

The Role of Jeremy Bentham's Utilitarianism in the Quest for Socio-Economic Well Being of the Nigerian State

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Abstract

Over the years, Nigeria has witnessed a lot of socio-political and economic challenges. Most of the problems are associated with lack of benevolent leadership and clear leadership ideology among the political class. Consequently, the Nigerian political space is bedeviled by selfish interests, where the political class amass wealth to enrich themselves, their families, and cronies, while the people suffer abject pain of lack. But how can the country overcome this vicious quagmire? Jeremy Bentham's notion of utilitarian hedonism provides the answer. This is because the theory provides that greatest happiness is the ultimate good of the greatest number of people. By this, Nigerian leaders are expected to mitigate the people's condition by shunning their political self-interests and offering policies and developmental structures that would avail collective happiness. Yet, this is not the case. Would it be that Nigerian political leaders are not familiar with Bentham's political proviso? Or, could it be that Bentham theorized an ethical proviso that is too utopian to realistically apply, even in Nigerian polity? Adopting the analytical and critical methods of philosophical inquiry, the paper argues that if the Bentham's principle is adequately understood and adapted in Nigeria as a leadership philosophy, there will be transformative change that would promote happiness and socio-political and economic well-being of citizens in the country.

Keywords: **Happiness, utilitarianism, hedonism, hedonistic calculus, pain.**

Introduction

The human predicament apparently presupposes that things are liable to go badly. Oguejiofor corroborating Warnock's view in the preface to his work *Philosophy and African Predicament* juxtaposes the human situation in the African continent with the floundering, uncomfortable and inherent status of humans as conceived by Warnock. For him, this unenviable human predicament

stems from natural and human factors such as; limited knowledge, limited resources, limited rationality, limited sympathy (1). Thus, there is no gain re-emphasizing that much of Africa in general and Nigeria in particular is in a precarious state with numerous developmental challenges such as; wide spread corruption, glaring looting of the national treasury, mass poverty, decayed infrastructures, alarming unemployment, wanton insecurity of lives and properties, moribund manufacturing sector, poor state of education and health system, pervasive inequality, food insecurity, compromised judiciary, rampant inflation, confused ideology, crisis of leadership, failed followership, electoral fraud and absolute disregard for due process and the rule of law among others.

However, the good news is that, having realized the inherent tendency to the negative, there is tremendous effort by philosophy scholars in Africa to overturn the negatives and proffer ideological solutions that will ameliorate the unenviable state of affairs of the Africans. The reason for the cravings for revolution is that the government and political officials are enjoying while the masses are in suffering. Consequentially, the first coup in 1966 which turned out to be a pace setter of pogrom against particular ethnic groups in the country was a revolutionary response by the military against the ineptitude of the First Republic political leaders and it equivocally led to military intervention in governance in Nigeria and as in most African countries.

Also, the thirty-month civil war with its unforgettable effect was more or less a response to a revolutionary clarion call due to perceived injustice and marginalization of the then Easterners by the Northern majority. Of recent, the country is plagued with seemingly unending eruptions of religious violence and mayhem against other ethnic groups for little or no provocation; unwarranted destruction of lives and properties by Fulani herdsmen and cattle rustlers, the Boko Haram insurgency, the Shites revolts against constituted authorities (as witnessed in Kaduna State in 2017), revolutionary movement such as Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), the Coalition of Northern Groups (CNG), and the multiplicity of ethnic militias. There are glaring indications that the country

is in a boiling state with each ethnic group being suspicious of the other on one hand, and the masses generally aggrieved by the wanton looting of their collective wealth by a privileged few which has led to economic stalemate and biting hardship on the other hand (Dennis 85). The desire for a revolution by the masses could be summarized thus in Bade (116):

Since a social organization, however inadequate never disappears by itself, since a ruling class, however parasitic never yields power unless compelled to do so by overwhelming pressures; development and progress can only be attained if all the energies and abilities of a people that was politically, socially and economically disfranchised under the old system are thrown into battle against the forces of the ancient regime.

