

Happiness as Justice and Liberty: A New Perspective of John Stuart Mill's Utilitarianism

For a long time, the predominant standard for evaluating economic arrangements has been a form of utilitarianism. Although widely used as a guide to public policies, utilitarianism arouses persistent misgivings. Among the objections, the violation of distributive justice and equal liberty is a critical one which economists still cannot refute with a general theory. With respect to the problem, this paper suggests that John Stuart Mill's version of utilitarianism may provide a solution since his theory of distributive justice presumes that everyone has an equal right to substantive freedom. Working in the realm of economic thought and social philosophy, the paper explores a general principle of economic ethics from Mill's utilitarianism and his observations on human nature. This principle suggests that justice grounded on utility requires limitations upon certain sectors' economic freedoms to prevent threat to others' subsistence. In other words, economic freedom requires distributive justice as its premise. Accordingly, economic policies and institutions in compliance with this principle will bring forth not only the greatest human happiness in general, but also the fair distribution of real freedom.

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