**Intro to Consequentialism**

PHIL 230, Hendricks, Fall 2014

“Plain Consequentialism” from IEP (1a): *“*Plain Consequentialism: Of all the things a person might do at any given moment, the morally right action is the one with the best overall consequences.”

“Consequentialism,” from Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP): “Consequentialism = whether an act is morally right depends only on consequences (as opposed to the circumstances or the intrinsic nature of the act or anything that happens before the act).” (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consequentialism/#ClaUti>)

**How to judge consequences?** What makes consequences of actions good or bad?

-- one answer is found in JS Mill’s Utilitarian view, which subscribes to “hedonism”

“Hedonism,” from SEP: **“**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).” (SEP, “consequentialism” <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consequentialism/#ClaUti>)

(to keep from having to resize all the boxes in the chart below, I’m leaving it the same size as when I showed it on the screen)

**For Mill’s hedonistic consequentialist view:**

In *Utilitarianism* Chpt. 4, Mill attempts to justify the claim that pleasure and pain are the only things of intrinsic value that should be used to determine the moral value of actions.

1. Actual consequences, intended, probable, expectable, or expected?

2. Maximizing? So if you don’t produce the maximum good, then act wrong?

3. Consequences for whom? And value of consequences for all to count equally (impartiality)?

Happiness, defined in terms of pleasure and pain, determines value of consequences of acts

Actions undertaken or contemplated, in particular situations

Moral evaluation of actions comes from moral evaluation of their consequences

*What reasons might be given for saying that the moral value of actions should be judged based on their consequences?*

**Questions 1-3, above**

**1. What sorts of consequences? Actual, intended, probable, etc.?**

“Actual Consequentialism = whether an act is morally right depends only on the actual consequences (as opposed to foreseen, foreseeable, intended, or likely consequences).” (SEP, “consequentialism” <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consequentialism/#ClaUti>)

*Potential problems with this view?*

IEP (1d): “Expectable Consequentialism”: “the morally right action is the action whose reasonably expectable consequences are best.”

(IEP 1d) “Reasonable Consequentialism: An action is morally right if and only if it has the best reasonably expected consequences.”

*Difference between these two? One better than the other?*

2. Maximizing? So that if you don’t do the action with the best (actual, expected, or whatever the theory holds) consequences, the action is morally wrong?

Plain consequentialism (IEP 1c): *“*Of all the things a person might do at any given moment, the morally right action is the one with the best overall consequences. (If there is no one best action because several actions are tied for best consequences, then of course any of those several actions would be right.)”

Also sometimes called “maximizing consequentialism”: moral rightness depends only on which consequences are best (as opposed to merely satisfactory or an improvement over the status quo).” (SEP, “consequentialism,” <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consequentialism/#ClaUti>)

*Problems with this?*

* Morally obligatory, under maximizing view: what has the best consequences, in comparison with any other action that could be performed
* Morally wrong: what has worse consequences than the morally obligatory action as defined above
* Morally permissible or optional: what ties with another action as having the best consequences of all possible actions

Plain Scalar Consequentialism (IEP 1c): “Of any two things a person might do at any given moment, one is better than another to the extent that its overall consequences are better than the other’s overall consequences.”

3. Consequences for whom/what? And impartiality?

a. Universal Consequentialism = moral rightness depends on the consequences for all people or sentient beings (as opposed to only the individual agent, members of the individual's society, present people, or any other limited group). (SEP, “consequentialism,” <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consequentialism/#ClaUti>)

Mill’s version of Utilitarianism: in determining the moral value of an action, must consider consequences for all sentient beings affected

b. Mill’s view is also “impartialist”:

“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). (SEP, “consequentialism,” <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/consequentialism/#ClaUti>)

Another definition of “impartialist”: “the value of the consequences of an action is to be assessed from an impartial point of view; the value of the consequences on all who are affected are given equal weight in determining the [moral] status of an action” (Timmons, *Moral Theory*, 2nd ed (Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), p.149).