Invariably, it is pertinent to state that there is a dire need for a dynamic change from the bleak socio-political and economic conditions in Nigeria. Thus, the way and manner the change Nigerians so anticipate would take is central to the research. In fact, the motivation of this research is on how philosophy done by Africans could contribute to amelioration of the Nigerian predicament. The research is a response to the political menace in Nigeria which is filled with individualism, selfishness and greed and how philosophy can lead to the amelioration of the situation.

The citizen's wellbeing is the sole essence of the formation of government. The government is but a tool to making up each person's insufficiency. The making up of each person's insufficiency, therefore, implies giving satisfaction to the basic needs that guarantees existence and not maximizing one's own selfish desires and pleasures to the detriments of other people (Obioha and Okaneme 45). When the people have satisfaction, happiness becomes their expression in all of their doings. Hence, since the attainment of the people's happiness is the sole purpose of a government, and happiness is pleasure, all policies of the government ought to be tailored to producing maximum pleasure. This pleasure seeking and reaching policies is the synopsis of hedonistic philosophy. For Hedonism holds that every action (policy) is only good when it has the capacity of producing or maximizing pleasure not only for the individual, but for group of persons. This has not been the case within the socio-political and economic

spheres of Nigeria. It has rather been situations where policies are navigators of hardship to citizens than the pleasure which ought to be the guiding principle.

Nevertheless, in this work we sought to show that there will be a turnaround in the socio-political and economic spheres if policies are formulated and implemented with the intention of giving utmost pleasure to Nigerians. The work adopted the methods of critical analysis in analyzing concerned concepts as applicable to the work, and the method of exposition to demonstrate the applicability of Jeremy Bentham's hedonistic philosophy to the contemporary socio-political terrains of Nigeria. Hence, we advocated the consideration and application of the tenets to solve the Nigerian situation.

Jeremy Bentham's Utilitarian Hedonism

Bentham published his most famous work, *Introduction to the Principles of Morals* (1789), which has been widely regarded as the founding document of British utilitarianism. It is in this book that he discussed his utilitarian hedonism which this paper focuses on. The last decades of Bentham's life were devoted to constitutional reform as part of the construction of a codified legal system for a modern state. Bentham's enduring legacy is a complex one. On the one hand, he is associated with utilitarian projects for social reform which suggested an activist conception of the state and which attracted charges of collectivism. On the other, his constitutional theory, with its suspicion of big government and its democratic commitment to accountability and openness, suggests a liberal. Bentham died in 1832, immediately following the passing of the Great Reform Act.

The Principle of Utility

Both in the *Fragment* and in the *Introduction*, Bentham calls his central normative principle the principle of utility. For him, the principle of utility can be the basis for determining a morally right or wrong action. In giving credence to this, Harrison in his work titled *General Introduction to all the Philosophical Aspects of Bentham* asserts that according to Bentham, 'utility' provides the standard of right and wrong' (51). By the principle of 'utility', he says in the Introduction, is meant that principle, which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency which it appears to have to

augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question. Thus, Bentham writes:

By the principle of utility is meant that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever. According to the tendency it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question: or, what is the same thing in other words to promote or to oppose that happiness. I say of every action whatsoever, and therefore not only of every action of a private individual, but of every measure of government (1).

