

Political Science

CSS-2023

Question #02

Explain Bentham's greatest happiness of the greatest number?

The greatest happiness of the greatest number is the foundation of morals and legislation.

- Jeremy Bentham

Introduction:

Jeremy Bentham, an influential English philosopher and jurist in the 18th and 19th century, developed the ethical principle of "the greatest happiness of the greatest number". This principle, also known as **utilitarianism**, aimed to determine the morality of actions based on their consequences on overall happiness. Bentham believed that society's fundamental goal should be maximum happiness and minimize suffering for the majority.

Consequentialist principle + Hedonic principle + Equity Principle

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The Great Happiness Principle

Consequentialist principle: This principle evaluates the morality of actions based on their outcomes or consequence, seeking to maximize overall positive result.

Hedonic principle: This principle focuses on maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain or suffering as the ultimate measure of goodness or ethical value.

Equity principle: This principle advocates for fairness and equal treatment, ensuring that resources and benefits are distributed justly among individuals and communities.

Cursory Glance at Bentham's philosophy of utilitarianism:

Bentham's principle of Utility, which he described in 'A Fragment on Government' 1776 is given as:

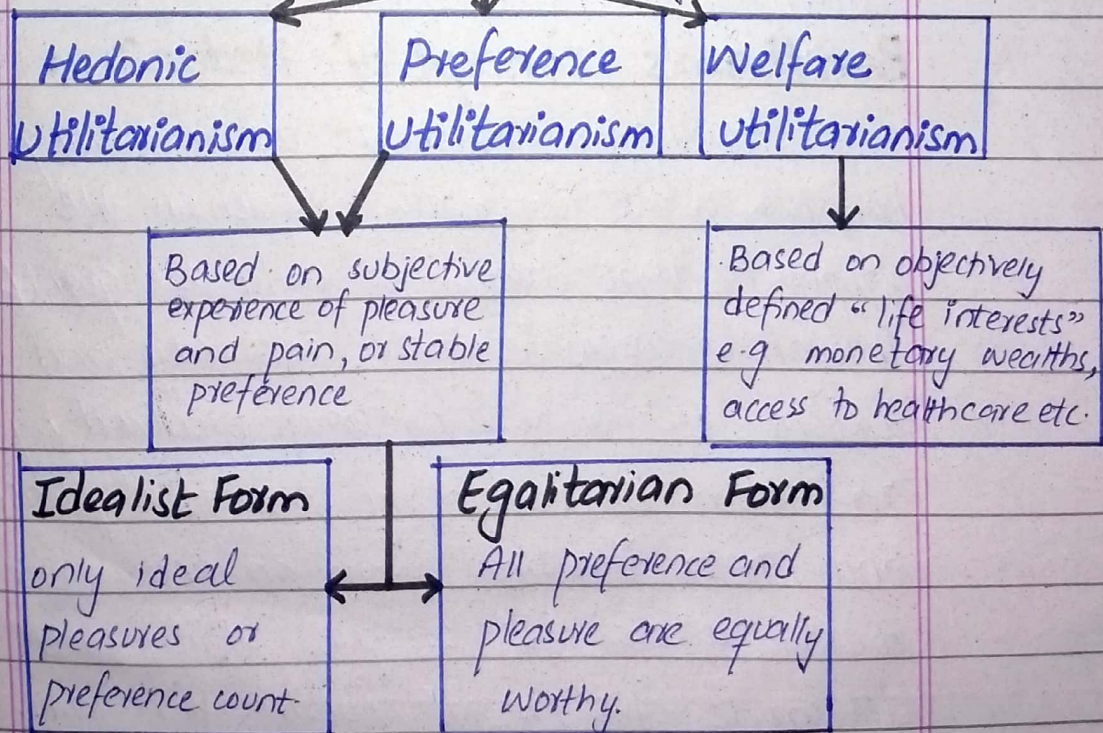
"It is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong."

Utilitarianism - a political and moral philosophy - emphasizes the importance of maximizing collective happiness and minimizing collective suffering. Bentham promoted that humans' ultimate goal was to achieve the greatest amount of

pleasure and avoid the greatest amount of pain. Bentham **utilitarianism** - a moral philosophy - enlists that the greatest amount of ~~pleasure~~ and best action is the one that maximizes overall well being (or utility). According to him "the utility can be quantified and measured, and the moral value of an action or policy can be determined by the sum of its positive and negative effects on all affected individuals. He believed that the goal of ethics and policy should be the promotion of the collective and greatest happiness.

