

Why state economic and social policies are utilitarian than deontological?

Sarat Das

KiLax Ltd, London, UK

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Abstract

In utilitarianism, the moral equivalent of an action is ascertained only by its ensued consequences. Although there is deliberation over how much consideration should be attached to substantive and actual consequences, foreseen consequences and intended consequences. These considerations underpin the economic policies cover setting interest rates, taxation, money supply, labor market policies, state ownership, trade policies referring to tariffs, trade agreements, redistribution of income and a host of endless state intervention through regulatory policy, anti-trust policy and industrial policy. The states on both sides of the Atlantic have based their policies in Utilitarianism as Bentham cites in his book A Fragment on Government, "it is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong" and asserts this as a fundamental axiom for all economic and social policies. In An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation, Bentham emphasizes on "the principle of utility" but later prefers "the greatest happiness principle."

In contrast, Immanuel Kant's theory of ethics is regarded deontological as he reasons that to act in the morally right way, all individuals must act from duty (deon). Further, he affirms that it was not the consequences of actions that categorise them right or wrong but the motives of the individual who executes the action. The social policies, which should have been guided by Kant's deontology, now shifting towards utilitarianism covering social problems, law, language, culture, poverty, welfare programs, social inclusion, social interventionism. Deontological ethics or deontology is the normative ethical position that determines the morality of an action based on the action's steadfast adherence to a rule or rules.

Punctuated equilibrium in social theory too hints at this shift employing its method of apprehending the change in convoluted social systems as it steadfastly studies the evolution of policy change, including the evolution of conflicts. The theory reveals that a large number of social systems exist in an extended period of stasis, which are later punctuated by precipitous shifts in radical change.

Will the states strive to achieve a trade-off between utilitarianism and deontology? Or will the utilitarianism hold the sway thus characterizing the state action as a quantitative and reductionist approach to ethics, thus ignoring the consequences of an act as a determinant of its moral worth? John Stuart Mill believed that despotism was also understandable through utilitarianism as a transitional period towards more democratic forms of governance. As an advocate of liberalism, Mill emphasized on the relationship between utilitarianism and individualism. However, all these imponderables can be answered looking at multiple state contexts.
