



Mains Practice Question

Q. Human actions should aim at promoting the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people. Comment. (150 Words)

29 Jul, 2021 GS Paper 4 Theoretical Questions

Approach

- Introduce with explaining the statement with reference to Utilitarianism approach.
- Discuss the pros and cons of the approach in society.
- Give a suitable conclusion.

Introduction

Utilitarianism proposes that human actions should aim at promoting the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people.

- **Utilitarianism** requires a moral agent to foresee the consequences of his action. In any given situation, one has to consider the available alternative courses of action and select that course which will result in the maximum utility or the minimum uselessness.
- The modern form of the consequentialist theory of utilitarianism derives from 19th century British philosophers such as Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill.

Body

Pros

- **Primary Focus on the Satisfaction of Society:** The main reason that makes the Utilitarian theory famous is based on the fact that the theory bases its primary focus of existence on the contentment of society.
- **Theory Can be Easily Implemented:** The decision-making process is straightforward in any society and not complex; thus, easily understanding the negativity and positivity of particular decisions.
- **Theory Seeks to Achieve the Greatest Good for Society:** Rather than maximising individual welfare, utilitarianism focuses on collective welfare and it identifies goodness with the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of people: the '**greatest happiness principle**'.
- **Offer a Universal Solution:** The incorporation of objective manners and universal morals shows that the Utilitarian theory offers a promising goal of a principle aimed at providing solutions to many of society's problems.

Cons

- **Does not consider any other element besides happiness:** As a way of determining an action's morality and ethics, Utilitarian only focuses on majority happiness. It's critical to note that various items have tremendous values to consider besides joy in our human lives.
- **Relies on consistent decisions by the people:** One of the things that the human being is good at is continually changing their minds whenever they are faced with a difficult decision to make.

What if, for example, people decide now, and the moment its implementation starts, they get swayed and change their minds?

- Human reasons' unpredictability makes it harder for this theory to work since it's **impossible to trust one person** to ask for a greater good when most people have selfishly decided to get rid of that idea even if they see a greater interest in it.
- The theory creates a potential for the **significant part to rule through Tyranny**. As majority happiness may be against the minority interests.
- Utilitarianism **ignores the distributional aspects of happiness** or welfare.
- **Individual rights cannot be adequately explained** by utilitarianism.

Conclusion

"Means are as important as ends" -Mahatma Gandhi

Therefore, the theory of utilitarianism, though useful in formulation of certain policies for welfare of a large number of people but can not be treated as the end as a civil servant should be cautious of both- means and ends using the highest amount of intelligence.

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