NOTES:

Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism as compared with Deontology

* Utilitarianism says the right action is the one that bring about the most overall happiness (over unhappiness). No other moral rule has universal validity.
* Deontology says that there are an absolute number of moral rules, eg “never kill” “never cheat” “never steal”

Utilitarianism focuses on happiness & consequences. Nothing else counts as a moral rule. It is OK to break other ‘rules’ if doing so creates more happiness.

Deontology says some things are morally wrong. There are standard moral rules that cannot be broken. Morality tells us to follow them even if more happiness is the consequence of breaking them.

Utilitarianism consists of three principles’

1. Consequentialism - Actions are to be judged right or wrong solely by virtue of their consequences.
2. Hedonism - In assessing consequences, the only thing that matters is the amount of happiness/unhappiness that is caused.
3. Equality principle - Each person’s happiness counts the same.

P1 P2 P3

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Sixers | 3 | 3 | 3 |
| Flyers | 2 | 2 | 6 |

Flyers game creates 10 units of happiness, Sixers game creates 9.

John Stuart Mill (1806-1873)

Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) - founder of modern day utilitarianism

Bentham simple view of pleasure - “Quantity being equal, pushpin is as good as poetry”

John Stuart Mill was taught at young age, Latin & Greek at 4, Math/Logic at 6, Political and Moral Philosophy at 7 and 8.

*Utilitarianism* (1861)

Mill on higher and lower pleasure

There are some pleasures that are distinctively human, intellectual, and mental. These pleasures are higher.

Other pleasures are more animal, bodily, and sensation. Mill considers these lower pleasures.

We end up having trouble making the distinction Mill wants us to make about higher and lower pleasures. Does not seem to be a qualitative difference between two experiences.

Higher Lower

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Action 1 | 7 | -240 |  |
| Action 2 | 0 | 0 |  |

Cannot make the distinction that Mill wants us to make. Will need to go with a simple view of pleasure, only quantitative.

Mill’s happiness proof

No reason can be given why the general happiness is desirable except that each person desires his own happiness

Audible - people hear it, Visible - people see it.

1. Each person desires his or her own happiness
2. If something is desired by someone, then it is desirable (for him or her)
3. Therefore, each person’s happiness is desirable (for him or her)
4. Therefore, the general happiness is desirable (for everyone)
5. Do desirable and visible (audible) work the same way?
6. How would an egoist attack this argument?
7. According to Mill, is it possible to desire something other than happiness? (paragraphs 4-8)

Valid.

G.E. Moore (*Principia Ethica*, 1903)

Attack on the second premise. Confused analogy with visible and audible.

Just because something is *capable* of being desired does not mean it is *desirable.*

1. Premise (2) is false. Mill is misled into accepting premise (2) because he thinks “desirable” works the same way “visible” does. It does not. “Visible” means “capable of being seen.” Hence the fact that something is seen proves that it is visible.

But “desirable” means not “capable of being desired” but “worth of being desired.” Hence the fact that something is desired does not prove that it is desirable.

Mill might be mislead with the visible analogy but the premise is still true. “If something is desired by someone then it is still desirable.”

Mill is referring to the factual claim.

1. At best, Mill has offered a proof of ethical egoism, not utilitarianism. For even if he can get to (3), Mill can go no further. There is no sound route from (3) which an egoist would accept to (4) which the utilitarian needs.

Mill can reply. First remove the brackets from the argument; modify the argument. If each person’s happiness is desirable then the general happiness is desirable.

1. Even if the proof succeeds, Mill has only shown that happiness is desirable, not that it is the *only* thing that is desirable.

We desire other things - Virtues, health, wealth, sleep, food, grades, safety, clothes, being clean, etc.

Mill can respond by saying all these things we desire are either a part of happiness or a way to happiness.

If there is a connection between desire and happiness, it is *not* that happiness is the only thing desirable. The connection is something else; if you get what you desire then you are happy. But this does not support what Mill needs; that happiness is the only thing desirable.

1. At best, Mill has succeeded in proving only hedonism and perhaps the equality principle. He does nothing to prove consequentialism, which many think is the core of utilitarianism.

Contemporary debate on utilitarianism

Utilitarianism is comprised of three principles.

1. Consequentialism - Actions are to be judged right or wrong solely by virtue of their consequences.
2. Hedonism - In assessing consequences, the only thing that matters is the amount of happiness/unhappiness that is caused.
3. Equality principle - Each person’s happiness counts the same.

