

Group 4

Chapter 8

Zhongtian Yu, Geyang Wu, Zishuo Li, Yihan Diao

8.1 Utility and the Greatest Happiness Principle

- “**Utility**” originally referred to **social reformers** who valued **practical usefulness**
- Philosophical Utilitarianism, however, is about **general happiness**, not mere efficiency
- the Greatest Happiness Principle: “that action is best, which procures the greatest happiness.”

8.2 Jeremy Bentham

Founder of Utilitarianism: A child prodigy and legal scholar (Oxford at 12)

Lifelong Mission: Campaigned for a more intelligible, just, and humane legal system in England.

Philosophical Legacy: Shifted focus from legal procedures to the concept of "Utility."

Redefining Utility & The Two Sovereign Masters

What is "Utility"? A property that produces benefit, advantage, pleasure, or prevents pain and evil.

Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure.

The Ultimate Standard: Successful institutions and correct individual actions must maximize pleasure and minimize pain.

Hedonic Calculus

A Quantitative Approach: A system to distinguish and measure different kinds of pleasure and pain.

Weighing Consequences: Designed to compare the relative weights of outcomes from different courses of action.

Rational Decision-Making: Replaces unfounded prejudices and whimsical administrative choices with logic.

J.S. Mill & The Greatest Happiness Principle

Philosophical Sophistication: Refined Bentham's crude concepts into a recognized philosophical theory.

The Greatest Happiness Principle:

- Actions are **right** if they promote happiness.
- Actions are **wrong** if they produce the reverse of happiness.

8.3 Egotism, Altruism, and Generalized Benevolence

Egoism: a philosophical concept asserting that self-interest is the primary motive, driver, or justified goal of human behavior

Altruism: selfless concern for the well-being of others, without care for one's own interests; unselfishness.

Generalized Benevolence: the disposition, desire, or inclination to do good, characterized by kindness, generosity, and goodwill toward others

Compare

Altruism: myself < others 1 < 2

Generalized Benevolence: myself = others

Relationships with Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism is about **general happiness**, not mere efficiency

- Utilitarianism is not merely asking for occasional sacrifice. It sometimes demands **full impartiality**, meaning the people closest to us (family, friends) must be treated as morally equal to strangers in decision-making

So it's more like **a moral theory/decision rule**: you should choose the action (or follow the rules) that maximizes overall utility (meaning the happiness/well-being and the reduction of suffering).

- Generalized Benevolence is **a moral attitude**: you care about everyone's interests impartially—no one's welfare counts “more” just because they're you, your friend, or your group.

If you do something, then...

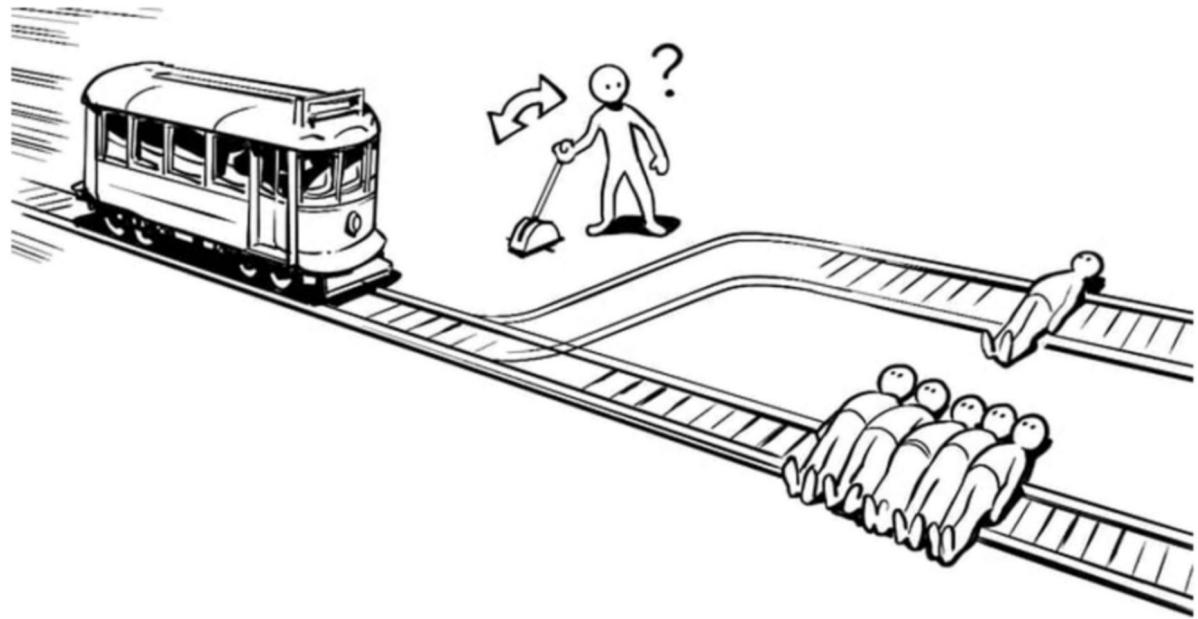
everyone's interests at first: $1 + 2 + 3$

