

= Two @-@ level utilitarianism =

Two @-@ level utilitarianism is a utilitarian theory of ethics developed by R. M. Hare . According to the theory , a person 's moral decisions should be based on a set of ' intuitive ' moral rules , except in certain rare situations where it is more appropriate to engage in a ' critical ' level of moral reasoning .

Utilitarians believe that an action is right if it produces the best possible state of affairs . Traditional utilitarianism treats this as a claim that people should try to ensure that their actions maximise overall happiness or pleasure .

Two @-@ level utilitarianism is virtually a synthesis of the opposing doctrines of act utilitarianism and rule utilitarianism . Act utilitarianism states that in all cases the morally right action is the one which produces the most pleasure , whereas rule utilitarianism states that the morally right action is the one that is in accordance with a moral rule whose general observance would create the most happiness . In terms of two @-@ level utilitarianism , act utilitarianism can be likened to the ' critical ' level of moral thinking , and rule utilitarianism to the ' intuitive ' level .

= = Utilitarianism = =

Utilitarianism is a type of consequentialist ethical theory . According to such theories , only the outcome of an action is morally relevant (this contrasts with deontology , according to which moral actions flow from duties or motives) . Utilitarianism is a combination of consequentialism and the philosophical position hedonism , which states that pleasure , or happiness , is the only good worth pursuing . Therefore , since only the consequences of an action matter , and only happiness matters , only happiness that is the consequence of an action is morally relevant . There are similarities with preference utilitarianism , where utility is defined as individual preference rather than pleasure .

The two predecessor theories to two @-@ level utilitarianism , act and rule utilitarianism , were beset by various objections . For example , rule utilitarianism was criticized for implying that in some cases an individual should pursue a course of action that would obviously not maximise utility . Conversely , act utilitarianism was criticized for not allowing for a ' human element ' in its calculations , i.e. it is sometimes too difficult (or impossible) for an ordinary person .

As a descriptive model of the two levels , Hare posited two extreme cases of people , one of whom would only use critical moral thinking and the other of whom would only use intuitive moral thinking . The former he called the ' archangel ' and the latter the ' prole ' . It is worth noting that it is not Hare 's intention to divide up the entire human race into either archangels or proles ; according to his theory each person shares the traits of both to limited and varying extents at different times . The archangel has superhuman powers of thought , superhuman knowledge and no weaknesses . This unbiased ' ideal observer ' , when presented with an unfamiliar situation , would be able to immediately scan all potential consequences of all possible actions in order to frame a universal principle from which he / she could decide an appropriate action for the situation . Such a person would not need a set of intuitive moral rules , as he / she would be able to decide the correct response to any possible situation by reason alone . By contrast , the prole has these human weaknesses to an extreme degree . He / she must rely upon intuitions and sound prima facie principles all of the time , as he is incapable of critical thought . The set of intuitive moral rules that the prole follows must be simple and general enough that they can be easily understood and memorised , and also quick and easy to use .

Once one has identified the different types of moral thinking , the next step is to identify when one ought to think like an archangel , and when like a prole . Hare identifies three types of situation where critical thinking is necessary . The first is when the intuitive general principles conflict in particular cases . The second is when , " though there is no conflict between principles , there is something highly unusual about the case which prompts the question whether the general principles are really fitted to deal with it . " Thirdly , and most importantly , critical thinking is necessary in order to select the intuitive prima facie principles that will be used .

= = Criticisms = =

Apart from the criticisms that are commonly made of utilitarianism in general , there are several criticisms made specifically against two @-@ level utilitarianism .

One objection is that two @-@ level utilitarianism undermines an agent 's commitment to act in accordance with his or her moral principles . For example , a theist will comply with his / her moral code because he / she sees it as based upon God 's will . However , a two @-@ level utilitarian knows that his everyday set of moral rules is merely a guideline , and as such any breach of these rules is unlikely to accompany the same degree of guilt as would someone who believed that it was wrong in principle to act in that way . In reply to this objection , some utilitarians have put forward a " radical proposal " ; although they accept utilitarianism as the correct moral theory , it would be more beneficial if we do not proclaim this fact , and keep it a well @-@ guarded secret . " Utilitarianism would then become an esoteric doctrine , accepted by only a few philosophers who would , if challenged , deny its existence in public . " . This form of Utilitarianism (commonly named as Government House utilitarianism) , whilst having historically held traction (Mill 's publications being in the 18th century) , no longer presents such a convincing case in light of modern education levels and opportunities .

David McNaughton argues that , even if the agent 's commitment to his / her principles is not undermined , two @-@ level utilitarianism does not succeed in its goal of showing , " how , on utilitarian principles , it is a good idea to think and reason in a pluralist and non @-@ consequentialist manner . " It is impossible , he claims , to compartmentalise one 's thinking in the way the two @-@ level account requires ? to simultaneously think like a utilitarian and act in a non @-@ utilitarian way . Hare 's response to this type of criticism is that he does his own moral thinking in this way , therefore the challenge that this type of moral thinking is impossible must be false .

A third variety of objection somewhat related to the problem of ' weakness of will ' is that difficulties arise when we try to keep critical thinking separate from intuitive thinking .