

Peer Review

Review of: "Review, Evolution, and Theoretical Implications of the Utility Concept"

Shaun Hargreaves Heap¹

1. King's College London, London, United Kingdom

This article reviews how the concept of utility has evolved. It correctly identifies a move from an objective to a subjective sense of utility, to an expanded subjective sense where actions have symbolic properties that also guide choice.

I have two suggestions for how the article might be improved.

First, it could be clearer what is gained by having knowledge of this evolution in the concept. There is a suggestion at the end that the objective sense of utility might be linked to basic needs and hence to arguments for redistribution. But this is sketchy and begs a question as to whether anything beyond the objective sense is necessary for such a contribution.

Second, the article refers at the beginning to a further axiomatic or revealed preference approach to the concept of utility, but nothing really is said about this later, e.g., over how it might relate to or qualify the objective and subjective stories that are set out.

I have three minor observations. One is that some care is required over the objective/instrumental approach. In the first figure showing how this relates to the subjective sources in decision-making, it is apparent that the objective/instrumental still requires a subjective evaluation before it yields a decision.

Another is that some care is also required with locating Adam Smith as an objectivist because his 'special pleasure of mutual sympathy' looks a lot like what is referred to later as an 'intersubjective procedural' source of utility.

Finally, the discussion of procedural utility seems a bit repetitive, and I suspect it could be edited to create space to develop in the directions that I suggested above.

Good luck!

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.