

Utilitarianism

1. Objectives
2. Administtrivia
3. Utilitarianism
4. Essay Question Discussion

Objectives:

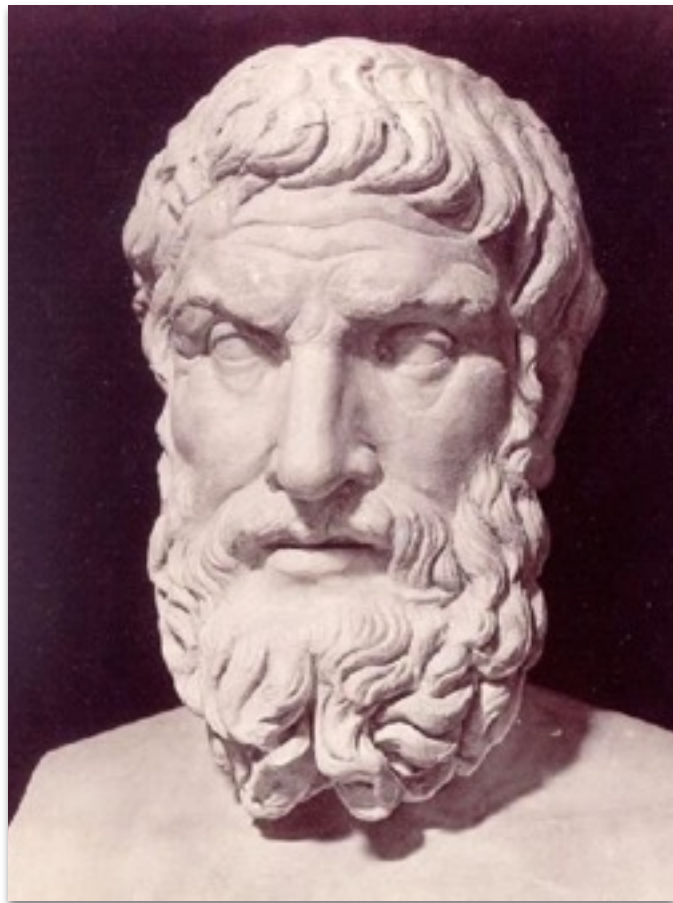
By the end of this lecture you should be able to:

1. Define optimific outcomes.
2. Differentiate between Act and Rule utilitarianism.
3. Evaluate criticisms of Rule utilitarianism
4. Differentiate between actual utility and expected utility
5. Evaluate criticisms of expected utility

1. Argument outlines due next week

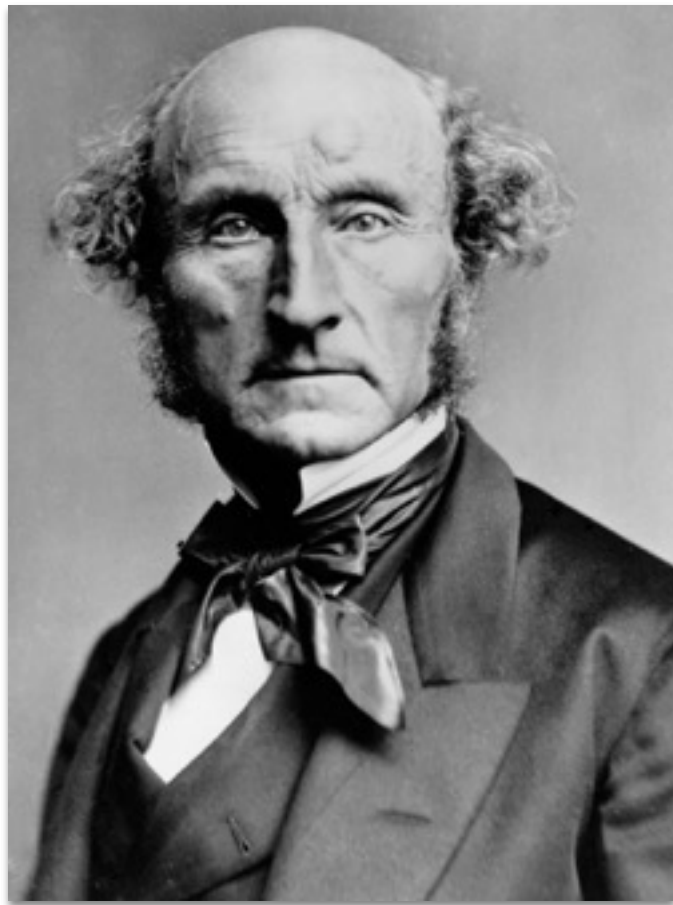
Anything Else? Anyone?





Epicurus (341-270 BCE)

Acknowledge that “pleasure is the alpha and omega of a blessed life”



J.S. Mill (1806-1873)

Not all pleasures are equal



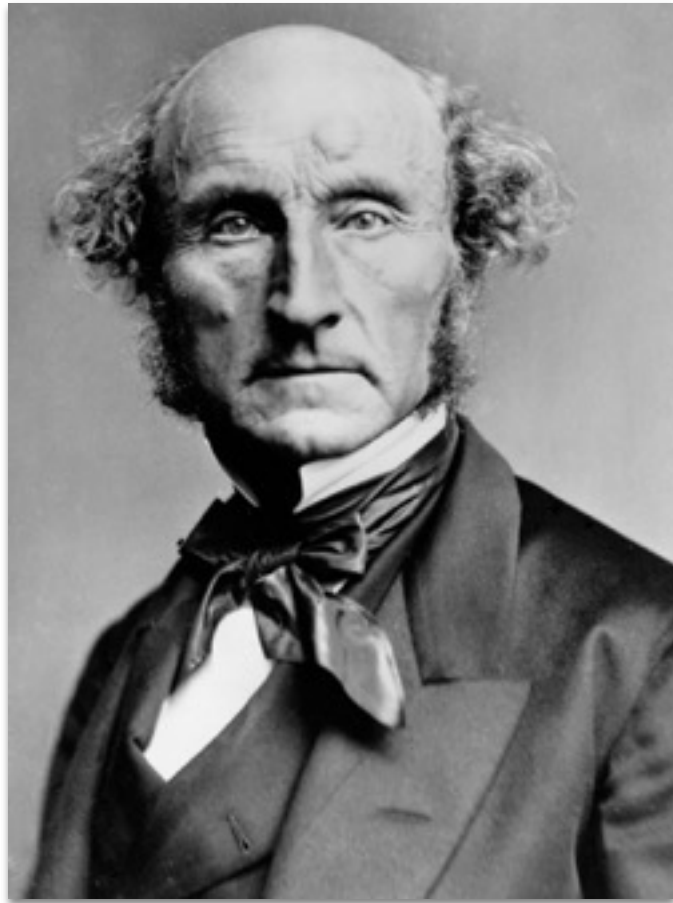
Chris Heathwood

Something is good for you if, only if,
and because it satisfies your desires



Aristotle (384-322 BCE)

The person's character is what matters!