Start by looking at attacks on: Consequentialism - Actions are to be judged right or wrong solely by virtue of their consequences.

* If anything else matters other than consequences than consequentialism must be false.

Attacks:

1. Justice - ex. Of throwing an innocent person in jail to prevent a riot. Utilitarianism says you should because this action has the better outcomes. But this runs counter to our ideal of justice.
2. Rights - ex. Peeping Tom that does not get caught. Utilitarianism says this action is OK because there is no negative consequences. But this is against our ideal of a right to privacy.
3. Backwards-looking reasons - ex promise breaking for a slight increase in happiness. Utilitarianism says this action is OK but there appears to be significance to things like ‘promises’ that utilitarianism cannot account for.

Ways utilitarianism can respond to the attacks

1. Deny utilitarianism really conflicts with our moral common sense.
   1. Typically throwing innocent people in jail does not produce the best outcome / Typically Peeping Tom’s will be caught.
   2. In these cases utilitarianism and moral common sense will not conflict.

Further attack - There is at least hypothetical situations where throwing an innocent person in jail will increase happiness or a Peeping Tom will not be caught. In these cases utilitarianism will run counter to our moral common sense.

1. Accept that Act-Utilitarianism conflicts with moral common sense, but change to Rule-Utilitarianism to avoid the conflict.
   1. Understand the distinction between Act-Utilitarianism and Rule-Utilitarianism.
      1. Rule-Utilitarianism - (two step, indirect theory). An act is right, if it is allowed by a set of rules conformity to which would maximally promote general happiness.
      2. Act-Utilitarianism - (one step, direct theory) - An act is right, if it maximally promotes general happiness.
   2. The Rule-Utilitarian would come up with rules such as … Rule 37 - Never bear false witness against the innocent…. Rule 55 - Never break promises.
      1. These rules are justified because conformity to them would typically maximize the general happiness.
      2. Now the Rule-Utilitarian would NOT conflict with moral common sense.
   3. Understand how Rule-Utilitarianism fails, collapses back onto Act-Utilitarianism.
      1. What if breaking one of the ‘rules’ would maximize happiness? (this forces the Rule-Utilitarian into a trilemma)
         1. Modify the rule \* can break if maximizes happiness.
         2. Can just break the rule
         3. Stick with the rule, even if following that rule does not maximize happiness.

Rule-Utilitarianism will collapse back onto Act-Utilitarianism

1. When utilitarianism and moral common sense conflict, utilitarianism wins out. Moral common sense is wrong.
   1. All values have a utilitarian basis
      1. We value things like “truth telling” because it causes happiness. We defend the opposite, lying, when causes happiness.
   2. Our reactions cannot be trusted in exceptional cases
      1. We condemn lies and injustice by instinct, they so often cause harm or pain that we instinctively say they must be wrong. But in exceptional cases they are increasing happiness.
   3. Focus on all the consequences
      1. Either 1 innocent person goes to jail or several innocent people are killed in a riot.

Attack on hedonism - Hedonism says that the only thing that matters is the amount of happiness/unhappiness that is caused. If something other than happiness/unhappiness is morally relevant than hedonism is false.

1. Friendship - ex. Friend talks about another behind their back, no unhappiness is caused because they never find out. Hedonist would say this is ok, however, it appears wrong because friendship is morally relevant no matter if there is no unhappiness.

Equality principle - Each person’s happiness counts the same.

1. Utilitarianism is too demanding. Demanding us to always give to others.

Utilitarian can respond in one of the three ways from earlier.

Universalism

Kantian Deontological Tradition (Universalism)

Focus on Ch. 8 in the Right Thing - Categorical Imperative

Immanuel Kant (1724- 1804)

Kantian Deontological Tradition (Compared with utilitarianism)

View about the nature of morality

* Moral requirements are requirements of reason
* Make a distinction between a hypothetical and a categorical imperative

Hypothetical imperative: Tells you to do something as a means to get something else you want. They apply to you only if you want that further thing

Categorical imperative: Tells you to do something regardless of what else you want. It applies to all rational beings.

Nature of morality: Morality consists of categorical imperatives

* The concept of a moral requirement is the concept of a categorical imperative
* There are genuine categorical imperatives

Four formulation:

**Universal Law Formulation** - first formulation of The Categorical Imperative

* Act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law
* Act as though the maxim of your action were by your will to become a universal law of nature

Maxim - The principle on which you act. It explains what you take yourself to be doing and the circumstances in which you take yourself to be doing it.

Will - The force of your action. To will something to be the case is to commit yourself to trying to bring that thing about, to the extent that you can do so.

