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# Ethics

## (Jeremy Bentham's Utilitarianism Theory)

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## Jeremy Bentham's Utilitarianism Theory

### Small Biography

Jeremy Bentham, hailed as the "Father of Utilitarianism," was an eighteenth-century philosopher.

- Jeremy Bentham was born in Houndsditch, London, on February 15, 1748.
- The Bentham's were a wealthy family.
- James and Alice, his parents, spent their time in social and intellectual pursuits.
- Bentham was a prodigy as a child.
- He could read well by the age of three.
- Jeremy began learning Greek and Latin at the age of four.
- While young James was intellectually superior to his peers, he was physically thin and frail.
- At the age of twelve he graduated and his father enrolled him at Queens College in Oxford.
- In 1766, he completed his Master's degree at Oxford, with a major in Law.
- Bentham's writings had established him as an international thinker by the 1780s.
- He interacted with figures such as Adam Smith and the French Revolution's movers and shakers.
- The changes brought about by the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution had an impact on him.
- Through his philosophy, he attempted to bring legal and political improvements to Britain.
- He was an outspoken opponent of slavery and a supporter of women's rights.
- Bentham is also known for being one of the earliest animal rights advocate.
- He felt that animals might be killed for food or to defend oneself or others from attack, but only if no unnecessary suffering was involved.
- Bentham began to think seriously about his death and legacy as he approached his eighties.
- He left explicit instructions on what should be done with his body.
- He died in his home in Westminster, London, in 1832.
- His body was dissected and his preserved corpse (or auto-icon) was clothed and displayed in a wooden case, as per his instructions. (University College London)

### Bentham on Pleasure and Pain

- He argues that everything we do should be based on pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain.
- He claims that no matter how much we attempt to ignore the value of pain and pleasure, our desire to maximise pleasure and reduce pain is unavoidable.
- However, we should employ our faculties of reason and law to achieve this goal.
- Bentham can be seen as a hedonist in two senses.

### Psychological Hedonism

- He claims that we are all driven by the urge to seek pleasure and avoid pain.
- E.g. - The shortcuts we take to reach a place.

## Ethical Hedonism

- He argues that it is entirely right that we should seek to maximise pleasure and minimise pain.
- E.g. - If one badly need money he/she can steal.
- Hedonism is a philosophical system that dates back to the Ancient Greeks and maintains that we should pursue pleasure.
- Bentham increases the scope of hedonism, which is often criticised as a shallow and selfish belief.
- The goal of utilitarianism is not just to maximise our personal happiness, but to maximise the happiness of everyone, that is, every being capable of experiencing pleasure and pain.

## Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism is a moral theory that discusses what is right and wrong.

- And how people and institutions should behave and make decisions based on what is right and what is wrong.
- It asserts that all actions should be directed toward maximising utility, which is essentially wellness or happiness.
- According to the principle of maximum happiness, each action should always aim to bring the greatest happiness to the largest number of people.
- E.g. -
  - As a doctor you have 5 doses of a medicine that are needed by 6 patients.
  - Out of the 6 patient one patient need all 5 doses to survive while other 5 patients need 1 dose each.
  - Following the Utilitarianism principle the doctor will give the doses to 5 patients who need 1 dose each.
- But how can we know which action brings us the greatest happiness?
- To determine that Bentham introduced the felicity calculus.

## Bentham's Felicific Calculus

- Bentham is most recognised for his principle of greatest happiness.
- This principle has also become known as the felicific calculus, a Latin term meaning 'calculation of felicity', or calculation of happiness.
- Calculus is a phrase that refers to the mathematical aspects of this approach, as it needs us to assign a value to the amount of happiness or suffering we feel in order to calculate the total amount of happiness we have gained.
- It also necessitates us speculating on the emotional value of various objects to others.
- It's easy to understand how complicated this may get.
- Bentham's approach to utilitarianism is known as quantitative hedonistic utilitarianism.
- It's referred to as 'quantitative' since it attempts to calculate 'quantities' of pleasure.

## **Critiquing Bentham**

- The felicific calculus is difficult to apply. It's difficult to know how much value to give to different experiences.
- Bentham's theory asks for us to be very even-handed when considering the pleasure and pain we can cause. Since for him everyone's pleasure and pain is of equal value.
- Further, it is, difficult to suppress partiality. For example, we appear to be inclined to prioritising the happiness of our loved ones over that of strangers.

### ***It ignores Individual Rights.***

- The goal of utilitarianism is to achieve highest aggregate happiness. As a result, it may make sense to tolerate or inflict pain to a small number of people in order to assure the happiness of the greatest number. This is known as 'tyranny of majority.'

### ***It ignores intention.***

- Utilitarianism is a consequentialist theory. This means it considers consequences, but not intentions, to be morally meaningful. It is not enough to have good intentions for utilitarian's.