

Utilitarianism

US275 Scientific Ethics
John R. Hoffman
Arcadia University



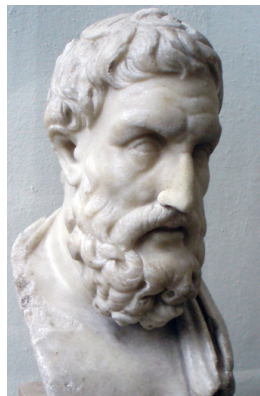
review of moral theory categories

- deontology
 - focused on the act
- teleological
 - focused on the consequence



Classic Utilitarianism

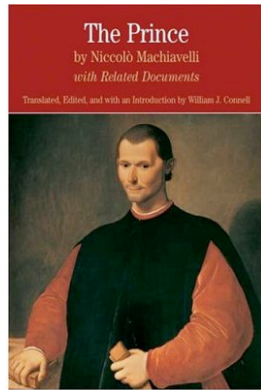
- universal teleological system
 - maximize goodness in the society
 - greatest good
 - for the greatest number
 - not the good of the individual
- utility
 - pleasing consequences of actions



bust of Epicurus (342 - 270 BCE)

Consequentialist principle

- teleological aspect
- rightness or wrongness of act determined by the goodness or badness of the results.
- the end justifies the means



Utility Principle

- Hedonist principle
- the only thing that is good is some specific state
 - pleasure, happiness, welfare
- an act is right
 - if it brings more pleasure than pain or prevents pain.



Hedonic Calculus

- measurable score
- pleasure or pain
 - intensity, duration
 - certainty, nearness
 - fruitfulness, purity
 - extent



Eudaimonistic Utilitarianism

- eudaimonia (greek): happiness
- higher pleasures
 - intellectual, aesthetic
 - long-term, continuous, gradual
- lower pleasures
 - eating, drinking, sexuality
 - more intensely gratifying, cause pain when overindulged



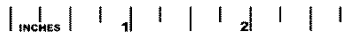
Barroom Dancing
John Lewis Krimmel, 1820
Wikimedia Commons

Act Utilitarianism

- An act is right if and only if
 - it results in as much good as any available alternative.

No act of kindness,
no matter how small,
is ever wasted.

- Aesop



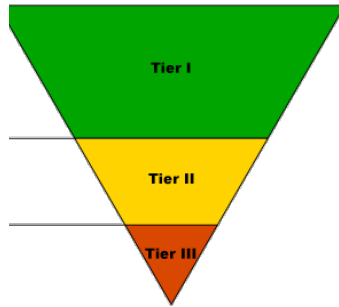
Rule Utilitarianism

- maximize favorable outcome by following the set of rules most likely to give the desired results.



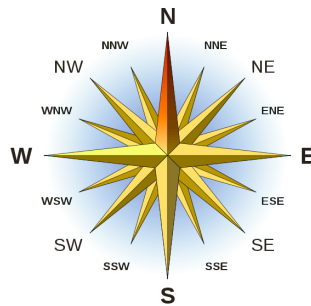
3 levels of rules

- utility-maximizing rules
 - basic rules to be followed unless in conflict with other rules
- conflict-resolving rules
 - priority of applying rules
- Remainder rule
 - when no other rule applies, simply do what your best judgement deems to be the act that will maximize utility.



Strengths of Utilitarianism

- absolute core principle
 - do what promotes the most utility
- has clear guidelines
- provides guidance for actions of posterity



Compass Rose South
Wikimedia Commons

Criticisms of Utilitarianism

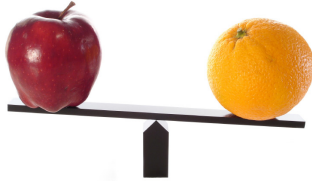
- promote greatest happiness for the greatest number
- which is priority?
 - higher level of happiness for few people
 - lower level of happiness for many people



Kulikov Fair
Ivan Semenovitch Kulikov, 1910

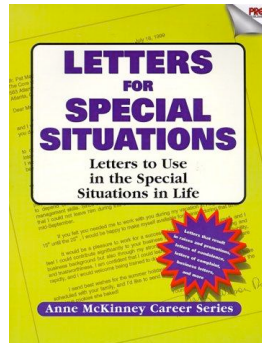
Criticisms of Utilitarianism: comparing consequences

- Absolutely right
 - has best actual consequence
 - can only be determined after the act.
- Objectively right
 - reasonably expect to have the best consequence



Situationalism

- Different application of rules in different situations
 - objectivism
 - apply utility principle to specific situation
- not relativism
 - different application not because of individual/group determinations.



Do the ends justify immoral means?

- Utilitarianism has levels of rules
- Utilitarian Doctrine of Negative Responsibility
 - Responsible for evil that we commit
 - and for the evil that knowingly allow
 - sometimes may have to do the "lesser of evils"



Robert de Normandie at the Siege of Antioch 1097-1098
J.J. Dassy, 1850



Assignment

Indentured servitude and Surrogate motherhood?

Indentured servitude is the practice of contracting to provide a service for a fixed amount of time in exchange for food, clothing, and necessities during the indentured period. This is prohibited in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights passed in 1948. In surrogate motherhood, a woman contracts with a couple to become pregnant and provide the couple with the baby. Normally the contract provides a stipend to cover the mother's living and medical expenses.

In your discussion group:

What do the views of egoism and utilitarianism say about surrogate motherhood? Is surrogate motherhood a form of indentured servitude? Does paying the surrogate mother a salary make this better or worse?

Readings

Chapter 7: Utilitarianism

Pojman & Fieser,
Ethics: Discovering Right and Wrong



Wisdom, mural by Robert Lewis Reid, 1896
Caption underneath reads
"KNOWLEDGE COMES BVT WISDOM LINGERS".

Any Questions?

Email me at:
hoffmanj@arcadia.edu



<http://www.vipitbullkennels.com/images/animated-question-mark.gif>