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UTILITARIANISM AND THE IDEA OF UNIVERSITY A Short Ethical Analysis¹

ABSTRACT

The standard objection to the utilitarian vision of morality is that utilitarian so-called "Greatest-Happiness Principle" could justify counter-intuitive practices such as punishing and sacrifice of innocents, breaking of promises and manipulation. The underlying presumption is that the greatest cause (general utility, "happiness") must be capable of justifying causing suffering of the few. The fact is that, in the upbringing and education of humans (children), some degree of manipulation is needed. Instead, in that process, we use concepts which belong to deontological prescriptions ("obligations," "duties") such as "Do not lie" or "Do not steal." Our question is: Can we imagine the *University* guided by the simple utility principle. We must remember that a *University* is for adults, not for children. Why now not be open and at the *University* say that everything we do we do for the sake of hedonistic "happiness," not for the sake of duty. That seems suspicious for several reasons. Maybe the most noteworthy objection is that Mill's version of the utilitarianism tends to divide humanity into two classes: moral aristocracy, which seeks "higher pleasures," and others who do not. Does that mean that utilitarians must organize *secret* utilitarian universities for moral aristocracy? Does it mean that moral aristocracy, according to the utility principle, should organize "deontological," manipulative public universities for lower classes?

KEYWORDS

utilitarianism,
hedonism,
consequentialism,
university

1. Introduction

For more than a decade, the academic and intellectual community in South-East Europe has been faced with a call for a "reform" of the system of education, especially at higher levels. So far, nobody gives a complete and accurate picture what "the reform" should be, but concepts of "efficiency" and "productivity" are undoubtedly the essence in most of the offered explanations and justifications. However, it is notoriously unclear what in some academic areas utilitarian-like "efficiency" is. Does "efficiency" in education mean increasing *the number* of students who get *any* degree? What "efficiency" in *humanistic* disciplines and art is and how to evaluate it? How to estimate the effectiveness of education in basic *sciences* – fundamental physics, for example? Those questions certainly are vague. On the other

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hand, the *utilitarian taste* of the proposed and ongoing reform is evident. The reason is that the “efficiency” in public affairs is associated with a concept of “utility.” That is nothing new. The “curricular battle” between utilitarians and conservative elites was alive in John Stuart Mill’s time (19th Century). As Elizabeth Anderson has noted, this conflict “was framed as a conflict between modern science and ancient arts” (Anderson 2009: 358). Nowadays, the conflict has changed its form, but the essence is the same. It is a tension between demands of “efficiency” and question of a public need for “broadly educated intellects.”

The goal of this paper is not political, but a philosophical one – to assess whether core ideas of utilitarianism are compatible with the idea of University. This brief analysis has three primary contentions:

- 1) A university is *not* “a factory of knowledge” or training camp. As Anderson puts it: “The fundamental purpose of a university is not to train professionals but to produce cultivate human beings” (Anderson 2009: 358). The University is an association of teachers, researchers, and students who are free to exchange and challenge various intellectual ideas. That freedom is based on three fundamental notions: *autonomy, integrity, and development of critical thinking*. It is a critical issue to examine whether these concepts could be based or even adequately explained on a utilitarian basis. Of course, in the contemporary theory of education, a practical utility of the institution of the university is widely recognized. However, even those who emphasize the fact that it has utility value admit the importance of further consequences of its existence: “The basic reality, for the University, is the widespread recognition that new knowledge is the most important factor in economic and social growth. We are just now perceiving that the university’s invisible product, knowledge, may be the most powerful single element in our culture, *affecting the rise and fall of professions and even social classes, of regions and even of nations*” (Kerr 2001: pp. vii-viii).
- 2) The university is an institution where individual *moral education* comes to an end. What sort of *moral* education university should provide – utilitarian, which, under some circumstances, could include indoctrination and manipulation, or some other?
- 3) The university is an *institution* with its own rules. Those rules may be not the utilitarian ones.

2. Back to the Beginning: Bentham and Mill

In the second chapter of his *Utilitarianism*, J. S. Mill wrote: “The creed which accepts as the foundation 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. By happiness are intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure” (Mill 2007: 7). The same basic idea has been presented earlier by Jeremy Bentham. However, Bentham’s initial utilitarian concept was more radical but also theoretically clearer than Mill’s. Let us see what Bentham’s initial idea of “quantitative utilitarianism” was. A famous quote: “The utility of all these arts and sciences, —I speak

both of those of amusement and curiosity, —the value which they possess, is exactly in proportion to the pleasure they yield. Every other species of preeminence which may be attempted to be established among them is altogether fanciful. Prejudice apart, the game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry. If the game of push-pin furnishes more pleasure, it is more valuable than either. Everybody can play at push-pin: poetry and music are relished only by a few. The game of push-pin is always innocent: it were well could the same be always asserted of poetry. Indeed, between poetry and truth there is natural opposition: false morals and fictitious nature” (Bentham 2003: 94).

