

## Distance Learning in John Stuart Mill's Utilitarianism Perspective

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### ABSTRACT

This research explores distance learning from the perspective of John Stuart Mill's utilitarianism, employing a qualitative philosophical approach for an in-depth and contextual analysis. Using the Research on Actual Problems model, the study focuses on philosophical reflections on contemporary phenomena, specifically the global trend of distance learning. Descriptive and critical data analysis methods are employed, continuously referencing concrete issues in detail. The study examines how distance learning can be viewed as the best method to achieve happiness and benefit the greatest number of people, according to Mill's utilitarian principles. The analysis centres on factors contributing to collective happiness in distance learning, while also addressing potential problems such as the digital divide and the psychological effects of reduced social interaction within the framework of utilitarian theory.

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### INTRODUCTION

In the current era of globalization, education must be part of the telecommunications trend. Utilizing data technology in exceptional distance education learning systems will increase student independence, individualization, and autonomy during the learning process. This is based on the characteristics of distance education. The current situation shows that the distance learning approach needs to be more flexible and still reflects a centralized education system. (Ashabul Kahfi, 2020: 137)

Due to technological advances and the urgent need created by the global pandemic, distance learning, also known as e-learning or online learning, has significantly transformed in the last ten years. Students can learn from anywhere with this type of education, which provides significant flexibility in time and space. This concept uses digital platforms for assessment and evaluation, teacher-student interaction, and dissemination of learning materials. Overcoming geographical barriers is one of the main advantages of distance learning. It offers educational opportunities for those living in remote areas or with limited mobility. Additionally, this model is very flexible, allowing students to set their study schedules and balance work or family responsibilities. Additionally, it is often cheaper than conventional education because costs such as transportation, accommodation, and physical materials are reduced.

Distance learning is an educational method that involves interaction between teachers and students and the delivery of subject matter without the presence of students in class. This phenomenon has received increasing attention, especially in the current era of information technology. Distance learning allows access to various educational programs worldwide, gives students flexibility in time and location, and utilizes technology to present various course materials.

John Stuart Mill created utilitarianism, one of philosophical thought's most critical ethical concepts. Based on the thoughts of Jeremy Bentham, Mill expanded and improved the principles of utilitarianism by emphasizing pleasure or happiness as the primary moral goal and quality of pleasure. According to Mill, policies or actions are ethical if they produce the maximum happiness for the most significant number of people. Lower pleasures, usually physical, differ from higher pleasures related to intellectual and emotional activities. Mill's method resulted in the realization that happiness includes long-term satisfaction and well-being as well as momentary satisfaction. In addition to providing a deeper understanding of ethical considerations in everyday life, his thinking has also provided an essential basis for modern public policy and ethical discussions.

John Stuart Mill was a philosopher who thought about utilitarianism. The most significant principle of happiness, also known as the moral foundation of utility, states that it is considered suitable if someone does something to increase happiness. If one intends to do the opposite, it is considered wrong. If the goal is happiness, the action is to obtain pleasure and avoid pain; if the aim is unhappiness, the action is the presence of hardship and pain. The principle of most significant happiness states that the human goal is to experience as much happiness as possible regarding quality and quantity.

The distance learning phenomenon increasingly dominates the world of contemporary education and training. This method has changed how we acquire knowledge and skills in the continuously developing information technology era. However, distance learning must be considered from an ethical perspective in addition to being practical and accessible. According to the utilitarian perspective developed by the philosopher John Stuart Mill, distance learning has significant moral implications. The utilitarianism perspective assesses a person's policies or actions based on their ability to maximize happiness or satisfaction as much as possible. Therefore, it is essential to view distance learning from the perspective of utilitarianism. This article will explore how distance learning can be analyzed and assessed through the ethical lens of John Stuart Mill's utilitarianism.

