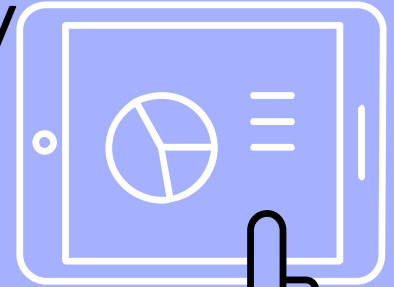
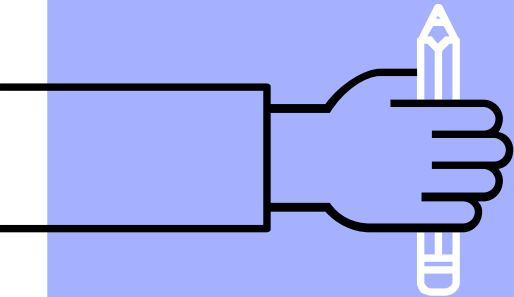
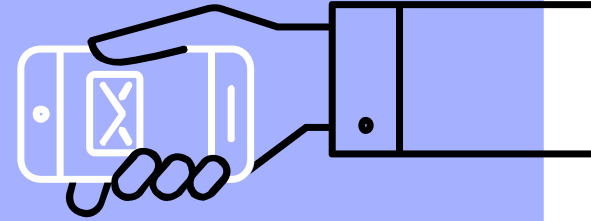
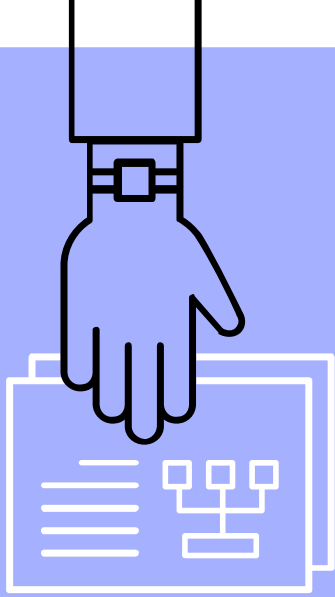


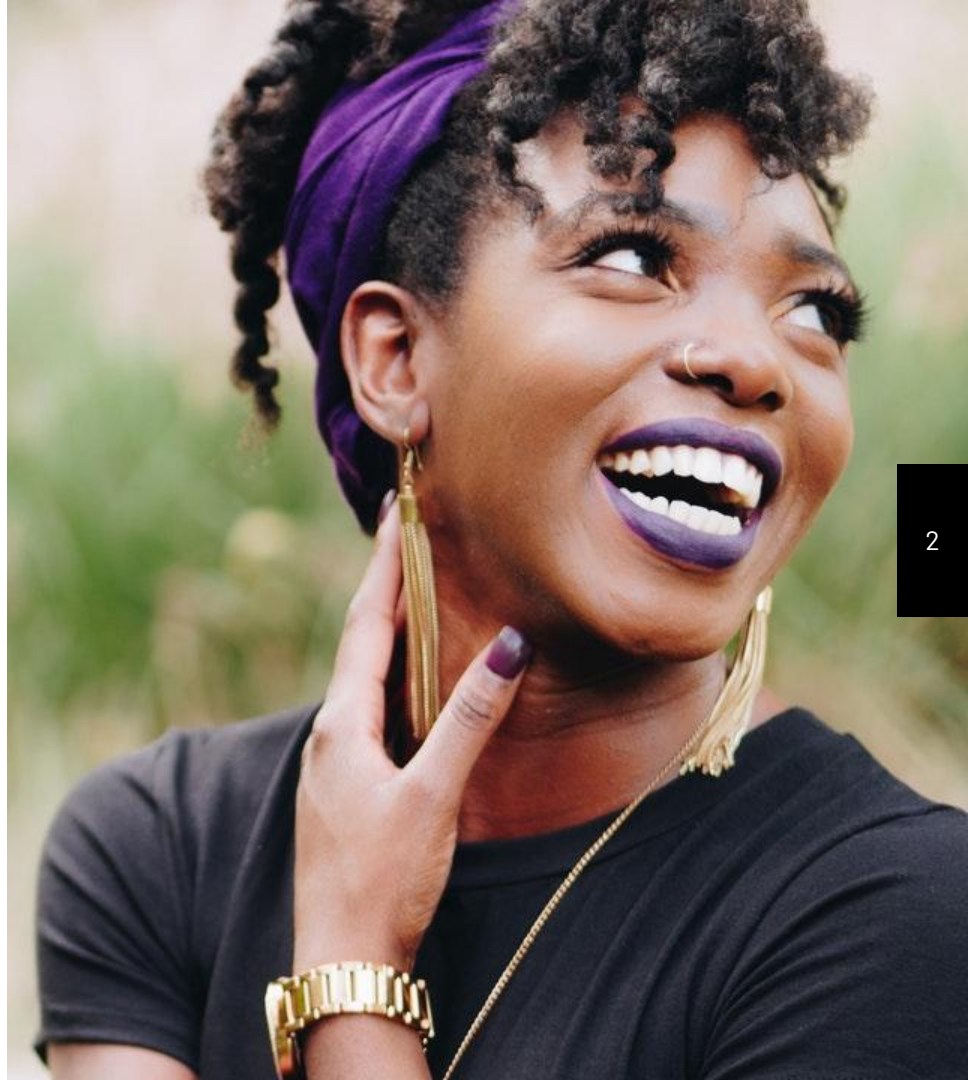
Module 1: Consequentialism / Utilitarianism



