UNIT 7: THE THEORIES OF MORAL STANDARDS: HEDONISM

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7.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit you will be able to

- define Hedonism,
- discuss different types of Hedonistic Theories,
- explain Psychological Hedonism,
- discuss Ethical Hedonism,
- elaborate Bentham's Gross or Quantitative Utilitarianism,
- make critical comments on Gross Utilitarianism.

- elaborate J. S. Mill's Refined or Qualitative Utilitarianism,
- make critical comments on Refined Utilitarianism.

7.2 INTRODUCTION

This unit introduces to you that ethical theory which propounds that we always desire pleasure. Pleasure is the only object of desire, good or bad. You should remember that in Moral Philosophy or in Ethics actions are judged as good or bad by reference to the supreme end of life. Do you know how actions are judged as good or bad? Any action which is conducive to consistent with the supreme end of life is judged as good. Again, any action which is not conducive to or inconsistent with the supreme end of life is judged as bad. There are many ethical thinkers like Bentham. Mill etc., who have propounded that 'Pleasure is the supreme end of life or Summum Bonum of man'

7.3 HEDONISM IN MORAL PHILOSOPHY

The word Hedonism is derived from the Greek word 'Hedone' which means pleasure. The Moral philosophy which advocates that 'Pleasure is the supreme end of life' is known as Hedonism. The thinkers of this theory are known as Hedonists. Aristippus, **Epicurus**, Bentham and Mill are the important philosophers of the Hedonistic school. All these thinkers have accepted the importance of feeling in human life. Feeling is the highest function of mind. Hedonist thinkers have accepted that those feelings are good which give pleasure in human life. Therefore, Hedonistic Ethics is called the 'Ethics of Sensibility'.



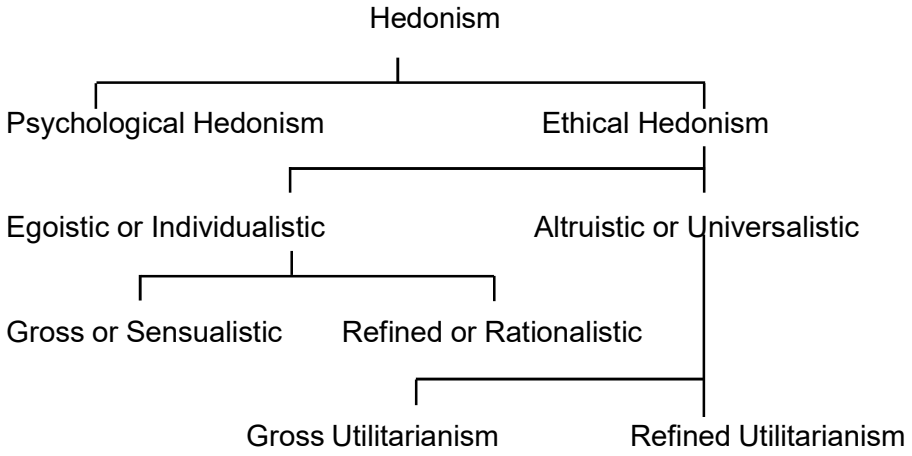
Epicurus (341-270 BC) recognizes that reason is most fundamental in the conduct of life.

7.4 CLASSIFICATION OF HEDONISTIC THEORIES

Hedonism is broadly classified into two categories. They are Psychological Hedonism and Ethical Hedonism. Again, Ethical Hedonism is broadly classified into two categories. They are: Egoistic or Individualistic, and Altruistic or Universalistic. Egoistic Hedonism is further classified into Gross or Sensualistic Hedonism and Refined or Rationalistic Hedonism.

While Altruistic is further classified into Gross Utilitarianism and Refined Utilitarianism.

Classification of Hedonism is given in the following table:



7.5 PSYCHOLOGICAL HEDONISM

Psychological Hedonism advocates that 'Pleasure is the natural object of desire'. We always seek pleasure and avoid pain. Pleasure is defined as the natural end and motive of human action. According to this theory individuals desire things only for the purpose of seeking pleasure. Therefore, things are not desired for their own purpose.

