A utilitarian perspective of volunteer tourism in Africa

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Abstract

This paper seeks to align 'volunteer tourism' within the philosophical framework of utilitarianism, with an emphasis on Africa. John Stuart Mill, author of the defining book, entitled 'Utilitarianism' asserts that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote human happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness (Mill, 1863). The key commonality between utilitarian theory and volunteer tourism is the premise that both are doctrines that emphasise social reform, and that good or happy consequences matter. Volunteer tourism can be an experience, which "might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or environment" (Wearing, 2011). In other words, it is a voluntary activity, which seeks to achieve good consequences, and furthermore that volunteer tourists have become a critical human resource for achieving 'good' for many organisations in Africa as well as globally. The issue here is to understand volunteer tourism within utilitarian theory. It is contended that an improved theoretical understanding of this niche area in the tourism industry, will be associated with beneficial economic and social consequences. The significance of tourism, including volunteer tourism both economically and socially can be seen by the number of international tourist arrivals in Africa, which has increased to a new record of 56 million, making Africa one of the fastest growing tourism regions in the world (Zuma, 2014).

Keywords: Volunteer tourism, utilitarianism, South Africa.

Introduction

The premise of this treatise is to consider and evaluate volunteer tourism from a utilitarian perspective. Many assumptions and speculations are forwarded about why people volunteer, but much of the discourse often lacks a reasoned analysis with a framing philosophical perspective. This paper acknowledges that the social actions, notably 'volunteerism' in terms of doing good are well discussed in many historical periods, particularly in medieval and renaissance ethical discourse. This is perhaps most clearly encapsulated within the Augustinian tendency to 'volunteerism' (from the Latin: 'voluntas', meaning 'will'), which is pursued in relation to both the subject and the criterion of goodness (Haldane, 1989). Therefore this paper seeks to provide a more informed understanding regarding the activity of volunteer tourism on the African continent from a utilitarian perspective.

Utilitarianism

The utilitarian approach as proposed by David Hume and thereafter developed most notably by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill emerged during a time of great social and political upheaval in Europe, which included the French Revolution, the American Civil War, and the enormous societal changes caused by the Industrial Revolution (Mill, 1863).

In his book entitled 'Utilitarianism', John Stuart Mill asserts that the creed, which accepts as the foundation of morals 'Utility', or the greatest-happiness 'Principle', holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote human happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness (Mill, 1863). This statement where Mill refers to 'moral utility' is clearly aligned with a consequentialist approach, where by actions that result in happiness are construed to be right, while actions that result in unhappiness are wrong. We may extend this line of thinking with the arguments forwarded by Bentham (1789), who contends that there is one ultimate moral principle, namely, the 'Principle of Utility'. This principle requires us to always choose whatever action or social policy would have the best consequence for everyone concerned.

The views espoused by Mill (1863), and Bentham (1789) are taken up by Rachels (2015), who seek to summarise classical utilitarianism into three propositions:

1) Actions are judged right or wrong solely by their virtue of their consequences; nothing else matters.
2) In assessing consequences, the only thing that matters is the amount of happiness or unhappiness that is created, everything else is irrelevant.
3) Each person's happiness counts the same.

To sum up the Utilitarian approach, one may be best guided by the words of one of its foremost architects John Stuart Mill (1863) "The utilitarian doctrine is that happiness is desirable, and the only thing desirable, as an end; in all things desirable as means to that end".

Rachels (2015:100) make the point that "the appeal of this theory to philosophers, economists and others who theorise about human decision making has been enormous". However, utilitarianism has been challenged by some very serious objections, which ought to be highlighted, as this will inform the present discussion. Firstly theorists have cautioned the utilitarian's preoccupation regarding the notion that pleasure is the only thing that is important. Critics of utilitarianism have asked what exactly is happiness, and what is pleasure?

Secondly, and perhaps more worrying is that utilitarianism merely considers the consequence(s) and does not concern itself with what will happen as a result of doing it. The theory can often be at odds with other important moral prerogatives, notably the ideal of justice. The risk here is that proponents of utilitarianism are only concerned about good consequences, and it becomes increasingly irrelevant (to utilitarian's) if an injustice is perpetuated e.g. torturing a prisoner to make them tell the truth, especially if the response leads to happiness, such as the finding and recovery of stolen money. Whilst the truth is desirable as a good consequence, it is however morally unsanctionable to torture a human being for this result.

