

The greatest principle - utilitarianism



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In chapter two, Sandel has discussed the moral and ethical considerations that motivate people's action. He has raised very pertinent issue of moral and ethical responsibility of whether killing another person can be justified. He has discussed the famous Dudley case where murder and cannibalism were justified under utilitarianism. Captain Dudley along with his two associates had killed the fourth sailor, a young boy of seventeen or eighteen years of age for food when they were stranded on a boat for more than 24 days. According to them, killing the young boy was important for the wider welfare or survival of the remaining crew members. While the legal verdict was that of murder, the precept and concept of utilitarian as moral and ethical judgment for one's actions had become crucial issues.

The chapter describes Sandel's moral and political philosophy and explores human behavior on the wider context of human relationship based on moral and ethical values. Bentham's utilitarianism are discussed and juxtaposed against Mill's philosophy of freedom and liberty. Aggregate utility and maximized happiness are major points of Bentham's utilitarianism. It is based on the motive of the act and therefore can be used for justifying wrong acts. In other words, the wrong motives can be used for justifying actions which could primarily be for vested interests of few. Indeed, according to act utilitarian, actions should be such that they maximize happiness for greatest number of people.

Aggregate utility becomes important aspect of actions as per Bentham's philosophy. Sandel asserts that Bentham's utilitarianism has basic two flaws when translated within the broader social context: it fails to safeguard individual's rights and there cannot be common solution to every person's preferences or problems. Indeed, it would pose huge difficulties for the

market economy. Ford had refused to fix defective gas tank due to high cost per fatality. Ford's action is prime example that shows the non feasibility of actions based on aggregate utility and translating everyone's preferences into single solution.

Mill's philosophy introduces accountability of actions and therefore emphasizes that people can act in any way they wish but their actions must not harm the interests of others. This is hugely pertinent because while it takes individuals' right into consideration, it also reinforces moral obligation on their actions. It also tries to explain second objection which highlights the need to evolve single scale to measure everyone's preferences. Mill segregates quality of happiness on the basis of higher and lower levels of pleasures that actions can generate on the basis of previous experience. Hence, if certain action has generated more pleasure across more people based on their previous experiences, then those actions could be interpreted as justified. Moral objectivity is strong element of Mill's philosophy which relies on moral principles. The major difference is the way actions are interpreted and 'means' applied to justify one's actions.

The chapter, while discussing various pros and con of Bentham and Mills' philosophy of human behavior, strongly correlates them with the changing social dynamics. Sandel strongly believes that ethics and morality, both need to be contextualized to the current situations for maximizing benefits for maximum people.

(words: 520)

Reference

Sandel, Michael, J. (2009). Justice: What's the Right Thing to do? Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

<https://assignbuster.com/the-greatest-principle-utilitarianism/>