

Ethics & Social Responsibility Weeks 2 & 3

Gerome Goh

Teleological and Deontological Theories

▶ TELEOLOGICAL

- ▶ “Consequentialist”
- ▶ Making decisions based on the results/consequences
- ▶ Comes from the Greek word *telos* which means end, goal, purpose
- ▶ Eg Utilitarianism, ethical egoism

▶ DEONTOLOGICAL

- ▶ “Principles-based”
- ▶ Making decisions based on moral rules, or duties; consequences are not relevant
- ▶ Comes from the Greek word *deon* which means duty
- ▶ Eg Kantian ethics

Theories Covered

Utilitarianism

Kantian theory

Ethical egoism

Theories of Justice

- Rawl's justice as fairness
- Robert Nozick's Libertarianism
- Aristotelian conception

Aristotle's virtue ethics

Ethics of care

Confucianism

Utilitarianism



Utilitarianism

Based on consequences and outcomes or perceived/predicted likely consequences

An action is right and ought to be performed insofar as it leads to overall happiness or benefits, as opposed to pain or costs

Bentham's Utilitarianism

Jeremy Bentham (regarded as the founder of modern utilitarianism)

- ▶ Nature has placed mankind under the governance of 2 sovereign masters: Pain (intrinsically evil) and Pleasure (intrinsically good)
 - ▶ May be caused by various kinds of sensations, thoughts, emotions, memories, expectations and associations
- ▶ Utility is the ability to produce pleasure, happiness, good and prevent pain and evil
- ▶ The rightness of the action is determined by its utility
- ▶ Essentially a hedonistic calculus to determine the right action based on the happiness value of the particular action
- ▶ The only morally right principle of action for every situation is to promote the greatest happiness of the greatest number (Everyone's happiness counts equally)
- ▶ Felicific Calculus (mathematical calculation): Happiness value can be determined by the intensity, duration, remoteness, repeatability, extent of the pleasure and the certainty to which the pleasure will materialise

Mill's Utilitarianism

- ▶ John Stuart Mills - self-declared reformist of utilitarianism
- ▶ Modified Bentham's thesis by admitting to and emphasising the qualitative aspect of pleasure
 - ▶ Believed there was a need to distinguish between higher and lower pleasures
 - ▶ A higher pleasure is one which cannot be exchanged for any amount of the lower pleasure and vice versa
 - ▶ The greater capacity to appreciate higher pleasures is connected to a person's sense of dignity and influence of his environment (Better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied)
 - ▶ To be decided by persons who have experience or knowledge of both pleasures
 - ▶ Pleasures that go with the exercise of intellectual capacities are higher and better than sensuous pleasures
- ▶ One is bound to promote general happiness over individual happiness if not there will be sanctions (conscience, remorse, displeasure from others etc)

Mill's Utilitarianism

- ▶ Actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness
- ▶ “Good” is equated with happiness and he believes that happiness is an end in itself
- ▶ Happiness is that enjoyed by an aggregate of persons (community or larger society)
- ▶ Greatest Happiness Principle
 - ▶ Overall happiness based on pleasures and pains in a community or the larger society
 - ▶ To apply this principle, the levels of pleasures and pains would have to be assessed and determined
 - ▶ Moral actor should act as a “disinterested and benevolent spectator”
 - ▶ Moral actor should give equal weight to the pleasures and pain experienced by himself/herself as compared to those of the affected persons in the community

Act and Rule Utilitarianism

- ▶ Act utilitarianism
 - ▶ Argues that the morality of any action is dependent upon its consequences
 - ▶ The most moral action is the one which leads to the best consequences
 - ▶ Viewed from the immediate perspective
 - ▶ However, focusing only on the consequences of the action in question can lead people to commit outrageous actions when they foresee good consequences
- ▶ Rule utilitarianism
 - ▶ Imagine that an action would formulate a general rule
 - ▶ If the following of such a rule by everyone would result in bad consequences, it should be avoided even if it would lead to good consequences in this one instance
 - ▶ Somewhat similar to Kantian categorical imperative
 - ▶ Similarly, even if in this instance, there may be bad consequences but the overall situation is that there will be more good than bad by following these rules, then one ought to follow the general rule

Difficulties with Utilitarianism

- ▶ Lack of sufficient information to predict the likelihood of a particular event happening
- ▶ Difficulty of quantifying happiness, aesthetic values and human attributes (love and friendship)
- ▶ Weighing short-term v long-term benefits/costs (interests of future generations)
- ▶ Does not take into account justice (fairness in distribution)
- ▶ Ignores minority interests, too focused on the overall welfare produced
- ▶ Difficulty of making interpersonal comparisons of utility
 - ▶ Do not know preference of other members of the community
 - ▶ Do not know the strengths of those preferences
 - ▶ Do not know the circumstances and needs of that particular actor (beggar v aristocratic royalty)

Kantian



Kantian ethics (Immanuel Kant)

- ▶ Deontological (based on moral duties)
 - ▶ Sought to explain why people should bother to be good from a secular perspective
- ▶ Pure reason (reason *a priori* without resort to empirical or sensory facts)
- ▶ Each person possess autonomy and freedom to act
- ▶ A rational person possesses understanding and seeks to exercise his or her will based on reason, free from impulses, inclinations and senses
- ▶ Requires a person to act from a moral duty instead of acting based on inclinations or interests
- ▶ Good Will - an end in itself

Kantian ethics (Immanuel Kant)

