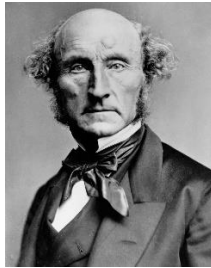


John Stuart Mill (1806-1873)



PYQs on Mill

1. Comment on: *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 (J S Mill). (2005, 200, 20)*
2. Comment on: *"The worth of a State... Is the worth of individuals composing it." (J. S. Mill)(2011,200,20)*
3. Comment on: *"All silencing of discussion is an assumption of infallibility." (J. S. Mill)(2014, 150,10)*
4. Comment on: *John Stuart Mill is a 'reluctant democrat'. - C. L. Wayper (2018, 150, 10)*
5. *Representative democracymeans the people as a body must be able to control the general direction of government policy .(J.S.Mill). Comment . (2020, 15 Marks)*

"If there is anyone, who is liberal, it is Mill."

Though John Locke is known as father of liberalism , yet, he has given the elaborate theory only on right to property. Hence he is called as the scholar of '**possessive individualism**.' It would be wrong to limit liberalism as just the **justification of capitalism**. Liberalism is not just about right to property, it is about liberty , freedom of speech and expression, freedom to form association, freedom from customs, traditions and so on. It was Mill who was the first person to give the theory of liberty from the perspective of liberalism. In his book , **ON LIBERTY**, he has given the extensive idea of liberty.

Mill is also known as the champion of democracy and an advocate of rights of women.

Mill belonged to utilitarian tradition.

Mill's uniqueness as a thinker

Unique aspect of Mill is that he is an inconsistent thinker. If he is known as champion of liberty, he is also known as, the "**Prophet of empty liberty**". If Mill is an advocate of democracy, he is also known as "**reluctant democrat**". Thus , Mill is an utilitarian who destroys utilitarianism.

Reason behind his inconsistency

He is inconsistent because of the times. He stands at the crossroads of **classical and modern liberalism**. However, the significance of a thinker is depended on the relevance of his thoughts, not the consistency of his thoughts.

On Utilitarianism :Revision of utilitarianism by Mill

Utilitarianism has been the dominant philosophy in Britain in 18th and 19th centuries. It had wide appeal among the common man. Hence, it is known as the philosophy of common man. Common man may not have ability to understand the grand philosophical notions and hence the utilitarian philosophy, which is based on the simple concept of pleasure and pain, has an appeal among the common man. According to utilitarian ethics, man should do what gives him pleasure and should avoid what gives him pain.

Utilitarianism was once, very popular but gradually it came to be criticised as '**Pig's philosophy.**' (Carlyle) Utilitarian simply emphasized on the satisfaction of appetite. Hence, utilitarianism degrades man to the level of pig. The pig is just concerned about the satisfaction of appetite and has no concern with quality. Utilitarianism became the basis for the justification of the extreme exploitation of the workers by the capitalists. Since profit is a source of pleasure for capitalists, there is nothing wrong if person is making profit/pleasure, even at the cost of huge distress to others. Bentham is considered as the Father of utilitarianism .

Mill considered **Bentham as his master** and so he thought, it is his duty to defend Benthamism. However, once he tried to defend utilitarianism, he ended up destroying the very fundamentals of utilitarianism. That is why Mill is called as "**Peter who denied his master.**"

How Mill destroys the foundation of utilitarianism?

If he is influenced by Bentham, he was also influenced by Greek thinkers like Plato and Socrates. Hence, he **tried to reform utilitarianism by bringing the concepts of idealism from Greek philosophy.** Mixing the two contradictory ideas led to the destruction of the fundamentals of utilitarianism .

Salient features of Utilitarianism as given by Bentham.

Though utilitarianism is prior to Bentham, yet Bentham was the first person to make utilitarianism as the systematic school of thought. Hence, utilitarianism became synonymous to Benthamism. The salient features of Utilitarianism given by Bentham are:

1. Principle of utility as a principle of ethics. **“Nature has placed man under the governance of the two sovereign masters, pleasure and pain. Not only we do what they dictate, but we ought to do that way.”**
2. **Pleasure is just a quantitative term, quality is not important.** There is more pleasure or less pleasure, rather than higher pleasure or lower pleasure. In the words of Bentham, **“Pushpin is as good as poetry.”** Thus, there is no difference in pleasure and happiness.
3. **Pleasure is materialistic in origin.** Pleasure is understood on the basis of experience rather than sacrificing pleasure.
4. **Felicific calculus** - He even devised a formula to measure the pleasure known as felicific calculus.
5. Bentham also suggested the yardstick for the actions of the state. And that yardstick is **“Greatest happiness of Greatest number.”**

Greatest Happiness of Greatest Number

According to Bentham if state does not intervene in economy, state give rise to maximization of pleasure/profit. Hence, he suggested that state's intervention in economy on behalf of poor to provide them social security may not be the desired policy.

The principle has been criticized by socialist as it gives **primacy to the profit over number**. It has also been criticized as **'pig's philosophy'** which justifies profit maximization at the cost of the dignity of worker.

