

Ethics
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Module No 3
Lecture 15

Welcome to this lecture series on ethics. This lecture is going to discuss hedonism, hedonism primarily as an ethical theory but also have to discuss the hedonistic approach has a doctorate by psychologists because there is a strong psychological theory which says that human nature or human beings by nature seek pleasure. And in one sense, we can also say that the ethical theory is to a very great extent based upon the psychological theory.

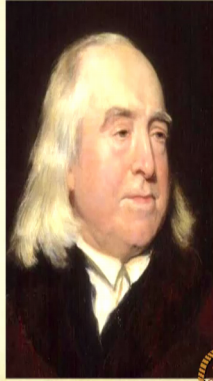
So in that sense we have to see both approaches but the primary emphasis will be on understanding hedonism as an ethical approach. And in a subsequent lectures, we will also discuss the various types of hedonistic ethical frameworks, particularly utilitarianism. So we will begin with this.

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Two Sovereign Masters: Pain & Pleasure

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*



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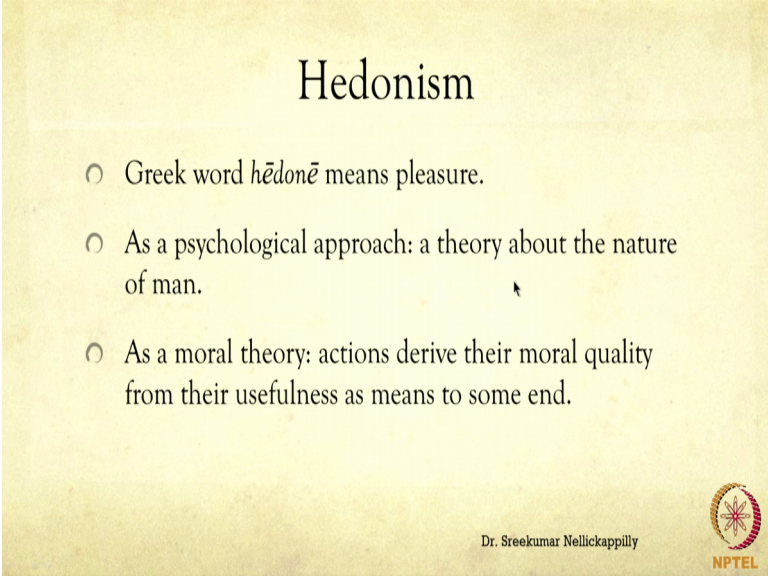


This is a quote from Jeremy Bentham, an introduction to the principles of morals and legislation. Jeremy Bentham is a very famous philosopher, very notable and a very important figure, particularly in the history of utilitarianism, the history of hedonistic thought. So what he says is that nature has placed mankind under the governance of 2 sovereign masters, pain and pleasure.

It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do as well as determine what we shall do. Bentham here claimed that nature has placed mankind under the governance of 2 sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. So the 1st sentence in this advocates a psychological theory. It says that by nature man is like this.

Then the latter half of this statement, Bentham goes on to say that it is for them alone to point out what we ought to do as well as to determine what we shall do. So the ethical theory. So it is clear that Bentham is trying to derive his ethical theory from his psychological position. Now let us say hedonism a little closer.

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The slide is titled "Hedonism" in a large, black, serif font. Below the title, there are three bullet points, each starting with a small circle. The first bullet point says "Greek word *hēdonē* means pleasure." The second bullet point says "As a psychological approach: a theory about the nature of man." The third bullet point says "As a moral theory: actions derive their moral quality from their usefulness as means to some end." In the bottom right corner, there is a small circular logo with a star-like pattern inside, and the text "Dr. Sreekumar Nellickappilly" and "NPTEL" below it.

Hedonism

- Greek word *hēdonē* means pleasure.
- As a psychological approach: a theory about the nature of man.
- As a moral theory: actions derive their moral quality from their usefulness as means to some end.

