

USING MORAL ATTITUDES IN THE VIEW OF UTILITARIANISM AND DEFINING THE STAGES OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT ACCORDING TO KOHLBERG

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Abstract

This study aims to find the relation between the level of use of moral attitudes from the point of view of utilitarianism and the stages of moral development according to Kohlberg. The methodology of the study is quantitative with a total of 200 subjects participating in the study. The utilitarian view revolutionized ethics by stating that morality is a matter of making the world happier and not a matter of pleasing God nor of being faithful to abstract rules. In fact, two of the emblematic utilitarian representatives, Bentham and J. S. Mill, insisted that there is only one moral principle — the Benefit Principle, which requires that we choose whichever action, would have the best consequences for all concerned. On the other hand, Kohlberg defined the six stages of moral development, the fourth of which is the support of the social system and mindfulness, in which the good is understood as the performance of civic duty and as the support of the welfare of the group; while personal relationships are subject to the interests of the group. The correlation analysis suggests that there is a strong positive correlation between high level use of moral attitudes in terms of utilitarianism and the stage of conventional morality. Comparative analyses have shown statistically significant differences between high- and low-level use of moral attitudes in terms of utilitarianism and Kohlberg's dominant stage of moral development.

Keywords: Use of moral attitudes, utilitarianism, stages of moral development

1. Introduction

This research, the variables of which belong to the field of moral philosophy and the ethics of psychology, answers the research question of: what is the relation between the use of moral attitudes in the aspect of utilitarianism and the stages of moral development according to Kohlberg?

The utilitarian moral considers the power of human beings as legitimate to sacrifice their greatest good for the good of others, and considers in vain the sacrifice that does not add to or is expected to add to the general extent of happiness, since happiness is not the agent's own happiness, but that of all concerned. "As between his own happiness and that of others, utilitarianism requires him to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator" (Mill. J. S, 2006).

In Kohlberg's theory of moral development, three levels (six stages in total) in the hierarchical structure of the moral development theory were addressed. These three levels follow a consistent order, but substantively correspond to different types of moral reasoning. The first and primary motive of the first level (pre-conventional), which includes the first two stages (obedience and punishment; individual interests), is avoiding punishment and attain

pleasure. In the first stage, the individual does not understand or care about the fact that other people may have desires and want things similar to theirs. Thus, the person at this stage acts in an egoist way. Then, in the second stage, the person realizes that he can differentiate her own desires from the wishes of other people and the authority figures. At the second level (conventional), which includes the third and fourth stages (interpersonal; authority), the individual has a motivation that is concerned with mutual relations and expectations. The main motivation of the individuals at this level is to be accepted and socially approved by others and, in this context, to fulfill the orders of those who are hierarchically superior. Consequently, at this level, people define interpersonal relationships through their place in society.

At the last and third (post-conventional) level, the individual develops an autonomous moral conception, while in moral judgment he often refers to a universal set of principles (such as justice and fairness).

2. Theoretical framework

2.1 The use of moral attitudes from the utilitarian point of view

It is rightly considered that utilitarians revolutionized ethics and are often even called social reformers since their goal was their doctrine to bring change not only to the thought but also in practice. They assumed that they can achieve this goal by declaring happiness as a legitimate purpose of human life and by concluding, at the same time, that the core of morality is the happiness of being in this world, even by requiring us to do whatever necessary to foster this happiness.

Initially, Bentham was the main figure whose primary goal was the reform of English laws and institutions, and was later succeeded by James Mill and his son John Stuart Mill, who even more persuasively turned into the most important defender of this moral theory. Bentham considered the principle of utility as the basis of his work, and that any other kind of principle is wrong, since it is the only right principle to guide us in all cases, for which he provided a clear and precise explanation of what he meant by it: "By the principle of utility is meant that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency which it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question: or, what is the same thing in other words, to promote or to oppose that happiness. I say of every action whatsoever, and therefore not only of every action of a private individual, but of every measure of government."(Bentham, J. 2002-2006).

It is indisputable that John Stuart Mill is the most meritorious for placing utilitarianism within the genuine theoretical framework, first by clarifying what Utilitarianism is not, and then by defining what should we understand by it.

According to him, from Epicurus to Bentham, utility is not defined as something opposite to pleasure, but rather as pleasure, which among other things includes the absence of pain. "The creed which accepts as the foundations of morals "utility" or the "greatest happiness principle" holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness." (Mill.J. S,2006). He further defines happiness as "intended pleasure and the absence of pain" while "unhappiness" as "pain and the privation of pleasure" (Mill. J. S, 2006).

One of the most frequent misapprehensions of utilitarianism was the equation of life to that of beasts which, according to Mill, is felt as degrading, since a beast's pleasures do not satisfy a human being's conceptions of happiness. "Human beings have faculties more elevated than the animal appetites, and when once made conscious of them, do not regard anything as happiness which does not include their gratification" (Mill. J. S, 2006).