Definition 1:

Consequentialism:

the morality of actions,
policies, motives, or rules
depends on their producing the
best actual or expected results.



“

*It is shewn that the assertions
'This action is right' or 'is my duty'
are equivalent to the assertion
that the total results of the action
in question will be the best
possible.*

§89 of G.E. Moore's Principia

Core Intuitions

INTENTIONS ARE NOT ENOUGH

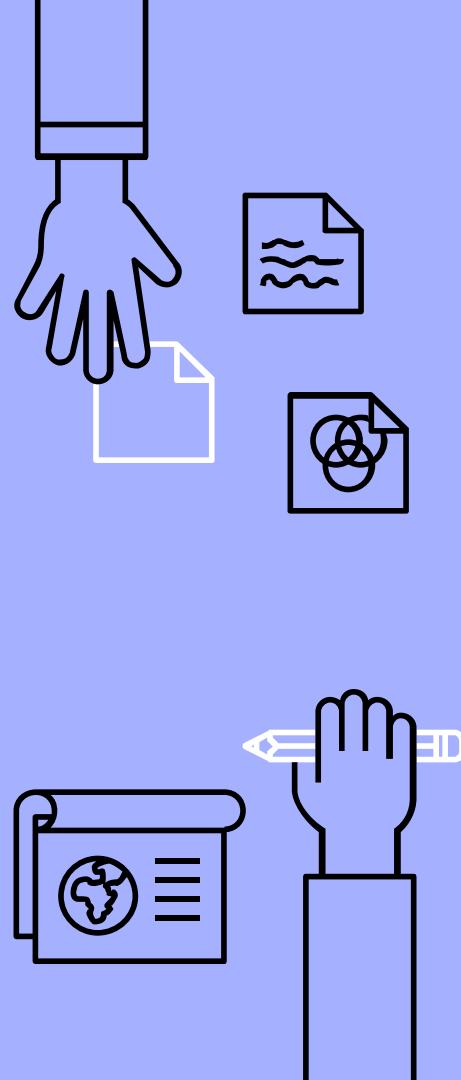
Trying to do good is not enough.
You must actually produce good
effects in the world. Optimificity is
the standard of right action.

Example: The moral klutz.

ACTUAL VS. EXPECTED

The actual effects of your actions
are what are morally important.
Your expectations are not.
Sub-optimific actions fail to satisfy
the requirements of morality.

You may not be *blameworthy* if the
expected optimificity of your
actions do not actualize, but you
did fail to do what was required.

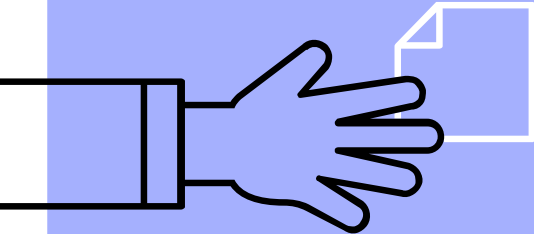
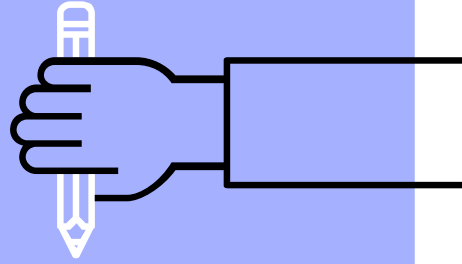


Decision making procedure:

1. Identify what is intrinsically good - valuable in and of itself, and worth having for its own sake. (e.g. happiness, autonomy, knowledge, and virtue.)
2. Identify what is intrinsically bad - bad all by itself. (e.g. physical pain, mental anguish, sadistic impulses, and the betrayal of innocents.)
3. Determine all of your options. Which actions are open to you at the moment?
4. For each option, determine the value of its results. How much of what is intrinsically good will each action bring about? How much of what is intrinsically bad?
5. Finally, pick the action that yields the best balance—the highest ratio of good to bad results. That is the optimific choice. That is your moral duty. Doing anything else—failing to strike the greatest balance of good over bad - is immoral.

