

philosophy 164: medical ethics  
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**some major ethical theories**  
**handout one:**  
**utilitarianism**

**the basics of utilitarianism:**

POU: "Actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness."

A term to describe ethical theories which determine rightness on the basis of consequences is **consequentialism**.

Bentham and Mill were both concerned that everyone's welfare be taken into equal regard: no one person counts more or less than another. This is a principle of **egalitarianism**.

GHP: "Those actions are right that produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people"

Mill and Bentham did, that happiness is measured in terms of pleasure, and unhappiness in terms of pain. This kind of view is called **hedonism**.

**five assumptions about pleasure and pain:**

- i. Pleasure and pain are feelings, or sensations.
- ii. Pleasure and pain come in "episodes" which are events that consist in someone's feeling pleasure or pain at some time.
- iii. Every episode, e, of pleasure or pain has a duration -- a measure of how long it lasts.
- iv. Every episode, e, of pleasure or pain has an intensity -- a measure of how "strong" the feeling is.
- v. The amount of pleasure or pain in an episode is determined by multiplying intensity by duration to yield "hedons" (in the case of pleasure) or "dolors" (in the case of pain).

1 hedon = negative-1 dolors

the **total hedonic utility** of an act token  $a_1$  =df. the total number of hedons produced by  $a_1$  minus the total number of dolors.

**act utilitarianism:**

AU: An act token A is morally right if and only if A maximizes (universal) hedonic utility.

MAU: An act token A is morally right, if and only if A maximizes (universal) *qualified hedonic utility*.

**the John and Judy case:**

- a1. Give the child the kind of ordinary medical treatment a normal child would receive.
- a2. Give the child special treatment for its problems.
- a3. Don't treat the child: allow it to die.
- a4. Put the child to death in a painless way.

	total hedons	total dolors	HU
a1	0	3500	-3500
a2	150	2150	-2000
a3	0	3000	-3000
a4	100	2000	-1900

**an objection to AU: unforeseen consequences**

- 1. If we cannot accurately predict what the consequences of a given alternative will be, then AU is not a practical theory for making practical decisions.
- 2. We cannot accurately predict what the consequences of a given alternative will be.
- 3. Therefore, AU is not a practical theory for making practical decisions. 1, 2 MP

**another (stronger) objection to AU:**

Consider the following

	HU
a1	500
a2	500

- 1. If AU is true, then a1 is morally permissible.
- 2. It's not the case that a1 is morally permissible.
- 3. Therefore, AU is not true. 1, 2 MT

**a similar argument:**

	HU
a1	500
a2	501

- 1. If AU is true, then a1 is morally obligatory.
- 2. a1 is not morally obligatory.
- 3. Therefore, AU is not true. 1, 2 MT

**the Medicaid program:** Medicaid pays physicians for services provided to those poor enough to qualify for the program.

MP: The program would collapse if nearly all physicians were not honest in billing Medicaid for their services, the result would be that many poor people would suffer needlessly, and physicians themselves would lose a source of income.

Dr. Cheater's alternatives:

- a1. rip off Medicaid, and treat Patty's condition: HU 1500.
- a2. be honest, and not treat Patty's condition: HU -1000.

### **the collective action objection to AU:**

1. If AU is true, then some doctors (like Cheater) should rip off Medicaid, but not all doctors should act the same way.
2. If some doctors (like Cheater) should rip off Medicaid, but not all doctors should act the same way, then its okay for some people, but not others, to break rules.
3. Its not okay for some people, but not others to break rules.
4. Therefore AU is not true. 1-3 MMT

### **rule utilitarianism:**

**RU:** An act token A is morally right if and only if A conforms to some rule R such that following R will produce at least as much HU as any other applicable rule.

#### **2 problems for RU as it is stated**

1. Rules are likely to conflict when they are applicable to the same case.
2. Establishing rules to cover so many different circumstances and circumstances results in such an abundance of rules that it becomes nearly impossible to remember them all, and to implement the theory.

**RU\*:** An act token A is morally right if and only if A conforms to a set of rules that maximizes HU among the available alternative sets of rules.

### **the biggest problem for utilitarianism in any form: justice**

#### **a specific example: the organ harvest**

- a1. Kill Digit; transplant organs +5,000
- a2. Treat Digit; let five die -5,000

1. If the POU (in any form) is true, then a1 is morally obligatory.
2. It's not the case that a1 is morally obligatory.
3. Therefore, it's not the case that POU is true. 1, 2 MT

#### **a general statement of the biggest problem: the normative irrelevance of justice objection**

factor f is **normatively irrelevant** =df. f has no direct bearing on the moral rightness or wrongness of any action.

1. If POU (in any form) is true, then justice is normatively irrelevant.
2. It's not the case that justice is normatively irrelevant.
3. Therefore, it's not the case that POU is true. 1, 2 MT