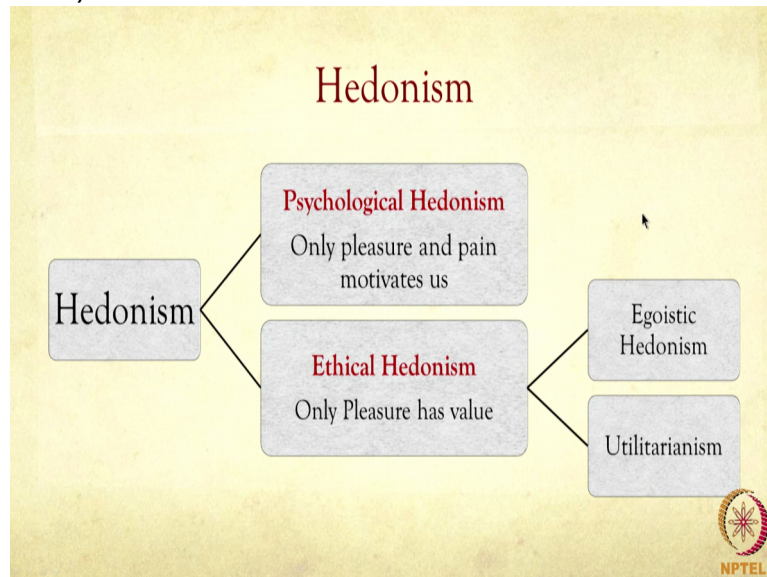
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Here, the word hedonism derived from the Greek word hedone which means pleasure. So the emphasis is on pleasure and then as a psychological approach, this is a theory about human nature which I have already pointed out, which Jeremy Bentham and many others are advocating this. So it says that human beings by nature seek pleasure. Pain and pleasure are the 2 important motivations or rather the sole motivations which determine human actions.

Whatever actions man performs, human beings would consider these 2 motivations, these 2 are the ultimate motivations. Again, as a moral theory which we are more interested in, actions derive the moral quality from their usefulness as a means to some end and that some end is happiness or pleasure. So here again you know, the emphasis is on the consequence of the action

and the consequences are inevitably pleasure and that alone is the most important motivation for performing any action or ought to be the most important motivation to perform action.

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So here, this figure will give you a very comprehensive picture of the entire project of hedonism, the different kinds of hedonism. So it says that you know, hedonism can be broadly divided into 2, which have already mentioned, psychological hedonism which says that only pleasure and pain motivate us and the ethical hedonism which says that only pleasure has value. Then ethical hedonism we could see further gets divided into egoistic hedonism or hedonistic egoism and hedonistic utilitarianism.

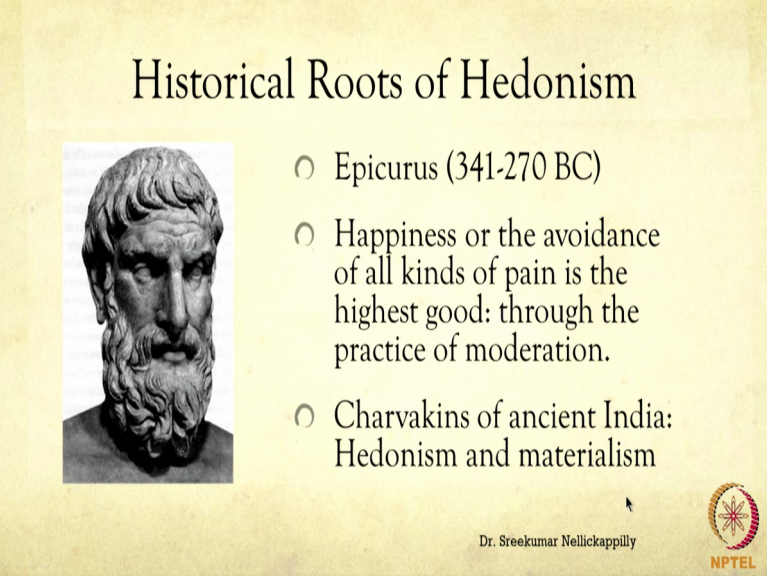
Egoistic hedonism emphasises on the individual. It says that every individual ought to seek, I underline the word ought, every individual ought to seek his or her pleasure and utilitarianism is a theory which is other regarding which says that it considers pleasure or happiness as the goal no doubt, like egoistic hedonism it also considers pleasure or happiness as a goal as a end but it says that we have to consider the happiness or pleasure of the entire society or the entire humanity for that matter.

It advocates a kind of maximalism and says that maximum happiness to the maximum number of people. In most simplistic terms, that is the most important slogan that captures the very essence of utilitarianism, maximum happiness to maximum number of people. And when we try to

examine the historical roots of hedonism, again we have to see probably the Greek roots, the Greek philosophy and this Greek philosopher, Epicurus is probably the most important figure here.

And on the other hand we could also see that other civilisations also have hedonistic trends, we could see their, in their historical developments. For example in India, we could see the Charvakins. In one sense we can say that they are hedonist par excellence because they are also materialists. We will come to that later.

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The slide has a light yellow background. At the top center, the title "Historical Roots of Hedonism" is written in a black serif font. On the left side, there is a black and white photograph of a classical marble bust of the philosopher Epicurus, showing him with a full, curly beard and hair. To the right of the bust, there is a bulleted list with three items, each preceded by a small circle. The text of the list is in a black serif font. At the bottom right of the slide, there is a small circular logo with a red and white design, and the text "NPTEL" below it. At the bottom center, the name "Dr. Sreekumar Nellickappilly" is written in a small black font.