It is an important question whether happiness could be explained (only) in terms of pleasure. For that reason, some philosophers have offered revised characterizations of utilitarianism. For example, as a more accurate synonym for vague label “utilitarianism,” Bernard Williams proposed the term “eudemonistic consequentialism.” This concept might be helpful because most of the objections to the utilitarian approach to morality and ethics are, in fact, objections to the “consequentialistic” nature of utilitarianism. Of course, there are other forms of consequentialism, but utilitarianism is certainly the most influential one. The natural question now is: what is consequentialism? Bernard Williams’ explanation may be helpful: “No one could hold that everything, of whatever category, that has value, has it in virtue of its consequences. If that were so, one would just go for ever, and there would be an obviously hopeless regress ... If not everything that has value has it in virtue of consequences, then presumably there are some types of thing which have non-consequential value, and also some particular things that have such value because they are instances of those types. Let us say, using a traditional term, that anything has that sort of value, has *intrinsic* value. I take it to be the central idea of consequentialism that the only kind of thing that has intrinsic values is *states of affairs*, and that anything else that has value has it because it conduces to some intrinsically valuable state of affairs.” (Williams 1973: 82–83).

For Bentham and Mill, “intrinsic value” is ascribed to the which has *maximized overall happiness*. Bentham was a radical hedonist, so he thought that happiness could be calculated by measuring the quantity of pleasure and pain (“moral arithmetics”). It is a wide-accepted opinion that the *radical hedonistic* (quantitative) utilitarian approach to general morality has many problems. In the case of the university, it is a reasonable assumption that, for Bentham, the question about the need for the higher education is settled by his simple initial theoretical approach. Establishing of such a complex institution, as the university is, depends on the fact whether it produces more costs (pains) than benefits (general happiness). Moreover, an often-overlooked Bentham’s idea should be stressed. The real “representative” of the value (utility) in the human world is the money (Bentham 1882: 8–9). It follows that anything that should be estimated regarding social value must have some comparative market value measurable in some amount of money. The logic of that thinking tells us that the same method should be applied to the value of the university. In a case of the University that logic seems odd.

Mill tried to fix various problems of Benthamian “felicific calculus” by introducing a new idea – the idea of “qualitative utilitarianism.” Supposedly, if we can distinguish between pure physical, (“lower”) pleasures and “higher” (i.e., spiritual) pleasure the accusation of “vulgar” and “crude” hedonism addressed to the

utilitarians would vanish. In his response to accusations of vulgarity, Mill wrote: “When thus attacked, the Epicurean has always answered that it is not they, but their accusers who represent human nature in a degrading light since the accusation supposes human beings to be capable of no pleasures except those which swine are capable” (Mill 2007: 7 – 8).

Here is the further question. How to *distinguish* higher from lower pleasures?

Mill thought that he had an answer: “If I am asked what I mean by the difference of quality in pleasures ... there is but only possible answer. Of two pleasures, if there be one to which all or all most of all who have experience of both give a decided preference, irrespective of any feeling or moral obligation to prefer it, that is the more desirable pleasure. If one of the two is, by those who are competently acquainted with both, placed so far above the other that they prefer it, even though knowing it to be attended with a greater amount of discontent, and would not resign it for any quantity of the other pleasure which their pleasure is capable of, we are justified in ascribing to the preferred enjoyment superiority in quality so far outweighing quantity to render it, in comparison, of small account” (Mill 2007: 8–9). It is not clear whether Mill was consistent in thinking that everybody is willing to admit the superiority of “higher pleasures.” There is a part of Mill’s work that strongly suggests that it is not the case. His thoughts on political freedom and culture (including education) are that part. Mill states: “The only real hindrance to the attainment of happiness by almost all people is the present wretched education, and wretched social arrangements” (Mill 2007: 13).

