

Humanism and Hedonism: An ethical sense of human health improvement

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Abstract: Human beings are truth seekers. They are considered as the great creatures of the Universe only because of having high rational ability of thought. They are the only creatures which can rule over the intellectuality with their realization towards the truth. With the passes of time human beings are developing their intellectual power and way of realization of seeking truth and in many cases they are successful of establishing their prioritize ideas in theoretical or practical fields. Among all the intellectual topic man tends to interpret with subjective manner. Ethics is among one of the major branches of Philosophy. Humanism and Hedonism are also the creation by the same process of human psychological thought which fall in the category of ethical theory. The debate between Humanism and Hedonism is going to make some comparison between both the ethical theories and will try to see compatibility of each-other which is linked to improve human health. Again it will be consisted of bringing out the similarities or dissimilarities and strengths or drawbacks of these two theories with the concept of Value in an Indian way.

Key words: Ethical responsibility, Human happiness, health improvement, Value, Humanity, Vedānta etc.

1. INTRODUCTION:

As many men many minds there are various interpretations on the same topic with the different empirical ideas. Human beings keep researching on various curious topics; which is knowable or beyond or which has suspense or which has far way to go towards the entity of truth and vice-versa. Since the earliest days of philosophical progression both the East and West thinkers have developed the idea that the main end of human life is to work for happiness for own self and humankind which is confined with Nature. Philosophy is the father of all subjects and it contains various branches of thought. Ethics is one among them. Ethics denotes moral code of conduct of voluntary actions done by man. Therefore, ethics is fully dependent upon human psychology. It is the human psychology which can produce man as a brutal animal or a moral teacher. It depends upon the attitude of a particular human being as how he takes his own thought and choices. As an example, a man eagerly wants to wear a gold ring because gold is his favourite metal and in some other cases a man does not want to even see gold because he hates golden colour. Similarly human beings have their own choices to pursue their own life, now it depends on human beings and their choices. As two different ethical theories Humanism and Hedonism carries different moral conducts. Yet to

some extent it contains some identical values as well. For that we have to collect a brief description of the definition, nature, types and proper meaning of Humanism and Hedonism. Here will be a trial to give a short note of most of the aspects of human progression (connection) so that it can be suited to modern era. In this regard we have to try to share various standpoints of various thinkers. Though Humanism and Hedonism are carrying different types of philosophical thoughts yet somehow in some aspects it carries some similarities between them. For understanding this thought we have to thoroughly analyze these two philosophical schools. Humanism and Hedonism are two multi dimensional theories which are still controversial and still taking place for debating for the progression of civilized human existence. It has either agreement or disagreement of ethical values.

With the evaluation of freedom and self decision human beings have tried to evaluate themselves with rights, equality, moral responsibility etc. There have been vigorous changes and improvements (Of all sides) since the Human civilization took place into existence. Especially from the beginning of 19th century there have been going on multiple upgradations of human race (technological, social, philosophical etc). Since 19th century till today within this small period of time human progression is harshly fast comparing to earlier centuries. Scientifically proven theories and invention of machinery equipments have given a new dimension to entire human civilization. Simultaneously, thought provoking philosophical inventions are also running with the same enthusiasm with their multiplicity of multi dimensional and intellectual attire.

According to the American socialist Philosopher Corliss Lamont, “Since the earliest days of Philosophic reflection in ancient times in both East and West thinkers of depth and acumen have advanced the simple proposition that the chief end of human life is to work for the happiness of humans upon this earth and within the confines of the Nature that is our home. The Philosophy of enjoying , developing and making available to everyone the abundant material, cultural and spiritual goods of this natural world is profound in its implications, yet easy to understand and congenial to common sense. This human-centred theory of life has remained relatively unheeded during long periods of history. While it has gone under the variety of names, it is a Philosophy that I believe is most accurately designed as Humanism.” This may be the perfect explanation of Humanism which centres on all human comforts of humankind. Still without looking at the history of humanism we should not take a whimsical decision on it.

The term Humanism has a long history of almost three hundred years. There are various aspects and standpoints of discussing Humanism. Though it is highly said that the term Humanism started properly since the seventeenth century, yet the starting of Humanism may be before than that. Humanism started as a philosophical movement in Italy in fourteenth century and it has gradually started spreading all over the European countries. At that time human beings were having dominant feature of life and social system was stressing the dignity of a man. In every step of life men realized their need for freedom- both for the freedom of nature and society. In this context man wanted an autonomous institution where he could exercise his full freedom. As a result of this thought man started to imply naturalism, within humanism. (Humanism: its major types and features.)

