Greatest good for the greatest number

Sociology, Ethics

Michael Sandel lectures on justice throughout two episodes. Episode 1 Part one " The Moral Side of the Murder" has three cases that demonstrate how to recognize moral selflessness and cope with consequences. These cases also show us how they move us to act and the opportunities that exist from those actions. The moral rightness of these cases can maximize consequentiality moral reasoning and can also locate morality in certain duties and rights which is categorical reasoning. In the first case driving the trolley and killing one worker rather than five is not considered an act of murder according to students from Sandels discussions.

The majority expressed consequentialist moral reasoning. As an onlooker on a bridge looking at the trolley, some students would not push a fat man over the bridge to save the five workers, they said that the act would be committing murder; therefore the consequences are complex and categorical. When asked about a surgeon removing five organs from one healthy individual to save the lives of five other individuals, the majority of the students did not agree to be morally correct. In this example the greatest number was compromised because of moral reasoning.

Episode 1 Part two, " The Case for Cannibalism" is a real life story that asks the question if the four survivors of the Mignonette ship were morally justified. Brooks, Dudley, Stevens and Parker had been on a life boat for 19 days. Parker's decision to drink the salt water put him in a vulnerable position that ended his life by cannibalism to save the rest. By day twenty-four, Brooks, Dudley and Stevens were rescued and arrested. The majority of the students agreed to try them while the minority asked the question to what degree of necessity would exonerate them.

It was discussed if the three survivors would benefit the community or be a danger to society for being cannibalistic. The key point by Sandel and the students was that adding consent would make a difference in the trial. Kantian ethics was preferred instead of Bentham's utilitarianism theory. Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill have different proposals on utilitarianism. " Jeremy Bentham identified good consequences with pleasure, which is measured in terms of intensity, duration, certainty, propinquity, fecundity, purity, and extent.

John Stuart Mill argued that pleasures differ in quality as well as quantity and that the highest good involves the highest quality as well as quantity of pleasure. " There is no agreement on which theories count as consequentiality under this definition therefore skepticism will always exist. Episode 2 Part One " Putting a Price Tag on Life" was focused on Bentham's theory of act-utilitarian. Cost benefit analysis was a huge focus on this topic. This analysis involves placing a dollar value to stand for utility.

The first case took place in Czech Republic encouraging the citizens to smoke. The company Philip Morris conducted a cost benefit analysis and had the highest gain which included early death fromsmokingto benefit the government or other people. Decision to smoke was a qualitative risk factor since there was known probabilities. This objection to utilitarianism fails torespectindividual and minority rights and is not possible to total a dollar value on human life. Another study that examined placing a dollar value on human life, was done by psychologist Edward Thorndike.

He conducted a survey in the 1930's for the purpose of placing a dollar amount with various scenarios. The choices of living in a farm in Kansas,

pulling off a front tooth, cutting off a toe and eating a worm all had a value. The majority favored as the highest pleasure to live in a farm in Kansas. Episode 2 Part Two " How to Measure Pleasure" discusses the levels of pleasure. The examples of choosing the highest pleasure between Shakespeare, Simpsons or Fear Factor were based oncultureandeducation. Students reasoned that Shakespeare voted the highest because this is presented throughout the school years.

But if given a choice between Shakespeare, seasons of the Simpsons as the only pleasure for life, majority ruled I favor of Shakespeare for intellect purposes. The Simpsons for entertaining purposes were voted second and Fear Factor last. To test the highest pleasure, people would have to experience all to pick the very best. John Stuart Mill said that utility is the only standard of morality therefore you must experience both pleasures. The similarities between Episode 1 and 2, was that categorical moral reasoning was preferred.

Circumstances dictated those whom decided that the greatest good was for the greatest number. In contrast, more utilitarian and consequential moral reasoning emphasis was found in Episode 1 than in episode 2. The moral of the story that philosopher Bentham suggested was that " Here in life and in death is a man who adhered to the principals of hisphilosophy. "

References

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