After some decisions:

Utilitarianism → max the overall benefits: $1 + 1 + 7$

Generalized Benevolence → $2 + 2 + 2$

1. Six of them have equal social utility
2. The upper one has more social utility
3. How can you predict the future



The greatest happiness can require you to treat family members as if they were not special—a requirement many people find morally alien or psychologically unrealistic.

Takeaway

If utilitarianism were the correct theory, it still owes an explanation of moral authority: Why should morality override what matters most to us personally?

Utilitarianism is merely a judgment based on current values/utilities within a group/country/society

Utilitarianism can approve actions that conflict sharply with justice, respect, and basic decency—because it aggregates welfare without protecting individuals.

8.9 Act and Rule

- Rule utilitarianism
- The Sheriff and the Mob from H.J. McCloskey

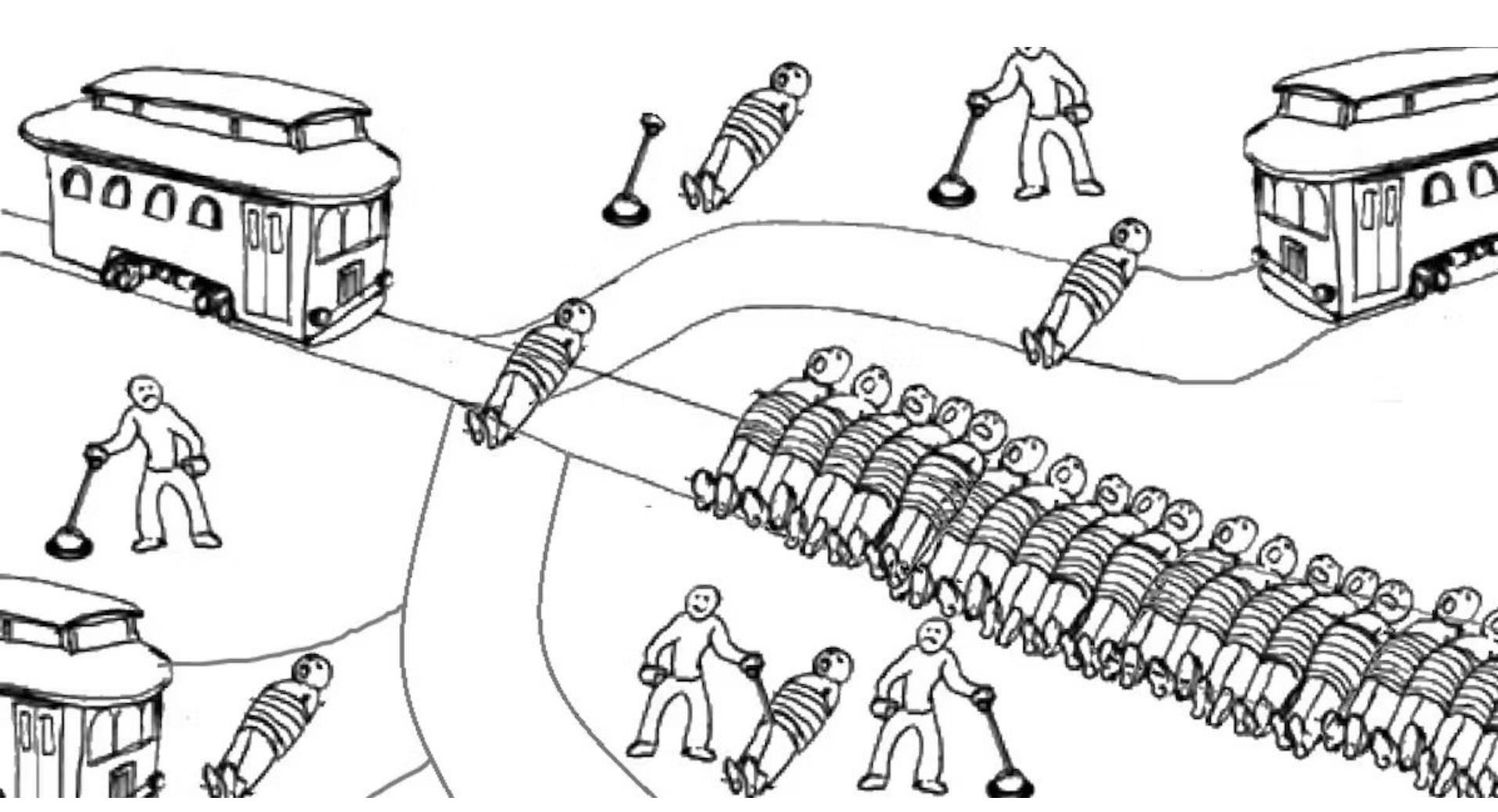
Rule Utilitarianism

