

# Liberty, Utilitarian Morality and Sustainable Development

## Wolność, moralność utylitarna i zrównoważony rozwój

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### Abstract

State's progress is dependent upon its political and socio-economic development which is tantamount to an increasingly adverse impact on climate. These adverse impacts on climate not only endangers our life but also our future generations, resulting in political and socio-economic instability. These irrational and rampant developments of any state require a systematic strategic principle. Following such a principle, a state can be progressive in a real sense by gaining political and socio-economic development while simultaneously maintaining sustainability. In this paper, through examining J. S. Mill's doctrine of liberty and utilitarian morality, a valiant attempt has been made to resolve the problem of the free individual within the social whole by including sustainable development as a part of the progressive accomplishment of well-being.

**Key words:** liberty, development, state, opinion, individuality, utility, sustainable development

**Słowa kluczowe:** wolność, rozwój, państwo, opinia, indywidualność, zrównoważony rozwój

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### Introduction

The notion of development employs the growth of any state as political, and socio-economic, but without adding sustainable development does not complete the development of a state. We have been facing various ecological problems such as natural disasters, climate change, air pollution, futile land, earthquake etc. which drive us in an adverse way towards development irrespective of that state and attains development in political, and socio-economic sense, which is why development without sustainability and sustainability without development jeopardize the growth of the economy in any state as in the contemporary world, development is considered through the economic growth (Prakash, 2020, p. 205). Firstly, for the betterment of a state's long-lasting prosperity, the Brundtland Commission released its report to remodel our ways of living after industrialization and raised a global agenda for strategic change by including environmental integrity with socio-economic development (Strange and Bayley, 2008, p. 24; Baker, 2006, p. 19, Singh, 2018, p. 185). Though the term sustainable development was firstly mentioned in the *Nature Conservation of Nature* published in 1980 as ecological perspective in the field of forestry (Klarin, 2018, p. 70). The exploitation of natural resources ensures the implementation of environment friendly systematic schemes. The modern notion of sustainable development has come into light from the Brundtland Report. To operationalise sustainable development, one should uphold a principle that should integrate decision-making which secures the environmental goals and considerations together and implement it into the decision-making for development. Thus, in the sustainable development framework, all kinds of development underlie, and such integrated decision-making principles should be implemented in a state by policy or law (Dernbach, 2003, p. 248). In this paper, I argue that J. S. Mill came forward with his doctrine of liberty with a utilitarian background so that a society can be flourished fully and his account of the notion attains the development of a society. Here, his account of societal development encapsulates latent development of sustainability too, subsequently, adding a principle that facilitates us to move towards greater social, economic, and political development with environmental sustainability and helps in reducing the negative effects of rampant urbanisation and globalisation.

### The doctrine of liberty

I analyse the modern doctrine of societal development that adopts a development of sustainability so that such a coherent conceptual system operates upon this liberal state at a more abstract level. The underpinning characteristic of classical and medieval theory gives an account of an oppressive authority or state. Political history has always represented the struggle between liberty and authority, thus in the earliest known history, the term liberty is being defined as a protection against the tyranny of the authority (Mill, 1951, p. 267). Here, for Mill liberty is paramount in all kind of state, still democracy is the most prominent one, nevertheless, state does carry its oppressive part through the tyranny of the majority. To dilute the problem of oppressive rule, Mill tries to make a fitting adjustment between individual liberty and authority power (Bell, 1994, p. 121-123). Here, Mill adopts negative sense of liberty where within an area one is free to do according to her/his nature, while give up some liberty for preserving others' liberty (Berlin, 1969, p. 126). To be very lucid to expound his doctrine of liberty, Mill formulates a harm principle so that we can draw some limits on a state to exercise its power and within an area an individual enjoys her/his liberty unobstructed by others (Gray, 1983, p. 57). *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. That the only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any number of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others* (Mill, 1952, p. 271). By formulating this harm principle, Mill distinguishes between the private and public realm and confines legislation into the realm of the public, where one's action directly harms others (Singh, 2021, p. 508). For defining the harm principle, Mill's vital purpose is to draw a personal realm so that every individual can enjoy his/her liberty for the development of a state and within this realm, no one can interfere.