Universal law - Change the maxim from first person singular to everyone - “I” to “everybody”

Contradiction in the will - Your will contradicts if you try to will something impossible. Try to will that no one stands up but you stand up.

Law test

To see if a prospective action is morally permissible (i) identify the maxim, (ii) universalize the maxim, (iii) try willing the universalized maxim. If you can will the universalized maxim without it contradicting itself, the action is OK. If you cannot the action is wrong.

Kant gives four examples to help understand this universal law formulation.

1. Loan example - I will ask to borrow money, promise to pay it back, but have no intention of paying it back.
   1. What would it be like if everyone asked for money, promised to pay it back, but had no intention?
   2. Kant believes this maxim cannot become a universal law, it would be impossible for everyone to act in this way at the same time.
2. Charity - A man can help others in need but decides not to. If this becomes a universal law, then this man would not get the help he needs if he is in that position.
   1. What about a man that does not need help later in life?
   2. This is possible, but all Kant needs is this man to will that he gets help, even if he never needs it.
   3. Even someone that will not accept help from others only needs to will the help one time for the contradiction.
3. Suicide - For love of myself I will shorten my life when a longer duration threatens more evil than satisfaction. Kant thinks this contradicts because self-love is telling me to take my life and also continue living at the same time.
   1. Unclear how suicide contradicts with self-love. Does not seem like self-loves only job is to continue living at all costs.
   2. Even assuming suicide and self-love contradict, there could be other reasons to take your life.
   3. Kant does not need universalization principle to generate this contradiction.
4. Talents - Instead of developing talents would prefer to indulge in simple pleasures. Rational beings necessarily will that faculties be developed, but this contradicts with this man willing faculties not being developed.
   1. Where does Kant get, rational beings will talents to be developed?
   2. No need to universalize to generate contradiction.

Kant uses 4 examples because there are 4 categories of duty.

1. Duty to self
2. duty to others
3. stricter duties – you absolutely have to do it at all times
4. broader duties – you have some obligation, but not needed at all times

When you think about the violation of a stricter duty, it is an impossibility, you cannot do it. You can imagine the violation of a broader duty but you cannot will it.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Duty to self | Duty to others |
| Strict | Suicide | Loan (lie) |
| Broad | Talents | Charity |

**Second formulation of the Categorical Imperative**

Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as a means only.

People (rational beings) occupy a special place in the world. They have intrinsic moral worth, that gives them value above all. Other things have value in so far as they serve human purposes.

1. People have desires, things that satisfy those desires can be valuable. Things are only valuable as they promote human ends

2. People have intrinsic worth. They are rational agents. Moral goodness can only come from a good will. You should act from a sense of duty to your goodwill.

Cannot use people to get something you desire. Must treat people ‘as and end and never as a means only’.

Punishment- Involves harm (fine, prison, capital)

Typical benefits for punishment

1. Comforts the victim
2. Takes criminal off the street
3. Deters future would be criminals
4. Rehabilitates the criminal (benefit to society)

Kant is against these (utilitarian) reasons for punishment. They fail the second formulation of the Categorical Imperative.

Kant - Punish because a crime was committed. And the punishment needs to fit the crime

His own evil deed draws the punishment upon himself

Defend Kant

* The Categorical Imperative is binding for all rational beings. Not accepting it would be immoral and irrational.
* This judgment is backed up by reason and if you accept it you must accept it at all times.
* People cannot regard themselves as superior or special from a moral point of view.

How to understand Kant in comparison with utilitarianism and standard deontology

**Kant is not a utilitarian!**

**Kant is not standard deontologist either**

**Kant is not a Rule-utilitarian either.** His test requires us to universalize then look for contradictions in the will, not look for best consequences and maximize happiness.

**Kant is not a deontologist either.** The CI appears to generate ‘rules’ but he is not a deontologist. Because:

1. his test is a test for maxims not actions, so does not rule out any type of action
2. his view is monistic. He offers a single test rather than a plurality of different absolute moral rules.

Problem cases for the Universalization test

* Innocent non-universalizable maxim
* Guilty universalizable maxim

Seems like something might be missing. The universal law test appears to be a portion of morality but not the entire thing.

Henry Sidgwick (utilitarian)- there is a problem with thinking you can get all of morality out of a universal law test. It does show some problems with people making exceptions for themselves. But seems like it is missing consequences and happiness.

Consuming meat - Tastes good, tradition,

Not consuming meat - Does not taste good, concern for animals, health