

Philosophy and Critical Thinking
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Week- 05
Lecture 24: Utilitarianism

Welcome in lecture 24. Today we are going to talk about Theory of Utilitarianism, one of the very important theories for normative ethics. We are discussing ethics even in the last class, we have talked about hedonism and in hedonism we have talked about the egoism and altruism. So, hedonism is when we are giving an importance or to pleasure, importance to pleasure in the sense that when you are performing any action, for example X and is going to produce any amount of pleasure for you, then this action is good. So now what we are doing, we are judging any action based on the consequences of the action. Now consequence of the action means the result. So, when like for example you performed any action, then its result or consequences is a good, action is good. So, what we are doing, we are judging an action with its consequences, with its result. So, what we are doing, we are trying to understand that what kind of action is good and what kind of action is not good, right or not right. So, in the idea of hedonism. Now hedonists are going that pleasure is only value and pleasure has an intrinsic value. Intrinsic value means it is itself is not good. So, what they are saying that pleasure is itself is good, not because it is going to produce something else. For example, in last class which I gave the idea of money, for example we have money, so money is not intrinsically good because it is not in itself is good. You may use this money to produce some other pleasure. Therefore, money itself is not good or is not intrinsically good. However, hedonism argued that any action which going to produce any amount of pleasure because pleasure is intrinsically good, the action is good. So, for example, you performed an action X and is produced a pleasure, then this action is good and if this action is going to produce a pain, then this action is not good. We also have discussed that how the many philosophers including Hume, another philosopher that believe that pleasure and pain is an important right, important in the sense that when we are performing an action, these two things are motivating factor. So, when you are aware that if I am going to perform a Y action and it may produce pain, then you will not perform this action. When you know that there is T action and you this action will lead to a pleasure, then this action is good. So, this is how we do, how we perform an action. Hedonist, if you put this argument in hedonism, hedonist is arguing that since the pleasure is only value, so now what they are doing, they are formulating a moral ethics or moral conduct, arguing that any action which going to produce any amount of pleasure for you, any amount of a pleasure is good. Now the question arises that this pleasure for whom and who is good we should aim to maximize. So, there is one argument that we have to think about ourself, our own pleasure. We have to or we are obliged to maximize our own self-interest and that is called Egoism. So, let us say this is a hedonism. So, if you are going to talk about yourself,

I mean your own pleasure or we are maximizing your own pleasure or thinking of own pleasure or judging an action based on own pleasure is called egoism. So, egoism will say if the action is going to maximize your pleasure, it is called egoism, other action is right. It is called egoism. So, egoism will talk about maximization of or maximizing your own pleasure, own self-interest. Now there is another area or another theory, another group who argue that it is not possible to think of own pleasure all the time and therefore any action if it is going to produce any amount of pleasure for other, that action is right. It is called Altruism. So, altruism is an action which is going to produce pleasure for other and I gave an example of like for example driving. You are driving on a road where there is a school or children park. Now you are driving very slowly in order to avoid injuries very carefully about that right. So now this is called altruistic behavior like example the act of charity. So you are helping others. This is the action is going to produce pleasure for others. It is called altruism. Now, if you see this both sides, I mean if you either you go for the own pleasure or if you go for another pleasure, it is not possible to talk about in both side, the other side. We cannot all the time talk about own pleasure, we cannot talk about all the time other's pleasure right. So even you are going to think that egoism is an ultimate principle, it may not succeed. I mean it will be difficult to establish this egoism as a right model theory and same time the altruism as well because all the time we cannot think of the other's pleasure. But my point is here that when we are talking about the altruism or egoism, is it not possible for some other option where we can include your own pleasure. So hedonism is what arguing that pleasure is only value. Now the question arises that who's good or we should aim to maximize right. So, there are option like for example we are talking about the pleasure then the question arises that pleasure whom, whose good we should aim to maximize. Now there is a one way to argue this in this theory that we have to talk about the ego, egoism as we have discussed in the last class. Saying that if any amount, any action is going to produce any amount of pleasure is for yourself right, for own interest is called action is good, is called egoism, one theory right. So according to this theory this pleasure for what, for whom, pleasure for myself. So, when I am performing an action and if this action is going to produce any amount of pleasure for myself this action is good for me. Now the question arises that is it possible to think all the time own pleasure right. So that is what this egoism if you say take it cannot be a universal principle then another group who talks about the altruism and say and argued that any action is going to produce any amount of pleasure for others that action is good right. So now the idea is supposed, we are confused right between two actions for example X and Y we should perform it or not perform and we believe in the situation that both action is good and both action we can perform. So I am confused what to do. If you bring this theory egoism, then this theory says that you think of your own interest which one is going to benefit you, which one going to maximize your pleasure and if you subscribe this theory, this theory will say you take choose which is going to produce a pleasure for you. If you bring this theory altruism, we will argue that you choose an action which is going to produce a pleasure for others right.