The chief exponents of this theory in ancient time were Cyrenaics. They are the followers of Aristappus of Cyrene. According to the Cyrenaics we always seek pleasure and avoid pain because 'Pleasure is the natural object of desire.' Their main concern was to live a good life. It was an ethical concern. They advocated that a life of pleasure led rationally should be the ideal.

Again, the modern exponents of this theory are Bain, Jeremy Bentham and J.S.Mill. Bentham upholds that the fundamental motives of our actions are both pleasure and pain. In life we always aim at attaining this fundamental motive. But, for J.S.Mill we, only desire pleasure. Things are desired only for the attainment of pleasure.

7.5.1 Critical Comments on Psychological Hedonism

Psychological Hedonism is criticized because of its two fundamental doctrines. They are :

1. Pleasure is the ultimate object of every desire.
2. Humane choice is always determined by the idea of pleasure.

Criticism on Psychological Hedonism is elaborated below:

a) Critics here are of the opinion that Psychological Hedonism is based on un-psychological mental process. So it is un-psychological in nature. You know that there is a psychological mental order when we seek for any desired object. It follows as, (i) want (ii) desire of an object (iii) desire to attain the object (iv) the feeling of pleasure. But in Psychological Hedonism this mental order is not followed. When we desire pleasure and not things for their own sake then it contradicts the theory that we normally desire an object and pleasure follows as a result. Psychological Hedonism fails to explain that how pleasure is desired beforehand (i.e. before the object is desired.) Critics hold that pleasure is the result of the satisfaction of a desire which is directed to an object. Happiness is the result of the attainment of an object. For example, we may desire for wealth, good health, name and fame. Here we primarily desire for the object and pleasure follows as a consequence of its fulfillment.

b) Again, if pleasure is the only motive of human action as Psychological Hedonism advocates, then Critics point out that more we try to attain happiness or pleasure, the less we achieve it. Critics hereby comment that when we are more disinterested for pleasure we obtain pleasure more easily. Hence, ordinarily speaking, any conditional or selfish human action can never give pleasure or happiness. It is only unconditional or self-less human action that can give ample pleasure or happiness in life. Even Mill observes that those are happy who have not fixed their mind on some object other than their own happiness.

Critics like Sidgwick and Rashdall comment that this is the paradox

of Hedonism. Do you know what paradox means? Paradox means 'self contradictory statement'. So the Hedonistic conclusion 'Pleasure is the supreme end of life' is self-contradicted if we accept the above explanation that pleasure is possible if we do not run after it. Sidwick adds his comment in this regard that the complexity in Psychological Hedonism arises because 'predominating impulse towards pleasure actually defeats its own aim.'

Rashdall justifies his own opinion on the complexity of Psychological Hedonism by saying that it involves a 'hysteron proteron'. This means 'the cart before the horse'. Rashdall puts that in Psychological Hedonism pleasure is put before the object … … the 'hysteron proteron' The effect is put before the cause. It is true that the satisfaction of a desire brings pleasure but it is always not the fact that the object is desired because it is thought to be pleasurable.

c) The word pleasure itself is ambiguous because of two reasons. They are as follows:

i) the word pleasure is usually used to mean the feeling of satisfaction arising from the attainment of some object

ii) the word pleasure is sometimes used to mean an object that gives pleasure.

In the second condition we refer to a concrete object that gives us pleasure. This view is not objected to because whenever we desire an object and the attainment of it gives us pleasure. The problem is when we speak of pleasure in reference to an object because we mean here the feeling of pleasure or satisfaction which the object brings with it after its attainment. This shows that we always desire some object and the attainment of it is accompanied by a feeling of pleasure or happiness. Therefore, we desire the object and do not desire the pleasure.

d) Psychological Hedonists cannot distinguish between 'pleasure in idea' and 'the idea of pleasure '. Parents take pleasure in self-sacrifice for their children's good. But self-sacrifice is the basic motive of their action.They are prepared to sacrifice their own self-interest for the

betterment of their children which is their motive. So you can understand why pleasure cannot be the natural object of desire and as such Psychological Hedonism is not accepted as a satisfactory Ethical Theory.



Activity 7.1

1. What do you mean by hedonism? Discuss.

Ans: .....

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CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q1: Name the thinkers who have supported Psychological Hedonism in modern times.

