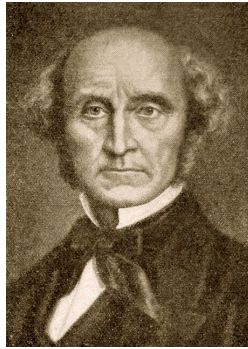
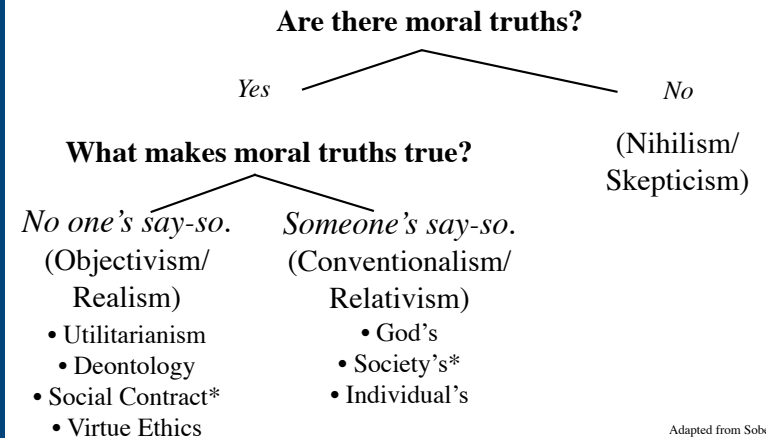


Mill

Utilitarianism



The Ethical Playing Field



Classical Utilitarianism

Three points

1. Actions are judged right or wrong only by appeal to their consequences.
2. When evaluating consequences, all that matters is the amount of happiness or unhappiness that is created.
3. Each person's happiness counts the same.

What is a right action?

- What makes right actions right and wrong actions wrong?
 - Right actions are those that produce the greatest amount of happiness over unhappiness.
- What are wrong actions?
 - Wrong action are those that produce unhappiness
- Called the "Greatest Happiness Principle"

What's Meant by "Happiness"?

- The "Happiness" Machine: Imagine a machine that provides you with any pleasure you desire....
- Given what you know about the Happiness Machine, would you choose to step into the machine, living a life of total contentment and pleasure?
- Is all we seek from life pleasure, happiness, and contentment?
- Why wouldn't we want to live a life of total happiness?

Consider the "Friend"

- You think someone is your friend, but behind your back s/he ridicules you
- No one ever tells you and you never discover this, so you live a happy life
- Would you want this kind of relationship?
- What is it we value?

Hedonism

- The Happiness Machine illustrates hedonism
 - Hedonism: the pursuit of one's own pleasure as an end in itself
- Early versions of Utilitarianism identified happiness with hedonistic pleasure
- Mill himself says, "by happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure"
- The second case challenges hedonism: Why do we value friendship? Is it simply because it makes us happy?

Mill's Qualitative Hedonism

- Mill realized the problems with a theory based on producing the greatest amount of happiness
- So, he thinks there are "higher" and "lower" pleasures, and the higher are better than the lower
-
- "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied."
- What does Mill mean by this quote?

We're More than Pleasure Seekers

- A human's pleasures are of a different degree than a pig's
- While a pig might be satisfied hooked up to the Happiness Machine, humans demand more from life and experience than merely the satisfaction of bodily pleasures
- Humans strive to realize their potential as human beings and this means striving to realize uniquely human capacities and potential, not just the satisfaction of bodily pleasures

Consequences Matter

- For Utilitarianism, the motives of one's action do not affect the morality of an action
- Actual consequences of an action determine whether that action is right or wrong
- What if there is more to determining the morality of actions than simply an appeal to the consequences of an action?

Equal Importance

- Each person's happiness counts the same
- Since each person's happiness counts the same, we must treat each person's welfare as equally important
- Mill said we must be, "as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator"
- Utilitarianism endorses a principle of fairness and equality

Objective Ethical Theory

- Utilitarian believes there is a universal, objective ethical principle that everyone ought to follow
- This objective principle is utility
- Can one be wrong about rightness and wrongness?
 - The right action is not necessarily what you might think is right or what you might desire
 - Rather, the right action is determined by the goodness or bad of the action's consequences

Motive to Obey Principle of Utility?