Historical Roots of Hedonism

- Epicurus (341-270 BC)
- Happiness or the avoidance of all kinds of pain is the highest good: through the practice of moderation.
- Charvakins of ancient India: Hedonism and materialism

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This Epicurus who lived between 341 to 270 BC, Epicurus advocates a unique philosophical approach towards life and also advocates a form of hedonism which in one sense is very unique because it couples hedonism or pleasure with moderation. It says that real pleasure or real happiness can only be experienced, only if you practice moderation.

So he says that happiness or the avoidance of all kinds of pain is the highest good. Through the practice of moderation, we can attain this. So one has to pursue happiness, one has to seek happiness and try to avoid all kinds of pain. And the Charvakins in India, hedonism and materialism as I already mentioned, they combined both. See here, before we proceed, we have to mention a little bit more about the Charvakins because in the Indian context particularly, according to ancient India, there are 4 important goals of human life.

They are called the dharma, artha, kama and moksha. These are the 4 important goals of life. Purusharthas they are called and out of these Purusharthas, dharma for example is the path of righteous conduct, doing good or rather morality, ethics, everything comes in this dharma. We can also understand India's history by following the different interpretations of dharma as conduct by different philosophical schools during different periods.

Say for example, the Vedic India or the Vedas advocate a unique concept of dharma which we can also see in the Upanishads. Upanishads carry a lot of discussions on dharma. There are references to samanya dharma, vishesha dharma, everything in the Upanishads as well. But when you come to later literature, particularly to the Buddhist era, Buddhism advocates are very different kind of concept of dharma which does not understand dharma as it was understood by the Vedic religions.

There are some differences, some important differences. It emphasises ahimsa and various other aspects which was not really emphasised by the Vedic religions. But when you come to later literatures, say for example Mahabharata, or Ramayana or Bhagwat Gita, in these texts we could see again a more elaborate kind of discussions on the concept of dharma.

So following these discussions and debates on dharma, the connect will understand the history of ancient India. This is what I meant. But as I said, the 4 Purusharthas, dharma, artha, kama. Artha is pleasure, anything that is sensually valuable, fame, everything comes under artha. Then, kama is desire, it is desire for pleasure and aversion towards pain. So something which is very similar to the kind of happiness or pleasure these people, the hedonists were advocating.

And then the 4th one is moksha. Moksha is often treated as the highest Purushartha, highest goal. It is also stated that moksha is the parama Purushartha but most of the Indian philosophical systems advocate all the 4, dharma, artha, kama and moksha because they tried to combine all the 4 and try to present life as a balance of all the 4. Everything is important, artha is important, kama is important, dharma is important, and moksha is the ultimate objective.

But when it comes to the Charvakins, we would find a very different picture and a very interesting perspective. The Charvakins say that artha and kama are the only 2 Purusharthas.

They reject the validity of dharma and moksha. The important slogan for them is, eat, drink and be merry man, you will die tomorrow.

They thus try to advocate a very popular kind of philosophy among the people but to what extent they were successful is a different question because we do not have any writings coming down to us from the Charvakins, nothing is left to us. We do not know what happened to the literature. There are references to the Charvakins used here and there in the Indian literature and these have been collected by scholars.


That is the only source of to know about the Charvakins and their views today. But in the great tradition, Epicurus and many others, they advocate a philosophy which is more comprehensive than the kind of materialism of the Charvakins. For example, as I already indicated, Epicurus was trying to argue that search for happiness, the pursuing happiness should be combined with moderation, the practice of moderation.

So one has to reduce one's wants. Only then one can be really happy and one should not be bothering about death and other things because death is yet to happen. That is not there. When I here, death is not there and when death happens, I am not there. Then why should I worry? This is a very famous Epicurean wisdom.

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Epicurus and the Charvakins

Epicurus	Charvakins
<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Advocated moderation.○ Enjoy happiness by reducing wants.○ He who is not satisfied with a little, is satisfied with nothing .	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Materialism○ No dharma and no moksha, only artha and kama.○ Eat, drink and be merry.○ After death there is nothing.

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Now, Epicurus advocated moderation, enjoy happiness by reducing wants. He who is not satisfied with a little is satisfied with nothing. So this underlines the value of moderation, this statement. He who is not satisfied with a little is satisfied with nothing. Charvakins on the other hand as I indicated, they advocate materialism and there is no dharma, no moksha, only artha and kama, eat drink and be merry. After death, there is nothing.

Now we will try to understand hedonism in modern context. So as I mentioned, in the previous lecture also I indicated this when we were discussing egoism. We have seen that there is a descriptive model of egoism, descriptive approach towards egoism as well as a normative approach. Similar to that, in hedonism also, there are these 2 approaches.


There is a descriptive approach which is largely psychological as I already briefly discussed it which is a psychological theory of the human nature and then there is the normative theory which is the ethical theory.

