Strengths And Weaknesses Of Utilitarianism

The theory I have chosen is Utilitarianism, the theory of Utilitarianism states that “you ought to do the act that will produce the most overall net well-being out of all the actions available to you”. To elucidate this better let me break down the important terms “well- being,” and “overall net” used in describing this theory in order to understand the theory of Utilitarianism better. In this context the term “well- being” means the idea of one’s life going better or worse. By “overall net” it means across numbers of individual’s well-being, in other words the focus is on the well- being of the majority. Let’s discuss two strengths and weaknesses of Utilitarianism.

Let us first do the “Stress Test” to determine whether a claim is plausible or implausible. Let us begin with the claim “Morality is Impartial.” Is it plausible that morality is impartial, yes it is plausible that morality is impartial, all lives matter none more than the other. Let me use the “Surprise test,” If Utilitarianism were true would it be surprising that morality is impartial, all lives matter? To elucidate this further, for Utilitarianism all that matters is well –being, it doesn’t matter what your race is, your beliefs or your colour. Therefore, it wouldn’t be surprising that morality is impartial, so it passes the surprise test. Thus, this is strength for Utilitarianism. Now let’s look at another claim which can show us strength of Utilitarianism.

Let’s take the claim “The moral community includes animals as well” in order to show this as a strength, let’s do the “surprise test” again on this claim. “No” it wouldn’t be surprising that moral community includes animals as well because for Utilitarianism by well-being it means the idea of a life going or worse. To elucidate this further, in other words animal’s lives can go better or worse therefore, it is not a surprise that moral community includes animals as well. This means it passes the surprises test as it comes as no surprise at all and it also shows as strength for Utilitarianism. Though it may seem as Utilitarianism as a theory is strong, there are some weaknesses as well.

Let me take the claim “killing innocent people is wrong” now it may seem like the most ethically reasonable statements however when this claim is applied against Utilitarianism, it actually comes up as a weakness for Utilitarianism. Let’s do the surprise test again with this claim, Yes it would be surprising.

Let’s elucidate this further, for Utiliatnism it’s about overall net well-being, which means if one person who is extremely ill and there are 5 other patients who needs organs to survive, utilitarianism would suggest to kill that one innocent person and give his organs to the others because that will produce the most overall net well-being. Another weakness of Utilitarianism can be shown through “Overreach test”, let’s go back to the claim “animals are part of moral community as well.” Does Utilitarianism's explanation of the fact that moral community includes animals as well conflict with other known facts? So if utilitarianism is true animals are part of moral community because they are living things, their lives can go better or worse, they have well-being. Because, trees, insects they are all alive, their lives can go better or worse as well, which means utilitarianism explanation should include all living things not just animals. It seems plausible that animals are in moral community but it doesn’t seem plausible that every living thing is part of the moral community therefore it fails the “overreach test.”