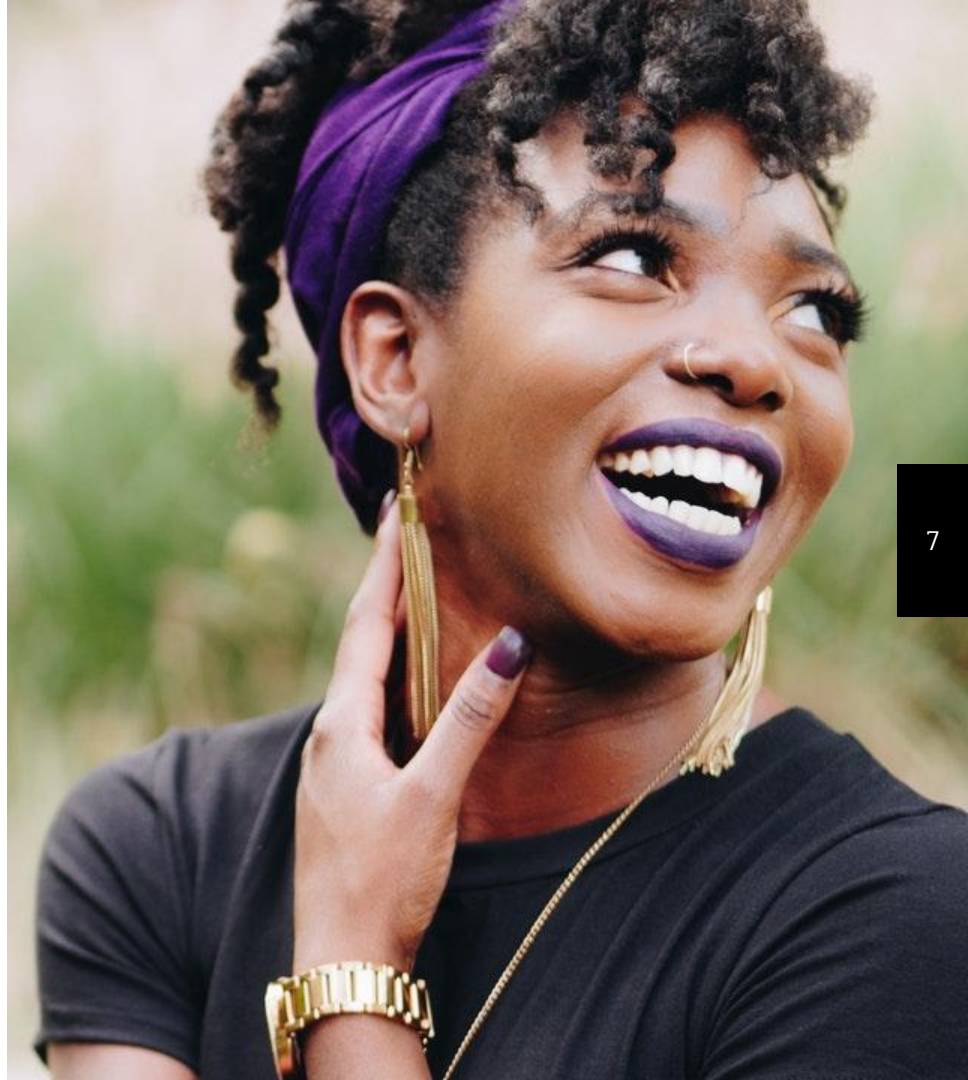


Bentham & Mill: Utilitarianism



Definition:

The moral view that what makes an action right is what creates the greatest net balance of happiness over unhappiness.