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Hedonism as a Psychological Theory

- A theory of human nature.
- Also known as motivational hedonism.
- Pleasure and pain are the only motivation to act and not to act.
- The desires to encounter pleasure and to avoid pain guide all of our behavior.

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So now we will focus more on hedonism as a psychological theory where it is a theory of human nature and also known as motivational hedonism. It is known as motivational hedonism because it says that pleasure and pain are the only motivation to act and not to act. So if one is sure about pleasure, going to be there as a consequence of one's action, then that is a great motivation or rather that is the sole motivation for one to perform a particular action.


Similarly if one is quite sure about or one is rather anticipating the possibility of pain as a consequence, then one would be a bit reluctant to act. So pleasure and pain are the ultimate motivations to act and not to act. So this is what hedonism as a psychological theory primarily argues. The desire is to encounter pleasure and to avoid pain guide all of our behaviour.

So the desire to encounter pleasure, to have pleasure, this pleasure seeking approach which is so ingrained so which is so integral to human nature is underlined here. Men see pleasant consequences and by nature do desire pleasure.

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Psychological Hedonism

- Men see pleasant consequences and by nature do desire pleasure.
- This need not be the greatest pleasure and not necessarily the most intense and the most lasting pleasure: [Hence they leave room for a theory of ethics.](#)
- Each person has an ultimate desire for her own happiness. (William Lillie)
- Happiness is the one and only thing desirable in itself (J S Mill)
- Happiness is desirable in itself (J S Mill)
- Everyone desires his own happiness (J S Mill)



By nature, we all as human beings desire pleasure. Then again, this need not be the greatest pleasure or the greatest pleasure and not necessarily the most intense and the most lasting pleasure.

So this is the problem like we are all by nature pleasure seeking, no doubt about it. No human being would consciously or even subconsciously seek pain. We would all try to avoid pain and seek pleasure. But then that need not necessarily be the most intensive kind of pleasure and the most lasting pleasure and definitely need not be the greatest pleasure we seek always. So this actually gives a room for an ethical theory.

An ethical theory in this context can supplement the psychological theory and come up with the assumption that all human beings ought to seek the greatest pleasure which is what utilitarians are doing. But then utilitarians do it in a different way because they would argue that the actions would become morally good only if they produce maximum pleasure or the greatest pleasure to the greatest number of people, not just to the person who is performing the action, not just to the agent.

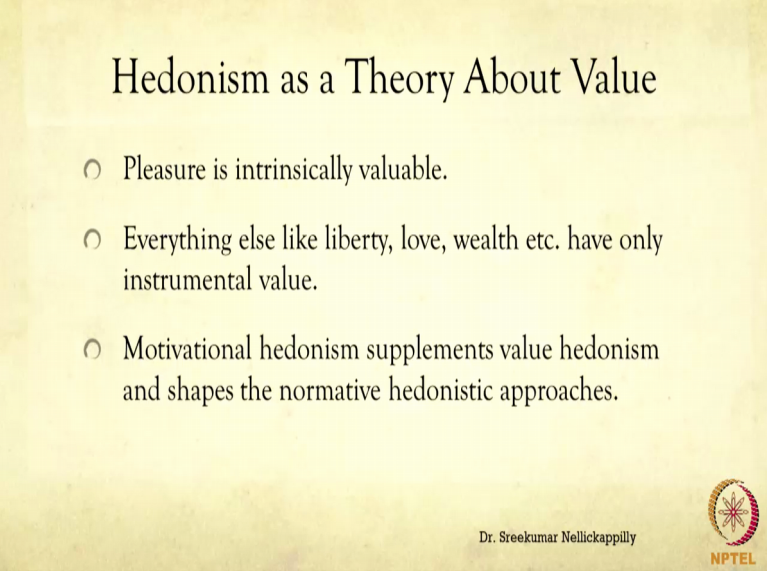
So it is not an exclusively agent centric form of morality they are trying to advocate. They are advocating hedonism no doubt but at the same time, their hedonism is utilitarianism, a utility for the entire humanity is sought. Each person has an ultimate desire for her own happiness. This is

from William Lillie's book, textbook on ethics. Then again, JS Mill says that happiness is one and only thing desirable in itself.

So what do you mean by desirable in itself? It means that that is the only thing which is intrinsically desirable. Everything is instrumentally desirable. Everything else but happiness is instrumentally desirable. It is desirable in itself. And again, happiness is desirable in itself, everyone desires his own happiness. Each person desires his own happiness.

Now we have been talking about conceiving hedonism as a psychological theory. Now we have to take up, now we have to consider hedonism as a theory about value, about human values.

