

Religious Studies essay.

Explain the development of Utilitarianism and the criticisms it faces.

Teleological is a type of ethical theory. This is when the morality of action is decided by the goodness or badness of the consequences. People who take this approach are called teleologists.

The theory of utilitarianism was set by a man called Jeremy Bentham. He was a man of extraordinary intellectual gifts. At the age of three he began to study Latin. At five years old French and in 1763 at the age of 16 he took his degree at Oxford.

Bentham believed that no actions were good in themselves, their value considered that those actions which resulted in the greatest pleasure for the greatest number ought to be performed, we ought to seek to create pleasure.

Bentham realised that for such a view to work it must be possible to measure pleasure. He offered the following as a hedonic calculus.

- 1) The intensity – how intense it is.
- 2) Duration – how long it lasts
- 3) It's certainty – how sure we are that it will come.
- 4) It's propinquity – how near it is
- 5) It's fecundity – will it lead to more pleasure
- 6) It's purity – how free from pain it is
- 7) It's extent – how many people are affected by it.

Bentham also believed that human beings were organisms who will always seek out pleasure and avoid pain. For Bentham laws should only be passed if they maximise pleasure and minimise pain for the majority of people. However vicious satisfactions cause a problem for utilitarianism, example: suppose a group of sadistic guards are torturing a prisoner. If the guards pleasure is greater than the prisoners pain then according to Bentham's theory and the hedonic calculus this is justice.

Mill focused on quality instead of quantity to solve vicious pleasure problems. He preferred to talk about 'happiness' rather than 'pleasure'. He said that some pleasures mainly those of the mind, are higher and more estimable than others, mainly those of the body (physical). This version of the theory is possible to now say that the pleasure experienced by sadistic guards does not justify their actions, because their pleasure is of so low of value that it does not outweigh the pain experienced by the prisoners.

Mill argued that intellectual pleasures should be preferred to physical pleasures. Example, you should assess the quality, as well as the quantity of pleasure that comes because of your actions.

Utilitarianism can face many criticisms / problems, eg: if the majority of people always have their way then the minority will always be left out and will not be given a fair chance.

Cultural and religious minorities could also become permanently neglected. This is not something Mill and other utilitarians wanted. Mill believed a healthy society would be one with a huge variety of different individuals and lifestyles, as long as they didn't interfere with the freedom of others.

Another problem faced could be: if there was a situation where you could either save your father or a professor, who would develop a medical cure in the future, the right thing to do would be to save the professor, instead of your father. Therefore utilitarianism doesn't take into account the loyalty you owe to your father. You would obviously want to save your father because you love him and he is a very close family member. Unlike the professor, who is a complete stranger to you.

According to the utilitarianism point of view, a judge would be right to condemn an innocent person to death, if he / she believed that such as crime etc. would be prevented and a greater good result would be achieved. Problem is that while this action may maximise the sum of total happiness, many would still believe it to be unfair.