## **METHODS**

This research uses a qualitative philosophical approach, namely research that helps researchers understand and analyze philosophical problems in an in-depth and contextual way. This method often involves philosophical discussions focused on understanding the meaning and consequences of philosophical ideas and exploring complex philosophical concepts. Research in the field of philosophy is based on an inventive style. To be able to provide an evaluation, a philosopher must have a personal opinion and be able to develop a personal system. This research is heuristic. Heuristics in philosophy is the continuous actualization of thought. Philosophy must strive to continually return to presenting fundamental problems. (Anton Baker and Achmad Charis Zubair, 1990: 17)

The research model used in this research is research on actual problems. This research is a philosophical reflection on an actual phenomenon or situation, whether structural or normative, that is a controversial issue. The actual phenomenon or problem needs to be re-examined according to the formal methods and objects of one of the sciences or scientific fields. However, the problem is highlighted philosophically, viewed in the light of the basics of reality or connected to human nature. (Anton Baker and Achmad Charis Zubair, 1990: 107)

This research uses data analysis, namely descriptive and critical analysis. Descriptively, it is described so that there are continuous references to concrete problems with details. (Anton Baker and Achmad Charis Zubair, 1990: 112). Then, in critical analysis, data analysis with a critical analysis approach is an in-depth and critical process for analyzing data or information collected during research or study. This approach examines the data literally and considers factors such as the social, cultural, and political context that influence the data. Critical analysis aims to uncover biases and assumptions, allowing more contextual, critical, and impactful research to provide a deeper understanding of the problem under study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### John Stuart Mill's Biography

The most influential English philosopher of the 19th century was John Stuart Mill. All major areas of philosophy, including epistemology, metaphysics, ethics, social and political philosophy, philosophy of religion, and philosophy of education, have been significantly influenced by Mill. John Stuart Mill is one of the significant figures in this school and has contributed to his thinking. He was the last English philosopher to offer a comprehensive perspective on the whole of philosophy and to link the normative and theoretical dimensions of his thought. Mill was not just a writer; he was a public figure. His practical work in philosophy and economics constantly asks him to speak on controversial public policy issues. Mill was also active in many ways, including serving as a member of Parliament. Because of Mill's life and efforts, he is known as a social and political philosopher. (Capaldi, N, 2004)

Mill was born in London in 1806 as the son of James Mill, a famous economist and philosopher. His father ensured his son received a well-rounded education in just three years. By 12, he was already well-versed in ancient Greek and Latin literature, history, and mathematics. He studied the works of national economists such as Adam Smith and David Ricardo when he was 13. From 1823, John Stuart Mill worked as a clerk for the Indian House Company, becoming part of the "utilitarian circle" that included Jeremy Bentham, who was friends with his father. He was a Lower House of the British Parliament member from 1865 to 1868. He died in 1873 in Avignon, France. Remembering his hard work, John collapsed in 1826 Due to his nervous illness. His mental crisis, however, had a positive effect. John began to develop his view of Utilitarianism and broke free from the philosophy of Jeremy Bentham. During almost the entire late 19th century, especially in England, the idea of Utilitarianism became an interesting topic of discussion. One of Mill's essential contributions to moral philosophy was his unique understanding of utilitarianism, which he put forward in his work. (Franz Magnis-Suseno, 1997)

John Stuart Mill is one of the positivist figures who characterized the importance of individual freedom for the individual in his ideas. How Mill thinks freedom is a right everyone deserves will be explained to learn as academics hungry for knowledge. Mill also discusses happiness by stating that happiness is the only goal of human action. Promoting happiness is the benchmark for all human actions, from which it can be concluded that happiness must be the benchmark for morality because what is part is contained in the whole.

John Stuart Mill also considered government, economics, women's equality, psychology, ethics, and logic. "On Liberty" and "Utilitarianism" are his most famous works. In his writings on politics, Mill coined the ideas of "classical liberalism," which supported free market economics, individual rights, and liberty. She also changed perspectives on women's rights and is considered one of the early supporters of the feminist movement. His works continued to be an essential reference in the history of liberal and democratic thought even after his death.

Pati Regency is one of the regions in Central Java Province, located in the eastern part. The location and position of Pati Regency is very strategic because it connects the big cities around the North Coast of Java Island often known as Pantura. These cities include Surabaya, Semarang and Jakarta. Astronomically, Pati Regency is located between 6025<sup>0</sup>-7000<sup>0</sup> south latitude and between 100050<sup>0</sup>-111015<sup>0</sup> east longitude (BPS Pati Regency, 2023). Based on its geographical position, Pati has a northern border with the Jepara Regency, a southern border with the Grobogan Regency and Blora Regency, and a western border with the Kudus Regency and Jepara Regency. Apart from that, the eastern border of Pati Regency also borders Rembang Regency and the Java Sea.

