

Explain Bentham's greatest happiness of the greatest number.

1. INTRODUCTION:

"Bentham is not political philosopher or a thinker at all, he is at best, theoretical reformer."

- Allen

Jeremy Bentham was born in London in 1748. His father was a prosperous attorney whose generosity enabled his son to spend his life in study and contemplation. The young Jeremy was a precocious child. He is said to have been reading Latin and historical works of English at the age of three. He wrote Latin and was reading Voltaire when he was six. The principle of utility is at the heart of Bentham's theory; all else is just elaboration, explanation and application. He says that every human action is motivated by the desire to obtain pleasure and avoid as much pain as possible. Morality is judged by these measuring sticks. What brings ~~good~~ ^{pleasure} is good; what produces pain is bad. Any system purporting to judge morality on ^{any} other basis lacks 'sense' and 'reason'.

2. BENTHAM'S PRINCIPLE OF UTILITARIANISM (Greatest happiness of greatest number)

According to Bentham, every action which produces greatest number of happiness to the

greatest number of people is morally and legally justified. Likewise, every action which minimizes greatest number of pain to the greatest number of people is legal. This school of thought is called **Consequentialist** or **Utilitarian** school of thought.

The principle of utility recognizes this fact, and measures the acts of both private persons and governments accordingly. In his "A Fragment on Government," he states that the only principle through which a government can be judged is that of utility. A government which fails to enact laws securing the greatest happiness for greatest number of people will only invite resentment and breed revolution. It will be of no importance as how the government is constituted.

His second book "An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation" states that:

"Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure." These two masters govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think.

3. UTILITARIAN CALCULUS:

Bentham's method of estimating pleasures and pains can be ~~estimated~~ applied to egoistic hedonism. With the addition of utilitarian factor 'extent' of pleasure, hedonism can be extended to any number of persons. The major factors of sensations of pleasure and pain resulting from an action can be summarized as:

- a- Intensity: How intense is the pleasure or pain?
If the intensity of pleasure is less, then do something which enhances pleasure.
- b- Duration: How long does the pleasure or pain last?
- c- Certainty: What is the probability that the pleasure or pain will occur?
- d- Propinquity: How far off in the future is the pleasure or pain? It depends on how long one must wait for the pleasure to occur.
- e- Fecundity: What is the probability that the pleasure will lead to other pleasures?
- f- Purity: What is the probability that the pain will lead to other pains?
- g- Extent: How many persons are affected by the pleasure?

4. CRITICISM:

Bentham's Utilitarianism Theory has several shortcomings.

a- Wrong Analysis of human nature:

Human nature is a complex phenomenon. It is not confined merely to seek pleasure and avoid pain as advocated by Bentham.

b- Wrong calculus:

Pleasure and pain cannot be measured.

c- Society underestimated:

Bentham has underestimated the society and only emphasized on individual pleasure.

d- Neglected the influence of habits:

Bentham ignored the influence of habits altogether in believing that

man is always motivated by a desire to seek pleasure and avoid pain.

e-Impracticable Theory:

The theory of greatest happiness of the greatest number has never and can never be realized. It has always been seen that the happiness of the ruling elite has been secured at the cost of common man.

5. CONCLUSION:

Bentham's theory of greatest happiness of the greatest number can reform personal, private and governmental affairs. Nevertheless, it lacks practical or realistic aspect of human nature i.e., man always secure his own interest first. Moreover, it associates morality with greatest happiness for greatest number of people only. Wappler remarks about Bentham that:

"He was not an outstanding philosopher, though paradoxically he occupies an important place in the history of philosophy"

His greatest contribution in the field of reforms enable him to stand in the form of the fathers of a welfare state where rulers are always aware of the greatest happiness of the greatest number in all their actions.