

Philosophy and Critical Thinking
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Lecture 25: Mill on happiness

Welcome in lecture 25. Today, we are going to talk about Mill on happiness. We have been discussing the ethics and one of the ethical theories is hedonism, which we have discussed in last few classes. Hedonism is all about the pleasure and for them, pleasure and happiness are same. And then we also talk about the egoism, the altruism and Bentham idea of theory of utility or utilitarianism. Now, today we are going to discuss John Stuart Mill on happiness. However, John Stuart Mill is a very significant philosopher from western philosophy who has contributed in many areas. Since this course is on a very basic level, so we will try to understand the Mill, how Mill argued for the happiness. Now, before starting the Mill on happiness, I also would like to mention here that the idea of happiness which is we are discussing in western philosophy, we also have in Indian philosophy as well. In one of the classes, I have talked about this idea of happiness that how there is a philosopher called Charvaka and he talked about the happiness of pleasure. Now, if you bring this idea in Indian system, we have a different way to understand the pleasure and happiness. So, sometimes pleasure is not happiness. Now, what important part is that happiness plays a very, very important role in the human life. For example, if you read in an Indian system or say the Indian school of thought, where they have talked a lot about suffering and then how we can remove this suffering and can achieve this happiness, the ultimate happiness. So, happiness has been go not only or matter of discussion not only in western as well in the Indian philosophy. Now, happiness is an important because if you take in this western philosophy, Hume leads all the hedonist philosopher, Bentham, Mill, Sidgwick, there are many philosophers who what they did, they have argued that our action is because this happiness. We are saying that happiness is the goal. So, whenever we are performing an action, we are looking for a happiness, looking for a pleasure. So, if an action is going to lead up, going to produce a happiness, then this action is good. Now, this in hedonism basically, we are trying to understand this happiness in the sense that we are judging an action in terms of pleasure or not pleasure, happiness and pain. So, if it is going to produce a pleasure, it is going to produce a happiness, then action is good. If this action is not going to produce a pleasure or going to produce a pain, then this action is not good. Now, you may ask question that, okay, fine, if someone is getting happiness in killing other or act of stealing, for example, then does it mean that this action is good and so on. So, there are so many questions like where we can talk about Mill is going to answer that how it is this set of action or like for example, killing others is not a good idea and so on. So, they have talked about the moral action, the right action, the wrong action based on the happiness. Even in Indian system, we have talked if you want to achieve the ultimate

happiness, ultimate happiness in the sense that there are two kind of thing that when you are getting things and things is coming and going by. So, for a small duration, but if you want an unlimited happiness, you have to go for the unlimited object because limited object cannot produce unlimited happiness. And therefore, in Indian system, we talk a lot about the Brahman, which we will be discussing soon. Indian philosophy is again importance to the happiness and how to achieve that. They also have an idea of talking about the moral action based on the idea of pleasure. However, in Western philosophy where we are discussing about happiness, this happiness has become is a cause or reason to choose an action. I suppose you are confused between two action X and Y, then they will ask you to check which action is going to produce a pleasure or which action is going to at least restrict or avoid the pain. So, the idea of happiness, let us say Bentham and Mill is the absence of this pain. Now, if you take about Indian philosophy or let us talk about Indian philosophy, where one of the philosophers argued that complete happiness and without or a complete absence of pain is not possible. There is different way to handle this concept. Now, why I am comparing because it is always good to read things in comparison. However, the comparison sometimes is not possible because the ultimate goal of talking about happiness in the Western philosophy or for example, for Bentham or for Mill is different. And for the Indian philosopher, they have a different goal to explain the happiness. So, anyway, this lecture is always moving around the happiness and let us understand what is happiness for the John Stuart Mill.

