

ETHICS AND CULTURE (HUM-103)

HEDONISM II: UTILITARIANISM

LECTURE BY RIAZ P KHAN



Utilitarianism and other ethical theories

- ❖ Aristotle's conception of happiness
- ❖ Egoistic hedonism
- ❖ Kantian deontological ethics





JEREMY BENTHAM (1748 – 1832)

- ❑ Bentham was an English Philosopher, jurist and a social reformer
- ❑ Considered the founder of modern utilitarianism
- ❑ Committed to social equality, democracy, public education, and a universal improvement in the public welfare
- ❑ Developed the theory of Utilitarianism in response to the ills of Industrialization
- ❑ His well known book on ethics- *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (published in 1789)



“Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do...”

(Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*)

- ❖ Consequentialist Ethics – The rightness or wrongness of an act is determined by the goodness or badness of the consequences that flow from it. It is the end, not the means, that counts; the end justifies the means
- ❖ Utilitarian Ethics – The good is that which has useful consequences – only that which has utility produced by our actions should be promoted
- ❖ “Greatest Happiness Principle” – *Act always to promote the greatest happiness for the greatest number*
- ❖ Quantitative Measurement – Units of *hedon*



Hedonic or Felicific Calculus

- ❖ Algorithm for calculating the degree or amount of pleasure a particular action is like to cause
- ❖ *Hedon* – unit of pleasure or pain
 - Intensity – How intense is the pleasure?
 - Duration – How long does it last?
 - Certainty – How certain that the pleasure will occur?
 - Propinquity – How soon will it occur?
 - Fecundity – Will it lead to additional pleasure?
 - Purity – Is the pleasure mixed with some/any pain?
 - Extent – How many people will it affect?



Pleasure and the Concept of Utility

- ❖ Hedonism – The only thing that is good in itself is some specific type of state (for example, pleasure, happiness, welfare). It views pleasure as the sole good and pain as the only evil. It maintains that only pleasure or happiness has intrinsic value
- ❖ Regarded as the ethical standard or moral guide for our actions
- ❖ Empiricist formulation of ethics
- ❖ However, an action is right **if and only if** it produces- “*The greatest happiness for the greatest number for the greatest good*”
- ❖ Lifeboat example – “*Pushpin is as good as poetry*”





JOHN STUART MILL (1806- 1873)

- ❑ Usually cited as J.S. Mill, was a English philosopher, political economist and civil servant
- ❑ Mill was the godson and student of Jeremy Bentham; and Mill's father, James, was a friend of Bentham.
- ❑ Considered one of the most influential English speaking philosopher of the 19th century
- ❑ Strived to save the theory of Utilitarianism form the charge of being a ***Pig Philosophy*** and thus expanded on Bentham's concept of Utilitarianism
- ❑ Well known work on ethics- *Utilitarianism* (published in 1861)



Different Kinds of Pleasure

“It is quite compatible with the principle of utility to recognize the fact, that some kinds of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others. It would be absurd that while, in estimating all other things, quality is considered as well as quantity, the estimation of pleasures should be supposed to depend on quantity alone...”

“It is better to be human dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are of different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question. The other party knows the comparison both side...”

❖ Mill sought to distinguish happiness from mere sensual pleasure:

1. **Higher-order pleasure** : activities that were intellectual, literary, aesthetic, philosophical
2. **Lower-order or elementary pleasure** : physical, sensual like eating, drinking and so on.

❖ Who decides? The Role of the Philosopher reprised



Act Utilitarianism and Rule Utilitarianism

- ❖ Act Utilitarianism (Bentham)
- ❖ Rule Utilitarianism (Mill)
- ❖ Examples



The Question of Supererogatory Actions

- ❖ Supererogatory Action and Satisficing Utilitarianism
- ❖ Pursuing the Best Option (Highest Happiness)
- ❖ Happiness > Unhappiness (Satisficing Utilitarian)