It is in the “moral influences” of education, at once “more important than all others” and “the most complicated,” that Mill perceives to be its greatest potential. Without appropriate influences, the young will not develop the “mental culture” necessary for the independence of thought and autonomy of action which is the proper moral state of human beings. Moreover, children are, in Mill’s opinion, inordinately selfish, not in the cold, calculating manner of some adults, but in always acting under the impulse of a present desire. It is, therefore, imperative to exploit the power of education to cultivate those desires whose satisfaction is at least compatible with the good of people. Those desires naturally include desires for the happiness of others (Mill 1989: 49; Cooper 2001: 107).

Classical utilitarianism and a university

Mill’s “defense” of utilitarianism has many problems. For our purpose, it is necessary to recognize the often unobserved fact that a “qualitative utilitarianism” has a strong tendency to divide mankind into two classes (or types of character): *intellectual and moral aristocracy* that seeks “higher pleasures” and others (“plebs”) who do not. It is not a mere interpretation of Mill’s opinion. We can find clear indications of that classification in Mill’s work: “One of the commonest types of character among us is that of a man all whose ambition is self-regarding; who has no higher purpose in life than to enrich or raise in the world himself and his family...If we wish men to practice virtue, it is worthwhile trying to make them love virtue, and feel it an object, and not a tax paid for leave to pursue other objects. It is worth training them to feel, not only actual wrong or actual meanness but the absence of noble aims and endeavours...” (Mill 2009: 350–351).

The question now is: *for whom* universities, from a utilitarian point of view, are made? Are they made for higher class only, or for, as Mill put it, for “collective mass of fellow creatures,” as well? If members of “lower class” do not have any interest in higher pleasures, it is a logical conclusion that they do not have much interest in traditional university education, especially in theoretical and humanistic sciences and “fine arts.” High-level education simply requires proper motivation that stems from seeking higher pleasures. On the other hand, “lower class,” at best, would be satisfied with a level of education needed for mastering some practical and lucrative skills. For that “class,” factories of practical skills or training campuses are all they need.

3. A Thought Experiment: “Utilitarian University”

Classical anti-utilitarian arguments typically take a form of short stories. Those stories usually have this inner structure: 1) the argument starts with a description of some moral dilemma whose consequences affect more than one person (i.e., the agent himself), 2) within that descriptive framework, an individual or social group must make a decision that involves enormous moral consequences, and 3) any action on utilitarian basis seems to go against “ordinary morality” and/or linguistic intuitions. Some of the most famous examples are “punishment” of innocent to avoid disastrous consequences (McCloskey 1972: 119–134), the so-called “desert island problem” – practices of secretly breaking promises to achieve the “greater good” (Narveson 1963: 63–67), or acting outrageously (e.g. killing the President) to obtain the best consequences (Locke 1976: 153–155). If the agent is a utilitarian in these cases, she must (respectively): punish an innocent man; break a promise, and kill the President. In those cases, there are two ever-present, *but not always visible*, “secret ingredients.” First, all those acts should be done *in total secrecy* (otherwise they would be ineffective or harmful to the “utilitarian project”). Second, if the action fails, a utilitarian agent has a particular obligation to do his best to hide the real truth, even by using manipulation and indoctrination, if necessary.

How this type of the argument looks like in a case of the university?

For the beginning let us say that some philosophers think that utilitarianism (in all forms) could have issues with the so-called *condition of publicity*: “It must be possible under any circumstances for us to promulgate it publicly without thereby violating that theory itself” (Bykvist 2010: 95). To put it differently: an adequate ethical theory *must not* require secrecy, but utilitarianism cannot avoid it. This condition is based on following Sidgwick’s remark: “[T]he utilitarian conclusion, carefully stated, seems to be this: The opinion that secrecy can make right an action that wouldn’t otherwise be so should itself be kept comparatively secret.” (Sidgwick 1981: 490).

In the spirit of these remarks, we can imagine this situation. A group of caring utilitarians would like to improve the existing educational system. They “realize” that a concept of the university in the current sense does not meet needs of a majority and contemporary criteria of efficiency. Consequently, they decide to do “the reform.” Because humanity is naturally divided into two classes (“utilitarian moral aristocracy” and “pebs”), it follows that *the utilitarians* should organize

