

Week 4 Discussion: Utilitarianism

Required Resources

Read/review the following resources for this activity:

- Textbook: Chapters 7, 8
- Lesson
- Minimum of 1 scholarly source (in addition to the textbook)

Initial Post Instructions

The principle of utility involves maximizing happiness as a desirable outcome of decisions. Although it does not get directly said, there is an inverse intention to minimize the undesirable outcome of disaster. Utilitarian decisions are directed toward outcomes—that is, the consequences of decisions.

We need to look at results. We first look at the actual results of an action. We judge if it was the best possible result. We can judge the actual results in comparison to other results that reasonably could be said to have been possible.

If we do not yet have the actual results of an action, we do not know if it is moral or not. We can talk hypothetically about what might happen, and then what that would show about the morality of an action. However, if we do not know what the action had as its consequences, we cannot yet say if it is moral or not.

Initial Post Instructions

For the initial post of this week's discussion respond to one of the following options, and label the beginning of your post indicating either Option 1, Option 2, or Option 3:

Option 1: You are a nurse on a floor with only elderly patients. Every day, each patient tells you about how much pain they are in and asks you to help them. They want you to inject them with something to end their lives. If the patients die, the beds on that floor would be freed up for other patients. The hospital is at 100 percent capacity. There is no other hospital for 30 miles. Other patients may be not receiving care due to a lack of free beds. What is the moral thing to do here? Why is that the moral thing to do? What would an utilitarian say is the moral thing to do? Why would they say that? Compare and contrast the utilitarian approach with that of an ethical egoist or social contract theorist

Option 2: A new social media app is offering itself to you for free. If you upload a picture to it, the app will show how you will look at 10 years. John Doe, a friend of yours, says not to use the app as it will then possess your biometric facial data. Jane Doe, another friend of yours, says that she heard the app shares the facial data with a security firm that helps the government detect terrorists at airports. Should you use this app? Why or why not? If John Doe is right, would an utilitarian say it is right to use the app? Why or why not? If Jane Doe is right, would a social contract theorist say it is right to use the app? Consider the role the Fourth Amendment at play here.

Option 3: You are a nursing student at the XYZ College. It has a 50 percent acceptance rate (half the applicants do not get in). XYZ is a public college. XYZ has decided to implement an affirmative action policy. The college has few students over the age of 50. To encourage more students of that age, every student 50 or older will receive a bonus point. A student's admission is dependent on having 11 points. One earns points for a GPA above a certain score, ACT/SAT score above a certain number, having a letter of recommendation, etc. XYZ also lacks LGBT students, Muslim, and African-American students and is considering offering a bonus point for any student fitting those categories. What is the key moral conflict for XYZ? What social values should XYZ promote here? What diverse populations are involved here, and what are their interests? Do you think XYZ's social action is the correct solution to lack of diversity? Why or why not? Factor the ethics of egoism and utilitarianism into your answer.