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## Training Exercises E3 (Consequentialism)

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### Issue 1: *Warming Up*

- (a) What is the general idea of consequentialism?
- (b) Describe maximizing, collectively satisficing, individually satisficing and equalizing forms of consequentialism. What are their differences?
- (c) What is the difference between hedonism and preference theory?
- (d) What are objective and subjective accounts of relevant consequences and what are their differences?

### Issue 2: *Utility Monster*

Imagine that there is a so called *utility monster*. It loves to harm others, but no matter how much harm it does, the benefit it gets is always ten times higher than the harm it causes (no matter which axiology you assume).

- (a) For which forms of consequentialism is that problematic and why?
- (b) How could a consequentialist answer to this problem?

### Issue 3: *Scheduling Problems*

It is Tuesday. You are a student assistant and it is part of your job to scan documents. Your professor said that you are to scan a certain book until Wednesday. In addition, you have an exam on that day you need to study for and also your sister asked you to help her move today. You only have time to do one of those. You know that your sister has plenty of friends who can help her move and you are sure that enough of them will show up. Your parents, though, won't like it much if you don't help your sister. You and your sister do not get along too well, so both of you actually would prefer if you did not help with the move. The exam tomorrow is very important for your studies and if you fail it now, the only possibility is to retake the exam later, which will delay your studies by one more semester. This would mean a lot inconvenience for you, as you cannot proceed with your life plan without having finished your degree. You think that there are good chances to pass the exam if you study today, but that you will most likely fail if you don't. Your professor will be a little angry with you if you do not hand in the scan in time, because he always gets angry about students who do not do their jobs properly. This will make you feel moderately embarrassed. Apart from this you cannot see any negative impacts, as you know that the scan is supposed to be for a seminar that only starts in a month time. You are

reasonably sure that a few days of delay won't make any difference. You only have enough time to do one of those things: scan the documents in time, help your sister move, or study for the exam.

- (a) What is the right thing to do according to Expected Utility Preference Utilitarianism?
- (b) Can you tell what is the right thing to do according to Classical Utilitarianism given the above information on your decision situation?

#### **Issue 4: *Dr. Good***

Dr. Good wants to avoid any suffering and thus blows up the planet. Invent a form of consequentialism where this would be right and find at least one other (different, probably less drastic) scenario that shows a problem of such a form of consequentialism.

#### **Issue 5: *Bad Things?***

We likely (hopefully!) share the intuition that certain things are wrong most of the time (or even all of the time), including

- (i) murder
- (ii) assault
- (iii) cruelty towards animals

Answer the following questions for each of the above:

- (a) Use a maximizing account of utilitarianism to explain that, for most situations, actions of this type are wrong.
- (b) Can you come up with a (possibly counterfactual) scenario, where maximizing utilitarianism would allow the action? If yes, present such a scenario. If no, why not?

#### **Issue 6: *Bernhard Williams***

In the following, you will analyse two famous examples written by Bernard Williams.

(1) George, who has just taken his Ph.D. in chemistry, finds it extremely difficult to get a job. [...] The results of all this, especially on [his] children, are damaging. An older chemist, who knows about this situation, says that he can get George a decently paid job in a certain laboratory, which pursues research into chemical and biological warfare. George says that he cannot accept this, since he is opposed to chemical and biological warfare. The older man replies that he is not too keen on it himself, come to that, but after all George's refusal is not going to make the job or the laboratory go away; what is more, he happens to know

that if George refuses the job, it will certainly go to a contemporary of George's who is not inhibited by any such scruples and is likely if appointed to push along the research with greater zeal than George would. Indeed, it is not merely concern for George and his family, but (to speak frankly and in confidence) some alarm about this other man's excess of zeal, which has led the older man to offer to use his influence to get George the job... George's wife, to whom he is deeply attached, has views (the details of which need not concern us) from which it follows that at least there is nothing particularly wrong with research into [chemical and biological warfare]. What should he do?<sup>1</sup>

Williams text was written in the early 1970s. His second example did not age well at all, and we will rather paraphrase it instead of quoting it directly:

(2) Jim accidentality comes into a situation in which armed mobsters have tied twenty people up against a wall who failed to comply with the mob's unjust demands. The boss of the mob steps forward and announces that he will have all twenty people killed to incentivise others to comply with the criminal practices of the mob. The boss likes Jim for some reason. He offers Jim to shoot one of the twenty people himself. If Jim complies, the other nineteen will be spared and are free to go. If Jim does not comply, all twenty will be killed. Jim has no way to save all twenty and he knows that. The twenty people beg Jim to kill one of them, such that the others can live. Even though this is hard to believe, Jim has no reason to believe that the mobster boss is lying about his offer.<sup>2</sup>

- (a) What ought Jim to do according to Classical Utilitarianism? Assume that everything in the text is true and that Jim is not misled by the mob's boss.
- (b) What ought Jim to do from the perspective of a subjective, maximizing, hedonistic consequentialism, assuming that he has – contrary to the example! – good reason to believe that the boss wants to mislead him and would kill all twenty people anyway and just wants to enjoy Jim's horror when he kills someone.
- (c) What ought George to do according to Expected Utility Preference Utilitarianism?

### Issue 7: *Gamification – revisited*

You saw the following case before on exercise sheet E1:

Tim is the manager of a supermarket. He ponders on introducing a gamification system in order to increase customer satisfaction. The system is supposed to work as follows: Every customer is asked to rate their cashier on a scale from 1 to 5 after checkout by pressing one of five buttons. The average of those ratings is calculated for every cashier and the employee with the highest rating gets a week of extra holiday as a bonus, while everybody else gets just their regular holidays. This results in them being a little less happy with their own number of days off than they otherwise would have been. Cashiers can always see their own average rating as well as the currently highest average, but not whom it belongs to.

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<sup>1</sup>quoted from *Utilitarianism: For and Against*, with J.J.C. Smart, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973, pp. 93ff.

<sup>2</sup>inspired by *ibid*

1. Under which circumstances is Tim morally allowed to introduce the system? Under which circumstances isn't Tim morally allowed to do so? Evaluate these questions for
  - (a) classical utilitarianism
  - (b) subjective, hedonistic, maximizing utilitarianism
  - (c) objective, hedonistic, equalizing consequentialism
2. Does your moral intuition that you had on exercise sheet G1 have consequentialist elements? Which elements from your intuition are not consequentialistic?