secret utilitarian universities for the moral aristocracy and “public universities” for others. The reason for secrecy is to select “genuine” candidates without potentially harmful effects of public opinion and demands for “justice” or, in that case, “equality of opportunities.” At secret (“real”) universities for the moral aristocracy, education could be organized in an openly utilitarian manner. The point is obvious: members of utilitarian “moral aristocracy” naturally seek higher pleasures, and for that reason, they would not neglect humanistic disciplines, highly theoretical sciences, and art. What about lower class? The moral aristocracy, according to the utility principle, should organize public, fundamentally manipulative, universities for lower classes. Those institutions would not be “real” or “serious,” but could be (falsely) *called* “universities” for reasons of propaganda or “useful” manipulation. In fact, they would be “factories of practical skills.” Students and even most of the professors of those schools would not be aware of the utilitarian basis of their institutions because they have the “wrong” (e.g., deontological) idea of morality. Of course, those institutions are not “proper” universities. They have lower demands on “students” and “professors”; they are not concerned with any “theory” that could not lead to utility; “fine arts” are excluded from the curriculum, and so on. However, it does not matter. Why? Because all the “lower class” needs from education is a small degree of skills that enable members of it to make some money. Those men and women are blessed with ignorance, so they without any guilty conscience could indulge themselves in “lower pleasures” – eating a favorite food, drinking beer, watching ball games, having sex, and so on. Simply, complex institutions, such as the University, are of no interest to them.

What if such a project fails, say because somehow knowledge of the existence of secret universities for “higher class” becomes public and that triggers public outrage?

Nothing! Deny everything and cover up the truth! (*Recognition* of the failure would have disastrous consequences. Who would improve institutions if the plot is discovered?)

We can expand this argument in the following manner. “Benevolent utilitarians” for the sake of “social justice”, “equality of opportunity” and social *efficiency* could decide to publicly “abolish” *the institution of university* as “obsolete” and then: a) publicly organize “schools of skills”; and b) *secretly* organize “real” universities of their own. Secret universities could recruit their students almost as officers of secret services.

This case could go much further, but it would be unfair not to mention a typical utilitarian response to it. It comes to this: “stories” like the one presented above, are oversimplified, unrealistic and, consequently, theoretically irrelevant. Richard Hare, who was a utilitarian, thought that these cases could serve as arguments only against “crude one-level act-utilitarian” who “constantly figures as Aunt Sally in the writings of anti-utilitarians” (Hare 1981: 191).

4. Education, Indoctrination and Manipulation

It is fair to add that one of the *utilitarians* – Richard Hare – has warned us that we must admit the difference between education and indoctrination. He thinks that this difference does not lie in the content but in the method of education. That way

of thinking is nothing unusual in utilitarian tradition. We have already seen that Mill's original idea was that intellectual elite has *an obligation* to make the rest of humanity love intellectual and moral virtue. That process could (or should?) include manipulation and indoctrination because "lower class" does not have a natural tendency to develop a virtue. That conclusion is suggested by Mill's expression "*make them love virtue*" in his "Inaugural Address at St. Andrews" (quoted above).

Preference utilitarian Richard Hare allows *some* degree of manipulation and indoctrination to be necessary because infants and young adolescents are incapable of a higher level of "critical thinking." Hare's conclusion from that fact is: "If one wants to keep 'indoctrination' as a bad word, one cannot start using it of methods which everyone thinks legitimate, because inevitable" (Hare 1992a: 115). Furthermore, it seems that some degree of indoctrination is a necessity in *any* educational process, even in a moral one: "If a teacher is willing to engage in serious and honest discussion with his pupils to the extent that they are able, then he is not an indoctrinator even though he may also, because of their age, be using non-rational methods of persuasion. These methods are not, as is commonly supposed, bad in themselves; they are bad only if they are used to produce attitudes that are not open to argument. The fact that the teacher does not himself have such attitudes is the guarantee that he is not an indoctrinator."¹ Expectably, Hare offers the following comment as a safeguard: "Irrational attitudes cannot flourish when rational methods are seriously practiced" (Hare 1992a: 119). And, indeed, pedagogical manipulation (and indoctrination) is a *special case* of manipulation. We could put this essential observation in the following manner: "Pedagogical process is essentially manipulative, as education is in a way a process which manipulates people... The aim and goal of pedagogical manipulation are, however, different from what we usually associate with the concept of 'manipulation.' Its aim is not deceit or indoctrination but a state of affairs in which there is no longer any more reason for manipulation to go on. The aim is maturity and competence, which should comprise a command of factual knowledge and capacity to make good evaluations, both in the world of accepted values (in terms of success and happiness) and regarding their moral rightness and wrongness. This presupposes the capacity for autonomy and self-determination" (Babić 2005: 233).