Definition: Actions should conform to the principle that brings the greatest happiness when they are universally accepted and implemented.

Rule Utilitarianism

It is introduced **mainly** to:

- Solve the problem of spontaneity,
- Avoid the problem of unjust means,
from act utilitarianism.



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Sheriff and mobs

- The sheriff arrested "a innocent man who looked like the murderer."
- Mob surrounds jail: Execution or else riots will break out.

Unjust means from act utilitarianism

Unjust means from act utilitarianism

Kill the innocent.

Rule utilitarians would want to do otherwise
“We should never kill the innocent.”

Moral dilemma

"You have to choose, no matter how you choose, you'll be wrong."

The author's argument:

Usually, not kill innocent is better (utilitarianism speaking)

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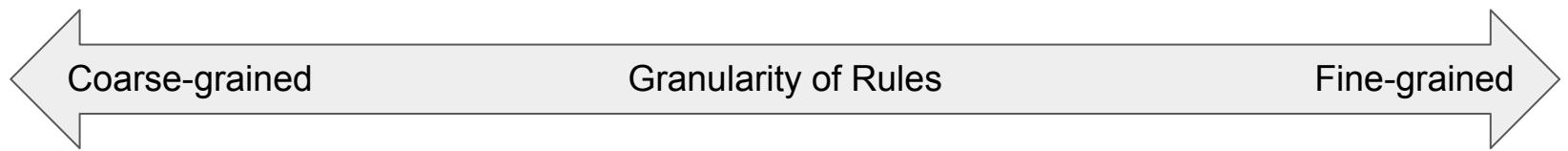


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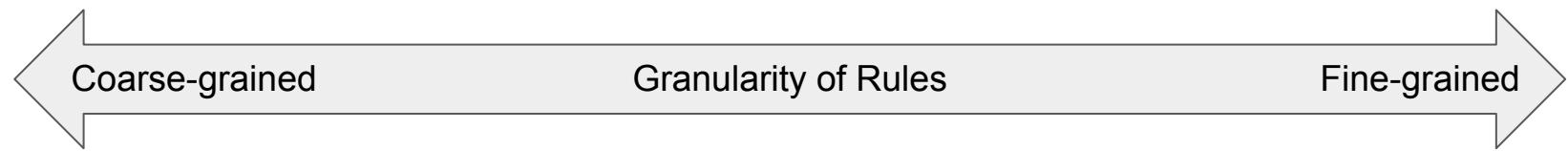
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Rule Utilitarianism



