

Critical Paper 1: "A Critique of Utilitarianism"

In section 4 of his essay, Bernard Williams repeatedly brings up the idea of moral identity in terms of moral feelings. He uses these ideas to argue that people who follow utilitarianism lose their integrity (page 103-104). He has an argument as follows:

1. Utilitarians regard their moral feelings as objects of utilitarian value. (Assumption)
2. If (1), then utilitarians lose a sense of their moral identity. (Assumption)
3. Therefore, utilitarians lose a sense of their moral identity. (from 1, 2)
4. If (3), then utilitarians lose their integrity. (Assumption)
5. Therefore, utilitarians lose their integrity. (from 3, 4)

I think that premise 2 is false. Williams may believe this premise is true because he personally feels a direct correlation between his own moral identity and his moral feelings. However, I have an issue with the assumption that the disregard of moral feelings leads to the loss of moral identity. I think that a person's moral identity is not lost when she chooses to think like a utilitarian, but that her moral identity is redefined in terms of utilitarianism. For instance, if I decided to become a utilitarian, my moral identity would not stem from my moral feelings, but would instead stem from my system of weighing what will lead to the most pleasure and the least pain for the public good. My moral identity would therefore still be in existence and not disappear, as Williams' assumption argues. Thus, I do not find Williams' argument to be persuasive.

100 A+ I simply can't find anything wrong with this – great intro, great reconstruction of the argument, clear and pointed critique. Well done!

Bradley Rettler 10/9/17 3:53 PM

Comment [1]: Nice, clear statement of the conclusion of the argument.

Bradley Rettler 10/9/17 3:54 PM

Comment [2]: Clear premises; obviously valid argument.

Bradley Rettler 10/9/17 3:54 PM

Comment [3]: Clear statement of disagreement.