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The slide has a light yellow background. At the top center, the title 'Hedonism as a Theory About Value' is written in a black serif font. Below the title, there are three bullet points, each starting with a small circle. The first bullet point says 'Pleasure is intrinsically valuable.' The second bullet point says 'Everything else like liberty, love, wealth etc. have only instrumental value.' The third bullet point says 'Motivational hedonism supplements value hedonism and shapes the normative hedonistic approaches.' In the bottom right corner, there is a small circular logo with a star-like pattern inside, and the text 'NPTEL' below it. In the bottom center, the name 'Dr. Sreekumar Nellickappilly' is written in a small black font.

Hedonism as a Theory About Value

- Pleasure is intrinsically valuable.
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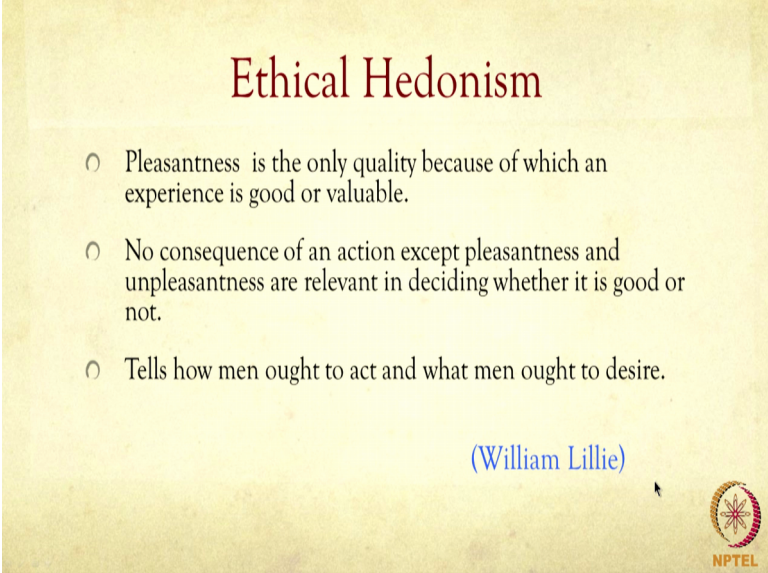
Now pleasure is intrinsically valuable, is taken for granted by hedonism as a theory about value as well, as an ethical theory also. Or rather, ethical hedonism, we can put it in that way. Now what it does is that, everything else like Liberty, Love, wealth, et cetera have only instrumental value. So all these things are valuable in life.

We know that liberty is valuable. Love is quite often we would say that love is intrinsically valuable because we want love not because of something else but because love is intrinsically valuable. Normally that is the way we understand it. Even Liberty also. Why do we need freedom? Because freedom is intrinsically valuable.

But the hedonist would argue that that is not so. These are all valuable things, no doubt in that but they are only instrumentally valuable. Liberty is valuable because it is an instrument that takes us to the highest value which is happiness. Wealth is valuable because it makes us happy. Love is valuable because it makes us happy.

Everything else makes us happy, hence they are valuable. So their value is not intrinsic but only instrumental but the value of happiness is intrinsic in itself. Motivational hedonism supplements value hedonism and shapes the normative hedonistic approaches. So this is what we are trying to argue. The normative hedonistic approaches which are the ethical approaches surrounding the psychological theory of hedonism or rather the perspective of hedonism, takes a lot from motivational hedonism which is a psychological theory. It is supplemented by that theory, it presupposes that theory to a very great extent.


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Ethical Hedonism

- Pleasantness is the only quality because of which an experience is good or valuable.
- No consequence of an action except pleasantness and unpleasantness are relevant in deciding whether it is good or not.
- Tells how men ought to act and what men ought to desire.

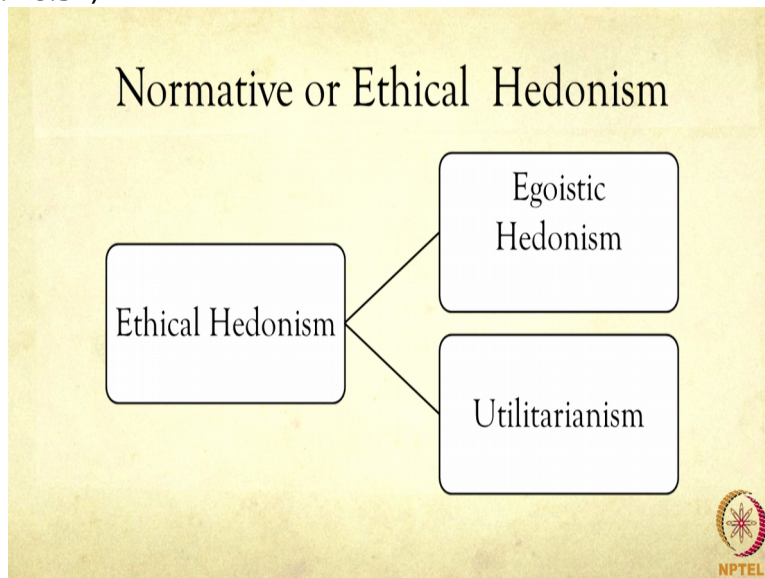
(William Lillie)



Now, ethical hedonism. Pleasantness is the only quality because of which an experience is good or valuable. So here, the consequence aspect is underlined. Pleasantness is the consequence of an action here and that makes the action valuable. No consequence of an action except pleasantness and unpleasantness are relevant in deciding whether it is good or not. So to decide whether it is desirable, it is good, it is right, it is valuable, we have to see whether pleasantness is the consequence or not.

