

## Ethics in the Social Sciences – Revision – Sample

### Consequentialism

Consequentialism is ethical concern about the **outcome** of a given action.

#### Universal Ethical Egoism

Everyone should act in their own self-interest. E.g. economically (capitalism). E.g. go to university, develop yourself, get a job, and find the best situation and outcome for you. People like to operate for their own self-interest, and it is very primary in our thinking. Strength – it is considered to be psychological, you should be able to determine what is best for you. Weakness – we don't all have equal opportunity to progress our self-interest (some people have incredible advantage or disadvantage), sometimes you pursuing your self-interest impedes on others trying to achieve their own self-interest, it kind of assumes an illimitable world, can impede other people.

#### Utilitarianism

Greatest good for the greatest number. E.g. bomb in a building – to save many lives ... is it okay to torture that person for that information? The problem is that it is hard to determine consequences. Weakness – consequences are hard to determine; the ripple effects can go beyond what you think they will.

#### Act Utilitarianism

Choice! An act of 'personal discretion' creates the greatest good for the greatest number. You are trying to consider the greatest good. Strength – flexible, time-place-person-responsive sensitive, the person is at the centre of the situation and you can choose what to do, focus to create the greatest good, in situations where the rule is considered 'wrong' you can choose. Weakness – as the individual has the power it might not be a good decision to make, cannot always trust individuals to make the 'right' choice, sometimes people are not good at creating the greater good.

#### Rule Utilitarianism

That 'rule' which creates the greatest good for the greatest number. Following the rule. No moral agency of the individual. E.g. laws, following speed limits – the rules are there for the greater good. Not caring about the individual situation. It is blunt and overarching rule. The rules are there to protect people. The rules basically keep us safe and function. Strength – no one can put their personal interests above others as it is set in stone (e.g. going through a green light and assuming that people at the red light will stop to let you through). The rules are there to protect the people. Weakness – doesn't take into consideration the individual. The individual sometimes suffers because of the rules, as they don't consider individual circumstance.

#### Example – Speeding

**Universal Ethical Egoism:** everyone can choose to speed if they feel it is what's best for them ... (e.g. they feel like they can get where they need to go quickly and safely without any risk to self).

**Act Utilitarianism:** everyone can choose to speed if they feel it is what's best for the greatest good ... (e.g. the roads look safe and they need to get home to look after a sick relative).

**Rule Utilitarianism:** everyone must follow the rule to not speed, regardless of the circumstances. This rule has been determined by the State to result in the greatest good ... (individual choice cannot be trusted to result in the best interest of society).

## **Non-Consequentialism**

Non-consequentialism is concerned with the ethics of the **action** itself. The action is where we invest the moral value.

### **Act Non-Consequentialism**

Personal discretion, choice – determines the moral action. Feels good, do it.

Strength – moral agency (make your own decisions based on your beliefs), people should be able to choose, very flexible and time specific. Weakness – some people aren't as moral, can we really trust moral agency?

### **Rule Non-Consequentialism**

Perform the action that adheres to the rule.

#### Divine Command Theory

Following a supernatural being – the 'Supreme Being' determines the moral action, which becomes the rule. Strength – you have clear rules (moral certainty). Weakness – could be so caught up in the given rules that you can't see anything else, not open to anything else, dogma (rigid and fixed beliefs that you cannot challenge), it can shut down moral agency.

#### Kant's Duty Ethics

'Reason' determines the rules of moral action (can put reason at the centre of things). Would my action work if everybody did it? – categorical imperative (the act is only moral if it can be universalised). Strength – creates equality (if I can only do what everyone else can do, it is equal). Weakness – too blanket, no exception to rules.