

Candidate 2 evidence

National 5 Philosophy Assignment

The Trolley Problem

The trolley problem has grown to become one of the most famous paradoxes since it originated; should you pull the lever? This interesting dilemma was created by famous British philosopher Phillipa Foot in a 1967 essay on the “doctrine of double effect”. This dilemma explores a situation where a trolley is on track to collide with five strangers, however you have a choice to flip a lever and change the path of the trolley to another track which holds one person: your best friend. You can either have five strangers killed or your best friend killed. We will explore this paradox by looking at Jeremy Bentham’s consequentialist-based theory of Utilitarianism and Immanuel Kant’s duty-based theory of Kantianism.

Utilitarianism takes an approach to morality which states that the most moral action is the one which provides the most happiness. Bentham established the GHP (greatest happiness principle) as a way of determining morality. This states exactly that the action which creates the most happiness and least unhappiness is the most morally praiseworthy. This is made up of 3 components: The consequentialist principle which states that the action with the best consequences is the most moral, the Hedonistic principle which states that happiness and pleasure are the only things worth valuing when determining morality and the Equity principle which states that everyone’s happiness is of equal consideration.

First, a utilitarian would look at the choices available. These are A) leave the switch and kill the five strangers or B) flip the switch and kill your best friend. They would then apply the GHP to see which action is the most moral. Using the consequentialist principle, A) would mean that five people would die which would affect them and their family and B) would mean your best friend dies which would affect them and their family. Next, the equity principle, A) would lead to 5 people dying which would mean your best friend survives which you and them would be thankful for and B) would mean that your best friend dies however the 5 strangers would survive which they would be very grateful for. Finally, the hedonistic principle would be used to determine the happiness created. A) would lead to five strangers dying which would create unhappiness between them and each of their families. B) would lead to your best friend dying which would create strong unhappiness between you, and their families. Both options are likely to make you unhappy as people are dying either way, however you are more likely to naturally be unhappy over your best friend’s death to whom you are close. However, we can see that

the negative consequences of killing your best friend outweigh the positive consequences of saving your best friend. Therefore, a utilitarian would choose option B) to flip the switch and kill your friend. This is because this would have the best consequences and create the most happiness and least unhappiness.

Bentham's utilitarianism has many criticisms, too. We must understand that calculating the consequences of an action cannot always be simple. Although the GHP provides us with 2 options which makes it easy for us to determine the most moral one, we must outline that short term consequences vary from long term consequences; the short-term pleasure gained from keeping your friend alive will be good initially, however overtime the long-term consequences of killing 5 people is likely to slowly make you grief. Also, the equity principle states that everyone's happiness should be of equal consideration, however the Tyranny of the Majority goes against this. It states that the majority should always be prioritised over the minority, meaning that if a majority desired a pleasure which affects the minority negatively, it would still theoretically be allowed – which does not line up with the equity principle.

In contrast, I will be exploring Kantianism. Founded by Immanuel Kant, it is a deontological theory. Unlike utilitarianism which bases morality on the consequences of an action, Kantianism leans towards a side which suggests that the rightness of an act is determined by the motives and/or the intentions. To attain morality, Kant says that you must act in accordance with your duty. This is something which you follow because it is the morally right thing to do, regardless of your feelings on the act. In other words, it is morally right because it is a moral rule. To determine a choice of action which is the most moral, Kant established the Categorical Imperative as a test to put his maxims through. Maxims are general rules of behaviour which must apply to two criteria: The universal law formulation which checks to see if a maxim can be applied to everyone or not. For example, Kant states that nobody, under any circumstances, should tell a lie. Also, it must apply to the End formulation which checks if anyone is being used as a means to an end as opposed to an end in itself.

Firstly, a Kantian would look at the choices available. These are A) leave the switch and kill the five strangers or B) flip the switch and kill your best friend. They would first identify the maxims in this situation: these would be to always kill or to never kill. They would then identify which maxims can be universalised – this would be to never kill. Next, they would use the End formulation to see if anyone is being used to an end. By choosing option B) you would be using your best friend as a means to an end. This is because you would be killing them in return for the end result - the lives of the 5 strangers. Also, Kant has two

perfect duties which should never be broken under any circumstances – these are to never lie and never kill. By choosing option B) you would be breaking Kants perfect duty to never kill as you would be responsible for flipping the switch and killing your best friend. Overall, a Kantian would choose option A) to kill the 5 strangers as this would mean you are not breaking any perfect duties, you are not using someone as a means to an end and it would be the best fit decision for a Kantian who is formulating the most moral decision.

