Ethics lab - term paper Malte I. Lauterbach-3.06.2021

In the following paper, I would like to examine, based on my previous research, *in which way a vaccination prioritization that favors members of society due to cultural relevance, scientific relevance or political relevance* can be considered ethical according to different ethical foundations.

In the first part of the text I analyze, based on the basic principles of utilitarianism, whether the above problem is ethical in the sense of teleological ethics. By using the principle of consequences, the main statement of which is that the moral rightness of an action is determined by its consequences.[[1]](#footnote-1) The consequences are that certain members of society who meet the above criteria are vaccinated first, i.e. are no longer threatened by the current pandemic. However, a negative effect is that vaccination is delayed for people who do not meet these criteria. Secondarily, it can thus be concluded that according to the principle of utility, whose main criterion is the utility of the consequences of action of the intrinsically good, no valuation can be determined, since the implicit value theory required by the principle of utility is difficult to infer in this case. The problem is that in this case, as in many others, it is difficult to make an ethically correct decision with the help of the principle of utility. Tertiary we can thus conclude with the help of the hedonistic principle, whose main message is the maximization of human happiness. A smaller group of people, namely those favored by vaccination prioritization, thus experience a lot of happiness. A larger group of people, namely those who are not favored by vaccination prioritization, feel a lot of frustration. Thus, we can conclude that from a hedonistic point of view, vaccination prioritization as defined above is unethical.

In the second part of this term paper, I would like to analyze the situation defined above with the help of Kant's ethics, more precisely with the help of the categorical imperative. In order not to exceed the scope of this paper, I have limited myself to two basic formulas, each of which is based on the Categorical Imperative. Kant's universalization formula states that one should only act according to that maxim "by which one can at the same time will that it should become a universal law". At the extreme, the situation can be equated with "Some people are more important, i.e. worth more than others". This admittedly exaggerated statement contradicts all basic ethical assumptions and maxims. Conversely, this means that even a less strongly abstracted law is in conflict with Kant's universalization formula. We go on to analyse the given situation with the help of the natural law formula, which, like Kant's universalization formula, attempts an ethical classification by presenting the action as a natural law. It is noticeable here that similar laws are already anchored in the subconscious of nature. Nature, in its existence between hunting and being hunted, already prioritizes members of itself. The urge to survive ensures the *survival of the fittest in the* long term, which means *evolution.* So this means that by abstracting the situation, similar to the universalization formula, we find that the law already exists. The ecosystem as a complex association of life forms already prioritizes to create equilibrium. In the context of the kingdom-of-purposes formula, we can conclude that in a chain of decisions such as Kant's kingdom-of-purposes provides, our decision is ethical because it helps society in the near future by protecting individuals in society who occupy a certain role.

Under observation, with the help of the hedonistic calculus, we realize that the intensity of our actions is correspondingly low, as no direct harm emanates from them. The duration of our action, and the corresponding effect, can be fixed in time to the respective, corresponding speed of the country's import. The probability of occurrence is high, as such a decision can only be introduced as law by political leaders. The same applies to the temporal proximity.

To conclude this paper, we can conclude that there is a certain controversy in our ethical analyses. We find that different perspectives on the same problem produce different results. Thus, it can be determined that in the sense of teleological ethics, especially in the sense of the hedonistic view, our decision to carry out a corresponding prioritization would not be ethical.

By analyzing Kant's maxims and applying them to our problem, they determine that the principle of utility is in conflict with our problem, thus judging it to be unethical. The natural law formula, however, evaluates vaccination prioritization as ethical, as it is already anchored in nature in a certain way. Evolution and especially the will to survive naturally provide for prioritization.

Based on the ethical analyses made, we can conclude that vaccination prioritization as defined at the beginning of the text would have to be carried out with the utmost care so as not to give members of society the appearance of being disadvantaged by the legislation. Only through a joint consensus between government, scientific experts and citizens of the country can it be determined and agreed that a politically correct decision has been made. This decision, if adopted as law, must be manifested in the legal code in a very limited way in order to prevent it from serving as a prevalent case to disempower the fundamental rights of a country. In my opinion, the concept of vaccination prioritization is problematic on some level because it manifests a certain set of societal values.[[2]](#footnote-2) It reinforces the concept of a multi-class society. On the other hand, it is natural and right that certain members of society should be vaccinated before others. Especially in the context of this ethical responsibility, I personally find it important that vaccination prioritization has been lifted.

1. An implicit evaluation therefore takes place. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. However, it should be pointed out that this already exists in people's minds. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)