The idea of individual liberty facilitates an individual to act according to her/his conviction or will as an instrument of getting full development of a state and curbs the state to exercise its coercive power over the individual. Here, it seems to facilitate individual liberty; Mill is in favour of the free development of individuality that is subservient to the development of a state, and such development is averse to the development of sustainability. For example, single use of plastic is very harmful to the environment. Still, if an individual wants to use it, then a state cannot restrict her/him from using it due to disruption of the personal realm because all individuals are sovereign over his/her mind and body. Subsequently, as per Mill's proclamation of adopting democracy the most favourable one to adopt his principle is to fail to discharge environment-friendly schemes, which would be more helpful in the development of a state. Suppose all individuals decide unanimously to adopt or avoid particular law which is governed by the state. In that case, no rule can prevent them to act accordingly whether it is environment friendly or not. However, if one interferes in this realm, then this interference should be ceased by the harm principle. Here, the state should curb other's interference, and this interference might be by humans or non-humans as this relationship between humans and non-humans in connection with the harm principle is a much-debated issue among environmental philosophers (Fragniere, 2014, p. 6). For Mill, the harm principle embodies that one cannot obstruct others personal realm or harm others. If we extend Mill's account of harm principle to abstract entities such as climate and ecosystem then this principle is applicable on the notion of common ecological good. And this connection between harm and the environment has a direct connection even which is subservient to individual liberty. Though, individual liberty is at stake when a state, through the harm principle, puts coercive action against the individuals' will to draw the collective accountability for the development of a whole society. It is noteworthy that environmental problems lead to lots of damage which directly harms individuals as CO<sub>2</sub> emission causes. Furthermore, Mill's arguments of individual liberty bolster the development of a state which supports the sustainable development schemes within as his advocacy of free development of individuality on the backdrop of absolute liberty of thought and discussion aligns with sustainable development so that not only present generations but future generations could also enjoy their liberty in an adequate sense. Thus, in the next section of this paper, I argue how free development of individuality is possible on the backdrop of absolute *liberty of thought and discussion*.

### The free development of individuality

Certainly, Mill concedes that an individual is sovereign over his mind and body and parallelly examines the nature of a state's power, which can be applicable to individuals legitimately. For this consideration, he admits that an individual can accelerate one's liberty by applying absolute *liberty of thought and discussion*. Furthermore, Mill elucidates that there is a distinction between '*liberty of thought and discussion*' to *liberty of free speech* as liberty of free speech belongs to the umbrella category and underlies *liberty of thought and discussion*. To define more explicitly, an example of a *black current* and *fruit* elucidate its connection as a black current is a fruit, but it does not mean all the attributes of a black current can be applicable to every fruit. *Liberty of thought and discussion* is an act of speaking and writing which requires context, and difference in context makes a difference of significance. For an instance, if a person raises his/her hand in a different context then his/her same gesture of raising one's right hand at right angles to one's body makes a difference in significance as when s/he on the road or on the soccer

ground. To analyse all different discussion forms, Mill provides an idealist model of the seminar room so that all individuals can get assurance of absolute liberty which can serve the purposes of human life (Mill, 1952, p. 276). Discussions are always needed because one experience is not enough to rectify all mistakes. And a fair discussion cannot be possible without being open to listen to one's own criticism of conduct or opinion. During an ideal seminar room presentation, no one is allowed to interfere when one speaks, nor to dominate others in the discussions. Here, the successfulness of a seminar depends upon the members who assemble to discuss a particular topic, and all are rational and fair, so that concur upon some agreement as a rule to participate even in any complex set of conventions. This seminar model represents an ideal model for any of the institutions of a state so that one can get the best possible approach to getting the truth, and for Mill, every opinion is a fraction of truth as support or help to replace another. The discussion is the right way of getting the right truth. One thing one should practice continuously in the way of outstanding performance is listening to all individuals' opinions, irrespective of favourable or unfavourable opinions (Mill, 1952, p. 276). And this feature of outstanding performance neutralises the fallacy of the infallible being as this fallacy leads to a coercive, authoritative government. As per Mill's account, *Miscellaneous collection of a few wise and many foolish individuals, called the public* (Mill, 1952, p. 276). To deal with the public for getting the best possible approach of truth, Mill recalls that every person is a fallible being embodies one should not concur with an argument sans listening to others where it does not matter to him/her whether others' opinion support his/her argument or oppose. This is the lone way of keeping a being away from falling upon the fallacy of infallibility. History itself divulges the example of the lack of free discussion, steering the whole society far behind real development. As the Greek philosopher, Socrates should have been awarded as a great human being instead of being awarded the death penalty by accusing him of a corruptor of youth by the authority (Mill, 1952, p. 278). This was the dispute between authority and Socrates's notion, and at that time, authority used its coercive power to trample Socrates's notion, but gradually Socrates idea's come into limelight and conceded him as a great thinker. Mill writes, *no one can be a great thinker who does not recognise, that as a thinker it is his first duty to follow his intellect to whatever conclusions it may lead* (Mill, 1952, p. 283) and later, designated him as a virtuous man.

