**First Dilemma**

In 1841 the ship William Brown struck an iceberg off Newfoundland and 32 passengers and 7 crewmen were crowded into a lifeboat intended to hold half that number.

As a storm threatened, it became obvious that the lifeboat would have to be lightened if anyone were to survive. The captain reasoned that the right thing to do in this situation was to force some individuals to go over the side and die of hypothermia and/or drowning.

Such an action, he reasoned, was not unjust to those thrown overboard, for they would have drowned anyway. If he did nothing, however, he would be responsible for the deaths of those whom he could have saved.

Some people opposed the captain’s decision. They claimed that if nothing were done and everyone died as a result, no one would be responsible for these deaths. On the other hand, if the captain attempted to save some, he could do so only by killing others and their deaths would be his responsibility; this would be worse than doing nothing and letting all die.

The captain rejected this reasoning. Since the only possibility of rescue required great efforts of rowing, the captain decided that the weakest would have to be sacrificed. In this situation it would be absurd, he thought, to decide by drawing lots who should be thrown overboard. The weak were thrown overboard.

As it turned out, after days of hard rowing, the survivors were rescued and the captain was tried for murder as a result of his action.

**If you had been on the jury, how would you have decided?**

**Second dilemma:**

In Victor Hugo’s Les Miserables, the hero, Jean Valjean, is an ex-convict, living illegally under an assumed name and wanted for breaking parole.

Although he will be returned to the galleys if he is caught, he is a good man who does not deserve to be punished. He has established himself in a town, becoming mayor and public benefactor and is an important person in many people’s lives.

One day, Jean learns that another man, a vagabond, had been arrested for a minor crime and identified as Jean Valjean.

Jean is at first tempted to remain quiet, reasoning to himself that since he had nothing to do with the false identification of this hapless vagabond, he has no obligation to save him. Perhaps this man’s false identification, Jean reflects, is “an act of providence meant to save me.” Upon reflection, however, Jean judges such reasoning “monstrous and hypocritical.”

He now feels certain that it is his duty to reveal his identity, regardless of the disastrous personal consequences. His resolve is disturbed however, as he reflects on the irreparable harm his return to the galleys will mean to so many people who depend upon him for their livelihood—especially troubling in the case of a helpless woman and a small child to whom he feels a special obligation.

He now reproaches himself for being too selfish, for thinking only of his own conscience and not of others. The right thing to do, he now claims to himself, is to remain quiet, to continue making money and using it to help others.

The vagabond, he comforts himself, is not a worthy person anyway. Still unconvinced and tormented by the need to decide, Jean goes to trial and confesses.

**Did he do the right thing?**

Types of Utilitarianism  Utilitarianism is a tradition that in its simplest form would say that the end does justify the means.

The focus is on the consequences of the act rather than the act itself.

Only acts which benefit or harm somebody can be right and wrong.

What way must our actions be useful – for them to be good – there  are various forms:

* 1. Naïve utilitarianism – The right action brings about the greatest amount of pleasure the least amount of pain:

Straightforward example: Two people are stranded in the desert. They know they will be rescued in six hours. One has a bottle of water and since she is thirsty she drinks half of it. She can save half of it for when she becomes thirsty in a couple of hours. Or she can give it to the other person who will suffer extreme dehydration if he does not get a drink. According to naïve utilitarianism she ought to give the other person the remaining water. That action is for the ‘greater good’, maximising happiness.

Utilitarianism can demand we sacrifice our own pleasure for others, and often the individual needs are eclipsed. While Utilitarianism is a philosophy that calls for choices that involve self- sacrifice, hedonism is a philosophy that involves choices that focuses on overall pleasure for oneself.

Hedonistic – utility: Hedonism says that the most important thing is your own pleasure – a philosophy where choices involve the most overall pleasure for yourself.

a. Psychological hedonism–maximize your own pleasure Psychologically – people’s actions are always aimed at their own pleasure – even if they do not admit it.

b. ‘Moral Hedonism’: - duty to maximize your own pleasure It is the view that people ought to act to get pleasure and avoid pain: That way they can have the best lives

It is like utilitarianism except it is only concerned with the person making the decision-  It is a difference that is important.

If a utilitarian and hedonist are given the opportunity to do something for someone - the utilitarian will consider the personal loss to be outweighed by the greater happiness whilst the hedonist will say “what’s in it for me?” So although both the Utilitarian and the Moral Hedonist count pleasure as a central thing you can be a Utilitarian without being a Moral Hedonist.

**Activity: Naïve Utilitarianism Read and Discuss**

The story is told of a tragic incident that occurred when an American frontier village was raided by Indians. Several members hid where they could not be found. One woman had a very small baby in her arms and smothered it for fear it would cry and alert the Indians to their whereabouts and ensure death for them all. Some time after the raid she was punished by the Church and the Community for committing murder.6

* What would you do? Why?
* Do the ends justify the means?