The third aspect of utilitarianism, which Rachels (2015) chide with, is that the utilitarian doctrine appears to demand too much of us, in as much that we must be equally concerned for everyone in the world. They point out that we have family and friends who we (naturally) value very highly, and thus it seems farfetched that one can simply regard all people, where ever they live as equally important, because logically it places an unrealistic expectation upon each of us, and has the very real possibility (if enacted) of disrupting our personal and intimate relationship with family, friends and colleagues, as well as persons in our community.

It is perhaps pertinent at this stage to acknowledge the historical context in which Utilitarianism was fashioned during the social and economic upheaval in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth century and why these historical and social antecedents provide insights into this present discourse, namely the extraordinary socio-economic changes that have characterised Africa's transitions from pre-colonial, to colonial and a post-colonial experience. This comparison, should not be construed to be literal, rather it is presented as a milieu that alludes to two continents at different times and the enormous changes that were experienced. It also relates to the general emancipation of people from political and economic hierarchies that hitherto had determined their life experience and expectations, and with that emancipation emerged new discourse, and social theory and policy that in the main sought to improve the lot of mankind. In particular utilitarianism responds most actively for better consequences, not only for mankind, but also for the environment and the animals that share the planet with us. This paper will attempt to acknowledge that utilitarianism provides a tangible and relevant framework for better understanding volunteer tourism, because it is not bound to 'common sense' thinking, which constrains our appreciation of what is right and what is good. In particular it can be seen that Africa has experienced some of the worst excesses of modern development, most clearly by the exploitation of people, resources and the environment, along with the collateral damage to animals. It is contended that volunteer tourists who are largely from Europe and the United States, are young people who are cognisant of the historical antecedents that have culminated in the present socio-economic challenges and on going exploitation of Africa, and are in this activity (volunteer tourism) attempting some form of redress, where by their action(s), namely being a volunteer tourist results in good consequences, happiness, and thus these actions can be construed to be right.

Perhaps one of the most attractive tenets of a Utilitarian approach as a form of 'consequentialist theory' is offered by Pettit who presents the key proposition that motivates an argument for consequentialism, because it shows that the non-consequentialist is committed to a theory which is seriously defective in regard to the methodological virtue of simplicity (Singer, 2000). Thus the guilelessness of utilitarianism, as inferred by Singer (2000) presents a theory aligned with individual actions and activities that are driven to achieve beneficial consequences, notably if they engender more happiness. It is this straightforward and frank appeal that made it attractive for social reformers and policy makers in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, and it is argued, that the bold and clear purpose of utilitarianism resonates well within the African context, along with African philosophy, such as the doctrine of 'Ubuntu', a form of humanism. According to Chibvongodze (2016) the African philosophy of Ubuntu is generally construed within a framework of humane relations, where one's being is tied to that of another. However the same author goes further, and acknowledges that one must also understand the transference of Ubuntu into environmental management practices and ethics has depended on the adoption of indigenous knowledge systems. He goes on to argue that environmental conservation

in traditional societies of Africa has been effectively achieved through the epitomes of Ubuntu such as taboos, totems, clan names, folklore and proverbs.

It is perhaps important to mention that the very essence of Ubuntu hinges on consolidating the human, natural and spiritual tripartite (Museka, 2012); when the great novelist Chinua Achebe died in March of 2013, his death was likened to that of a fallen iroko tree. This association of the writer and the iroko tree seem to mirror an interconnectedness of African life and existence with nature (Chibvongodze, 2016). To take the next step, in a global world, it is inferred that the underlying principles of utilitarianism are imbued and manifested in a significant proportion of people from developed affluent nations, who wish to donate time and money to underdeveloped nations, especially in Africa. The primary motivation for the donation of both time and money is to uplift communities riven by poverty and disease, along with rehabilitation and support work in nature parks, and animal sanctuaries. It is contended that this unique group of individuals who are defined as *'volunteer tourists'* whose work is invariably to effect *'good consequences'* are essential proponents of utilitarianism.

Tourism

The African Union (AU) Commission has prioritised tourism among the socio-economic sectors in defining the targets and strategies for the Africa Agenda 2063. The AU believe tourism has a huge potential and would go a long way in improving the economic and social status of Africans in the next few decades (Zuma, 2014).