Bentham came to prefer 'the greatest happiness principle' as the best description of his central principle. However, in spite of Bentham's preference, the term 'utility' has stuck, and Bentham is normally thought of as a utilitarian. Indeed the prescient young Bentham founded a 'sect of utilitarian'. Although we could assert that he founded a sect, but neither utility nor happiness originates with Bentham. They were plucked from the surrounding Enlightenment air. Bentham himself writes that he used 'utility' because of Hume (23). Also, in trying to explain the thrust of utilitarianism, Kelly in his work titled *Utilitarianism and Distributive Justice* also asserts that the famous 'greatest happiness' formula appears in the works of the Italian legal theorist Cesare Bonesana Beccaria, whom Bentham much admired (12). Hence, by happiness, Bentham meant that property in any object, whereby it tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasures, good or happiness, (all this in the present case comes to the same thing) or (what comes again to the same thing) to prevent the happenings of mischief, pain, evil or unhappiness to the party whose interest is considered: if the party be the community in general, then the happiness of the community: if a particular individual, then the happiness of that individual. In fact, Bentham's principle applies not only to morals but also to legislation and his aim is to apply his principle to legislation and to ignite reforms in legislation. He has, as Davidson in his work titled *Interpretations of Bentham's Utilitarianism* states that it is a living and practical interest in the welfare of the community at large that motivates Bentham's Utilitarianism and not selfishness (79). Hence, he substitutes for the principle of utility the more significant phrase 'the greatest happiness principle'.

Thus, we can infer that the greatest happiness is therefore the appropriate end of action. However, the next question is whose happiness? But his famous formula says 'of the greatest number' but this could render the formula indeterminate between recommending that the greatest happiness be achieved and recommending that the greatest number get happiness. This means that happiness is to be maximized whomever it may belong to. Bentham clarifies this in his work *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* when he writes:

The interest of the community is one of the most general expressions that can occur in the phraseology of morals: no wonder that the meaning of it is often lost. When it has a meaning, it is this. The community is a fictitious body, composed of the individual persons who are considered as constituting as it were its members. The interest of the community then is the sum of the interests of the several members who compose it (4).

This proves the fact that Bentham usually takes the proper aim of government to be concerned with the greatest happiness of the people composing the country. This might be taken as a merely practical recommendation that is why Bentham takes the universal happiness as his end. Thus, he believes that every government should restrict itself to maximizing the happiness of its own people. This is a necessary feature of his brand of utilitarianism.

Pleasure and Pain

Jeremy Bentham held that all human and political action could be analyzed in terms of pleasure and pain, and so made comprehensible. One such analysis is how people actually do behave; according to Bentham, seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. Another such analysis is of how they ought to behave. For Bentham, this is that they should maximize utility, which for him is the same as producing the greatest happiness of the greatest number, which, again, is the same for him as maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain. His chief study was planning how there could be a good system of government and law; that is, how laws could be created so that people being as they actually are (seeking their own pleasure) might nevertheless do what they ought to (seek the greatest pleasure of all). Following this, he states:

Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think: every effort we can make to throw off our subjection, will serve but to demonstrate and confirm it... (106).

Bentham used this idea to produce a profound analysis of the nature of law and legal terms such as; 'right', 'duty' or 'property'. These are what he calls names of fictions - terms which do not directly correspond to real entities (Bentham 122). However, this does not mean that they are meaningless. Instead, meaning can be given to them by translating sentences in which they occur into sentences in which they do not occur. However, as Bentham states, pleasure and pain point out what we ought to do, so they also determine what we shall do. The principle of pleasure-pain, he finds, determines man's action, and also recommends it as the criterion of right and wrong. Pleasures and pains are the 'instruments' which legislators (as well as other agents) have to work with; therefore, it is crucial that they should understand how to measure their value.

Hedonic Calculus

Hopefully it is now clear that for Bentham the consequences in terms of pleasure production of any action are what determine the morality of that action, and that no other factors are relevant. However, it is not clear how exactly we should go about working out what to do in specific cases. Bentham recognized that such *Problems of Calculation* relating to the pleasure associated with future actions needed addressing in order for Utilitarianism to be a workable moral theory. Bentham therefore created the Hedonic Calculus (sometimes known as the Felicific Calculus) in order to help an individual work out how much pleasure would be created by differing possible actions. The Hedonic Calculus, as suggested by Bentham, is based on assessing possible pleasures according to their: Intensity (i.e. how intense the pleasure of an act will be), Duration (i.e. how long the pleasure will last), Certainty (i.e. how sure that pleasure will arise from such action), Remoteness (i.e. how far into the future the pleasure is),

Fecundity (i.e. how likely it is that pleasure will generate other related pleasures), Purity (i.e. if any pain will be felt alongside that pleasure) and Extent (i.e. how many people might be able to share in that pleasure).