Core Intuitions

Hedonism + Consequentialism

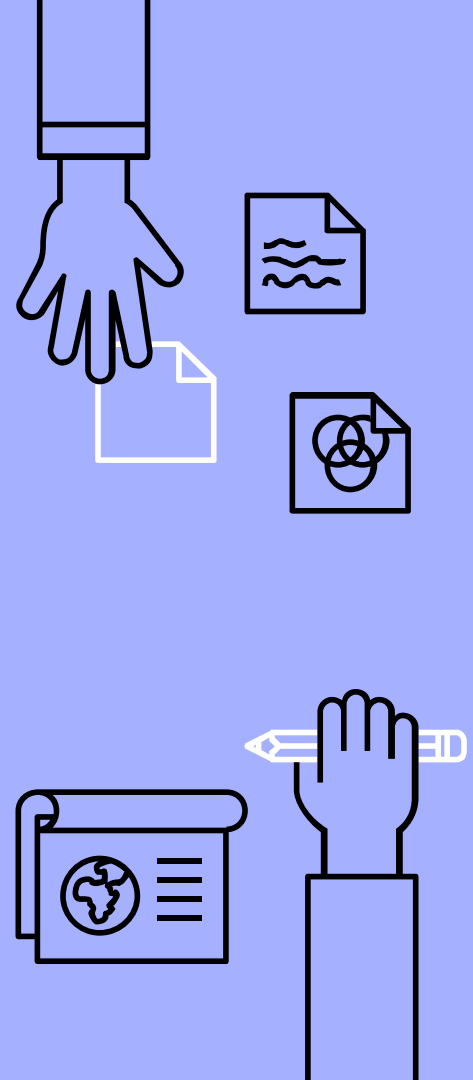
Hedonism is correct insofar as it correctly identifies intrinsic value with happiness, but it needlessly restricts the scope of individual moral action.

Consequentialism is correct insofar as it correctly expands the scope of morality, but it doesn't identify what has intrinsic value.

Consequences Justify

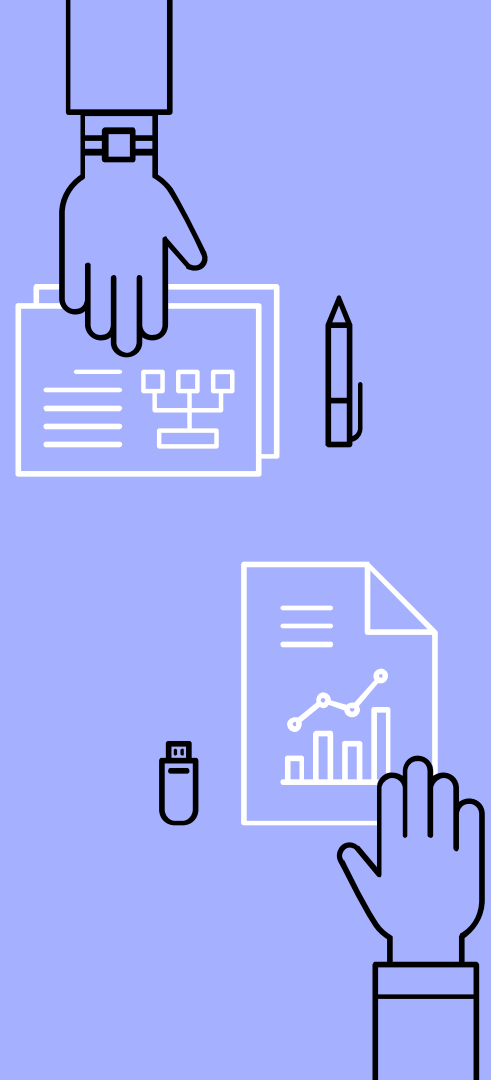
There are not actions which, in and of themselves, right or wrong. If an action is optimific, then it is morally required no matter what.

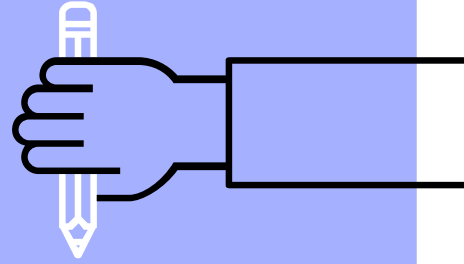
- Can you come up with any counterexamples to this?



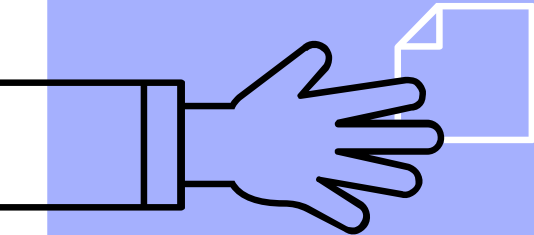
Benefits of the view:

- ▶ Impartial: No one person's / group's happiness is more valuable than any other person's / group's.
- ▶ Explains pre-theoretic moral convictions: Much of what we think is good and bad can be explained purely in terms of happiness increases / decreases.
- ▶ Can solve moral disagreement: Optimificity determines the correct position.
- ▶ Nothing is inherently immoral: Circumstances are morally relevant in a way absolutism ignores.





Internal Disagreements



HAPPINESS - 1 or 2?

