

Candidate 3 evidence

Utilitarianism is a moral theory founded by a man called Jeremy Bentham which states that whatever action should bring the most happiness and least suffering is not only the morally correct thing to do but, it is actually or moral obligation to carry out such an action. In this essay I will be explaining utilitarianism, its core principles and methods and I will be looking at its strength and weaknesses to answer the question of if utilitarianism is practical in day to day life.

Utilitarianism has a central principle of which the whole theory is based upon, this is known as the Greatest Happiness Principle (GHP). The GHP is the belief that the moral worth of an action is determined exclusively by the amount of happiness and suffering that it brings in to the world. Utilitarianism is also a consequentialist theory, this means that when you are finding the moral worth of an action you should entirely ignore the actions intentions and base the morality fully on its consequences. Utilitarianism believes in two further principles. the equity principle is the first of these, it states that every humans pleasure is of equal value and worth. The second of these is the Hedonistic principle, this principle states that the only inherently good thing is happiness. Because humans actively seek out pleasure and avoid pain, we ought to conclude that pleasure and happiness are the only things that hold true moral worth and are the only truly good things. When creating utilitarianism, Jeremy Bentham created a way to quantify and calculate the moral worth of an action based on the happiness it brings; this is known as the Hedonic Calculus. The Hedonic Calculus uses seven criteria to determine the worth of an action, these criteria are Purity (freedom from pain), propinquity (the remoteness of the pleasure), Intensity (the strength of the pleasure), Fecundity (if it will lead to further pleasures), Duration (how long lasting the pleasure is), certainty (how likely the pleasure is to occur) and extent (the amount of people the pleasure reaches). Each of these criteria (except for extent) are given a rating from 1 to 5, these are then added up and multiplied by the number of people the happiness reaches (extent). An example of this in use would be making a decision between visiting your gran or seeing a football game. Your team may lose the football game meaning it isn't particularly certain, the pleasure of seeing your gran is far more likely, the football games pleasure is quite remote whereas visiting your gran is slightly less remote, the pleasure of a football game is likely more intense than that of seeing your gran, seeing your gran is far more likely to lead to further pleasures, seeing your gran would almost certainly last longer than a football game and so has a higher duration, the joy of the football game will only occur if your team wins and therefore its is uncertain and finally seeing a football game only extends to you whereas the extent of visiting your gran effects 2 people. The hedonic calculus would claim that it is your moral obligation to visit your grandmother instead of seeing the football. A utilitarian would believe the hedonic calculus to be practical because it offers a simple and intuitive way of quantifying happiness and therefore makes it far easier to tell what the morally correct course of action is in a situation. While Jeremy Bentham believed all types of pleasure were equal in value and therefore valued the quantity of happiness over the

quality, John Stuart Mills (one of Bentham's students) thought that quality of happiness should also be morally relevant than quantity and so, he came up with the idea of Higher and Lower pleasures to fix this quantity bias. Mills believed that there were such a thing as Higher pleasures, he defined these as pleasures that use logic and reasoning such as reading poetry or doing philosophy. Likewise he also believed in Lower Pleasure, he thought these to be animalistic pleasures such as eating, sleeping or sex. Mills claimed that we ought to hold higher pleasures in a higher regard than we do Lower pleasures due to their basis of logic and reasoning. After differentiating these pleasure Mills claimed there to be people who he deemed 'competent judges', he said that to be a competent judge one must have experienced both higher and lower pleasures. Mills believed that those who have experienced both types of pleasure would always chose higher pleasure over lower ones. A utilitarian would believe these Higher and Lower pleasures to be practical in day to day life as it removes the quantity bias that was present in Bentham's utilitarianism. This means that if everyone were to act in accordance with utilitarianism, more people would indulge in pleasures of the mind rather than those of the body meaning we would have a far more civilised society and is therefore practical.

Despite John Stuart Mills trying to fix such a clear problem of utilitarianism, he still left the theory with many clear and apparent flaws. One such flaw is that due to Bentham's Utilitarianism being so heavily weighted towards quantity of pleasure over the type of pleasure, it allows utilitarians to justify what would seem to most to be a horrific act. The Sadistic Guards analogy explains this flaw. It goes that if you had a group of guards in a prison who got immense joy from torturing, starving and killing their prisoners, so long as the pleasure they gain from this outweighs that of the displeasure felt by the prisoners it would be not only the morally correct thing but, in fact, their moral duty to carry out this torture. This makes utilitarianism impractical as so long as a large enough group of people want to do something, it is likely the hedonic calculus will conclude it is the correct thing to do. Ultimately by allowing people to justify any horrific act through quantity of pleasure, we surely have a collapse of society as we know it. Another flaw of utilitarianism is that often moral decisions require extremely quick and immediate action, you usually do not have enough time to use the hedonic calculus to determine the moral outcome of an action in the moment. An example of this is the trolley problem, this problem poses a situation in which there is a trolley about to kill 5 people and a switch which can change it on to a different track and only kill 1 person. This decision would have to be made very quickly and you'd likely not have time to use the calculus to enter mine every possible outcomes pleasures and therefore, it is impractical. A final reason Utilitarianism is impractical in day to day life is that it is incredibly difficult to determine the outcomes of an action. Because things often do not go to plan and other humans can be very difficult to predict, it may be difficult to tell exactly what will come of an action. Due to Utilitarianism's Consequentialist basis, you must use an action's outcomes to determine its worth however this is highly

impractical due to the unpredictable nature of the world making determining this worth extremely difficult.

In conclusion Utilitarianism is a moral philosophy based on the core ideas that whatever action brings the most happiness is the correct action, only the consequences of an action are morally relevant, all people's happiness is equal and that pleasure is the only inherently good thing. Utilitarianism has many reasons to be seen as practical such as its method of quantifying happiness and its prioritisation of logical and reason based pleasures. On the other hand it has many impracticalities such as its Bias towards quantity allowing for acts that are widely accepted as immoral to be justified, the lack of applicability in urgent situations and the difficulty of determining consequences. I believe that overall utilitarianism is not practical in day to day life due to it being a consequentialist theory. I believe this makes it impractical as the consequences of actions are nearly impossible to determine. I also believe it is impractical as I believe torture, murder and similar things are strictly immoral and utilitarianism clearly opposes this view.

Philosophy National 5 Resource Sheet		
Candidate Name		Scottish Candidate Number
Intro		
P1 - explain		
Calculus - Purity (freeness from pain), propinquity (remoteness), intensity, fecundity (further pleasures), duration, certainty (how probable is it), extent. Score from 1 to 5 for each		
Hedonistic- happiness only truly good thing		
Equity- everyone's pleasure equal		
Quantifies happiness - assigns happiness with certain values		
Link - Bentham's utilitarianism says all happiness is equal, JSM set out to fix		
JSM Higher Lower, competent judges- experienced higher and lower - would always choose higher, Removes quantity bias		
Higher - logic and reason pleasures (poetry, doing philosophy)		
Lower - animal pleasures (sex, eating, sleep)		
Utilitarian practical because - refines what makes moral correct, animal pleasure less valuable - apparent that intellectual pleasures are more valuable		
Jeremy thought all pleasures equal, JSM thought they weren't		
Example of both in use		
P2 criticisms		
Quantity bias allows horrible act justification - sadistic guards - why that's impractical, urgency of decisions - example, difficult to figure out consequences - why makes impractical		
Conclusion		
Briefly explain utilitarianism, restate strengths and weaknesses, give my view (impractical)		