Humanism was born to prevent the stress of not having a peaceful life by the prevalence of multiple religious faiths preaching and aiming to promote peace. But later on gradually it grows somehow towards hedonistic level. Since Humanism is an ethical standpoint it affirms worth of a person and the rights of each and every human beings to the highest level of possible freedom, but it should take into account the rights of others too. A humanist cannot harm or neglect others rights only for the sake of fulfilling one's own freedom. They consider morality as the big part of human nature which is based on understanding and a care for others. Actually it is a value oriented ethical theory which emphasises on value of what is good.

With the course of time there are lots of improvements of Humanistic thoughts. They are having different groups and different types of layer to put forward their different interpretations. To analyze these thoughts at first let us go through its meaning with the help of world class dictionaries.

According to The Webster's New World College Dictionary - Humanism is a system of thought or action based on nature, interests and ideals of Humanity; specif., a modern, non-theistic, rationalists movement that holds that humanity is capable of self fulfilment, ethical conduct etc without recourse to supernaturalism.

According to the American Heritage Dictionary -

1. Humanism is a system of thought that focuses on Human's and their values, capacities and worth.
2. It concerns with the interests, needs and welfare of humans.
3. (Noun form) An ethical System that centres on humans and their values, needs, interests, abilities, dignity and freedom, especially for a secular one which rejects theistic religion and superstition.(From 19th century)

According to Oxford Dictionary-

Humanism is a philosophical or essential system that centres on the concept of the dignity, freedom and value of human beings.

Wikipedia-

Humanism is a philosophical and ethical stance that emphasizes the value and agency of human beings, individually and collectively and generally prefers critical thinking and evidence (rationalism and empiricism) over acceptance of dogma and superstition.

Humanists have a deep belief in science; it stands for using science in a creative manner. This is the rational aspect of humanism. Humanists believe that each and every people of this universe determine its values. All situations or all problems which are faced by a person lies only in human's thought and their actions. The outcome of their thoughts and actions are the individual and social environment they create for themselves, not mere divine religious practices can solve problems of a society and human Freedom. Actually Humanism is a

philosophical thought where a life needs to establish proper moral principles by considering basic human needs of socially civilized people to lead a happy life together with a unified society. As the American Historian Professor Edward P. Cheyney says, humanism has many things: “It may be the reasonable balance of life that the early Humanists discovered in the Greeks; it may be merely the study of the Humanities or polite letters; it may be the freedom from religiosity and the vivid interests in all sides of life of a Queen Elizabeth or a Benjamin Franklin; it may be the responsiveness to all human passions of a Shakespeare or a Goethe; or it may be a Philosophy of which man is center or sanction. It is the Last sense, elusive as it is, the humanism has had perhaps its greatest significant since the sixteen century.”

According to different interpretations there are different kinds of Humanism that exist. And the number of the types of humanism is increasing day by day. Although all of these systems are carrying some moral values yet they have some dissimilarity. They are: -

1. Renaissance Humanism
2. Philosophical Humanism
3. Christian Humanism
4. Secular Humanism
5. Religious Humanism
6. Spiritual Humanism
7. Progressive Humanism
8. New Humanism
9. Ethical Humanism
10. Scientific Humanism
11. Secular Humanism
12. Naturalistic Humanism
13. Democratic Humanism etc.

There are many more types of Humanism other than the above kinds, depending on the emphasis that one wants to give, which are from different background and disciplines; increasing day by day, still we may bring out the above kinds of Humanism as the prominent theories regarding humanistic thought. By seeing the above types we may summarise it as Corliss Lamont says about it. He says, “Humanism is a many-faceted Philosophy, congenial to this modern age, yet fully aware of the lessons of History and the richness of the Philosophic tradition. Its task is to organise into a consistent and intelligible whole the chief elements of Philosophic truth and to make that synthesis a powerful force and reality in the minds and actions of living persons.” Corliss Lamont after going through the study of this theory explains ten central propositions in the Philosophy of Humanism. They are:

1. Humanism believes in a Naturalistic metaphysics or attitude toward the Universe that considers all forms of the supernatural as myth; and that regards Nature as the totality of being and as a constantly changing system of matter and energy which exist independently of any mind or consciousness.
2. Humanism, drawing especially upon the laws and facts of science, believes that we human beings are an evolutionary product of the Nature of which we are a part; that the mind

is invisibly conjoined with the function of the brain and that as an inseparable unity of body and personality we can have no conscious survival after death.

