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Utilitarian Tradition (Part 1) : Introduction and Basic Tenets for NET, IAS, State-SET (KSET, WBSET, MPSET, etc.), GATE, CUET, Olympiads etc. (2023)

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[Utilitarian Tradition \(Part 1\) : Introduction and Basic Tenets \(Political Science\) \[https://youtu.be/Vc95pYWVRdU\]](https://youtu.be/Vc95pYWVRdU)

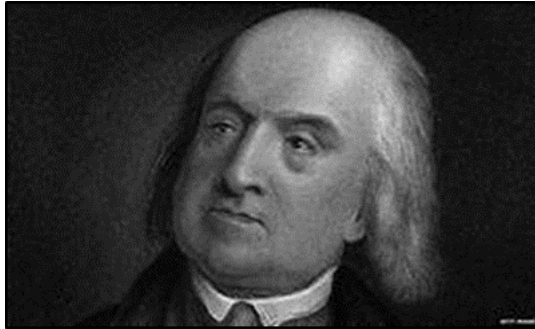
Introduction

- Refers to school of thought which flourished in 18th century England within the broader stream of liberalism.
- It founded a tradition of ethical theory which holds that the rightness of act, policy, decision or choice is determined by its tendency to promote happiness.

Basic Tenets

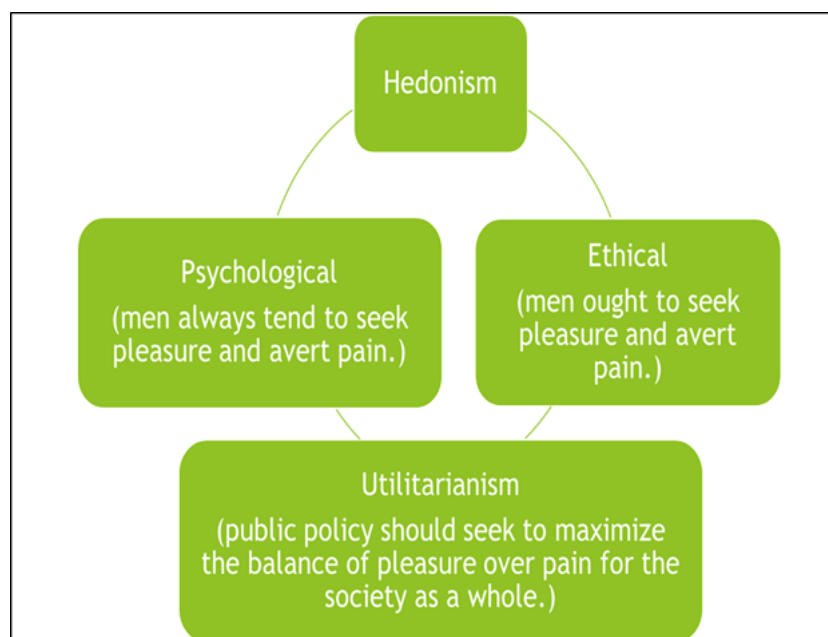
- According to utilitarianism, the guiding principle of all legislation and public policy should be 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number'.
- It regards 'utility' as the criterion of acceptance of a proposed option.
- Utility in this sense, refers to the amount of satisfaction derived from the consumption of goods or making use of services.
- According to the 'law of diminishing utility', different things may be identical in terms of their 'usefulness', but with increase in their supply, their utility starts decreasing.
- For example: each identical slice from a loaf of a bread has equal usefulness. But when we are hungry the first slice of bread will give us maximum satisfaction.
- The amount of satisfaction starts decreasing with the second and subsequent slices of bread.

Jeremy Bentham



- English philosopher , regarded as chief exponent of utilitarianism, and in the history of political thought he is regarded as the founder of utilitarianism.
- He believed that pleasure and pain are the chief motive force behind all human actions.
- The balance of pleasure over pain derived from a thing or a course of action represents the amount of happiness.

Composition of Utilitarianism



Concept of Utility

- Bentham and his followers argued that the concept of absolute right, absolute sovereignty and absolute justice had no relevance to the realities of social life .
- There was only one absolute standard regulation of human affairs, viz. that of absolute expediency.
- Public institutions and policies therefore should not be rated as good or bad in relation to some visionary or arbitrary concepts of human rights and obligations; they should be judged by their fruit.
- This leads to the concept of utility and utilitarianism.

Felicific Calculus

- Bentham focused on quantitative differences between different pleasures.
- And for this Bentham has laid down seven criteria which are compendiously described as 'felicific calculus' or 'hedonistic calculus' . They are-
 - Intensity (how strong is it feeling?)
 - Duration (how long it lasts?)
 - Certainty (how certain we feel to have it?)
 - Proximity or propinquity (how near it is to us , i.e.. how early can we have it?)
 - Fecundity (does it also produces other types of pleasure?)
 - Purity (no pain is mixed with it)
 - Extent (how far it extends to others?)
- Of these first six criteria are meant to judge utility of a thing or action for the individual.

- While the seventh criteria must be combined with them for determining the acceptability of a public policy as expressed in the principle of greatest happiness of greatest numbers.

Principles of Legislations

- Rejected the ideology of natural rights and the social contract yet subscribed to the sovereignty of reason .
- Repudiated the theory of 'general will' .
- He accorded a central place to the individual on question relating to public policy and legislations.
- He defend the interest of the individual as something which tends to increase the sum total of his pleasures, or to diminish the sum total of his pain.
- The interest of the community could likewise be discovered by adding the interest of all individual who composed it.
- He insisted that in calculating pleasure and pain for determining public policy , each individual should be treated as one unit.
- He asserted the necessity of treating all men as equals.
- He did not base his doctrine of equality on 'natural law' .
- Instead he proceeded on his original assumption that – men were born to be happy that is the plain dictate of experience.
- Since freedom is essential to happiness, men were entitled to freedom.
- Bentham sought to curb the legislator's tendency of ignoring happiness of the people in pursuance of their own moral standards or in promoting the happiness of their choice.

Utilitarian Theory of Punishment