So, this is what the application when we talk about the egoism and altruism. For example, I do not have any job, and I need money to support my family to feed my family right. My family is dependent on me. Now I need money and now I have two choices. I borrow money with my friend even in that you have two choices. First one is make some false promises. I will return you immediately or within a week and so on or tell the truth that what is the situation is right. I may not be able to return that money. Now what to do? Should I go for the making the false promises or saying that my credit is not well, so I need money and that can we do like that. Can you invest make some false statement. Now if egoism you bring this egoist theory in the situation it will say that go for it because it is going to produce a pleasure for you right. So, this is how what we do we always when you are confused, we applying a theory and looking for which action is the right action. Now this actions you remember is always consequences based right. I mean they are going to check whether this action is right or not right based on the result of the action not action itself.

Today what we are going to do is we are going to talk about some other theory which is called theory of utility or utilitarianism. If you see this egoism and altruism you find that both theory will not be possible all the time right. We cannot like all the time think of our own pleasure or only others pleasure or we may argue that can we like include now even own pleasure while thinking of others place and so on. So now let us understand today class that what is theory of utilities. So, there is a philosopher name is Bentham. He developed this utilitarianism as an ethical theory. His time was 1748 to 1832 and his chief concern was formulation of an ethical theory which would serve as a guide in the moral conduct of the individual. Providing an ethical basis for legal theory and practices was his chief concern right. So he was more interested in the legal theory. He wanted to come up the idea or rules which is going to guide the moral conduct to what set of action is right and what set of action is not right. So, he was more interested in the legal theory in the legal side and Bentham has contributed significantly in that area. However, since this course is on a very basic level we are not going in detail about the Bentham and his contribution but just we will try to understand the theory of utilitarianism from the Bentham perspective. So, we will have just an idea about how the Bentham talked about utilities and so on. Very important point I would like to mention here that Bentham was empiricist. We have discussed already that what is empiricism inside. Empiricism is a person or a theory or theorist who believe that whatever we are getting knowledge, is a source of knowledge is experience. So whatever we have this is caused by the experience. So only through experience we can get knowledge and this is what he argued that the intellect has no material to work with apart from obtained by the senses. So even we are thinking that we are some there is some intellectual work that is just because we have obtained it by senses right. So this Bentham is an empiricist. He also believed that the moral science the basic principle is that people can only know that which can be observed and verified. Now this empiricism on the idea he what he did he applied in the moral science. Now he is arguing

that we have to always accept or let us say that can only know that which is can be observed or verified because he is an empiricist. Empiricist means who always can experience things. So, he is more interested in something which we can observe or we can verify. We have discussed this much this theory again from the Humean perspective how Hume also has argued for the imprecise as a source of knowledge. Now again as Hume he argued that the pleasure is the only good and pain without exception is only evident. So, pleasure itself is good as Hume argued that pleasure and pain is an emotional factor of human action. He also accepted that and argued that pleasure is the only good. So, and pain in any form without an exception is only evident. So, this is you find that in Bentham we will be discussing of Bentham. He is his theory and his aim is only to first to get this knowledge to produce any his main intention or main theory is all about the pleasure and again he has always talked about avoid the pain. Now as hedonist have argued that pain and pleasure are the final cause of individual action. So, in any action we are going to just is we are going to check first the consequences the result of the action and result is in the terms of pain and pleasure. So, if there is a pain then obviously, we are not going to make this action or judge this action as in right action. When this going to put us in a pleasure then we are going to accept this action as in right action. So, the utility of act is determined by its consequences.

Now let us understand how Bentham has argued. He argued that the principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever according to the tendency which it appears to have in an augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question. By utility it meant the property of any object whereby it tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, good or happiness or to prevent the happening of mischief, pain, evil, unhappiness to the party whose interest is considered right. It is in a very clear that when he talking about the utility he is always if you see this the second point accepting the happiness and pleasure and trying to avoid the pain and unhappiness. Now what Bentham has talked about the four sources of pleasure and pain or sanctions is first one physical, the political, the social and the religious right. Now one more important point I would like to mention here that how to check that which action is going to produce a maximum pleasure. Now for example there is no when we have talked about the pleasure and pain in the first example there is a question that suppose you are confused with the two action X and Y then even the Bentham will argue that if the X is going to produce a pleasure, then you have to go for X because X is right. Now the Bentham talked about something called hedonistic calculus how to calculate the pleasure and then he talked about the seven different point. So, first point says that intensity you have to check the intensity of pleasure right. You may understand and in the example of the pain or intensity of pain suppose we are like in pain then we can talk about the intensity right. This pain on that pain and so on. Now in terms of the pleasure if you are going to any action going to produce a pleasure then you have to check the intensity of this pleasure. Now we also have to check the duration, the timing right. Third point that in certainty and uncertainty suppose you are

