

Classic utilitarians held hedonistic act consequentialism. Its best-known proponent is J.S. Mill, who formulated the greatest happiness principle: always act so as to produce the greatest happiness. He distinguished higher and lower qualities of pleasures according to the preferences of people who have experienced both kinds (Mill 1861, 56).

This qualitative hedonism has been subjected to much criticism, including charges that it is incoherent and does not count as hedonism (Moore 1903, 80-81; cf. Feldman 1997, 106-24).

Hedonism then claims that pleasure is the only intrinsic good and that pain is the only intrinsic bad. Together these claims imply that an act is morally right if and only if that act causes "the greatest happiness for the greatest number," as the common slogan says.

Bentham, Mill, & Moore all agreed that the rightness of an action is to be judged solely by consequences, states of affairs brought about by the action.

R.M. Hare & J.C.C.. Smart agreed that we should maximize the achievements of people's priorities; it is for each person to decide what constitutes one's happiness. On the other hand, we also have Negative Utilitarianism: Promote the least amount of evil/harm or try to prevent the greatest amount of harm for the greatest number (Karl Popper).

The 2 central in debates about whether utilitarianism is an adequate or true moral theory are: (1) whether & how utilitarianism can be clearly & precisely formulated (how is utility defined; e.g., act vs. rule utilitarianism) & applied (quantity or measure good effects/consequences) ; (2) whether the moral implications of utilitarianism in particular cases are acceptable, or instead constitute objections to it.

Classic utilitarianism is a complex combination of many distinct claims, including the following claims about the moral rightness of acts (even though it reduces all morally relevant factors to consequences.

- 1. Consequentialism = whether an act is morally right depends only on consequences** (not circumstances or the intrinsic nature of the act, or anything that happens before the act).
- 2. Actual Consequentialism = whether an act is morally right depends only on the actual consequences** (as opposed to foreseen, foreseeable, intended, or likely consequences).
- 3. Direct Consequentialism = whether an act is morally right depends only on the consequences of that act itself** (as opposed to the consequences of the agent's motive, of a rule or practice that covers other acts of the same kind, etc).
- 4. Evaluative Consequentialism = moral rightness depends only on the value of the consequences** (as opposed to other features of the consequences).
- 5. Hedonism = the value of the consequences depends only on the pleasures and pains in the consequences** (as opposed to other goods, such as freedom, knowledge, life, and so on).
- 6. Maximizing Consequentialism = moral rightness depends only on which consequences are best** (as opposed to satisfactory or an improvement over the status quo).
- 7. Aggregative Consequentialism = which consequences are best is some function of the values of parts of those consequences** (as opposed to rankings of whole worlds or sets of consequences).
- 8. Total Consequentialism = moral rightness depends only on the total net good in the consequences** (as opposed to the average net good per person).
- 9. Universal Consequentialism = moral rightness depends on the consequences for all people or sentient beings** (as opposed to only the individual agent, present people, or any other limited group).
- 10. Equal Consideration = in determining moral rightness, benefits to one person matter just as much as similar benefits to any other person** (= all who count count equally).
- 11. Agent-neutrality = whether some consequences are better than others does not depend on whether the consequences are evaluated from the perspective of the agent** (as opposed to an observer).

What matters here is just that these claims are logically independent, so a moral theorist could consistently accept some of them without accepting others. Yet classic utilitarians accepted them all. That fact makes classic utilitarianism a more complex theory than it might appear at first sight.

Single Value or Pluralistic Theories of Value:

Many consequentialists deny that all values can be reduced to any single ground, such as pleasure or desire satisfaction, so they instead adopt a pluralistic theory of value. Moore's ideal utilitarianism, for example, takes into account the values of beauty and truth (or knowledge) in addition to pleasure (Moore 1903, 83-85, 194; 1912). Other consequentialists add the intrinsic values of friendship or love, freedom or ability, life, virtue, and so on..