- The motive to obey the principle of utility is both internal and external
- The internal motivation is that we all desire our own happiness
- The external motivation is that we desire and reinforce behavior in others that promotes their own happiness
- The use of external rewards and punishments can promote or prevent an individual's happiness

Runaway Train and Calculating the Right Action

- You are standing at a track switching station and there is a runaway train heading your way. If you don't pull the switch the train will kill two people. If you pull the switch, the train will kill one person. What do you do?
- What if you have to make the choice between two or 20 deaths. What would you do? What does utilitarianism demand?

Possible Problems with Utilitarianism

- Violations of justice
- Violations of rights

Are Consequences All that Matter?

- Utilitarianism says that all that matters is the consequences of an action.
- All that one needs to do to determine whether an action is right is examine the consequences of that action
- But, if there is something else that influences our decisions about whether an action is right or wrong independent of an action's consequences, then it appears that utilitarianism is undermined

What Matters in This Case?

- Case: White cops wrongly arrest and beat a black man. Race riots break out with many deaths. Our utilitarian realizes that his false testimony would result in the arrest and conviction of a particular cop. If the utilitarian knows that his false testimony would end the riots and save lives, then must he bear false testimony against the innocent person for the overall benefit of society?
- Why might we be concerned about this case?
- With what ethical principle is this case inconsistent?

Utilitarianism and Justice

- We should be concerned with this case because it appears that utilitarianism is incompatible with ideals of justice
- Justice requires treating people fairly
 - treat people according to their needs
 - treat people according to their merit
- What does the conflict with justice say about utilitarianism?

Case of the Peeping Tom

- Suppose someone has been photographing the most intimate details of your life. You have not know about this and are not likely to find out. Suppose further that the photographs have been distributed to a dozen of the photographer's friends for their enjoyment.
- Is this act morally permissible?
- What has been violated?

Equal Concern for Others

- Mill states Utilitarianism demands that we should have an equal concern for others
 - We should be as impartial and disinterested when determining the right course of action
- What does this equal concern demand?
- Consider the case of the privileged American...

Should We Treat All People Equally?

- Should we treat our friends and family impartially and dismiss the special relationship we have with them?
- If we think that we should have a special relationship with them, then we are not being impartial
- But, this impartiality is inconsistent with utilitarianism
- It seems that utilitarianism's demand for impartiality demands that one subordinate everything to the general welfare

Defense of Utilitarianism

- It looks like these attacks on Utilitarianism defeat the theory
- But, many modern defenses have been made in support of Utilitarianism
 1. Fancy examples don't matter
 2. Utilitarianism is a guide to choosing rules, not individual actions
 3. Common sense can't be trusted

1. Fancy Examples Don't Matter

- The arguments against utilitarian are unrealistic examples--they don't really capture how the world works
- Each case describes an example and shows that from a Utilitarian point of view, a certain, undesirable course of action must follow
- So, one is forced to conclude that Utilitarianism is false
- For example, does bearing false witness really have good consequences?

Utilitarianism is Commonsensical

- Utilitarianism does explain why one should not lie or violate another's rights...
 - in the long term there will likely be more harm done than good
- What does it mean, the utilitarian might ask, to say that some actions are right or just apart from the good benefits resulting from those actions?
- Utilitarianism is commonsensical

2. Revise the Theory

- If at first you don't succeed, revise the theory....
- This attempt to save Utilitarianism admits there's a problem with assuming that each individual action is evaluated by the principle of utility
- What causes problems in the bearing-false-witness case is the theory's assumption that whether the action is right or wrong depends on the consequences of that particular lie
- The assumption that the consequences of a particular action determine the rightness of wrongness of action is what leads the theory into trouble

Rule Utilitarianism

- Revise the theory so that it is not individual actions that matter, but a set of rules
- What set of rules would lead to the best society and benefit society most? What general rules would promote the greatest happiness?
- Individual acts are judged right or wrong with reference to these set of rules. Once the principle of utility determines which set of rules will promote the greatest amount of happiness, then we no longer need to consult the principle of utility
- Bearing false witness is wrong because it violates the rule, One Should not Lie

3. Bite the Bullet

- We were inclined to reject Classical Utilitarianism because it seems to conflict with other moral judgments we think are right
- But, these feelings about justice and rights are based on common sense. Why assume that our common sense is reliable?
- Our common sense notions about justice and rights might have irrational elements in part resulting from prejudices adopted from our parents, our religion, or our society
- Perhaps it is the feelings and not Utilitarianism that is mistaken