J.S. Mill (1806-1873)

Do as much good as you can



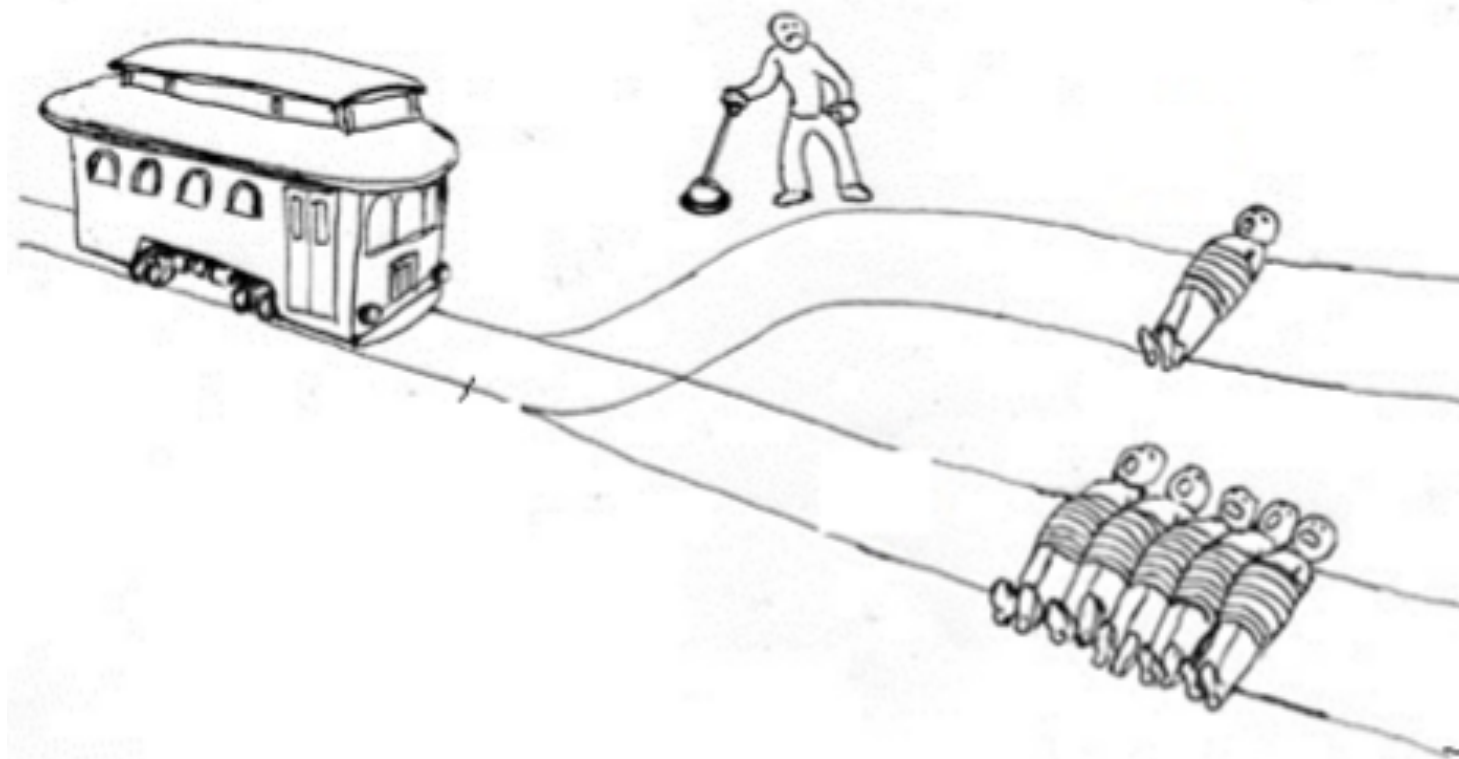
Russ Shafer-Landau

“

It requires us to move beyond egoistic concerns, and to focus on improving the lives of others, as well as our own. We must make the world the best place it can be.

- Text, p. 119

”

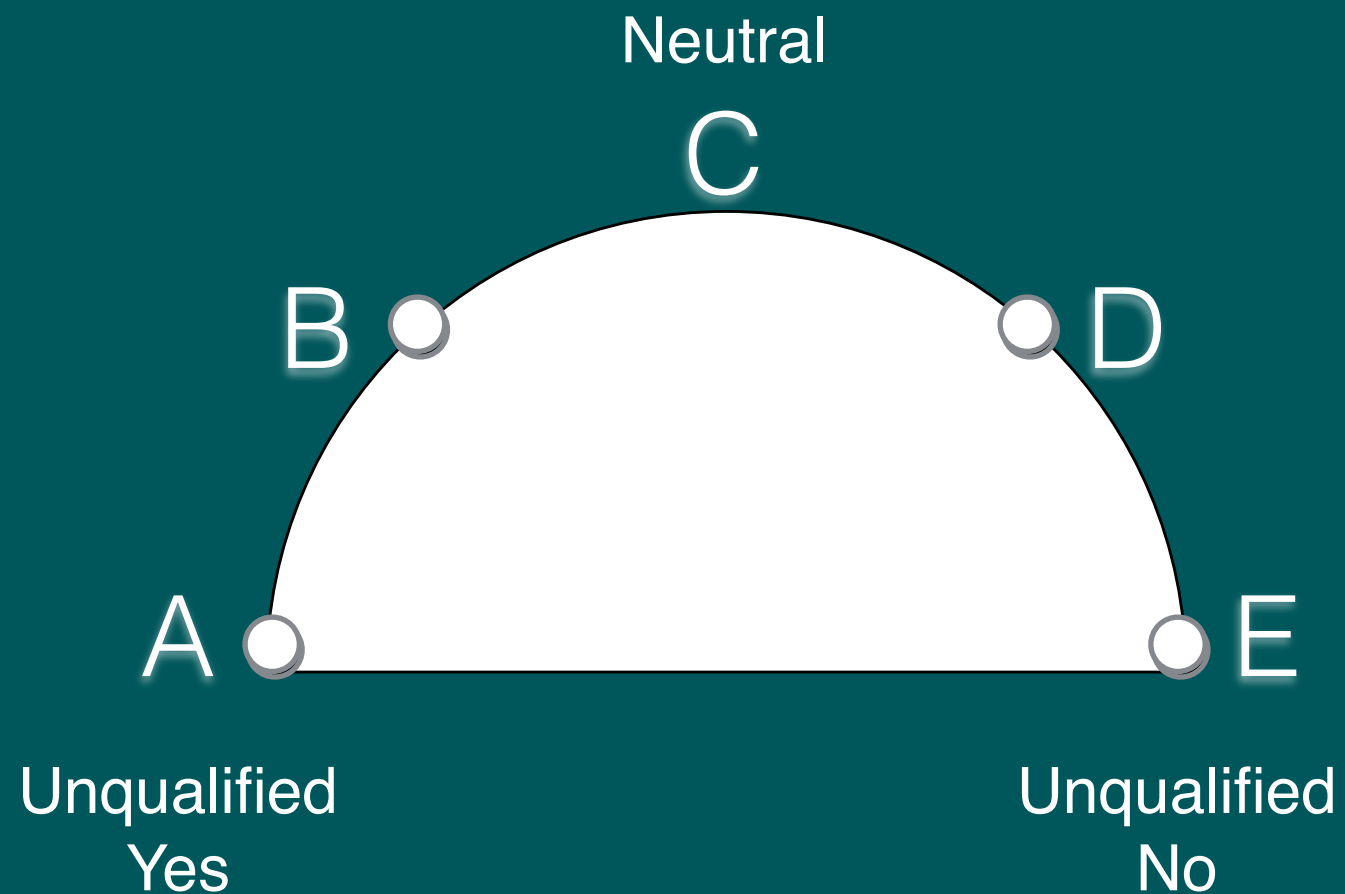




Poll

Question

Would you pull the lever?



