

It is often said that we operate under two sovereign masters, pleasure and pain and we know them well, some more than others. I want to argue that in the modern Utilitarian ideology, the pursuit of ultimate happiness leads the relevant agent to make wrong choices because they don't incorporate the consequences that arise down the road into their decision process which ultimately leads them to make the wrong choice that has bad consequences after the agents happiness is no longer satisfied.

According to Utilitarianism actions are right if it maximizes the amount of happiness for the greatest number of people. The decision process can be broken into two theories: Value Theory and the Theory of Right Action. Value Theory is that happiness, in the absence of suffering, is the only thing that is valuable in its own right. Theory of Right Action is the theory that the right action is the one that maximizes and produces the most of what is available; if it is uncertain then choose the action with the most expected value. They believe that this should be the guiding principle in which all should act on in order to maximize everyone's happiness.

This theory seems very attractive at face value because it seems as though it has universal applications. Any given society strives for the universally shared goal of achieving happiness and this seems to be a great solution to achieving those means. It also is presented in such a way that it supports egalitarian views because it ranks everyone's happiness to be equally important as everyone else's. Although this is very attractive, I would like to prove that some of the premises need to change in order for this theory to actually achieve the best outcomes for all individuals involved.

Utilitarianists fail to see potential benefits that come from actions that do not maximize the amount of happiness at the present moment, but produce more happiness if repeated on a consistent basis over a long period of time. Collective action problems are good examples to help point out this flaw in this ideology. Let's say there is a community of 100 people who live on a small island with only one pond, and in this small pond is exactly 100 fish. There is nothing on the island to eat besides vegetables - which will provide just enough nutrients to prevent everyone from starving - and the 100 fish. Now, let's assume that everyone is starving initially on the island and they need to act quickly to feed all 100 people before everyone dies. There are four possible options: Option A, everyone eats one fish - everyone will completely satisfy their hunger. Option B, everyone eats a portion of a fish and a portion of vegetables - everyone will not be as satisfied but will survive and preserve some fish. Option C, everyone eats just vegetables - they will survive but will not be very satisfied and no fish die. Option D everyone eats nothing and they all die. Now given what we know about Utilitarianism if these Islanders lived with the same guiding principle and had to choose what to do, they would choose option A so that everyone receives the most happiness possible. This ultimately will result in the death of all of the fish, and the community will have to survive just off of the vegetables around the island for the rest of their lives. Obviously, this is the wrong choice because it eliminates any future possibilities of anyone ever eating fish again.

Now, Utilitarianists can argue for choice B because it would maximize happiness for there will be fish in the future to eat at the next feast. The thought provides hope for the future of their wellbeing which in turn gives everyone more happiness because they know that over the course of all future meals they will still be able to have fish with their meals. However, I believe

that this argument takes one step outside of Utilitarianism when they try to include choices outside of the present time frame when calculating the happiness of each action. The happiness they try to derive from the given action only comes from the present action, not future accounts and future decisions that will be made outside of the scope of the current decision. For each time the Islanders go to eat, they will be too focused on their current levels of happiness and fail to incorporate the long term consequences. Utilitarianists can only make the correct choice of option B if they add a condition that the population of fish may never fall below a given threshold to maintain a proper reproduction rate of fish so that all Islanders can continue to eat fish with their vegetables.

Introducing a condition into the decision process in order to reach a plausible conclusion of choosing option B shows that Utilitarianism cannot stand on its own and reliably produce the action with the best results. This conditions is only specific to this example and not applicable to others where they may require other conditions. If they wish to provide a guiding principle for all to follow in order to maximize their collective happiness, it would be best to give them a guiding principle that does not need special situational conditions that must be met to produce the most happiness. One would simply go mad from trying to remember all of the special rules and regulations for each scenario. In order for Utilitarianists to produce a guiding principle that will provide better results for reaching maximal happiness for all situations, they need to provide enough space to incorporate all possible future consequences and decisions needed to achieve levels of happiness that is reasonable and fair for all not just in the present but also the future.