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Philosophy

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Philosophy/Ethics

Utilitarianism

Introduction

Utilitarianism is a philosophical model that claims that an action's morality must be judged based on the capacity to maximize the overall pleasure or happiness of the highest sum of the individual affected by the action. It simply means that the right action course produces the greatest net happiness or pleasure for people as it minimizes the amount of suffering or pain ((Bowden, 2009). This theory is associated with philosophers such as Stuart John and Jeremy Bentham. These philosophers emphasize the minimization of pain and suffering and the maximization of pleasures and happiness. Jeremy proposed that happiness can be measured using hedonistic calculus, which weighs intensity, certainty, duration, and other pain or pleasure factors. This essay will explain the main concepts and arguments of the theory, present a practical example of how utilitarianism can handle real-life situations, and reflect on the theory's adequacy in moral reasoning.

Main Concepts of the Theory

The main concepts of utilitarianism include consequentialism, which means that the theory makes judgments of the action's molarity based on the consequences of the action. According to this concept, an action is morally right if it results in the best outcomes, while an action is preferred as morally wrong if it leads to the worst possible results ((Bowden, 2009). Another concept is quantitative vs. qualitative utilitarianism. Qualitative utilitarians hold that the

quality of pleasure or happiness is more important, while quantitative utilitarians believe that it is the quantity of pleasure or happiness that matters.

The third concept is universalism which means that utilitarianism is applicable to every person equally regardless of social status, gender or race. The theory considers everyone to have equal moral worth and should have equal pleasure or happiness value. The fourth concept is Act vs. Rule. Act utilitarianism focus on individual's actions consequences while rule focus on consequences based on certain principles or rules. The fifth concept is hedonism. This is a belief that happiness and pleasure is the ultimate life's goal. However not every utilitarian belief in this concept as some of them belief the ultimate goal of life is justice and equality in addition to pleasure and happiness. The sixth concept is greatest happiness principle. It is also called utility principle and holds that actions must be selected based on their capability to enhance happiness to the great number of people.

Main Arguments of the Philosophers Associated with Utilitarianism

Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) is the founder of the theory. Jeremy believes that pain and pleasure are the chief motivators for our actions. He once stated, ' Nature has put humans under pleasure and pain as governance masters in our thinking and actions' (Indira Gandhi National Tribal University, n.d). He believed that actions must be judged based on their utility in enhancing the utmost happiness for the highest sum of individuals ((Bowden, 2009). John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), a disciple of Bentham, developed utilitarianism rule. He begins his arguments by stating, ' The creed that embraces utility hold that right actions enhance happiness while wrong actions produce pain' (Utilitarianism.com, 2009). He believed that the action's moral worth must be judged based on if the action conforms to set general rules that enhance utmost

happiness to the highest number of persons. Additionally, John argued that happiness is defined in terms of moral and intellectual pleasure rather than physical pleasure.

Henry Sidgwick claimed that utilitarianism provides a scientific and rational approach to morality, and it can be used to guide the behaviors of individuals as well as political and social policies. He emphasized impartiality and recognized the importance of individuals' freedoms and rights, and held that utilitarianism must be applied (Utilitarianism.com, 2009). He acknowledged that it is not easy to measure and compare the pleasure or happiness of different persons. Furthermore, R M Hare developed preference utilitarianism, claiming that maximizing people's preference satisfaction must be the main aim rather than simply their pleasure or happiness (Scarre, 2002). Moreover, Peter Singer holds that people have moral obligations to decrease pain and suffering possible if even if it calls for personal happiness sacrifice. He has used this theory in concerns such as climate change, animal rights, and global poverty.

Example of how Utilitarian would Address Real Life Moral Situation

During the Covid 19 pandemic, our community hospital runs low on ventilators. This situation put the healthcare providers in a dilemma in deciding which patients should receive the limited ventilators available. Advocates of utilitarianism in this situation would argue that the final decision should be founded on promoting the overall societal well-being or utility. In this situation, a utilitarian would examine the effects of the decision on families and their patients, and healthcare providers. Advocates of this theory will also put into consideration other factors such as patients' illness severity, survival likelihood, and the average time a patient needs to be on the machine.

From the above considerations, utilitarianism advocates can decide that the available machines are to be allocated to the sick, who have the highest chances of survival once put on

the ventilator, and the ones who are at death risk if they do not use it. The decision of the advocate aims at promoting and maximizing the general societal well-being by saving the most lives possible with the available limited resources, ventilators. Utilitarianism advocates the decision to reduce burdens to the healthcare providers, thus balancing the needs of all the parties involved to achieve the greatest good for many persons. Therefore, utilitarianism theory succeeds as the coherent approach to the above situation because it aims at achieving the well-being and greatest good of the society to the greatest number by its equal consideration.

Reflection on Adequacy of Utilitarianism in Moral Life Reasoning

Utilitarianism succeeds as a coherent approach to moral life reasoning in general despite its weaknesses and criticism. Utilitarianism views morality as a weapon to achieve the greatest happiness for many people possible. It encourages people to act in ways that enhance happiness while considering the possible consequences of their actions (Bowden, 2009). This theory is an adequate and coherent approach to general moral reasoning because it offers measurable and clear standards to evaluate moral decisions; it focuses on the consequences of one's action and weighs it against other alternatives, thus providing a decision-making framework aimed at maximizing societal well-being.

This theory also promotes impartiality as it considers the interests of all the parties equally without bias, thus enhancing fairness and preventing discrimination (Scarre, 2002). Moreover, utilitarianism encourages altruism by advocating for actions that benefit others even if they can cost them, thus promoting happiness for the greatest number of people. Utilitarianism is also flexible in moral decision-making as it recognizes how different situations require different approaches, thus enhancing adaptation to changing circumstances and new advancements and

information (Scarre, 2002). Finally, utilitarianism can be applied in many contexts; thus, it becomes a useful framework for seeking ethical decisions at personal and organizational levels.

References

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