What *should* you do?

What *should* you do?

Step 1

Identify what is
intrinsically good

- happiness
- autonomy
- knowledge
- virtue

Step 2

Identify what is
intrinsically bad

- physical pain
- mental anguish
- sadistic impulses
- betrayal

What *should* you do?

Step 3

What are my options?

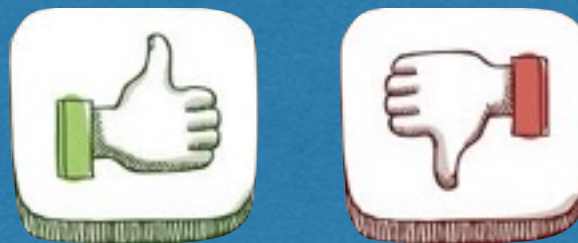


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What *should* you do?

Step 4

List Pros & Cons



What *should* you do?

Step 5





Russ Shafer-Landau

“

Whichever policy is **optimific** (i.e., such as to yield the greatest balance of benefits over drawbacks) is the one that morality requires.

- Text, p. 120

”



Russ Shafer-Landau

“

Consequentialists are those who encourage us not to cry over spilt milk. They direct our attention to the future, not the past. They ask us to look at the *consequences* of our actions...

- Text, p. 120

”



Russ Shafer-Landau

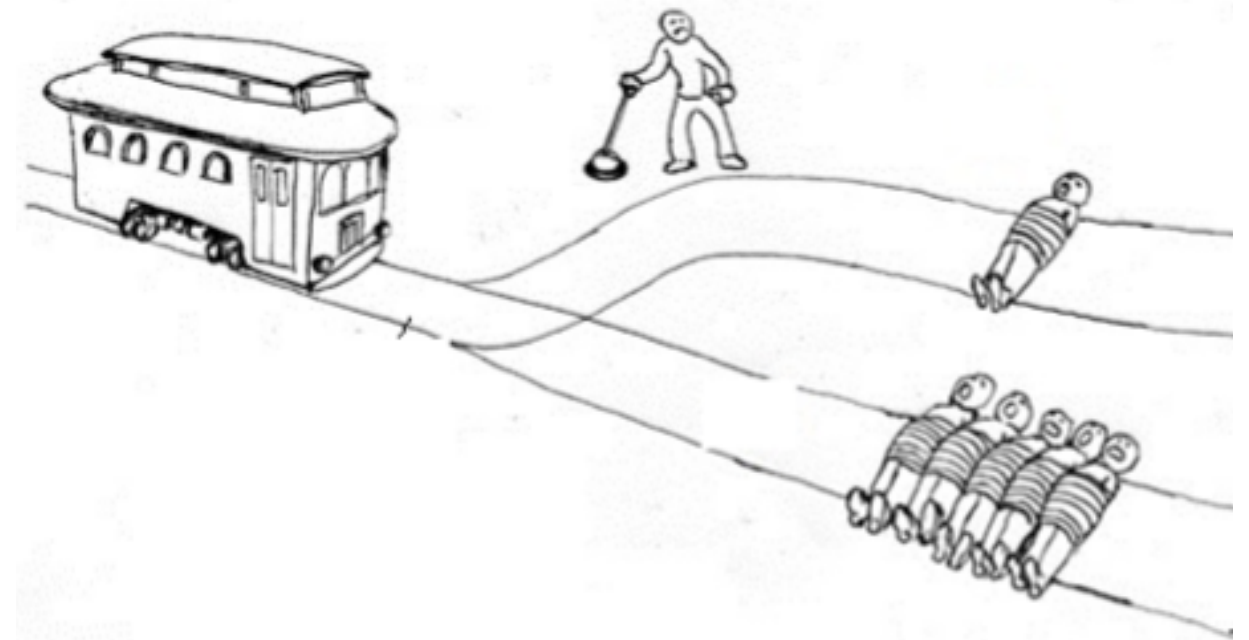
“

For them, the ends justify the means so long as the ends are good enough.

- Text, p. 120

”

1. What is intrinsically good?
2. What is intrinsically bad?
3. What are my options?
4. What are the pros and cons?
5. Which is the optimific option?

