

Key concepts:

Application: The use of animals for medical research

- Often, the principle of utility (or the 'greatest happiness principle') is used to argue that human happiness in the long-term outweighs the suffering of animal experimentation.
- However, such philosophers as **Peter Singer** says we should have a rule against causing harm or suffering to any sentient being.
- However, the purpose of animal experiment should be considered; **medical** research after all, is more noble than **cosmetic** safety tests. The sheer numbers benefitting from successful treatments or controlling epidemics over against the amount of pain caused for animals is justification enough.
- Whether one uses **Bentham or Mill** is another variant. The above arguments would certainly support Mill; however, Jeremy Bentham argued famously, 'the question is not, can they reason? Not, can they talk? But **can they suffer?**' and indeed was an active campaigner for **animal rights**.
- Another point to consider is that any conclusion reached on for this area is difficult because of the uncertainty of predictions and the inability to measure pain accurately. Bentham's calculus could be used to attempt to quantify the pleasure that results from animal experimentation, however, Mill's distinction of the quality of pleasure could mean that animal pleasure and pain are at a lower value than higher pleasures of humans. Even though animals have moral rights, this is not equal to human rights for some.
- An Act approach to Utilitarianism would have to look at individual cases of diseases, epidemics and medical possibilities to make a decision whereas a Rule approach would establish guidelines, possibly such as the guide for the use of animals for research used in the United Kingdom.

Application: The use of nuclear weapons as a deterrence

- The application of Utilitarianism to the use of any weapon, whether as a deterrent or as a **means to achieve an end**, is very suspect and almost appear alien to the notion of the **principle of utility**. However, the other side of the coin of the principle of utility is to **avoid pain** and this is often forgotten.
- Another problem is the element of **risk**. The implications of a deterrent not working and the consequences devastating since there would be no winners; it is difficult to see how any form of Utilitarianism could justify this scenario.
- However, if it is clear that the deterrent will work then this is another matter altogether and is obviously a preferred option for all. The **numbers benefitting** from the stability resulting from deterrence could be seen to support the greatest happiness for the greatest number.
- On the one hand, **Mill** might say that we should use whatever means available to create and protect a society where **higher pleasures** can develop; however, a nuclear program could have a detrimental effect on this development.
- An **Act** approach to Utilitarianism would have one look at specific conflicts to make decisions (using a utilitarian calculus) about nuclear deterrence.
- A **Rule** approach would possibly support the principle of deterrence since no nuclear war seems to suggest it has worked in the past.

Key quotes:

"To discriminate against beings solely on the account of their species is a form of prejudice."
(P. Singer)

"Producing a new medicine is a lengthy and complex process ... Tests on animals play a vital role." (The Nuffield Council on Bioethics)

"Such weapons have no legitimate place in our world. Their elimination is both morally right and a practical necessity in protecting humanity."
(Ban Ki-moon)

Issues for analysis and evaluation:

Key arguments/debates

Some philosophers would argue that Utilitarianism is ideal for solving moral dilemmas in that it is a tried and tested political system with a great record of success. Others would argue that the mistakes of animal cruelty and war are clear signposts that we do need to progress more morally.

Key questions

Can justice be established by any consequentialist theory?

If Utilitarianism does not have a definitive approach how can it possibly be 'useful' in itself as an ethical theory?

Key words:

Peter Singer

Bentham or Mill?

deterrent

numbers benefitting

medical research

animal rights

means

higher pleasures

cosmetic research

quality and quantity

ends

Act

suffering

risk

avoid pain

Rule