The Hedonic Calculus is therefore supposed to provide a decision-procedure for a utilitarian who is confused as to how to act in a morally tricky situation. For example, a fighter-pilot might consider the intensity of the pleasure of surviving versus the duration of the pain of death, while also needing to balance these factors against the relative certainty of the possible pains or pleasures. No doubt, the fighter pilot would still face an agonizing moral choice but it seems that he would at least have some methodology for working out what Utilitarianism morally requires of him.

Bentham, like Thomas Hobbes, disregarded the natural law idea and associated law with utility and sovereignty. He criticized the Natural Law school of thought, calling it "nothing but a phrase" (Carlway 33) and even went so far as to brand Blackstonian Natural rights a complete "non-sense upon stilts" (Carlway 33). According to him, pain and pleasure two sovereign lords who alone determine what a man should do or not do have subjugated mankind to them by nature. It results in the phrase hedonic calculus, subsequently known as his utility principle. Bentham was critical of the theory of natural law, which holds that there are inherent, universal principles of justice and morality that are discoverable through reason and intuition. He argued that natural law was based on vague and subjective notions of what is "natural" or "right" and that it lacked a clear and objective basis for determining what actions were just or moral.

Bentham believed that the concept of natural law was often used to justify existing social and political hierarchies and to support the interests of the powerful. He argued that natural law was used to create an illusion of moral legitimacy for actions that were actually motivated by self interest or a desire for power (177). Instead of relying on natural law, Bentham advocated for a utilitarian approach to morality and politics, which emphasized the promotion of happiness and the prevention of harm.

The citizen's wellbeing is the sole essence of the formation of government. The government is but a tool to making up each person's insufficiency. The making up of each person's insufficiency, therefore, implies giving satisfaction to the basic needs that guarantees existence. When the people have satisfaction, happiness becomes their expression in all of their doings. Hence, since the attainment of the people's happiness is the sole purpose of a government, and happiness is pleasure, all policies of the government ought to be tailored to producing maximum pleasure. This pleasure seeking and reaching policies is the synopsis of hedonistic philosophy. For Hedonism holds that every action (policy) is only good when it has the capacity of producing or maximizing pleasure for the individual or group of persons. This has not been the case within the socio-political and economic spheres of Nigeria. It has rather been situations where policies are navigators of hardship to citizens than the pleasure which ought to be the guiding principle.

To attain this happiness and avoid pain, Bentham enunciated his hedonic calculus as a scientific method to quantify and calculate the value of different pleasures. The sole aim of his hedonic calculus as William Lawhead puts forward in his work *The Voyage of Discovery* was to seek caution that when considering any action, we should evaluate the amount of pleasure or pain it will produce according to the seven dimensions (440). However, Bentham's Hedonic Calculus identifies several aspects of pleasure that contribute to its value, including certainty, propinquity, extent, intensity, and duration. The Hedonic Calculus also makes use of two future-pleasure-or-pain-related aspects of actions – fecundity and purity.

Nigerian Socio-Political Situation

Nigeria has had what Jean Lipman Blumen calls "toxic leaders". These are leaders who engage in destructive behaviour and who exhibit dysfunctional personal characteristics. These toxic qualities include among other things lack of integrity, enormous egos, ambition, arrogance, amorality (unable to discern right from wrong) avarice (greed), reckless disregard for the cost of their actions, incompetence, in key leadership situations. A great deal of destructive leadership behaviour is driven by self-centredness, which manifests itself through pride and greed. Nigeria has had such self-centered leaders in

abundance since her independence in 1960 (Ignatius et al. 78). Driven by this tendency, politics has been viewed as the cheapest and easiest means of acquiring wealth with the result that political office holders regard the state funds as an extension of personal estate.

