

Philosophy 104, Ethics, Queens College, Spring 2006
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Lecture Notes, February 21

I. Quiz: What are the three clauses of the utilitarian theory?

II. Utilitarianism

We saw that there are really three clauses of the utilitarian theory:

- 1) Consequentialism;
- 2) Hedonism; and
- 3) Egalitarianism.

The consequentialism is intuitive.

And the principle itself seems much more flexible, and therefore honest, than piecemeal theories which provide a range of specific rules.

Utilitarianism gives you one flexible, general guideline.

For the hedonism clause, consider any good thing. Why is it good?

We can show that it traces back to happiness.

Mill's argument for hedonism, p 69:

1. Every one wants to be happy.
 2. If we all followed utilitarianism, then happiness would increase.
- ∴ Utilitarianism is the right moral theory.

Even God likes it: she made us all want to be happy, p 68.

[Consider whether the second premise is true.]

Egalitarianism:

Maybe some people are worth more than others.

But the utilitarian can account for this, without abandoning the basic egalitarianism.

Consider Godwin's argument that the archbishop is worth more than the chambermaid, p 240.

This defense is actually utilitarian.

The archbishop is worth more for two reasons:

- 1) He affects more people.
- 2) He has the capacity for a higher degree of happiness. (See below, Criticism #1.)

The utilitarian, can defend the higher value of the archbishop, without dropping egalitarianism.

The president is not himself worth more, but actions that affect him, and which he performs will also affect others. There's no need to count each one as more than one.

III. Considering criticisms of utilitarianism

Along the way, try to notice forms of responses:

One can dismiss the objection

One can adjust the theory in response to the objection.

One can reject the theory, abandon it, in the face of insuperable criticism.

IV. Criticism #1: Happiness is a life for pigs, p 66.

That is, utilitarianism provides too low a standard for morality.

Response: there are higher and lower pleasures.

Since the higher pleasures are more valuable, the standard is not too low.

We have to decide between pleasures, so we need a criterion.

We can ask some one who has had both.

Those who have had both higher and lower pleasures will say that some pleasures require work, but are worth it.

Godwin's defends the archbishop's "more refined and genuine happiness," p 240.

Mill says, "It is better to be a Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied."

This objection may thus be dismissed.

We just look to long term and quality of happiness, and the problem is solved.

So, dismiss this criticism.

V. Criticism #2: Happiness is not our ultimate goal in life.

Consider the Mackie quote from Brandt., p 85.

Mackie wants to add freedom, art, and self-governance as human goals.

Mill considers this objection, and calls the other goals parts of happiness, p 69.

Consider money.

We really want it for what it buys us, which we want for the happiness it brings us.

But some people seem to want money just for itself.

"It may, then, be said truly that money is desired not for the sake of an end, but as part of the end." (70)

Mill here seems to be conceding the point he thinks he is refuting.

Our ends are complex, and not solely about happiness.

In fact, these various ends might conflict.

Consider an accident which renders a young pianist unable to use her hands, but whose happiness may be insured by a 'happy pill'.

If the utilitarian says that all that matters is happiness, and the happiness is maintained, it seems that the utilitarian has no means for describing why this is a bad outcome.

Mill says fulfilling your goals is a means to your happiness, but maybe the goal is independent of happiness.

One might try to dismiss this objection as an implausible scenario: of course the happiness would be decreased.