going to perform an X and X or you are confused between X and X and Y then you have to check which action is going to produce pleasure with certainty right. It is going to sure is going to produce this pleasure. You have the set of experience and you are aware that this action will be producing a pleasure for sure right. So, this is what we will talk about whether it is a certain or it is not certain. Propinquity or remoteness is another point Bentham added that it is an important to check that whether when is a nearness of the pleasure. Fecundity if there is an action is produced a pleasure, and this pleasure is going to produce another same type of pleasure like a similar kind of pleasure right. So, there is an action and it is a produced on a pleasure and then followed by another pleasure. We also have to check the purity. Purity in the sense that it is in a complete absence of pain. So, in what sense it is in a pure and in what level that is we have to check and the final one is the extent and what extent that if this action is going to produce a pleasure. So, Bentham argued that this is kind of a model where we can check, we can calculate about the pleasure. So, whether which action is going to produce a pleasure, how to check and how to calculate. So, these are the points by Bentham which is very important.

Now Bentham later added two principles. First is disappointment or prevention principle that is a very important contribution I believe that he believed that when we were talking about the pleasure many times, he talked about in terms of wealth right. So when you are adding in a more wealth this action is going to produce a more happiness, more pleasure for you right. Now one point supposes there are two questions right. Suppose because of an action or I am losing my money right. Bentham argued that if you are going to lose things then it will produce a more unhappiness and therefore, he has talked about the protection of wealth. Now Bentham idea is more about in a legal system where he had talked about how why the government should do this and do that and so on or while making any principle or law you have to take care of these ideas right. So Bentham argued that suppose that an action or in that action I lose that lot of property or wealth, a huge amount of wealth that is going to produce an disappointment right. So, what we need to do is we have to avoid those things or at least we need to protect that and second one when he said that a greatest happiness for the greatest number. When we start talking about when you are performing any action then you have to check that this action is going to produce a maximum pleasure for maximum number. So, for example suppose there is a party and you are going to buy ice cream for all the friends right. So, for example, there are 20 friends right and out of 20 friends 13 or 14 friends likes like what do you like flavor right. So, if you bring this theory, the theory will say that always go for the vanilla because this is this action is going to produce a greatest pleasure, the greatest number. However, you have a two-choice vanilla or chocolate. Now you realize that or you knew that the maximum of the friend likes chocolate or vanilla. For example, they will all of them are 14 out of 20 likes Vanilla. So, for you buying a vanilla ice cream, ice cream with Vanilla flavor is an right action because that is going to produce a greatest happiness for the greatest number right. Now here it is in a very important when you were talking about the hedonism, one

side we talked about egoism where we are talking about your own pleasure and other side we are talking about altruism. Now we are talking about theory of utility. The utility is talking about the maximum number greatest pleasure for the greatest number. Now, here we include my own self, myself right. So now if any there is any action if you are going to produce a maximum happiness for the maximum number then that action is called right action. This is what we got theory of utility or utilitarianism. So, Utilitarianism always a belief in the greatest pleasure for greatest number. Now the greatest pleasure he talks about terms of the quantity. See the quantity. He argued that the art of directing men's action to the production of the greatest possible quantity of happiness. So this is what he is in a quality of happiness. So, Bentham has always talked about that. So that is the reason that his philosophy or his theory of utilitarianism is called Quantitative Utilitarianism. He argued that the conduct which is conducive to the general happiness always coincides with that which conducive to the happiness of the agent right. So, in conclusion if we have understood the hedonism then there is an egoism and then altruism and then theory of Utilitarianism right. So one part we have discussed the pleasure any action which going to produce any amount of pleasure for myself, my own self, my own or any action is going to maximize the self-interest is good for egoism. If any action is going to maximize the pleasure of others, this action is good according to altruism. Any action is going to produce a maximum pleasure for maximum happiness, this theory of utilitarianism. In basic level that you may understand in this way. However, there are many questions for example an argument we can consider who has rejected or has shown a problem in the theory of utilitarianism. For example, suppose you are walking right near a lake and then you saw someone drown. Now saving this person is good, because it is going to maximize happiness for me. Now the question arises suppose this person is very criminal. If you are not going to save this person you are going to support many of them. Now, these questions it will not come in this area because when suppose someone is drowning whatever it comes in my mind and suppose a thing came in mind by saving this person is a good action because it is going to produce a pleasure for others or maximum need. Then I have to save this one. So saving this person is always good always right action. However, that is not a part of our course and I am supposed to like discuss this theory of equitivism in a very basic level. So you just take these things in this way that whenever we are going to talk about the greatest pleasure for greatest happiness that is a the theory of utilitarianism and theory of utilitarianism talks about the quantity of happiness. However, we will be continuing this discussion in the next class as well.

So, thank you for your kind attention. This talk was based on the history of philosophy by Frank Thilly and the Stanford Encyclopedia the two entry the Jeremy Bentham and the history of utilitarianism. Thank you so much for your kind attention. Thank you.