

Candidate 2 evidence

Question 15

Utilitarianism is a philosophical ideology created and utilized by Jeremy Bentham, a well-known English philosopher who based utilitarianism and his life style upon happiness. It was later reformed into Rule utilitarianism by John Stuart Mill, who was actually partly educated by Bentham. While act utilitarianism is the more free variation, Rule Utilitarianism is much more restricted and poses rules so that Utilitarianism works better practically. Utilitarianism is the belief that the greatest outcome comes from the greatest amount of happiness produced by an action, this therefore contradicts other theories such as Kantian ethics which bases itself around duty and responsibility much more than how a person lives their life and whatnot.

The key principles of utilitarianism as a moral theory is that a person should try to seek out the greatest amount of happiness that they can get in their life. Act Utilitarianism consists of taking seven factors into account, intensity, duration, certainty, propinquity, fecundity, purity and the extent of happiness caused by an action. Act utilitarianism was created by Jeremy Bentham, and later reformed into Rule Utilitarianism by John Stewart Mill, although both were and still are practiced separately due to the differing 'rules' of each school of belief. Act Utilitarianism often utilizes the hedonic calculus, a method of calculating the happiness or unhappiness of a person through the use of hedones, a unit of measurement invented by Bentham. The happiness is valued upon the greatest amount of people getting the greatest amount of happiness rather than the greatest amount of happiness being directed into one person. Jeremy Bentham said that "It is the greatest good to the greatest number of people which is the measure of right and wrong." Simply put, 5 people getting a medium amount of happiness is better than 1 person getting a high amount of happiness. In even simpler terms, this could be interpreted as 'the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few'

Furthermore, Rule Utilitarianism detracts from this theory and adds a set of rules to utilitarianism in order to maximise happiness as a whole, such as not allowing killing. Along with this, Rule Utilitarianism values the quality of happiness over the quantity. The creator, John Stewart Mill is quoted as saying "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied." Essentially saying that it's better to wait on items or actions that will give you a better quality of happiness, such as the fine arts like opera or poetry over things like chocolate which would only give you short term happiness.

If a person applying utilitarianism to this scenario they may respond in any number of ways. On one hand, if the person were to cross the red light then

would generate more short term happiness for them because they would be able to get their child to the hospital quickly and they would not be worried about them for so long. The child will be put out of their misery quicker and so they will be happier. However, if they thought that they would be stopped by the police then they would realise that actually the happiness they thought they would get would be less because now they will be later getting to the hospital and their child will be in more pain for longer and they have a fine to pay which will make them unhappy too. An act utilitarian may utilize the hedonic calculus in order to find the right solution to this, while a rule utilitarian would probably just say that they should not cross the red light because it would make most people happy if people don't cross traffic lights.

A strength of this is that using the hedonic calculus can provide a near to accurate result of how happy both parties would be. This therefore can produce a more accurate decision that can result in greater happiness for everyone.

However, a weakness of this is the fact that using something like the hedonic calculus can be extremely time consuming and actually waste more time than the person has.

In addition to this, there are a few disadvantages to rule utilitarianism. Rule Utilitarianism was a theory based upon Act Utilitarianism created by John Stewart Mill. Sometimes it is better to break the rules. If you had to kill a terrorist to save 10 people you would probably think that was ok, but the rule utilitarian would say you can't do that because it is against the rule do not kill, so it is wrong to do it, even though it will be most happiness if you did break it,

In conclusion, both act and rule utilitarianism are only partly successful in answering this scenario. They are both somewhat successful as they allow for the maximization of happiness, which in effect is a good thing, but when put into use within the real world, results in catastrophe and is difficult to use in this scenario.