Happiness is one thing that can be measured - Bentham

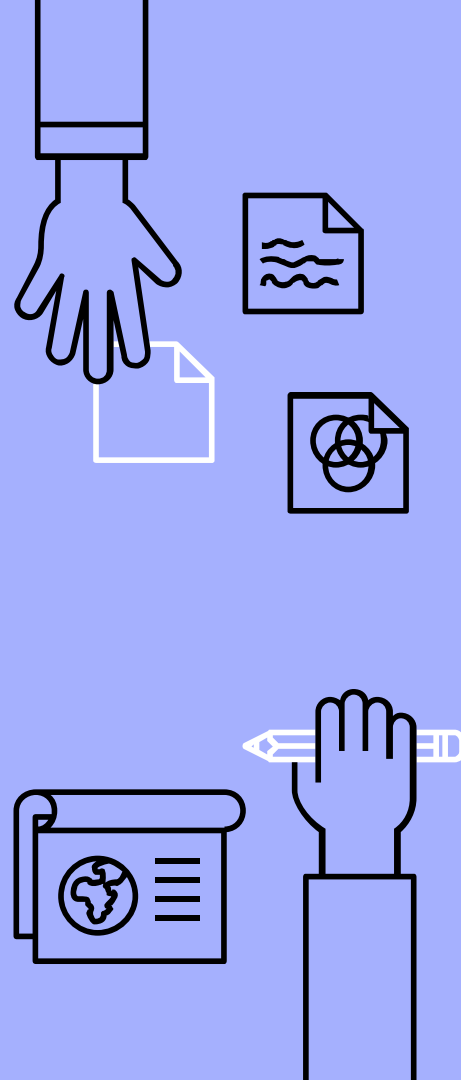
Happiness is just one thing which can be experienced differently. The happiness one experiences simply varies with regard to: intensity, duration, certainty, remoteness, fecundity, purity, and extent.

If gorging oneself on pizza produces more happiness units than reading philosophy, then eating the pizza is morally required.

Happiness is two things that differ in quality - Mill

Happiness comes in two qualitatively different forms: higher and lower. The lower pleasures are (roughly) what we share with non-human animals. The higher pleasures are what is distinctive to humans.

In general, therefore, one should read their philosophy books rather than pigging out on pizza.



DECISION MAKING PROCEDURE?

Act Utilitarianism - Bentham

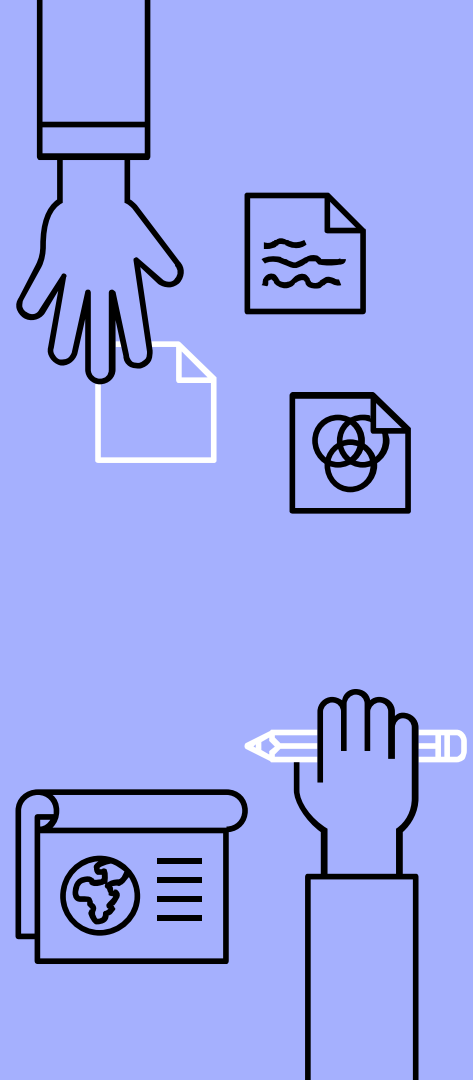
An act is morally right just because it produces the best actual or expected results. The Hedonic Calculus helps the agent to arrive at the correct action.

Is this too demanding?

Rule Utilitarianism - Mill

Actions are morally right just because they would be required by an optimistic social rule. Mill thought that many of our normal moral rules were basically correct.

Can we ever break the rules?