3. Humanism, having its ultimate faith in Humankind, believes that **human beings possess the power of potentiality of solving their own problems, through reliance primarily upon reason and scientific method applied with courage and vision.**

4. Humanism, in opposition to all theories of Universal determinism, fatalism or predestination, believes that human beings, while conditioned by the past, possess genuine freedom of creative choice and action, and are within certain objective limits, **the shapers of their own destiny.**

5. Humanism believes in an ethics or morality that grounds all human values in this-earthly experiences and relationships and that holds as its highest goal the this-worldly happiness, freedom and progress—economic, cultural and Ethical—of all humankind, irrespective of nation, race or religion.

6. Humanism believes that the **individual attains the good life by harmoniously combining personal satisfactions and continuous self development with significant work and other activities that contribute to the welfare to the community.**

7. Humanism believes in the widest possible development of art and the awareness of beauty, including the appreciation of Nature's loveliness and splendour, so that the aesthetic experience may become a pervasive reality in the lives of all people.

8. Humanism believes in a far-reaching social program that stands for the establishment throughout the world of democracy, peace and a high standard of living on the foundations of a flourishing economic order, both national and international.

9. Humanism believes in the complete social implementation of reason and scientific method; and thereby in the democratic procedures and parliamentary government, with full freedom of expression and civil liberties, throughout all areas of economic, political and cultural life.

10. Humanism in accordance with scientific method believes in the unending questioning of basic assumptions and convictions, including its own. Humanism is not a new Dogma, but is a **developing Philosophy ever open to experimental testing, newly discovered facts and more rigorous reasoning.**

By the above ten central propositions given by the American Socialist Philosopher Corliss Lamont on humanism one thing we may draw that Humanism is not only a theory for professional Philosophic thinkers but also a general fundamental belief which is worth to be recognised by general average mass for leading a happy and worth living life. This theory mainly centres human life where there is no place for cramping human emotions from irrational restrictions and myths. That emotion is not only connected to mental health but also human physical health. Humanism is necessary for protecting the rights of human beings so that equally almost all human beings can lead a mentally and physically healthy life.

2. HEDONISM:

Ethical life is concerned with values. The nature of those values which ethics deals with is carefully conceptualized by the Philosophers of early western Philosophical era. Ethical values are mainly concerned with the notion of goodness of a person's voluntary moral

actions. These actions may be related to his health also. Whether an action is morally right or wrong it depends upon the standard of the notion of what is good for him and others from all aspects. A person who is morally concerned can follow the value related to goodness. Let us see the concept of hedonism as an ethical theory and try to examine it whether it is related to value of goodness or not.

The term “Hedonism” is derived from the Greek word “Hedone” which means “Pleasure”. The etymological meaning of this theory called hedonism is “human beings seek pleasure in their lives; especially they seek pleasures and comfort of the senses. Anything which pleases our sensory organs that is good.” Seeking pleasure can improve human health or may destroy it. It depends upon how a man desire for something. What is the object which a man desire for. Hedonism as an ethical theory is always points for human happiness related to mind and body both issues. A happy mind is always necessary for a healthy body.

Not only in western theories but in Indian philosophical thought also we find a thought of seeking pleasure. In Indian philosophical school CARVAKA materialism interprets of pleasure seeking theories. They consider happiness as the ultimate aim of human life. Therefore this school suggests to “Eat, drink and be marry” which means Enjoy your life as much as you can. Whether we can admit it or not but one thing we must admit that the basic nature of human being is to seek happiness and comfort. A human being always needs happiness and tries to avoid pain. The thing or situation which makes a human being happy is considered as the good one and which makes a human being unhappy or uncomfortable is bad. Since life is precious human beings always try not to lose any moments which make them happy. Men try to avoid those situations which create discomfort to them. Though human beings usually try to face good and happy moments in life but yet in some situations in search of happiness mistakenly (in some unavoidable circumstances) they choose some wrong or painful path which later on makes them unhappy. One thing we should mention here that happiness is *Relative*. It depends upon each and every individual. The thing which makes someone happy may not make the other one Happy or even if it makes some other happy it may not be that powerful as the earliest one has felt it. It depends upon the psychology of a person or the situation needful for that person. It depends upon the mentality and realisation of a human being which is different with each and every human being.