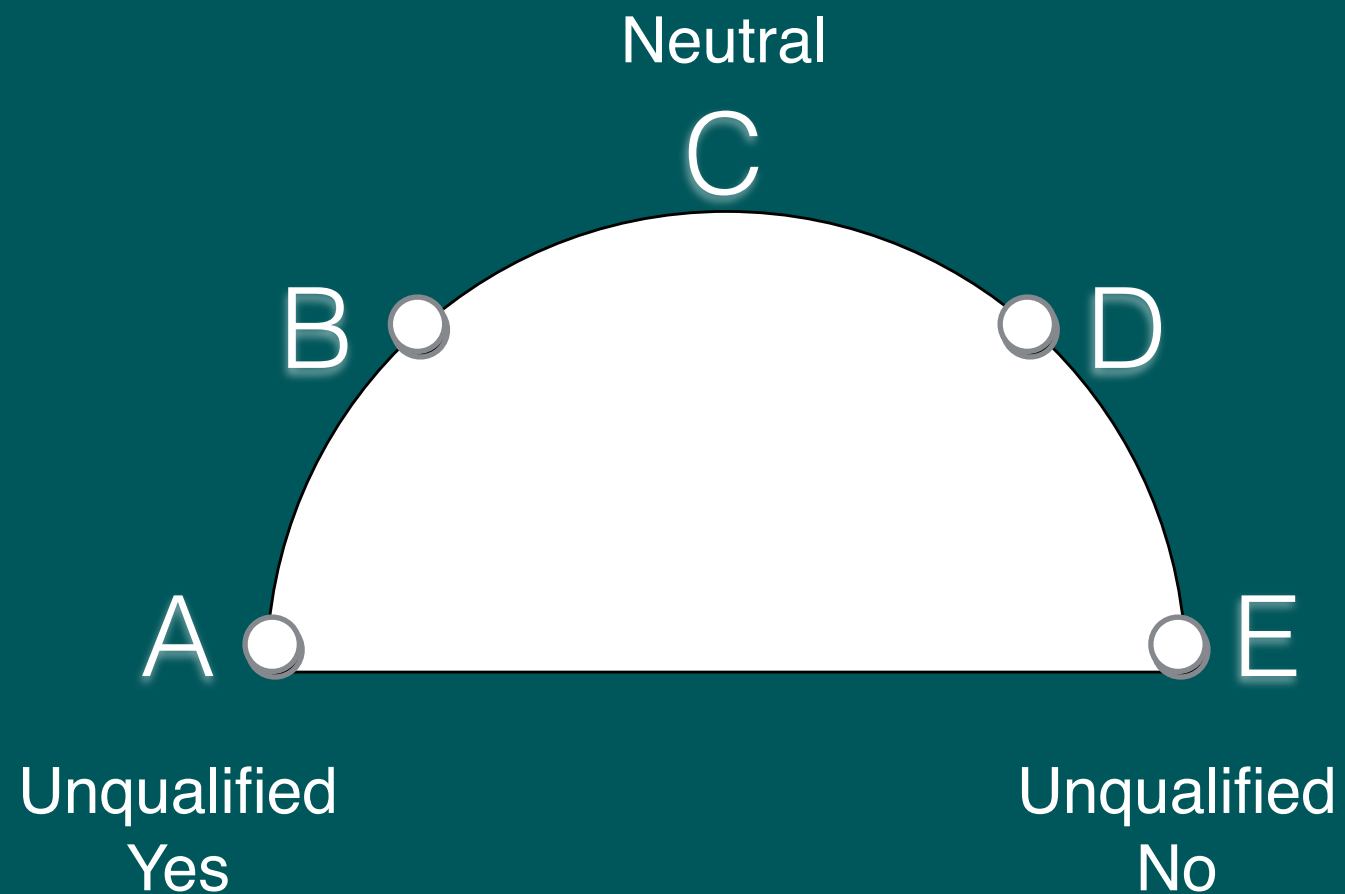


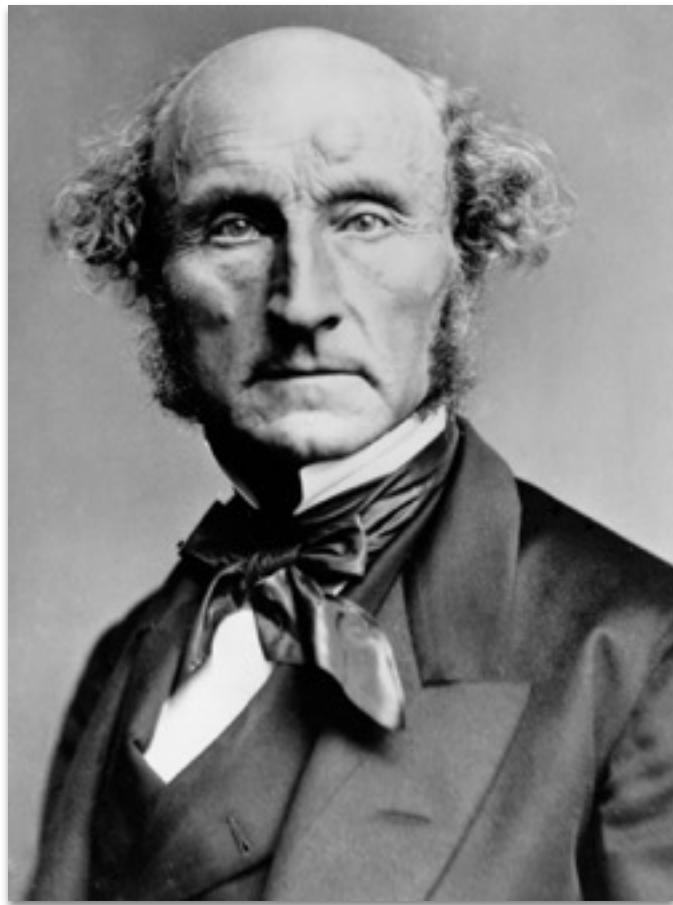


Poll

Question

Would you pull the lever?





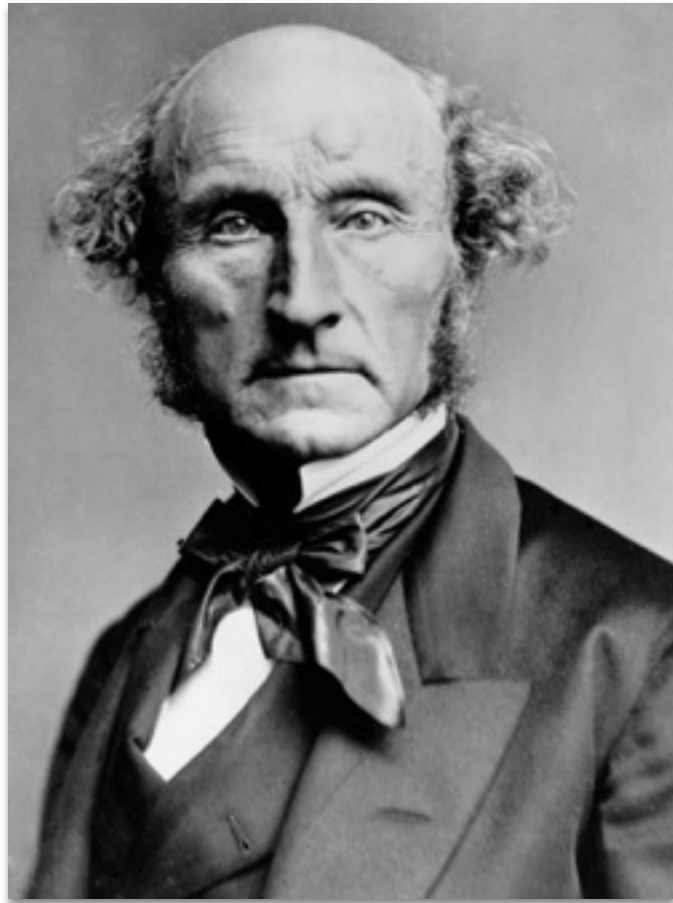
J.S. Mill (1806-1873)

“

The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness.

- J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ch 2.

”



J.S. Mill (1806-1873)

“

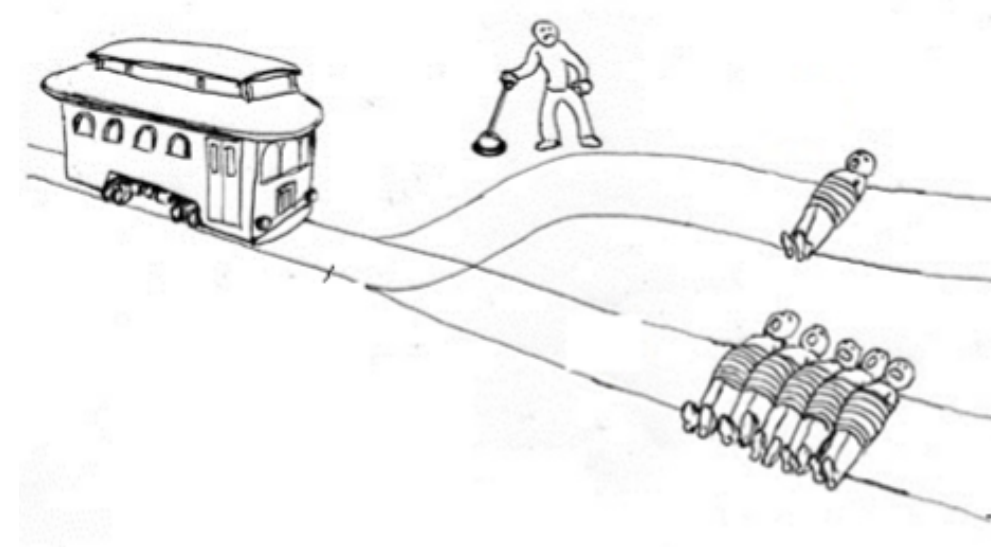
...for that standard is not the agent's own greatest happiness, but the greatest amount of happiness altogether;

- J.S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*, ch 2.