Kantianism has a vast number of issues in its theory. It cannot be ignored that the Categorical imperative gives maxims set rules with absolutely no exceptions which means they are easy to follow, however we must highlight that the consequences of an action do matter; we cannot know the true intentions that somebody has when completing an action. For example, if you flip the switch by accident, killing your best friend, you will have the same consequences as somebody who flipped the switch on purpose with the intention to kill them. In argument, Immanuel Kant does state that the consequences of an action are not completely useless, however they are just irrelevant when making moral decisions from his perspective. Another feature is your duties; what if you have more than one? For example, if you are in a situation like the trolley problem and your duties are to never flip levers but always save more lives, what should you do? A main concern in Kantianism is that maxims can be difficult to extract from certain situations. We will look at this issue using Kants famous “lying to the murderer at the door” scenario. If a murderer comes to your door and asks you where your friend is – whom is inside your house – would the maxims be to “always tell the truth”, “never tell the truth” or “only tell lies when lives are at risk”? If you tell them, then the murderer would go inside your house and kill your friend. If you refuse to answer, then the murderer could just murder you anyway. By using more complex maxims such as “only tell lies when lives are at risk” then you would be using specific maxims which only apply to certain situations to get around the Categorical Imperative which would reduce the accuracy of your decision dramatically.

In conclusion, the trolley problem by Phillipa Foot is an astonishingly quality test to put Utilitarianism and Kantianism through to determine a realistic answer to the paradox. As much as Kants theory is considerate to everybody and creates equality, overall, the decision making is specific and unreliable and determining the morality of an action is made difficult. However, Bentham’s theory of using consequences to determine morality proves very well as it is in human nature to act in situations based on the consequences that an action poses. Overall, the best theory for the trolley problem, and the one with the best answer is Jeremy Bentham’s Utilitarianism – to flip the switch and kill your best friend. This is because he prioritises the consequences and happiness that an action produces which overall gives us a realistic and reasonable answer to the Trolley Problem.

Philosophy National 5 Resource Sheet			
Candidate Name		Scottish Candidate Number	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1967 british philippa foot ... issue description • Jeremy Bentham/consequential + Immanuel Kant/duty = answer 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approach:= Moral action = happiest one • GHP moral praiseworthiness... (more/less 😊) • Consequentialist, Hedonistic, equity. 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a=5,b=best friend • GHP, negativeKG > positiveKG B>A 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consequences: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Easy (2 options) - Calculation difficulty - Short vs long pleasures (best pal vs 5 strangers) • Tyranny of the majority ≠ equity 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deontological theory • Rightness = intentions/motives • Attaining morality = duty* *(∴morally right>feelings)(🏰) • Categorical imperative • Maxims (behavior): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Universal law formulation: mass applicable? ○ End in itself: end in themselves > means to an end ■ 🧑 = 🧑 = 🧑 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a/b • always/never ↓ ↓ ⊗ ⊕ A>B • B)= MTAE • Perfect duties: B = 🧠 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> + Categorical imperative : set rules + no exceptions = easy to follow - Consequences MATTER, intentions cannot be accurately known. *example *flipping switch = accidental vs purposely = same - Kant : consequences ≠ useless ... = irrelevant in morality - Duty: if 1<_ ...? – *Never flip/Always Save - Maxims: difficulty extracting. *example (lying/murderer/door) *always truth/never/only when lives risked - Tell them/refuse answer/specific maxims: ↻ → CI: accuracy 📏 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TTP: 🧠 • Kant: + Considerate & equal - unreliable, unrealistic, stubborn, hard to determine morality • Bentham: using consequences = good ∴ human nature to act on consequences. • Utilitarianism = 👑 ∴ prioritises consequences & happiness 			