John Stuart Mill is again was aware of the Bentham. His father was again J. Mill, James Mill who was a well-known person again and very good friend of Bentham, which we have discussed in the philosophy in the last class. And Mill was aware of his philosophy. So, he was aware of this theory of utilitarianism in very young age. And this is how he talked about the utilitarianism and then he argued against the Bentham. Now, we will have a different way to talk about the pleasure and happiness. So, let us understand. So, John Stuart Mill, timing of this philosopher is 1862-73 and he argued that promotion of happiness is the ultimate principle of Teleology. So, Teleology is when there is a purpose. So, there is an action which you are performing and the consequences of this an action, the result of an action. Now, if the result of this action is going to promote the happiness, then this action is good. So, what Mill argued that only promotion of happiness is the ultimate principle. Now, as Bentham has talked about that how the action is the right and wrong in terms of happiness. John Stuart Mill is arguing that only promotion of happiness is the only principle of Teleology. Now, he argued that happiness is the sole end of human action and the promotion of it and taste by which to judge all human conduct. So, Mill argued that the only aim of human action is happiness. And even you see our human action, our action in day-to-day life, we are always performing action which action is going to produce or going to promote our happiness. So, our happiness is a main goal where we are going to always aim the happiness, where we are always going to talk about the happiness, thinking about our happiness to increase our or maximize our happiness. Mill is claiming that the sole end

of human action is just a promotion of the happiness. So, if there is an action and this action is going to promote your happiness, then this action is always good. Remember here we are talking about the moral principles. We are trying to understand that how an action is right and wrong. So, suppose there is a sort of action which is to just now this action, judging this action based on the values or the own ideas is maybe it is relative. It can change time to time. But now, so therefore, it is important to talk about a moral theory so that we can judge any action universally. So, we can say, okay, this action is right and that is not right. So, if you are in any situation and you have two choices like T and P, now you are confused what to do because you believe that T and P both is right. This is a moral dilemma where we have discussed about it. Now, both options are good for you. I mean, you believe in the right. This dilemma is not about right and wrong. This dilemma is all about right and right where we are saying the two things and both you believe that is right. Now, what to do? Then, hedonism will argue, if you subscribe to hedonism, we will talk about the pleasure, look for the pleasure. For them, pleasure and happiness are same. It is not different. Now, if you take the egoism have a different way to talk, altruism has a different way to say and theory of hedonism has an own way to talk about. However, if you see this all the hedonist philosopher, there is one argument that the happiness or pleasure is an important thing or happiness is the sole end of human action. So, what we are performing in action, our goal is promotion of our happiness, promotion of our self-interest. So, this is what even the Mill had talked about.

Mill presented the proof of the principle of utility. First, he talked about the desirability that happiness is the desirable as an end. So, even if there is a choice like T and P and in the given situation, if you are supposed to perform an action and now I have two choices, T and P, what to do and what not to do. So, my only desire will be to get a happiness as an end. So, which action is going to produce happiness for me? And based on that, I will be choosing that action. So, what we do, we desire this happiness all the time and for us, happiness is in everything. Exhaustiveness, the second one is nothing but happiness is desirable and an end. Now, Mill has argued that human desires many things but some of the object, some of the thing is as a means of happiness that has become a part of the happiness. So, remember even the Mill is what a belief that happiness is intrinsically good. So, this pleasure is itself a good and it is the most desirable by human being. So, what we are doing, we are performing an action with this desire to get happiness, to promote our happiness. Now, there are many things for example, money, for example, music, games. It is a means of the happiness, it is going to produce happiness for us, for me and therefore, these are also part of happiness. So, what Mill has did, Mill argued that humans what they are desiring is all about the happiness. So, even you believe that sometimes directly I am not desiring the happiness or desiring something else, Mill arguing that because that is a means of happiness. So, this is how he has talked about the second point. Third is the impartiality that is each person's happiness is equally desirable. Mill argued as we already we have discussed the Bentham and other philosopher who is basically they are empiricist.

