

Ethics

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Morality and ethics

- *Morality/morals* = The moral beliefs, views and attitudes of given individuals, societies and groups – for example religious groups.
- *Ethics* = Systematic reflections on moral views and standards (values and norms) and how one should assess actions, institutions and character traits.

Why ethics?

- Other disciplines (sociology, history etc) can tell us how the world is.
- But these disciplines cannot tell us how we should act and live in the world.

Morality and ethics

- We all have some experience with, and idea or understanding of, morality (e.g. as part of our upbringing):
 - Moral emotions (shame, guilt, resentment, indignation)
 - Moral norms (not to kill, not to steal, to keep promises, to respect the rights of others)

Morality and ethics

- **Judgments about the future** (what should be done)
 - *"We should take action to prevent global climate change"*
- **Judgments about the past** (assigning praise and blame)
 - *"The rich countries of the world are responsible for climate change"*



Ethics – Four Branches

- **1. Descriptive ethics** (“how the world is”)
- Factual investigation of moral standards. Describes moral praxis (moral opinions, attitudes and actions) up through history and today – historians, sociologists, psychologists.

Ethics – Four Branches

- **2. Normative ethics** (“how the world should be”)
- Systematic investigation of moral standards (norms and values) with the purpose of clarifying how they are to be understood, justified, interpreted and applied on moral issues – philosophers, theologians.

An example

- **Factual claim:** "The Chinese government is allowing its people less freedom of speech than the Norwegian government".
 - *This claim can be verified through observation.*
- **Ethical claim:** "The Chinese government should allow its people more freedom of speech than it currently does".
 - *This claim cannot be verified through observation. Instead it must be justified by good moral reasons.*

2. Normative ethics continued

- What actions and decisions are right or wrong from an ethical point of view?
- What makes an action or a decision morally right or wrong or good or bad?
- How should we organise basic social institutions (political, legal economic), and how should such institutions distribute benefits and burdens (rights, duties, opportunities and resources) among affected parties?

Normative ethics continued

- Questions of justice (e.g. what is a fair distribution of benefits and burdens in society?)
- Political philosophy
- Moral assessments of a person's character or character traits (e.g. honesty, generosity).
- Assessments of motives and intentions behind acts
- Assessments of moral and legal responsibility.

Ethics – Four Branches

- (3) **Metaethics** = The study of ethical terms, statements and judgements.
 - Analysis of the language, concepts and methods of reasoning in ethics. It addresses the meaning of ethical terms such as right, duty, obligation, justification, morality, responsibility.
 - Moral epistemology (how is moral knowledge possible?)
 - Investigates whether morality is subjective or objective, relative or nonrelative, and whether it has a rational or an emotional basis.

Ethics – Four Branches

- (4) **Applied ethics** = Applied ethics is a part of normative ethics that focus on particular fields
- “The philosophical examination, from a moral standpoint, of particular issues in private and public life that are matters of moral judgment” (Brenda Almond).
- Bioethics
- Animal ethics
- Environmental ethics
- Intergenerational ethics
- Climate ethics
- Business ethics
- Computer ethics etc...

Central concepts

- *Values* = What is regarded as a good.
- Examples: Friendship, education, freedom, autonomy, etc.

- *Moral norms* = Moral duties and rights.
- Examples: Duty not to kill, right not to be tortured

Central concepts

- *Moral duties* = Norms that prescribe how one should act.
- *Positive duties* – A duty that requires some form of (positive) action – e.g. the duty to help people in need.
- *Negative duties* – A duty that just requires that agents refrain from certain courses of action – e.g. the duty not to inflict harm on others or the duty not to lie. One can fulfil ones negative duties without lifting a finger.

- *Universal duties* – Duties owed to everyone.
- *Special duties* – Duties that arise as a result of previous acts (e.g. signing a contract) or special relations to others (e.g. special duties to one's children, family and friends).

Central concepts

- *Moral agents* = Persons (competent persons) who can have moral duties towards others and who can be held accountable (or responsible) for their actions and decisions.
- *Moral subjects* = The class of beings who should be taken into account in our moral assessments and reflections. All moral agents have duties towards all moral subjects, in the sense that all moral subjects have moral status (or moral standing).

Central concepts

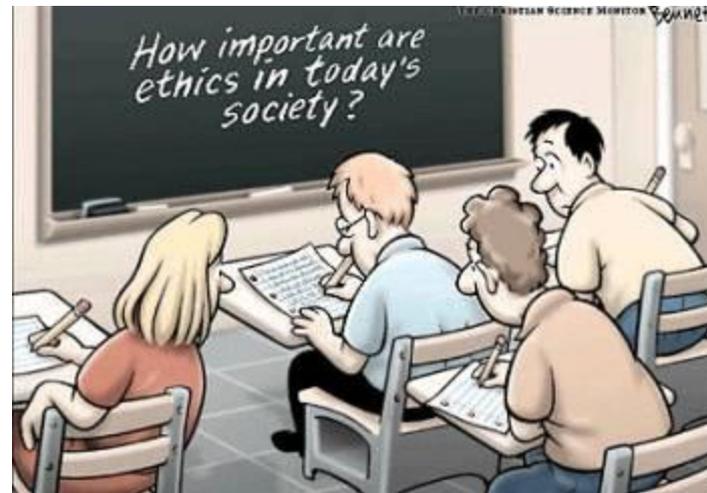
- ***Moral status*** = ‘To have moral status is to be morally considerable, or to have moral standing. It is to be an entity towards which moral agents have, or can have, moral obligations. If an entity has moral status, then we may not treat it in just any way we please; we are morally obliged to give weight in our deliberations to its needs, interests, or well-being. Furthermore, we are morally obliged to do this not merely because protecting it may benefit ourselves or other persons, but because its needs have moral importance in their own right’ (Mary-Ann Warren. *Moral Status: Obligations to Persons and Other Living Things*, (1997), Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- > Central debates about moral status concern the moral status of human embryos (e.g. debates about abortion), animals, nature and future generations.