Mill's Revision of Benthamism

Mill also accepts that human actions are guided by pleasure. However, he makes following changes in Bentham's concept of pleasure.

1. Pleasure is not just quantitative, it is qualitative also.
2. There is a difference between pleasure and happiness. Pleasure is about satisfaction of body, happiness is satisfaction of soul.
3. Once pleasure becomes qualitative term, quality cannot be measured and thus it makes felicific calculus redundant.
4. Mill also suggests that not only pleasures differ in quality, persons also differ in quality. Some are men of reason and some are men of appetite.

According to Mill, **“It is better to be a Socrates dis-satisfied than a fool satisfied. It is better to be a man dissatisfied than a pig satisfied.”**

Thus according to Mill pleasures differ in quality, not only pleasures differ in quality persons also differ in quality, the things from which a pig will draw satisfaction will not satisfy a human being. Similarly, the things which give pleasure to the common man, may not satisfy the man of reason like Socrates. Hence 'push-pin' is not as good as poetry. There is difference between man and animal. The actions of man cannot be guided just by appetite.

In the words of J S Mill, "I regard utility as the highest appeal of all human actions, however it is utility in its widest sense. It is based on the understanding of man as a progressive being." Like Bentham, Mill also regards utility as the ultimate appeal to all human actions or the principle of ethics.

Utility in widest sense means

- A. Not just pleasure but happiness.
- B. Not just the satisfaction of body but also soul.
- C. Not just quantity of pleasure but even quality of pleasure.

Man as a progressive being means man is different from animal. The basic difference lies in reason.

Thus, in order to defend Bentham, Mill ends up in destroying the foundations of Benthamism. Hence it is said that Mill was a Peter, who denied his master. Though Mill is accused of destroying utilitarianism, but he reformed utilitarianism, made it more legitimate. He made utilitarianism more humane.

Mill on Liberty

"If there is anyone, who is liberal, it is Mill."

Liberty is the core value of liberalism. No other liberal philosopher before Mill has dealt with the issue of liberty in an exhaustive manner.

John Locke did talk about the three natural rights, but he has not given a detailed view on the concept of liberty as found in liberalism. He gave the detailed view of Right to Property. Thus these scholars have reduced liberalism to a philosophical justification of capitalism. Though Locke is known as father of liberalism, yet the best way to describe Locke is the scholar of 'possessive individualism.' Liberalism is not just the protection of property, liberalism deals with liberation of man from outdated customs, traditions, protection of man from the arbitrary actions even of state.

Mill is the first person to give detailed view of liberal concept of liberty in his book ON LIBERTY.

Importance of Liberty

The purpose of life is happiness. There is no happiness without liberty. Thus liberty is a precondition for utility and has priority over utility.

In liberalism we see two traditions:

- A. Tradition of Utility, represented by Bentham.
- B. Tradition of Rights and dignity, represented by Immanuel Kant.

Mill has brought liberty at the centre stage of liberalism.

*According to Mill, **liberty is important not only for persons or individuals, but also for society.** Just like individual needs liberty for development of his personality, state also gets benefit of the liberty of individuals.*

“No state becomes great by dwarfing its own people.”

Liberty is a precondition for development. When state denies freedom to its people, it is not giving them opportunity for development. Ultimately state is harming itself by denying freedom.

We can give the example of China. China may be economically rich, but China cannot be called as a great nation. It has denied basic liberties to its people. China is like a golden cage.

Limits of liberty: Harm Principle

*Mill suggests ‘**harm principle**’. He categorizes human actions into two types. **Self regarding and others regarding.** According to him, no interference by the state in Self Regarding actions. It means state should give absolute liberty in this sphere. State can limit the liberty of a person.*

There is inconsistency in Mill, on one hand, he aspires for absolute freedom but on the other hand, he recognize the problems because of absolute freedom. He is realizing the necessity of state’s intervention.

“The sole purpose for which mankind is warranted to interfere in the life of the other person, it to prevent harm to others. Self harm is not basis to interfere. Over himself and over his body, man is sovereign. All other restrains are qua-restrains”. If state puts restrain for any purpose other than to prevent harm to others, there is no justification.

Barker : “Mill as a Prophet of empty liberty”

Mill is inconsistent in his views. On one hand, he wants absolute liberty. He realizes the problems because of absolute liberty. He makes artificial separation between self-regarding and

other's regarding actions. Any action of an individual can be interpreted as others regarding action and so gives huge scope for state's interference in the life of man.

Mill gives another example which shows the greater inconsistency. According to him, state can prevent a person from crossing a bridge, which is about to fall. If state does not prevent a person, he may lose his life. Mill brings the metaphysical concept of the real will. He says that the real will of the person may not be to kill himself.

Barker is a positive liberal and he is not satisfied with the description of liberty as the absence of state's interference. Negative liberty is indefensible. And hence even Mill is not able to defend it.

Though Mill could not defend his theory of liberty, and he is inconsistent yet we cannot deny Mill's contribution towards the concept of liberty. And it is rightly said that **'if anybody is liberal, it is Mill.'**

Barker : Mill as the scholar of abstract individualism.

