

Analysis of IR

PS 1599 | Week 1: Welfare

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So...

My friend Bob is getting married.

My friend Anthony **disapproves** of Bob's partner.

Yet my friend Anthony is also Bob's best man...

Should Anthony let Bob know that he disapproves? Or should he stay silent?

Anthony says that it's the right thing to do, regardless of the consequences...

Thesis of this course

1. What we want: improve people's **welfare**
 2. What determines welfare? **Economic growth/development**
 3. How do we get development? **Technological innovations**
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- But how **legitimate** is this thesis?
 - Lots of pushback against the idea that development=good
 - Environmentalists, religions, nationalists, traditionalists
 - Today: ethics and development

Ethics and politics

Principles of ethics

- To justify a goal: need to think about **ethics** of our societies
- Three main families of views on an **ideal** society looks like
(Bueno de Mesquita et al 2016)
 1. Consequentialist ethics
 2. Deontological ethics
 3. (Virtue ethics)

1. Consequentialism

- Idea: what matters is the **consequences** of our actions
- Colloquially: ends justify the means
- Question: what constitutes a ‘good’ outcome/consequence?
- Main views:
 1. Utilitarianism
 2. Egalitarianism

1.1. Utilitarianism

“Utilitarianism is the view that what matters morally is utility, or happiness, and that the right action in any situation is that which maximizes the total amount of it there is. (Swift 2013)”

- Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832): “the greatest happiness of the greatest number”
- J.S. Mill: utility instead of happiness
- What determines utility?
- **Thus: if utility=consumption, then development is just**
- Corollary: tech is justified when it helps development

Can you think of reasons to disagree with utilitarianism?

Key concerns

- Do the ends justify the means?
- How to deal with perverse preferences?
- How can we measure utility?

1.2. Egalitarianism

- Egalitarians agree that consequences is what matters
- Egalitarians disagree that it's about average or total welfare.
What matters is its **distribution**
- Extreme version: equality of outcomes
- **Thus: development is good when it reduces inequality**
- Variants
 - Equality of opportunities and resources (Dworkin)
 - Rawls and Sen

Rawls

- John Rawls (1921-2002)
- Equality is **rational**
- Reason: that's what society would pick **behind a veil of ignorance**
- (Note: criticized by John Harsanyi and others)
- Inequality is tolerable **only** if it helps the most disadvantaged (**difference principle**)
- **Thus: development is just when it helps the poor**

Sen

- Amartya Sen (1933-)
- **Freedom** is a moral imperative
- Being free ≠ no prison
- Being free ≠ no gov (libertarianism)
- Freedom: having capabilities to meet your aspirations
- **Thus: development is just when it contributes to freedom**

2. Other ethical schools

- Kantian deontology
- What matters are **actions**, not **consequences**
- Just actions are those that are universal and rational
(categorical imperative)
- Major challenge against consequentialism

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Summary so far

- Consequentialist ethics cares about **outcomes**
- Outcomes that matter for U and E: **welfare**
 - Utilitarianism: **average/total** welfare
 - Egalitarianism: **distribution** of welfare.
 - Rawls, Sen: poorest
- Others tend to care less about welfare. Justifiable!

- My thesis this semester: we should prioritize welfare
- (Global) political problems are defined by lower welfare than feasible
- Major caveats!
 - We should think about levels *and* distribution of welfare
 - Sometimes: doing the right thing \neq improving welfare
 - Welfare is not just about material pleasures
- Next step: how should we **define** and **measure** welfare?

Questions?

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Source for title page painting: Quentin Matsys, *The Money Changer and His Wife*