Ethical theories

- **What is an ethical theory?**
- The aim of ethical theories is, among other things, to present and defend systematic answers to the two following questions:
 - (1) What moral standards (norms and values) should we take into account when assessing actions, decisions and institutions?
 - (2) How should such moral standards be justified?

Moral reasoning

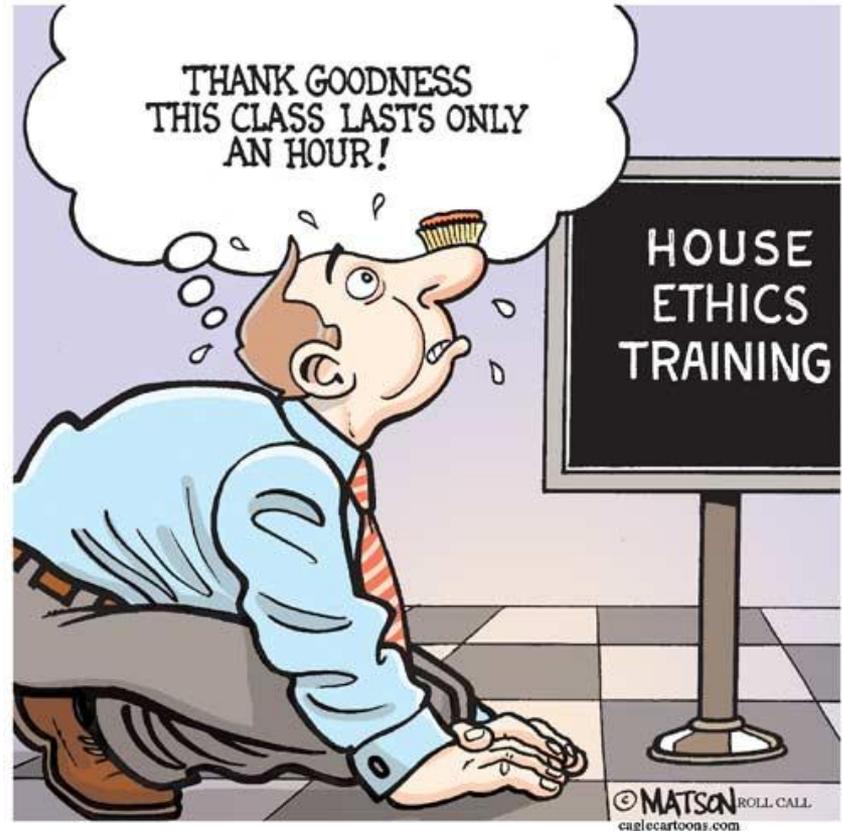
- A normative ethical theory seeks to demonstrate how moral judgments can be defended or justified.
- Moral reasons and considerations.
- Ethics is about weighing different reasons and considerations against each other (for and against).



Moral reasoning

- John Locke (1632-1704): *No moral rule can be proposed, whereof a man may not justly demand a reason*
- The most important question in ethics (and philosophy):

Why?

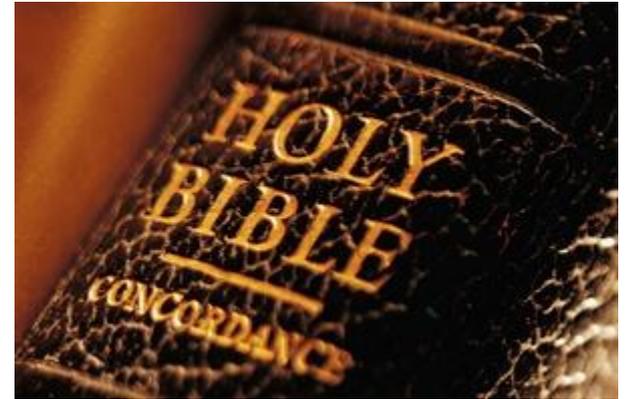


An example

- **Claim:**
- "Euthanasia is morally wrong!"

Why?

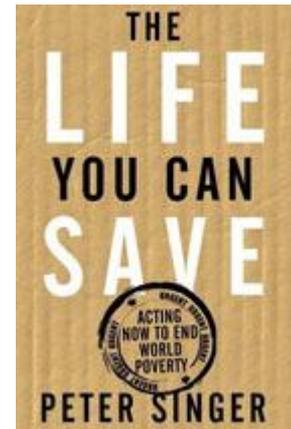
- **Justification:**
- "Life is holy" or "doctors should *save* lives, not *take* them"



Another example

- **Claim:**
- "We have a (positive) duty to save the lives of the poor" (Peter Singer).

Why?



- **Justification:**
- We can save lives without considerable cost to ourselves and to our own well-being (we won't have to sacrifice much).

Another example

- **Claim:** "We have a moral obligation to become vegetarians"

Why?

- **Justification:**

Animals are sentient beings, and we ought not to inflict pain and suffering on them. Also, we can abstain from meat without being made worse off.

