Pakistan Journal of Social Science 3 (7): 948-951, 2005

J. S. Mill on Freedom and Method

Nusrat Jahan Kazal
Department of Philosophy University of Chittagong, Chittagong-4331, Bangladesh

Abstract: Mill is the first British political philosopher of individualism aware of the tenuous status of the individual and his freedom in specifically modern society. In this study Mill does provide a justification of the principle of freedom designed to demonstrate its utility to all members of the society with which he is concerned. Mill castigates all attempts to study a society by either simple induction or unsupported deduction. But he sees the first as the main enemy and aspires to rescue the study of man and society from empiricism and unscientific surmise. I focused wholly on the nature and impact of Mill's views on social science and method.

Keywords: Mill, freedom, method, induction, society

INTRODUCTION

The element in question is Mill's definition and use of the concept freedom toward the end of On Liberty Mill remarks that preventing a person from an unsaved bridge is no infringement of his liberty, for liberty consists in doing what one desires and he does not desire to fall into the river[1]. Surprisingly enough, this almost parenthetical assertion contains the most explicit and positive definition of liberty or freedom (Mill uses the two words synonymously) provided by Mill in the entire essay. Nevertheless, its content is not surprising. There is abundant evidence that a definition of freedom as doing what one desires was accepted by Mill as a matter of course.

His subject, Mill asserts at the outset is civil or Social Liberty the nature and limits of the power which can be legitimately exercised by society over the individual. It becomes clear that Mill means to distinguish an area of action in which men are free i.e. are allowed to act according to their own desires or inclinations-from an area in which actions are subject to the power of society; and that he is interested in determining the legitimate boundaries of the latter area. This is made evident and the sense of freedom Mill is employing is brought out more fully, in Mill's statement of the principle which is the major conclusion.

The object of this study is to assert one very simple principle as entitled to govern absolutely the dealings of society with the individual in the way of compulsion and control, whether the means used be physical force in the form of legal penalties or the moral coercion of public opinion. That principle is that 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 member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to other. His own good, either physical or moral is not a sufficient warrant. He can not rightfully be compelled to do or forbear because it will be better for him to do so, because it will make him happier because in the opinion of others to do so would be wise or ever right[2].

This according to Mill is the proper basis for separating an area in which men may act as they wish from an area in which they should be controlled or in which their desires and inclinations are subject to judgment by moral and legal standards. In the final chapter of On Liberty, Mill makes much use of this conception of freedom as acting according to any desire or inclination whatever. Whether or not Mill decided that freedom at work in each case is evident: freedom is acting as one desires, whatever one happens to desire.

From these passages it appears that Mill is employing freedom in what has been called a positivistic or descriptive rather than a normative sense. The term freedom has value connotations. To determine whether an individual in any situation is free, it is not necessary to make value decisions; it is necessary only to be acquainted with his desires and his possibilities of acting on them. Mill's objective is to determine in what situations an individual should be free. Thus Mill's definition of freedom follows the tradition in which freedom is identified with acting according to desire and in which no moral other qualifications are placed on the desire.

When we turn to the consideration of the methods of Induction formulated by Mill, we find the conception of induction that governs his discussion of these methods are stated by him as follows: to ascertain therefore, what are the laws of causation which exist in nature; to determine the effect of every cause and the cause of all effects is the main business of Induction; and to point out how this is done is the chief object of

Inductive Logic[3]. The reason for this is that according to Mill, all the uniformities which exist in the succession of phenomena and most of the uniformities in their coexistence, are either.....themselves laws of causation or consequences resulting from and corollaries capable of being deduced from such laws[4]. So that notion of cause is the root of the whole theory of Induction[5]. Mill is concerned only with what he calls physical causes; that is to say he regards causation exclusively as a relation between phenomena. The only notion of a cause, which the theory of induction requires such a notion as can be gained from experience (VII 326). The formula Mill comes up with to his own notion of cause is, that the cause of a phenomenon is its unconditional, invariable antecedent, invariable can easily mislead the causal reader. The invariable antecedent of a phenomenon is not its necessary condition. It need not be an antecedent which invariably precedes the phenomenon. It is rather the antecedent which the phenomenon invariably follows; that is to say, its sufficient condition. So a cause is an unconditionally sufficient condition[6].