Again, tells how men ought to act and what men ought to desire. In that sense, it proposes a very strong ethical theory. It is what you desire, what you ought to desire and what you ought to do and this is what William Lile says.

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Now, as I mentioned earlier, ethical hedonism how the normative ethical hedonistic perspectives in general can be divided into egoistic hedonism and utilitarianism.

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Egoistic Hedonism

- We ought to do whatever makes us happiest.
- Do whatever gives us with the most net pleasure after pain is subtracted.
- No need to consider those consequences for anyone other than oneself.

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Egoistic hedonism is as the name indicates, suggests, we ought to do whatever makes us happiest. We in the sense, each individual. So the stress is on the individual here. The individual's happiness is important here. Not happiness in general or not happiness of the general humanity but the happiness of the individual who acts, who is the agent of action.

So according to this framework, an action becomes right if that action leads to consequences which do good to the individual which means which makes the individual the agent happy or rather the happiest. Which action makes him the happiest is the good action for him, is the ethically more valuable action for him.

Do whatever gives us with the most net pleasure after pain is subtracted. So there is a suggestion of a calculus. You have to see each action, each course of action and see which course of action gives you the net pleasure after pain is subtracted. So kind of a course benefit analysis you can perform before you consider when you consider your choices before you take your final decision on which course of action is good for you.

There is no need to consider those consequences for anyone other than oneself. So this is a very interesting suggestion and rather this suggestion has got some consequences which are also sometimes very unpleasant and undesirable because it says that there is no need to consider. When you consider, when you have to decide the moral value, moral worth of an action, one need not consider the consequences for anyone other than oneself which means that if I am badly in need of some money, I can steal it from anyone else.

I do not have to basically bother about what consequences this will have on that other person from whom I am stealing this money. Whatever happens to him or her, I do not have to just care about it. I just have to get my things done because my happiness is more important here. So this could be an implicit suggestion of the statement that we do not have to bother about the consequences these actions will have on other people.

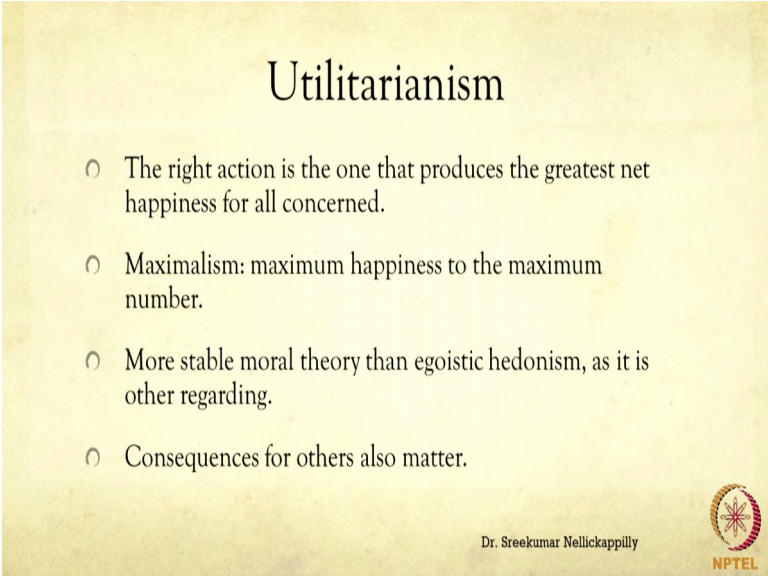
And here you know, independent of the feelings of sympathy and guilt, this becomes an imperative for an ethical egoistic because in order to be a perfect egoistic hedonist, a person need to be as insensitive as possible, as indifferent as possible to the problems of other people. One

has to consider only one's own problem and try to find the happiest solution for one's problem. There and even at the expense of other peoples happeniness.

Other people might become happy, unhappy but that is not our concern. They are happy or unhappy, that is not our concern. They, what happens to them is not our concern. We have to really bother only about ourselves. Now in contrast to this, utilitarianism which actually stresses on the collective happiness of people which stress on the maximum happiness of maximum number of people, is a philosophical framework that is essentially other regarding.

It is concerned about other people. It is concerned about the entire humanity in a very important manner.

