

UTILITARIANISM & KANTIAN ETHICS HANDOUT

Suppose you are on an island with a dying millionaire. As he lies dying, he entreats you for one final favor: “I’ve dedicated my whole life to baseball and have gotten endless pleasure, and some pain, rooting for the Cincinnati Reds for fifty years. Now that I am dying, I want to give all my assets, \$400 million, to the Reds. Would you take this money [he indicates a box containing the money in large bills] back to Cincinnati and give it to the owner of the Cincinnati Reds, to help him buy better players?” You agree to carry out his wish, at which point a huge smile of relief and gratitude breaks out on his face and he expires in your arms. While you are returning to the United States, you see a newspaper advertisement placed by the World Hunger Relief Organization (whose integrity you do not doubt) pleading for \$400 million to be used to save 3 million people dying of starvation in East Africa. Not only will the \$400 million save their lives, but it will be used to purchase technology and the kinds of fertilizers necessary to build a sustainable economy. You reconsider your promise to the dying Reds fan in light of this information.

Quick judgment: What should you do (i.e., what’s the morally correct action), give the money to the Reds or the World Hunger Relief Organization? _____

According to utilitarianism, what should you do with the money?

Two men are starving to death on a raft floating in the Pacific Ocean. One day, they discover some food in an inner compartment of a box on the raft. They have reason to believe that the food will be sufficient to keep one of them alive until the raft reaches a certain island where help is available, but if they share the food, both of them will likely die. One man is a brilliant scientist who has in mind the cure for cancer; the other man is undistinguished. Otherwise, there is no relevant difference between the two men.

According to utilitarianism, should they share the food or give it to one or the other of the two men?

Without going into quite as much detail as we did for the Reds-WHRO example, explain your answer. Include who will be affected by each action and how they will be affected (especially whether they are positively or negatively affected).

A prominent and much-loved leader has been rushed to the hospital, grievously wounded by an assassin’s bullet. The leader is responsible for maintaining stability and prosperity in his country. Without him, the country is in danger of descending into a civil war. He needs a heart and lung transplant immediately to survive. No suitable donors are available, but there is a homeless person in the emergency room who is currently unconscious and is a perfect donor. Without the transplant, the leader will die. Security at the hospital is very well controlled. The transplant team could hasten the death of the homeless person and carry out the transplant without the public ever knowing that they killed the homeless person for his organs.

You promise your coworker, Amy, that you will try to convince your boss to give her a raise. But then you consider breaking your promise.

You have an opportunity to cheat on an exam. According to the categorical imperative, should you?