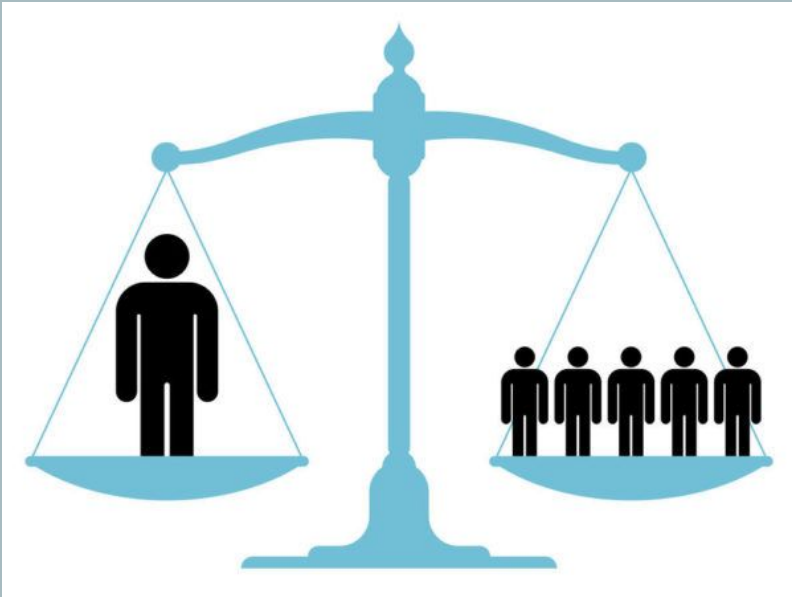


Utilitarianism

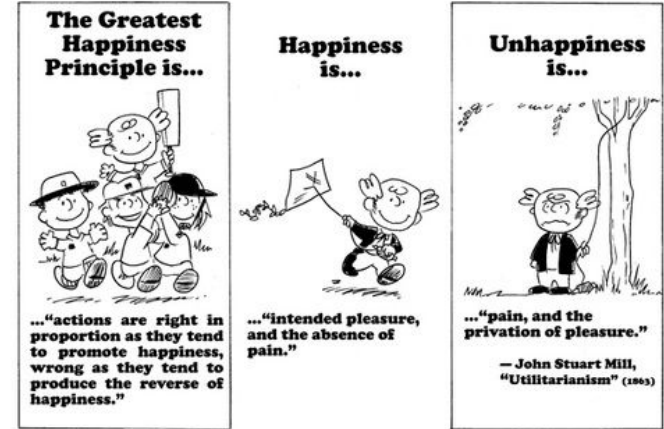
Chapter 8

Team 1 - Zeeva Chaver, Shivani Varma,
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Section 8.1 – What is Utilitarianism?

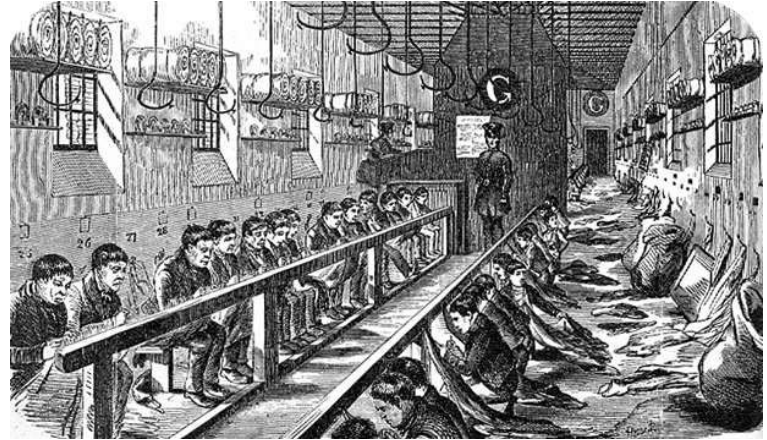
- Utilitarianism is centered around general happiness
- Its fundamental doctrine is
 - “That action is best, which procures the greatest happiness.” → actions are right if they maximize overall happiness
 - This is known as the Greatest Happiness Principle (GHP)



- Utilitarianism gives “pride of place to happiness”
- Moral worth is judged by the **success with which we bring about happiness**
- Unlike Kant:
 - Kant emphasizes *deserving* happiness, utilitarianism emphasizes *producing* happiness

The Workhouse Example

- Utilitarians were behind the workhouse replacing old Elizabethan Law (were given financial assistance)
- Poor & unemployed people were compelled to move into workhouses where food, lodging, and employment were provided “under one roof.”
- They may have served “utility” by:
 - Taking people off of streets
 - Putting financial limits on welfare costs
- But the poor (the people actually affected) feared the misery and degradation caused by workhouses



**“Concerned with usefulness
alone, without regard to
beauty or pleasantness”**

Chambers Dictionary

Where did Utilitarianism Come From?