According to the current information of the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO, 2014), global international tourist arrivals grew by 5% on average in 2013 to over 1 billion compared to 2012. Demand for international tourism was strongest for destinations in Asia, the Pacific and Africa, which grew by 6%. Even with the financial crisis, tourism in Europe grew by 5%.

Against this background, International tourist arrivals in Africa saw an increase in arrivals by 3 million tourists in 2012, bringing the number of international tourists to Africa's shores to a new record of 56 million. This figure is more than double that registered in 2000, making of Africa one of the fastest growing tourism regions in the world during the last decade, starting from a very low base. More specifically South Africa has also become a popular destination for leisure consumers and according to South African Tourism (SAT) 8.8 million tourists visited South Africa in 2011 of which 4.8 million did so for the primary purpose of leisure (South African Tourism, 2011). Swarbrooke et al. (2003:6) suggest that the concept of tourism generally involves the act of travel or journeying and the dependency of tourism on travel is perhaps one of the reasons why these two areas are so interconnected. Robinson and Novelli (2005:4) suggest that at the "core of tourism is a series of subjective, emotional experiences that actually begins with the first decision and opportunity to travel" (Robinson & Novelli, 2005:4). Wearing (2001:8) further suggests that tourism is not only a form of temporary escape from everyday life, but is also undertaken as a means of self-development.

This journey or act of travel is undertaken by tourists who are defined by the UNWTO (2012) as a visitor (domestic, inbound or outbound) whose trip includes an overnight stay. Theobald (1994:283) further suggests that there are many different types of tourists in the market today. Each individual can participate in many forms of tourism as well as many different activities during a trip and will experience each form and activity to be unique (George, 2007:13). One can therefore say that individuals who

participate in tourism as a form of recreation do so during their free time with the purpose of relaxation, rejuvenation and self-development (Wearing (2001:8).

Furthermore, MacCannell (1976:23) suggests that tourism is a cultural experience. It is an experience of social interaction (Ryan, 1997:203) and is "shaped by power groups who have a stake in the experience" (Wearing, 2001:23). It is therefore a "commercial industry as well as a social phenomenon" (Buckley, 2007:1428). It can be inferred from recent UNTWO reports that this commercial industry is one of the fastest growing and most resilient sectors in the various African economies, and according to Hermann et al. (2010:281) this trend has been verified specifically in South Africa.

Volunteer tourism

However, the term tourism is very broad and can be divided into many different types of tourism, depending on the type of activities that tourists participate in while on vacation (Swarbrooke et al., 2003:6). These activities can be spiritual, business, holiday, cultural, physical, extreme, educational and/or experiential by nature (Torkildsen, 2005:277). Within these sub categories exists volunteer tourism, which is the focus of the paper.

In terms of clarity it should be noted that volunteers offer their skills and time for no remuneration (Wearing, 2001; Edington et al., 2004). However, the way in which people understand and decide to become volunteers has changed significantly over the past decade and Hill et al. (2009:1) suggests that "societal trends, globalisation, technological transformation, demographic shifts, an evolving civil society, the emergence of post-modern values, changes in family life, work patterns and support structures" have had an effect on the behaviours and attitudes of the individual towards volunteering. Volunteer tourism is considered as one of the fastest growing forms of tourism worldwide because of its increasing accessibility by general tourists (Sin, 2009). More specifically volunteer tourists are those individuals who travel to other countries for the primary purpose of providing an unpaid service to others or the environment, usually for the benefit of the community (Wearing, 2001). It is perhaps important to remind ourselves about the utilitarian view that we ought to be equally concerned for everyone in the world, and is an aspect recognised by Rogerson (2010) who has identified a growing element of youth tourism in Africa, which has been driven in part by volunteer tourism, whereby young people have had an increasing willingness to volunteer their services abroad. The consequentialist prerogative is reflected for example by the determination of volunteer tourists to alleviate poverty, help those who are sick, or rehabilitate the environment and working in animal sanctuaries.

A number of commentators believe that volunteer tourists can be divided into two distinctive categories of volunteer tourists, namely volunteer minded versus vacation minded travellers (Brown & Morrison, 2003; SNV Netherlands Development Organisation, 2009).

In the first category we can describe volunteer tourists as those persons who spend most of their vacation time at the volunteer project and a small part of their time on other tourism activities. Their primary reason for undertaking the particular vacation therefore being to spend time volunteering, and by inference it is their intention to render good to those who most need it, in order to realise a good and/or improved consequence.