THOUGHT experiment

Judith Jarvis
Thomson and the
Transplant Surgeon





“

...imagine yourself to be a surgeon, a truly great surgeon. Among other things you do, you transplant organs, and you are such a great surgeon that the organs you transplant always take. At the moment you have five patients who need organs. Two need one lung each, two need a kidney each, and the fifth needs a heart. If they do not get those organs today, they will all die; if you find organs for them today, you can transplant the organs and they will all live. But where to find the lungs, the kidneys, and the heart? The time is almost up when a report is brought to you that a young man who has just come into your clinic for his yearly check-up has exactly the right blood-type, and is in excellent health. Lo, you have a possible donor. All you need do is cut him up and distribute his parts among the five who need them. You ask, but he says, "Sorry. I deeply sympathize, but no." Would it be morally permissible for you to operate anyway? Everybody to whom I have put this second hypothetical case says, No, it would not be morally permissible for you to proceed.

Thomson *The Trolley Problem*



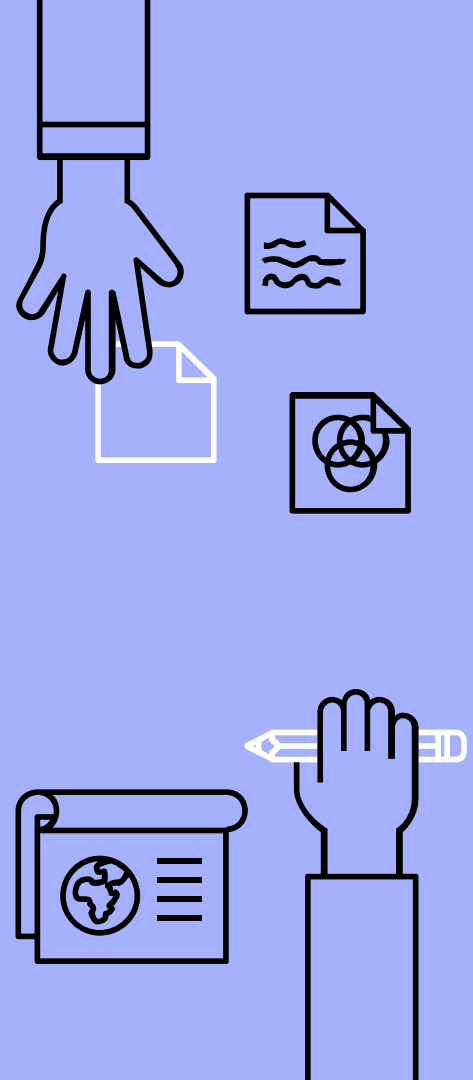
SHOULD THE SURGEON KILL?

Act Utilitarianism - Bentham

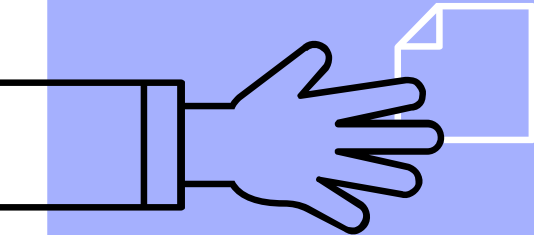
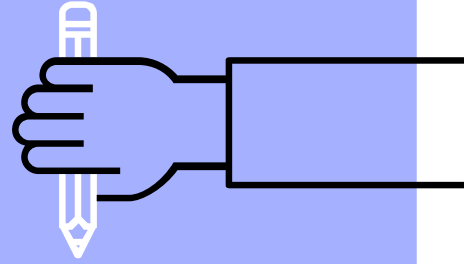
It is hard to see how Bentham can capture our intuition about the case. So long as the doctor is sufficiently careful to not get caught, it seems like killing the healthy patient would be optimific.

Rule Utilitarianism - Mill

So long as a rule against harming others is optimific, then Mill can tell the doctor not to kill the healthy patient. Afterall, a world where doctors acted like that would be quite a *worse* world.