The way classical liberals describe human nature as extremely individualist, is considered by modern liberals as abstract individualism, which means not a real individual but imaginary. Modern liberals believe in conception of moral man who lives in a society. The way Mill describes individual completely free in the realm of self regarding actions is nothing but abstraction.

Mill on Freedom of Speech and Expression

"All silencing is an assumption of infallibility." Mill

"If all but one, has a difference of opinion, majority should listen to that person. Just like tyranny of one cannot be accepted on the tyranny of all, similarly tyranny of all cannot be accepted on one person." Mill

Liberty is necessary for good life or happiness. And out of all liberties the most important is freedom of speech and expression.

It is the most precious gift of God to man. No other species has capacity to communicate with each other through speech. Other species can only make sounds. This is the most distinguishing element between man and animal. We can call it as a human condition.

It implies that, if any state denies this freedom to its citizens, the state is not treating them, even as humans.

Limits on freedom of speech and expression

Even in this case, he proposes harm principle. It means so long person's speech does not result into, any concrete harm to a person, there is no other basis to limit the freedom of speech and expression.

Advantage of freedom of speech and expression

Here we can see the influence of Socrates on Mill. The purpose of life is to lead a good life. In order to lead a good life, we should understand what is truth, which means what is right and wrong. To understand what is right and wrong, we need to examine our beliefs. We need dialectics. There is no use of suppressing the truth, the truth will ultimately emerge. When we suppress the truth, we postpone our attainment of truth. There is no point stopping a person from speaking his mind.

Advantage of allowing a person to put forward his views

If the person is wrong, he will understand and will keep quiet. If he is right, then it is not right to suppress him, rather it is in our benefit, that we can reform ourselves. He even suggests that we should listen to even those considered as mad, because we never know from whom truth will emerge. Thus, for Mill, all silencing the opposition denotes that a person thinks himself as infallible or God.

The purpose of the strong defense to the freedom of speech and expression

*Often, we misunderstand democracy as the game of number, which makes democracy a **tyranny of majority**. On the other hand, democracy is not about number, it is about who has the right argument. Hence, J S Mill makes difference between the tyranny and democracy. In tyranny, people do not have rights, whereas in democracy, people enjoy rights. According to him, just like **we will not accept the tyranny of one person on majority, we cannot accept the tyranny of majority over one person.***

Mill on Democracy

*Mill suggested that democracy is the **best form of government**. It is the only form of government which gives protection to the liberty. Only in democracy man can exercise his freedom of speech and expression to its fullest extent which is very important aspect of his personality and a precondition for his development. Mill's views on democracy are found in his book **THE REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT**.*

Which democracy is ideal?

Direct Democracy.

Which democracy is the best practicable?

Representative democracy.

Why representative democracy is unavoidable?

The complexities of the modern way of life necessitates the representative form of democracy.

Though Mill is an advocate of democracy, CL Wayper calls Mill a '**reluctant Democrat**'. He is reluctant to introduce democracy everywhere. In the words of Mill, "**Benevolent despotism is good for barbarians.**" According to him, democracy or self-government is not advisable for the people living in colonies. Democracy can be introduced only where people are civilized. India and china may be once great civilizations, but not at present. For introduction of democracy it is necessary that society is democratic. Democracy is not a free gift, people have struggled for ages and hence it cannot be distributed as a free gift.

He is reluctant democrat because he was fearful of democracy turning into the tyranny of majority. During his time, there was demand for right to vote for working classes, he was fearful with respect to the future of democracy when the poor and uneducated will get the major say in formulation of laws. Hence, he suggested certain reforms, which can protect democracy from being converted into mobocracy.

Suggestions made by Mill

In his book ON REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT, he gives following suggestions to improve democracy.

1. **Weighted voting** - Those who are educated and posses property, should be given more than one vote. This will increase the weightage of their views on the laws.
2. **Plural voting** - Right to vote in more than one constituency.
3. **Strengthening the powers of house of lords.**
4. **Proportional representation** - It will ensure the minority, which to have their representation in parliament.
5. **Open ballot** – to protect freedom of speech and expression.
6. **Enfranchisement of women .**

Mill is called as reluctant democrat because, he is fearful of the future of democracy in context of the demands for right to vote by the working classes. In order to protect democracy, he brings Aristocratic elements and thus brings inconsistency.

If we compare Mill with Indian leaders like Gandhi and Nehru, Mill will appear reluctant democrat, Gandhi and Nehru can be called as passionate democrat. According to Pandit Nehru, "If people cannot come to democracy, we can bring democracy to their doorstep."

The biggest flaw of Mill is that he takes democracy as an end in itself whereas Indian leaders saw democracy as means to an end. The end of democracy is empowerment of the people.

Mill on subjection of women.

According to Mill, all forms of slavery have ended but slavery of women is continuing. Subordination of women is so universal that it appears natural. He was supporter of right to vote to be given to women. He wanted, women should be allowed to participate in public sphere. There is no benefit confining women within the four walls of family. At times we associate some negative qualities with women, like insecurity, it happens because we confine them within the four walls of family. There are advantages when women are in public sphere. Men will behave in a more civilized manner, and it will improve their performance.