Vacation minded travellers on the other hand; spend a small amount of their vacation time at the volunteer project and the majority of their time, participating in other tourism activities, which are typically self-indulgent. Their primary reason for undertaking the particular vacation is not to spend time volunteering, but to spend most time on their personal enjoyment as part of the vacation. This category is also referred to as luxury voluntourists (Travelanthropist, 2010), and it could be argued that this type of volunteer tourist is expressing a more hedonistic predilection, and their actions and motives are not aligned with a utilitarian approach. Thus, it is important at this point to emphasise that this essay concerns itself with the first category as described here, namely those individuals who not only planned to donate their time at a volunteer project (as part of a vacation), but expressly spent the majority of their time, money and resources supporting the project. This orientation towards the helping of 'others' or 'causes' is a disposition that seeks to realise good consequences, and it is argued to all intents and purposes that this is essentially a utilitarian approach.

Tomazos and Butler (2009) point out that volunteer tourists do not get paid for their service, but instead pay for this privilege. Interestingly South Africa with many economic, social and environmental challenges has become one of the most popular destinations for volunteer tourists (Lasso Communications, 2009). The focus on South Africa, as a preferred destination for volunteer tourists may also be a consequence of its unique and well-known socio-political history, with the transition from Apartheid to a democratically elected government in 1994. Thus it may have a distinctive appeal, as the socio-political change that ensued it, is universally recognised as one of the most significant and peaceful transitions from a totalitarian regime, to a constitutional democracy deeply rooted in human rights.
Attempting to understand the volunteer tourist does not simply stop at placing the individual in a category or identifying motivations. There are also many other factors that one should consider. It is perhaps apparent from the various trends discussed above, that volunteer tourism has a strong link to the individual's motivation on one hand, and perhaps an equally strong preference toward an individual's philosophical predilection, which is likely to be couched within a utilitarian ethos.

Sin (2009) suggested that the structure of the volunteer tourism industry might be flawed, because it does not actively engage in the important issues of democracy and active citizenship. It could be reasonably argued at this juncture that organisations, which do not appreciate the importance of framing their project in the most appropriate philosophical approach, and understand the importance of social, political, economic and environmental issues, could be positioning their program on a fragile rationale. It is therefore contended that by referencing volunteer tourism within utilitarian theory allows for a more purposeful shaping of missions and visions for organisations wishing to operate successfully in this sphere of tourism.

Hill, Russell and Brewis (2009) have suggested that volunteer organisations that offer volunteer experiences, often create these programmes with the volunteer in mind instead of determining the needs of the local community. It is this shaky and ill-defined notion of 'volunteer tourism' that may undermine its purpose, and its benefit to society. Therefore, it is argued that a clear theoretical framework, that has a consequentialist and/or utilitarian approach, which functions to afford individuals and organisations the scope to make choices that enact appropriate action or social policy, would be beneficial to both volunteer tourists and local communities that they serve. It is contended that this objective, framed within the utilitarian approach is most likely achieved by a participatory process that is by active engagement and dialogue with the affected individuals and/or community. By doing this the volunteer tourist working

within, and from a utilitarian perspective consciously seeks to avoid a paternalistic standpoint that too often characterises so many interventions by wealthier nations, and the attendant charitable and/or aid organisations. Sin (2009) goes further to say that the lack of active engagement with affected communities, simply perpetuates and reinforces the image of aid-recipients as inferior. As a result, the volunteer industry therefore invariably fails in its goals and objectives of addressing social inequalities. Orphanage or pro-poor volunteer tourism can serve as an example of what appears to be a well-intended type of volunteer tourism. In recent years, these forms of volunteer tourism have brought a lot of media attention to the issue of poverty, but on the other hand it is being questioned for its value to local communities.

It should be emphasised that there are many environmental and humanitarian organisations working in Africa that rely on the assistance of international volunteers (Wearing, 2001). These volunteer tourists do more than just provide assistance. It can be seen that volunteer tourists also contribute to the local economy, increase host organisations capacity to provide accessible services to communities, which furthermore leads to an improved quality of life as well as peer support and social contact (Hill *et al.*, 2009). Yet they are likely to be better able to deliver social and environmental projects if there was a tacit understanding of the consequentialist nature of their work.

