

Sequence 03 Utilitarianism Part 2 (24S1)

Activity 1: Mini Quiz on Standards of Rightness vs. Decision Procedures

As you learned, most utilitarians claim that utilitarianism is a standard of rightness, rather than a decision procedure. A standard of rightness is a statement of the conditions under which actions are morally right, while a decision procedure is a method for guiding our decisions. Which of the following are standards of rightness, and which are decision procedures?

This exercise will not count towards the final grade for this course. However, it will help to prepare you for the MCQ quiz at the end of this sequence, which will count towards the final grade

1

"When you see a yellow light, prepare to stop."

Choose one of the following answers.

- **Decision Procedure**
- Standard of Rightness

2

"It is morally right to make your siblings as happy as possible."

Choose one of the following answers.

- Decision Procedure
- **Standard of Rightness**

3

"Do not steal."

Choose one of the following answers.

- Decision Procedure
- **Standard of Rightness**

Activity 3: Take a vote on Obligatory vs. Supererogatory Actions

As you learned, obligatory actions are things that we are morally required to do, while supererogatory actions are morally positive, but not obligatory - they're above one's obligations.

Answer whether you think the following 4 actions are obligatory, supererogatory, or neither. You'll be able to see what your classmates think as well!

(1) Helping an elderly person who looks like they are having trouble crossing the street.

- Obligatory
- Supererogatory
- Neither

(2) Giving correct directions to a tourist who is lost.

- Obligatory
- Supererogatory
- Neither

(3) Giving some money to charity every now and then.

- Obligatory
- Supererogatory
- Neither

(4) If one is rich, giving a significant portion of one's income to charity.

- Obligatory
- Supererogatory
- Neither

Final Activity: Graded Quiz

You have reached the last compulsory activity for this session.

On the next page is a quiz, comprising ten multiple choice questions related to what we have covered in this sequence.

There is only one correct response to each question. You can attempt the quiz up to 3 times. Your score from your last attempt of the quiz **will count towards your overall grade** for this course.

1

Which of these is a problem for the theory of utilitarianism?

Choose one of the following answers.

- Impartiality
- Context Sensitivity
- **Measurement**
- Dilemma Resolution

2

A morally obligatory action is one that is:

Choose one of the following answers.

- Something that is morally positive, but not required, for us to do.
- Something that is morally neutral for us to do.
- Something that we are morally prohibited from doing.
- **Something that we are morally required to do.**

3

One difficulty for utilitarianism is the problem of 'deliberation'. The issue is best described by the following statement:

Choose one of the following answers.

- Two very wise and morally upright people deliberating on a moral dilemma may still decide to do different things.
- It is often difficult to measure pain and pleasure.
- Even though someone may know the right thing to do, he may still deliberately go ahead with the wrong action.
- **It seems difficult, if not impossible, for a regular human being to constantly calculate all the potential effects of all his actions.**

4

In the 'drowning child' case, a tall, strong adult must decide whether or not to wade into a shallow, dirty pond to save a drowning child. Why do philosophers like Peter Singer think that this case helps us answer questions about global poverty?

Choose one of the following answers.

- There's good reason to think we should have similar moral responses to both cases. Both are situations where one party can very easily help another who's in great need.
- The drowning child case will help us clarify whether adults are morally obliged to save the lives of children who aren't their own.
- There are many children living (and dying) in flood-stricken, dirty regions. Helping the poor includes helping such children.
- Philosophers don't think the case helps us answer questions about global poverty. The two cases have nothing in common.

5

Which of these actions is most likely to be a morally supererogatory one?

Choose one of the following answers.

- Choosing not to stab someone for accidentally bumping into you.
- Choosing to drink coffee instead of tea in the morning.
- Snatching candy from a baby.
- Throwing yourself in front of a train to save a stranger.

6

Which of these is the best example of a plausible utilitarian decision procedure?

Choose one of the following answers.

- Always maximise well-being.
- Always steal when you have the chance.
- Don't do the action that will cause a greater drop in well-being.
- Don't steal.

7

What is not a difference between a 'rule of thumb' and a 'standard of rightness'?

Choose one of the following answers.

- One of them is more fundamental to morality than the other.
- There is no difference between the two.
- One of them is only used by utilitarians, and the other is only used by people who believe in other moral theories.
- Only one of them may not yield the correct answer all the time.

8

Which of these statements supports the theory of utilitarianism?

Choose one of the following answers.

- **People often have similar wants and needs.**
- The average person isn't capable of constantly calculating the effects of all his actions.
- It seems really wrong to kidnap someone and harvest his organs, even if it might save the lives of five other people.
- People often find it difficult to decide between living in the moment and enjoying themselves fully, and being cautious to enhance their long-term prospects.

9

Some utilitarians distinguish between a 'standard of moral rightness' and a 'decision procedure'. Which of the following statements is true?

Choose one of the following answers.

- **For any moral dilemma, the best decision procedure may still sometimes clash with the correct standard of moral rightness.**
- There is no real difference between a standard of rightness and a decision procedure.
- The distinction between the two is important for solving the 'measurement' problem of utilitarianism.
- The 'standard of moral rightness' is also commonly referred to as the 'rule of thumb'.

10

Which of these seems like an extremely absurd judgment that might follow from utilitarianism?

Choose one of the following answers.

- When given the choice between alleviating someone's existing chronic migraines, and giving someone else new chronic headaches that are less severe, we should choose to do the latter.
- When given the choice between saving a female and male, we should always save the female.
- **When given the choice between alleviating someone's chronic migraines and giving twenty billion people one lick each from a lollipop, we should choose to do the latter.**
- When given the choice between saving a female and a male, we should save the one who is responsible for the well-being of more people.