### John Stuart Mill's Utilitarianism Thought

#### *Happiness*

John Stuart Mill expanded and deepened the idea of utilitarianism, which Jeremy Bentham initially developed. Mill's view of utilitarianism differed substantially from Bentham's. According to Bentham, Mill has different opinions regarding the quantity and quality of happiness. Benham's hedonistic view of utilitarianism received much criticism and was called the Philosophy of Swine. The view that pleasure is the only good always faces objections, as shown in Bentham's utilitarianism, which is similar to pigs. Because it assumes that morality can be measured through pleasure

and enjoyment compared to physical pleasure, Mill responded to his criticism of the Philosophy of Swine by stating that quality and quantity must be considered in assessing pleasure. Pleasure is superior in terms of quality if all or almost all who have experience of both pleasures have a determined preference for the or type of pleasure so that they will not give up just for the sake of quantity of pleasure even though they know that the pleasure they choose will bring other dissatisfaction. Mill recognizes and emphasizes that apart from physical pleasures, there are also spiritual pleasures, which are more noble, aesthetic, and wisdom. Therefore, giving up lower blessings for higher blessings and spiritual pleasures is possible.

Mill said that utilitarianism comes from two sources. First, the normative basis says that an action is considered correct if it is intended to seek happiness or avoid painful things. Second, introductory psychology says most people desire to unite and live harmoniously with fellow humans. According to the principle of utilitarianism, "An action can be morally justified if its consequences support the happiness of all those concerned with it." Pleasure and freedom from pain is the definition of happiness. Mill stated that pleasures differ in quality and quantity, with higher and lower levels of pleasure.

Utilitarianism holds that when we are faced with choices and do not know what to do, we do not know what to do. John Stuart Mill established the principle of utility as the basis of morality. To what extent an action tends to cause happiness must be considered in terms of right and wrong. Happiness means pleasure and freedom from pain and the absence of happiness. (A.I. Meden, 1967).

The principles of greatest happiness and utility are the standards of Mill's utilitarianism morality. Standards are defined as rules for human behaviour. The principle of greatest happiness states that actions are good because they increase happiness and are harmful if they produce the opposite of happiness. Happiness is pleasure and the absence of pain, while unhappiness is pain. An action can be good as long as it increases happiness and refers to utility, namely, in achieving happiness according to the principle of utility. According to Mill, happiness is the happiness of everyone involved in an event. One person's happiness should never be considered more important than another person's happiness, as Mill said: "Everybody to count for one, nobody to count for more than one." Thus, an action is considered good if happiness exceeds unhappiness, and the happiness of everyone involved is calculated similarly. (K. Bertens, 1993)

Mill distinguishes between lower and higher pleasures and argues that not all types of pleasure are equal; some pleasures have higher value and provide greater intellectual satisfaction than others. Therefore, Mill proposes that higher pleasures, such as intellectual, moral, and aesthetic pleasures, should be given more consideration than lower pleasures, such as lesser pleasures.

John Stuart Mill says that an action is good if it leads to happiness, and an action is evil if it leads to something contrary to happiness. Happiness does not only consist of the happiness of a particular individual but also general happiness, the collective happiness of all people. (John Stuart Mill, 1996)

The principle of greatest happiness, also known as the moral foundation of utility, states that an action is right if one performs it to seek to increase happiness and that an action is also wrong if it is intended to do the opposite. If the goal is happiness, the action is to obtain pleasure and avoid pain; conversely, unhappiness means pain and hardship. The principle of greatest happiness states that the human goal, whether for the benefit of oneself or others, is to experience as much happiness as possible regarding quality and quantity.

Mill also expanded the concept of individual freedom. According to the harm principle, individual freedom is essential because it allows people to pursue the most important pleasures as long as their actions do not harm others. This principle supports the freedom of individuals to make decisions and live their lives as they wish as long as they do not harm others.

According to Mill, the principle of greatest happiness is man's ultimate goal. He stated that pleasure is the ultimate goal of humans, both in terms of quantity and quality, and the measure of pleasure is the experience of the person experiencing

it. They are people who can compare what will bring satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Therefore, utilitarianism considers moral norms as rules or commands that must be followed so that everyone who performs these actions can feel as much pleasure as possible and avoid pain. Mill rejected the charge that utilitarianism was a selfish ethic. Mill believes that the utilitarianism he advocates invites individuals to care for their fellow humans. He recommends that every individual can sacrifice their happiness for the sake of others. (John Stuart Mill, 2001).