”

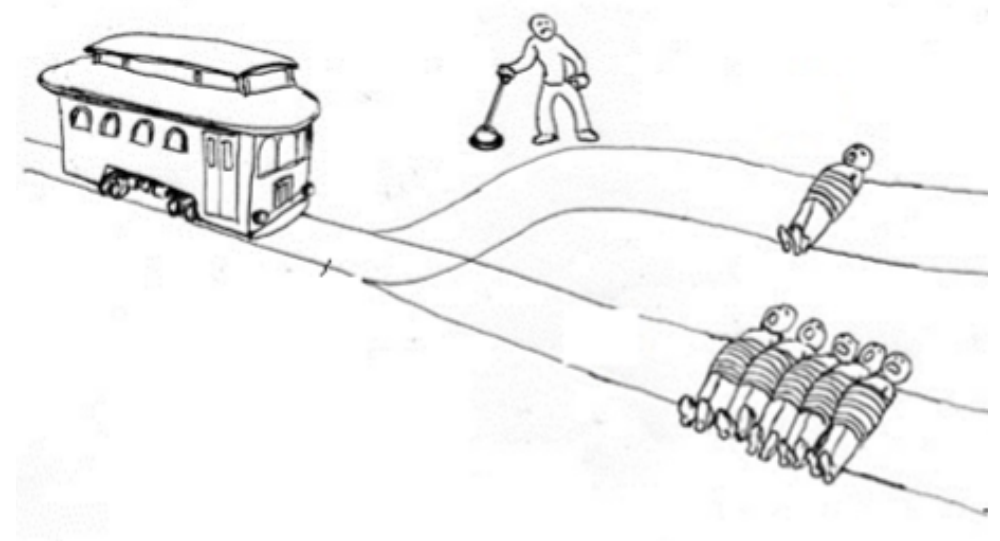
Mill isn't talking about choosing acts which benefit the greatest number of people.

The minority may be benefited more than the majority



Mill doesn't tell us to choose the action with the greatest amount of happiness simpliciter

We are to do that which creates the greatest net balance of happiness

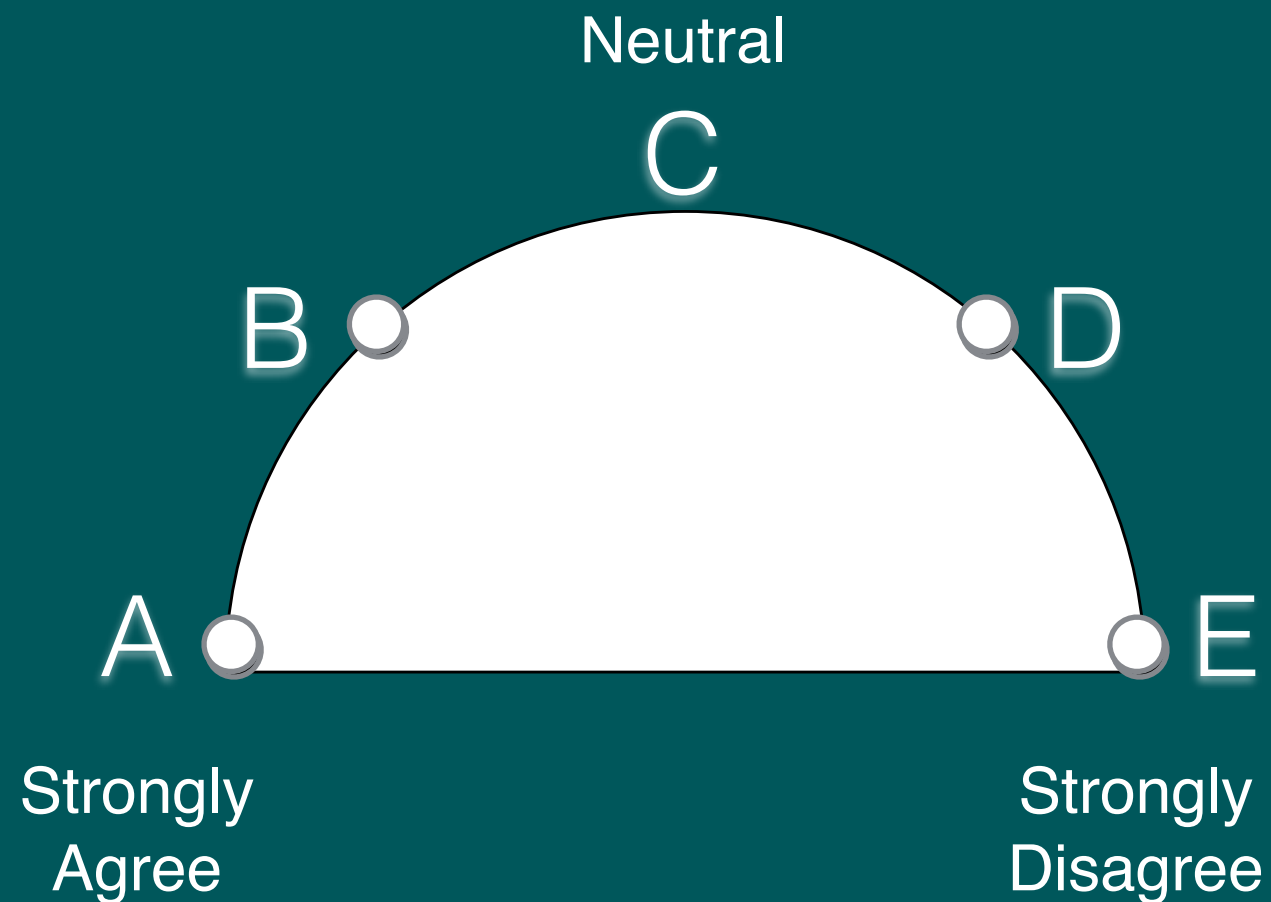




Poll

Question

Is pulling the lever the obvious best choice?





Russ Shafer-Landau

“

Utilitarians make the rightness of an action depend on all of its results, no matter how long after the action they occur. There is no statute of limitations on counting consequences.

- Text, p. 123

”

Act Utilitarianism: Improve overall well-being

Rule Utilitarianism: Follow optimific social rules



Russ Shafer-Landau

“

An optimific social rule is a rule that meets the following condition: if (nearly) everyone in a society were to accept it, then the results would be optimific.

