


Psychological Aspects of Social Issues

Chapter 5
Consequentialist Theories:
Maximize the Good


1



Outline/Overview

- o Ethical egoism
 - Thomas Hobbes
 - Moral rules vs. moral ideals
- o Utilitarianism
 - Bentham & Mill
 - Act & Rule Utilitarianism
 - Evaluation
- o Question for discussion

5



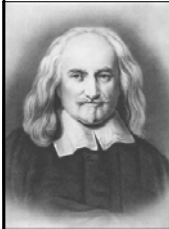
Ethical egoism

- o Right action maximally advances self interests.
- o Everyone makes their own welfare their primary concern.
- o Two forms of ethical egoism
 - Act egoism – determine right action by applying egoistic principle
 - Rule egoism – consider the “rule” that would lead to maximum benefit
- o What is our self-interest - define?

6



Thomas Hobbes – egoist



7

- o 6 basic elements of human condition
 1. concerned with their own well-being
 2. want to avoid death
 3. concerned with what others think of them
 4. care about present and future well-being
 5. desires often conflicts with another's satisfaction
 6. roughly equal in physical abilities



Hobbes (cont.)

8

- o Six elements lead to a situation without industry, culture, knowledge, arts, & continual fear and danger of violent death
 - Life is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, & short
- o Paradox of egoism –unrestrained pursuit of self-interest = state of affairs contrary to self-interest.
- o Moral side constraints
 - basic moral prohibitions



Moral rules vs. moral ideals and the egoist



9

- o Bernard Gert
- o Rules include prohibitions of actions, e.g., killing, causing pain, cheating, etc.
- o Ideals include positive obligations such as preventing killing, preventing the causing of pain, and so on
 - positive obligations associated w/ moral rules
- o Side-constrained egoist accepts the prohibitions included in the moral rules.
- o Does not accept the moral ideals as imposing obligations.



Psychological egoism

- We “look out for number one”
- Even seemingly altruistic acts performed for the satisfaction that results.
- Evaluate ethical egoism
 - consistency with considered moral judgments is often not met.
 - evil acts should be broadly prohibited
 - best serve self by secretly breaking rules
 - doesn't treat equals equally
 - contradictory advice or actions.
- Moral side constraints can help overcome many of the problems.

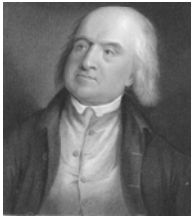
10



Utilitarianism

- One of the most influential moral theories in history.

Jeremy Bentham



John Stuart Mill



13



Bentham's 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. ...

By utility is meant that property in any object whereby it tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness, (all this in the present case comes to the same thing) or (what comes again to the same thing) to prevent the happening of mischief, pain, evil, or unhappiness to the party whose interest is considered.

14



Utilitarianism (cont.)

- Mill - "greatest happiness principle"
- Consequentialist theory
- Contrasted with egoist theories:
focus changes in terms of whose good
- Fair and impartial
 - requires that we function as "a disinterested and benevolent spectator."

15



Utilitarianism (cont.)

- Which path yields the most happiness? Bentham – "hedonic calculus"
- Bentham - various actions generate different amounts of happiness.
- Mill - pleasures can vary by both quantity and quality
 - higher and lower pleasures.
 - difference between these, examples?
- Bentham - who acquires the greatest quantity of pleasure is closest to an ideal
- Mill - "better to be a human being dissatisfied than a satisfied pig." – what does he mean?

16



Act and Rule Utilitarianism

- Act utilitarianism – judge each action by the consequences produced.
- Rule utilitarianism – consider what rule act might fall under then whether the rule would maximize utility if everyone followed it.
- "No rest problem"
- Useful theory: 1. Consequences matter; 2. Impartiality; & 3. Beneficence
- Chapter 2 of Utilitarianism

17



Discussion question

- o #10, pg 94 in text
- o Suppose you had to decide which one of a dozen dying patients should receive a lifesaving drug, knowing that there was only enough of the medicine for one person. Would you feel comfortable making the decision as an act utilitarian would? Why or why not?
- o What factors would you consider in deciding who gets the drug?

18