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Q2: Define Psychological Hedonism. (Answer in about 20 words)

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Q3: State whether the following statements are True or False

a) In Psychological Hedonism pleasure is accepted as the natural end and motive of human action (True/False).

b) Psychological Hedonism is not related simply with a statement of fact. (True/False).

c) The Greek word 'hedone' means pleasure. (True/False)

d) Hedonism advocates that pleasure is the supreme end of life. (True/False)

Q4: What are the two main forms of hedonism?

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7.6 ETHICAL HEDONISM

After going through the table of the classification of Hedonism you can understand that Ethical Hedonism is another type of Hedonism.

Ethical Hedonism advocates that we ought to seek pleasure. These thinkers hold that 'Pleasure is the proper object of our desire'. The Hedonist thinkers like Bentham and J. S. Mill have developed their Ethical thinking on Psychological Hedonism. We find an element of difference in Sidgwick's thinking. He has not developed his Ethical Hedonism on Psychological Hedonism. Why, do you know? The reply is, for Sidgwick, pleasure is the reasonable subject of our desire.

7.6.1 Critical Comments on Ethical Hedonism

Let us now discuss the critical comments on ethical Hedonism :

The fundamental principle in the doctrine of Ethical Hedonism is in identifying value with pleasure. This identification is strongly criticized. We can never say that pleasure is the only value of an object. We can never identify value with pleasure. Let us consider, for example, virtue, beauty, knowledge etc. When these are attained we feel pleasure and when we fail to attain them we feel pain. So you can see that here pleasure is not identified with value.



Sentient : Capable of being perceived or felt.
Transient : Lasting only for a short time.

Actually value depends on the object of desire. Pleasure and pain need to be defined. Pleasure is the feeling of positive value; on the other hand pain is the sense of negative value. Pleasure, therefore, is the sign of value. It is not the value itself. You can understand why we cannot identify pleasure with value. Pleasure is **sentient** and **transient** while happiness is rational and abiding.

Moreover pleasure cannot be considered as the ultimate value of any object. Here Rashdall, holds that pleasure is one of the values of any object. Pleasure according to Rashdall is inferior to knowledge, beauty and virtue. Virtue is the highest value when compared with happiness, knowledge

and beauty.



Activity 7.2

1. What do you mean by hedonism? Discuss.

Ans: .....

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2. Is psychological hedonism satisfactory? What do you think? Discuss.

Ans: .....

.....

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CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q5: Does Sidwick develop Ethical Hedonism on Psychological Hedonism?

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Q6: What are the different types of Ethical Hedonism?

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Q7: State whether the following statements are True or False:

a) Ethical Hedonism identifies value with pleasure. (T/F)

b) Sidwick advocates that pleasure is not the reasonable object our desire. (T/F).

7.7 EGOISTIC ETHICAL HEDONISM

According to Egoistic Ethical Hedonism, 'Pleasure of the individual

is the moral standard'. This theory advocates that every person ought to seek his own greatest pleasure. The doctrine of this theory is that when an action promotes the agent's own greatest happiness, that action is good. Again, when an action does not promote the agent's own greatest happiness, that action is bad. Two factors are taken into consideration while justifying the quality of pleasure. They are: intensity and duration. Egoistic Ethical Hedonism are sub-divided into Gross Egoistic Ethical Hedonism and Refined Egoistic Ethical Hedonism.

7.7.1 Gross Egoistic Ethical Hedonism



Aristippus : (c.435-c.355 BC) Greek Philosopher, a follower of Socrates

Thomas Hobbes : Thomas (1588-1679) English political philosopher.

Mandeville : Bernard(1670-1733) Main Book, The Feeble of the Bees

Helvitius: Claude-Adrien(1715-71)French Enlightenment philosopher.

Gross or Sensualistic Egoism is found in the teachings of Aristippus. **Aristippus** advocates that 'the only good of life is the individual's own pleasure'. All pleasures are alike in kind. Pleasures differ only in intensity or degree and duration. So he recognizes no qualitative differences among pleasures. The dictum of this Sensualistic Egoism is 'Let us eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we may die'. According to **Thomas Hobbes** man thinks only for himself. He naturally seeks his own pleasure and avoids pain.