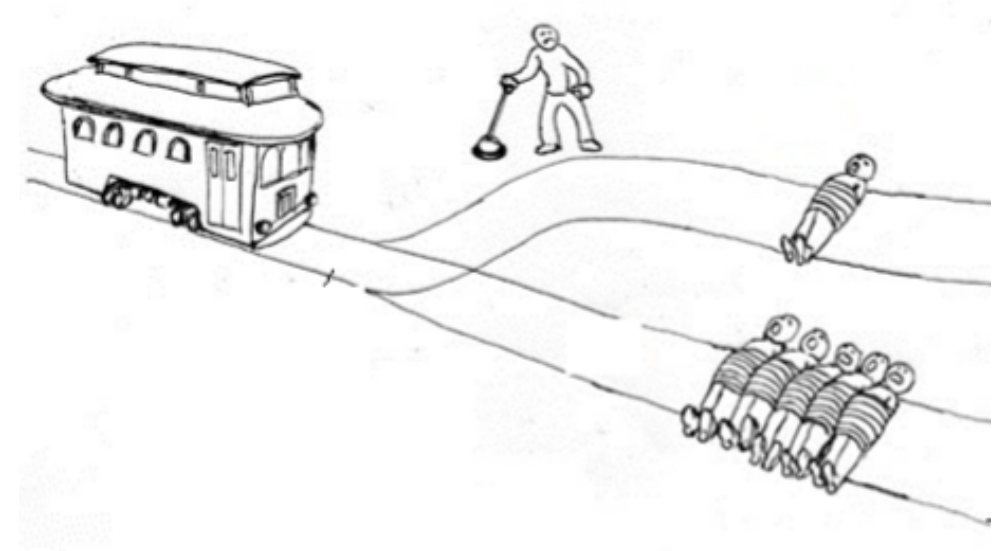
- Text, p. 123

”

So what we do is ask: *Does my action conform to a moral rule?*

Rule: Do not harm people.

Rule: Do not trump another person's interests.







J.J.C. Smart (1920 - 2012)

“

...clearly R is a useful rule of thumb; if we have not time or or are not impartial enough to assess the consequences of an action it is an extremely good bet that the thing to do is to act in accordance with R.

- J.J.C. Smart, *Extreme and Restricted Utilitarianism*.

”



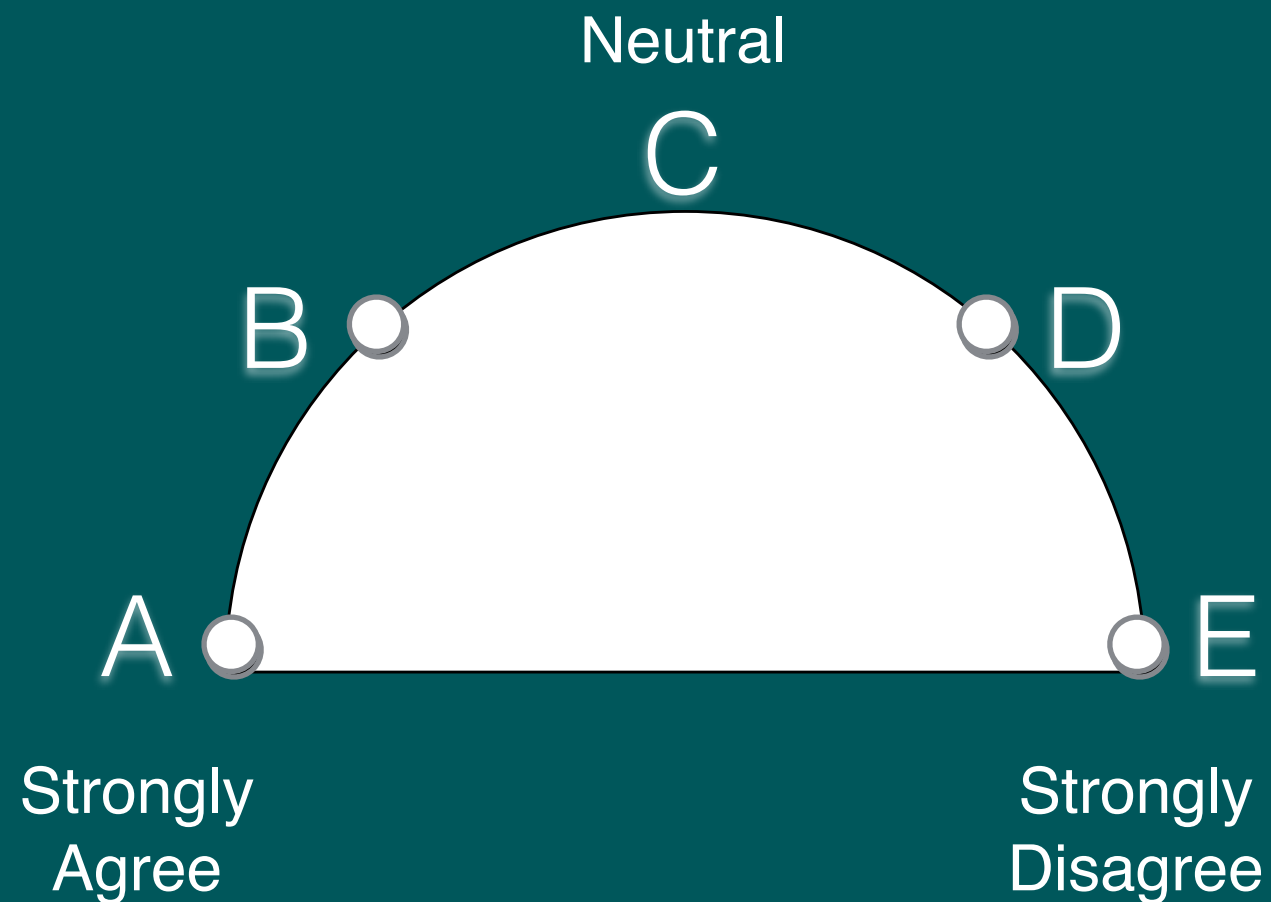
But what happens when we've done the calculations and the better result is to break rule R?

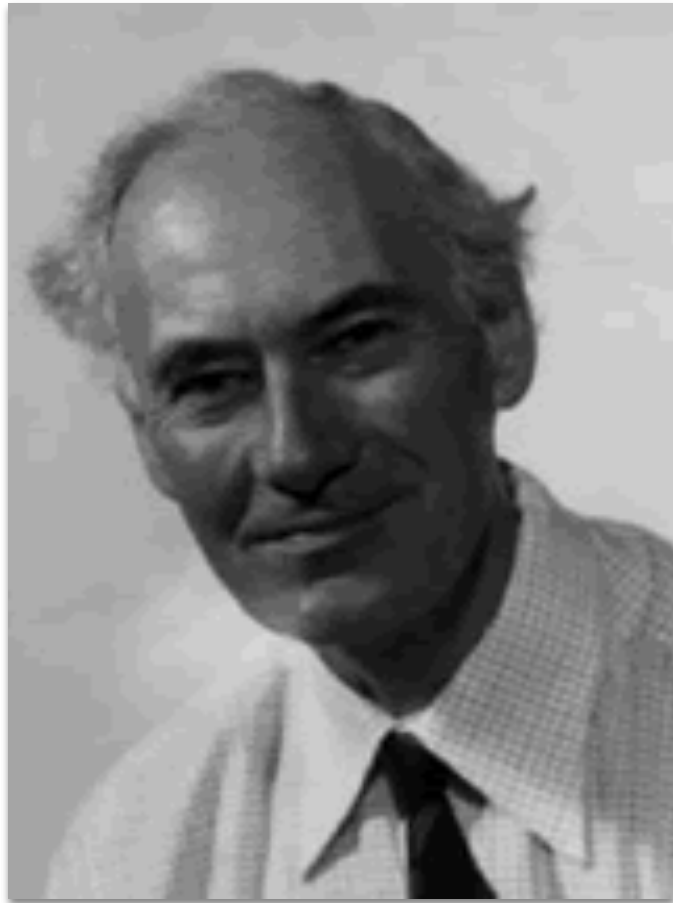


Poll

Question

Should we break rule R?