### ***Rule Utilitarianism***

Mill's thinking shows how vital moral and ethical regulations are based on the principles of utilitarianism. He offered the idea of "rule utilitarianism," which evaluates actions based on whether they conform to rules that would produce the greatest net happiness if performed by everyone.

A utilitarian view of goodness promotes happiness in many people but is often criticized for allowing wrong actions to achieve that happiness. Therefore, the rule of utilitarianism was introduced, which requires acting according to the code of behaviour most conducive to the greatest happiness. Rule utilitarianism was alluded to by Mill. Mill's statement states that in judging something, an action is morally wrong not because it fails to produce the greatest happiness but because it is behaviour that can damage the general good and thus will encourage people to criticize the behaviour and feel guilty about it so that people will be motivated to follow certain moral rules and use more specific rules as a basis for evaluating their behaviour and the behaviour of others for the sake of long-term happiness. (Shaw. W. H, (1999)

John Stuart Mill developed a variant of utilitarianism known as rule utilitarianism. According to rule utilitarianism, an action is morally good if it depends on the goodness of rules that enable it to achieve the greatest happiness—the short-term effects of such actions changed from the previous focus on individual effects. In rule utilitarianism, actions must conform to rules that produce the greatest happiness for society. According to experience, this rule is considered to produce the greatest happiness for society in the future. Mill argued that rule utilitarianism is better than act utilitarianism because it prevents people from making wrong choices and increases society's general happiness. However, rule utilitarianism also has weaknesses, namely that the rules created can result in unfair decisions in certain situations. Therefore, rule utilitarianism should be used cautiously and well-considered in every situation.

### ***Justice***

In the age of speculation, one of the most significant obstacles to the support of this doctrine was the assumption that happiness, or utility, was a criterion of right and wrong drawn from concepts of justice, strong sentiment, and clear perception so that to some thinkers the word seemed quickly and indeed showed the innate qualities of things. According to Mill's rule utilitarianism, justice is very important for utilitarianism because the existence of justice and injustice influences happiness. (John Stuart Mill, 2020)

The idea of justice presupposes two things, namely, rules intended for good and sanctions, namely, the desire for punishment to be suffered by those who violate the rules. In the utilitarian view, sanctions can be justified if:

1. The great pain or suffering (loss) in the loss of welfare for those punished is proportional to the benefits of the punishment.
2. These benefits cannot be achieved with less suffering or at less cost to those punished.

Based on this, utilitarianism holds opinions not only about the considerations that support punitive practices in general but also about what kinds of acts should be criminalized and the suitability of specific laws for certain types of crimes. (Shaw W. H, 1999)

Repaying good with good and suppressing evil with evil, in the concept of justice, must be followed: we must treat all equally, and society must treat all equally well for those who deserve absolute good. This moral obligation rests on the principle of utility or the principle of greatest happiness. One person's happiness is considered to be on the same level as other people's happiness. Each person has an equal claim to happiness in moral judgments, and lawmakers give rise to the same claim to all means of happiness. (Plamenatz, J., 1951)

Mill also explains the harm principle. Mill's harm principle states that a person's freedom can only be limited by society or the government if their actions cause harm to other people. He argues that everyone has the right to pursue happiness and advancement if their actions do not harm others. In Mill's view, harm is a central concept that describes situations in which one person's actions harm others. Essentially, Mill defends broad individual freedoms and opposes the interference of public authorities in a person's life except in cases where it could be proven that one's actions harmed others. In other words, in Mill's view, justice is related to this principle, namely that restrictions on one's freedom can only be justified if it can be proven that one's actions harm others. Mill's thinking about social justice and freedom was deeply influenced by this principle.

Mill then explains the consideration of utility as a principle of harm, which is based on the individual who is not responsible to society for his actions by disturbing the interests of others except himself. Actions such as giving advice and persuasion, if deemed necessary for the betterment of society, can be justified in expressing dislike or disapproval of his behaviour. Second, for actions that harm the interests of others, the individual must be responsible and can be subject to social or legal punishment if society believes that one or the other is necessary for its protection. (John Stuart Mill, 1996)

A powerful state can only interfere with the lives of others if it will prevent or reduce the possibility of others violating decision-making rights. The harm principle becomes part of the justified decision-making process because states support the utility principle more effectively than other coercive decision-making methods. (Holtug, N, 2002) The state can participate in limiting and preventing negative actions. Mill agreed that states should implement laws to increase happiness because harm, like crime, is incompatible with happiness.

