

PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology

UTILITARIANISM AND LONGING FOR HAPPINESS

Dr. Dipanjali Das

Former PhD, R/S, Department of Philosophy

NEHU, Shillong-22

Email- dipanjali2012@gmail.com

Dr. Dipanjali Das; Utilitarianism and longing for happiness-- Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 17(6). ISSN 1567-214x

Keywords: Hedonism, Utilitarianism, Value, Gain, desire, Pain etc.

Abstract:

Utilitarianism is a theory of Happiness which was born as the broader sense of the theory Hedonism. In the late 18th century and almost the starting of the 19th century the concept of Hedonism was developed in a broad sense. British philosopher Jeremy Bentham is considered as the founder of the theory of Utilitarianism. Later on both the Philosophers Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill developed the concept of the theory. Utilitarianism gains its popularity in the late 18th century in the hands of British philosopher Jeremy Bentham in his book "An introduction to the principles of Morals and legislation" in 1789. How people can be happy with the greatest number is the main motto of this theory. How utilitarianism can be the theory of highest utility for human happiness, is the debate for this paper with comparison to Mill and Bentham.

Introduction:

It has already been mentioned that *Utilitarianism* is the latest and developed version of *Hedonism*. If we have to discuss on 19th century Hedonism then we must have to go through the highly popular concept of Utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham in that time which itself is trying to conclude the theory as the developed version of Hedonism. Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill tried to give more clear and conclusive concept of that theory with the new motto of ethics, i.e., ***the greatest happiness of the greatest number*** -- That means Happiness is necessary but we should perform that action which is the best for everyone, if it is not best for everyone then at least it should be best for most of them, the quantity should be maximum in the part of the happiest people by the respective action. An action is morally worthy if its contribution brings overall utility for maximization of happiness almost towards among all people. In a simple way we can say that human beings should perform that action which is value oriented and Good for everyone.

According to some Hedonists and Utilitarianism philosopher there are two kinds of values of pleasure. They are:

- a. Quantitative Value and
- b. Qualitative value.

These two values firstly differentiate John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham's theory of Utilitarianism. John Stuart Mill believed in qualitative value of pleasure, while Jeremy Bentham preferred quantitative value of Pleasure. Let us explain what exactly the difference of John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham's theory of utilitarianism consist of.

1.5.1. Difference between Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill's theory of Utilitarianism:

As it is mentioned above that the main difference between Jeremy Bentham's Utilitarianism and John Stuart Mill's Utilitarianism starts with qualitative distinction and quantitative distinction of pleasure, therefore root of this distinction is explained here.

Bentham's theory of Utilitarianism: Bentham believes that the only standard of valuation of pleasures is quantitative. This Quantity has different forms which has seven dimensions of Value. They are:

- a. Intensity: it means one pleasure is more intense than another. Here Preference of pleasure is dependent on its more intensity.
- b. Duration: it means one pleasure is more durable than another. Here preference of Pleasure is dependent on its more Durability.
- c. Proximity: it means a proximate pleasure is more preferable to a distant pleasure.
- d. Certainty: that pleasure which is more certain is more preferable to an uncertain pleasure.
- e. Purity (freedom from pain): a pain free pleasure is more preferable to a painful pleasure. That pleasure that is pain free is considered as pure, therefore that pleasure which is pure is more preferable to an impure pleasure.
- f. Fecundity (Fruitfulness): a pleasure should have fruitfulness, it must give rise to other pleasure; in simple a pleasure which is fecund can be considered as more preferable to a barren pleasure which cannot expand number of pleasure.
- g. Extent (the number person effected): there should be extent of pleasure, that means the more people is involved in a pleasure is more preferable to the less people is involved in a pleasure.