Though there is an old history of the origin of Hedonism in the early 4th century BC which was founded by the Aristippus of Cyrene (born c. 435 BC, and died 366 BC Athens). He was the founder of the Cyrenic school of Hedonism ; yet hedonism needed to be developed to be more exclusive and clear. Though Hedonism was an ethical theory but it promotes the theory of selfishness where people can go to any extent to get happiness. Greek Philosopher Aristotle said that Happiness is the highest good. Hedonism is that philosophical theory which talks about the most important nature of human beings; the pursuit of pleasure or happiness which is more or less the basic nature of each and every individual and this theory admits that seeking pleasure is the ultimate good for every human being. Hedonists believe that getting pleasure or seeking pleasure is the ultimate good and avoiding pain or staying away from pain is the same. It is the human nature that people need happiness and try to keep themselves far from any situation or thing which can make them get pained. According to this theory the

goal of our life should be maximization of pleasure to our life and minimization of pain from our life. Therefore people strive in their whole life to attain happiness and prosperity and every time try to make oneself, not only oneself but the loving and near and dear ones far from those situations or things which may bring them to the ocean of pain. There are various kinds of Hedonism. The theory of Hedonism is mostly divided into two main kinds. They are

1. Psychological Hedonism, and

2. Ethical Hedonism.

(There are some other sub-branches of these kinds.)

1. Psychological Hedonism: According to Psychological hedonism we are psychologically made up in such a way that we human beings exclusively desire pleasure, there is nothing other prior except getting pleasure.

2. Ethical Hedonism: according to this theory we ought to get happiness, our basic moral need is to maximise pleasure in our life. We should try to get happy in our moral and practical life, with our own voluntary actions and others too. It is our normative claim that we *SHOULD* always try to act according to the moral path of producing pleasure by our own for our own and to our own.

From the above thoughts in more or less ways somehow we find that hedonism promotes individualism along with egoism which states that each and every human beings should try to find out their own good in all situations or in all things. Later on in the late 18th century and almost the starting of the 19th century the concept of Hedonism was developed in a broad sense. British philosophers Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill developed the concept of the theory with a new name called “Utilitarianism”. Utilitarianism gains its popularity in the late 18th century in the hands of British philosopher Jeremy Bentham in his book “An introduction to the principles of Morals and legislation” in 1789.

One thing we can mention here that utilitarianism is the latest and developed version of Hedonism. If we have to discuss on 19th century Hedonism then we must have to go through the concept of utilitarianism of John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham. Which itself is trying to conclude the theory as the developed version of Hedonism.

Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill tried to give more clear and conclusive concept of that theory with the new motto of *the greatest happiness of the greatest number* -- That means Happiness is necessary but we should perform that action which is the best for everyone, if it is not best for everyone then at least it should be best for most of them, the quantity should be maximum in the part of the happiest people by the respective action. An action is morally worthy if its contribution brings overall utility for maximization of happiness almost towards among all people. In a simple way we can say that human beings should perform that action which is value oriented and Good for everyone. There are two kinds of values of pleasure. They are:

- a. Quantitative Value and
- b. Qualitative value.

And these two values firstly differentiate John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham's theory of Utilitarianism. John Stuart Mill believed in qualitative value of pleasure, while Jeremy Bentham preferred quantitative value of Pleasure.)

According to John Stuart Mill: "The creed which accept as the foundation of moral utility or the Greatest Happiness principle holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote Happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of Happiness. By Happiness it intended pleasure and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain and the privation of pleasure." So Utilitarianism is the idea that the rightness and wrongness of an act is determined by the consequences of the act for everyone. It is a theory where rightness of an action can be judged by its consequences. But there are various kinds of actions here, actually what kinds of action we mean that is also a big question in the sense of Hedonism or its improved version Utilitarianism.

If a person solely desire for sensory pleasure like sex, over eating etc. then he may be falling in severe health issues, but in other sense a person who desire for desirables he may not have such issues. One thing is very much clear that a a person with a good health always have to be a halthy mind and he has to stay in a comfortable environment which a humanist and hedonist will always seek for.

3. REFERENCES:

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