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The slide is titled "Utilitarianism" in a large, black, serif font. Below the title, there are four bullet points, each starting with a small circle. The text of the bullet points is as follows:

- The right action is the one that produces the greatest net happiness for all concerned.
- Maximalism: maximum happiness to the maximum number.
- More stable moral theory than egoistic hedonism, as it is other regarding.
- Consequences for others also matter.

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It says that the right action is the one that produces the greatest for all concerned, greatest net happiness for all concerned. So this is for all. So it takes into account all the stakeholders so that it is essentially other regarding. It is not so egoistic in that sense. So in one sense, we can say that egoistic hedonism fails as an ethical theory.

As we saw in the previous lecture that egoism fails as an ethical theory, here egoistic hedonism also fails as an ethical theory because it is not other regarding because it does not make sense in a social context to be presented as a theory so that everyone can follow it. It will have very

adverse consequences if everyone becomes egoistic hedonist. Similarly again, it advocates maximalism, maximum happiness to maximum number.

Then again more able moral theory than egoistic hedonism as it is other regarding. So this makes it a more consistent moral theory or ethical perspective. But it has got its problems because it is still regardless of the fact that it is other regarding, it emphasises on consequences of actions. It tells you that other things are unimportant. Intention of the action, all these things are unimportant.

What is important is only consequences, consequences for others also matter. It is not just consequences for oneself alone. But what consequences one's action are going to have on other peoples life is also a concern here. So in that sense, it is more important. Before we conclude, we will have a little closer look on utilitarianism and we will have an elaborate analysis of utilitarianism in the coming lecture.

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What is Utilitarianism?

- The usefulness of actions is emphasized.
- Usefulness is equated with utility, which is further equated with happiness.
- A practical approach.

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Utilitarianism emphasises the usefulness of action. Like hedonism, the consequences are very important in utilitarianism. The usefulness of an action is important here. And again, usefulness is equated with utility which is further equated with happiness. That is the reason why it is called utilitarianism. It is actually maximum utility to maximum number of equal, not happiness.

But then later on what happens is that utility is equated with happiness or pleasure by utilitarians. That is why they became hedonists. And they present to us a very practical approach because utilitarian framework or utilitarian approaches can be implied in order to solve many practical issues. Say for example, if you want to construct a dam in a particular site, or a bridge what you can do is that constructing a dam for example raises a lot of ethical problems, a lot of moral issues because with regard to the environment and other things.

But here you can probably go for a cost benefit analysis and see in what way the society is going to benefit in the dam is constructed and you can also see what is the cost. Like how much forest will get submerged, to what extent the environment is getting affected, all these things can be studied by expert scientific teams and then finally take a decision.

How many people are going to get employment? In what sense this is going to help government to serve water and also improve the agricultural facilities in the society, all these things can be considered and finally take a decision. So in that sense utilitarianism with its emphasis on utility and also consequences suggests or presents a very practical approach to morality.

Greatest happiness of the greatest number should be the end and criterion. So the we have a very objective criterion here which can be quantified to a very great extent. To what extent people are going to be benefited and what are the expenses, what is the loss, all these things can be calculated, more or less objectively and scientifically. So we can arrive at a sort of a perfect noncontroversial kind of a final decision on such matters which is not very easy of course but to a very great extent, it is a very practical approach and apply to service and politics.

Particularly in these areas, it has a tremendous practical applications because of its objective approach to morality and moral issues. Now, we wind up with this one point that we are now going to start our discussion on utilitarianism and we would be discussing 2 important frameworks. One is called the act utilitarianism, other one is rule utilitarianism and we would be discussing, analysing the contributions of 2 important thinkers here, Jeremy Bentham and JS mill.

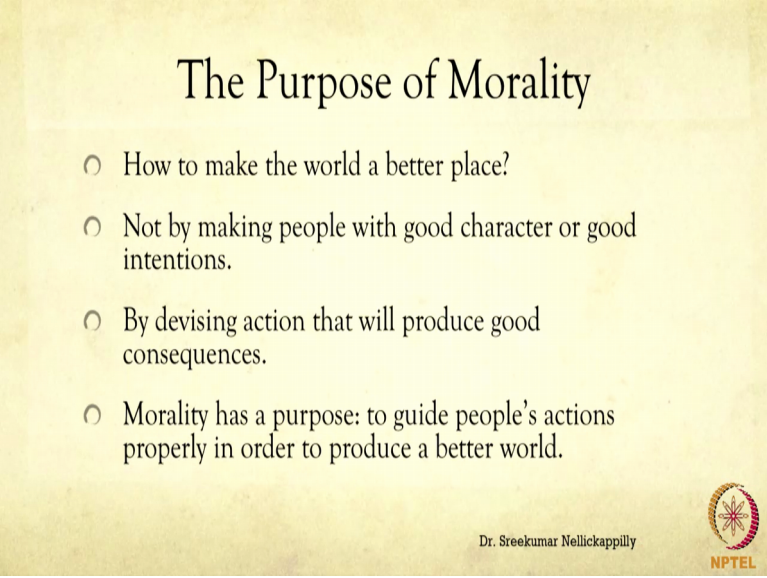
These are the 2 important philosophers who we are going to discuss, their contributions. Now before that, we will ask a very general question here and then start our discussion on

utilitarianism. What is the purpose of morality? And we have been discussing about ethics, morality in this course for nearly about 15 lectures.