The being that has low capacities of enjoyment has the greatest chance of being satisfied while the highly-endowed one will always feel that any happiness which he can achieve is imperfect.

"It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied" (Mill. J. S, 2006).

According to Mill, the utilitarian moral considers the power of human beings as legitimate to sacrifice their greatest good for the good of others, and considers in vain the sacrifice that does not add to or is expected to add to the general extent of happiness, since happiness is not the agent's own happiness, but that of all concerned. "As between his own happiness and that of others, utilitarianism requires him to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator" (Mill. J. S, 2006).

The proclamation of happiness as the legitimate purpose of life and the claim that morality consists precisely in the achievement of this purpose and not for God to be pleased with us nor to be faithful to abstract rules, were sufficient for utilitarianism to often be described as atheistic, to which Mill responds as follows: "If it be a true belief that God desires, above all things, the happiness of his creatures, and that this was his purpose in their creation, utility is not only not a godless doctrine, but more profoundly religious than any other"(Mill. J. S, 2006).

Even the other defamation as an immoral doctrine due to the identification with Expediency, according to Mill is unfair and unsustainable since, on the contrary, The Expedient, in this sense, instead of being the same thing with the useful, is a branch of the hurtful. (Mill. J. S, 2006).

The classic utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill considers that actions should be judged as good or bad based on their consequences and during their evaluation, only the amount of happiness or unhappiness caused matters, which weighs equally for every person. Therefore, gone are all references to God or to abstract moral rules, because morality is no longer conceived of as faithfulness to some divinely given code or some set of inflexible rules, nor as a system of nasty puritanical prohibitions, which are mainly designed to stop people from having fun. (Rachels, J.&Rachels. S, 2009).

2.2 Determining the stages of moral development according to Kohlberg

Although over the years the moral psychology community has come to accept that there are two types of moral reasoning, namely Kohlberg's justice Gilligan's care, but there still seem to be some unresolved issues. (2006).

Since the very beginning, Kohlberg's theory has incited controversy and stimulated a heated debate. However, just as he obstinately defended the cognitive-developmental approach,

Kohlberg also listened carefully to his critics, as he continued to revise and reformulate his theory throughout his career, admittedly “eating his own words” while doing so. (Kohlberg, 1973, cited by; Arnold.L. M, 2000).

Kohlberg's theory suggests that moral development can be conceptualized along a continuum ranging from low and concrete to high and abstract levels (Söderhamn. O, Bjørnstad. O. J, Skisland. A, Cliffordson.CH, 2011).

There are three levels (in a total of six stages) in Kohlberg’s theory of moral development in a hierarchical structure. These three levels follow a consistent order, but substantively correspond to different types of moral reasoning. The first and primary motive of the first level (pre-conventional), which includes the first two stages (obedience and punishment; individual interests), is avoiding punishment and attainpleasure. In the first stage, the individual does not understand or care about the fact that other people may have desires and want things similar to theirs. Thus, the person at this stage acts in an egoist way. Then, in the second stage, the person realizes that he can differentiate her own desires from the wishes of other people and the authority figures. At the second level (conventional), which includes the third and fourth stages (interpersonal; authority), the individual has a motivation that is concerned with mutual relations and expectations. The main motivation of the individuals at this level is to be accepted and socially approved by others and, in this context, to fulfill the orders of those who are hierarchically superior. Consequently, at this level, people define interpersonal relationships through their place in society.

At the last and third (post-conventional) level, the individual develops an autonomous moral conception, while in moral judgment he often refers to a universal set of principles (such as justice and fairness). This stage corresponds to a universal set of moral principles that all people must follow, according to Kohlberg, and moral superiority is characterized as reaching this stage. The normative moral superiority, which a rational human being as in Kant’s categorical imperative must achieve as a result of cognitive reasoning, is a sense of universal justice. The individual in this stage sees morality as an end, not as a means. (Yılmaz. O, Bahçekapili. G. H, Sevi. B. 2019).

3. Methodology

The variables of this research were treated through non-experimental methodology, quantitative approach, the data of which were collected through appropriate instruments for measuring the key variables. The sample of this study is intentional and was selected by sharing the instrument on social networks (Facebook and LinkedIn), which had the possibility to apply the tool online, and has ensured and guaranteed the anonymity of each subject by respecting all research ethical norms. The respondents were not informed in advance about the purpose of the study although they had instruction details related to the application of measuring instruments specified. A total of 200 respondents participated in the study, of which 84 (42%) are male and 116 (58%) are female. Regarding the status of the institution where they work; 80 (40%) stated that they work in public institutions, 58 (29%) in private institutions and 61 (30.5%) respondents are unemployed.