In some point Bentham is an advocate of psychological Hedonism also. He thinks that "Nature has placed man under the empire of pleasure and pain. We owe to them all our ideas; we refer to them all our judgements and all the determination of our life. His object is to seek pleasure and shun pain. The principal of utility subjects everything to these two motives."¹ "Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain

¹Bentham,Jeremy.*Introduction to the Principles of Moral's and Legislation*, (1789), Chapter-I.

and pleasure.”² In this context Bentham wants to base Ethical Hedonism to Psychological Hedonism and argues that we *ought to* desire pleasure only because we *do* desire pleasure. According to him an action is right if it gives pleasure and wrong if it gives pain. Rightness and wrongness of an action are calculated by Bentham through purely hedonistic criteria of right and wrong. Therefore Bentham’s theory of Utilitarianism somehow goes back to its root hedonism itself that makes man a totally selfish being. On the other hand Bentham clearly admits natural egoism of men, men are egoistic by nature. He says, “To obtain the greatest portion of happiness of himself is the object of every rational being. Every man is nearer to himself than he can be to any other man, and no other man can weigh for him his pleasure and pains. He himself must necessarily be his own concern. His interest must to himself be the primary interest.” In some other paragraphs in his book “An introduction to morals and legislation” he says, **“Dream not that men will move their little finger to serve you, unless their own advantage in so doing be obvious to them. Men never did so and never will, while human nature is made of the present materials. But they will desire to serve you, when by so doing they can serve themselves.”** But Philosophers consider his theory as Utilitarianism only because of his acceptance of “extent” as a dimension of value of pleasure i.e. the number of people affected by that pleasure. Again since Jeremy Bentham is less concerned with the qualitative difference among pleasure; for him a pleasure is as good as another pleasure provided they are equal in quantity which sounds ridiculous in itself.

To pursue general happiness Bentham emphasises on four external sanctions for moral obligations. They are: physical or natural sanction, political sanction, social sanction and religious sanction. Men are controlled by these four sanctions; the pleasure and pain caused by nature or Physical body; by the governance of the state; social sanction means by the society; and God or supreme believe to an individual man. With these four sanctions he believes that men are compelled to be unselfish for the welfare of others: a person develops his nature from egoism to altruism under the insistence of these four external sanctions; and these external sanctions control social moral obligations, therefore men are bound to be altruistic.

Criticism of Jeremy Bentham’s Theory of Utilitarianism:

1) Since Bentham recognises men’s Psychological hedonistic side of desiring pleasure; therefore it falls under the drawbacks of psychological hedonism. Since people tend to naturally seek pleasure for their own self, there may arise a problem of paradox of Hedonism; the more we seek pleasure, the less we get it. English Philosopher Henry Sidgwick said as, “The impulse towards pleasure can be self defeating. We fail to attain pleasure if we deliberately seek them.”³ And if we naturally seek pleasure then there is no point of ought to seek pleasure. Since ethical state is higher

²Ibid, chapter I

³Sidgwick,Hendry.*The Methods of Ethics*.

than psychological state therefore there is possibility of evolving ourselves through ethical practices.

2) Bentham projects pleasure and pain as concrete things by holding the quantitative measure of pleasure and pain such that rightness of an action can be determined by the surplus of pleasure over pain unlike wrongness of an action can be determined by surplus of pain over pleasure. But it is known to us that feeling of pain and pleasure are totally subjective state of mind by nature. It depends upon men's attitude, variations of moods, situations, time etc. we cannot universally measure it like a coin.

3) Though Bentham advocates Utilitarianism, it is not free from egoism. He straightly accepts egoistic nature of human beings. It is difficult to understand as how at a time a theory follows egoism and altruism together.

4) Without quality, quantity of pleasure is not perfect. Bentham does not recognise quality of pleasure that sounds quite absurd; because pleasure depends upon our mentality, situation etc, it is not easy to describe pleasure with only quantity like Bentham described it.

5) Our transition from egoism to altruism by Bentham's external sanctions are also doubtful, because we obey the four external sanctions; nature, state, society and god not for their good (external sanction's good) but for our own good. If we don't obey it we may lose our own benefit which may cause pain for us.

6) Bentham does not distinguish between intellectual pleasure, sensual pleasure, aesthetical pleasure, spiritual bliss etc. Though he added 'purity' as one dimension of value of pleasure but yet he elaborates purity in the sense of pain free state; he does not recognise the qualitative superiority of purity as the dimension of value of pleasure.

7) Though Bentham recognises the extent of pleasure but in practical utility it is difficult to determine it. How can we evaluate others pleasure without knowing their mentality, many men can react differently in a same situation, how will we be able to recognise how many people are getting pleasure and how many are feeling pain for the same situation; it is still unpredictable, we cannot calculate them.