In modern time Sensualistic Egoism has been propounded by **Mandeville** and **Helvetius**. Both of these thinkers share the same philosophy. They state that 'self-love is the only virtue for man'.

7.7.2 Refined Egoistic Ethical Hedonism

Refined Egoistic Ethical Hedonism is found in the teaching of Epicurus. He advocates that reason is the proper guide for the attainment of true happiness. Epicurus prefers mental pleasure than physical pleasures. The reason is that mental pleasure is more pure and un-mixed with pain. The dictum of his ethical thinking is: 'happiness is possible not in cultivating our capacities of enjoyment but by reducing our wants and desires'.

7.7.3 Criticism

Let us now turn to the criticism of Gross Refined Ethical Hedonism

a) Both Gross and Refined Ethical Hedonism have been criticized because critics opine that these theories actually depend on Psychological Hedonism. The fundamental paradox of Hedonism: 'impulse towards pleasure, if too predominant, defeats its own aim' is present in these two Hedonistic theories.

b) You know that human nature involves **egoistic** element but he has in him **altruistic** elements also. Hence pleasure is always relative and can never be universalized. In Egoistic Hedonism morality itself is in question because it has failed to provide us with an uniform standard of morality. There is no criterion to judge our action as right or wrong because for the Gross Ethical Hedonists, 'Happiness or bliss means the highest possible amount of physical pleasure.'

c) Refined Egoism is undoubtedly more reflective than sensualistic egoism. Refined Egoism Recognizes the function of reason in moral life because it does not regard momentary pleasure as the highest good of life.



Egoistic : One who believes that our actions are caused by a Wish to benefit ourselves.
Altruistic : Believing in welfare and happiness of others rather than one's own.

7.8 ALTRUISTIC ETHICAL HEDONISM– BENTHAM



Bentham, Jeremy : (Feb15,1748-June 6, 1832) British Philosopher, Jurist, Social reformer and the founder of modern utilitarianism.

Bentham's Ethical Theory is known as Altruistic Ethical Hedonism or Universalistic Hedonism. But it is Gross or Quantitative Utilitarianism in nature. According to Bentham, universal pleasure is the supreme end in moral life. You know that Utilitarianism means that the ultimate standard of morality is 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number'. This dictum is present in Bentham's theory of Utilitarianism. But it is Gross in nature because of two fundamental principles. They are as follows:

1. Bentham justifies that 'the only standard of value is quantity'.
2. For Bentham, man is naturally egoistic

Bentham does not admit any qualitative differences among pleasure. For e.g. purity is not any superior quality. Bentham defines pleasure as pure when it is unmixed with pain. Again, he defines pain as pure when it is unmixed with pleasure. Hence, this view of Bentham makes his Utilitarianism

as Gross in nature. Moreover Bentham's Hedonism is 'Altruistic' only because he considers 'extent of pleasure'. By 'extent of pleasure' he means dimension of pleasure i.e. we ought to aim at universal happiness. Do you know what Hedonistic Calculus is? Hedonistic Calculus means that we have to calculate pleasure and pain equally. Bentham advices us to: "Weigh pleasures, weigh pains and as the balance stands, will stand the question of right and wrong".

7.8.1 Criticism

The basic criticism is that Bentham's Gross Utilitarianism is criticized by many thinkers. His theory of Egoistic Hedonism or Individualistic can never be Altruistic or Universalistic in nature.

- According to the critics Bentham's Gross Utilitarianism is based on psychological postulate… 'an individual is bound by his very nature', In this case the desire for 'general happiness' becomes a burden on the theory itself. How can a self-interested individual think for the welfare of the society?
- The critics also point out that the Gross nature arises because he did not recognize the qualitative difference of pleasures.
- Bentham's emphasis on the extent of pleasure makes the hedonistic calculus very difficult. It is just next to impossibile to calculate the pleasures of others. If we do so then we have to provide a new standard of value which can justify our own pleasure as well as other's pleasure. Hedonism never supports to calculate the pleasure of all mankind.



Mill, J. S. : (May 20, 1806-May 8, 1873) English Philosopher, political economist, civil servant and a proponent of utilitarianism.