3.1 The instrument for measuring the use of moral attitudes from the utilitarianism point of view

The instrument for measuring the level of use of moral attitudes from the utilitarianism point of view has a total of 12 statements and measures by Likert scale: 1 ("Strongly disagree"), 2 ("Disagree"), 3 ("Agree") and 4 ("Strongly agree").

The statements of the respective instrument have been oriented towards collecting data from the respondent on law enforcement as a general utility, interpersonal sincerity, willingness to share excess material wealth to those in need, care about reducing the physical consequences of others and the readiness to donate bodily organs for people in need. The instrument was designed by the researchers themselves and was applied for the first time in the field with this respective sample. This instrument has an average internal reliability and consistency, with a value of Alpha Cronbach's .46.

3.2 The instrument for determining the level of moral development stages according to Kohlberg

The instrument for determining the level of moral development stages according to Kohlberg included 5 improvised situations for the actual standard, which included 6 moral judgements, and for each moral judgements, the responded has had the opportunity to assess based on the Likert scale: 1 ("Strongly disagree"), 2 ("Disagree"), 3 ("Agree") and 4 ("Strongly agree").

The situations of the respective instrument have been oriented to put the subject in the position of a student who is on the verge of graduation and has to make some non-standard decisions in the last exam, to pass the exam or not; in the position of the citizen who has to consume more or less water than the amount allowed by the city reserves; the pay toll employee who has to allow or not to pass an emergency case free of charge; breaking of speed limits in traffic due to the urgency to pay a loan installment and unmasking of the work colleague who has committed a theft in the workplace.

The moral judgements the respondents have assessed according to certain scales have been oriented towards collecting data related to judgements as a result of obedience and punishment based on personal interests; judgements based on other people's and authority figures' desires and judgement based on some universal principles (such as justice and fairness). This instrument has high internal reliability and consistency, with a value of Alpha Cronbach's .77.

4. Results

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for the main variables, which show that the utilitarian variable mean is $M = 13.75$, with a minimum value 9 and a maximum 19, indicating that the obtained mean is below the expected mean and there is no variable presence. The mean of the first moral development stage is $M = 10.83$ with a minimum value 5 and a maximum 19, indicating presence of this variable, the mean of the second moral development stage is $M = 13.77$ with a minimum value 9 and a maximum 19, the mean of the third moral development stage is $M = 12.08$ with a minimum value 8 and a maximum 19, the mean of the fourth moral development stage is $M = 13.05$ with a minimum value 8 and a maximum 18, the mean of the fifth moral development stage is $M = 13.65$ with a minimum value 9 and a maximum 18, the mean of the sixth moral development stage is $M = 13.27$ with a minimum value 7 and a

maximum 19, all variables have shown a lower obtained mean than the expected mean, except the variable of the use of the utilitarian moral attitude that has shown a higher obtained mean higher than expected, although the Skewness score lies in the negative direction and proves the opposite.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the use of moral attitudes from the utilitarianism point of view and determination of moral development stages according to Kohlberg

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
Utilitarianism	200	23.00	45.00	32.22	3.6494	.243	.172	.591	.34
First stage	200	5.00	19.00	10.83	2.2239	.261	.172	1.05	.34
Second stage	200	9.00	19.00	13.77	1.8423	.109	.172	.102	.34
Third stage	200	8.00	19.00	12.07	1.8538	.052	.172	.635	.34
Fourth stage	200	8.00	18.00	13.04	1.9108	-.222	.172	-.004	.34
Fifth stage	200	9.00	18.00	13.65	1.9561	.016	.172	-.226	.34
Sixth stage	200	7.00	19.00	13.26	2.2672	-.294	.172	.066	.34
Valid N (listwise)	200								

Table 2 shows the normality test which indicates that the distribution of the study variables is above 0.05 ($p > 0.05$), and that according to Kolmogorov-Smirnov, there are no differences between the expected normality by the real population and that surveyed in the study.

The normal distribution is also graphically presented, where even in Q-Q plots it is seen that the means lie in the line of expected normality, that of utilitarianism and of moral development stages. From this observation, it is shown that the conditions to use the parametric statistics in further testing of the study hypotheses are met.