Example: Growing GM Food

- **For**
 - Growing of GM food can have good consequences, because plants become easier to grow or they contain more nutrients.
 - In this way we can feed more people, and poor farmers can make more money.
- **Against**
 - GM plants might spread into nature and become a kind of weed.
 - Perhaps there are unknown health-related consequences associated with eating these plants.
- **Decision – what to do?**
 - Decision under uncertainty / Risk analysis / Precautionary approach

Moral reasoning

- Moral reasoning, like all reasoning, involves at least two things: a set of reasons, and a conclusion that these reasons are meant to support. When you put these things together, you have what philosophers call an **argument**.
- An argument is simply any chain of thought in which reasons (philosophers call these **premises**) are offered in support of a particular conclusion.

The Role of Moral Theory

- Moral philosophy is primarily a matter of thinking about the attractions of various ethical *theories*.
- Moral theorizing is the result of a perfectly natural process of thinking. We are questioning beings, interested in seeking out ever deeper explanations of things. And we are uneasy if there is no chance of a unifying explanation, and account that can coherently organize the various aspects of our thinking and experience.

Ethical theories

- **Two types of ethical theories**

- **(i) Teleological theories**

- Value based theories = An act is morally right if it promotes the good or what has value.

- (a) *Consequentialism (and utilitarianism)*

- Whether an act is morally right depends solely on consequences or the goodness of consequences.

- (b) *Virtue ethics*

- Whether an act is morally right or good depends on whether it is in conformity or conflict with certain virtues (or character traits).

Ethical theories

- **(ii) Deontological theories**

- Whether an act is morally right or wrong depends on whether it is in conformity or conflict with moral duties and rights.

- (a) Kantian deontology (monistic & absolutistic)

- (b) Rossian deontology (pluralistic & pro tanto)

4.1 CONSEQUENTIALISM AND UTILITARIANISM

- **Consequentialism**

- **Utilitarianism**

- **Act Utilitarianism**

Objections to act utilitarianism

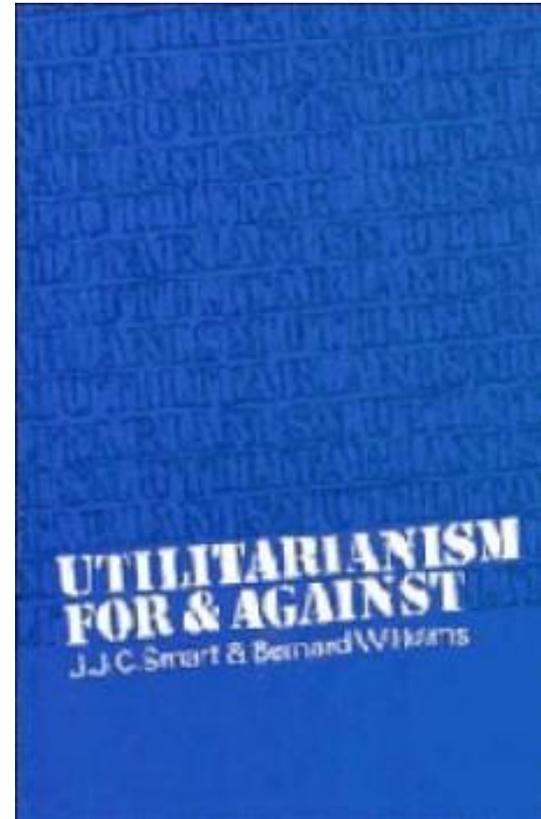
- **Rule utilitarianism**

4.1 Consequentialism

- **Two types of consequentialism**
- (1) *Egoistic and particularistic consequentialism*
- One only takes into consideration how the consequences of an act will affect oneself or a given group – e.g. ones family, fellow citizens/ compatriots, class or race. Moral rightness depends on the consequences for an individual agent or a limited group.
- (2) *Universal consequentialism*
- One takes into account how the consequences of an act will affect *all* the parties involved. Moral rightness depends on the consequences for all affected people or sentient beings.

Utilitarianism

- "The only reason for performing action A rather than alternative action B is that doing A will make mankind (or, perhaps, all sentient beings) happier than will doing B" (J.J. Smart, "An Outline of a System of Utilitarian Ethics", in Smart & Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against*. Cambridge, 1973: 30.)



Utilitarianism

- For the utilitarian, the only thing that has value are states of affairs.
- Utilitarians deny the deontologist's claim that some actions have inherent moral value – as required, forbidden, etc.
- For the utilitarian, if an act has value as right or wrong, then it can only be derivatively, because of the good or bad states of affairs that it produces.

Utilitarianism

- The fundamental principle of utilitarianism is the principle of utility:

The principle of utility

- *The morally right action is the one that produces the best overall consequences with regard to the utility or welfare of all the affected parties.*
- > Jeremy Bentham's slogan: The right act or policy is the one that causes 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number' – that is, maximize the total utility or welfare of the majority of all the affected parties.

Utilitarianism

- But which states of affairs are valuable and which states of affairs are not?
- Utilitarianism tells us that it is the happiness or well being of sentient beings that is the valuable thing.
- Attractive aspect of the theory: we can understand what is good about happiness and bad about suffering, without appealing to anything mysterious or intrinsically valuable.
- It is part of the psychological make-up of sentient beings that they are repelled by pain and attracted by pleasure.

Utilitarianism

- (1) *Welfare hedonism*
- The good is the experience or sensation of pleasure and the absence of pain – pleasure is the only intrinsic good, and pain is the only intrinsic bad (J. Bentham).

- (2) *Higher and lower pleasures*
- The good is what promotes the entire range of valuable mental states, and mental states can be rewarding and valuable without being pleasurable (J. S. Mill).