Tourism as a commercial recreation market has grown tremendously over the past 40 years and as a result of the increasing number of role players, it has developed into an extremely complex industry (Robinson & Novelli, 2005). However, despite this extraordinary growth, a recent review of the current literature by Wearing and McGehee, (2013) found that almost no volunteer tourism literature and research studies focus on formal volunteer companies. Furthermore, there is limited reference to the philosophical underpinnings that characterise not only the programs themselves, but also importantly the volunteer tourists who contribute their time and money to support social and environmental causes. It has been reported by Olivier, Davies & Joubert (2015) that volunteer tourists not only use online resources to identify a program that identifies with their principles and beliefs, but as a result of this information also book their trip directly with the host organisation. The online information is extremely important because it helps the volunteer tourist find a program with which they identify. It is argued that this is fundamentally driven by a utilitarian predilection of wishing to effect good, or improve the happiness of a community. Furthermore, this review process by the prospective volunteer tourist serves as preparation for the experience, creates understanding of what can be expected and gives the host organisation an opportunity to communicate expectations prior to arrival (Lyons & Wearing, 2008). Thus the importance of a well designed web page and/or online information link allows the prospective volunteer tourist to be well informed and enabled to identify a project, which meets their expectations of *Utility*, driven in part by their altruistic motivation. It is argued that programs that accurately present the objectives of the volunteer tourism project(s) offered, and also provide a reasoned theoretical underpinning, namely a utilitarian approach can be more assured of providing a 'volunteer tourism' experience that satisfies the needs of volunteer tourists themselves, sustains a well-managed volunteer programme, and importantly benefits the community and/or environmental project they are seeking to improve.

But from where do volunteer tourists emanate from? It would appear that the people who serve the volunteer tourism industry are dominated by residents from Europe and the USA, with the proportion of volunteer tourists from Asia increasing (Mostafanezhad, 2014). It would be fair to suggest that many of the European and

North American volunteer tourists are expressing a utilitarian approach. However, it is worth noting that the rise in volunteer tourists from Asian countries can be seen as having little do with a utilitarianism, but can be attributed to government laws that ironically make volunteering mandatory. Both Singapore and China have these mandatory laws of participation (Sin, 2009; Holmes & Smith, 2012).

Another interesting differential relates to whether volunteer tourists are likely to be male or female. It appears there that there is a distinct difference in what motivates the various genders (Benson & Seibert, 2009:306). According to the literature it is apparent that women are more likely to participate in volunteer tourism activities (Broad, 2003; Stoddart & Rogerson, 2004; Benson & Seibert, 2009; Holmes & Smith, 2009; Sin, 2009; Tomazos & Butler, 2009; Alexander, 2012). According to Hill et al. (2009:8) women are also more concerned with helping others and making a meaningful contribution to society, whereas men are more interested in participating in adventurous activities. This view was also supported by Lasso Communications (2009) who reported that 64% of all females surveyed, participated in humanitarian projects whereas 62% of males participated in conservation projects (Lasso Communications, 2009:6). Thus females it is argued are more likely to espouse and/or appreciate a philosophical approach that is about making a positive difference, and which results in good and happy consequences, especially in places and communities where this assistance is needed most. This characteristic may in turn allow organisations that promote and/or operate volunteer tourism projects, to effectively target potential 'volunteers' more effectively, and also provide the theoretical underpinning for the project, namely a utilitarian one, that resonates most closely with the attitudes and beliefs of the prospective 'volunteer'.

Current research seems to focus on the benefits of volunteering to the volunteer tourist whereas host organisations and communities are least studied (Sin, 2009; McGehee, 2012; Lupoli & Morse, 2015). Lupoli and Morse (2015) suggest that host communities benefit from volunteer tourism through the forming of close bonds and friendships, sharing of knowledge, breaking down stereotypes, as well as promoting cross-cultural understanding.

Benefits are also financial with Brightsmith, Stronza and Holle (2008) suggesting that host communities also benefit when volunteer tourists purchase goods and services, whereas the actual host organisations benefit through volunteer placement fees.

Mustonen (2007:97) introduce a different viewpoint, based on some basic psychological traits, and suggests that in recent years, volunteer tourist motivations have changed from an altruistic motivation (helping others) to an egoistic motivation (helping yourself first), a concept that is also supported by Sin (2009:481) who even goes as far as to suggest that it has become "the cleansing of developed-world middle-class guilt". Thus, one may suggest that those motivations stemming from altruistic behaviours are also more likely to be aligned with a utilitarian perspective.
These views support the findings from previous South African based studies by Stoddart and Rogerson (2004) and Benson and Seibert (2009), which found that volunteer tourist participants were motivated by new and different experiences, notably helping others and getting to know others, especially African people.

