Consequentialism

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Definition: Consequentialism

- Moral character of an action solely determined by consequences.
- Motive and intrinsic nature unimportant.
- Ends justify the means; If the act’s good out-weighs the bad, the act must be promoted.
Utilitarianism

- Mill 1861: *Utilitarianism*
- “Actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote pleasure or happiness.”
- “Greatest happiness in greatest number of people.”
- Pleasure/happiness is the only ultimate good.
- Pain is the only ultimate evil.
- No inherent moral properties of actions of their own.
- Utilitarianism = Consequentialism + hedonism
Psychological hedonism

- Underlies Mill’s utilitarianism:
  - All we ever desire, for its own sake, is pleasure.
  - All we ever avoid, for its own sake, is pain.

- Contradicts Mill’s utilitarianism:
  - Each person ultimately desires his/her own pleasure.
  - My pleasure matters more than anyone else’s.
Act and rule consequentialism

- **Act consequentialist:**
  - Judge each individual action.
  - No absolute rules.

- **Rule consequentialist:**
  - Rules can have good consequentialist justification.
  - Rules better than judging each individual action.
  - No rules for their own sake.

- **Examples:**
  - Stop at red traffic light.
  - Lying.
Act and omission

- No moral difference between act and omission; only consequences count.
- Counter-examples:
  - Letting injured person die, same as killing?
  - Refraining from donating blood during a crisis, equal to harming people?
Intention and foresight

Consequentialism
- No differentiation between intent and foresight.
- Responsibility for intention and foreseen results.
- Calculate into future.
- No moral conflicts but choice.
- Only difficulty predicting consequences.

Doctrine of double effect
- Foreseen effects divided into intended and not intended effects.
- “Just war” theory.
Subjective and objective points of view

View from nowhere
- Perspective-free view of reality.
- Impartial benevolent spectator.
- Cannot be view of any actual individual
- But:
  - Only individuals can act morally.
  - Individual perspective cannot be merged into unitary perspective.

Individual view
- “I’m forbidden to break the rules.”
- No maximization of compliance with rules.
- No consideration of others’ compliance with rules.
- Respect for autonomy and integrity.
Justice, ends and means

Consequentialism

- Disinterested basis.
- Equal weight on all people.
- Challenges vested interests.
- No distributive or retributive justice.
- Rational beings as mere means to ends.

Kant’s postulates

- People as ends themselves rather than mere means.
- Personal autonomy.
- Consent.
What to do next

CLAIMS TO BE A HEDONISTIC ACT
UTILITARIAN

STILL HAS TWO
KIDNEYS