

FIFTH CLASS: OCTOBER 13

EXAMPLES OF CONSEQUENTIALIST ARGUMENT: MAXIMIZING HUMAN WELFARE

In Jonsen, Topic 5, Organ Transplantation; Topic 8, Research with Humans; Topic 9 Genetics; Topic 11 Cloning. Are there cases in which the appropriate ethical argumentation centers on deciding how to improve and sustain some state of human welfare? How is that state to be defined? How is "maximization" compatible with the rights of individuals?

1. The Consequences of Choices and Actions and Their Moral Importance; Figuring Out Moral Dilemmas; the Intuitive Appeal of Teleological or Utilitarian Moral Theory

Teleological (Gk: *telos*="aim, goal, purpose") or Utilitarian, Consequentialist Moral Systems: Arguments to justify action are based on the (actual or intended) achievement of the best possible state of affairs as a result of the actions taken. For example, Jeremy Bentham formulates the **Principle of Utility**: that action is right that maximizes the welfare of the greater number, "the greater good of the greater number." An act is *right* if and only if it produces a utility as great as any alternative action the agent could perform.

"The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals 'utility' or the 'greatest happiness principle' holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain, by unhappiness, pain and the privation of pleasure...the happiness which forms the utilitarian standard of what is right conduct is not the agent's own happiness but that of all concerned. As between his own happiness and that of others, utilitarianism requires him to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator." (John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*)

"Society is rightly ordered when its major institutions are arranged so as to achieve the greatest net balance of satisfaction summed over all the individuals belonging to it." Henry Sidgwick, (*Methods of Ethics*)

2. Elements of Utilitarianism: A) Definition of Welfare= pleasure, happiness, satisfaction of desires, quantity and quality of pleasure. B) Calculation of Welfare: Bentham's "Felicific Calculus"=quantification of Intensity, Duration, Certainty/Uncertainty, Propinquity/Remoteness, Fecundity, Purity, Extent. C) Universality and Impartiality. D) Rule Utilitarianism.

3. Problems with Utilitarianism A) Difficulty or Impossibility of Calculation (Measure, Commensurability). B) Useless as a moral decision procedure. C) Overdemanding. D) Incompatible with many common moral judgments, e.g. punishing the innocent, promising, etc.

“Suppose that I, a simple Utilitarian, entrust the care of my health to a simple Utilitarian doctor. Now I know, of course, that his intentions are generally beneficent, but equally that they are not uniquely beneficent towards me. Thus, while he will not malevolently kill me off, I cannot be sure that he will always try to cure me; I can be sure only that he will do so, unless his assessment of the general happiness leads him to do otherwise. I cannot of course condemn this attitude since it is the same as my own; but it is more than possible that I might not much like it, and might find myself put to much anxiety and fuss in trying to detect, at successive consultations, what his intentions actually were. There are two things that I could not do to diminish my anxieties; I could not get him to promise, in the style of the Hippocratic Oath, always and only to deploy his skills to my advantage; nor could I usefully ask him to disclose his intentions. The reason is the same in each case. Though he might, if I asked him to, promise not to kill me off, he would of course keep this promise only if he judged it best on the whole to do so... Similarly, if I ask him what his intentions are, he will answer truthfully only if he judges it best on the whole to do so... If general felicific beneficence were the only criterion, then promising and talking alike would become wholly idle pursuits. At best, as perhaps in diplomacy, what people said would become merely part of the evidence on which one might try to decide what they really believed, intended or were likely to do; and it is not always obvious that there is much point in diplomacy.” GE Warnock, *Object of Morality*, p.33.

Readings for the FIFTH CLASS: OCTOBER 20
JUSTICE: CAN IT BE VIEWED AS DEONTOLOGY PLUS
CONSEQUENTIALISM?

In Jonsen, Topics 3, Autonomy and Topic 12, Health Care System. What is justice? Is the moral principle of justice compatible with the principle of autonomy? How does justice apply to sickness and health, health care? Is there a Right to health care? What are Rights?