

### **The Crossroad of Utilitarianism**

The dilemma, while assessing the consequences of our actions that are meant to be for the greater good of society but may not seem so good from another angle, reflects the essence of a Utilitarian approach. A utilitarian approach is a moral theory that essentially promotes 'the greatest amount of good for the greatest number of people.' The ideology inherently backs actions that foster happiness in a way that aims for the betterment of society and resists those actions that cause unhappiness or sorrow. The utilitarian perspective is gray zones that indicate the situations which are difficult to distinguish as completely ethical or unethical.

I experienced one such situation just a year ago, which is still vividly engraved in my mind. With the Coronavirus Pandemic spreading across the globe and covid-19 cases around the world experiencing an exponential increase, the society was in dire need of vaccines to prevent this spread. However, before the world could produce vaccines on a mass scale and vaccinate the population, a proper genuine trial was necessary to rule out any side effects or harmful effects of the vaccine on people. I was enrolled in one such vaccine-producing unit of a company as an intern, where I had to administer a vaccine against Covid-19 on a trial basis. This meant clinical trials were to be performed on human beings. The sampled population, consisting of healthy individuals, were made aware of the vaccine trial's side effects, ranging from no harmful side effects, to mild sickness, life-long illnesses or something as worse as being disabled to death. I was not surprised to see that all the healthy volunteers belonged to a meager income group who were being given some remuneration for volunteering to take the risky trial vaccine. This meant they were ready to risk their lives for some compensation. This was the moment when I felt, why are we doing this? Are we the real philanthropists as participating interns in these clinical trials, or are we simply exploiting the economic condition of some healthy young people? There was a constant conflict within me trying to decide whether this was good or for the greater good (that is, the development of vaccines to save millions globally); it was justified to take advantage of the poor background of the volunteers. This situation made me anxious, and it was an enigma until I decided to make a wise comparative assessment of my generalized role of administering potential vaccines to the set of economically underprivileged volunteers and comparing them with the overall benefits to a global population. Keeping the stakeholders in mind, the net benefits shifted towards 'the good' a successful vaccine trial could do globally. Here, it was not only apparent 'the greater good' but also a much higher number of stakeholders that could

benefit, which was significantly more than the number of individuals that may suffer. However, one point of my argument was that while making any decision, each stakeholder's interests must be weighed equally because each one is capable of suffering. I was definitely flouting this norm. But the question was how much I was deviating from the norm. Could I balance this deviation with the greater good that would be in sight soon, i.e., a vaccine to save the global population, young and old, sick and healthy? When I did this assessment, I prioritized my objectivity and applied a reason-based approach without any subjective feelings, emotions, and cultural bias. Thus, I finally convinced myself to administer trial vaccines to underprivileged volunteers for the overall well-being of humankind. Two years down the lane, it was heartening to see the mass population being benefited by the vaccines which had started as trials. At this juncture, I do pat myself on my decision. However, the other side of the coin was the sad part which reflected in the continued health issues and even a few deaths in a marginal proportion of the volunteers. The entire episode made me realize that a Utilitarian approach helped choose the correct decision to save the lives of the majority of the human race by determining right and wrong. However, a small proportion of the trial mates suffered, which was the negative aspect of Utilitarianism, but it was outweighed by the positive impact the choice created. It was evident that I had applied the Utilitarian approach and somewhat convinced myself that the minimal humanitarian damage may be overlooked to a limited extent if it compensates and caters to the more significant overall benefit to immense humanity.