



Mains Practice Question

Q. How is the capability approach different from utilitarianism? Discuss. (150 Words)

30 Dec, 2021 GS Paper 4 Theoretical Questions

Approach

- Briefly define the two concepts i.e. capability approach and utilitarianism
- Highlight the major differences between the two and substantiate them with examples
- Conclude by suggesting Capability Approach as a more effective tool for policy making in comparison to Utilitarianism

Answer

Amartya Sen's capability approach is a process of development by enhancing people's capabilities thereby expanding their real freedoms. The capability to function effectively is what matters the most and it goes well beyond the availability of commodities. It emerged as the most influential tool to standard economic frameworks for poverty, inequality and human development.

Utilitarianism on the other hand is a moral theory that advocates actions that promote overall happiness or pleasure and rejects actions that cause unhappiness or harm. It has three pillars: Act-consequentialism, welfarism and sum-ranking.

| Difference between Capability Approach and Utilitarianism | |
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| Utilitarianism | Capability Approach |
| Utilitarianism is a consequentialist approach where actions are assessed only in terms of the goodness or badness of their consequences. This excludes any consideration of the morality of the process by which consequences are brought about. | Capability Approach argues instead for a 'comprehensive consequentialism' which integrates the moral significance of both consequences and principles. |
| Utilitarianism aims for "the greatest happiness of the greatest number" by maximizing the welfare of the people. | It lays emphasis on augmenting human capabilities which makes individuals free from dependence on State welfare programs and enables them to live an independent and respectful life. |
| It promotes Welfarism, which is the view that goodness should be assessed only in terms of subjective utility i.e. everyone should be satisfied with his/her social conditions. | Sen's Capability Approach, however offers a critique of Welfarism because people can become so normalized to their conditions of material deprivation and social injustice that they may claim to be entirely satisfied. For example- a subdued and subjugated housewife who has made peace with her role and her fate. |
| Utilitarianism focuses on maximizing the total amount of welfare in a society without regard for | Capability Approach points out that individuals differ in their ability to convert resources such as |

how it is distributed. It pays no heed to distinct requirements of different individuals.

income into welfare.

Utilitarianism has many limitations due to which it fails to assess and acknowledge the varied needs of individuals and is primarily driven by outcomes. Capability Approach, however, overcomes these limitations and emerges as the most viable alternative for policy formulation and implementation.

So, we can say that Capability Approach follows the broader aspect of development which believes in a just and equal society for all in comparison to the Utilitarianism which is a narrow concept. The Capability Approach can be truly instrumental in social, political and economic development of society

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