

## Quadrant II – Transcript and Related Materials

**Programme: Bachelor of Arts (First Year)**

**Subject: Philosophy**

**Paper Code: PIC 101**

**Paper Title: Theories of Moral Standard**

**Unit: 02**

**Module Name: Jeremy Bentham's Utilitarianism**

**Module No: 11**

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### Notes

Utilitarianism is a modern form of hedonism. It is also called universalism or altruism or altruistic hedonism.

It is of two types-

- a) gross or quantitative utilitarianism given by Jeremy Bentham
- b) refined or qualitative utilitarianism given by J.S. Mill. It follows the principle of "the greatest good for the greatest number." Therefore, it is altruistic in nature.

### **Gross or Quantitative Utilitarianism or Bentham's Altruistic Hedonism**

It is altruistic hedonism as it follows the principle of general or universal happiness i.e. "the greatest happiness of the greatest number" as the ultimate moral standard.

Bentham recognized only quantitative distinctions among pleasures. Therefore, it is called gross or quantitative utilitarianism. This theory is called utilitarianism because it judges all actions according to their utility to promote general happiness or prevent general pain.

Bentham gave seven dimensions of value to pleasures quantitatively. They are:

1. Intensity - the more intense pleasure is preferable to a less intense pleasure.
2. Duration - the more durable pleasure is preferable to a less durable one.
3. Proximity - a proximate pleasure is preferable to a remote pleasure.
4. Certainty - a certain pleasure is preferable to an uncertain pleasure.
5. Purity - a pure pleasure is one that is free from pain and is preferable to a pleasure mixed with pain i.e. an impure pleasure.
6. Fecundity - a pleasure has fecundity when it gives rise to a number of other pleasures, i.e. it has fruitfulness. Therefore, a fecund pleasure is preferable to a barren pleasure which does not give rise to other pleasures.

7. Extent – a pleasure enjoyed by a large number of persons is preferable to a pleasure enjoyed by a small number of persons i.e. the extent refers to the number of people affected.

Bentham also advocated psychological hedonism and argued that we do seek pleasure; therefore, we ought to seek pleasure. He based ethical hedonism on psychological hedonism.

Bentham also believed in the hedonistic calculus. 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. To calculate pleasure or pain, we have to take into account the seven dimensions of value. Bentham admitted that man is egoistic by nature but he advocated altruistic hedonism. He explains the change (transition) from egoism to altruism by means of four external sanctions:

- a) Physical or natural sanction – which operates through the pleasures and pains caused by nature. It results when we disobey natural laws. For example, the laws of health state that we should satisfy our appetites moderately or else it results in diseases and pains.
- b) Political sanctions – operates through pleasures and pains caused by the state. It consists of those pains which follow when the state inflicts penalties on us for disobeying/violating political laws and when the state rewards us for performing actions beneficial to society.
- c) Social sanctions – operates through the pleasures and pains caused by society when society inflicts penalties (for example, ex-communication) upon the individual when we act selfishly.
- d) Religious sanctions – operates through the pleasures and pains caused by religion/God and compel us to be altruistic. For example, the fear of punishment in hell or the hope of reward in heaven might drive us to act in a particular way.

Thus, these four external pressures compel an individual to sacrifice his own interests to those of the society. Thus, the individual passes from egoism to altruism under the pressure of the external sanctions.

### **Criticism of gross or Quantitative Utilitarianism**

- i. His hedonistic calculus is impracticable because feelings of pleasure and pain are subjective states of mind and cannot be measured like money. They also depend on our mood, temperament and circumstances.
- ii. He recognized the egoistic nature of man and still advocated altruistic hedonism without giving any reason why we pursue general happiness. From pure egoism, he can never evolve to altruism.
- iii. He does not recognize qualitative distinctions among pleasures and his theory is therefore, gross.
- iv. The four external sanctions are obeyed for our good and they can create a must or a physical compulsion but never an ought or moral obligation.