### **Distance learning from the perspective of John Stuart Mill's Utilitarianism**

Education is necessary and also a fundamental right of every citizen without the need for discrimination based on race, ethnicity, age, gender (sex), social status, and geographic residence, which means that everyone has the same rights in the context of education to acquire knowledge. Various new educational obstacles have become the government's task to find the most appropriate solutions to solve problems in the academic world. One of the problems in the world of education today is that the education system in Indonesia needs to be equally distributed. Distance learning education is the right choice. to identify educational problems caused by geographical locations that do not allow learning to be carried out conventionally. (Apriani Safitri, J. A., & Astuti, (2019: 2)

Distance learning is an educational method that does not occur in one room and does not allow direct interaction between teachers and students. During this pandemic, various platforms, such as learning management systems and video conferencing, can be used to enable distance learning. Popular learning management systems include Google Classroom and e-learning portals owned by educational institutions. Meanwhile, Zoom, Google Meet, and Visco Webex are popular video conferencing applications for distance learning. Besides these applications, WhatsApp Groups are also an option for distance learning. (Abdul Latip, 2020: 108)

According to John Stuart Mill's utilitarianism, distance or online learning can be considered beneficial. It was because of Mill, an English philosopher and economist, that utilitarianism emerged. The main principle is that actions or policies are right if they cause the greatest happiness for the most significant number of people and wrong if they cause suffering.

In the context of distance learning, several things can be obtained, namely,

1. Distance learning allows more people to learn, especially those who live in remote areas or have physical limitations that prevent them from attending in-person classes.
2. Distance learning provides flexibility in terms of study time and location. This allows students to learn at their desired pace, which can improve understanding and retention of material.
3. Learning via the Internet is usually cheaper than conventional education. This is a more socially efficient use of resources and benefits students financially.

If seen in this context, distance learning provides many people with happiness. Limitations of distance, space, and time are not obstacles to learning. Many online courses regarding soft skills are also obtained through distance learning. Online courses usually offer low prices compared to conventional courses because, if you look closely, online courses only require time, a laptop or device, and adequate Internet to take the course. It requires more vehicle fuel and appearance costs (makeup, perfume) than conventional courses.

However, happiness for many people will still be a minority. In this case, students' readiness to accept and participate in distance learning is one of the factors that influences the distance learning process. Not only physical skills, such as the ability to use applications and have online learning media, such as a laptop or smartphone, but also psychological readiness to adapt to distance learning. When using PJJ, these two components must be considered because they can hinder the achievement of learning objectives and impact student learning outcomes. (Panggih Wahyu Nugroho & Muhammad Arief Maulana, 2021: 13)

However, this challenge can be resolved with the support of new technological innovations, and distance learning has developed rapidly. Tools like adaptive learning, virtual reality, and collaborative platforms have improved online learning. Additionally, many institutions are now adopting blended learning models, combining in-person and distance learning elements to build a broader educational approach. Overall, distance education methods have made education more accessible and more inclusive. The potential to provide quality education globally makes it essential to the current and future educational landscape.

## CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates how distance learning can be evaluated through the lens of John Stuart Mill's utilitarianism. The findings suggest that, when properly implemented and managed, distance learning aligns with Mill's criteria of maximizing happiness and goodness for the greatest number of people. Key features like flexibility, efficiency, and accessibility contribute to a more equitable and inclusive education system.

However, the study also acknowledges limitations, such as reduced social interactions and challenges in maintaining student motivation and engagement. Despite these drawbacks, the utilitarian perspective holds that the collective benefits of distance learning, particularly during crises like pandemics, outweigh these issues by allowing education to continue with minimal risk.

The research underscores the importance of the quality of distance learning, emphasizing that effective online education should foster both cognitive and emotional development, not merely the dissemination of information. To fully adhere to Mill's principles of utilitarianism, ongoing efforts are needed to address the digital divide and ensure equal access to educational resources for all students. By doing so, distance learning can provide broad access to high-quality education, fulfilling its utilitarian purpose.

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