomy. He then concludes that *those objections cannot have shown that utilitarianism is a dead end. Why?*

A study on social utility and decision-making in the interpersonal sphere concludes that an individual's relationship with others tends to be more significant than her interest when the result between two members is not compared (Loewenstein, Thompson & Bazerman, 1989). For example, two friends, X and Y are buying dresses for prom night. X would want the best dress for Y but at the same time she would not want to buy a dress that would be less appealing than Y. An individual would wish the best for her friend, but she would equally want the best option for herself too. To sum up, decisions that are made to secure the best outcome for oneself are not a crime, but they should not be done by robbing another's rights or interests. Hence, in a social context, utility promotes equality by securing rights and individual interests. Even though sometimes it has the potential to sound utopic to practice, proper research to formulate appropriate policy will guide society to practice utilitarianism.

## B. Political

Mill's utilitarianism was mainly designed to accommodate legal and political changes as he highly valued law more than morality (Binder & Smith, 2000). He says in his *Utilitarianism* "whoever thinks that government is necessary, sees no injustice in as much inequality as is constituted by giving to the magistrate powers not granted to other people" (Mill, 1871, p. 69). Individuals accept inequality in exercising power if it helps to maintain social order. Therefore, equality in political dynamics is subjective and depends on the context that is being discussed. Every individual has the liberty to participate in politics. However, not everyone can be a politician who has the power to influence society.

There have been numerous discussions carried on regarding the stand of utilitarianism on punishing the innocents. Utilitarianism justifies the punishment of innocents under three circumstances. First, penalizing a person who has not committed a crime is acceptable if such action paves the way for a lesser crime. Second, if the total happiness produced through punishing the innocent is greater and third, penalizing the innocent is justified if it helps with the realization of the end (Rosen, 2005, p. 209). For example, a riot in a province is causing hundreds of casualties and property damage. And sentencing a non-guilty person to death will help to restore peace in the province. As a utilitarian, the judiciary of the affected province is allowed to punish one innocent person for the betterment of society. However, is it acceptable to punish someone who has not done wrong if it benefits the population? In this scenario, the principle of utility is immensely flawed because despite everything certain actions must not be executed (Quiambao, 2022).

A general understanding of justice is that justice demands the eradication of every morally *arbitrary inequality* (Miller & Dagger, 2006, p. 462). Arbitrary according to the Cambridge dictionary is a decision or choice that was made based on luck or chance and not organized or relied on rational justification. Thus, legislation should be designed in a manner where the existence of inequalities that have no reasoning or justification can be eradicated and replaced with policies that will advocate justice.

It is worth noting that Mill's articulation of the principle of utility is vague. His writing portrays that he is in a moral dilemma about making decisions based on maximization of utility, specifically in the context of policy making. On page 94 in *Utilitarianism*, he states that "*all persons are deemed to have a right to equality of treatment, except when some recognized social expediency requires the reverse.*" In other words, everyone is entitled to be treated equally only to the extent that better social benefits are available by performing some inequalities. However, there is no sufficient explanation of the extent of acceptable inequalities. The above statement implies that killing one person is acceptable for greater benefit but on the next page itself, Mill says, "Thus, to save a life, it may not only be allowable, but a duty, to steal, or take by force, the necessary food or medicine, or to kidnap, and compel to officiate, the only qualified medical practitioner" (Mill, 1871, p. 95). While mentioning killing a person is acceptable for greater benefit, he also states that disobeying rules for saving a person's life is acceptable. Furthermore, in *On Liberty*, Mill firmly makes his point to ensure that utility is seen as the uttermost appeal on every subject about ethics while also emphasizing that society needs to be protected from the *tyranny of the majority*. Isn't an act of sacrificing one person's interest in the name of maximization of utility also a form of tyranny of the majority?

To declare oneself a Democrat is to accept the foundational principles of democracy: respecting the dignity and worth of each individual and never considering anyone as lacking in worth or dignity. There should be no issue in protecting human rights and basic liberties that stem from the dignity and worth of an individual. Not even the greatest happiness of the greatest number, national interest, or common interest should be placed above human dignity and worth (Conklin, 1976). Thus, in a political context where policymaking, legislation and distribution of power are considered, the principle of utility is not in favor of equality.

### C. Economic

Bentham, says Kawsan (2023), sums up happiness and equality as, the closer the distribution of wealth among people is to being equal, the larger the overall happiness will be.

In 1991, John Broome said that the understanding of the term 'utility' in economic platforms has shifted from the potential benefit an object can deliver to the actual benefit an object delivers. He raises an interesting question regarding utility in economics. Is maximizing utility (utility here defined as 'good'), adequate to reach economic equality because an individual's interest may result in different outcomes than entirely maximizing the common good? Nevertheless, compared to the 1800s, the term 'utility' anchors various economic theories and scholars in the economic field elaborate values, human behavior, market equilibria and so on by addressing 'utility' (Moscati, 2020).

The three major concerns regarding the distribution of resources according to utilitarian values are inclusiveness, qualified aggregation, and egalitarian interpretation (Audi, 2007). These three concepts can be understood with the following scenarios. The scenarios are derived from Audi's (2007) extensive writing on Utilitarianism's role

as a distributive agent.

### I. Inclusiveness

Situation X: 10 apples are being distributed to 10 students.