J.J.C. Smart (1920 - 2012)

“

Is it not to erect R into a sort of idol if we keep it when breaking it will prevent, say, some avoidable misery? Is not this a form of superstitious rule-worship...and not the rational thought of a philosopher?

- J.J.C. Smart, *Extreme and Restricted Utilitarianism*.

”

✓ 99%

✗ 1%

2015

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2015 COMMERCIAL EDITION

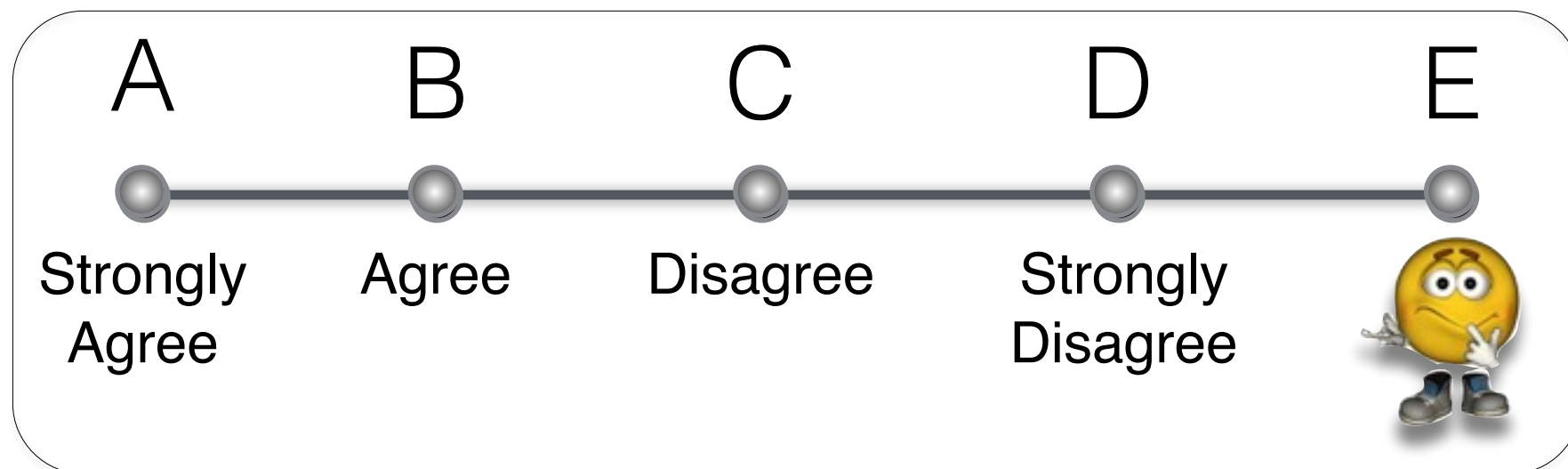




Poll

Claim

You should keep your promises





Keep your promises







Poll

Question

Which of the following claims is true?

- A Rule utilitarianism would say this is wrong
- B Act utilitarianism would say this is wrong
- C We don't have enough info to say B is true
- D Both A and B
- E Both A and C

Keep your promise

(And give the fortune to the leafs)



Keep your promise

(And give the fortune to the Children's Hospital)





Drive on the right!

“



J.J.C. Smart (1920 - 2012)

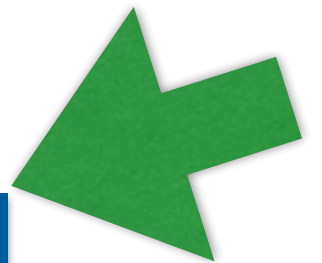
...the rule does not give us a reason for acting so much as an indication of the probable actions of others, which helps us to find out what would be our own most rational course of action.

- J.J.C. Smart, *Extreme and Restricted Utilitarianism*.

”

Act Utilitarianism: Improve overall well-being

Rule Utilitarianism: Follow optimistic social rules



“



Russ Shafer-Landau

Utilitarians make the rightness of an action depend on all of its results, no matter how long after the action they occur. There is no statute of limitations on counting consequences.

- Text, p. 123

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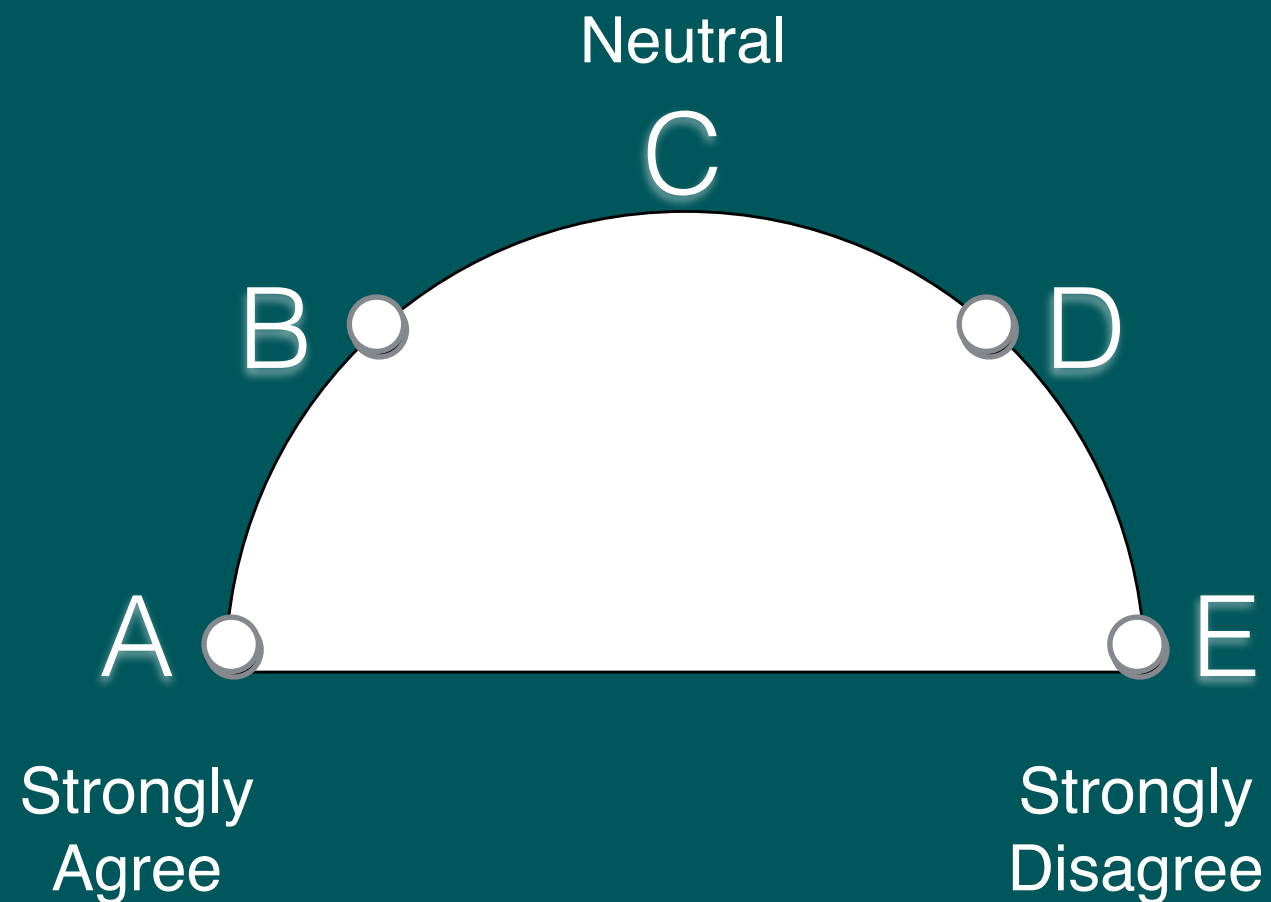
These are actual consequences...not
expected outcomes



Poll

Question

Is helping an elderly person across the street the right thing to do?



