

Candidate 4 evidence

Philosophy National 5 Resource Sheet			
Candidate Name		Scottish Candidate Number	
<p>“...it may rather be supposed that he is the driver of a runaway tram which he can only steer from one narrow track to another; five men are working on one track and one on the other; anyone on the track he enters is bound to be killed.”</p> <p><u>Bentham</u>: - hedonistic principle - groundbreaking equity - utility principle - <u>calculus</u> : intensity, duration, certainty, propinquity, fecundity, purity, extent - Hedons dolors - no perfect info : probability +: equity, adaptable -: calculation difficulty</p> <p><u>Kant</u>: - Motive - duty - Imperatives - “Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end.” +: easy use, ends criterion -: problematic rigorism —> (wrong?) Foot: Judge – trolley driver - “why we should say without hesitation that the driver should steer for the less occupied track, while most of us would be appalled that an innocent man could be framed.” - Positive / negative duties - Judge = negative for positive driver= negative + negative - <u>“let five die”</u> <u>“Killing one”</u> - Killing one Killing five - +: ...psychological, not absolute, not hard to make a decision</p>			

Philosophy Assignment

The Trolley Problem

The ethics thought experiment “The Trolley Problem” was introduced in 1978 by Philippa Foot in “The Problem of Abortion and the Doctrine of the Double Effect”. She states “...it may rather be supposed that he is the driver of a runaway tram which he can only steer from one narrow track to another; five men are working on one track and one on the other; anyone on the track he enters is bound to be killed.” The choice is between killing five or steering onto the other track and killing one, saving the five. Meta ethics experiments have shown that when placed next to the track, with the ability to turn the trolley, most people wouldn't turn it. However we must consider what is the right moral thing to do. The thought experiment is very important as it can highlight key differences and issues in different moral theories. It is also a genuine issue faced by for example, pilots, who must choose between crash landing their plane in a highly populated city, or on a less populated suburb. We can evaluate Jeremy Bentham's utilitarianism (consequence based ethics) and Immanuel Kant's deontology (duty based ethics) through ‘The Trolley Problem’. Philippa Foot's original contributions will also be evaluated.

Jeremy Bentham was the founder of utilitarianism. He believed it was human nature to seek maximum pleasure and minimum pain (this is called the hedonistic principle). Bentham came up with several groundbreaking ideas for the time such as the principle equality (everyone has an equal right to happiness). Other principles include the utility principle (the greatest good for the greatest number) and consequentialism (morality is dependent on the consequences of an action). Bentham came up with a system for deciding if an action was moral or not. It is called the Felicific Calculus, you must consider how much pleasure and how much pain your action will cause, but you must consider it in terms of seven categories; intensity, duration, certainty, propinquity (how soon the pleasure/pain will occur), fecundity (will the pleasure/pain produce more pleasure/pain), purity and extent. You consider the amount of pleasure or pain in each category and assign it an amount hedons (Bentham's unit of pleasure) or dolors (Bentham's unit for pain). If the overall hedons are more than the overall dolors then more pleasure than pain is produced and the action is moral. In terms of ‘The Trolley Problem’, we do not have the perfect knowledge of the future of the workmen so we cannot say for certain who will have the more positive effects (for example the one could have the cure for cancer and the five could be future murderers). So we must make a decision based on probability. We presume the five will produce more pleasure than the one. So Bentham would say it is moral to turn the trolley.

Jeremy Bentham made many contributions to ethics and society. The equity principle was a revolutionary idea and is still totally applicable in society today. The Felicific Calculus has the advantage of being adaptable to any situation (no matter how extreme) due to its separation from rules. However one of the most common criticisms is the difficulty in calculating consequences. As mentioned, we cannot have perfect knowledge of the future and must decide on probability rather than deciding based on certainty.

Immanuel Kant believed the essence of a moral decision was in the motive. If you relied on consequences you can't be sure of the person is acting solely out of good will or out of self-interest. So, Kant believed the only way to be sure an action was moral was if it was done out of duty, and no pleasure was taken in the action. If we take the example of the two mothers. One loves her child and takes great pleasure in raising them. The other (for whatever) dislikes having to raise their child but still does it. To Kant, only the second mother

can be acting moral as she is doing it because 'it's the right thing to do'. The first mother may be considered praiseworthy, but not moral. Kant also developed a system called the Categorical Imperative. It has three stages or imperative and the action must pass all stages to be moral. For the first stage you must: create a maxim (or principle of action), universalise it, then make it a law. The law must pass these questions. Is it a contradiction in conception? Is it a contradiction in the will? In other words, is it a logical law to have in society? Could you genuinely want this law in society? For the second imperative Kant states "Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end". In other words, you should never use a person as a way of achieving a goal. In 'The Trolley Problem' if you turn the trolley to do so to save the five, and in doing so you kill the one. Therefore you are using the one as a way of saving the five which fails the second imperative. Therefore, to Kant, it is your moral duty not to turn the trolley and hit the five.

Kant almost has created an antithesis to Bentham. His Categorical Imperative has the advantage of being easier to use than the Felicific Calculus. It works almost like a flow chart you could programme a computer to do. The ends in themselves citation is also an important idea when it comes to abolishing ideas like slavery. However, due to its reliance on rules, a big negative for Kant is 'problematic rigorism'. There are no expectation or bending the rules regardless of how extreme the situation is. This may lead people to do what feels intuitively wrong (like in the trolley problem, some feel it is wrong not to turn the trolley).

Philippa Foot first highlighted the trolley problem alongside the problem of the judge. The judge has a crowd of riots outside who vow to take "bloody revenge" on a section of the community, if the judge doesn't find a certain person guilty and execute them. However, the judge knows that the person is innocent. They have the choice to executing the one and saving several lives, or lawfully finding them innocent and having more evidence against a section of the community. Foot's question is "why we should say without hesitation that the driver should steer for the less occupied track, while most of us will be appalled that an innocent man could be framed." Foot concludes that it is to do with positive rights and duties and negative rights and duties. In the case of the judge, if they execute the innocent person, they would be doing a negative duty for a positive one, which most find morally wrong. Whereas the trolley driver faces a conflict of negative duties (the duty to save the five and the duty to save the one). The driver shouldn't be blamed for wanting to minimise the damage he does. Judith Jarvis Thompson put Foot's position in simpler terms "(i) killing one is worse than letting five die" and "(ii) killing five is worse than killing one"

Philippa Foot examines the problem coming from a more psychological angle rather than basing a system off motives or consequence. In doing this she avoids the problems thrown up by the other two: her statements are not rules and are not so absolute, meaning she avoids any problems of rigorism and remain adaptable to extreme situations and it isn't hard to make a decision on what to do.

In conclusion, Kant's notion of not using anyone is nice, but as shown by 'The trolley problem' it is not always practical and his theory is totally inflexible. Bentham gives what seems an intuitively correct answer, but due to its reliance on probability, it is not a complete system to follow. Philippa Foot has the best answer of the three. She doesn't rely on motive or consequence and although a strong system could be made of combining Kant and Bentham, her separation from them puts her above them. She provides statements that are hard to follow but still flexible. For these reasons, I believe Philippa Foot has the best answer of the three, and therefore it is morally right to turn the trolley and save the five.