Utilitarianism

(What ever is "good" must be good for people)



The Greatest Happiness principle:

A central aspect of utilitarianism, advocates judging policies and actions based on their ability to generate maximum overall happiness. Bentham believed it should guide human behaviour in all aspects of life, including politics, economics and criminal justice. He prioritized collective happiness over individual happiness, endorsing sacrifices for societal well being. Bentham's utilitarianism influenced criminal justice, advocating punishment to deter crime, reform offenders and protect society, with penalties proportionate to offenses and aiming to maximize happiness.

Bentham's concept of Hedonism:

Bentham's method for measuring happiness was quantitative hedonism. He proposed that happiness could be quantified through intensity, duration, certainty and extent of pleasure or pain produced by an action. By calculating the total pleasure and pain resulting from an action, one could assess its overall utility and determine its moral worth. Bentham introduced the concept of "Hedons"

to represent units of pleasure and 'Dolors' to represents unit of pain, thus making happiness a quantifiable entity.

Bentham's contribution to welfare economy:-

Bentham strongly believed that economic policy should aim to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number. He advocated for government intervention in the economy to ensure overall happiness and access to public goods and services like education and health care for all. Bentham saw the government's role as correcting market failures and ensuring fair and efficient economic operations to maximize societal well being. He emphasized the importance of providing public goods and services to promote the overall happiness of society and ensure equal access to essential resources for a happy and fulfilling life.

Political Utilitarianism:

When applied to public policy, the principle of Bentham's utilitarianism becomes 'political utilitarianism' advocating

that institutions, laws and social policies should maximize happiness for society as a whole. Bentham applied the greatest happiness principle to discuss the implications of various policies, such as property laws and death penalty.

- John Stuart Mill's Contributions:

John Stuart Mill, a philosopher and follower of Bentham, sought to refine utilitarianism by distinguishing between higher and lower pleasures. He argued that intellectual and moral pleasures, such as art, literature and self improvement, should be given greater weight than mere physical and sensual ones. Mill's contribution provided a more nuanced perspective on happiness and sought to address some of the criticism directed at Bentham's original theory:

Contemporary Applications of Bentham's Utilitarianism principle:

In modern times, there is renewed interest in applying utilitarian principles to public policy. For example, advocates of political utilitarianism argue for higher income taxes and increased investment.

in mental healthcare to promote overall societal well-being. Overall, Bentham's Utilitarianism, with its focus on happiness and consequences, ^{contributed to the development of ethical discourse} debates on morality and social policy to this day continues due to its influence.

→ Critiques of Greatest Happiness Principle:

While Bentham's theory had considerable appeal, it also faced criticism. Some argued that reducing morality to a mere calculation of pleasure and pain might overlook individual rights and justice concerns. Critics also argue about ambiguity of Happiness and predicting consequences. They questioned the practicality of measuring and comparing happiness in a precise and objective manner, suggesting that the theory could be too simplistic to address complex ethical dilemmas. And "greatest happiness" and "of the greatest number" both are admirable ethical principles no doubt. But they often clash. With the results that 'greatest happiness of the greatest number' fails to provide a guide for action in most cases.

Critical Analysis

In the critical diagnosis, Jeremy Bentham's principle of "the greatest happiness of the greatest number" is the central idea in utilitarianism. One strength of this principle is that it provides a clear and straightforward criterion for evaluating the morality of actions and policies. By focusing on the impact of an action on overall happiness, utilitarianism allows us to make systematic and objective evaluation of ethical questions. However, this principle also have critical weaknesses. Since, it does not take into account other important values and ethical considerations, such as justice, equality and fairness. As a result, utilitarianism can sometimes generate counterintuitive and morally problematic conclusions.

Conclusions:

While, Bentham's greatest happiness principle is a central idea in utilitarianism, provides a useful framework for evaluating ethical questions, it also has significant limitations and weaknesses. Utilitarianism needs to be supplemented with other ethical theories and considerations in

order to provide a more complete
and ~~new~~ nuanced evaluation of actions
and policies.