Mill says that the cause of a phenomenon is not just the invariable antecedent, but the unconditional invariable antecedent. (VII-338). He means that the assemblage of antecedent conditions must be exhaustive. That he thinks, is all that can properly be meant by the doctrine that causes necessitate their effects. That which is necessary, that which must be, means that which will be, whatever supposition we make in regard to all other things (VII 339). Hence it is strictly speaking redundant to insist that a cause is an unconditional invariable antecedent. The law of universal causation is that every event has a cause. If causal powers are supervenient, causal statements are universalisable and that ensures that Mill's other version of it is also true: it is the law that every event depends on some law or that there is a law for everything (VII-325). This is the basic principle which Mill needs or rather thinks he needs for his Methods of experimental inquiry.

A few words may now be said in connection with the methods of induction propounded by Mill. The methods described in his chapter entitled Four Methods of Experimental Inquiry, viz, the methods of agreement, of difference, of concomitant variations and of residues, are usually regarded as the most important part of his contribution to the theory of induction.

Mill states the Method of Agreement (MA) as follows: If two or more instances of the phenomenon under investigation have only one circumstance in common, the circumstance in which alone all the instances agree is the cause (or effect) of the given phenomenon. (VII 390).

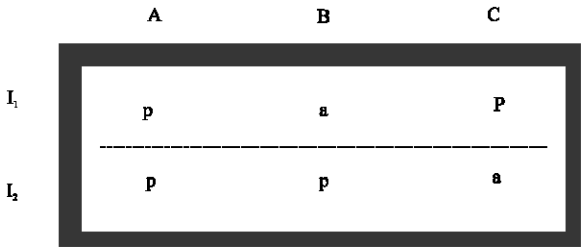

Fig. 1: Method of agreement

A good way of illustrating it diagrammatically is proved by Mackie (1974) and shown in Fig. 1.

A, B and C represent the possible causes or effects of phenomenon P. the list is assumed to be exhaustive. I_1 and I_2 are two observed instances of P. In I_1, A C were instantiated (P = Present) and B was not (a= absent). In I_1, A and B were present, C was absent. So long as a cause is taken to be a necessary and sufficient condition, Figure 1 shows A as the cause. B, C the absence of B, of C and of A and all combinations involving anyone of these are all eliminated. The argument proceeds in the same way whether the investigation is into the cause or the effect of P.

The Method of Difference (MD) is stated as follows: If an instance in which the phenomenon under investigation occurs and an instance in which it does not occur, have every circumstance in common save one, that one occurring only in the former; the circumstance in which alone the two instances differ is the effect or the cause, or an independent part of the cause, of the phenomenon. (VII 391)

Figure 2 proves that A is a cause or effect of P or an independent part of the cause. For granting that the cause of P may be an assemblage of conditions, it remains perfectly possible that the cause of P is the joint presence of A and B, or the joint presence of A and absence of C. In connection with the methods of induction Inductive

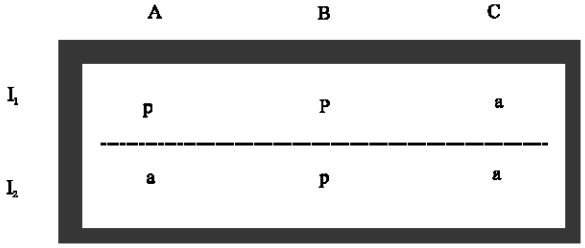

Fig. 2: Method of difference

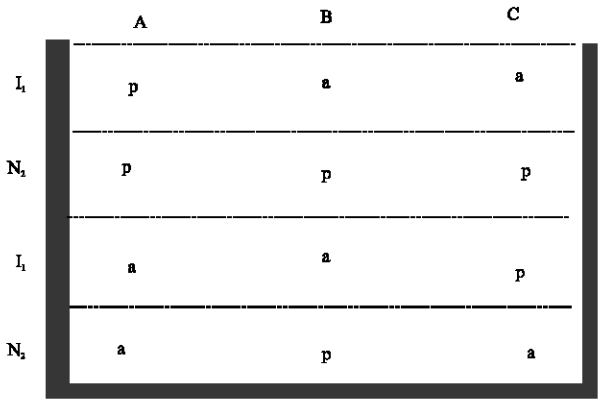

Fig. 3: Joint method of agreement and difference

inferences have to explain the natural appearances by formulating causal laws and by finding the causes there in of the phenomena to be explained. The root of his difficulties in connection with the concept of causation is after all the fundamental inconsistency, already demonstrated at length in our examination of Mill's methods of agreement and difference.