Utilitarianism

- Mill thinks that some *kinds of happiness or pleasures* are better than others.
- Intellectual pleasure, the satisfactions of finishing a project, or a long-term friendship... are better than...
- “base”/”animal” pleasures taken in eating, or sex.
- “It is better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied”

- Human beings have faculties more elevated than the animal appetites and, when once made conscious of them, do not regard anything as happiness which does not include their gratification...It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are of a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question (Mill, *Utilitarianism*, pp. 56-57).

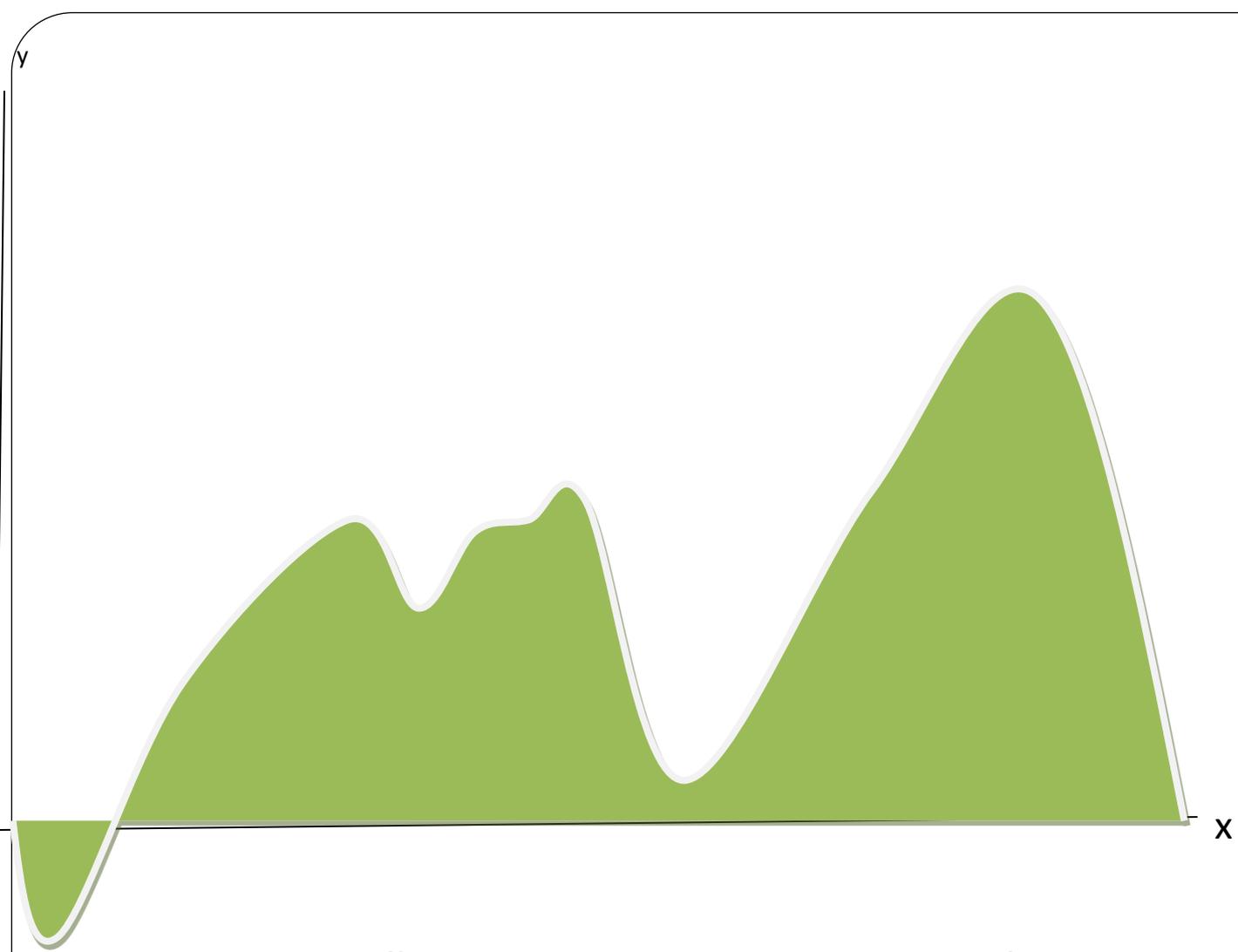
Utilitarianism

- (3) *Preference satisfaction*

- What is good is desire satisfaction or the fulfilment of preferences (whatever they are), and what is bad is the frustration of desires or preferences. “The more you get of what you want (satisfy your preferences), the happier you are”.

- (4) *Informed preferences*

- The good is to satisfy ‘rational’ or ‘informed’ preferences. On this view, the aim is to satisfy those preferences which are based on full information and correct judgements, while rejecting those who are mistaken and irrational.



alarm clock brush teeth coffee newspaper tube accident lecture dinner falling asleep

Fig 2.1 The measurement of well-being

Torbjørn Tønnes, *Understanding Ethics. An Introduction to Moral Theory. Second Edition.* Edinburgh University Press, 2009, p. 20.

Utilitarianism

- **Impartiality**
- Everyone is equally important, and one should give equal weight to each person's (or sentient being's) good or utility/welfare (all who count equally).
- > Utilitarianism is an agent-neutral theory.

Utilitarianism

- **The question of moral status**
- Since utilitarianism assumes that all who count should count equally, it is important to consider the question of who should count or who should be ascribed moral status. It is interesting to note that prominent utilitarians such as Jeremy Bentham and Peter Singer hold that all *sentient beings* should be ascribed moral status, in the sense that moral agents have duties towards all beings who can experience pleasure and pain.