A utilitarian perspective in regard to volunteer tourism

It is perhaps important to remember that when talking about ethics, and in this instance utilitarianism, one is talking about a theory of social relations. The injunctions of ethics are principally injunctions to do good for people, and for sentient beings more general perhaps (Goodin, 1993). This begs the question, 'how far does one cast the net to do good'. It should be noted, that many volunteer tourists feel obligated to render a service to those groups of people who suffered from racist ideology, and the blunt uncompromising advent of colonialization, especially in Africa. However, while such sentiments, namely that racism and racialism are construed to be wrong in the mainstream thinking of developed countries, it is ironic that another sub-category of volunteer tourism, namely environmental and animal conservation orientated projects, are often marginalised, at the expense of 'people' first projects. It is in this instance, worth emphasising the potent and revolutionary positional statements made by Singer (2000), notably the viewpoint that speciesism may be at odds with the delimitation and hierarchical expression of ethics, when it places 'Homo sapiens' at the top, then sentient beings thereafter, with non-sentient creatures being ostracised.

It is in this context that Smart and Williams (1973) cautions that 'common sense' cannot be trusted, as it may exhibit degrees of increasing deficiency, depending upon the historical context in which 'common sense' views are espoused, believed and acted upon. This can be clearly seen in the racist ideologies prevalent in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which unfortunately are still perpetuated in today's supposedly more enlightened world.

According to Rachels (2015) the inadequacy of 'common sense' may turn out to be utilitarianism's greatest contribution. The deficiencies of moral 'common sense' become obvious when these deficiencies are repeatedly and starkly expressed via value systems, perceptions and actions that on reflection are ethically moribund.

It is pertinent to recall these 'common sense' notions that dominated thinking in the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, included broad based attitudes, which were largely prevalent throughout the population in Western Europe and North America that were characterised by demeaning and racist views of certain groups of people. These 'common sense' notions or beliefs allowed for actions and policy that were often enacted in a manner that would be construed as morally repugnant today (Rachels, 2015).

To provide an example of this, it is interesting to consider the observation made by Steyn (2016) in his biography of Jan Smuts, and the sentiments and beliefs held by those in high office. Steyn points out that one should remember that in the Western World at this time (around 1850) the existence of black inequality was barely questioned. Racial segregation was common while a universal or common franchise was almost unknown. Steyn (2016) further suggests that even in the United States, Abraham Lincoln had felt obliged to separate the issue of black suffrage from that of slavery. During his senatorial campaign in 1858 Lincoln said, "I am not, nor have ever been in favour of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of white and black races, that I am not nor ever have been in favour of making voters or jurors of negroes, nor qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people; and I will say in addition to this that there is a physical difference between the white and black races which I believe will forever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality. And in as much as they cannot so live, while they do remain together there must be a superior and inferior, and as much as any other man

am in favour of the superior position assigned to the white race" (Ashbrook Center, 2016).

The worldview during this period, which it is suggested can be summed up to a large extent by the sentiments espoused by Abraham Lincoln, underscores the view held by Rachels (2015) who notes that many white people once felt that there was an important difference between whites and blacks, so that the interests of whites were somehow more important. Trusting the 'common sense' of their day, they might have insisted that an adequate moral theory should accommodate what the majority of people believed to be this 'fact'. Today no one worth listening to would say such a thing, but it is uncertain how many irrational prejudices are still part of society's moral 'common sense'?

It is no surprise perhaps that many volunteer tourism organisations work in countries that were most affected by the exploitative nature of colonialism, notably those in Africa. Furthermore, the bedrock for justifying the exploitation of African resources (both human and natural) was based merely on these 'common sense' notions, hitherto recognised as racist dogma, have been proven repeatedly to be both unjustified and morally redundant.