The great expectations that accompanied Nigeria's political independence in 1960 have, over the years, encountered serious challenges and problems. From an independence built on a vision of becoming the Giant of Africa and the entire black race, Nigeria, 64 years later, is one of Africa's most under-developed countries. How, despite its huge human and material resources, did Nigeria find itself in its present position? What are the probable causes of the evident lack of good governance and sustainable development in the country? Why is the state so fragile? To what extent can the re-introduction of civil rule address the various crises brought about by the long period of military rule in the country? In short, how can Nigeria's squandered developmental hope be fully restored? The burgeoning literature on Nigeria's multi-dimensional predicament is replete with scholarly explanations of the probable causes of the numerous challenges and problems facing the country. The most prominent among these trace Nigeria's inability to harness its potential and actualize to the deficiency in good governance, particularly the abiding nature of selfish governance, individualism and political corruption.

Nigeria claims to be practicing Democracy however, its system of government looks more like dictatorship (Ignatius and Umotong 12). Democracy, according to its earlier antecedents in the Greek city-states, literally means rule of or by the people. Ever since its evolution it has largely been characterized by equality (in terms of voting rights), natural rights and sovereignty (Heater 117). According to Christopher Udoфia in his paper "Leadership and National Development" articulates that, "the democratic style of leadership adopts the consultative as well as the participative decision making model whereby followers are consulted and given the chance to participate in decision making" (Udoфia 70). In Nigeria, as in many other modern states, liberal democracy, or representative democracy, is, therefore, the dominant model. The most important features of this model include the rule of law, transparency, accountability, periodic elections and constitutionalism. It is, perhaps, necessary

to note that democracy has, up to now, been widely accepted as the best form of government.

While governance and democracy might be inseparable in the advanced democracies of the developed world, democratization in Nigeria is not totally free from a possible relapse into the dark past and it can still be divided into those under bad governance. According to Fadakinte (12) good governance must entail the capacity of the state to function well in the service of the public good. In doing so the state must be transparent in its activities, and this includes transparency about the way government makes decisions, conducts business and spends public funds. Similarly, good governance requires that rulers abide by the rule of law and be accountable to the people. However, in relation to Bentham's utilitarian hedonism, the term "public good" is very crucial since the activities of government and the legislators must be geared towards the promotion of the good and happiness of the community.

Development, which consists of such elements as economic growth and generalized access to the good things of life, can be attained through the sustainability of the democratization process. In more concrete terms, development can be attained effectively through greater and continuously improving access to such basic needs as food, shelter, clothing, education, health, political and economic freedom and personal self-esteem, which comes from an individual's capacity to participate in meaningful and socially productive interactions with other members of the community (Olopoenia 9). But unfortunately, this is lacking in Nigeria as most times, the interest of the people and the common good is not taken into consideration by the government. According to Dudley (75) politics in Nigeria 'is not about alternative policies but about the control over men and resources'. This is well articulated in more theoretical terms by Joseph (21), with his perspectives on the country's political sociology that the control of public good for self aggrandizement has replaced useful policies for human wellbeing in Nigerian politics. Similarly, Ikpe (25) have adapted Max Weber's explanations of the concept of patrimonialism to explain the nature of the state and politics in modern Nigeria. Accordingly, he states that:

The most prominent features of patrimonialism or a patrimonial state include, among others, nepotism, administrative inefficiency, political corruption, political instability and a general lack of development. Obviously all these explanations for the Nigerian point to the fragile nature of the state and the inefficiency of leadership for the common good of the people (25).

The above view can best be suited when discussing about money and Nigerian politics. Discussions about money and politics in contemporary Nigeria, especially relating to the impact of money on political corruption, often generate serious concerns, which seem to derive from the significant role played by party funding and election financing in the realization of genuine democratic participation (Onuoha 135). It is patently clear, for instance, that party and election financiers may easily exploit their control over the parties they fund either in order to discriminate against particular candidates or to hijack the machinery of government if their party is victorious. This is still a stride against the common good which Bentham utilitarianism encourages.

