

Rule utilitarianism according to mill

Philosophy



The paper "Rule Utilitarianism According to Mill" is a wonderful example of an assignment on philosophy. Utilitarianism, as described by Mill, states that the ethical basis of an action depends upon the consequences of the action. The principle of utility which forms the cornerstone of utilitarianism states that the degree to which an act increases people's happiness, or minimizes their pain, is the measure of morality, and such does not involve the motives or intentions of the agent. When the act is considered as ethical or not on the basis of its particular circumstances, then such is called act utilitarianism. On the other hand, if through observation and experience several acts could be seen to fall within a single category, and secondary rules may be formulated about this group of acts, then this is called rule utilitarianism. Because a set of rules govern the decision to pursue the act or abstain from it, then it ceases to be intuitive as suggested by act utilitarianism and becomes instead guided by a set of principles garnered from empirical observation. Rule utilitarianism is not the same as the "rules of thumb". Rules of thumb are more in the nature of act utilitarianism because it considers the consequences of acts on a case-to-case basis, which is not true of rule utilitarianism which abides by rules. The rules are more or less permanent, and some authors tend to believe they assume a degree of rigidity. However, Mill believes that if there is sufficient empirical information that the rule can no longer be seriously considered valid, or if there are special exceptions that run along categorical lines, then the rule may be adjusted, revised, or eliminated, and a new rule consistent with the new situation would then be stated. I think Mill is correct in that he is merely being realistic. It is a normal and automatic consideration for people to think of the consequences of their actions, and perceiving this to be bad, would

<https://assignbuster.com/rule-utilitarianism-according-to-mill/>

abstain from it; or good, then continue to do it. Also, the rules that guide our actions tend to adjust through time because there is a constant evolution in our society and environment. In the normal course of history, this is but development. According to Mill, even if an act is performed by an agent for personal gain or interest (motive), as long as the intended action leads to the happiness of people more than it creates pain for others, then the act should be considered moral. As the principle of utility explains, the motivation of a person is doing something has nothing to do with the consequences and do not form part of the ethics of the act. For example, if a politician distributes provisions to the poor, although his aim is merely to generate publicity to enhance his image with the public and this is purely selfish, then the act he has performed is considered ethical because the provisions he distributed had some utility for and brought happiness to the people. I feel that Mills is not entirely correct in this opinion. Motive and frame of mind have much to do with the interpretation of an act. For instance, a dying person's organs are harvested and the doctor has a choice of which patient to give the heart to. He thereafter decides to give it to the patient who offered him money for the transplant. From the consequences, giving to one patient or the other would have equal utility because of one person lives and the other dies. However, the act of excluding one who might be more suitable and favoring the other on the basis of money to be received is a cloud upon the judgment, and highly unethical. In such cases, the motive of the agent becomes exceedingly important. Mill thinks that a happy life is not about being ecstatic all the time, because this is ridiculous and impossible. Happiness is attained instead by the pursuit of higher goals (compared to more basic sources of happiness) and by experiencing occasional periods of extreme

<https://assignbuster.com/rule-utilitarianism-according-to-mill/>

pleasure although there may be, every now and then, pain or some sad moments in life. As long as the pleasures that come are more often than the pain, and as long as the pleasures appeal to people's higher interests, then these are what will make up a happy life. People should also be aware of what is realistic for them to attain in life. If they aspire for something impossible, then they will never be happy because he cannot attain what is not possible. Mill thinks many people are unhappy due to poor education or unfavorable rules imposed by society. Lack of education leaves a person in the dark so he does not recognize his true aspirations, and therefore he remains unhappy. Also, even if the person knows the higher interests that would make him happy, if he happens to be constrained or limited by social biases and prohibitions, then he will continue to be unhappy. I agree with Mill that a happy life consists of both pleasure and pain, with pleasure being more frequent than pain. The occasional high points should be because of things we consider valuable so it gives us pleasure to seek and find them. Being consistently very happy will mean one is either mentally imbalanced or in his constant happiness his life becomes monotonous and boring. The variations in our life make life interesting, and therefore happy.