The Term “Utilitarianism”

- Became prominent in the early 19th century
- Originally associated with English social reformers
- Derived from the word **utility** meaning usefulness
- These reformers judged institutions mainly by their practicality and usefulness, rather than their religious significance or traditional function

The reformers were making changes they believed were “practical” or “efficient” for society but the people most affected by those changes (especially the poor) often did not agree and were harmed by them.

E.g. Schools replacing art and music with more math and test prep. Administrators argue this is ‘useful’ as it leads to better test scores, better funding, stronger reputation, but some students lose their creative outlets, feel less engaged, etc.

If removing art improves test scores and school funding, but reduces students’ creativity and enjoyment, is it still the more ‘useful’ policy?

What decision makers count as useful may not align with the lived experience of those affected → the issue is who defines usefulness and what factors are included in that definition

Section 8.2 – The Definition of Utility



- Today's definition:
 - the state of being useful, profitable, or beneficial
- Jeremy Bentham
 - The founder of Utilitarianism as a moral theory
- He defined utility as...

*“that property in any object, whereby it tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, good or happiness... or... to prevent... pain, evil, or unhappiness.
(Bentham, 1789, 1960: 126)”*

- “The good life” is one where the world has maximized pleasure
- Use “Hedonic Calculus” to measure different kinds of pleasure and pain to make decisions

Utility Continued



- Mill took the previous definition and refined it further

“Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle . . . that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness.” (Mill, 1871, 1998: 55)

- Utility promotes the greatest happiness which is defined as pleasure
- Combined from chapter 4 where he believed in different qualities of pleasure
 - Smaller quantity of higher pleasure > bigger quantity of lower pleasure

Is Net Pleasure Always Good?

TLC - sacrificing a few people's reputations for the happiness of thousands more viewers

- Bentham would approve, net positive
- Mill would believe there could be better pleasures
- “Swinish pleasures” vs Socrates philosophical endeavors

Is net pleasure always a good thing?



Overview

6.5/10 · [IMDb](#)

80% liked this TV show

Google users



Long-distance relationships have challenges that are sometimes difficult to overcome but consider if the distance traveled was halfway around the world and a couple had just 90 days to decide whether the courtship should conclude with marriage. That's the situation facing the men and women profiled ... [MORE](#) ▾

No. of episodes: 153 (list of episodes)

No. of seasons: 11

Network: [TLC](#)

First episode date: January 12, 2014 (USA)

Also known as: 90 Days to Wed

[Feedback](#)

Section 8.3: Definitions

- **Altruism:** the doctrine that others' interests should be put before your own interests (Ch. 8)
- **Egoism:** the doctrine that says practical reasons (to do things) have to be grounded in what matters to you (Ch. 3)
 - Rejection of altruism
- **Hedonism:** doctrine that the best kind of life you can lead has as much pleasure and as little pain as possible (Ch. 4)
 - Pleasure is the only natural good
- **Egotism:** gives pride of place to your own welfare (Ch. 8)
 - Selfishness: character trait that makes you seek and promote your own comfort and satisfaction before that of anybody else (Ch. 3)
- **Utilitarianism:** your moral worth is determined by how successfully you bring happiness about (Ch. 8)

Utilitarianism ≠ Egotism

- Bentham and Mill's emphasis on pleasure doesn't imply an egotistical attitude to life
 - Everyone's welfare should be treated as equal, ensuring that utilitarianism is not an egotistical doctrine
 - Doesn't attribute special value to the pleasure or happiness of the individual performing an action
- Bentham says: when applying the GHP, each person counts equally and no one counts for more than another
 - Your own pleasures/pains shouldn't be regarded as more important than another's when it comes to deciding what's right/wrong for you or anyone to do
 - Your own pleasures/pains and those of others are exactly on par

Utilitarianism ≠ Altruism

- Western morality has been influenced by Christianity, which often regards denying the self (of some desire) as a virtue
 - So many people think that altruism is central to morality
- Utilitarianism allows us to be concerned with our own welfare, though not to the exclusion of others
- **Generalized benevolence** (principle of Utilitarianism): happiness is what matters in the abstract
 - Your own happiness is as important as anyone else's, but it isn't more important

Prosocial Behaviors:

Generalized benevolence studied in psychology

- Prosocial: denoting or exhibiting behavior that benefits 1+ other people (APA Dictionary of Psychology)
- Antisocial: denoting or exhibiting behavior that sharply deviates from social norms and also violates other people's rights (APA Dictionary of Psychology)
- Prosocial behaviors include intentional actions that benefit others rather than those that benefit oneself (Dr. Narissra M. Punyanunt-Carter, via EBSCO)
 - E.g. donating, cooperating, assisting, and volunteering
 - Oftentimes, the behavior will include some risk or personal expense (e.g. giving up your place in line for someone else)
- Psychologists link prosocial behavior with altruism → though find that actions can be performed with the expectation of reciprocity at a later date