- ▶ The main rules Kant argued for are categorical imperatives - no exceptions
 - ▶ Principle of Universality - the ethical maxim applicable to oneself should be universally applicable
 - ▶ if everyone does the same thing you are proposing to do, how would it be?
 - ▶ Principle of Humanity - prohibits the use of persons **solely as a means to an end**
 - ▶ Example: company downsizing due only to concern with profits with no threat to company's survival is likely to violate this

Kantian ethics (Immanuel Kant)

- ▶ Specific duties which have to be derived from categorical imperatives
 - ▶ No suicide - contrary to self-love and preservation of life, using one's person as a means only
 - ▶ No false promises - would result in distrust amongst persons and the treatment of the lender as a means only
 - ▶ To develop one's talents and capacities - advancing the ends of humanity as an end in itself
 - ▶ To show benevolence towards others - advances the ends of others in a positive manner (love and sympathy, reciprocity)
- ▶ How to test a maxim with the Categorical Imperatives?
 - ▶ If the maxim that allows stealing is accepted, the concept and rights to property would not exist. This is because nothing could be owned by anyone. The universalised maxim that stealing should be allowed would be self-contradictory. Hence, stealing is unethical.
 - ▶ If A steals from person B, A is not respecting the principle of humanity because A is using B (by deceiving him) as a means to his end (of obtaining a certain possession).
- ▶ When someone freely chooses to do the right thing because it is the right thing to do, their action adds value to the world

Difficulties with Kantian ethics (Immanuel Kant)

- ▶ Does not prescribe what one should do in a situation but is a principle of non-contradiction
- ▶ People are not always rational
- ▶ Difficulty in resolving conflicts between duties
- ▶ Extremity
 - ▶ If X flees from a murderer and seeks refuge in Y's home and tells Y not to divulge his whereabouts, Kant would argue that Y would be acting unethically if Y lied to the murderer. This is notwithstanding that X will likely be killed
- ▶ First mover disadvantage
 - ▶ If a CEO has to pay a bribe in an industry where bribes is necessary in order to obtain a contract, Kant would require that he refuse to pay the bribe. However, if everyone else pays bribes, this CEO will likely lose out
- ▶ Overlooks the personal viewpoint and actual contextual specifics in ethical decision-making embodied in the ethics of care

Ethical Egoism



Ethical egoism

- ▶ Theory that an action is right to the extent that it is based on self-interest
- ▶ Each individual's pursuit of his or her self-interest will produce, via the invisible hand, overall benefits for the economy
 - ▶ Trading one good for another is based on the notion of comparative advantage
 - ▶ Pareto efficiency - voluntary trading allows parties to be better off
 - ▶ Some utilitarian consideration - ultimately benefits society
 - ▶ However, it may not always be in the best interest for you to pursue your self-interest without regard for others
- ▶ Sacrificing one own's interest for the good of others denies the fundamental value of one's own life to oneself
 - ▶ No one has any right to demand that another person makes sacrifices for the sake of that person
 - ▶ However, it is not necessarily the case that the two goals must be opposed

Ethical egoism

- ▶ Prisoner's dilemma
- ▶ You and a comrade (X) are held in prison and asked to confess
- ▶ The terms of the deal are as follows:
 - ▶ If you confess and X doesn't, you get 6 months and he gets 10 years.
 - ▶ If X confesses and you don't, he gets 6 months and you get 10 years.
 - ▶ If you both confess, you both get 5 years.
 - ▶ If neither of you confess, you both get 2 years.
- ▶ What is the best thing for you to do?
- ▶ Is that the best result?

Ethical egoism

- ▶ However, this depends on certain assumptions:
 - ▶ Perfect competition where parties have perfect knowledge of the market
 - ▶ Economic actors always act rationally
 - ▶ Economy does not suffer from externalities → in reality there is transaction costs
- ▶ Objections
 - ▶ Disincentivises the production of public goods and creates the free ridership problem
 - ▶ Subject to the Marxist critique regarding the exploitation of the working class
 - ▶ Does not seem to offer solutions where there is a problem involving conflicts of interest
 - ▶ Emptying waste into the river
 - ▶ Goes against the principle of impartiality (we should not discriminate against people on arbitrary grounds)
 - ▶ Ethical egoism may suggest we do not try to be impartial but simply give ourselves preferable treatment

The Free Market Theory and the Modern Corporation

▶ Milton Friedman

- ▶ Agent's role is to make profits for owners of business
- ▶ Minimal requirement of open and free competition without fraud
- ▶ Agent prohibited from spending principal's money for broad societal purposes contrary to how the principal would like to utilize the monies
- ▶ Agents may lack knowledge to determine societal interests

▶ Edward Freeman

- ▶ The above does not reflect business realities
- ▶ Evolution of laws compelling companies to take into consideration the interests of stakeholders such as customers and the local communities
- ▶ Businesses aim should be to create value for stakeholders instead of shareholders
- ▶ Capitalism should be understood as a system of social cooperation and collaboration rather than primarily competition

Theories of Justice



Theories of Justice

▶ Aristotelean Conception of Justice

- ▶ Just means lawful and fair → virtue that leads to someone else's good not merely oneself
- ▶ Distributive justice
 - ▶ examine the benefits and advantages accruing to one person as compared to another within the society
 - ▶ example: taxation
- ▶ Compensatory justice
 - ▶ compensation of victims for wrongs done to them (restore victim to original position)
 - ▶ example: tort law
- ▶ Retributive justice
 - ▶ punish the wrongdoer, restore the moral equilibrium
 - ▶ example: criminal law