Utilitarianism

- The day *may* come, when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withholden from them but by the hand of tyranny. 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 come one day 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 the case were otherwise, what would it avail? The question is not, Can they *reason*? nor, Can they *talk*? but, Can they *suffer*? (Bentham 1781/1988:311).

Utilitarianism

- 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 the suffering be counted equally with the like suffering – in so far as rough comparisons can be made – of any other being. If a being is not capable of suffering, or experiencing enjoyment or happiness, there is nothing to be taken into account. This is why the limit of sentience (using the term as a convenient, if not strictly accurate, shorthand for the capacity to suffer or experience enjoyment or happiness) is the only defensible boundary of concern for the interests of others. To mark this boundary by some characteristic like intelligence or rationality would be to mark it in an arbitrary way. Why not choose some other characteristic, like skin or colour? (Singer 1993:57-58).

Utilitarianism

- **Two types of utilitarianism**

- (1) *Act utilitarianism*

- The classic form of utilitarianism developed in the nineteenth century.

- (2) *Rule utilitarianism*

- Different versions of this type of utilitarianism play an important role in contemporary moral philosophy

Act Utilitarianism

- Act utilitarianism implies that one should assess whether an act is right or wrong *directly* in view of the principle of utility. This means that the morally right action is the one that has the best overall consequences for the welfare or utility of the majority of the affected parties.

Act Utilitarianism

- **An act utilitarian decision procedure**

- When we face a choice between alternative courses of action, we should choose the course of action that has the best expected consequences for all (or the majority of) the affected parties.

Thus, act utilitarianism prescribes the following decision procedure for assessment and choice of alternative courses of action on the basis of the principle of utility:

Act Utilitarianism

- Identify alternative courses of action:
- A1, A2, A3, ...
- Identify the expected consequences of the alternative courses of action and determine their value (both positive and negative) or utility:
- A1's consequences, A2's consequences, and so on.
- Assessment and choice of action on the basis of the principle of utility.

Example

- I have promised to spend the evening with a friend. But then another friend calls to say that she needs someone to help her prepare work for the next day, and that she can't find anyone else who will do it.
- How do I decide what to do?
- I must weigh the importance of the promise against the importance of helping my friend – weigh the costs and benefits of each course of action.
- The optimal course of action is the one with the greatest balance of benefits over costs – empirical matter of calculating costs and benefits.

Act Utilitarianism

- **3.1. Objections to act utilitarianism**

- The outlined classic version of act utilitarianism seems to face some serious problems.

- Bernard Williams: "the simple-mindedness of utilitarianism dis-qualifies it totally...[t]he day cannot be too far off in which we hear no more of it" (Smart & Williams, *Utilitarianism for and against*, 1973, s. 150)



Act utilitarianism

(1) Act utilitarianism requires too much of the agent's ability to judge.

- In order to decide what is right and wrong to do, we need to have knowledge of several things:
 - i. Know all available course of actions and their consequences.
 - ii. We must put a value on each of the available courses of action.
 - iii. We must compare these different courses of action in order to decide which action has the best expected consequences.
 - But this is almost impossible.
 - Mill's answer: conventional wisdom/ previous experience
 - We shouldn't spend too much time on deciding what to do.

Act Utilitarianism

- **(2) Act utilitarianism seems to be too permissive**
- In some situations, it might require us to do morally problematic or doubtful things in order to bring about a good result.
- No actions are ruled out in advance.
- *Permits actions that conflict with widely recognised moral duties and rights.*
 - The duty not to harm innocent persons.
 - The right not to be tortured.

Act Utilitarianism

- *Permits actions that allow the use of persons only as means.*
- In this connection, act utilitarianism can come into conflict with a fundamental principle in deontological ethics – i.e. the Kantian principle that one should treat other persons with respect and that one should never use other persons only as means.
- Ends justify the means

Act Utilitarianism

- > *The transplant case:*
- Imagine that there is a situation where five patients in a hospital will die without an organ transplant. The patient in room 1 needs a heart, the patient in room 2 needs a liver, the patient in room 3 needs a kidney, and so on. The person in room 6 is in the hospital for routine tests, and his tissue is compatible with the other five patients. Furthermore, a specialist is available to transplant his organs into the other five, but he will die as a result of this operation that will save the lives of the five others. There is no other way to save any of the other five patients.

Act Utilitarianism

- **(3) Act utilitarianism seems to be too demanding**
- The requirement to maximize the total utility or welfare among all affected parties in the world (and perhaps also future generations) would demand all our time and efforts. In order to do what act utilitarianism requires, I would have to devote virtually all my time, energy and resources to maximizing utility in the world. ‘The degree of self-sacrifice required would make the lives of the saints look self-indulgent’ (D. McNaughton 1998).

- This raises the question of where one should draw the line between (a) moral duties and (b) acts that are regarded as good and praiseworthy but not moral duties or requirements – i.e. supererogatory acts.

Act Utilitarianism

- **(4) Act utilitarianism rules out special duties**
- It leaves no room for the special duties which we take ourselves to have to those who are close to us – such as family and friends.
- > Special duties = agent-relative duties.

Rule Utilitarianism

- Rule utilitarianism can be regarded as an attempt to develop a version of utilitarianism that can avoid the outlined objections to the classic version of act utilitarianism.

Rule Utilitarianism

- Rule utilitarianism = The morally right action must be in accordance with moral rules or norms that can be justified on the basis of the principle of utility. Agents should decide what to do in concrete situations by applying rules whose acceptance will produce the best consequences – that is, rules such as ‘Do not harm innocent others’, ‘Do not steal others’ property’. The question is not which *action* will produce the greatest utility, but which moral *norm or rule* will produce the greatest utility or welfare.