Next comes what mill calls the joint method of agreement and difference. He states it thus: It two or more instances in which the phenomenon occurs have only one circumstance in common, while two or more instances in which it does not occur have nothing in common save the absence of that circumstance; the circumstance in which alone the two sets of instances differ, is the effect, or the cause, or an indispensable part of the cause, of the phenomenon, (VII 396).

Here we have assumed, requires that only one circumstance is present in all the positive instances and absent in all the negative instances. It may not identify it as an indispensable part of the cause all, because the cause may be an assemblage of circumstances in which it is not included.

I shall now state Mill's two remaining methods the method of residues and the method of concomitant variations and make some main points about them, without discussing them in detail. Neither of them is on all fours with the basic methods of agreement and difference reasoning covered so far.

The method of residues: Subject from any phenomenon such part as is known by previous inductions to be the effect of certain antecedents and the residue of the phenomenon is the effect of the remaining antecedents. (VII 398).

Mill says that the Method of Residues is in truth a peculiar modification of the method of difference. (VII 397)

The method of concomitant variations: Whatever phenomenon varies in any manner whenever another phenomenon varies in some particular manner, is either a cause or an effect of that phenomenon, or is connected with it through some fact of causation. (VII 401).

Before turning to consider how the eliminative canons fit into Mill's general picture of induction we must note some important weaknesses in his discussion.

For Mill a cause is an unconditionally sufficient condition. That means that a phenomenon can have a plurality of causes but we have seen that Mill's statement of the canons in iii. viii assumes that there is no such plurality. So Mill was wrong to leave the first canon as it stood, once he had allowed for plurality of causes. He should at least have explicitly restricted its formulation to the detection of effects even better, he should have thoroughly reviewed the use of eliminative agreement reasoning under conditions in which plurality of causes is allowed.

There are two basic forms of eliminative reasoning: agreement and difference reasoning. Agreement reasoning isolates the single common factor present in two or more instances in which the phenomenon occurs. Or it could isolate the single common factor absent in two or more cases in which the phenomenon does not occur. Difference reasoning isolates the single common factor which is present whenever the phenomenon is present and absent when ever the phenomenon is absent. On these basic elements more complicated variations, combining the two methods, can be built. Some of the instances may be constructed from what is known by previous observations and the instances may be instances of a joint variation. Mill castigates all attempts to study society by either simple induction or unsupported deduction. But he sees the first as the main enemy and aspires to rescue the study of man and society from empiricism and unscientific surmise[7]. It is a tenet of Mill's philosophy that direct induction will not yield conclusive results in situations where many conflicting causes are at work, specially in nonexperimental situations. Could he have foreseen the generalization of his Four Methods into more powerful modern procedures of statistical inference, he may have become more optimistic.

REFERENCES

1. Mill J. S., 1950. Utilitarianism. Liberty and Representative Government New York, Dutton E. P. *et al* (Eds), pp: 204.
2. Mill, J. S., On Liberty (Everyman Edition) pp: 951.

3. Blake, M. Ralph and C. J. Ducasse, 1960. Theories of Scientific Method, University of Washington Press, Seattle, p p: 230.
4. Mill J. S., 1965. System of Logic: Ratiocinative and iInductive, Book III Longman, Great Britain, pp: 245.
5. Scarre, G., 1989. Logic and Reality in the Philosophy of John Stuart Mill. Kluwer Academic Publishers, 34: 81.
6. Skorupski, J., 1989. John stuart mill. Routledge, London and New York, pp: 180.
7. Cunningham and J., ed. Wood, 1988. John stuart mill. Critical assessments. Routledge, London, New York,1: 483.