

Utilitarianism Evaluated

Bentham

<p>Teleological - it is the end or goal of moral action, not the act itself, that is good or of value</p>	<p><i>This is seen as a positive aspect to the theory. Utilitarianism tries to make the world a better place. Bentham and Mill were both concerned with political reforms such as the welfare state that improved society.</i></p>
<p>Consequentialist - moral judgements based on outcome</p>	<p><i>Consequentialism is summed up as "the ends justify the means". Some people disagree. It is easy to give examples of bad actions that lead to good consequences (e.g. hospitalising someone in a fight who turns out to have a tumour that they treat). The consequences of an action don't make the action right; the consequences cannot be predicted; even if you knew for certain what would happen, you couldn't calculate the consequences for everyone.</i></p>
<p>Hedonistic - humans desire pleasure and seek to avoid pain</p>	<p><i>This statement is attacked on two counts. Firstly, we desire a range of things - some people actively seek pain! Secondly, the naturalistic fallacy comes in here - just because we do desire pleasure doesn't mean we should.</i></p>
<p>Quantitative - "Quantity of pleasure being the same, pushpin is as good as poetry"</p>	<p><i>This makes any calculation easier. All pleasure has the same value. Mill disagreed (see Mill).</i></p>
<p>Act Utilitarian - each situation should be assessed separately</p>	<p><i>The positive is that the theory is flexible and allows you to do the 'right thing' in each situation. However, it is impractical. You can't work out all of the effects of every moral choice you make.</i></p>
<p>Reduce pain first before increasing pleasure</p>	<p><i>It is far better to reduce one person's pain than increase one person's pleasure. It would be better to have ten people not enjoying themselves than five having fun while five others suffered.</i></p>
<p>Principle of Utility - greatest good for the greatest number</p>	<p><i>If it is good to help one person, it must be better to help ten people. Try to help as many people as you can - that seems a good rule.</i></p>
<p>"Everyone to count for one, and no-one to count for more than one"</p>	<p><i>Although this may seem obvious, in Bentham's society only the rich got good medical care, education etc. Even today there are some who think they are more important because of status, power etc. Bentham disagrees.</i></p>
<p>Hedonic Calculus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> REMOTENESS PURITY RICHNESS INTENSITY CERTAINTY EXTENT DURATION 	<p><i>A very practical system for working out the utility (usefulness) of a course of action. If you thought about it yourself, you'd come up with a similar list. To work out how much pleasure, you need to know how long it lasts, how many people feel the pleasure, how strong the pleasure is etc. Some people still feel that it is too hard to do the whole calculation, but it is in line with how we work when deciding, for example, how to spend lottery money. "Only a few people will benefit from the Opera." Etc.</i></p>
<p>Rule of thumb - if a decision greatly resembles a previous decision, you can use it as a rule of thumb to avoid doing the hedonic calculus in detail again</p>	<p><i>This answers the criticism aimed at Act Utilitarianism above. It provides a way of making quick decisions in new situations.</i></p>
<p>Precedent - if your act has good consequences but will set a precedent leading to bad things in the future, do not do that.</p>	<p><i>This almost sounds like rule utilitarianism, and Bentham clearly sees the possible problems of his theory. We do need rules in society, and must bear in mind the 'rules' or precedent we will be setting when we act.</i></p>

Mill

<p>Qualitative - not merely the amount of pleasure/pain</p>	<p><i>This answers the criticism that sadistic guards might be right to torture someone for pleasure - theirs is a worthless sort of pleasure. This also moves away from hedonism - maybe 'happiness' is a better term than pleasure.</i></p>
<p>Higher and lower pleasures - 'Better to be a human dissatisfied than a pig satisfies; Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied'</p>	<p><i>When faced with the choice between playing a video game or watching a documentary, we are aware of the qualitative difference between higher and lower pleasures. It may be that a mixture is good, rather than trying for the highest pleasures every time as Mill suggests. Also, who is to say whether watching football is a higher pleasure or not? It seems very subjective.</i></p>
<p>Rule utilitarianism - "Act in accordance with those rules which, if generally followed, would provide the greatest general balance of pleasure over pain." (always good to say 'Some people see Mill as a rule utilitarian')</p>	<p><i>Seen by many as a step forward. Much more practical. Also in line with how society works. It isn't clear why we wouldn't break the rules if doing so led to the greater good.</i></p>
<p><i>"Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign"</i></p>	<p><i>This could be seen as a statement that having freedom will lead to a happier society. Some say this goes against the theory, because letting someone use drugs and harm themselves will lead to less happiness for that person and therefore less overall happiness. It isn't clear that individual liberty is compatible with utilitarianism.</i></p>

Other utilitarians

<p>Hare - preferences: the morally right action is the one that maximizes that satisfaction of the preferences of all those involved.</p>	<p><i>A vast improvement. Takes on board the fact that there are more important things to people than their pleasure. For example, we cover up dead bodies to preserve someone's dignity. Clearly they can no longer feel pleasure or pain, but they had a preference not to be undignified.</i></p>
<p>Sidgwick - motives: it is the motive (intending to bring about the greatest good) rather than the outcome that is good</p>	<p><i>Sidgwick gets round the problem of consequentialism above. It is the same theory, but once you work out what would have been called the 'right action', what is good is the motive to do that action, to want to bring about the greatest good, whether or not it works.</i></p>
<p>Singer - interests: you need to look at what is in the best interests of those affected</p>	<p><i>Singer extends the scope of utilitarianism to whatever has interests. We don't all have to be treated the same - pigs won't be given clothes to wear like us. However, where a pig has an interest, it is important to consider those interests.</i></p>