

Consequentialism

Mill's Theory of Utility

Consequentialism

- Theory of Normative Ethics
 - Has a different way of determining what the “good life is” from Aristotle:
 - J.S. MILL: “Good”-----> THEORY OF CONSEQUENTIALISM
 - Consequentialism: Produce the greatest amount of happiness for the greatest amount of people
- - Aristotle: Being Good means finding the golden mean
 - JS Mill: Being Good means maximizing happiness
- Opposed to Descriptivist Ethics
 - Trolley Problem

Consequentialism

- Consequentialism
 - The Sauce: Consequences are what matter
 - Theory of Ethics which holds that the best or “good” actions are those which bring about the most desirable consequences
- What are the most desirable consequences?
 - This is where consequentialism gets tricky
 - The type of consequences which are most desirable depend upon the theory
 - Different flavors of consequentialism



ULTIMATE GOAL: CONSEQUENTIALISM

- Consequentialism
 - The Sauce: Consequences are what matter
 - UCLA, USC, UC Irvine, UC Davis, Cal --- all interested in the theory of ***consequentialism***
 - Specifically related to: ***ETHICS AND ECONOMICS***
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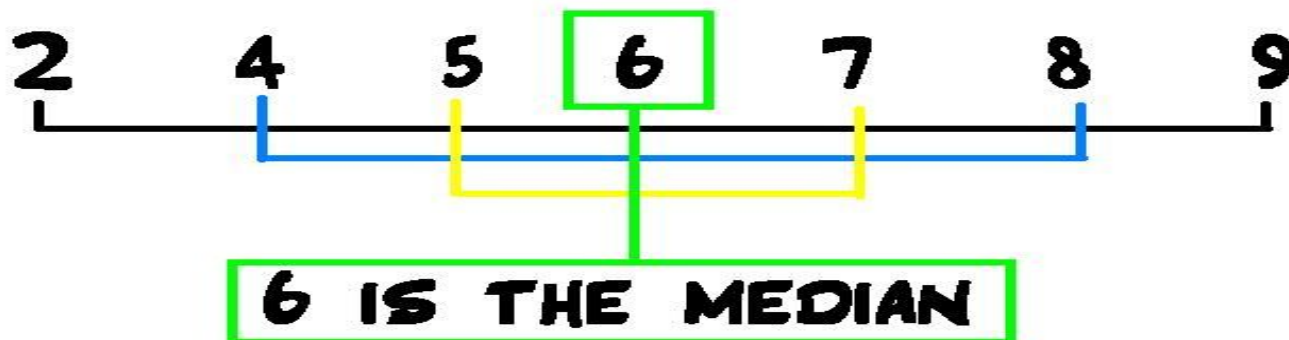


Consequentialism

- Is Virtue ETHICS - ARISTOTLE'S ETHICS? A type of of Consequentialism?

FIRST ARGUMENT:

The action I make is a median between excess and defect.



Consequentialism

So If I live my life according to Aristotle's virtue ethics, I will constantly be hitting the mean between excess and defect.

If we are hitting the mean between excess and defect, then we are *PRODUCING THE CONSEQUENCES WHICH ARISTOTLE SAYS ARE "GOOD AND VIRTUOUS"*.



Consequentialism

- Utility Theory:
 - The most classic and widely discussed form of consequentialism
 - Utility = Happiness
- Classic Utility Theory Slogan: “actions are good if they seek to promote the greatest happiness for the greatest number”
 - Technically misleading: “Bringing about a little bit of happiness for each person in a large group may result in a lower net total of utility than a vast amount of happiness for each person in a smaller group”

Julia Markovits:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uvmz5E75ZIA>

Consequentialism

- From Stanford Encyclopedia:
 - “Classic utilitarianism is consequentialist as opposed to deontological because of what it denies. It denies that moral rightness depends directly on anything other than consequences, such as whether the agent promised in the past to do the act now. Of course, the fact that the agent promised to do the act might indirectly affect the act's consequences if breaking the promise will make other people unhappy. Nonetheless, according to classic utilitarianism, what makes it morally wrong to break the promise is its future effects on those other people rather than the fact that the agent promised in the past.”

Net Totals - Utility Theory

- Simple Equation for Determining Total Utility
 - $\text{Quality of Happiness} \times \text{Amount of People} = \text{Total Utility}$
 - Standard in economics: achieve the most net gain
- Can we think of an example where the total happiness experienced by some could outweigh the total happiness experienced by many?