It is evident that when Hare talks about "non-rational methods of persuasion" he, in fact, talks about manipulation. There is a reason for that cautiousness. A huge number of anti-utilitarian arguments in the philosophical literature was built upon a possibility that utilitarianism could justify or even require indoctrination and manipulation. That seems true for all variations of utilitarianism which represent a classic version of consequentialism.

Now we are facing the following question. If realizing the desirable state of affairs can justify indoctrination that is not in itself bad (and *it is not* because it is needed at least in low-level education), where are the boundaries of educational manipulation? If we are not careful enough, we could fall down the "slippery slope" and conclude that indoctrination and manipulation are in a case of education always necessary. The question is: how, from the utilitarian standpoint, one makes a distinction between education and indoctrination? Is any form of education *ipso facto* indoctrination (manipulation)? That is one problem. On the other hand, the very idea of "university" is closely connected with the concepts of "universality,"

“autonomy” and “integrity.” However, those concepts do not belong to utilitarianism. They are ideas usually used in Kantian (deontological) theories. Universality cannot “stand” secrets and manipulation. However, that is a Kantian, not a utilitarian idea.

5. Main problems for Utilitarian Justification of the Institution of University

Problems of utilitarian approach to private morality are necessarily linked with problems in public (interpersonal and institutional) sphere. We shall offer a short list of problems of utilitarian account of the institution of a university which has no pretension to be exhaustive. It aims to be illustrative.

5.1. The Problem of “Intrinsic Value”

Despite efforts made so far, it seems that there is no possible utilitarian approach that would assign intrinsic value to anything but to utility itself. In utilitarian/efficiency world all values must be instrumental. Still, moral judgment seems to point to something else: there are *some* things, such as the University that have intrinsic value. Pure “instrumental university” is not a “real” university because it lacks intrinsic values which characterize the institution of University – non-utilitarian pursuit of truth, genuine curiosity, or personal and collective exploration of the (physical and social) “world”. It could be “factory of knowledge,” “instrument of social recognition,” “training campus,” “factory of experts,” and so on, but not the university in itself. Mill saw University as a “preparation for the higher uses of life” (Mill 2009: 353). That means qualitative, not quantitative preparation.

Nowadays the hugely popular idea of quantitative analysis of researching and teaching process (so-called “scientometry”) at a university is in direct connection with a concept of brute (“measurable”) efficiency. However, if philosophy has taught us anything at all, it is that quality of something *cannot* be quantified. How to measure “quality” of *the institution* of the university? Even if it could be quantified, who will be “the judge” – “ideal observer,” Hare’s (moral) “archangel” or contemporary overenthusiastic “reformers”?

5.2. The Problem of Institutions

There is no doubt that the university is *an institution*, but what does it mean? Maybe answer to that question is following: the institution of the university is best perceived as an *institutional fact*. Institutional facts are not “brute facts” of naive naturalistic view of the world. John Searle says: “There is a certain picture we have of what constitutes the world. The picture is easy to recognize but hard to describe. The picture is easy to recognize but hard to describe. It is a picture of the world as consisting of *brute facts*, and of knowledge as really knowledge of brute facts. Part of what I mean by that is that there are certain paradigms and that these paradigms are taken to form the model of all knowledge ... The model for systematic knowledge of this kind is the natural sciences, and the basis for all knowledge of this kind is supposed to be simple empirical observation recording sense experiences” (Searle 1969b: 50). Institutional facts disturb this straightforward and rather

raw “naturalistic picture” of the human world. To understand what institutional fact is, we must notice the distinction between *constitutive* and *regulative* rules based on Kant’s distinction between constitutive and regulative principles. “Some rules regulate antecedently existing forms of behavior. For example, the rules of polite eating regulate eating, but eating exists independently of these rules. Some rules, on the other hand, do not merely regulate but create or define new forms of behavior: the rules of chess, for example, do not merely regulate an antecedently existing activity called playing chess; they, as it were, create the possibility of or define that activity. The activity of playing chess is constituted by action in accordance with these rules. Chess has no existence apart of these rules... Regulative rules regulate activities whose existence is independent of the rules; constitutive rules constitute (and also regulate) forms of activity whose existence is logically dependent on the rules” (Searle 1969a: 131).

If we all agree that *any institution* is based on some kind of rules the question here is: what kind of rules – regulative or constitutive? Searle has a ready answer to that question: “... the institutions ... are systems of constitutive rules ... What I called institutional facts are facts which presuppose such institutions” (Searle 1969a: 131). Institutions are usually not perceived as “means” aimed towards any “goal.” They are a *network of constitutive rules* and nothing else. Whether they have any utilitarian justification is quite another matter. Karl Popper has noted: “Only a minority of social institutions are consciously designed while the vast majority has just ‘grown,’ as the undesigned results of human actions” (Popper 1957: 65). If most of the institutions grow naturally, the utilitarian explanation does not match the facts. Seek for utility and efficiency must be *planned*.