Going back history lane, we can see that the leadership style of individualism in Nigeria has marred a lot of communal interest and even endangering the lives of the people. Kolawole (7) observed that Nigeria marked the 'world water day' on march 22, 2019 with over 60 million people without access to safe drinking water; but some days after the world water day, the Federal Executive Council (FEC) met and approved ₦35 billion to build an office (12 storey building for the department of petroleum resources), plus ₦1.4 billion allocated to design it. Concerning this, the then Minister of state for petroleum, Dr. Ibe Kachikwu told Nigerians that such an amount was the lowest cost. We must note that this is just an office, not a factory and also it is good to point out that no one said anything again about the 60 million Nigerians drinking unsafe water (Ezugwu 23-24). We should also recall that between 2018 and 2019, there was a huge tug of war between federal government and the labour union over the approval of ₦30, 000 as minimum wage; but not quite long, the same government comfortably approved ₦37 billion just for the renovation of National Assembly building. Speaking on this, the Senate deputy chief whip, Senator Sabi Abdullahi had the courage to tell Nigerians that their outcry was irrelevant because

the building was 20 years old and therefore needed to be renovated with such an amount. In recent time, after immediately after the swearing-in of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu on May 29, 2023, he decreed the removal of fuel subsidies which had a spiral effect on the cost of living. The poor, became poorer, the middle class eroded to the poor, while the rich struggled to keep their status. Who was not really affected by this proclamation? Your guess is as good as mine. The politicians kept living afloat, flaunting their wealth in every possible time. Yet, when the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and other labour unions made the case for increment in minimum wage due to inflation, the politicians replied with "there is no money". It was only after much tussle and disagreement that 70,000 naira was set as the new minimum wage in a country where a bag of rice is about 100,000 naira. The above mentioned scenarios no doubt raise some concerns and questions. How can a country that is named 'poverty capital of the world' approve ₦37 billion just for renovation? How can a country that its roads are decorated with potholes; a country where unemployment rate is on the increase due to infrastructural deficit; a country where minimum wage is a disgrace; and a country with no well-equipped public schools and hospitals approve ₦35 billion for building just an office and ₦1.4 billion for its design? What do all these things tell us? They simply tell one that we have selfish political leaders who only think about how to sustain their extravagant lifestyles and what benefits them at the expense of the lives of the common people. There is no iota of doubt that one of the reasons we always experience lack of peace and security in Nigeria is because our political leaders are selfish. They take decisions that favour their interests at the expense of the general well-being.

This is why we argue that Bentham's Utility principle should be embraced and be made a guiding principle so as to control the selfish attitudes of our political leaders and make them become sensitive to the well-being of the general public (Umotong 5). Selfishness, bad leadership and corruption are the bane of Nigeria's socio-economic development. There is a consensus among well-meaning individuals and foreign nations that corruption has largely retarded the quest for sustainable growth and development in Nigeria. It is the single most critical impediment to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs);

and like a deadly virus, it attacks the vital structures and systems that engender progressive functioning of the Nigeria society. Additionally, it corrupts the interest of the common good which Bentham emphasizes.

Adapting Bentham's Hedonistic Principle to the Nigerian State as a Solution

The potential application of Jeremy Bentham's Hedonic Calculus as a means to mitigate the problem of selfishness in Nigeria provides one with a rich terrain of possibilities. Bentham's utilitarian framework, which centers around the quantification of pleasure and pain to guide moral and social decisions, presents a unique approach to addressing issues of self-interest that pervade various facets of Nigerian society (Nwabueze 68). Hence, the principles of Hedonic Calculus could be harnessed to foster a more altruistic and equitable social environment. Bentham's Hedonic Calculus is designed to evaluate actions based on their capacity to produce pleasure or prevent pain. It incorporates factors such as intensity, duration, certainty, propinquity, fecundity, purity, and extent. Applying this calculus involves assessing how actions impact individual and collective happiness and making decisions that maximize overall utility. The following are prospects of manifesting Bentham's ideas. To address selfishness, policy-making could be reframed through the lens of Hedonic Calculus. By incorporating measures that explicitly evaluate the pleasure and pain resulting from various policies, Nigerian governance could promote more ethical decision-making (Obi 21). For instance, anti-corruption initiatives might be evaluated based on their expected outcomes in reducing bureaucratic inefficiencies and enhancing public trust, thus fostering greater societal happiness.