John Stuart Mill's Theory of Utilitarianism: John Stuart Mill's theory is called Refined or Qualitative Altruistic Hedonism or most popularly we call it Utilitarianism aiming for moral Utility. Utilitarianism according to John Stuart Mill is, **"The creed which accept as the foundation of moral 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' is intended pleasure and the absence of pain; by 'unhappiness', pain and the privation of pleasure; and the freedom from pain are the only things desirable as ends; and all desirable things are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in themselves, or as means to the promotion of Pleasure and the Prevention of pain."**⁴ Mill also accepts the same idea of rightness and wrongness as Bentham does. And he uses the term Pleasure and the term Happiness as synonymous. According to Mill, human beings desire pleasure because it is pleasant to them. In one sense Mill accepts his

⁴Mill, J. s. *Utilitarianism*, Chapter II

Utilitarianism in the base of Psychological Hedonism by saying that, "desiring a thing and finding it pleasant are, in strictness of language, two modes of naming the same psychological fact; to think of an object as desirable, and to think of it a pleasant are one and same thing; and to desire anything, except in proportion as the idea of it is pleasant, is a physical and metaphysical impossibility."

In the other sense he advocates ethical Hedonism by saying that, "the utilitarian doctrine is that happiness is desirable and the only thing desirable, as an end; all other things being only desirable, as means to the end." But the following lines given by him that, "the only proof capable of being given that an object is visible is that people actually see it. The only proof that a sound is audible is that people hear it, the sole evidence that anything is desirable, is that people actually do desire it."⁵, proves that his Ethical Hedonism is based on Psychological Hedonism.

Mill's distinction of Qualitative Pleasure gives a special dimension to his theory of Utilitarianism. Before Mill Epicurus drew a distinction between pleasure of mind and pleasure of body and emphasised on the superiority of the pleasure of mind, but he did not recognise the quality of mental pleasure as how it is superior to bodily pleasure. But for the first time while explaining Utilitarianism Mill brings a new thought that quality of pleasure is independently distinctive to quantity of pleasure. In this regard Mill says, "It is quite compatible with the principle of utility to recognise the fact that some kinds of pleasure are more desirable and valuable than others. It would be absurd that while, in estimating all other things, quality is considered as well as quantity, the estimation of pleasure should be supposed to depend on quantity alone."⁶ But how can the quality of pleasure be recognised? For answering this question he prefers intellectual pleasures to bodily pleasures and he distinguishes man and lower animals here; because lower animals are capable of sensual pleasure alone, unlike man has a strong mental capacity to enjoy qualitative pleasure. He brings an example to the verdict of competent judges. Mill says, "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied". And if the fool or the pig is of a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question. The other party to the comparison knows both sides."⁷ For him whoever attains the happiness is; it has to be general happiness (greatest number of people should be affected by it) with quality. Mill asserts two kinds of sanctions for altruistic conduct i.e. external and internal sanction of conscience. He combines external sanctions to internal sanctions of conscience to articulate greatest happiness for greatest number. He says the following few lines which proved his theory of utilitarianism as the most desirable theory; that is, "The internal sanction of duty is a feeling in our own mind, a pain, more or less intense, attendant on violation of duty. This feeling when

⁵ Mill, J. s. *Utilitarianism*, Chapter IV

Here J. S. Mill wants to prove that since man always desire Pleasure, therefore pleasure is desirable.

⁶ Mill, J.S. *Utilitarianism*, Chapter II

⁷ Mill, J.S. *Utilitarianism*, Chapter II

disinterested and connecting itself with the pure idea of duty is the essence of conscience.”⁸ According to him such kinds of internal and external sanctions of conscience i.e. sympathy, a feeling for helping to mankind, having a desire to be staying with unity with others etc. can bring greatest happiness to greatest numbers. This wideness of Mill’s theory of utilitarianism shows the greatness of his theory and makes it unique than any other branches of Hedonism.

References:

Mill, John Stuart; *Utilitarianism*.

Bentham Jeremy; “An introduction to the principles of Morals and legislation”.

⁸Mill, J.S. *Utilitarianism*, Chapter III