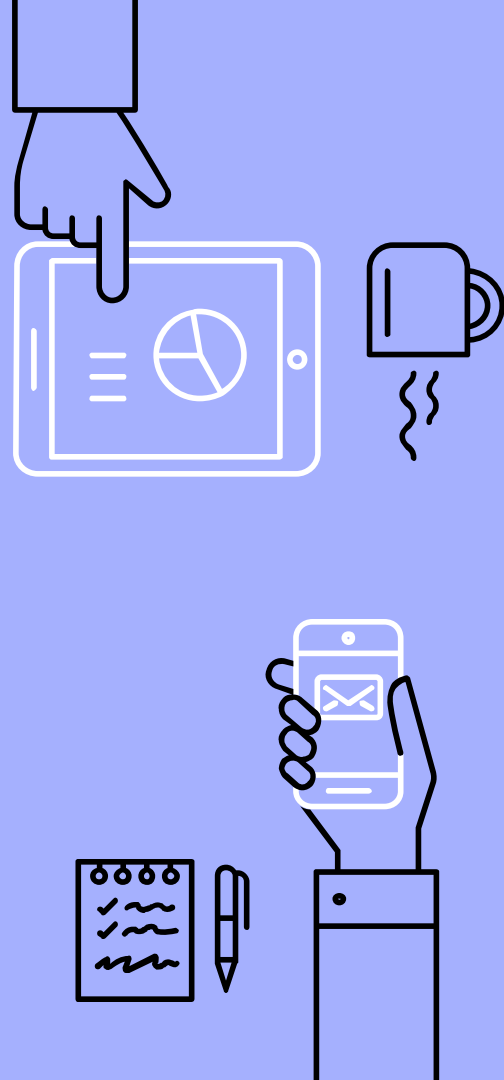
Objections



ANY ACTION CAN BE JUSTIFIED

Any action can be justified for the utilitarian so long as the consequences of the action are sufficiently good. If you have the intuition that some actions are just wrong (i.e. are never morally justifiable), then utilitarianism will leave a sour taste in your mouth. In response, the utilitarian can appeal to what I call a 'stacking argument'.

Take whatever action is supposedly never morally allowable (call such an action X). Then, concoct a situation where if a single occurrence of X will prevent any future occurrences of X for all times. The lesson, according to the utilitarian, is that by stacking the prevention of X to a sufficiently high degree, then the single instance of X will be morally justified (in fact, it may be required). If this is right, then there are no intrinsically morally prohibited actions since we can always stack cases until our intuitions shift.

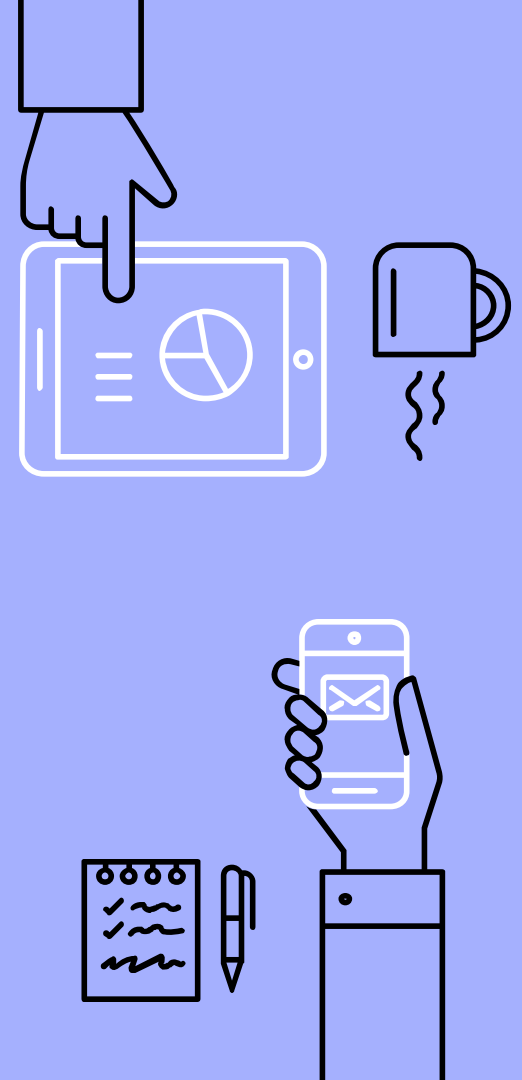


UTILITARIANISM DEMANDS TOO MUCH

Suppose that you are walk past a pond and see a child drowning. You are the only one around and the child is on the verge of death. You are wearing very expensive clothes which, if you wade into the water, will be ruined. You will, however, save the child's life. There is not enough time to take off the expensive items, nor to find a stick long enough to extend to the child. You either ruin your clothes and save the child, or save your clothes and let the child drown.¹

What do you do and why?