1. Education and Public Awareness: Education plays a critical role in reshaping societal values. Implementing educational programs that emphasize the principles of Hedonic Calculus can instil an understanding of the broader impact of one's actions. By illustrating how individual behaviours contribute to collective well-being or suffering, such programs could nurture a sense of responsibility and encourage more altruistic behaviour.

2. Incentivizing Ethical Behaviour: Incentive structures are a practical application of Hedonic Calculus. In Nigeria, creating rewards for ethical

behaviour and penalties for selfish actions could align personal interests with collective goals (Ibeanu 87). For instance, introducing performance-based incentives for public servants who demonstrate integrity and efficiency could reduce corruption and promote a culture of accountability.

3. Enhancing Transparency and Accountability: Bentham's Hedonic Calculus underscores the importance of transparency in evaluating the consequences of actions. By implementing systems that make governmental and corporate activities more transparent, Nigeria can ensure that actions are subject to public scrutiny (Suleiman 71). This increased transparency would make it harder for selfish behaviour to go unnoticed and unaddressed, thereby promoting ethical conduct.

4. Community Engagement and Participatory Governance: Hedonic Calculus suggests that collective decision-making can enhance utility by incorporating diverse perspectives. Involving communities in the decision-making process through participatory governance can help align policies with the actual needs and preferences of the people (Obi 74). This approach not only ensures that policies are more effective but also fosters a sense of collective responsibility and reduces self-interested behaviours.

5. Measuring and Evaluating Impact: To effectively use Hedonic Calculus, it is crucial to develop robust metrics for measuring happiness and suffering (Olaniyan 36). In Nigeria, establishing frameworks for assessing the impact of policies on various socio-economic indicators can provide valuable insights into their effectiveness. Regular evaluation based on these metrics would enable continuous improvement and adaptation of policies to maximize overall utility.

6. Addressing Structural Inequalities: Selfishness often thrives in environments characterized by deep structural inequalities. By addressing these inequalities through policies that promote equitable distribution of resources and opportunities, Nigeria can create a more just society (Ake 25). Hedonic Calculus can guide these efforts by evaluating how different policy interventions impact various demographic groups and striving for outcomes that benefit the greatest number of people.

7. Fostering a Culture of Empathy and Cooperation: Additionally, the application of Hedonic Calculus should aim to cultivate a culture of empathy and cooperation. By highlighting the interconnectedness of individual actions and collective well-being, societal attitudes can shift from self-interest to a greater focus on mutual benefit (Adegbola 96). Community programs and public campaigns that emphasize the value of contributing to the common good can reinforce this cultural shift.

Conclusion

In this paper, it has been established that despite the challenges identified, Bentham's Hedonic Calculus has far-reaching potential for addressing selfishness in Nigeria by promoting a more utilitarian approach to policy and social behaviour (Ikuenobe 47). Its focus on the impact of actions on collective happiness and well-being, makes it suitable for the Nigerian political space. Political leaders can work towards reducing self-interested behaviour and working towards a more equitable society using the Calculus. The journey towards this transformation will require thoughtful application of Hedonic Calculus principles, along with a commitment to transparency, education, and community engagement. With sustained effort and innovative approaches, it is possible to leverage these principles to create a more just and harmonious society.

To prevent making already-existing disparities worse, policies founded on utilitarian principles must place a high priority on equity and inclusivity. A more equitable distribution of benefits can be attained by involving a variety of stakeholders in the policy-making process and making sure that the demands of marginalised groups are taken into account. Applying utilitarian principles successfully requires addressing corruption and enhancing governance. To make sure that policies are carried out efficiently and that resources are used to maximise overall value, it is imperative to establish anti-corruption measures, improve transparency, and fortify institutional capacity.

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