Karl Popper has suggested that we should concern ourselves not so much with the maximization of happiness as with the minimization of suffering. “Minimization of suffering” is the central thesis of so-called “negative utilitarianism.” This argument is based on Popper’s conviction that all moral urgency has its basis in suffering or pain. According to him, we should replace the classic utilitarian formula “Maximize happiness” by the formula “Minimize suffering.” That formula can be made one of the fundamental principles of public policy. “Positive formula” (“Maximize happiness”) is potentially dangerous because it could lead to dictatorship (Popper 2013: 548). By “suffering” we must mean “actual pain,” not just unhappiness. This position is according to J. J. C. Smart illustrated by the case of University: “Suppose that we found a new university. We may hope that indirectly research will help to minimize pains, but that is not the only reason why we found universities. We do so partly because we want the happiness of understanding the world. But producing the happiness of understanding could equally well be thought of as removing the unhappiness of ignorance” (Smart 1973: 28–29).

All these insights tell us that we must be extremely cautious in attempts to found or improve some institution. “Radical reformism” often leads to holistic historicism, which can destroy existing institutions and even result in totalitarian utopia and justify terrible consequences. Karl Popper thought that human factor is the key: “The human factor is the ultimately uncertain and wayward element in social life and in all social institutions. Indeed, this is the element which ultimately cannot be completely controlled by institutions (as Spinoza first saw); for

every attempt at controlling it completely must lead to tyranny; which means, to the omnipotence of the human factor – the *whims of a few men, or even one*” (Popper 2013: 158). Humans are fallible. Future is often unpredictable, as well. That is the reason why, as an alternative to historicism, which requires *holistic social engineering*, Popper, by the concept of *negative utilitarianism* proposes an idea of *piecemeal social engineering*. Piecemeal social engineering means that society and crucial institutions cannot be adequately changed as a whole. Small and reversible changes should be made piece-by-piece to society to be best able to learn from the changes made. The unpredictability of the future and human behavior makes the effect of any larger changes random and untraceable. Small changes enable one to make limited, but testable and, therefore, falsifiable statements about the impact of social actions (Popper 1957: 58–95).

All these observations apply to the institution of the university, especially view of the necessity of cautiousness in modifying its constitutive rules. Ambitious over-all reforms in the field of education, which is one of the bases of an organized society, could lead to disastrous effects, even when good intentions guide them. Of course, it does not mean that changes cannot be needed. Even though Popper thought that institutions protect society, he thought that the existence of some institution would not itself guarantee infallibility: “We thus find that even the best institutions can never be foolproof ... Institutions are like fortresses. They must be well-designed *and* properly manned. But we can never make sure that the right man will be attracted by scientific research. Nor can we make sure that there will be men of imagination who have the knack of inventing new hypotheses. And ultimately, much depends on sheer luck, in these matters. For truth is *not manifest*, and it is a mistake to believe – as did Comte and Mill – that once the ‘obstacles’ (the allusion is to the Church) are removed, truth will be visible to all who genuinely want to see it” (Popper 1957: 157).

There are good reasons to agree with Popper’s cautious approach towards social changes. However, trouble for utilitarianism might be that even some utilitarians think that “negative utilitarianism” is not utilitarianism at all. Smart notes: “It seems likely that Popper is himself not a utilitarian, and so *a fortiori* not a negative utilitarian. For alongside the negative utilitarian principle he sets two principles, that we should tolerate the tolerant and that we should resist, and that we should resist tyranny. It is hard to see how these principles could be deduced from the negative utilitarian principle, for surely on this principle we should approve of tyrannical but benevolent world exploder. Such a tyrant would prevent infinite future misery” (Smart 1973: 29).

