

Chapter I - OF THE PRINCIPLE OF UTILITY

Utilitarianism was a political, economic and social doctrine which was widespread at the beginning of the 19th century among the industrial middle class whose interests it suited. Jeremy Bentham was the main theorist of this doctrine.

The text below illustrates some of the most significant elements in the utilitarian doctrine

TASK

Identify from the text:

- a) The definition of utility
- b) The principle on which it is based
- c) The way in which utility can affect policies

The following text is an extract from the first chapter of the “An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation” written by Bentham Jeremy.

The reader could understand from the title, OF THE PRINCIPLE OF UTILITY, two things: first of all that the text is organized with a latin syntactic structure, and the second that the text is going to talk about the

utilitarianism, that is a political, economic and social doctrine which was widespread at the beginning of the 19th century among the industrial middle class whose interests it suited.”

Starting analyzing the first paragraph, the writer reduce the humanity under the government of two powers that are “pain and pleasure” and from them depend what mankind shall do. From this the reader could understand that, for Bentham, the mankind isn’t free but, whatever it does is depend on pain and pleasure. Going on with the analysis the reader found the definition of what the writer definite utility : something that “tends to produce benefit” not “mischief, pain, evil, or unhappiness”. He furthermore specified that “if party is the community in general, then the happiness of the community”, if is the individual the happiness is of that individual. So utility is something that try to be useful for the community or for the individual. So something useful is something that produces an interest, and this is explained in the fifth chapter, where he underlines that is vain talk about the community interest whiteout underlining the individual interest. There he underlines that interest is the addiction of all the things that take pleasure or that reduce the pain. After that he itemize the interest into the community, “when the tendency it has to augment the happiness of the community is greater than any it has to diminish it.” So in this two paragraphs he underlines the principle on which utility is based, interest and happiness.

In the last paragraph he underlines the way in which utility is used in policy. He underlines that it isn’t a “particular kind of action” but as in the community and in the individual is something that reduce the pain and share the happiness.