

Utilitarianism

8.5-8.8

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Types of Utilitarianism

Two key features: Hedonic and Consequentialist aspect

Hedonic: Happiness/Pleasure is the standard for right and wrong

Consequentialist: Evaluates actions based on consequences and outcomes

Act Utilitarianism: Evaluates each act by happiness caused

Rule Utilitarianism: Follows rules that tend to cause that said happiness or pleasure



Differences with Kantianism and Consequentialism

Utilitarianism does not mean consequentialism. You can be a consequentialist and don't care about being happy while doing these actions.

Kantianism also only focuses on if the action they do being done out of duty and not happiness

Ex: Don Quixote is shown as morally good since his actions are done out of duty for Kantianism but morally bad in terms of Utilitarianism as the outcomes were negative towards others.



The Ripple Effect of Consequences

- Actions may seem to have clear-cut finite effects (ex: ripples from a rock in the pool)
- But real-world actions cause indefinite chains of consequences with immediate effects, not so straight line like a ripple with cause and effect
- These chains including immediate effects, further consequences of those effects, and negative consequences(what doesn't happen)
- Consequences become so numerous and interconnected that they become incalculable



The Archduke's Driver and Consequentialism

- Should One mistake Bear the Weight of History?
 - World War 1 was linked to a driver's mistake that led to the Archduke Franz Ferdinand's assassination
 - This triggered World War 1, the Russian Revolution and the rise of Stalin, Hitler, World War II etc.
 - Immediate consequences was the death of the Archduke
 - Further consequences can trace to the Holocaust and the development of Nuclear Weapons
 - Negative consequences included delayed economic development and peaceful diplomatic alternatives



Was it intentional?

Is he morally responsible for the assassins' choice?

Could the same events have occurred anyway?

Why not trace responsibility further backward?

Assessment / Anticipated vs Actual

In response to the archduke's driver dilemma, consequentialists (and utilitarians) separate consequences into two types.

What will happen if I turn?

1. **Anticipated Consequences** - what we anticipate to happen as a consequence of an action
2. **Actual Consequences** - what actually happens after the fact, unknowable before

Assessing morality of a decision, and holding people responsible, would only depend on the first - we can't blame them for not predicting the future.

Can we still blame someone for not anticipating consequences? Is gross negligence offered protection by this?



Prescription / Assessment Example

Following this, we should make our decisions based on such anticipated consequences. We use generalizations, past experience, knowledge, and reasoning.

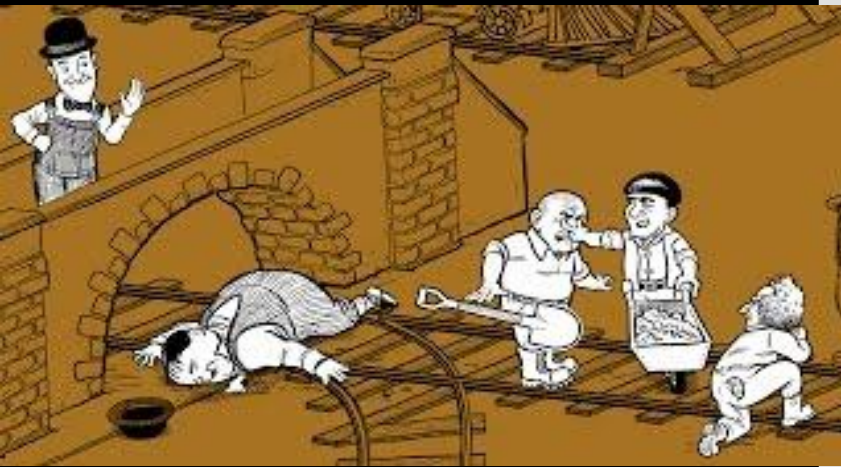
As long as we generally agree on *what* the anticipated consequences are for some action, this is fine in practice.

Returning to the case of the spoiled medical supplies, the act was moral since the *anticipated* consequences were good, assuming there is general agreement on such consequences.

What happens if we disagree on what the anticipated consequences are (see: gun control)? Does utilitarianism even need to answer this?

I anticipate
turning to
be good!





Consequentialism & Spontaneity

"Time taken up in consideration of the consequences is more likely to increase than diminish the death toll... The greatest happiness will not always be served by those who spend time calculating." (Pg 107)

The problem: Consequentialist ethics demands maximizing good outcomes but overthinking consequences in emergencies may worsen the result. This also leads to question Moral deliberation Vs Instinctive action

Example: The Trolley Problem

Risks of Spontaneity



"I might unwittingly pull a future Hitler from the flames... these results might have been anticipated."
(pg 107)

- Spontaneity risks unintended harm (e.g., saving a tyrant, prolonging suffering).
- Moral Luck: Outcomes depend on factors beyond control, challenging consequentialist accountability.

Example: The Butterfly Effect- leading unintended consequences

Consequentialism urges us to calculate the best outcomes, but in urgent situations, calculation can cost lives or lead to paralysis.

Spontaneous action often produces better real-world results in emergencies, yet pure spontaneity can also produce unintended harm.

Then how do we solve the problem?

Shaping our instincts ? By instilling Utilitarian values?

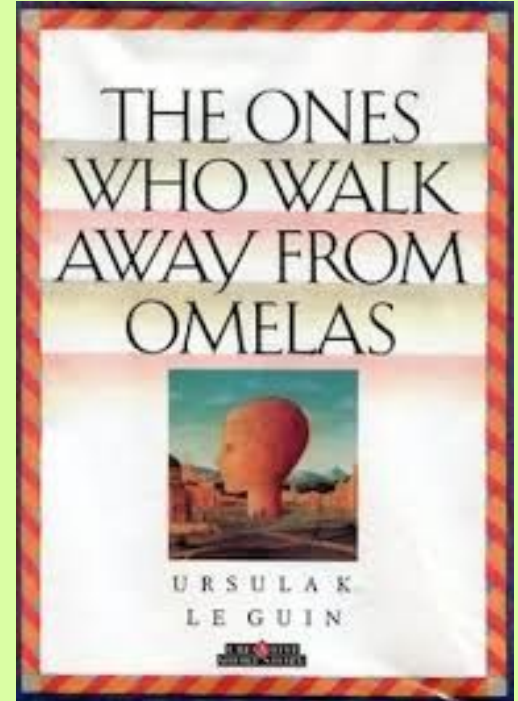
This is akin to Aristotle's idea of cultivating virtue: virtuous people act rightly "automatically" because they have trained their character.

John Stuart Mill also recognized that "rules of thumb" and moral education are necessary because we cannot always calculate consequences in the moment.

The City of Omelas

- Everyone is happy
- Perfect Utopia
- Long Lasting

- Someone suffer for the city to function
 - Forcibly trapped
- Everyone in the city is aware
- Some choose to leave



Morality of the City

Should the people in the city be held morally responsible for the foundation of the city they live in?

What philosophies would approve of a city that is built on the suffering of the few, such as this?

