



Mains Practice Question

Q. "The greatest good for the greatest number" is a foundational principle of quantitative utilitarianism. Discuss the ethical implications of prioritizing numerical outcomes over individual rights in the context of public policy decision-making. (150 words)

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Approach

- Begin with a concise explanation of quantitative utilitarianism, highlighting its focus on numerical outcomes and the goal of maximizing aggregate happiness.
- Discuss the ethical implications of prioritizing numerical outcomes over individual rights.
- Conclude by restating the need for a nuanced approach to public policy decision-making that considers both numerical outcomes and the protection of individual rights.

Introduction

"Quantitative utilitarianism, encapsulated by 'The greatest good for the greatest number,' aims to maximize overall happiness. Yet, applying this principle in public policy raises ethical concerns, especially when it compromises individual rights for numerical outcomes."

Body

Ethical Implications:

- **Neglect of Individual Rights:** The utilitarian emphasis on maximizing aggregate happiness may lead to the neglect or violation of individual rights. In some cases, the rights of minority groups or individuals might be sacrificed for the perceived greater good of the majority.
- **Potential for Injustice:** Utilitarian decision-making may justify actions that, while beneficial to the majority, could be perceived as unjust or unfair to certain individuals or minority groups. This poses ethical concerns regarding the equitable distribution of benefits and burdens.
- **Overlooking Minority Interests:** The utilitarian focus on the majority's well-being might result in the marginalization of minority interests, needs, or cultural values. This raises questions about social justice and the inclusivity of public policies.
- **Dilemma of Quantification:** Quantitative utilitarianism relies on the measurement of happiness or well-being, which can be challenging and subjective. Assigning numerical values to outcomes may oversimplify complex ethical considerations, reducing the richness of individual experiences and values.
- **Long-Term Consequences:** Utilitarianism often focuses on short-term outcomes that maximize immediate happiness. This might ignore the potential long-term consequences or harms that could arise from prioritizing numerical outcomes without considering the sustainability and ethical implications of such decisions.

Conclusion

Quantitative utilitarianism, striving for maximum overall good, must be applied in public policy with a careful balance between numerical outcomes and safeguarding individual rights. Achieving a just and

equitable society demands nuanced ethical decision-making, acknowledging the intricacies of human experiences and values.

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