Rule Utilitarianism

- **(i) A two-step procedure**
- In rule utilitarianism, assessments of the rightness or wrongness of actions proceed through a two-step procedure:
 - **(1) *An assessment of moral norms (or rules) on the basis of the principle of utility:***
 - One should assess which moral norms (or set of moral norms) that will produce the best overall consequences for all the affected parties, if one assumes that all (or almost all) will follow or accept such norms. Such a list of will probably include moral rules such as ‘Do not lie’, ‘Keep your promises’.

Rule Utilitarianism

- (2) *An assessment of the rightness and wrongness of actions in concrete situations in view of the moral norms that are justified in the first step:*
- One should determine how to act in a concrete situation on the basis of the moral norms justified in step one – even if an alternative course of action will have better consequences for all the affected parties in a given situation. For example, if the norm ‘Do not lie’ is on the list of norms that can be justified in view of the principle of utility (see step one), then it is not permissible to lie (or act in conflict with this duty) even though lying would produce the greatest utility in the case under consideration.

Act utilitarianism

- The principle of utility



- Assessment or choice of action

Rule utilitarianism

The principle of utility



Moral norms



Assessment or
choice of action

4.2 Deontology

- 1. Deontology versus Consequentialism
- 2. Two kinds of deontology
 - Kantian deontology
 - Rossian deontology
- 3. Issues in contemporary deontology

Deontology versus consequentialism

- ‘Deontological’ (from the Greek *deon*, “duty” or “obligation”)
- Deontological theories are most easily understood in contrast to consequentialist theories.
 - While *consequentialists* hold that we should choose the available action with the best overall consequences, *deontologists* hold that we should act in ways constrained by moral rules or rights, and that these rules or rights are defined (at least partly) independently of consequences.
 - Whereas *consequentialists* claim that we should always strive to promote the best consequences, *deontologists* claim that our moral obligations (whatever they are) are in some ways independent of consequences.

How do we determine whether lying or killing is morally right or wrong?

- **The consequentialist's answer:**

- *By appeal to consequences*

- ✓ The rightness or wrongness of lying or killing must be explained by its consequences: if it has good consequences, then it may be right to lie or kill. On the other hand, if it has bad consequences, then it may be wrong to lie or kill

- **The deontologist's answer:**

- *By appeal to norms, rights or obligations*

- ✓ The rightness or wrongness of lying or killing cannot be explained simply by its consequences. The actions of lying or killing are (often) wrong in themselves, independently of whether they have good consequences.

Deontology versus consequentialism

- **Deontology**

- Duties of special relationships (agent-relative duties)
- Not only are we permitted to do more for those close to us, but we are often required to put their interest first.
- It would be wrong to neglect our own children, even if we could thereby do more for (many) other children.

- **Consequentialism**

- Agent-neutral theory (especially act consequentialism)
- Each of us have reason to promote *everyone's* good.

Options

- Am I permitted to care more about my own welfare than about the welfare of others?
- Act utilitarianism says *no*: we have impersonal reasons to try to fix the world (maximise the good)
- Deontology says *yes*: I have personal reasons to care more about myself and my family than about others (strangers).

Supererogation

- **When have I done enough by way of helping others?**
- Act utilitarianism: you will never come that far; there is no point at which you are permitted (or have the option) to do no more.
- This leaves out *supererogation* (acting beyond duty)
- Deontology: there comes a point, perhaps hard to determine, at which you have an option not to do more. But if you make an extra sacrifice, we admire and praise you for it – it is supererogatory.

Examples of supererogation

- The doctor travelling to a plague ridden society to save lives
- The beneficent person who donates (a lot of) money to charity
- The victim who forgives the wrongdoer
- The soldier throwing himself upon a live grenade to save his comrades
- ???

Supererogation

- Often difficult to say whether or not an action goes beyond duty because the boundaries are ill-defined.
- Example 1: what is a nurse's role obligations to desperate, terminally ill patients who cling to the nurse for comfort in their few remaining days?
- Example 2: What about treatment of HIV-infected patients? Is treatment of such patients optional or required?
- Example 3: Fire-fighters entering the twin towers on 9/11, required or supererogatory?

Deontological constraints

- **A duty not to harm *anyone*.**
- **A duty not to lie, kill innocent people, or torture.**
- These prohibitions constrain us in what we may do to *any* person (not just those close to us), even in pursuit of good ends.
- Some acts are good or bad in themselves.
- Some acts are ruled out in advance.

Deontological constraints

- How stringent should these constraints be?
- **Kant** (Kantian deontology): **absolute** or **exceptionless** – we should not lie or kill no matter what.
- **Ross** (Rossian deontology): **pro tanto** – we should not lie or kill unless there are very good reasons to do so (overriding reasons).

Two kinds of deontology

- *Kantian deontology*

- Absolutistic

- Absolute norms and principles.



- *Rossian deontology*

- Pluralistic

- Pro tanto norms and principles



Rossian deontology

- Ross thinks we have several pro tanto duties, for example:
 - A pro tanto duty to help others
 - A pro tanto duty to keep our promises
 - A pro tanto duty of gratitude
 - A pro tanto duty of non-injury
- ❖ The idea is that these things matter morally, they make a difference to what we should do

Ross versus Kant

- Ross' objections to Kant's deontology. Morality is constituted by categorical rules for Kant: we should never infringe on them, even if we have good moral reasons to do otherwise – as when we need to lie to protect someone in danger (cf the Nazi case).
- Why does Kant think it is wrong to lie to the Nazi?
- The problem with Kant's theory is how to handle situations of conflicting obligations and considerations.