Another question worth exploring is what other 'common sense' notions prevail in our modern world, which run counter to the notion of utilitarianism? Perhaps the most uncomfortable example relates to the status and understanding we have of animals. According to James Bentham, an early eighteenth century English utilitarian philosopher and social reformer, "the day may come when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights, in other the same rights as Homo sapiens, which never could have been withholden from them but by the hand of tyranny. The same author notes that the French have already discovered that the blackness of the skin is no reason why a human being should be abandoned without redress to the caprice of a tormentor. It may one day come to be recognized that the number of the legs, the villosity of the skin, or the termination of the *os sacrum*, are reasons equally insufficient for abandoning a sensitive being to the same fate. What else is it that should trace the insuperable line? Is it the faculty of reason, or perhaps the faculty of discourse? But a full-grown horse or dog is beyond comparison a more rational, as well as a more conversable animal, than an infant of a day, or a week, or even a month, old. But suppose they were otherwise, what would it avail? The question is not, can they reason? nor, can they talk? but, can they suffer?" (Bentham, 1789).

In this passage Bentham (1789) points to the capacity for suffering as the vital characteristic that gives a being the right to equal consideration. "If a being suffers, there can be no moral justification for refusing to take that suffering into consideration. No matter what the nature of the being, the principle of equality requires that its suffering be counted equally with the like suffering—in so far as rough comparisons can be made—of any other being" (Singer, 1989:8).

Conclusion

The ease with which 'common sense' has shaped attitudes and beliefs is clear to see in the advent of racist ideologies during the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and how these ideologies were perpetuated in one form or another thereafter. Even though there has been a substantive condemnation of racist ideology, other similarly hurtful and damaging ideologies prevail. Rachels (2015) make the point

that future generations will look back in disgust at the way affluent people confined and slaughtered animals, further saying that "if so, they might note that utilitarian philosophers of the day were criticised as simple-minded for advancing a moral theory that straightforwardly condemned such things" (Rachels, 2015:116-7).
Thus we might construe the act of being a volunteer tourist in terms of what Goodin (1993) describes as an act of self-sacrifice. For example Goodin (1993) acknowledges that individuals sometimes engage in acts of self-sacrifice and further suggests that by donating hard-earned money to charitable organisations, an individual is indicating a preference that goes beyond, or even counter to that individual's hedonistic pleasures. However, satisfying those preferences, it is nonetheless a source of utility for that individual.

It is reasonable to contend, given the foregoing that individuals who engage in volunteer tourism, in its many forms, are satisfying a preference for utility. One only needs to reflect on the activities, locations; causes that characterise volunteer tourism in Africa including for example educating children in war torn countries, delivering health care and palliative care to HIV and AIDS suffers, and the rehabilitation of both animals and the environment in which they live. Africa, due to its unique socio-economic experience, and the defining effects of colonialism continues to be characterised by a plethora of challenges. This begs the question, why do people choose to volunteer abroad and often select Africa as a destination of choice? Singer (1993) emphasises that the core of morality is the happiness of beings in this world. It is tentatively argued here, and not wishing to be overly presumptuous that such individuals who donate their time and money for such causes are in effect agents of the '*Principle of Utility'*. This principle requires one to always choose whatever action or social policy would have the best consequence for everyone concerned.

It would be reasonable to assert that Africa in more recent times has been through similarly dramatic social and economic changes that were experienced in eighteenth century Europe, which in turn cultivated the thinking of Hume (1739); Bentham (1789); and Mill (1863) and the emergence of utilitarian and consequentialist theory. It is suggested that many volunteer tourist organisations that are operating both as commercial organisations and/or NPOs, along with the volunteers who sustain them are in effect responding to the utilitarian doctrine, which espouses that "happiness is desirable, and the only thing desirable, as an end; in all other things being desirable only as a means to that end" (Mill, 1863). This is to say that while utilitarianism prompted social reform in Europe and America during period of post industrialisation; Africa since breaking the shackles of colonialism has sought to instigate similar social, economic and environmental reform.

Furthermore, it is argued that mankind is becoming increasingly aware that this predilection towards utility extends beyond humans, to both sentient and non-sentient creatures, as well as to the environment, which sustains life on earth. It is therefore relevant to reassert the foundation of morals 'Utility', or the greatest-happiness 'Principle', which holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote human happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness (Mill, 1863). Volunteer tourists have become a critical human resource for many organisations in Africa as well as globally. This paper has sought to develop a discourse framed within a utilitarian perspective that provides an improved understanding of the reasons and motivations that characterise the volunteer tourism organisations, volunteer tourists, and the communities and projects they serve. Thus we ought to be reminded that any discussion regarding moral obligations and ethics

are essentially about a theory of social relations, and it is with this mind that the *principle of utility* perhaps best reflects the nature of volunteer tourism.

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