

Ethics – Consequentialism vs Non-consequentialism

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ABSTRACT

In the academic field of business ethics, few would claim to be consequentialists, and, in fact, most find consequentialism in tension with ethics not a source of it, in part because consequentialism is often associated with a focus on either happiness or utility—oftentimes economic—rather than ethical values. The non-consequentialist, in contrast, is one who thinks that the rightness or wrongness of an action is not determined by its consequences but by some feature inherent to the action itself. It will be useful to explain more clearly consequentialist and non-consequentialist theories of ethics, and then highlight some of the key examples of how they have been applied in the field of business ethics. Non-consequentialist theories of ethics find the basis of ethics in some sort of rules not based on consequences. The intuitive appeal of non-consequentialism is that happy consequences and ethical behavior do not, in fact, seem to be necessarily connected.

Results and analyzations:

Consequentialism:

Consequentialism is a theory that says whether something is good or bad depends on its outcomes.

An action that brings about more benefit than harm is good, while an action that causes more harm than benefit is not. The most famous version of this theory is utilitarianism.

Although there are references to this idea in the works of ancient philosopher Epicurus, it's closely associated with English philosopher Jeremy Bentham. Bentham's theory of utilitarianism focussed on which actions were most likely to make people happy. If happiness was the experience of pleasure without pain, the most ethical actions were ones that caused the most possible happiness and the least possible pain.

He even developed a calculator to work out which actions were better or worse – the ‘felicific calculus’. Because it counted every person’s pleasure or pain as the same, regardless of age, wealth, race, etc. utilitarianism could be seen as a radically egalitarian philosophy.

Bentham’s views are most closely aligned with act utilitarianism. This basic form of consequentialism holds an action as ethical if and only if it produces more beneficial/pleasure-causing outcomes than negative/pain-causing ones. Whenever we are faced with a decision, an act consequentialist will expect us to ask that question. John Stuart Mill, a student of Bentham’s, disagreed. He believed it was too difficult for a society to run if it had to consider the specific costs/benefits of every single action. How could we have speeding laws, for example, if it would sometimes be ethical to break the speed limit?

Instead, Mill believed we should figure out which set of rules would create the most happiness over an extended period of time and then apply those in every situation. This was his theory of rule utilitarianism.

Non-consequentialism:

Non-consequentialism is a normative ethical theory which denies that the rightness or wrongness of our conduct is determined solely by the goodness or badness of the consequences of our acts or the rules to which those acts conform. It does not deny that consequences can be a factor in determining the rightness of an act. It does insist that even when the consequences of two acts or act types are the same, one might be wrong and the other right. This theory denies both act- and rule-consequentialism, understood as holding that the right act or system of rules is the one that maximizes good consequences as determined by an impartial calculation of good and bad. This calculation requires that we have a theory of what is good; it may be extremely liberal, holding that killings are bad or that autonomy is good, but we are still required to maximize the good. Despite the name “consequentialism,” many consequentialists think that we ought to maximize the goodness of states of affairs where this includes the act itself and its consequences. Non-consequentialists’ deny this. Because of the possibility of this alternative contrast, consequentialism can be thought of as a form of teleology and non-consequentialism as a form of deontology.

Examples of consequentialist ethics:

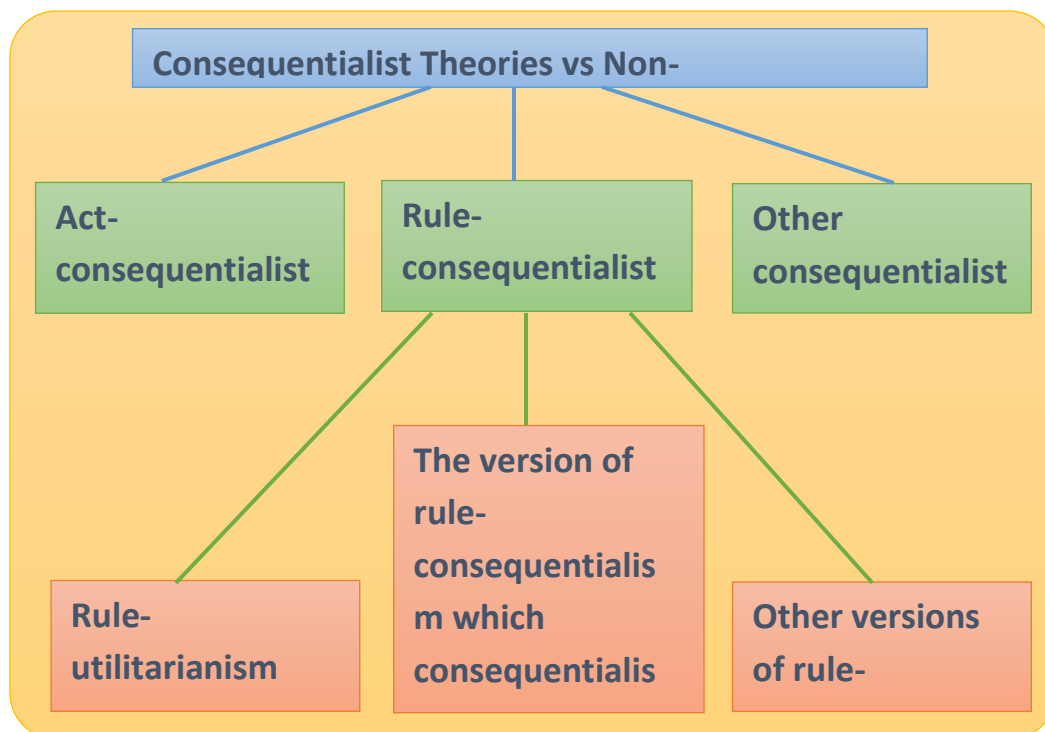
Consequentialism is an ethical theory that judges whether or not something is right by what its consequences are. For instance, most people would agree that lying is wrong. But if telling a lie would help save a person's life, consequentialism says it's the right thing to do.

Examples of non-consequentialist ethics:

Non-consequentialists may argue certain acts are morally wrong no matter what good they produce. For instance, they might say it is always wrong to seriously harm an innocent person even if that harm leads to some other benefit.

Figure:

Rule-consequentialism:



Conclusion:

Consequentialism initially seems a promising and intuitive moral theory, but it can yield strange moral results. This might show that consequentialism is false, or that consequences aren't all that matter in moral assessment. Or maybe consequentialism is true after all, and true morality doesn't always jibe with our everyday intuitions.

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Thank You