Rossian deontology

- ❑ Rights and duties are not absolute standards, but rather strong moral demands or considerations that may be overridden by other moral considerations or principles.
- ❑ *Absolute duties* – must be fulfilled no matter what the competing considerations are in a particular case.
- ❑ *Pro tanto* duties – must be fulfilled unless there are overriding considerations in a particular case.
- ❖ The same reasoning applies to moral rights.

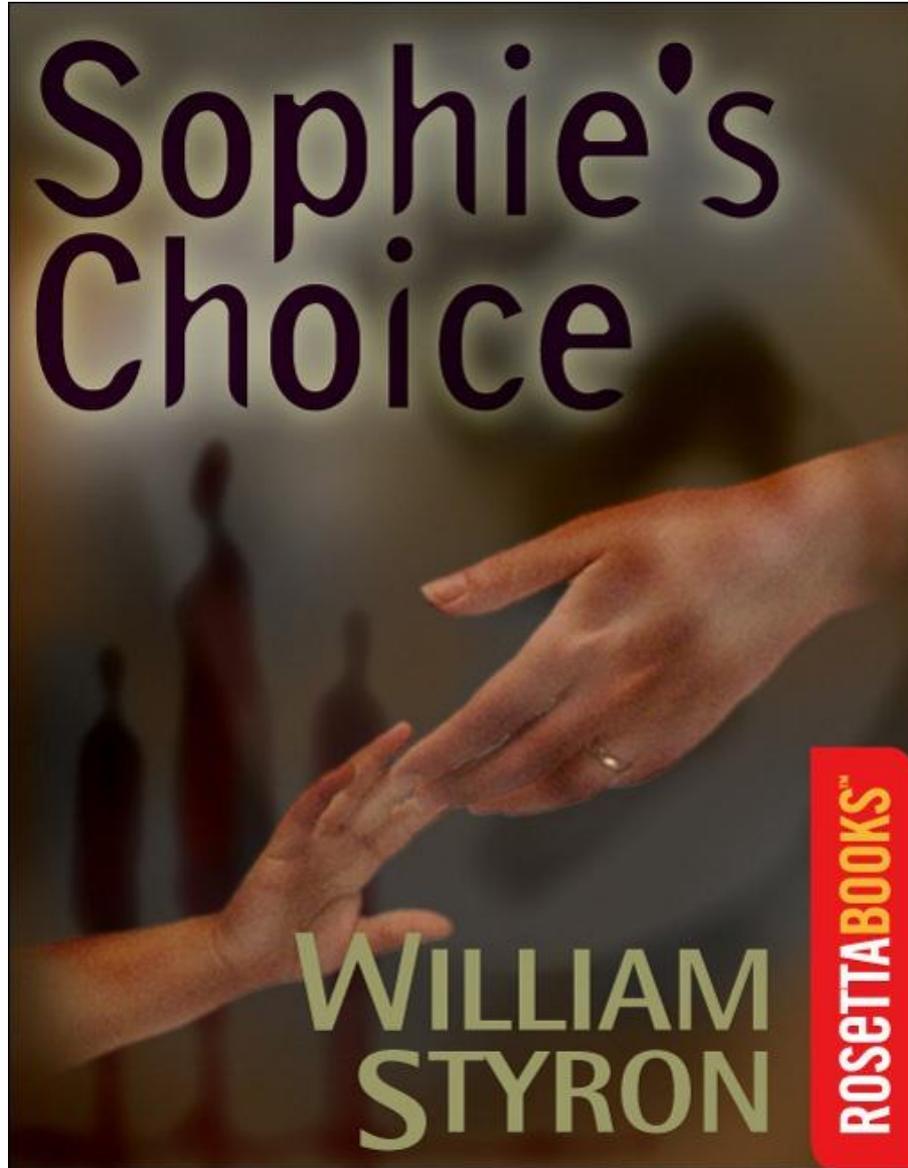
Easy, hard and tragic choices

- Morality is about making moral choices, and we all make such choices.
- 1. Some choices are *easy* – e.g. we don't consciously decide to comfort a close friend whose son was just killed; we just do.
- 2. Other choices are *hard* – e.g. should we have an abortion, or should I tell my sick father that his sister just died?
- 3. Still other choices are *tragic (dilemmatic)* – e.g. Sophies choice, or the doctor's choice, geoengineering.