When consequentialists incorporate a variety of values, they need to rank or weigh each value against the others. This is often difficult. Some consequentialists even hold that certain values are incommensurable or incomparable in that no comparison of their values is possible (Griffin 1986 and Chang 1997). This position allows consequentialists to recognize the possibility of irresolvable moral dilemmas (Sinnott-Armstrong 1988, 81; Railton 2003, 249-91). Pluralism about values also enables consequentialists to handle many of the problems that plague hedonistic utilitarianism. For example, opponents often charge that classical utilitarians cannot explain our obligations to keep promises and not to lie when no pain is caused or pleasure is lost. Whether or not hedonists can meet this challenge, pluralists can hold that knowledge is intrinsically good and/or that false belief is intrinsically bad. Then, if deception causes false beliefs, deception is instrumentally bad, and agents ought not to lie without a good reason, even when lying causes no pain or loss of pleasure. Since lying is an attempt to deceive, to lie is to attempt to do what is morally wrong (in the absence of defeating factors). Similarly, if a promise to do an act is an attempt to make an audience believe that the promiser will do the act, then to break a promise is for a promiser to make false a belief that the promiser created. Although there is more tale to tell, the disvalue of false belief can be part of a consequentialist story about why it is morally wrong to break promises. When such pluralist versions of consequentialism are not welfarist, some philosophers would not call them utilitarian. However, this usage is not uniform, since even non-welfarist views are sometimes called utilitarian. Whatever you call them, the important point is that consequentialism and the other elements of classical utilitarianism are compatible with many different theories about which things are good or valuable. Instead of turning pluralist, some consequentialists foreswear the aggregation of values. Classic utilitarianism added up the values within each part of the consequences to determine which total set of consequences has the most value in it. One could, instead, aggregate goods for each individual but not aggregate goods of separate individuals (Roberts 2002). Or one could give up aggregation altogether and just rank total sets of consequences or total worlds created by acts without breaking those worlds down into valuable parts. One motive for this move is Moore's principle of organic unity (Moore 1903, 27-36). For example, even if punishment of a criminal causes pain, a consequentialist can hold that a world with both the crime and the punishment is better than a world with the crime but not the punishment. Similarly, a world might seem better when people do not get pleasures that they do not deserve. Cases like these lead some consequentialists to deny that moral rightness is any function of the values of particular effects of acts. Instead, they compare the whole world (or total set of consequences) that results from an action with the whole world that results from not doing that action. If the former is better, then the action is morally right (J.J.C. Smart 1973, 32; Feldman 1997, 17-35).

K.M. Hare's Kantian Utilitarian (2 level view):

It attempts to accommodate deontological intuitions (Kantian universalizability) within the framework of utilitarianism by synthesizing both act utilitarianism and rule utilitarianism.

In sum, a person's moral decisions should be based on a set of 'intuitive' moral rules (derived from the logical feature of moral knowledge, common preferences of humanity, etc) except in certain rare situations (e.g., prima facie principles conflict, unusual cases) where it is more appropriate to engage in a 'critical' level of act utilitarianism. In terms of two-level utilitarianism, act utilitarianism can be likened to the 'critical' level of moral thinking, and rule utilitarianism to the 'intuitive' level.

1. The logic of moral terms like "ought": a. Moral judgments are by their nature universalizable (they are more than simple imperatives, they commit one to making the same ought judgment in all circumstances that share the same universal features; moral thinking is a rational pursuit).

2. Facts about human nature and commonly held human preferences (human condition): a. Human basic preferences tend to be uniform; b. Humans vary on their ability to think critically and act on what they determine to be moral principles.

3. Warrants a two-level version of utilitarianism. When you encounter (1) an unusual situation, (2) determine that two prima facie rules contradict each other, (3) or where the normal rules would specify a course of action that is clearly not the most beneficial, changing one's mode of moral thinking to the critical act utilitarian level is necessary (utility needs to be maximized). Act utilitarianism is a necessary complement to rule utilitarianism because in some cases an individual might pursue a course of action that would obviously not maximize utility. Conversely, act utilitarianism is criticized for not allowing for a 'human element' in its calculations, i.e. it is sometimes too difficult (or impossible) for an ordinary person with imperfect knowledge to calculate the action of maximal utility

Each person shares the traits of archangels and proles to limited and varying extents at different times: (1) **Archangel:** Only uses critical moral thinking; no intuitive principles are needed. Superhuman, god-like powers of knowledge, thought, and no human weaknesses. Unbiased, ideal observer who can immediately scan all potential consequences of all possible actions in order to frame a universal principle form which it could decide an appropriate action for the situation; (2) **Prole:** Human weaknesses to an extreme degree. Must rely upon intuitions and sound prima facie principles all of the time. Incapable of critical thought. The set of intuitive moral rules must be simple, general, easy to memorize, and use.

