

# Control, Collective Action, and a Solution to the Mismatch Problem

Bob Gruber - Springfield College - rgruber@springfieldcollege.edu

## 1 What's the mismatch problem?

*Two Buttons:* Whiff and Poof are situated in front of two identical buttons. Each can either press his button or refrain from pressing it. Unfortunately, for whatever reason, if Whiff were to push his button, Poof wouldn't push his. And if Poof were to push his button, Whiff wouldn't push his. What happens is that each of Whiff and Poof refrains from pushing his button, and the group thereby brings about an avoidable, bad result.

	Whiff pushes	Whiff doesn't push
Poof pushes	BEST	WORST
Poof doesn't push	WORST	BAD

**Act Consequentialism:** an act is morally permissible just in case there's no alternative with a better outcome.

*Three assumptions underlying the problem:*

- Groups sometimes act.
- Act Consequentialism can be extended to evaluate group acts.
- It is a defect in a moral theory if it allows for a collection of permissible individual acts to constitute a morally wrong group act.

## 2 Two ways to resolve the mismatch problem

#1. Usual approach: Modify Act Consequentialism so that it condemns at least one of the individual acts. (expected utility, uncooperativeness, collective consequentialism)

#2. My approach: Modify Act Consequentialism so that it exonerates the group act. (require only that agents perform alternatives that are under the agent's control)

### 3 When does an agent have control?

*Safe*: You are keeping \$100 inside a safe for which you've forgotten the combination. You *could* turn the knob first to '13', and then to '24', and then to '45', and then you could open the door and grab your cash. But were you to turn the dial first to '13', you would get the other numbers wrong and you would fail to open the safe.

**Inadequate Proposal:** an alternative is within an agent's *intentional control* just in case the agent can intend to perform the alternative and the alternative would be performed were the agent to intend to do it

(Obj 1) Some daunting alternatives are under my control.

(Obj 2) Some groups without collective intentionality have control:

*Cyclists*: Two cyclists are approaching each other, each riding the centerline of a bike path. The cyclists are competent. Were either one of the cyclists to veer off to her right, the other would adjust her course to the right as well—they would then pass each other on the right. Or were either one of them to veer to her left, so would the other—they would then pass each other on the left. So the group has two crash-avoiding alternatives, each of which the group can reliably get itself to perform.

*Some types of motivation.*

- intending
- trying
- choosing
- starting

### 4 My answer: motivational control

An alternative is within an agent's *motivational control* just in case the agent can be motivated to perform the act and the alternative would be performed were the agent to be motivated to do it.

*Conditions for a group having motivational control over an alternative:*

- At least one member can do their part in the group alternative.
- The individual's doing his/her part is under his/her motivational control.
- The group would carry out the alternative were its individual member to do his/her part in it.

	Whiff pushes	Whiff doesn't push
Poof pushes	-	WORST
Poof doesn't push	WORST	BAD

## 5 How should Act Consequentialism be modified?

Act Consequentialism imposes an unreasonable demand on agents in situations where they lack internal motivational control.

- Alternatives that aren't under an agent's motivational control should not be obligatory.
- At least one of the alternatives under the agent's motivational control should be permissible.

**Control Modified Act Consequentialism (CMAC):** An act is morally permissible just in case there's no alternative within the agent's motivational control that has a better outcome.

## 6 How does CMAC solve the mismatch problem?

(1) CMAC says both the group and the individuals act permissibly in Two Buttons.

(2) Whenever CMAC condemns a group act, it also condemns an individual act:

*Coordinated Buttons:* The same as Two Buttons except that for whatever reason, if Whiff were to push his button, Poof would also push his. And if Poof were to push his button, Whiff would also push his. What happens is that each of Whiff and Poof refrains from pushing his button, and the group thereby brings about a bad result.

## 7 Why CMAC is superior to some competitors

**Collective Consequentialism:** an agent is morally obligated to do whatever that agent does in the most optimific group act of which the agent is a part.

*Problem:* recklessness. (Swimming pool case.)

**Co-operative Utilitarianism:** an agent is first morally obligated to be prepared to cooperate. The agent must then identify other would-be cooperators. Then the agent is morally obligated to do as the agent does in the best pattern of behavior open to all would-be cooperators.

*Problem:* violates ought-implies-can. (Intractable dispositions.)

**Disposition Consequentialism:** an agent has a good disposition just in case the agent would do his or her part in the optimal collective pattern of behavior were all others to do their parts in it.

*Problem:* doesn't resolve mismatch within the territory of act evaluation.