5.3 Autonomy

In his consideration of the issues of moral education Richard Hare wrote: “It must have occurred to many people to ask what the connection is between the psychological state, state of mind, state of character, or whatever, which is called ‘autonomy’ and what others call ‘the logical autonomy of moral discourse’... Autonomy as *an educational ideal* seems most often to mean a disposition to think in a certain way. Even when it is an action that is called autonomous, it is called that because of the nature of the thinking which has led up to it. By ‘thinking in a certain way,’

I mean, of course, not ‘thinking certain things’ but ‘doing one’s thinking in a certain manner.’ The manner is characterized...by two features corresponding to the two parts of the word ‘autonomy’: the thinking has to be done by man for himself (*autos*); and he has to do it in accordance with some regular procedure (*nomos*)” (Hare 1992a: 131). In another article, Hare wrote about the nature of the relationship between utilitarianism and education: “... [The] utilitarianism is, in its formal aspect, itself morally neutral. It does not tell us what in particular we ought to do. That is decided by applying the logic, as it is imposed by moral concepts, to the autonomous preferences (or as Kant put it *wills*) of people, including our own. All of us have to do the willing, but the logic compels us to will in concert, once we realize that we have to will universally for all similar situations whoever occupies whatever role in them. This is the formal aspect of utilitarianism, which is perfectly compatible with a possible interpretation of Kant” (Hare 1992b: 199). According to Hare, utilitarianism is content and sense neutral and thus *compatible* with the Kantian concept of autonomy. However, it seems entirely possible that Hare confused (purely formal) “categorical imperative” with (substantive) “golden rule.”

What is “the autonomy” in general? According to the classic (Kantian) point of view, the autonomy of a person is based upon respect for the human capacity to govern our lives according to rational principles. Kant’s own formulation is: “Autonomy of the will is the property of the will by which it is a law to itself (independently of any property of the objects of volition)” (Kant 2002: 58). Similarly, the University as an institution and legacy of the human race should be able to do the same. The autonomous university should be free and rationally self-governed human institution. Also, the university should be an institution that secures *personal* autonomy. An efficiency/utilitarian approach to the idea of the university now has two further problems.

- 1) If we directly apply utilitarian “greatest happiness principle” to the institution of the university, it cannot be autonomous. The reason is remarkably straightforward: the very concept of autonomy does not have any sense in utilitarian/efficiency approach to the institutions. The justifiability of any institution’s existence depends solely on the effects of institution’s operations. Dependence on consequences is in direct contradiction with the concept of autonomy because the efficiency principle dictates what some institution ought to do to maximize desirable consequences. It does not matter whether we deal with “act” or “rule” utilitarian approach. The principle is the same. Proponents of “rule” or “preference” utilitarianism (Hare) tried to connect utilitarianism with a general concept of education. However, this concept of highly specific and yet universal principles has its troubles. For the sake of argument, we could agree with Hare that the best rules would not be simple. For example, the best rule for promise-keeping would be of the form: “Always keep your promises except...” (where the list of exceptions would be very long). This type of reasoning led the American philosopher David Lyons to argue that a plausible formulation of rule-utilitarianism would make it recommend the same actions as act-utilitarianism, so the two kinds are “extensionally equivalent” so, therefore, there is no practical difference between the two (Lyons 1965: 137).

- 2) Autonomy requires freedom. True freedom requires adequate information. However, some desirable effects could be produced in a total lack of relevant information or use of propaganda and manipulation. That means that a utilitarian university could operate in secrecy. Furthermore, even utilitarian philosophers do not believe that education should be based on the open teaching of the principle of utility. It is almost unimaginable how utilitarian *moral* education looks. Surely, nobody teaches their children things like: “promote happiness” or “maximize utility.” Any moral education starts with *deontological* commands, not with a principle of utility. The consequence is the already mentioned possibility of utilitarian justification of any manipulation. If the very basis of morality cannot be public, how can we secure our freedom of any decision?

5.4. Integrity

Many philosophers believe in the idea of moral integrity. Even though the concept of personal integrity is common in moral language, it has no “real” or even “technical” definition. It is basic and extraordinarily intuitive. Very loosely, integrity can be characterized as moral firmness and persistence. It can also be seen as an integration of agent’s will, choices, and actions. This notion is a part of normal moral upbringing. It is a general presumption that personal integrity may have significant implications in the public sphere. The question now is: *which* social (e.g., family, business, religious, educational) and political (e.g., forms of government) structures and processes may affect personal integrity. They can do this either by promoting or by undermining features essential to having or practicing integrity. If the integrity is as central as recent work on the topic suggests, then ideally *all social institutions* that shape our lives should be structured in ways that promote integrity. In accordance with this thesis, Susan Babbitt says: “An adequate account of personal integrity must recognize that some social structures are of the wrong sort altogether for some individuals to be able to pursue personal integrity and that questions about the moral nature of society often need to be asked first before questions about personal integrity can properly be raised. Questions about integrity may turn out to be, not about the relationship between individual characteristics, interests, choices and so on, and society, but rather about *what kind of society* it is in terms of which an individual comes to possess certain interests, characteristics, and so on. This does not imply that questions about personal integrity are entirely moral, not having to do with idiosyncratic characteristics of individuals; instead, it suggests that the very meaning of personal integrity in particular cases sometimes depends upon more general considerations about *the nature of the society* that makes some idiosyncratic properties identifying and others not. The pursuit of adequate personal integrity often depends, not so much on understanding who one is and what one believes and is committed to, but rather understanding what one’s society is and imagining what it could be” (Babbitt 1997: 118).