7.9 ALTRUISTIC OR UNIVERASLISTIC REFINED HEDONISM– J. S. MILL

J. S. Mill advocates Altruistic Hedonism. His theory is refined or qualitative in nature. Mill's theory of Altruistic Hedonism is also called Utilitarianism. The dictum of his ethical theory is that 'the standard is not the individual's happiness but happiness for all.' This is the qualitative value and the ethics of utility. J. S. Mill admits that 'The happiness which forms

the utilitarian standard of what is right in conduct, is not the agent's own happiness, but that of all concerned. In the golden rule of Jesus of Nazareth, we read the complete spirit of the ethics of utility. To do as one would be done by, and to love one's neighbor as oneself constitute the ideal perfection of utilitarian morality. (Utilitarianism, Ch.II, pp.24, 25)

You can raise two questions:

A. How can we prove that 'general happiness is desirable'?
B. What makes us to promote 'the general happiness'?

- In reply to the first question (A) Mill says that happiness is good. One's happiness is good to that individual and therefore general happiness is good to all mankind.

- Again, in reply to the second question (B) Mill says that the agent's happiness lies not in one's own but in general happiness. So every individual must promote 'the general happiness'. Mill holds that in Utilitarianism an individual must do self-less, i.e. desireless, activities because, according to him, an individual must be an impartial and benevolent spectator in selecting his own happiness and that of others.

7.9.1 Criticism

Mill's theory of Altruistic hedonism has been subject to following criticisms.

A. Altruistic or Universalistic Refined hedonism of J. S. Mill has been criticized by many thinkers. Martineau here points out that there cannot be transition from one to all. It is impossible to move from Egoism to Altruism. "From 'each for himself' to 'each for all'— no road"

B. Mill's argument for proving that 'general happiness is desirable' is also wrong. It is true that we desire our own happiness but it does not follow logically that we should desire happiness for all. A person desires to earn money for himself. He may desire to share his money with others but that does not logically follow that he must make all happy while

sharing his money with all. Utilitarianism, therefore, fails to give us sufficient ground of moral obligation.



CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q8: Who is the main advocate of Altruistic or universalistic refined hedonism?

……

Q9: Define altruistic ethical hedonism? (Answer in about 70 words)

……

Q10: What is altruistic or universalistic refined hedonism? (Answer in about 60 words)

……

Q11: Fill in the blanks :

a) For Banthum man is naturally .....

b) According to Benthum and Mill ..... is the ..... in morals.

c) Banthum advocates ..... utilitarianism.

d) J. S. Mill advocates ..... utilitarianism.



7.10 LET US SUM UP

The following discussion has dealt with hedonism in all its aspect. The following points stand out as central to our discussion.

- Hedonism advocates that pleasure is the end of life.
- Hedonism is divided into Psychological Hedonism and Ethical Hedonism.
- Psychological hedonism advocates that pleasure is the natural object of desire.
- Psychological Hedonism has been criticized by many thinkers because

according to this theory pleasure pre-supposes the desired object. But according to the critics the attainment of any desired object gives us pleasure.

- Sidgwick has not developed his Ethical Hedonism on Psychological Hedonism. According to him, pleasure is the reasonable subject of our desire.

- Rashdall, while criticizing Ethical Hedonism, holds that pleasure or happiness can be considered as one of the values of an individual. Pleasure cannot be the only value of our life. He considers virtue as the highest value in comparison to happiness, knowledge and beauty. Pleasure and value are not identical.

- Ethical Hedonism holds that pleasure is the proper object of our desire.

- Egoistic Hedonism which is a type of Ethical Hedonism advocates that pleasure of the individual is the end of life. It is thus the standard of morality.

- According to Gross Egoistic Ethical Hedonism all pleasures are alike in kind. The pleasures of the body are more important than that of the soul. Only the present is certain. Future is uncertain.

- Sensualistic Egoism is criticized by those thinkers who have never supported the maxim: 'Happiness means the highest possible amount of physical pleasure.'

- Epicurus propounds that individual's mind should be free from those thoughts which give him pain and anxiety. Every man should seek permanent pleasures in life easily. The happiest life is that in which there is no conflict and no failures. It is 'one of simple ease, good will, serene leisure' .