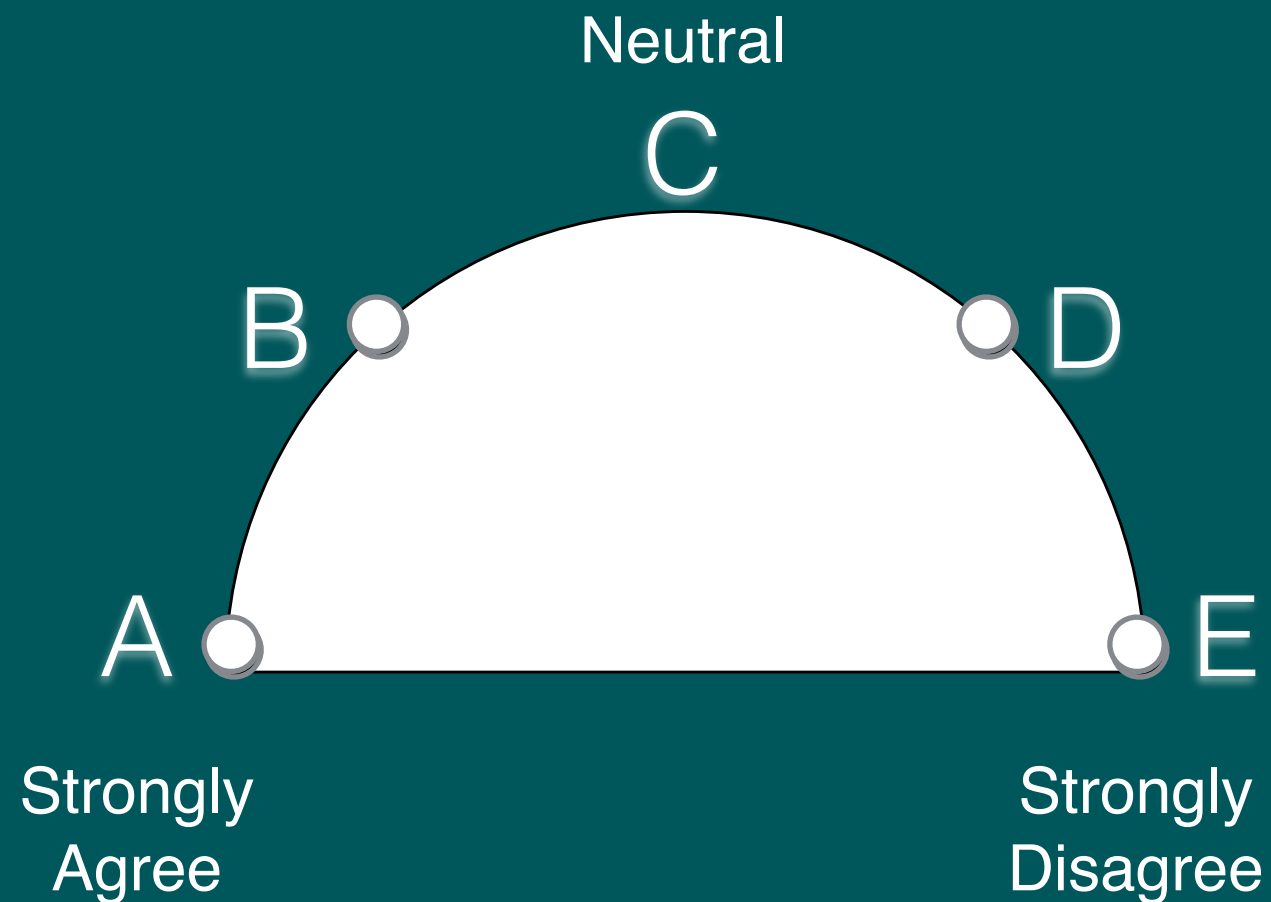




Poll

Question

Did you do something wrong by helping the elderly person across the street?





Two problems with expected outcomes...

- 1) Things can go horribly wrong even when we expect them to go well.
- 2) Things can go well even when we expect them to go horribly wrong

These are actual consequences...not
expected outcomes

Next day:

- 1) The attractions of Utilitarianism
- 2) Things to consider



Capstone Essay



Milestone Essay



Argument Outline



Written Reflections

PHIL 110B Milestone Essay
Introduction to Ethics & Values
Department of Philosophy
University of Waterloo

Value: 20% of final grade

Due: Wednesday, June 29 by end of class. A late penalty will apply to all assessments handed in later than this time. See LEARN for more details.

Format: Write a philosophical essay that demonstrates your knowledge of the course concepts and your ability to apply these concepts. You must state a thesis and defend this thesis. Essays will be marked for clarity of writing, rigor of argument, and philosophical acuity. A detailed rubric will be provided in Learn.

Instructions: Your essay should be no longer than 2000 words. Include a word count. Marks will be deducted for exceeding the word count or for failing to include a word count. Please use any regular 12 point font and double-space your writing. Please reference external sources using the referencing style outlined in Learn. Your essay should be edited for spelling, grammar, and organization. Marks will be deducted for poor editing.

A paper copy of your essay must be submitted by the end of class on June 29th. A late penalty will apply to all assessments handed in later than this time.

Please review policies related to Academic Integrity in the course syllabus, the course site in Learn, or the University of Waterloo website. Ignorance of these policies is not a defense.

Option 1

Question: Is it in our self-interest to be good? Explain.

Sub Questions:

1. Would everyone be better off if each of us just pursued our own self-interest?
2. If there are limits to what self-interest can do, what other reasons are there to be good?

You've already been exposed to a question along the same lines. For the fourth written reflection I asked you, "Are there reasons to be good? What are these reasons? Defend." This essay gives you the opportunity to explore the question further.

In preparation, read:

1. **Chapter 8** of the text: *Ethical Egoism*.
2. **Ring of Gyges**. Click on the link and scroll down to the relevant bit of text. <http://philosophy.lander.edu/intro/articles/gyges-a.pdf>
3. **Collective Action Problem**. Click on this link and then search the phrase "Collective action problem". There is a section with that as a title. Read the section. <http://homes.chass.utoronto.ca/~jheath/ideology.pdf>

Option 2

Choose a topic from the textbook and write on that. Clear the topic with me before you begin.