Table 2. Normality test

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Utilitarianism	,134	200	,200*	,963	200	,838
First stage	,194	200	,200*	,880	200	,188
Second stage	,208	200	,200*	,950	200	,707
Third stage	,255	200	,136	,912	200	,370
Fourth stage	,200	200	,200*	,870	200	,152
Fifth stage	,263	200	,109	,798	200	,028
Sixth stage	,263	200	,109	,798	200	,028

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

On Table 3, the results of the correlative analysis show that there is correlation with positive direction between the use of moral attitudes from the utilitarian point of view and determining of moral development according to Kohlberg, respectively the use of moral attitudes from the utilitarian point of view and the second stage with $r= 0.31$ (sig.=0.00), use of moral attitudes from the utilitarian point of view and the third stage with $r= 0.46$ (sig.=0.00), use of moral attitudes from the utilitarian point of view and the fourth stage with $r= 0.56$ (sig.=0.00), use of moral attitudes from the utilitarian point of view and the fifth stage with $r= 0.76$ (sig.=0.00) and use of moral attitudes from the utilitarian point of view and the sixth stage with $r= 0.58$ (sig.=0.00), while there is no statistically significant correlation between use of moral attitudes from the utilitarian point of view and the first stage. The shown statistics verify the first hypothesis that: *there is strong relation of positive direction between the use of moral attitudes from the utilitarian point of view and the fifth stage according to Kohlberg.*

Table 3. Correlative analysis of the use of moral attitudes from the utilitarian point of view and determining of moral development according to Kohlberg

		Utilitarianism	First stage	Second stage	Third stage	Fourth stage	Fifth stage	Sixth stage
Utilitarianism	Pearson Correlation	1	Second stage	.309**	.456**	.555**	.761**	.576**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		Third stage	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	200	Fourth stage	200	200	200	200	200
First stage	Pearson Correlation	-.100	Fifth stage	.353**	.308**	.185**	-.065	.144*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.160	Sixth stage	.000	.000	.009	.364	.043
	N	200	200	200	200	200	200	200
Second stage	Pearson Correlation	.309**	.353**	1	.464**	.570**	.291**	.248**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	200	200	200	200	200	200	200
Third stage	Pearson Correlation	.456**	.308**	.464**	1	.643**	.534**	.428**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	200	200	200	200	200	200	200
Fourth stage	Pearson Correlation	.555**	.185**	.570**	.643**	1	.588**	.508**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.009	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	200	200	200	200	200	200	200
Fifth stage	Pearson Correlation	.761**	-.065	.291**	.534**	.588**	1	.530**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.364	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	200	200	200	200	200	200	200
Sixth stage	Pearson Correlation	.576**	.144*	.248**	.428**	.508**	.530**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.043	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	200	200	200	200	200	200	200

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed)

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 4 presents the T-test obtained data which show that the highest mean in the second moral stage is scored by unemployed respondents, $M = 14.39$ and $SD = 1.72$, respondents employed in private institutions, $M = 13.47$ and $SD = 2.01$ and respondents working in public institutions, $M = 13.54$ and $SD = 1.71$.

The highest mean in the fourth stage is also scored by unemployed respondents with $M=13.60$ and $SD=1.60$, compared to respondents employed in private institutions $M = 12.74$ and $SD = 2.01$ and those employed in public institutions with $M = 13.54$ and $SD = 1.71$. The results of the difference based on the institution status in the use of moral attitudes from utilitarian point of view and other stages of moral development are not presented in the table since they did not show statistically significant differences. Based on this test, the second set hypothesis that: *Employees in public institutions possess a higher level of moral status, than the employed in private institutions and the unemployed, is not verified and in this case the null hypothesis is accepted.*

Table 4. T-test of the difference of moral development stages according to the respondents working institution status

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Minimum	Maximum	F	Sig.
Second stage	Public	80	13.5375	1.71327	.19155	9.00	18.00	5.123	.007
	Private	58	13.4655	2.01063	.26401	10.00	19.00		
	Unemployed	61	14.3934	1.71541	.21964	11.00	19.00		
	Total	199	13.7789	1.84264	.13062	9.00	19.00		
Fourth stage	Public	80	12.8500	1.90336	.21280	8.00	17.00	3.878	.022
	Private	58	12.7414	2.12389	.27888	8.00	18.00		
	Unemployed	61	13.6066	1.60498	.20550	10.00	17.00		
	Total	199	13.0503	1.91419	.13569	8.00	18.00		

5. Discussion

The findings of this research verified that: there is positive relation between the use of moral attitudes from the utilitarian point of view and the post-conventional moral stage, and this finding is in line with Mill's conclusion that the utilitarian moral considers as legitimate the force of human beings to sacrifice their greatest good for the good of others, and considers in vain the sacrifice that does not add to or is expected to add to the general extent of happiness, since happiness is not the agent's own happiness, but that of all concerned. "As between his own happiness and that of others, utilitarianism requires him to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator. (Mill. J. S, 2006). Moreover, there is similarity with "Even the other defamation as an immoral doctrine due to the identification with Expediency, according to Mill is unfair and unsustainable since, on the contrary, The Expedient, in this sense, instead of being the same thing with the useful, is a branch of the hurtful". (Mill. J. S, 2006).

Through T-test, it was found that the second and fourth moral development stages have a higher mean in respondents who are unemployed than in the employed respondents (private and public institutions). No similar or approximate examination including the same variables was found, therefore the discussion on the findings of this study with theory or earlier research is quite poor.

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