Situation Y: 20 apples are being distributed to 5 students.

The utilitarian concept that places higher importance on inclusiveness would choose situation X over situation Y.

### II. Qualified Aggregation

Situation M: 10 apples equally distributed among 10 students.

Situation N: 10 apples equally distributed among 15 students.

The utilitarian concept that places higher importance on qualified aggregation would choose situation N as the benefit is shared among a greater number of students.

### III. Egalitarian

Situation A: 10 apples equally distributed among 10 students.

Situation B: 20 apples distributed unequally among 10 students.

The utilitarian concept would choose situation A over situation B as it secures equality in the distribution of apples.

Therefore, when it involves resource allocation, utilitarians pay more attention to the number of people being benefitted, the qualified aggregation and egalitarian values. Even so, while distributing resources, identifying the deserving group is equally important to ensure that the benefit is maximized.

One of the common issues in the current economic setting is identifying deserving groups to set benchmarks for a country's carbon emissions. Utilitarianism, according to the researchers, helps uphold equity, climate, and development. Several allocation scenarios are empirically analyzed to demonstrate how a utilitarian strategy that takes equity into account might result in more ambitious climate objectives while fostering development prospects in low-income nations. The arguments suggest that this strategy accords with the interests of both high-income and low-income nations, making it more politically possible than alternative distributive justice concepts like equal per capita emissions or historical accountability (Budolfson et al., 2021).

It is understood that total utility can never exist separately; it is always about the value of the marginal unit, which can vary according to the situation (Rothbard, 1956). Marginal utility put forth that the positive impact an individual can gain from having another unit of an existing item is inversely proportionate to the number of items she already has (Britannica, 2016). This theory is applicable, especially in allocating government subsidies. Because the effect of a rise in wealth is relative to the social position of the receiver (Kawsan, 2023). For instance, Person A owns an expensive car and uses it as her primary mode of travel whereas Person B does not own any vehicle, and her primary mode of transportation is either through walking or public transportation. When both receive bicycles as government aid, only Person B would appreciate it, whereas it makes little to no difference for Person A. In this scenario, the extent of happiness felt by Person B and Person A differs. In a capitalist society, the accumulation of wealth is unequal; thus, applying the values of marginal utility would assist in securing maximum benefit.

Mill's criticism of capitalist society is a reflection of the harsh realities of a world where people are often trapped in an unending chase for wealth and status. He describes this struggle as a constant "trampling, crushing, elbowing, and treading on each other's heels," highlighting the competitive nature of our social interactions.



However, Mill insists that such endeavors to accumulate wealth come at excessive costs for all involved. According to Mill, it would be more just if everyone had equal opportunities in their quest for riches. Nevertheless, he thinks that an even better scenario would exist when none is poor, and no one wants to get richer. In this way, there would be nobody living in constant fear that others who are always advancing will leave them behind. This would mean having a feeling of satisfaction and security without any fears or pressures regarding the rat race kind of life that can be seen today in capitalist societies (McCabe, 2015).

In a situation where not all can be protected, egalitarianism demands drawing of lots or other ways to justly distribute resources however, utilitarianism necessitates the right action by evaluating the choices according to their capability to maximize utility (Savulescu, Cameron & Wilkinson, 2020). Perhaps creating perfect equality in the economy is not possible and causes irrevocable damage to society; however, it is plausible to decrease the extent of inequality. To Bentham, redistribution of wealth is not the smartest choice to promote equality but creating security is (Kaswan, 2023). Meanwhile, substantial inequalities should only be accepted if it is required to promote production or to remunerate the most disadvantaged (Page, 1979).

## CONCLUSION

Parents, family members, ethnicity, race, native language, skin color, hair texture, facial features, and, in certain scenarios, religion are not individual choices. A person cannot select their biological parents, siblings, or other intrinsic aspects of their identity. Diversity exists not by choice, yet it plays a crucial role in fostering a sense of uniqueness within society. Individual needs may vary according to cultural backgrounds, political beliefs, and social statuses. Nevertheless, the principle of utility necessitates a degree of altruism to ensure that equality is upheld. Mill recognizes the interplay between altruism and self-interest, acknowledging that while some altruistic actions may arise from obligation, others, which exceed expectations, are commendable (Scarre, 2020, p. 182).

Utilitarianism fundamentally addresses what ethics ought to be. From this perspective, ethical guidance directs individuals to make judgments that maximize benefit for the greatest number. This study concludes that, in a social context, the principle of utility can effectively promote equality by considering communal well-being and cultural norms. However, in political contexts, the application becomes problematic due to the differing values at play. While the social dimension of utility focuses on the needs and perspectives of the broader community, the political dimension often reflects the interests of those in leadership positions. In the economic sphere, the principle of utility can enhance equality to some extent, yet it falls short of eliminating deeply entrenched inequalities, which often serve to maintain social order.

This article has not exhaustively explored the multifaceted aspects of equality. Waldron (1991) distinguishes between equality as a substantive value that promotes equitable treatment and as a formal principle that mandates equal treatment of all individuals. He argues that the latter merits more profound consideration than the former, which is more readily acknowledged in legal and political philosophy. Therefore, further research is essential to understand the diverse dynamics of equality in society and to investigate how the principle of utility can further establish values that enhance equality.

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