Having this in mind, it is worth mentioning that a university is an institution that participates in the process of determination of “the nature of society.” There is no doubt that a university promotes integrity as a value. Trouble for the utilitarians is that the notion of integrity has almost no place in an account of any form of

utilitarianism. Even more: it is impossible to determine what integrity in a utilitarian system of values should be. Some moral philosophers even think that integrity sometimes *demand*s actions that are *contrary* to the principle of utility (Norman 1971: 100). Perception of the role of the university is that a part of its value is to help developing moral characters whose essential feature is integrity. Additionally, the institution of the university is usually seen as having its integrity – a kind of resistance to social or political pressure, regardless of the utility of that kind of behavior. That fact is almost inexplicable in utilitarian terms.

6. Concluding Remarks

It is an undeniable fact that the university is a highly useful institution. Scientific and hence technological progress is almost unimaginable without the idea of a university. Still, it seems that utilitarian explanation(s) of the origin, purpose and the way of organizing of a university does not seem highly plausible. There are several reasons for that. First, we are witnesses of “democracy of taste” in modern market-orientated society. Democracy of taste has not led us to any development of Millian “love for higher pleasures”. On the contrary, the real picture of modern society is pretty much Benthamian. Individuals who genuinely prefer “higher” pleasures that demand higher levels of education are a vast minority. Most of the students still consider university education more as an obligation than as any enjoyment. Second, rules that govern the institution of university almost have nothing with utility or efficiency. They *may* maximize overall happiness or satisfy most of the individual preferences, but that is not their purpose. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that the persistence of a university as an institution would maximize overall happiness or utility at all. That is a utilitarian *presumption*. We could easily imagine a realistic situation in which utilitarian logic requires tremendous changes in *constitutive rules* of the university. (University could become “obsolete,” and some other, “more efficient” institution could take its place.) Finally, the very concepts of universality, autonomy, and integrity, usually associated with the idea of the university have no utilitarian basis. Even more, they have no utilitarian explanation. That means that the university is generally perceived as an institution that has *intrinsic value*, not only instrumental one.

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Nenad Cekić

Utilitarizam i ideja univerziteta Kratka etička analiza

Apstrakt

Standarni prigovor utilitarnoj viziji moralnosti jeste da tzv. „princip najveće sreće“ može da opravda kontraintuitivne prakse kao što su kažnjavanje i žrtvovanje nevinih, kršenje obećanja i manipulaciju. Osnovna pretpostavka je da najveći razlog (opšta korisnost, „sreća“) mora biti sposoban opravdati uzrokovanje patnje nekolicine. Činjenica je da u okviru podizanja i obrazovanja ljudi (dece), neki nivo manipulacije jeste potreban. Umesto toga, u tom procesu mi koristimo pojmove koji pripadaju deontološkim propisima („obaveze“, „dužnosti“) kao što su „Ne laži“ ili „Ne kradi“. Naše pitanje je: možemo li zamisliti Univerzitet vođen jednostavnim principom korisnosti. Moramo zapamtiti da je Univerzitet za odrasle, ne za decu. Zašto se sada ne otvori i na Univerzitetu ne kaže da sve što radimo radimo zarad hedonističke „sreće“, a ne zarad dužnosti. To se čini sumnjivim iz nekoliko razloga. Možda prigovor najvredniji pažnje jeste da Milova verzija utilitarizma nastoji da podeli čovečanstvo u dve klase: moralnu aristokratiju, koja traži „viša uživanja“, i druge koji to ne traže. Da li to znači da utilitarci moraju da organizuju tajne utilitarijanske univerzitete za moralnu aristokratiju? Da li to znači bi da moralna aristokratija, prema principu korisnosti, trebalo da organizuje „deontološke“, manipulativne javne univerzitete za niže klase?

Ključne reči: utilitarizam, hedonizam, konsekvencijalizam, univerzitet