Objections:

- (1) Undermines an agent's commitment to act in accordance with his moral principles for he knows that his everyday set of moral rules is merely a guideline (less guilt for breaking an intuitive principles).
- (2) It is problematic for one's thinking in the way the two-level account requires — to simultaneously think like a utilitarian and act in a non-utilitarian way.
- (3) Weakness of Will: Problems arise when we try to keep critical thinking separate from intuitive (acting against one's own judgment).

Act utilitarianism states that in all cases the morally right action is the one which produces the most pleasure. Rule utilitarianism states that the morally right action is the one that is in accordance with a moral rule whose general observance would create the most happiness (latter is subject to "rule worship" and collapse into act-utilitarianism because no "rule" is safe).

Advantages:

1. Banishes mystery from realm of ethics for the questions now become "engineering" problems.
2. Clear practical method of resolving ethical issues.
3. Pleasure & pain are important considerations even if you can't capture it all.
4. Public policy (e.g., football field or inner-city school).

Arguments for Consequentialism:

1. We tend to begin with the presumption that we want to make the world a better place. The question then becomes what "constraints" or "options" do we want to include. 2. Even if every possible objection is refuted, we might have no reason to reject consequentialism. 3. Attack Opponents. This disjunctive syllogism or process of elimination will be only as strong as the objections to the alternatives, and the argument fails if even one competitor survives. Moreover, the argument assumes that the original list (deontology, virtue, intuitionism) is complete. It is hard to see how that assumption could be justified. 4. Consequentialism also might be supported by an inference to the best explanation of our moral intuitions. This argument might surprise those who think of consequentialism as counterintuitive, but in fact consequentialists can explain many moral intuitions that trouble deontological theories. 5. Consequentialism also might be supported by an inference to the best explanation of our moral intuitions. This argument might surprise those who think of consequentialism as counterintuitive, but in fact consequentialists can explain many moral intuitions that trouble deontological theories (kill 1 to save a million) 6. Consequentialists also might be supported by deductive arguments from abstract moral intuitions. Sidgwick (1907, Book III, Chap. XIII) seemed to think that the principle of utility follows from very general principles of rationality and universalizability. 6. Other conseq. seek foundations outside morality, either in non-normative facts or in non-moral norms. Mill (1861) is infamous for his "proof" of the principle of utility from empirical observations about what we desire (cf. Sayre-McCord 2001). In contrast, Hare (1963, 1981) tries to derive his version of utilitarianism from substantively neutral accounts of morality, of moral language, and of rationality. 7. contractarian argument (Harsanyi): All informed, rational people whose impartiality is ensured because they do not know their place in society would favor a kind of consequentialism.

Virtue Ethics Criticisms of Consequential Ethics:

1. They have difficult time justifying our ordinary deontological intuitions.
2. Problem of making moral evaluations dependent on consequences. It is very implausible or at least anti-commonsensical in relation to the evaluation of motives.
3. The problem of displacing motives of kindness and compassion for such things as those things that promote economic well-being.
4. Lacks any moral component. Thus, a moral duty for utilitarians are derived from a set of circumstances lacking any moral component.
5. Impossibility of actually determining full range of consequences.
6. Quantifying the moral calculations on good and evil. There is much disagreement on just how much good is necessary to outweigh evil.
7. Outrageous and horrific acts of injustice could be justified.
8. Taking responsibility for far-reaching consequences. To what extent does the consequentialist assume responsibility for far-reaching consequences?

Major Criticisms of Consequentialism by Ross:

1. Egoism: A great part of duty consists in respecting the rights & serving the interests of others "whatever the cost to ourselves may be."
2. Hedonistic Utilitarianism: Pleasure is not the only thing we recognize as being intrinsically good; we recognize other things such as the possession of a good character & an intelligent understanding of the world having intrinsic value.
3. Ideal Utilitarianism: Productivity of maximum good is not what makes all actions right.