Sophie's Choice

WILLIAM
STYRON

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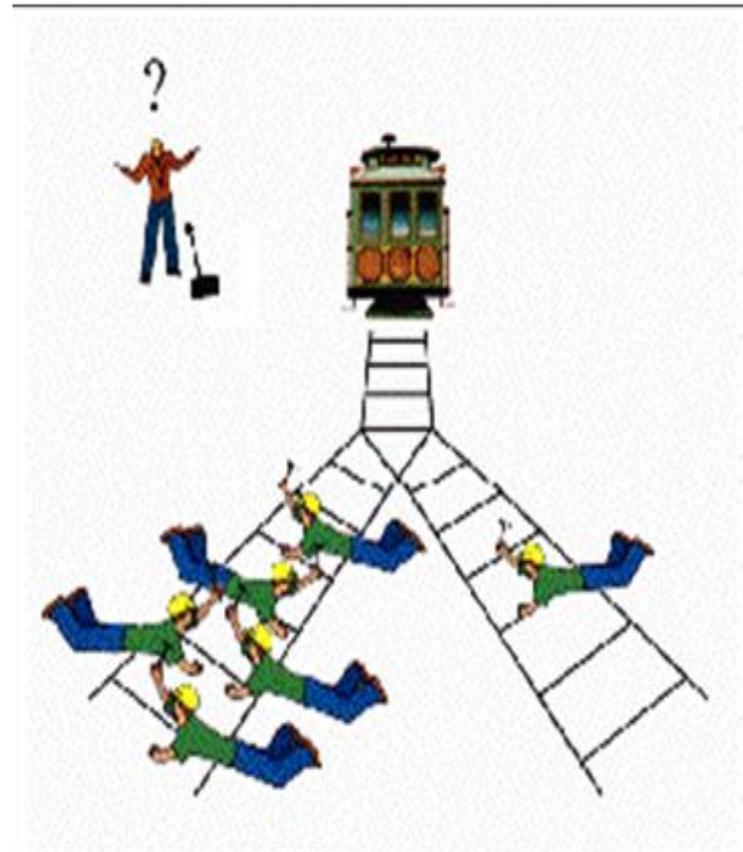


Question

- Should I kill one innocent person in order to save five (is it permissible for me to kill one innocent person in order to save five)?
- The *act utilitarian*'s answer: Yes, you should (it is permissible and sometimes even obligatory).
- The *deontologist*'s answer: No, you should not (it is impermissible to do so). It is a violation of the duty not to harm the innocent and the innocent person's right to life

Trolley Case

- You are at the wheel of a runaway trolley quickly approaching a fork in the tracks. On the tracks extending to the left is a group of five railway workmen. On the tracks extending to the right is a single railway workman.
 - If you do nothing the trolley will proceed to the left, causing the deaths of the five workmen. The only way to avoid the deaths of these workmen is to hit a switch on your dashboard that will cause the trolley to proceed to the right, causing the death of the single workman.
- Is it permissible for you to hit the switch in order to avoid the deaths of the five workmen?



Fat man Case

- A runaway trolley is heading down the tracks toward five workmen who will be killed if the trolley proceeds on its present course. You are on a footbridge over the tracks, in between the approaching trolley and the five workmen. Next to you on this footbridge is a stranger who happens to be very large.
- The only way to save the lives of the five workmen is to push this stranger off the bridge and onto the tracks below where his large body will stop the trolley. The stranger will die if you do this, but the five workmen will be saved.
- Is it permissible for you to push the stranger on to the tracks in order to save the five workmen?



Transplant Case

- A brilliant transplant surgeon has five patients, each in need of a different organ, each of whom will die without that organ. Unfortunately, there are no organs available to perform any of these five transplant operations.
- A healthy young traveler, just passing through the city the doctor works in, comes in for a routine checkup. In the course of doing the checkup, the doctor discovers that his organs are compatible with all five of his dying patients. Suppose further that if the young man were to disappear, no one would suspect the doctor.
- Is it permissible for the doctor to use the organs from the traveller to save the lives of the five patients?



Empirical studies

- Trolley Case
 - ✓ Most people have the intuition that it's permissible to turn the trolley onto the side track. The BBC did an online poll to test this, and 77% of 14,000 respondents agreed that you ought to turn the trolley onto the side track. And in another online survey 90 % said you ought to do this.
- Fat Man Case
 - ✓ Most people have the intuition that it's impermissible to push the one from the footbridge onto the path of the trolley in order to prevent the trolley from killing the five.
- Transplant Case
 - ✓ Most people have the immediate reaction that it would be a moral outrage for the doctor to do this.

The problem

- How do we explain why it is permissible to kill one to save five in the Trolley Case, but impermissible to kill one to save five in the Fat Man Case and in the Transplant Case?

The solution?

- **The Doctrine of Double Effect** (a doctrine going back to the catholic teaching of Thomas Aquinas)
- This doctrine (principle) prohibits the intending of an evil such as for example the hitting of an innocent person with a trolley; it prohibits intending an evil either as an end in itself, or as a means to some greater good. But the doctrine, by contrast, says it's sometimes permissible to do that which you merely foresee will bring about an evil so long as you don't intend the evil.

- In both the Fat Man Case and the Transplant Case we *intend* an evil, such as the killing of an innocent person as a means to save five persons. In the Trolley Case, however, we merely *foresee* that our turning the trolley onto the side track will kill one person.

Deontology versus consequentialism again

- Act **utilitarians** generally think it is permissible to kill one innocent to save the five in all three cases. This is because you should always do the most good, and five persons alive are better than one person alive.
- Most **deontologists** think it is permissible to kill one to save five in the Trolley Case, but impermissible to do so in both the Fat Man Case and the Transplant Case.

Other examples

- *What is the relevance of the Doctrine of Double Effect for real life situations?*
- **Euthanasia:** Many believe that it is permissible to administer morphine to relieve pain *foreseeing* that a patient will die as a consequence, whereas it is impermissible to administer morphine with the *intention* of killing a patient.
- **Self-defense:** It is permissible for you to kill another person in order to save your own life. Here you intend to save your life, the death of the other person being a side-effect of your saving your own life.
- **Terrorism and warfare:** It is impermissible to drop a bomb onto a city, e.g. Hiroshima, with the intention of killing innocents, even if it is done in pursuit of the worthy goal of bringing about an end to this war. However, it is permissible to drop a bomb on a military target, e.g. on a munitions factory, even if a comparable number of people will die as a result of this. The point is that it is never permissible to intend the death of innocents in warfare, whereas it is sometimes permissible to foresee that the same number of people will die in pursuit of a military objective.