Empiricism is what they believe that experiences is the source of our knowledge, and later on they start talking about that everything, all knowledge is worth based on observation, or which we can verify that is the right knowledge, again with knowledge. Now, here look how Mill has argued that only proof capable of being given that an object is visible is that people actually see it, empiricist. The only proof that however, Mill has another stand about this theory of knowledge which we are not going to discuss here because that is not part of this course and however, you stick this Mill in the way that Mill is talks about that how the observation and is an important part. So, he writes that the only proof that a sound is audible is that people hear it and so of the other sources of our experience in like manner I apprehend the sole evidence it is possible to produce that anything is desirable is that people do actually desire it. Now, Mill argued that each person desires his own happiness. So, every person who is going to perform an action, he wants the happiness out of this action, right. So, since the Mill also is a part of this chain, I mean if you take in our course what we have discussed the hedonism, egoism, altruism, Bentham idea of hedonism and so on. So, all of them is a chain of consequentialism, where they are going to talk about the consequences of an action. The consequences of action are good, the action is good. The consequences of action are not good, now good and not good is in terms of the pleasure. So, it is pleasure, it is producing pleasure, it is not good, it is not producing pleasure, it is not. Now, they have their own way of to define or add more element to this idea. Mill arguing that each person desires his own happiness talking about a desire human, I mean he is trying to prove that how theory of utility is correct. So, what he is doing, he is trying to explain the human desire. If you take any action which you are doing, or you tend to do, because you want the happiness out of this action or you believe that this action is going to promote your happiness. So, here the desire is worth happiness, own happiness and that is not very quiet many if you examine our thought process or before we are processing it, performing any action. For example, what kind of courses is good for us, like so there are many courses, now which course is going to help in my career, what set of action is good for me, what set of moral action is good for me. So, there are many and dilemma in our day-to-day life where we are facing, but when we are discussing or you are trying to reach a conclusion, we are always considering our happiness, which can, which set of action can promote our happiness. So, promotion of happiness is an important thing or is a sole aim. This is how Mill is arguing, trying to show that how we desire only our own happiness. So, what we are doing, we are discussing things, we are performing any action, for example, charity, helping others, I am liking it, I like it, I am getting pleasure out of this action, this action is good for me. So, for example, I am confused what to do or what not to do, let us take a same example. Whether I should make a false promise or not, I need money and now I have two choices, make false promises that I will return it tomorrow or today so on, I will tell the truth. So, always if you are going to thinking of what to perform, what not to perform, you will be always considered on happiness, which is going to promote the happiness. So, there is A and B, confusion which action we should perform, you will be

thinking of which action is going to produce or promote our happiness. So, basic idea is or intention of Mill is to show that we always desire our own happiness. Mill argues that human being desires many things besides happiness because of the relation they bear to happiness. As we have argued that sometime if you examine our thought or desire, one may find that we are also desiring many things, not only happiness. What Mill is arguing that even we are desiring many things, those things is in a relation to the happiness. And that is a reason that that is in a part of happiness because that is as a means on a happiness. So, I am desiring X and X is not happiness, please be careful, but it can produce a happiness for me. And therefore, when I am saying that I am desiring many things, what Mill is arguing that many things is what is in a part of happiness because they bear to happiness. And the Mill argued that whatever means of happiness, which we are desiring, slowly we started looking this means as a happiness. So, for example, I like A because I believe the A is going to produce happiness for me or going to promote my happiness. Now, I am sort of desiring this A. I want A, I want A all the time, even thinking I am trying to perform an action to get A. Now, this is a means on a happiness, but the way I am independently I am doing it, it become a part of our happiness. So, the moment I get A is in producing that happiness, but that is a means to happiness. So, that is a part of our happiness. So, this is Mill argued that in reality nothing desire except happiness. So, what we are doing in our life or thinking before performing an action or taking a decision, we are always what we are doing desiring the happiness. Our pleasure, our happiness is the only sole end of our action. So, we have the set of action. We always thinking that which action is going to produce happiness for us. Now, for Mill, each person happiness is a good to that person and the general happiness therefore a good to the aggregates of all person. So, for example, A happiness is good for A, B happiness is good for B, C happiness is good for C, D happiness is good for D. But general happiness is good for all. So, this sum total of this happiness is a good. So, a good to the aggregate of the all pleasure. Mill argued that by happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain. By unhappiness pain and prevention of pleasure. So, this is a very clear idea what is a happiness and they see happiness which is an absence of pain. And by unhappiness it is a pain or absence of pleasure. Now, however, the Mill argued that pleasure differ in quality. Those which go with the exercise of intellectual capacity are higher, better than a sensuous pleasure. Here it is an important contribution of this Mill. Mill argued about that all pleasure is not same in quality. As if you say the Bentham idea of utilitarianism or pleasure, he always counting a same. So, for example, you are eating vanilla ice cream or you like it getting pleasure. You are reading novel, you are reading philosophical argument getting pleasure is good. Now, for Bentham the both kind of pleasure is same. We will count one. Either you have a sensuous pleasure or you have you are getting pleasure out of reading this philosophical argument. Mill arguing that both pleasure is different in quality. So, when you are suppose you like vanilla ice cream, you are having it now you are getting pleasure. One thing you are reading philosophical argument another pleasure. So, this second one is then a higher

