

WEEK 6 ETHICAL FRAMEWORKS (I): CONSEQUENTIALISM

NORMATIVE QUESTIONS

- What should I do?
 - What is good/bad for me or others to do?
 - What is im/permissible for me or others to do?
- Ethics provides answers to “normative” questions (questions about how one *ought* to act)
 - Is it bad to lie?
 - Is it wrong to steal?

ETHICS & THEORY

Ethical Theory

A theoretical framework for answering ethical questions that articulates (the) general principles concerning moral evaluation

CONSEQUENTIALISM

- Whether an act is morally right **exclusively** depends on the consequences of that act

UTILITARIANISM

Two components of utilitarianism:

- “Act” Consequentialism
- Hedonism

ACT CONSEQUENTIALISM

- An act is morally right if, and only if, that act *maximizes the good*
 - An act is maximally good if, and only if, the total amount of good for all minus the total amount of bad for all is greater than the net amount brought about by any other act available to the agent on that occasion

HEDONISM

- Pleasure is the only intrinsic good and pain is the only intrinsic bad

UTILITARIANISM IN ACTION

- Sample cases
 - Lying
 - Keeping promises

PROBLEMS FOR UTILITARIANISM

- Four potential problems
 - Ignores the seperateness of persons
 - “Utility monsters”
 - Self-effacing
 - Overly demanding

REVIEW

CONSEQUENTIALISM SAYS THAT THE ONLY GOOD THING IS PLEASURE

1. True
2. False

UTILITARIANISM

Two components of utilitarianism:

1. **Act Consequentialism:** An act is morally right if and only if that act maximizes the good
2. **Hedonism:** Pleasure is the only intrinsic good and pain is the only intrinsic bad

AN INTRINSICALLY VALUABLE GOOD IS ONE THAT IS VALUABLE ONLY IN RELATION TO SOMETHING ELSE

1. True
2. False

UTILITARIANISM APPLIED: SINGER ON THE EQUALITY OF ANIMALS

THE CLAIM TO EQUALITY

the claim to equality does not depend on intelligence, moral capacity, physical strength, or similar matters of fact. Equality is a moral idea, not an assertion of fact. ... The principle of the equality of human beings is not a description of an alleged actual equality among humans: it is a prescription of how we should treat human beings. (Singer, Animal Liberation, pp. 4-5)

The Principle of Equality of Interests:

the interests of every being affected by an action are to be taken into account and given the same weight as the like interests of any other being

- Q: What constitutes an “interest”?

THE PROBLEM OF MARGINAL CASES

1. Creatures that lack moral status lack it because they lack some characteristic *C* (e.g. rationality or intelligence)
2. But there are cases of beings that possess moral status (e.g. human beings) while otherwise lacking characteristic *C* (e.g. children, mentally disabled, people in persistent vegetative states)
3. There are no other relevant differences between these “marginal cases” and cases of beings that possess *C*, and so possess moral status
4. Therefore, whatever confers moral status must be a characteristic that is had by *all* cases, including the “marginal” ones, anything else is *arbitrary*

JEREMY BENTHAM ON THE BASIS OF MORAL STATUS

*What else is it that should trace the insuperable line [of moral status]? Is it the faculty of reason, or perhaps the faculty of discourse? But a full-grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day or a week or even a month, old. But suppose they were otherwise, what would it avail? The question is not, Can they **reason**? nor Can they **talk**? but, Can they **suffer**?*

- Why is suffering the relevant basis for moral consideration?

SUFFERING & INTERESTS

The capacity for suffering and enjoyment is a prerequisite for having interests at all, a condition that must be satisfied before we can speak of interests in a meaningful way...[the capacity for suffering] is also sufficient for us to say that a being has interests—at an absolute minimum, an interest in not suffering. (Singer, Animal Liberation, pp. 7-8)

SENTIENCE & MORAL STATUS

Sentience:

the capacity to experience suffering or pleasure

- According to utilitarianism, a creature has moral status if it has interests, and it has interests if, and only if, it is sentient

DOES UTILITARIANISM DEMAND VEGETARIANISM?

- No:
 - Utilitarianism prohibits eating animals if eating them has the wrong consequences, but not all cases of eating animals are wrong
 - (e.g.) Roadkill, (maybe) game, (maybe) non-IFS animals?