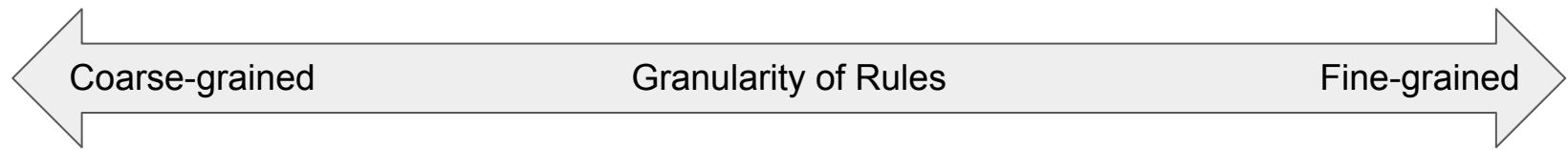
Rule Utilitarianism

No kill innocent



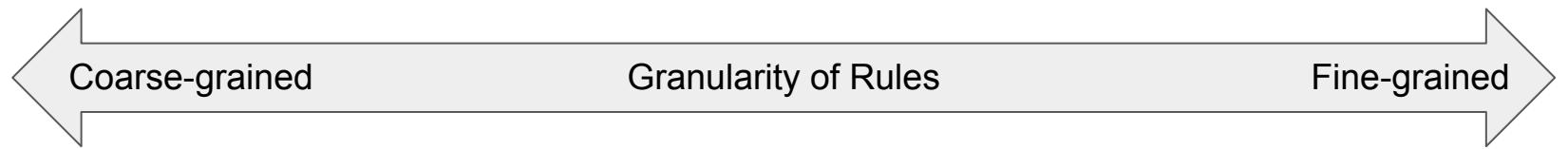
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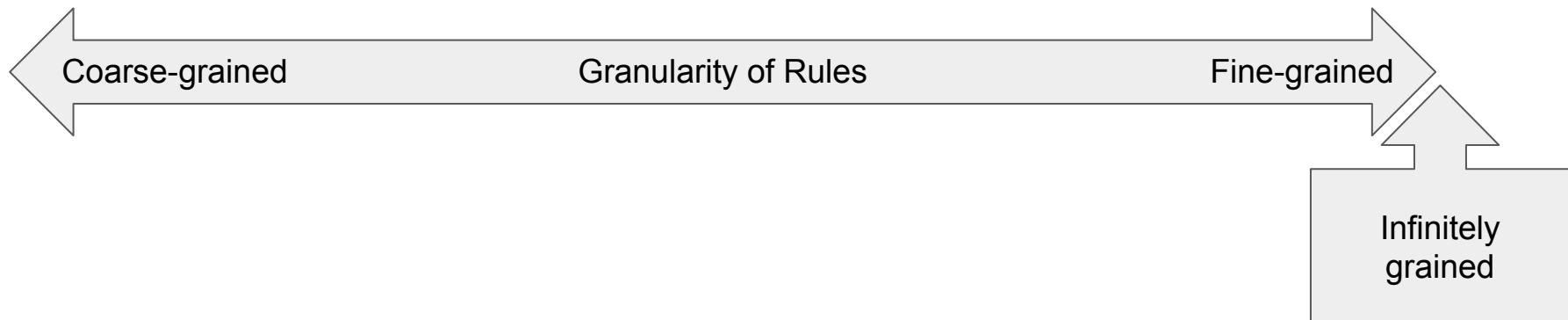
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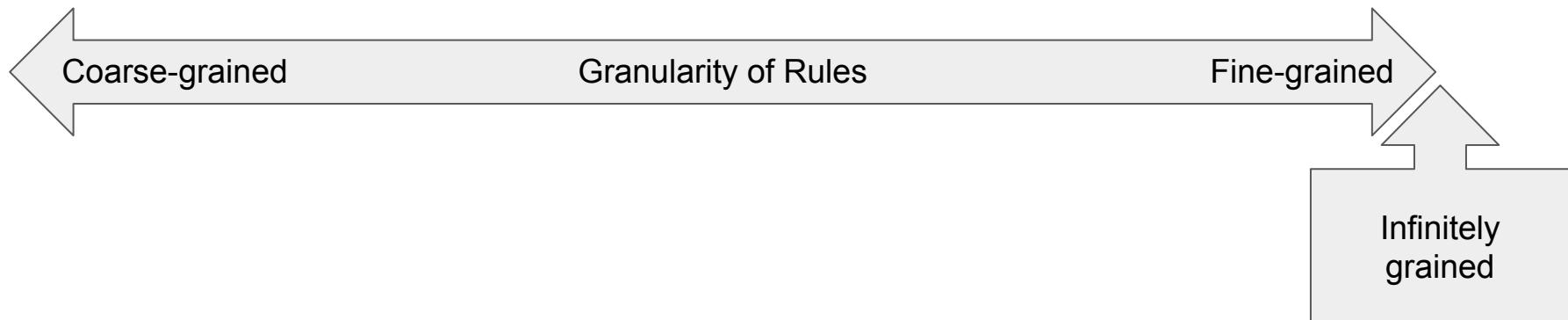