in quality and therefore, we talk about the quality pleasure. So, novel you reading this philosophical argument and this kind of pleasure, but you are getting out of this reading philosophical argument is in higher quality. So, when we are talking about the maximum pleasure of maximum number, let us say, but you have to talk about the quality of pleasure. When I talked about the quantity and Mill is arguing about the quality, because for him there is a quality difference between two different kinds of pleasure. First sensuous and another is intellectual. Now, Mill argument was based on a social feeling of mankind, that desire of unity with our own fellow creatures. Now, as I have said that whether robbing and killing other is a good or not good. So, if you take this utilitarianism or Mill's idea of utilitarianism, he will argue it is not good. You may get physical pleasure, suppose you are liking somebody for insulting someone or killing someone or scolding someone, but this kind of pleasure is not good, you have to always go for the higher pleasure and ultimately, this is not for the all. So, Mill argument was based on a social feeling of the mankind. So, we have to take the unhappiness in that sense, in a broader sense. So, it is required a man to be strictly impartial between his own happiness and that of others as if he were disinterested and beloved respected. Now, this is how Mill is promoting a general goodness or happiness. So, you have to be very strict or impartial about own and others happiness. So, if you see the last point, and then this point will argue that how killing other and robbing other is not good, and that action is immoral action even for the John Stuart Mill. So, when you are deciding or thinking on the happiness, you have to be very impartial or strictly impartial. So, he argues that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce reverse of happiness. So, when you are performing an action and this action is going to produce the right or promote happiness, this action is right and if this is going to produce the reverse of happiness, then this action is not right, its wrong. However, in last, Mill has talked about three distinct conception and it appears as it is mentioned in the Stanford Encyclopedia also. First in the hedonism. Hedonism is all which already we have discussed about how they have talked about the pleasure is only value and pleasure is intrinsically good. So, for them pleasure is value. Now, second is desired satisfaction is an important part. So, when you are desiring and when you are getting it right, so you have desired happiness and performed the action, you got that happiness. That is the satisfaction and that is very important. And third is Perfectionism. When you are using a maximum capacity to producing this happiness. So, it is now all the intellectual happiness, where we are doing that. I mean, this is how Mill had talked about a difference between the intellectual happiness or sensuous happiness. So, this is all about from the Mill, which we have discussed in very basic level and just try to explain you how Mill had talked about happiness. And based on this idea of happiness, he has argued for the right set of action and wrong set of actions. However, there are many philosophers after Mill who rejected the idea of the qualitative hedonism and they have a different way to explain. They also argued that how the happiness is not same as a pleasure. So, pleasure is a different from happiness. And they have rejected the idea of the

qualitative. However, those philosophers and that philosophy is not part of this course. So, we will not be discussing that. This theory of utilitarianism is an important and Bentham and Mill has contributed in this area. However, later on, Sidgwick also contributed in this area. You have to see this all the thought which we have been discussing as a development. So, even you have the first, from the first class, we are discussing about the one philosopher and the next philosopher is building the whole idea or rejecting the previous one and developing his own idea. This is how it is developing. So, you have to see as a development first and second. Also, you have to see their argument, how they are critically analyzing the previous theory or ideas and sometimes rejecting or accepting. So, their critical argument is important for this class. And what we have been doing, we are discussing varying basic concepts from a basic level.

So, thank you so much for your attention. This talk was based on the history of philosophy and then the Stanford Encyclopedia these two entries. Thank you so much for your attention.