

Mill's utilitarianism theory and kant's theory of deontology

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The idea that actions/consequences are morally right only if and because they produce the greatest good was created by a man named John Stuart Mill. This ethical theory is called utilitarianism. Utilitarianism is a form of consequentialism since it does not judge the actions of people based on intentions. It is a way of looking at morality. Instead of looking at what actions are right versus what actions are wrong, utilitarianism looks at the results. For example, parents often tell their kids it is not okay to lie or cheat. From a utilitarianism's point of view, a parent will look at the actions and then determine right from wrong based on what results in the greatest good for the greatest number of people. In other words, an action in and of itself has no intrinsic value (neither right nor wrong). It is only right or wrong in its affect. While other elements of Mill's philosophy may have faded away, utilitarianism is still touched as one of the three major ethical positions with Kant's Deontology.

Immanuel Kant was a philosopher who tried to wrap his head around the fact how human beings can be good and kind outside of traditional religions. He was a pessimist about human character and believed individuals by nature intensely prone to corruption. The PHILOSOPHY: Immanuel Kant video said this led him to argue although historical religions had all been wrong in a content of what they believed, they had latched on to a great need to promote ethical behavior. It was in this context, Kant came up with the idea of the categorical imperative. The categorical imperative states, act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law. Kant argues that the categorical imperative is the rule our own intelligence gives us.

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A British philosopher came up with a thought experiment that involved two scenarios. In the first rescue story, some people must drive quickly to save the lives of five other people (who are nearly threatened by an ocean tide). Another person needs assistance from a different disaster. However, there is no time to waste. As a result, the person driving must leave the single person to die in order to save the lives of the group of five. In the second rescue story, again some people must drive quickly to save the lives of five other people. This time, the path to drive is narrow and rocky. Along the path is an injured man. If the rescuers stop to save the lone individual, they will not reach the other five in time. The party of five will have drowned and died. In order to save the party of five, the rescuers would have to drive over the individual in the path. But they cannot do that. It sounds like the first scenario would be morally acceptable since no one would be held responsible for the man's death. Many would argue the second scenario is not morally acceptable since one would have driven over the man and be held responsible for his death.

According to Mill's theory of utilitarianism, he would tell the rescuer in Rescue I to leave the lone individual to die and save the five persons. He would also tell the rescuers in Rescue II to drive over the single guy and save the group of five from drowning. Based off his theory, saving the group of five from drowning would maximize happiness. Likewise, saving the group of five results in the greatest good for the greatest number of people. The Principle of Utility states that actions or behaviors are right in so far as they promote happiness or pleasure, wrong as they tend to produce unhappiness

or pain. We should condemn an action if it does the opposite. An action is said to have positive utility when it augments happiness more than it diminishes it.

According to Kant's deontological theory, he would tell the rescuer in Rescue I to save the people from drowning. The moral agent is stuck with a dilemma and must have proper motive and act according to moral law. By sacrificing one life, Kant can save five lives. However, he would tell the rescuer in Rescue II to help the individual needing assistance in the path. And this would result in the party of five drowning. Kant believes it would not be morally acceptable if he himself took the life of the individual by driving over him. "I can save five lives by killing one" would be the maxim. He says, "Act only on those maxims that you can will everyone else to follow at the same time." Basically, one should not make special rules one would not want others to follow. The second version of the categorical imperative says, "To act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end and not as a means." In other words, one should treat all persons including oneself as having inherent value and not to use people. The second version relates to Rescue II because everyone in the thought experiment needs to be treated with inherent value. Kant suggests one should not treat someone as a "mere means" because then it eliminates one's ability to make rational decisions.

One criticism of Mill was that his perspective solely focuses on the consequences rather than taking it to affect the individual parties involved. For the sake of the greater good, he would not care to be responsible of the

man in the path's death in order to save the five lives. In my opinion, I find it unkind that he would disregard the individual person's rights, and think their overall value less than the other five lives. One criticism of Kant is that he did not differentiate between knowledge of thoughts from knowledge of objects.

In my opinion, both Mill's utilitarianism theory and Kant's theory of deontology can be superior depending on the situation. In regards to Mill, there are situations where sometimes quantity overrules. I believe the lives of all are valuable but generally speaking, the loss of one life sounds better than the loss of five lives. In regards to Kant, the reason why we find ourselves doing the right thing is because it is the right thing to do. How one was raised plays a big role in what is morally right versus what is wrong. I believe the lives of all are valuable.