Kill, but only in some cases

Rule Utilitarianism



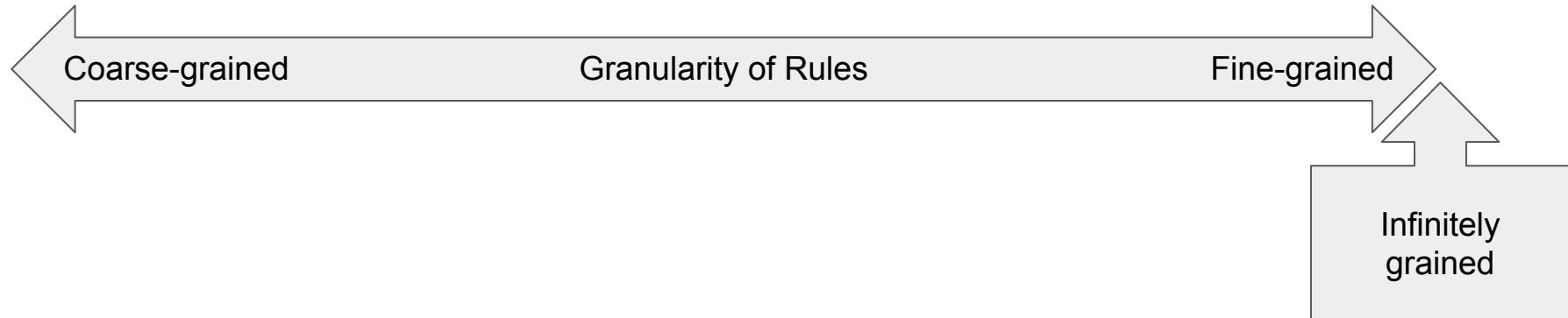
Rule Utilitarianism



Universalization
does a lot

Rule Utilitarianism

Universalization
does nothing



- There are always exception
 - Always need finer grained rules
 - Infinitely grained rules
 - No more universality
 - **Act utilitarianism**

My Opinion

- The opposition to rule utilitarianism works theoretically .
- Different case in practice.

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Why we do not kill innocent people

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 - The judicial system is unable to protect the good, nor punish the bad.
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 - Public can no longer trust in the judicial system.
- Universalization
 - The government can justifiably execute innocent whenever mobs threat for it.
 - No one is safe anymore.



**It is better to risk saving a
guilty man than to condemn
an innocent one.**

Voltaire



An assumption

Not kill innocent people will lead to more death.



~~Kill this innocent man is better utilitarianism speaking~~



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“Never punish the innocent unless serious social strife needs to be averted thereby.”?

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and the innocent is called John Smith
and lives in Davis California
and 25 years old
and this rule only valid until May 2026

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...

We cannot really subdivide rules infinitely.



In practice, rule utilitarianism \neq act utilitarianism.

One more thing

The problem is essentially a result of government incompetence.

- Information gap
- Strong distrust
- Poor legal awareness

Lying is wrong

A student:

- Not attending the lecture
 - No review
 - Cheating during the exam
 - Once caught, face a choice: to lie or not to lie.
-
- He say: "I am a rule utilitarian. After I refine the rules, I have to lie in order to maximize happiness."

Takeaway

- Rule utilitarianism is actually very useful
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I'm talking about morality.

2.3.3 From Essence to Being

Passive essence: “**unrealized, and its non-abstract reality remains unknown, a yet-to-be-conceived possibility**“ (**A Future Invention, An Unwritten Novel**)

Phenomenological

Active essence: “**actualized reality subject to awareness and direct experience as a conceivable potentiality**” (**A Built House, A Running Software System**)

Existential

“Is” and “Exists”: A Linguistic Distinction

We often say: The wave exists. The wave is rising. The wave is powerful.

But does something called a wave really exist in reality?

Or:

Only the seawater is moving?

Do not mistake "the existential structure in language" for "the existential structure in reality"

Reality = a holistic unfolding. (wholeness)

We analyze it using language,

but don't mistake the analytical structure for the actual structure.

Atomism

Our logical expression assumes that the world is composed of independent units.

(treat a family as two parents + a child)

This perspective is "incomplete."

It ignores relationships.

It ignores interactions.

It ignores the influence of the observer themselves.

Takeaway

All individual beings depend on a more fundamental "existence itself."

Light bulbs, televisions, and computers all rely on electricity.

Diversity is merely a superficial appearance; the true essence is a unified whole.

We say: This is a wave This is foam This is a splash

But in reality: There is only the sea. "Wave" is merely a form.