For Mill, even a living truth can be transformed into a dead dogma without fair discussion. One should follow the intellect to deal with an opinion by knowing the underpinnings of the opinion. For example, the sheer parroting of any formula does not represent that person's learning skill until that person does not understand and know the underpinnings of the formula. And certainly, a person follows all the underpinnings carefully and carries out an opinion, that opinion has more weightage because being rational, a person gave that opinion. Here, in a state, undoubtedly, free and equal liberty of discussion should be facilitated as *culture without freedom never made a large and liberal mind* (Mill, 1952, p. 285). Subsequently, suppression to express an opinion entails suppression of liberty and demands for equality (Gaubu, p. 134). And Mill provides *liberty of thought of discussion* in an absolute way by asserting that *if all mankind minus one were of one opinion, and only one person was of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, that he, of had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind* (Mill, 1952, p. 274). Considering this, Mill gives some sound arguments to prove his assertion that making a person silent is not good for mankind at any point. If an authority is quashing a person's opinion to express then:

- The first possibility of being true to that person's opinion is subservient and if his/her thought is true, authority deprives the truth from whole human race.
- The second possibility is that if an opinion is partially true, then the suppression of that opinion hinders the complete truth from society.
- The third possibility is that opinion is totally false but a true argument without any discussion turns into a dogma.
- The fourth possibility is that quashing an opinion without listening generates the fallacy of infallibility and this fallacy leads to the aristocracy.

In this way, Mill defines how suppression of any opinion heads towards the disadvantageous stage, which is why in any form, quashing an opinion should not be permitted in civilised society and facilitates individuals with an absolute right to liberty of thought and discussion.

Moreover, Mill does not make only critic of suppression of an opinion but also of prevailing sentiment as he asserts that *protection against the tyranny on the magistrate is not enough; there needs protection also against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling; against the tendency of society to impose, by other means than civil penalties, its own ideas, and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them; to fetter the development, and, if possible, prevent the formation of any individuality not in harmony with its ways, and to compel all charactered to fashion themselves upon the model of its own* (Pyle, 1994, p. 7). Here, Mill gives a fillip to individual liberty by facilitating all individuals with a free and equal discussion which turns down any prevailing sentiments and opinion, and adding this right as an absolute way maintains room for truly rational and effective governance. And this truly rational and effective governance is the need of a state to preserve the environment as well because the present and future development of a state depend upon environmental sustainability. The link between environment and societal development paves the way for enlightened self-interest and this link is the underpinning of sustainable

