

CSE 301 Essay: Ethical Frameworks

I would choose to use Act Utilitarianism for my personal decision-making. In order to be specific, we must recognize that there are two different kinds of Utilitarianism. One is Act Utilitarianism and the other is Rule Utilitarianism. In Act Utilitarianism, decisions are made with the basic notion that an action could be classified as good, when it's net effect on the overall affected beings, is to produce more happiness than un-happiness. Act Utilitarianism is practical and focuses on the happiness of all beings concerned in the decision making process. It is also comprehensive since it allows the decision maker to take all possible outcomes into consideration.

There are some disadvantages of Act Utilitarianism. One of which is that when analyzing the positive and negative effects of a decision, we do not know where to stop. There is no well-defined and distinct limit. Hence, it is up to the decision maker to know where to draw the line. The Butterfly Effect in Chaos Theory could be an example for this disadvantage. "Does the flap of a butterfly's wings in Brazil set off a tornado in Texas?" "(Edward Lorenz, MIT).The purpose of Lorenz's provocative question was to illustrate the idea that because of the sensitivity of complex dynamical systems, like the economy, or the world, outcomes are unpredictable. "This idea became the basis for a branch of mathematics known as *chaos theory*, which has been applied in countless scenarios since its introduction"(Jamie L. Vernon, americanscientist.org). According to chaos theory, even the smallest change could cause a big reaction. Therefore since we cannot take into account all of the possible effects of an action, we can never truly come to a definite answer.

Another disadvantage of Act Utilitarianism is that it is time consuming. It is impractical to invest so much time to spend taking all possible effects into consideration, when making every moral decision. A way out of this is the concept

of “rule of thumb”, where despite a decision being obvious that it is the right thing to do, a decision maker reserves the right to override this rule and act against it should circumstances warrant it.

Act Utilitarianism does not cover the concept of promise, or a decision made because of duty. Since it is more of a quantitative study of the effects of a decision, it recommends the decision with the greater positive effects, ignoring a promise made or a duty to the affected being. “We cannot predict with certainty the consequences of an action. Act utilitarianism is susceptible to the problem of moral luck.” (Michael J. Quinn, 2017, p. 76). It is the concept where an action could sometimes cause an unforeseen reaction, that are not fully under the control of the moral agent.

Rule utilitarianism compels us to adopt those moral rules that, if followed by everyone, lead to the greatest increase in total happiness over all affected parties. Hence a rule utilitarian applies the principle of utility to moral rules, while an act utilitarian applies the principle of utility to individual moral actions.

When I graduated high school, I had two decisions to make. Since I was born and raised in India, the decisions were: What course do I apply for? And, where do I go to for college? There were three common answers for the standard Indian student. You could either become a doctor, an engineer, or study Business. All of the three choices were generally accepted by both family and the society. Apart from these options, there was also the option of Liberal Arts, which was a choice not many make.

I decided to become a Computer Scientist because I took into account my interest in the subject, the vast scope the field has in the future and the financial security it provides after I graduate. I would also make my family very content, since I chose a course, which shows great promise in the future. The exposure and contacts I would have gotten, had I chosen to study in India would be no match to

the values that I have gained here. All of these were positive effects of my decision. The negative effects came into play when I decided to come to America. The torment of living alone, in a new society, away from the familiarity of family and friends all had a negative effect.

"Act Utilitarianism argues that we should always choose our actions based on what will cause the greatest amount of happiness." (philosophyterms.com). Since the pros outnumbered the cons of coming to America for college to study Computer Science, I believe that I have made the right choice since it gave my family and me the greatest amount of happiness, as stated above. Therefore, it was the right decision according to Act Utilitarianism.

I believe that I made the right decision with respect to Virtue Ethics, since : "Virtue ethics is person rather than action based: it looks at the virtue or moral character of the person carrying out an action, rather than at ethical duties and rules, or the consequences of particular actions." (bbc.co.uk) . Since I am adventurous and outgoing, I believe that the decision to come to America, a place that had a very different culture and society than the one I was used to at home, appealed to my adventurous virtue, and was the right decision. Due to the reading habit introduced to me when I was young, I have developed an affinity for gaining knowledge. Therefore, a challenging subject like Computer Science would appeal to my virtue.

"Rule Utilitarianism argues that we should figure out what sort of behaviour *usually* causes happiness, and turn it into a set of rules." (philosophyterms.com). Since I had decided to study Computer Science in America, I satisfied both my family and the society in India. As mentioned above, a career in Engineering, when pursued by their children, would make the parents very happy. Therefore, I believe that I made the right decision with respect to Rule Utilitarianism

References

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