

Bentham's Utilitarianism / Act Utilitarianism

Bentham is an advocate of Psychological Hedonism. His object is to seek pleasure and shun pain. Bentham argues that because we do desire pleasure, therefore we ought to desire pleasure. His basic ethical hedonism is psychological hedonism.

Bentham holds that the only standard of valuation of pleasures is quantitative. But quantity takes different forms. It has seven dimensions of value, viz.

- (i) intensity, (ii) duration, (iii) proximity, (iv) certainty,
- (v) purity (freedom from pain), (vi) fecundity (fruitfulness), (vii) extent, i.e. the number of persons affected.

One pleasure is more intense than another. Of pleasures otherwise equal, the more intense pleasure is preferable to a less intense pleasure. One pleasure is more durable than another. Of pleasures otherwise equal, the more durable pleasure is preferable to a less durable pleasure. An immediate pleasure is preferable to a remote pleasure. A certain pleasure is preferable to an uncertain pleasure. A pleasure is pure when it is free from pain. It is impure when it is mixed with pain. A pleasure is said to have fecundity when it gives rise to a number of other pleasures. A pleasure may be enjoyed by a small number of persons or a large number of persons. A pleasure of greater extent is preferable to one of less extent. These are intensity, duration, proximity, certainty, purity, fecundity, and extent of pleasures.

Bentham believed in hedonistic calculus. He says, "Weigh pleasures and weigh pains, and as the balance stands, will stand the question of right and wrong." An action is right if it gives pleasure or excess of pleasure over pain. An action is wrong if it gives pain or excess of pain over pleasure.

Bentham's Utilitarianism may be called gross or sensualistic, because he does not admit qualitative differences among pleasures. He says, on the contrary, that any one pleasure is as good as another provided they are equal in quantity. We must bear in mind that Bentham does not mean by purity any superior quality but merely freedom from pain. A pleasure is pure, acc. to Bentham, where it is unmixed with pain.

Bentham's Hedonism is altruistic because he takes into account the extent of pleasure, i.e. the number of persons affected by them.

Though Bentham is an advocate of altruistic Hedonism, he clearly recognized the natural egoism of man. That man is naturally egoistic is repeatedly asserted by Bentham.

How, then, does Bentham pass from Egoism to Altruism? If man is egoistic by nature, why should he seek the happiness of others? why is he bound to promote the general happiness? why should he sacrifice his own happiness for happiness of others? what is the binding force of morality? How does

equanim to altruism, physical or natural
of four external sanctions, physical sanction, social sanction
sanction, political sanction, social sanction
and religious or divine sanction. The
physical sanction is constituted by the physical
pains, which result from the disregard of
natural laws such as the laws of health.
It is a law of nature that we should (ii)
satisfy the appetites moderately, if we
violate it by their over-indulgence, the
violation is followed by disease and pain.
The political sanction consists of those pains
which follow upon the penalties inflicted
by the authority of the state. The idea of
these pains prevents the individual from
violating political laws, and the hope of
reward to the society. The social sanction
consists of those pains which follow upon the
penalties inflicted by the society upon the
individual. Acc. to Bentham, the individual (iii)
passes from equanim to altruism under the
pressure of the external sanctions. The so-called
moral obligation is due to them.

Bentham's Gross Utilitarianism is
open to the following objections:—

- (i) Bentham is advocate of Psychological Hedonism. So his doctrine suffers from all the defects of Psychological Hedonism. One desire is primarily directed towards some object, the attainment of which is followed

by pleasure. If we desire a pleasant object, it does not follow that we desire pleasure. Moreover, very often the more we seek pleasure the less we get it. This is the fundamental Paradox of Hedonism. Psychological Hedonism does not necessarily lead to Ethical Hedonism. There is no necessary connection bet. the two. In fact, the ideal cannot be evolved from the actual.

(ii) When Bentham recognises several dimensions of value among pleasures and holds that the surplus of pleasure over pain determines the rightness of an action, and that the surplus of pain over pleasure determines the wrongness of an action, he looks upon pleasure & pain as concrete things which can be added and subtracted and thus quantitatively measured. But feelings of pleasure and pain are purely subjectively states of the mind, which cannot be measured like coins. Thus hedonistic calculus proposed by Bentham impracticable.

(iii) Bentham clearly recognises the egoistic nature of man but still he advocates Altruistic Hedonism. He does not offer any argument for altruism. He did not give any reason for our pursuit of general happiness. He thinks the nature of man to be essentially egoistic. "To obtain the greatest portion of happiness for himself says Bentham, " is the object of every rational being, from pure egoism,

Bentham can never evoke altruism, but still recognises the extent of pleasure, and thus introduces altruism in doctrine.

(iv) Bentham introduces altruism into his doctrine by taking into account the extent of pleasures. He has no reason why the pleasures of greater extent preferable to those of smaller extent. In fact, intellectual pleasure and aesthetic pleasure can be shared by a large number of people. But sensual pleasures of eating and drinking cannot be shared by a large no. of persons. He does not recognise qualitative difference among pleasures.

(v) The external sanctions can never explain the transition from egoism to altruism. We choose to obey laws of Nature, Society, State and God. for their sake, but for our own good.

(vi) Bentham's altruism is gross or sensualistic because he does not recognise the qualitative difference of pleasures. Though he recognises purity as a dimension of value in pleasure, he does not mean by purity qualitative superiority or intrinsic excellence. But this is a distinction of psychological fact, intellectual pleasure, artistic enjoyment and spiritual bliss are decidedly higher in quality than the pleasures of eating and drinking.

Bentham by recognizing the extent of pleasures makes hedonistic calculus extremely difficult. How can we weigh the pleasures of others? From the hedonistic standpoint, it is not justifiable. Why should others' pleasures be preferable to our own? ~~However~~. Moreover, we cannot calculate the pleasures of all mankind.

X