- The standard of morality, according to Altruistic Hedonism, is the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

- Bentham advocates Gross Utilitarianism because he considers that the only standard of value is quantity.
- In Bentham's Gross Altruistic Hedonism there is no place for reason because according to him man is basically egoistic in nature
- Mill advocates Refined Utilitarianism. He gives priority to self-less activity in the attainment of pleasure or happiness. The standard of morality in Mill's Refined Altruistic Hedonism is the quality. of pleasure.
- In Mill's Utilitarianism actions are to de judged according to their utility. It is thus pragmatic in nature. Here utility has been considered as a means for the promotion of general pleasure and prevention of general pain.



7.11 FURTHER READING

1) Chatterji, Phanibhushan. (1952). Principles Of Ethics. Beadon Street Calcutta.
2) Lillie, William. (1964) An Introduction to Ethics: Methuen.
3) Sinha, Jadunath. (1973) A Manual Of Ethics. New Central Book Agency, Calcutta 9.
4) William K. Frankena: Ethics. Prentice-Hall, 1973.



7.12 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Ans to Q1: Bain, Hume, Bentham and Mill.

Ans. to Q. No. 2 : Psychological Hedonism advocates that pleasure is the natural and normal object of desire.

Ans. to Q. No. 3 : a) True b) False c) True d) True

Ans. to Q. No. 4 : Psychological hedonism and ethical hedonism

Ans. to Q. No. 5 : No

Ans. to Q. No. 6 : Egoistic Hedonism and Altruistic Hedonism

Ans. to Q. No. 7 : a) True b) False

Ans. to Q. No. 8 : J. S. Mill

Ans. to Q. No. 9 : Bentham's Ethical Theory is known as Altruistic Ethical Hedonism or Universalistic Hedonism. This theory is Gross or Quantitative Utilitarianism in nature, because it has two reasons: 1) Bentham justifies that 'the only standard of value is quantity'. 2) For Bentham, man is naturally egoistic. Bentham holds that universal pleasure is the supreme end in moral life. But, he does not advocate any qualitative difference among pleasures. So, his theory is known as Quantitative Utilitarianism.

Ans. to Q. No. 10 : J. S. Mill's ethical theory is known as Altruistic Hedonism. It is refined or qualitative in nature. He gives priority to self-less activity in the attainment of pleasure or happiness. The standard of morality in Mill's Refined Altruistic Hedonism is the quality of pleasure. The dictum of his ethical theory is that 'the standard is not the individual's happiness but happiness for all.'

Ans. to Q. No. 11 : a) Egoistic; b) Universalistic pleasure is the supreme end; c) Gross; d) Refined.

7.13 MODEL QUESTIONS

A. Very short Questions

Q1: According to hedonism, What is the supreme end of life?

Q2: Who are the main advocates of hedonistic school?

Q3: Mention the other name of the hedonistic school.

Q4: State the main objective of hedonism.

Q5: Write the names of the chief exponents of psychological hedonism.

Q6: What is the motto of psychological hedonism?

Q7: What do you mean by 'hysteron proteron?

Q8: Who are the advocates of Gross Egoistic Ethical Hedonism?

Q9: Define altruistic ethical hedonism.

Q10: Write the definition of altruistic or universalistic refined hedonism.

B. Short Questions (Write in about 100-150 words)

Q1: Briefly comment on psychological hedonism.

Q2: What is ethical hedonism? Discuss briefly.

Q3: Do you find any distinction between Gross egoistic ethical hedonism and refined egoistic ethical hedonism? Explain briefly.

Q4: Distinguish between altruistic ethical hedonism and altruistic or universalistic refined hedonism.

Q5: What is altruistic ethical hedonism? Briefly discuss.

C. Long Questions (Write in about 300-500 words)

Q1: Explain critically Psychological Hedonism.

Q2: Explain and examine Ethical Hedonism.

Q3: Explain the different types of Hedonism.

Q4: How does Bentham explain Gross Ethical Hedonism? Discuss.

Q5: How does J. S. Mill explain Refined Ethical Hedonism? Explain.

Q6: What are the basic differences between Gross Ethical Hedonism and Refined Ethical Hedonism? Discuss in detail.

Q7: Why is J. S. Mill's Refined Ethical Hedonism called utilitarianism? Discuss.

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