Mill's Theory of Utility

- John Stuart Mill
 - Also a student of Jeremy Bentham (Panopticon)
 - Main Opposition: Immanuel Kant
- Starts off by responding to attacks of being an Epicurean
 - Claims the people attacking him don't actually understand Epicureanism
 - Founded by Epicurus, an ancient Greek Philosopher in 300BC

Mill's Theory of Utility

- False Epicureanism - A theory of consequentialism which is *Hedonistic*. Only distinguishes between pleasures and pains. Does not value things like knowledge, freedom, or being.
 - Mill says this is a misreading of Epicurean Doctrine
- Mill's Epicureanism - A true Epicurean would know that Epicurus distinguished between pleasures of the body and pleasures of the mind.
- Pleasures of the Body (*Hedonism*)
 - Warmth, appetite, bodily
- Pleasures of the Mind
 - Knowledge, achieving goals, mental



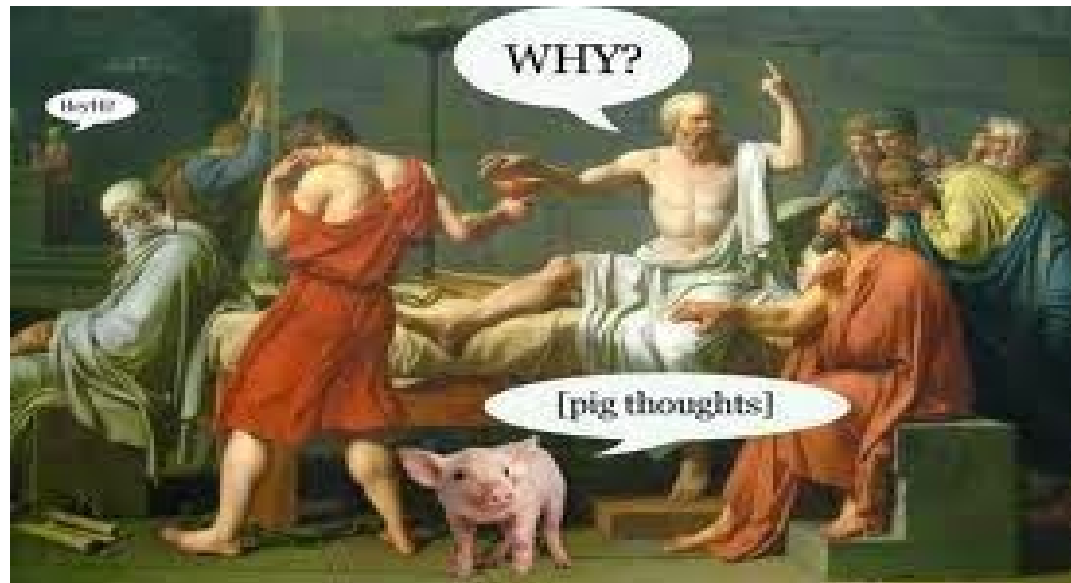
Mill's Theory of Utility

- Mill: People who have experienced both pleasures of the body and of the mind will prefer mental pleasures to bodily pleasures.
 - This tells us that there is a hierarchy of pleasures which will make us happy.
 - So the equation we set forth at the beginning makes sense



Mill's Theory of Utility

- Mental pleasures make use of higher faculties, which pigs and fools do not possess.
- “It is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a pig satisfied” - this is because it is easier to satisfy a pig than it would be to satisfy Socrates.



Mill's Theory of Utility

- What if you don't know which pleasure is greater?
 - Sometimes, the quality of a bodily pleasure will be altogether greater than that of a mental pleasure.
 - Mill: For the most part, mental pleasures are greater
 - Simple Solution: Ask someone who has experienced both.
- So the goal is to offer an account of consequentialism which negates Hedonism
 - Bring the focus to the mind as a way to distinguish quality of pleasure
 - Is this a good argument?

Mill's Theory of Utility

- Klyng: It is too subjective when things get specific
 - If you ask a group of mathematicians what brings them pleasure, their answer will be different than if you ask a group of artists
 - Both mathematicians and artists may prefer to engage in “mental” rather than physical pursuits.
 - Difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish which mental pursuits are “better” or of a “higher quality”
- Klyng:
 - Couldn't it also be the case that someone who engages in primarily physical pursuits be just as happy as a mathematician?
- Perhaps there is room to work here, but for another time.

Mill's Theory of Utility

- Mill: Regardless, we sometimes make mistakes when it comes to valuing mental vs physical pleasures.
- Problem of Measurement: Can't see the mountain in the distance



Sometimes physical pleasures are attractive because we want instant gratification

So you go out drinking with your friends and are too hungover to take the exam the next day.

Mill: You failed to properly value the size of pleasures and were seduced by the nearer and more attractive gratification.

Mill's Theory of Utility

- Mill: As our minds erode, we are no longer able to experience the intricacies of mental pleasure and seek physical pleasure instead.
- All things being equal:
 - Mental Pleasures are greater than Physical Pleasures
 - Sometimes we have a hard time measuring them up against each other.
 - Ask your elders for help.
- Can Mental Pleasures be associated with Higher Faculties?
 - Is this an issue?