

NORMATIVE FRAMEWORKS

GOALS OF THIS PART OF THE COURSE

What are the goals of public policy?

What do we mean by *good* public policy?

Three approaches

1. **Philosophical:** Normative political theory
2. **Procedural:** Social choice theory
3. A more modest set of goals and associated model

GOALS OF THIS LECTURE

Introduction to normative political theory

Reasonable people can disagree

Not all good things go together

Clarify concepts and debates

“You clarify a few concepts. You make a few distinctions. It’s a living.”



Sidney Morgenbesser

WHAT IS A NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK?

3 things normative theorists do

1. Identify and clarify various normatively valuable goals
2. Describe trade-offs amongst these goals
3. Offer foundational arguments about which goals are valuable and how to balance the trade-offs

A normative framework is a *model* for thinking about normative trade-offs

- ▶ We aren't looking for the **right** normative framework
- ▶ We are looking for useful normative frameworks

Private vs. public morality

OUTLINE

WELFARISM

Utilitarianism

Some Problems for Utilitarianism

EGALITARIANISM

Equality of Wealth

Equality of Opportunity

CONSEQUENTIALISM AND COSMOPOLITANISM

DEONTOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS

TAKE AWAYS

WELFARISM

A *consequentialist* normative framework

Determines the rightness or wrongness of an action, policy, or social arrangement by its consequences

In particular, the consequence of import is people's welfare

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UTILITARIANISM

Bentham: Society should seek to achieve the greatest amount of good for the greatest number

Underlying normative concept for almost all of policy analysis

Two definitions of aggregate utility

- ▶ Sum of utilities
- ▶ Average utility

WHY UTILITARIANISM?

Easy form of welfarism to think about and quantify

- ▶ Though informational requirement of interpersonally comparable utility is quite strong

Provides a powerful way of thinking about trade-offs

- ▶ Always just add up the “plusses and minuses”

Treats individual welfares symmetrically

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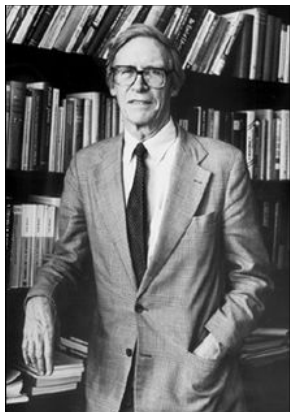
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THINKING ABOUT PROBLEMATIC CASES

“Objections by way of counter-examples are to be made with care, since these may tell us only what we know already, namely that our theory is wrong somewhere. The important thing is to find out how often and how far it is wrong. All theories are presumably mistaken in places. The real question at any given time is which of the views already proposed is the best approximation overall.”



John Rawls

CHALLENGES FOR UTILITARIANISM

Trolleys, transplants, and beyond

CHALLENGES FOR UTILITARIANISM

Trolleys, transplants, and beyond

Intergenerational Equity

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Trolleys, transplants, and beyond

Intergenerational Equity

Relationships



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EGALITARIANISM

Another consequentialist framework

Equality of what?

- ▶ Wealth
- ▶ Opportunity

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PROBLEMS FOR EQUALITY OF WEALTH IN GENERAL

Prioritization and Efficiency

Incentives

Leveling Down

LEVELING DOWN

	Person <i>A</i>	Person <i>B</i>
Society 1	20	20
Society 2	30	40

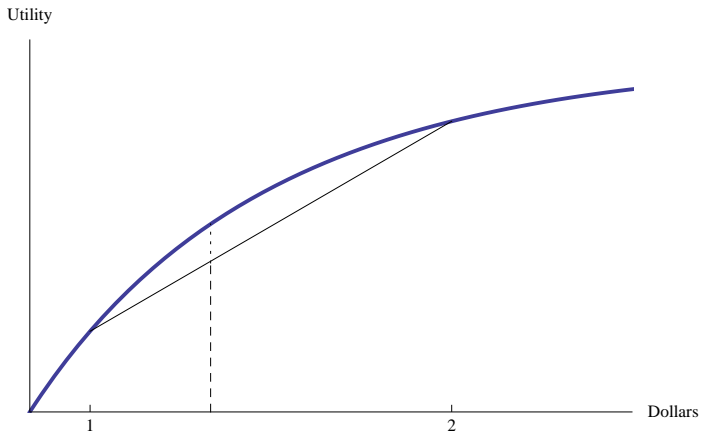
EQUALITY OF WEALTH

Utilitarianism

The veil of ignorance

Community

DIMINISHING MARGINAL UTILITY



COHEN'S COMMUNITY

Inequality breeds competition and commodification

These are debasing

Human dignity is best served by a society organized around cooperation and community

This requires sharing and equality, rather than self-interest and inequality

THE VEIL OF IGNORANCE



THE DIFFERENCE PRINCIPLE

Rawls' Difference Principle: A society should have inequality only to the extent that such inequality tends to increase the welfare of the worst off member of that society.

Egalitarian in spirit

Acknowledges the incentives problem and addresses the leveling down problem

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COHEN'S 3 EQUALITIES OF OPPORTUNITY

1. *Bourgeois Equality of Opportunity*: Irrelevant characteristics shouldn't affect access, only relevant competencies
2. *Left-Liberal Equality of Opportunity*: Irrelevant characteristics shouldn't affect chance of acquiring relevant competencies
3. *Socialist Equality of Opportunity*: Access to opportunities shouldn't be affected by place in distribution of natural talents

DWORKIN'S LUCK ELIMINATION

Matters of luck are only unjust if they are the result of “brute” circumstance, not a deliberate choice of an “option”

What constitutes luck?

- ▶ Parents
- ▶ Innate characteristics
- ▶ Preferences
- ▶ Actions

How do you achieve equality of opportunity without equality of outcomes?

A UTILITARIAN ARGUMENT

Like equality of opportunity to avoid wasting social resources

Balance benefits of equality of opportunity and incentive effects of necessary levels of equality of outcomes

Equality of opportunity isn't the core value

- ▶ Fairness
- ▶ Basic rights

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COSMOPOLITANISM

To apply a consequentialist framework, you must first identify the relevant population

Within a country vs. across countries

Within a generation or across generations

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DEONTOLOGY

Judge a policy or social arrangement by conformity to a moral norm or duty, rather than by its consequences

Rights and duties

Kantian autonomy

2 VERSIONS OF KANT'S CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

1. An action is moral only if a rational person would be willing to make the maxim (principle) that motivates the action a universal law.

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How CI helps with the trolley problem etc.

CHALLENGES FOR DEONTOLOGY

Trade-offs

Paradox of deontology

Identifying the maxim

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Various normative goals are often in conflict with one another

Any plausible normative framework has good arguments in its favor and good arguments against it

Normative frameworks are models that help us think through trade-offs, they do not offer *the* answer to any question

You will (and need) not be able to justify all your normative commitments within a single framework

Reasonable people can disagree