Prosocial Behaviors

5 factors influence whether someone will exhibit prosocial behavior (Dr. Punyanunt-Carter):

1. The benefactor must acknowledge that something uncommon is occurring
2. The benefactor must determine if the occurrence is urgent
3. After acknowledging the crisis, the person must resolve whether to offer assistance
4. The benefactor determines if they have the capacity to assist the recipient
5. The benefactor makes the final decision to help

Exhibiting prosocial behaviors is bolstered by:

- Social Learning Theory: individuals learn behaviors through the observation of others (Jennifer Kretchmar via [EBSCO](#))
- Operant conditioning: behaviors are shaped and learned through the (punishing or reinforcing) consequences they produce (Wylene Rholetter via [EBSCO](#))

Prosocial Behaviors

- The Prosocial Tendencies Measure (PTM) was developed to quantify the six distinct forms of prosocial behaviors that are suggested by theory and research:
 - Public: intended to benefit others, but performed in front of an audience, often to gain social approval or recognition
 - Anonymous: performed without the knowledge of others or without expecting recognition
 - Compliant: occur in response to a direct request or obligation
 - Altruistic: voluntary, aren't motivated by external rewards or recognition, focusing on the welfare of others
 - Emotional: carried out in situations that are emotionally charged or provocative
 - Dire: in emergency or crisis situations

Section 8.4 – Act Utilitarianism

- Utilitarianism (Bentham) (“**Act**”) - that action is best, which leads to the **greatest happiness of the greatest number**
 - This could **condone some questionable actions**
 - Eg 1: children laughing at “peculiar movements of handicapped people”(pg 101)
 - We teach them not to because of the hurt it causes
 - POV: general happiness: we could encourage their behavior
 - Handicapped = minority, according to GHP **pain of minority is outweighed by pleasure of majority**
 - Eg 2: Vagrant sacrificed for spare parts
 - murder of innocent who may not be contributing to common good

Section 8.4 – Rule Utilitarianism

- Utilitarianism (“**Rule**”) - act in accordance with the **rules of conduct** that are most conducive to the **greatest happiness**
 - Abhorrent action may contribute more to the general happiness
 - But the abhorrence comes from the fact that:
 - The action is **contrary to a rule** that would be most conducive to the greatest happiness
 - Eg: we condemn the willful murder of an innocent
 - Reason: Utilitarianism
 - Absence of prohibition/condemnation of the action -> increase fear, pain, and loss among humans -> creates unhappiness

Section 8.4 – Quote By Mill

“**Justice** is a name for certain **moral requirements**, which, regarded collectively, stand higher in the scale of **social utility**, and are therefore of more **paramount obligation**, than any others; though particular cases may occur in which some other social duty is so important, as to overrule any one of the general maxims of justice.”

- (Mill, 1871, 1998: 106)

- (Mill) -> Justice is important because of its consequences (is not absolute)
- In contrast with previous chapter (Kant) (duty-based)
 - Justice (moral-rules) come from the **categorical imperative**
 - Action is “right” if it can be **universalized**
 - Duties are absolute and cannot be overridden

Eg: Lying to save your friend from a murder
Lying is wrong because it breaks trust

- Mill: lying saves a life -> produces more happiness than saying truth -> lying is justified
- Kant: if everyone lied trust would collapse -> moral duties are absolute -> you must not lie

Consensus: 2.3.1- From Big Bang to First Cause

- Starting at the origin of the universe: After the Big Bang, hydrogen and helium atoms form
- Hydrogen: fundamental “building block” of the universe, all later complexities form from it
- *Which is primary: existence (hydrogen existing) or essence (what it is and its potential nature)?*
- **Why start with the Big Bang to introduce First Cause?**
 - Beginning of physical causation
 - The question of why the Big Bang even occurred has never been answered



The Problems of Consensus: 2.3. 2– First Cause

- First Cause
 - Ultimate reality that starts everything
- Ibn Sina
 - First Cause: “essence necessitates existence” → essence and existence collapse into oneness
 - Beyond First Cause, essence takes priority
- Spinoza
 - Everything is in God, and nothing can be created outside of God
 - Only one true essence
- Professor Sadegh Angha
 - Creation defined as “motion from motion in motion” [The Epic of Life, p. 74]

motion can be interpreted as a dynamic energy behind existence
motion is the essence: giving and unlimited, but not measurable or analyzable

‘Motion’

- An analogy of a river
 - River is constantly flowing, never the same water
 - Never made up of the same contents physically
 - Still dynamic and the identity of a river is described through its movement, not matter
- **Question for Audience:** What comes to mind when you think about the word ‘essence’? Is it different from existence?