development (Emas, 2015, p. 1). Taking this into consideration, true development of a state is only possible after following the path of enlightened self-interest and Mill's formulation of the principle of liberty against the background of utility is following the same. For example, drinking water and oxygen are the base of human life and due to industrialization, air and water get polluted. But without fulfilling these basic needs, no state can be developed. Therefore, clean water and air drive are necessary for the development of human beings. These natural resources are limited so policies and rules are required to preserve these for current and future generations. And these natural resources friendly policies and schemes get enough scope in Mill's principle of liberty within which man as a progressive being is the supposition, and long-term stability of the environment is latent. Individual liberty protects every individual against the tyranny of the magistrate and an authority. However, Mill knows very well that society's tendency to impose is also a major factor in precluding the formation of any individuality (Mill, 1952, p. 293) that drives a person to think and discuss any desired topic. Though Mill distinguishes between opinion and action as theory leads action that could be impacted negatively, that is a key element of well-being. Through the example of a corn dealer, Mill exemplifies the distinction. An opinion cannot be publishable through the press that a corn dealer is a starver of the poor, but the same opinion cannot be expressible in front of the house of the corn dealer where an excited mob is gathered. The prohibition of the such expression of one's opinion is justified due to increase in molestation (Mill, 1952, p. 293). Despite individual liberty as an element of well-being, Mill's assertion of the restriction of individual liberty by restricting to harm others and infallibility inherent to restrict liberty. Furthermore, as an element of well-being, Mill accentuates the free development of individuality which curbs the majority rule as a leading principle. And he attaches high values to the proper development of individuality as without the maturity of one's faculty (using and interpreting experience in her/his own way), one could not gain the highest and most harmonious development. *The free development of individuality is one of the leading essentials of well-being; that it is not only a co-ordinate element with all that is designated by the terms civilisation, instruction, education, culture, but is itself necessary part and condition of all those things; there would be no danger that liberty should be undervalued, and the adjustment of the boundaries between it and social control would present no extraordinary difficulty* (Mill, 1952, p. 294). Through the development of individuality, Mill wants to develop the whole society by taking the assumption of man as a progressive being. Further, Mill discards Calvinistic theories due to its application of sameness for all as every human being is valuable, however, it does not mean that all human beings are the same number of patterns. Every person has her/his own distinguishing features which make her/his unique being. *If a person possesses any tolerable amount of common sense and experience, his own mode of laying out his existence is the best, not because it is the best in itself, because it is his own mode. Human beings are not like sheep; and even sheep are not indistinguishably alike* (Mill, 1952, p. 299). He advocates allowing every person to follow as s/he wants to progress in her/his life, following that different individuals are allowed to live differently. And Mill has carried out this proposition by paying heed to the climate and natural growth of flora-fauna as he locates underlying diversity in unity by defining the relationship between climate and plants. For example, A person X sows ten same plants in her/his garden and another person Y sows ten different plants in the same climate, and a third person Z sows ten of the same plants in different locations where the difference in climate as well. Gradually, persons X, Y, and Z find their nine, eight, and two plants grow full-fledged. Similarly, human beings require diversity in their mode of life to grow in a full-fledged manner of their physical, psychical, spiritual, moral, and aesthetic stature. Taking inspiration from climate and plants development, Mill applies it to human beings and formulates free development of individuality because *the individuality is the same thing with development, and that it is only the cultivation of individuality which produces, or can produce, well-developed human beings* (Mill, 1952, p. 297). Well-developed human beings secure more development in society than the rest of individuals. Here, Mill accentuates the importance of genius and showers accolades on rationality because it enhances the thinking power, which helps to act properly in the discussion as well. Thus, freedom and a variety of situations are necessary for human development because his reverence for diversity divulges his reverence towards ecological sustainability. Not diminishing the variety of situations is an advocacy of the function of the ecological life, which places all individuals' development on par with sustainable development, heading a multi-facet societal system which mitigates conflicts and facilitates coexistence with sustainability that gives scope for future regenerations as well. The discussion is a stage that facilitates the true development of society, and Mill opens the path of discussion for those who do not violate others' rights but only hurt. But to grasp total selfish indifference stage only after using the weapon of education because true education makes a person a better human being by inculcating virtue. Finally Mill is asking for this true stage of individuality to get an adequate development of a state which is harmonious towards sustainable development. In the next section of this paper, I examine to what extent utilitarian morality impacts individual liberty and sustainable development.

### **Individual liberty on utilitarian background**

If one concurs with the common idea of utility as a maximum benefit for the maximum people, then the contradiction between individual liberty and utilitarianism is perceptible. However, Mill is a hard-core supporter of the moral principle of utilitarianism. As I have mentioned in the above portion of my paper, Mill's liberty ensures an

individual's liberty and draws a boundary so that no one can interfere within the area. This principle of individual liberty as the development of individuality also has room for sustainable development, which secures present as well as future generations' rights so that they live in harmony. This harmony includes environment preservation policies and the development of individuality. Although, in the principle of utilitarianism, we are only counting heads, on which side more people agreed upon, quashing minorities' rights and their development. This moral principle is based upon merely mathematical counting that justifies democratic government but fails to neutralise the tyranny of the majority. And Mill formulates his notion of individual liberty to turn down the tyranny of the majority because this is the hinderance of free development of individuality which lags behind all mankind to seek true development through free and equal discussions that are subservient to sustainable development. Thus, the moral principle of utility does not fit into Mill's notion of individual liberty and sustainable development. Following that, utilitarianism overturns Mill's notion of individuality as tantamount to rampant development, which causes danger for the humanity and environment too. But, I discharge the charge against Mill's doctrine of liberty that it has emerged antagonistic features by adopting utilitarianism. Certainly, Mill accepts utilitarianism in his doctrine of liberty, but not in a narrow sense where confinement of utility to maximum liberty is a moral principle. Mill, in his writings, asserts that in all forms, being a dissatisfied person is better than a satisfied pig (Mill, 1863, p. 7-9). Here, a person's dissatisfaction signifies that Mill does not apply utility criteria in his doctrine of liberty. Moreover, further analysis shows that Mill adopted the general principle of happiness as a moral principle of utility, but it served in the long run, which latent in his absolute *liberty of thought and discussion* as accepting to know all sides of an argument better. *Better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are a different opinion, it is because they only their own side of question. The other party to the comparison known both sides* (Mill, 1963, p. 7-9). Subsequently, he advocates utility in a broader sense where this utility embodies development (development of individuality, rationality, and progress) and is restricted only when a person crosses the arena of personal liberty and creates harm to others.

