

Utilitarianism

Stavros, David & Johan

The Principle of Utility

"By the Principle of Utility is meant that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency which it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question; or what is the same thing in other words, to promote or to oppose that happiness."

-- James Bentham

The Greatest Happiness Principle

"According to the Greatest Happiness Principle... the ultimate end, with reference to and for the sake of which all other things are desirable (whether we are considering our own good or that of other people), is an existence exempt as free as possible from pain, and as rich as possible in enjoyments."

-- John Stuart Mill

Revolutionary Contributions

- Moving away from the notion of "divine rules"
- ... as well as a "set of inflexible rules".
- The point of morality is seen as the happiness of beings in this world.
- Actions are permitted - or even required - to do whatever is necessary to promote that happiness.

Example 1: Euthanasia

- Permitted, as it provides an escape from the misery of a life in pain.
- As a stance it could also be adopted by a religious point of view if God was considered a benevolent creator.
- Laws should also have the same goal.

Example 2: Animals

- Animals are capable of experiencing pleasure and pain, therefore should be entitled moral concern.
- Utilitarianism has thus been extended to conclude that raising animals for meat production is immoral: the goods do not outbalance the evils.

Is Happiness the Only Thing that Matters?

- Hedonism
- Inherent value of concepts like friendship and artistic creativity is not acknowledged.
- Other 'flavors' of Utilitarianism focus on people's preferences instead, to overcome this weak spot.

Are Consequences All that Matter?

- Final consequences are only part of an action's effects.
- The means do not justify the ends.

Should Happiness of Everyone be Considered?

- Impractically impartial.
- No room for personal relationships and treatment.

Defending Utilitarianism

1. Fanciful examples do not matter.
2. The Principle of Utility is a guide for choosing Rules, not individual Acts.
3. "Common Sense" can't be trusted.

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