

Consequences Matter— Utilitarianism

Chapter 3

Learning Objectives

- After reading this chapter, you will be able to:
 - 3.1 Define "Utilitarianism" and understand the moral choices and consequences of this philosophy as they apply to real life.
 - 3.2 Articulate the relation of general happiness to Utilitarian arguments according to Bentham and Mill.
 - 3.3 Critically analyze whether and how one might distinguish between one happiness and another.
 - 3.4 Discuss Utilitarianism as it may apply to contemporary moral questions.

Teleological Theories

- Focus on the consequences of actions.
- Right actions are equated with those that produce things of value.

Utilitarianism

- Utilitarianism - an act is good if it maximizes the greatest amount of good.
- An act is right if and only if no other act available to the moral agent maximizes utility more than the act decided upon.

Utilitarianism

- **Utilitarianism** - an act is good if it maximizes the greatest amount of good, pleasure, or utility.
- **Bentham** - greatest overall **Quantity**. The **hedonic calculus** can be used to evaluate potential pleasure.
- **Mill** - **Quality** will lead to quantity of pleasure. Higher pleasures are better than lower pleasures.

Bentham claims that:

- "Nature has placed mankind under two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as determine what we shall do"

Principle of Utility

- By the principle of utility he means, "that principle which approves and disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency which it appears to have to augment or diminish happiness".

Hedonic Calculus

Acts of pleasure-

- Intensity
- Duration
- Certainty
- Propinquity - (nearness)

Consequences -

- Fecundity - the chances that it will be followed by more of the same,
- Purity - the chances that the pleasure will not be followed by pain
- Extent - the number of people it affects

Quality over Quantity

- "It is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied...It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied."

Higher vs. Lower Pleasures

- "If one of the two [pleasures] is, by those who are competently acquainted with both, placed so far above the other that they... would not resign it for any quantity of the other pleasure which their nature is capable of, we are justified in ascribing to the preferred enjoyment a superiority in quality, so far outweighing quantity as to render it, in comparison, of small account."

Mill Claims:

- Mill claims that the Hedonic calculus is impossible because the nature of pain and pleasure are such that no meaningful standard can be established to weigh one pleasure against one pain.
- He thinks that QUALITY pleasures will lead to a greater quantity of pleasure.

Utilitarianism is not Egoism

- "The happiness which forms the utilitarian standard of what is right conduct, is not the agent's own happiness, but that of all concerned..." In this way, the rightness or wrongness of an act is not based upon the consequences of pain and pleasure for yourself, but also those consequences for others.
