

Candidate 5 evidence

Utilitarianism is the moral theory that looks towards the consequences of an action as the source of morality. This essay will approach the scenario with act utilitarianism and compare the outcome to rule utilitarianism.

Utilitarianism is a consequential theory; this means that the consequences of an action will be used as the source of morality when moral decision making. Consequential theories ignore the intentions behind the action. In the scenario, we are asked to either save or kill a ruthless leader who is responsible for the deaths of thousands. In this scenario we would have to consider the consequence of our actions when deciding on which action to take. The action that would lead to the best consequence would be to kill the leader as it could potentially allow for a long line of suffering to end. A weakness of consequentialism is unpredictable consequences. We can never actually be certain of the consequences of our actions as good action may have a bad consequence. In this scenario, we may think killing the leader would allow for the suffering to end, however, there is the possibility that a new, even more tough dictator could take power which could cause more suffering, or it may not. We can't know for sure. Another weakness is global vs local consequences. The local consequences may seem great for the people, however killing the leader could spark a war between other countries or could cause a mass genocide of the people of the country if their leader were to die, which one do we consider?

Another feature of utilitarianism is hedonism. This is the theory that humans naturally avoid pain and seek pleasure; therefore, hedonism seeks consequences that maximise pleasure and avoid pain. Therefore, a hedonist would choose to kill the leader as this would stop the suffering of thousands which would bring immense pleasure, and it could prevent the suffering of people in the future.

In act utilitarianism, Bentham believes in three principles. The first principle is the principle of utility; this means the most useful action is the one that would produce the best consequences. Therefore, the most useful action would be to kill the leader as generally it would lead to the best consequences. Another principle is the principle of equity. This is where everyone's pleasure is considered as equal value. This means that we must not just consider the pleasure of the people, we must also consider the pleasure of the leader's family. The final principle is the greatest happiness principle. This states that the best action is the one that produces the greatest happiness for the greatest number for the greatest amount for the greatest amount of time. Therefore, the action that would lead to the GHP would be to kill the leader as it would allow for a great amount of pleasure for those who don't have to suffer for a large amount of people for a long time. A strength of act utilitarianism is that it allows for the equality for everyone in the scenario. A weakness is that it allows for the tyranny of the majority. This is where suffering is justified at

the expense of the pleasure of more people. This would happen if we were to kill the leader as they would suffer at the expense of society's happiness.

In act utilitarianism, Bentham utilises the hedonic calculus. This is Bentham's method of calculating how much happiness an action would bring by using 7 different parts to consider. When considering fecundity, killing the leader may not score high as it initially might lead to more pleasures, however, this may be short lived as a crueller dictator may step up which could cause more suffering than before. When considering propinquity, killing the leader may not score high either as there wouldn't be immediate pleasure if the leader died as killing him wouldn't instantly solve all the problems they have caused. Therefore when considering the hedonic calculus, the best action would be to not kill the leader.

In rule utilitarianism, there is a set of societal rules that we must follow such as don't lie, don't steal, etc. Rule utilitarians would look towards the action that would create the best consequences for society. Therefore, when considering soft rule utilitarianism, the action that would lead to the best consequences would be to kill the leader as it would cause a greater amount of happiness for society as it would end their suffering. However, a hard-rule utilitarian would not allow for the leader to be killed as killing goes against the general rules of society.

Overall, in the scenario, the best action would be to kill the leader as when considering act utilitarianism, it is evident that killing him would cause a great amount of pleasure for a great number for a long time, that's if a more cruel dictator doesn't step up.