1. This is a modified version of Peter Singer's case in *Famine, Affluence, and Morality*.

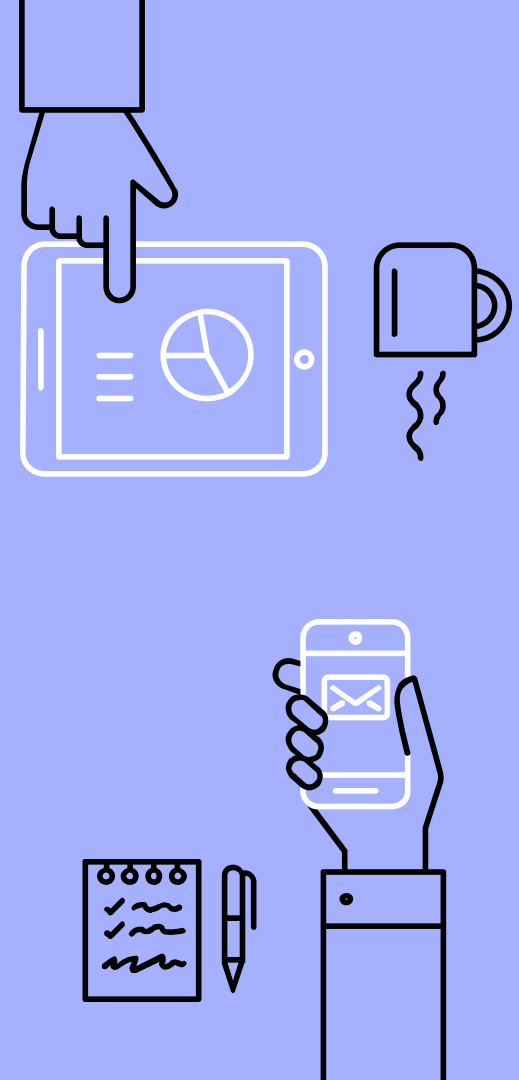


UTILITARIANISM DEMANDS TOO MUCH

Most, if not all, of you will have chosen to ruin your clothes to save the child. If we adopt utilitarianism, then it seems that it would also require us to save the child. The amount of happiness in the world will be increased (or, at the very least, there will be less pain in the world). How is this an objection?

Well, it turns out that we face a decision quite similar to the child-in-the-pond case many times each day. We spend money on coffee, on clothing, on overpriced food, on video games, etc. This is money that could be going to prevent death and suffering locally and around the world. In 2021, for example, over 5 million children under 5 years old died globally.¹ There are, of course, a variety of causes for those deaths. But, it seems undeniable that at least some of those deaths could have been prevented. If we are required to save the child in the pond, aren't we thereby required to forego our coffees and video games so that our money can save lives?

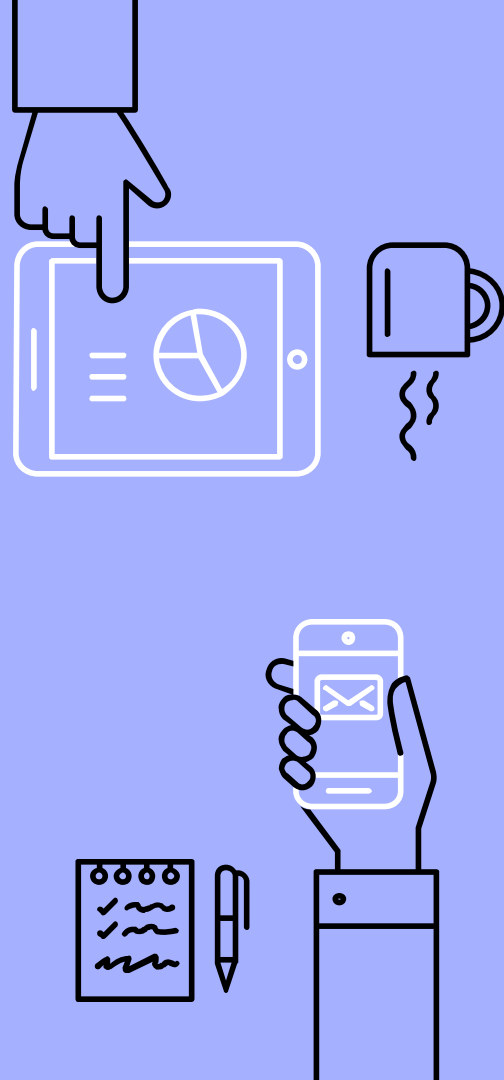
1. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.DTH.MORT>



UTILITARIANISM DEMANDS TOO MUCH

This is called a *demandingness objection* because it seems that if we are focused on maximizing overall happiness, then there will almost always be a better use of our time, our money, our resources, etc. We will almost never be morally justified to buy a new laptop, or a new hoodie. That money could have been spent to increase overall happiness! Sure, you'll be kinda bummed that you're still using your crummy old laptop, but someone will have been kept alive in place of those material comforts.

The core issue is that it is no longer just a good thing to give to charity. It is now required by the utilitarian. All actions which are not optimific are violations of what morality demands, and it seems quite hard to see how keeping people alive could ever be less happiness maximizing than your getting a new pair of AirPods. So, if this version of utilitarianism is correct, then we are all failing in our moral duties to an egregious degree.



Questions?

