

A Critical Discussion About the Utilitarianism Slogan “Some Wrong Actions Can Produce Good Outcome” in the rganizational Context

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Abstract

This essay, will argue about the utilitarianism, and will focus in the organizational context. Some wrong actions can produce good outcome. Utilitarianism contends that no action is in itself objectionable. An action according to this theory can be questioned only if it results in less happiness than could otherwise have been brought about. In this article we will bring some arguments about this statement in the organizational context.

Key words: Utilitarianism, decision making, actions, outcomes

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Introduction

Many juridical or physical persons make utilitarianism appealing as a standard for their decision making process.

By utilitarian standards, an organizational policy, decision, or action is good if it promotes the general welfare more than any other alternative. The statement “wrong actions can produce good outcome” of utilitarian view, is too relative and subjective, and especially in organizational context, it has really room for discussion if there is place for utilitarianism or not. And to argue that, I will bring an contra example to take into question the existent of utilitarianism as a priority in decision making on an organizational context.

I would like to begin by explaining first the definition in where Utilitarianism stands for. According to Oxford Dictionary, Utilitarianism is¹:

[NOUN]

1. The doctrine that an action is right in so far as it promotes happiness, and that the greatest happiness of the greatest number should be the guiding principle of conduct.

Utilitarianism is a moral doctrine that has as the main pillar the happiness as an outcome of people’s actions. Only if an action gives

¹English Oxford Dictionary,
<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/utilitarianism>

good outcomes and happiness for the people, that action is right and morally good. The most famous representatives of utilitarianism were the philosopher's Jeremy Bentham² and J. S. Mill³.

According to Bentham, the interests of the community are simply the sum of the interests of its members. An action promotes the interests of an individual when it adds to the individual's pleasure or diminishes the person's pain⁴. He argued for the utilitarian principle that actions are right if they promote the greatest human welfare, wrong if they do not.

John Stuart Mill continued Bentham's concept of pleasure, and developed it further⁵. The pleasures of the human intellect and imagination, in particular, have a higher value than those of mere physical sensation. Thus, for Mill the utility principle must take into consideration the relative quality of different pleasures and pains, not just their intensity and duration.

Although Bentham and Mill had different conceptions of pleasure, both men equated pleasure and happiness and considered pleasure the ultimate value. "...They cared about happiness because they

² Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/bentham/>

³ Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, <http://www.iep.utm.edu/milljs/>

⁴ Bentham, J.1789 "An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation"Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907 reprint of 1823 edition. (First printed 1780.)See in online version at Adress:

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⁵ Mill, J. S.; Bentham, J.; and Troyer, J.: "The Classical Utilitarians: Bentham and Mill" By John Stuart Mill, Jeremy Bentham, John Troyer, Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. Indianapolis/ Cambridge, 2003, pg. 94-95.

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implicitly identified it with well-being, that is, with what is good for people. In their view, our lives go well—we have well-being—just to the extent that our lives are pleasurable or happy.⁶” (Shaw, 2014).

1. Arguing about the utilitarianism in the organizational context

Before I say what is wrong with this argument, I want to argue about the utilitarianism in the organizational context. Many juridical or physical persons make utilitarianism appealing as a standard for their moral decisions in business or non-business organizations.

In organizational framework, “Utilitarianism provides a clear and straightforward basis for formulating and testing policies. By utilitarian standards, an organizational policy, decision, or action is good if it promotes the general welfare more than any other alternative. Also, utilitarianism provides a result-oriented approach to moral decision making. organizations focus on the results of their actions and policies, and it allows them to tailor their decisions to suit the complexities of their situations.⁷”.(Mill, J. S., 1861)

Nevertheless this object does not stand because of many critics, as for the following reasons: Utilitarianism theory has been criticized for

⁶ Shaw, W, S 2014, Business Ethics, 8-th edn. Wadsworth, International Edition, page 46-47.

⁷ Mill, J. S., 1861. Utilitarianism, edited with an introduction by Roger Crisp. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

focusing on the consequences rather than the motive or intrinsic nature of an action, for the difficulty of adequately comparing the happiness of different individuals, and for failing to account for the value placed on concepts such as justice and equality. Utilitarianism claims to maximize peoples happiness, but in different cases we may have different results, and of course uncertainty about the likelihood of results. But people are different, and what makes me happy, may not make you happy in the same level and manner that me did. Imagine and when it comes to compare actions where many people are involved, the matter may get hopelessly complex.

Furthermore, for utilitarianisms no action is in itself objectionable. “It is objectionable only when it results in less happiness than could otherwise have been brought about. But some actions can be immoral and thus things we must not do, even if doing them would maximize happiness”⁸.(Shaw, 2014)

2. Wrong actions can produce good outcome?

Even though I have to admit that the statement “wrong actions can produce good outcome” of utilitarian view, is too relative and subjective, I will bring now some examples to support that it can be true.

⁸ Shaw, W, S 2014, Business Ethics, 8-th edn. Wadsworth, International Edition, pg. 50.

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In England, since history remembers, and now turned quite in a myth, a person constrained to turn into a thief, was stealing to rich persons, and than giving them to poor people. His nickname was Robin Hood. His actions of stealing were wrong, but his motive and result was good: to help poor people, and so to reach their happiness.

