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## Paper 2 - Ethics

Utilitarianism is a normative ethical theory that judges the morality of an action based on its ability to promote the greatest happiness or pleasure for the greatest number of people. This theory is associated with Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, who developed and popularized it in the 19th century.

Bentham argued that all actions should be judged according to their utility, or ability to produce the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest number of people. He believed that pleasure and pain were the only factors that mattered in determining the morality of an action. Mill later refined Bentham's theory, arguing that not all pleasures are equal and that some are more valuable than others. He distinguished between higher pleasures, such as those associated with intellectual pursuits, and lower pleasures, such as those associated with physical sensations.

The principle of utility, which states that actions are good or bad depending on their capacity to produce the greatest amount of happiness or pleasure for the greatest number of people, is one of the main concepts and arguments of utilitarianism. The concept of the moral calculus is another crucial one. It entails weighing the potential pleasure or happiness that an action will bring against the potential pain or misery that it may bring.

An example of how utilitarianism might be applied in a practical situation is the decision to impose a tax on sugary drinks. A utilitarian might argue that such a tax would promote the greatest happiness by reducing the number of people who consume sugary drinks and, as a result,

reducing the incidence of obesity and related health problems. The potential pain caused by the tax, such as the increased cost of drinks for consumers, is outweighed by the potential pleasure of improved health outcomes for the greater number of people.

However, some critics of utilitarianism argue that it is difficult to quantify happiness and pleasure, and that it may be impossible to accurately predict the outcomes of an action.

Additionally, utilitarianism has been criticized for its emphasis on the majority at the expense of individual rights and interests. It is important to consider these alternative viewpoints when evaluating the adequacy of utilitarianism for moral reasoning.

Although utilitarianism has some advantages, there are also some significant drawbacks. The fact that utilitarianism can defend behaviors that are generally regarded as immoral is one of its main detractors. For instance, a utilitarian would claim that torturing a person is morally acceptable if doing so could save the lives of numerous other people. Another complaint is that it can be challenging to predict what choices will result in the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people, making it challenging to apply in practical settings. Finally, detractors contend that it can be unfair to demand that people forgo their own happiness in favor of the greater good, particularly if they belong to a minority group.

Suppose a government has to decide whether to spend money on building a new hospital or a new park. A Utilitarian would argue that the decision should be based on which option will result in the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people. If the hospital will save more lives and reduce suffering, then it is the better choice. If the park will provide more opportunities for leisure and recreation and therefore lead to more overall happiness, then it is the better choice.

One alternative view to Utilitarianism is Virtue Ethics, which argues that moral decisions should be based on developing virtuous character traits rather than simply maximizing happiness. Another alternative view is Kantianism, which emphasizes the importance of duty and moral law rather than happiness. Both Virtue Ethics and Kantianism have been offered as critiques of Utilitarianism.

One of the criticisms of utilitarianism is that it can overlook individual rights and justice in its pursuit of the greater good. This is because, in some cases, the actions that produce the greatest overall happiness may not be just or fair to certain individuals. For example, if a government were to legalize slavery to boost the economy, this may increase overall happiness, but it would clearly violate the rights of the enslaved individuals. As such, utilitarianism needs to find a way to balance the promotion of overall happiness with the respect for individual rights and justice.

In my opinion, utilitarianism presents a compelling moral theory that has much to offer in terms of guiding ethical decision-making. I appreciate its focus on the promotion of overall happiness and the use of empirical evidence to determine the best course of action. However, I also recognize the challenges of measuring and comparing happiness between individuals and the potential for overlooking individual rights and justice. Ultimately, I believe that utilitarianism can be a useful tool for making ethical decisions, but it should not be used in isolation from other ethical considerations, such as individual rights and justice.

In conclusion, utilitarianism is a normative ethical theory that judges the morality of an action based on its ability to promote the greatest happiness or pleasure for the greatest number of people. It is associated with Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, and its main concepts include the principle of utility and the moral calculus. While utilitarianism has its strengths in

promoting the greatest good for the greatest number, it is not without its criticisms and limitations, and it is important to consider alternative viewpoints when evaluating its adequacy for moral reasoning.