Short Paper #1: Three Moral Theories

Rickardo Henry

CUNYS

Introduction

Making morally upright and ethical decisions seems to be a complicated process because some values and principles need to be sacrificed or assumed when considering a certain philosophical perspective. There are always two sides, the action to be taken or decision to be made and the consequences or results. Sometimes good actions such as not killing and not lying may adversely affect the welfare of the larger group of people. In other cases, taking such actions improves the welfare of the aggregate community. This paper discusses these approaches, Kantian, Utilitarian, and Virtue Ethics in more detail while considering their strengths and weaknesses.

Virtue Ethics

Human virtue theory is based on the self-conscious approach of human beings to be courageous, trustful, friendly, and loyal. This theory is based on natural law in that human beings exist to offer trust, rationale, trust, companionship, and courage. These attributes form the character of an individual and according to Aristotle, the main proponent of virtue ethics, such character need to be nurtured (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy). The possession of these virtues together with practical wisdom enables the person to know the right actions to be taken in order to create a flourishing life (Ainley, 2017).

Aristotle argued that a virtuous individual has desirable characters and does not aim at the maximizing personal utility or getting favors (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy). The approach lacks moral or universal rules which guide different actions or decisions made by a person. The theory is based on three propositions. The first one is living a flourishing and worthy life based on reason. The second one is the use of common-sense that indicates desirable traits

(Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy). The last one is the ability to demonstrate care and entail taking care of each other, animals, and the environment.

Strengths

Virtue ethics create a society where each person aims at living a good or flourishing life. For example, in the workplace, the management should focus on being honest, open, trustworthy, and friendly. Nurturing such an environment and having leaders who act as role models lead to the formation of virtuous traits across employees. Each person joining the organization will aim at living a good life and creating such a life for others through demonstrating the outlined virtues. Therefore, the virtues guiding the company transform the person to living a virtuous character.

Weakness

The weakness of virtue ethics is that the approach emphasizes on the development of a virtuous society in a natural way without having laws, duties, and principles to act as reference points. For instance, virtue ethics does not demonstrate how good life of one person affects the life of the other. In the current world, nourishing the life of one person or a group of people may entail worsening the life of others.

Ethics of Duty Deontology

Duty ethics is based on certain principles, regulations, or rules which must be adhered to by any human beings despite the results. According this theory, an individual ought to do what is right as outlined in religious laws and other life-guiding doctrines such as do not kill, do not steal, do not course suffering and many others (Shakil, 2013). This theory was developed by

Immanuel Kant who argued that wrong actions should not be pursued even if their consequences

benefit a greater group of people. In other words, human beings are bound to act in goodwill by

following moral duties and laws. The goodwill entails the ability to reason and respect the

humanity of other people. This further shows that it is the intentions an individual possess that

determines their actions, either wrong or good, but not the results of their doings. The actions

need to conform to a given set of rules, principles, laws, or duties (Thomas, 2015).

Kant proposed the categorical imperative obligation based on acting by the universal law,

which is, doing actions that we will consider Ok if everyone undertakes it (Misselbrook, 2012).

Thomas (2015) noted that categorical imperative emphasizes on treating each person as ends and

doing to them what we would like them to do for us. For example, will it be good if a company

lies about the ingredients used in producing certain food products? And will it be okay if all

other firms lied about their production procedures? The answer is no because a society full of lies

will cause a lot suffering to everyone. Therefore, it is morally wrong to lie and decisions which

are undertaken by an individual should be sane and consistent. According to the theory, an

individual must have a rational reason to justify their actions. In the example, lying about the

ingredient is wrong because the moral laws prohibit lying whether the ingredients are harmful or

beneficial to the consumer. In this case, the Kantian approach tends to stabilize social

anticipations as well as protect people from harmful acts undertaken by others (Thomas, 2015).

Strength

The categorical imperative of ethics of duty is not imaginary and is not guided by desires

rather than reasons. The theory restricts people from undertaking wrong actions and thus

promoting a just society with no killings, lies, and causing of pain. In this instance, the

immediate effect of the actions on the victim is considered as opposed to the long-term benefits of other individuals being affected.

Weaknesses

The duty ethics emphasizes on following moral obligations and other laws that enhance dignity and respect across human beings. However, this is not enough in the current complicated business environment. Kant's approach prioritizes actions and duties that guide them over the consequences. For example, if lying on a CV could help an individual get a well-paying job, Kant argues that the person should not lie because it is morally wrong. However, the individual will remain unemployed and lack a source of income by adhering to moral duties.

Utilitarian Ethics

Utilitarian ethics is based on benefiting a large number of people despite the actions being right or wrong (Robertson & Walter, 2007). According to the theory, benefits or utility entails happiness and pleasure and ethical actions should ensure that these benefits are maximized across the larger group. For example, if a business has an extra strategy whether illegal or legal for generating more profit that in turn is used to improve the living standards of the whole society through donations, employing more people, and improving the social standards, then it should pursue the opportunity regardless if it is legal or illegal. Specifically, the company can engage in money-laundering under the consequentialist theory as long as the benefits or gains are used to improve the welfare of the larger society.

Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mills are the main proponents of utilitarian ethics. Jeremy Bentham argued that social policies should be based on reason and not emotional reactions and religious guidelines (Robertson & Walter, 2007). They both argued for the

improvement of the total utility and creation of desirable aggregate welfare in the society even if there is a violation of moral obligations and concerns during the process (Thomas, 2015). The main assumption here is that maximization of the welfare of a larger group by sacrificing some moral duties can lead to significant redistribution of aspirations and benefits, though not exclusive.

Strength

Utilitarian tends to create a society where each person considers the effect of their actions on the larger society or community rather than on their self. Utilitarian transform society from self-centered to collectiveness by maximizing utility (happiness and pleasure) of the larger group. In the above example, the distribution of profits to society through philanthropic and donation activities tends to promote equality. Therefore, the results of society with improved standards of living justify the action is taken that is engaging in money-laundering.

Weakness

The weakness of Utilitarian theory is that it promotes actions which are clearly wrong when an individual is taking personal decisions. For instance, in the above example, the utilitarian theory will encourage the firm to engage in money-laundering activities as long as the benefits in terms of profits are used to maximize pleasure and happiness of the larger society. This shows that the theory does not describe morally relevant actions and thus has less practical value. Thomas (2015) noted that the theory assumes that an individual has all information or evidence that proves that the actions to be taken will offer greater benefits. In the example above, the assumption will be that engaging in money-laundering will increase the firm's profits which

in turn will be used to improve the welfare of the society. The problem with this assumption is that it is not easy to confirm and verify the future in advance.

Conclusion

From the above discussion, I will prefer the utilitarian philosophical perspective towards ethical decisions. In this case, I believe that we need to evaluate the impact of our actions towards the welfare of the large community and not solely rely on the moral obligations of right and wrong. If saving an entire society entails causing pain, suffering, or even death of a single bad person, then I will better maintain the well-being or life of the society through inducing pain to that person. However, the action should entail deep analysis and serious considerations. In this case, the entire society will live in pleasure and happiness.

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