We have been doing that and we saw that you know, the purpose of ethics or purpose of morality is to find ways to negotiate conflicts that might occur in society particularly in our society which is getting increasingly complex because of the presence of various social institutions and the multiplicity, the diversity of requirements and desires and demands and all kinds of problems we face today.

So morality has a definite purpose, no doubt about it. Morality helps a lot for negotiations, reducing the levels of conflicts in society and also establishing some norms which are acceptable for everyone. Now utilitarianism envisages a greater role for morality. It is not just a armchair philosophy. It is a very practical kind of an approach to philosophy. How to make better place? That is the practical question which utilitarianism raises.


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The Purpose of Morality

- How to make the world a better place?
- Not by making people with good character or good intentions.
- By devising action that will produce good consequences.
- Morality has a purpose: to guide people's actions properly in order to produce a better world.

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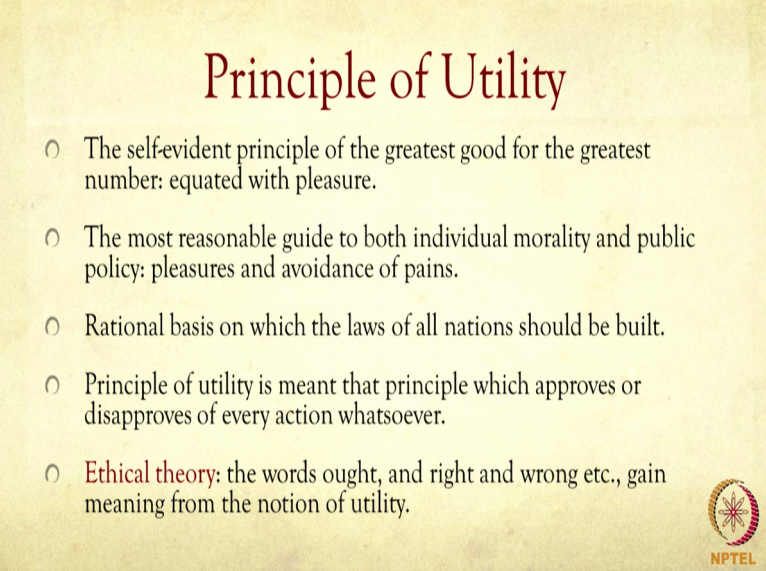
In what way we can make this world a better place for us to live? How to take decisions which would ultimately lead us to better decisions, implementing better plans, better policies and all that. Not by making people with good character or good intentions. This is very clear. Virtue ethics for example, it is concerned about making people good, their character very good. So by

making a lot of good people in the society, you may not ultimately make the society a better place to live, the world a better place to live.

And again, a lot of people with very good intention, may also not make the world a better place to live. For that you need to take practical decisions and implement them practically which would ultimately lead to very good consequences, to maximum number of people. Decisions should affect the lives of people in a very positive manner. How can you do that?

By devising actions that will produce good consequences. So this is the purpose of morality here. Morality is not just an armchair business but it is a practical activity. It has a purpose. It has to guide people's actions properly in order to produce a better world.

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Principle of Utility

- The self-evident principle of the greatest good for the greatest number: equated with pleasure.
- The most reasonable guide to both individual morality and public policy: pleasures and avoidance of pains.
- Rational basis on which the laws of all nations should be built.
- Principle of utility is meant that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever.
- **Ethical theory:** the words ought, and right and wrong etc., gain meaning from the notion of utility.

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So in that sense, utilitarianism is trying to devise a proper philosophy with its concept of utility, the principle of utility which is self-evident principle of the greatest good for the greatest number of people which is equated with pleasure. The most reasonable guide to both individual morality and public policy: pleasures and avoidance of pain. Rational basis on which the laws of all nations should be built.

Principle of utility is meant that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever and finally, ethical theory should be the words ought, and right and wrong, et cetera

gain meaning from the notion of utility. So this is the framework for a practical philosophy, for a practical ethics, for a practical moral thought and this is what the utilitarians are trying to do.

So we will wind up our discussion here on this problem and we will continue our discussion on utilitarianism in the following lectures as well. For the time being, we will wind up, thank you.