If one prostitute kills his tutor, this is a wrong action, because is wrong and illegal too to kill somebody, but in the frame of utilitarianism, it brings a good result, that is the release of that unfortunate women from the prostitution chains. This action gives happiness and a free life for her.

However, I will not defend the existent of utilitarianism as a priority in decision making on an organizational context. This, is too relative, depending on the kind of organization. In a business organization, especially now-days, there is no place for utilitarianism at all. The only utilitarianism aspect that a business organization can have, is the form of CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility), where they try to do something to the general public health and wealth. Even this, is a very light form of utilitarianism, because is not pure. Many critics⁹ argue that CSR is not an altruistic form of behavior at all; among others, they say that it is just a form that will make good publicity and good image; higher revenues for organization in the future, etc.

⁹ Freitag, 2008; Mullerat, 2009; Aras and Crouther 2010, etc.

Furthermore, I would see more interesting how does utilitarianism stands in a more complex organization than a business environment. I would like to put questions in arguing the utilitarianism context on state and government, that is a huge organization.

It says that: “By utilitarian standards, an organizational policy, decision, or action is good if it promotes the general welfare more than any other alternative”¹⁰, however, the following thought example will show that this statement is not true and absolute as the Utilitarianism theory claims to be.

For instance, we all are aware of recently arrests and imprisoning of all those who have not pay the bills of electric energy in all over the country. For years, this people have abused with Albanian State, by not paying anything, makes them debtor of OSSHE¹¹. In the other hand, of course that OSSHE will have to caver all its debt caused by those people, so in order to handle this situation, it was growing up continuously the price of electrical power, and all this burden was over the honest people that regularly had paid their bills. Was all this just? Of course not. Was this legal? It wasn't legal neither. And what about utilitarianism and social justice? This has to be discussed. The new government entering into power, thought to bring the social justice, and to apply the low as most important of all. Everyone should obey to law. Law is equal for all.

¹⁰ Shaw, W.H., “Business Ethics”, (Utilitarianism in an Organizational Context), San Jose State University, 9-th edition, USA, 2015. pg. 52

¹¹ OSSHE _in Albanian- Operatori I Shperndarjes Elektrike- stand for: Operator of Electrical Distribution. See the paying process at: <http://oshee.al/inforamcion-mbi-menyen-e-pageses/>

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So, if you want to have electrification in your home, if you use it, you have to pay for it. And this is what the government has done so far. Through the mobilization of police forces, it has controlled all the country and for every brake on the law, they have been arrested all the people that have done thievery of electrical power. I will argue even for the question “Is this legal?”. In my opinion this action is illegal, and I will base this on our Constitution. According to the Article 27, paragraph 3 of Constitution of Albanian Republic, it says: “*No one may be deprived of liberty just because he is not in a state to fulfill a contractual obligation.*” Now let’s see the other side of this medal. I’m not talking for all those people that have considerable incomes, and abusively have profit by not paying bills of electric energy, and especially for all kind of business that has not paid too, - they all deserve punishment for their non-obedience, and this have not any room for discussion at all. But I want to argue for a category of people that are poor and that don’t have the minimal standard of living: all those people that do not have enough incomes to feed themselves, that have very low pensions or wages that are not duly to carry the expenses of its whole family for food and medications, how would they pay bills for electric energy? Isn’t it our state duty to fulfill the minimum standards of living? According to our Constitution¹², on it’s fifth chapter “Social Objectives”, on Article 59/1 it says:

¹² CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA -Text approved by referendum on 21 November 1998 and created by the law No. 8417, and amended on 13 January 2007.

The state, within its constitutional powers and the means at its disposal, and to supplement private initiative and responsibility, aims at:

*“...b. fulfillment of the housing needs of its citizens;
...d. a healthy and ecologically adequate environment for the present
and future generations;”*

As clearly we can read, is the state obligation to obtain the minimal standards on the mentioned fields on this article. If the electric power is missing in a family because it has not money to pay for it, than what will happen? They can not have lights, no warm, no cooking, and all they would have is a miserably life. In this circumstances, they had to *fight for their survival, to fight for their living.*

So, even though the state though to bring into account the social justice, and to make every person accountable for their duties, this actions does not bring the highest happiness for all the Albanian society. This is because every person need to be treated differently according to their needs.

Conclusion

To summarize, In this essay I have discussed about the utilitarianism, its application in the organizational context. By utilitarian standards, an organizational policy, decision, or action is good if it promotes the general welfare more than any other alternative.

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The statement “wrong actions can produce good outcome” of utilitarian view, is too relative and subjective, and specially in organizational context, it has really room for discussion if there is place for utilitarianism or not.

Briefly I can say that utilitarianism is a moral theory with good intention that tried to regulate people behavior by learning them to behave in that way that would bring them the maximization of their happiness, but unfortunately this is an utopian theory that can't be stand purely.

Also, utilitarianism seen in the framework of organizational context, especially in our days, can not be outstanding, because as Milton Friedman says, the only intention of organization is “The maximization of Profits”. For more, utilitarianism has to go through many contra arguments that's make it impossible to be the leading theory on organizational policies and in their decision making process.

And in the end I can say that still the existent of utilitarianism as a priority in decision making on an organizational context is to be taken into question.

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