Mill concurs that *utility will best be served by following a secondary or subordinate principle rather than appealing directly to utility* (Lyons, 1994, p. 64). Hence in Mill's doctrine of liberty, features of the utility of the moral principle do not belong to the general principle of happiness, which belongs to the narrow sense of utility. As in his utilitarianism, Mill connects an individual to a reciprocal society; a menace to society is a menace to an individual. and through this notion of harming society, one can trace the sentiment of justice where a just individual is *bête-noire* of hurting society and oneself too. So, an individual is bound with certain duties towards the rest to maintain the protection of society (Ten, 1980, p. 55). And the protection of society cannot be possible without sustaining the natural resources because resources are imperative for not only development but even the survival of an individual (Aikins, 2014). The connection of an individual to society serves the purpose of true development of a human being and society on the backdrop of sustainable development. As utility criteria for Mill is a connector of collective accountability and individual liberty, applying the utilitarian mode of thought for social development on the backdrop of individual liberty provides a way from collective to individual. Climate change is a quintessential facet that directly damages individuals' wellbeing. Hence, facilitating climate policies does not create hurdles to an individual's liberty by coercive action of the state but rather accelerates the assumption of individual's liberty-man as a progressive being that is subservient to utility. Mill's utilitarian mode of thought is not the sheer assumption of the general principle of overall happiness, which implies upon society at large, but rather has a direct connection of individuals which concedes virtuous individuals' thoughts without mulling other individuals' thoughts. Furthermore, in Mill's account, utilitarianism is not merely about the source of the quantitative cost-benefit calculus, which secures economic development, whereas a doctrine that insists on human sentiments of solidarity and these sentiments of solidarity produces social harmony as it is a generous human sentiment. Such ilk of progressive accomplishment is the underpinning of a natural basis of the sentiment of utilitarian morality because he postulates a social feeling of solidarity naturally in all human beings so that all human beings instinctively inherit the common idea of social being and this state of the common idea obtains the common good, which embraces human well-being than any maxims, and precludes to hurt others wrongful interference (O'Connor, 1997, p. 9-10). As Mill's doctrine is best suited to a democratic state, and India is one of the largest democracies across the globe and the recent verdict of the Supreme Court of India ends the false discourse of development versus environment. It bolsters the discourse that for the progress of the whole state, development and environment should be nurtured together and both are intertwined. In its verdict, *The Supreme Court in a nuanced judgement struck a blow for durable economic development in a state denuded of almost all its forest cover. The legal core of the verdict is that all land in Haryana covered under the Punjab Land Preservation Act will be treated as forest land* (*The Times of India*, July 23, 2022). Through the verdict, the institution places harmony between development and the environment because it preserves Aravalli range which would help to turn down reckless destruction of the landscape. Aravalli is one of the oldest mountains in the world and its rampant destruction for the development and earning money has already extracted a large economic and health cost in the *NCR region*<sup>1</sup>. This verdict showers

<sup>1</sup> NCR is a region of three states Haryana, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. which is surrounded the National Capital Delhi and this region has notably very less forest cover area than the national average.

accolades on Mill's perspective of reconciling the principle of utility with individuality. As Mill's principle of free individuality aligns with utilitarian morality, which has special features of solidarity and care and adequately participates in the progress of the whole society (irrespective of states), including deliquesce the contemporary environmental crisis and sustainability problems such as a powerful earthquake, rampant urbanization, exploitation of natural resources, metal contamination of rivers and aquatic animals, climate change, acid rain etc. have enough capacity to not only make hurdles to the growth of a state but also ruin the developed state. Therefore, Mill's systematic principle of liberty on the backdrop of utility facilitates social progress, which does not exclude sustainable development for the well-being of human beings due to the inter-dependency of individual progress and environmental sustainability.

## Conclusion

Mill's notion of liberty and the sentiment of utilitarian morality offer a view on the adequacy of the harm principle and an absolute right of thought and discussion as a precept of right action and governance which facilitates civilised society that serves the purpose of true development of a state by gaining political and socio-economic development with maintaining the development of sustainability simultaneously. Hence, Mill's true stage of individuality opens the path of enlightened self-interest that advocates a variety of situations as a necessary condition for human development, heading a multi-facet societal system that mitigates conflicts of the free individual within the social whole by including sustainable development as a part of the progressive accomplishment of well-being that widens the scope for future generations as well.

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