Benthams version of utilitarianism philosophy essay

Utilitarianism is the belief that the value of a thing or an action is determined by its utility. It is based on consequences. For example, an action is right if it leads to happiness or pleasure but it will be wrong if it leads to pain or sadness. According to Bentham's theory of utilitarianism, the actions and institutions should be judged by their contribution to utility, which is in turn measured by calculating the relative contribution to happiness or pleasure, as opposed to pain and it does not take consideration of moral principle values. An action is morally right if its consequences lead to happiness and rong if it ends with pain. He proposed questions of morality by appeal to a hedonistic or felicific calculus.

From this understanding, actions are evaluated with respect to their tendency to produce pleasures and pain according to several circumstances. The first circumstance is the intensity where it measures the strength of the pleasure itself. The higher the pleasure, the more marks it will gain. The second circumstance is the duration. The longer the pleasure it can last, the higher the marks. The next in line is the rate of certainty or uncertainty. Pleasures which are very certain of the achievement will get a higher mark than pleasures which are not. The remoteness or propinquity is also one of the circumstances as the pleasure which is very near in time, will get a higher mark than the pleasure which will take longer time to achieve. Besides the above circumstances, purity, fecundity and extent are also taken into consideration. Genuine pleasure with no similarity will get a better mark, pleasures which will lead to more pleasure of the same kind, will get a higher mark and the larger the pleasure can be extended to creatures, the greater

marks it will get. As we can see from the above, Bentham's version is more on quantifying the outcome of pleasure.

Qustion 2

Describe and explain Mills's version of utilitarianism.

According to Mill's version of utilitarianism, pleasure and pain is more on qualitative scale and he believes that pleasure cannot be achieve by mathematical calculations. His famous formulation of utilitarianism is the " Greatest-Happiness Principle". The principle holds that one must always act so as to produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people, within reason. The morality or immorality of an act, for Mill, is based entirely on the consequences of that action. The most important part of Mill's utilitarian calculus is that it removes the importance of our self happiness from the calculation. We are allowed to include our own happiness in the calculation, but it counts exactly the same as everyone else's. We are forbidden to cause others pain for the sake of our happiness. Thus, while it may be in our nature to pursue our own happiness at any cost, according to Mill, we only are ethically justified in this pursuit if we do so without harming other people. Further, the best action is that which brings happiness not only to us, but to many others as well.

Thus, the " Greatest Happiness Principle" tell us that an action is right in so far as it promotes happiness in all people affected by that action, and wrong in so far as it brings unhappiness to the people affected by that action. For example, suppose someone is made happier by travel, and gets himself a trip to Hawaii. The pleasure he experiences by this trip is taken into account

in Mill's utilitarian calculus. However, if he robs a bank to pay for his trip, then the utilitarian calculus also takes into consideration the pain many people were caused by the bank robbery. The unhappiness created by the robbery vastly outweighs the happiness of one traveller, and thus, this action is immoral.

Unlike Bentham who treats all forms of happiness as equal, Mill argues that intellectual and moral pleasures are superior to more physical forms of pleasure. According to Mills, happiness is higher value than contentment. He defines the difference between the higher and lower value forms of happiness with the principle that those who have experienced both tend to prefer one over the other. He placed great importance in the type of pleasure one experiences. His argument is that the low or simple pleasures tend to be preferred by people who have no experience with higher form and therefore not a proper position to judge. While pleasures of the body eg food, drink or sex, are indeed conducive to happiness, he also discussed the " higher" pleasures associated with intellectual pursuits, education, and mental activities of all sorts.

Question 3

What is Kant's " Categorical Imperative" and how is it supposed to contribute to the resolution of ethical problems?

The Categorical Imperative is how one determines one's duty, how one determines what principles are proper and which are not. The Categorical Imperative states, " Act only on that maxim whereby thou canst at the same time will it should become universal law." A maxim is the principle or belief

governing the moral part of your action. If you're trying to figure out if you should make a promise you will not keep, in order getting yourself out of trouble, your maxim might be, " If you are in distress, you should make false promises." Following the Categorical Imperative, we should imagine a world where that maxim was universal law. If you are able to imagine such a world (i. e. if that world is logically possible) and you would want to live there, and then it is moral to act on that principle.

There are a few version of the " Categorical Imperative" but there are three distinguish ones i. e. Firstly, The Formula of Universal Law, secondly, The Formula of Humanity and thirdly, The Formula of Autonomy. The formula of Universal law means that one should act in such a way logically wills the maxim of action to be a universal law of action. This is the principle which motivates a good will, and which Kant holds to be the fundamental principle of all of morality. The second law requires us to act only in such a way that you can treat other person as ends in themselves and never as a mere means. In simple words, treat others as beings worthy of respect in their own right. The third law requires us to acts morally as if we were establishing a universal law governing others in similar circumstances.

According to Kant, human beings occupy a special place in creation, and morality can be summed up in one ultimate commandment of reason, or imperative, from which all duties and obligations derive. He defined an imperative as any proposition that declares a certain action (or inaction) to be necessary. All actions are performed in accordance with some underlying maxim or principle; it is according to this that the moral worth of any action is judged. He also holds that doing the moral thing for the wrong reason will

destroy the moral worth of the action. For example, a person helps an old lady to cross the road with intention to snatch her handbag.

Kant argues that the highest form of good is good will. To have good will is to perform one's duty. To do one's duty is to perform actions which are morally required and to avoid those actions which are morally forbidden. Kant said that we should perform our duty because it is our duty and for no other reason. To perform an action out of desire for any self indulgent consequences is not a morally good action. Duty is good in itself. Kant believed that we should act out of duty and not emotion. A human action isn't morally good because we feel it's good, or because it is in our own self interest. Even if duty demanded the same action, but it was done for a motive such as compassion, the act would be a good act, but the person would not be moral (virtuous) for choosing it.

Question 4

What distinction does Rawls make between " act utilitarianis" and " rule utilitarianism?"