

Bioethics Week 2

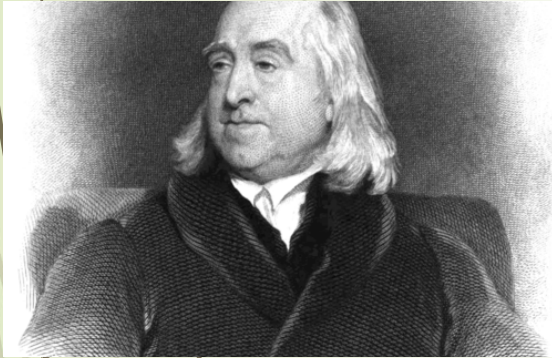


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Normative Ethics: Utilitarianism

- ▶ Utilitarianism also called Consequentialism is an ethical system that centers on the idea the good must be maximized and bad outcomes must be minimized.
- ▶ It is the actions (outcomes) that matter and not the intent of the actor.
- ▶ The theory was founded by Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873).
 - ▶ Bentham said “*The greatest happiness of the greatest number is the foundation of morals and legislation.*” from *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*
 - ▶ Hedonistic philosophy
 - ▶ Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do
 - ▶ The question is not, 'Can they reason?' nor, 'Can they talk?' but rather, 'Can they suffer?'



<https://www.stneotsmuseum.org.uk/articles/jeremy-bentham-philosopher-utilitarian-eccentric/>

Normative Ethics: Utilitarianism



<https://www.utilitarianism.net/utilitarian-thinker/john-stuart-mill>

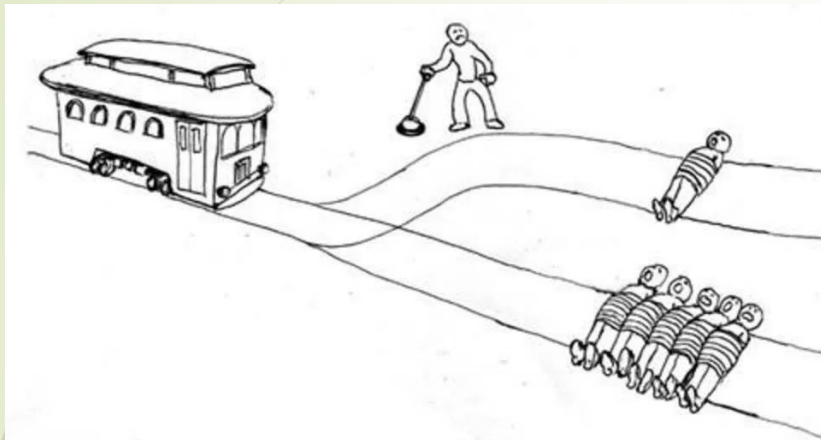
- ▶ John Stuart Mills said
 - ▶ Actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain.
 - ▶ Pleasure and freedom from pain, are the only things desirable as ends.
 - ▶ Again see hedonistic philosophy
 - ▶ The only purpose for which power can be rightfully exercised over any member of a civilized community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others. His own good, either physical or moral, is not sufficient warrant



Normative Ethics: Utilitarianism

- ▶ normative properties depend only on consequences.
- ▶ agent-neutral
 - ▶ Doesn't depend on motive of actor
 - ▶ Is still moral even if done for wrong reason
- ▶ What is good
 - ▶ Hedonistic
 - ▶ Pleasure is distinct from the absence of pain, and pain is distinct from the absence of pleasure
 - ▶ what is good is desire satisfaction or the fulfillment of preferences; and what is bad is the frustration of desires or preferences
 - ▶ Moore's ideal utilitarianism adds the intrinsic values of friendship or love, freedom or ability, justice or fairness, desert, life, virtue, and so on.
- ▶ Leads to a calculus adding up of good and bad
- ▶ Problems
 - ▶ Are some good and some evils so great others should be excluded?
 - ▶ What if the way to do the greatest good requires and immoral act? (Dropping nuclear bomb to end World War II or the use of bio-weapons to stop an evil dictator.

The calculus



You find yourself at a lever. A runaway trolley approaches five people who are tied to a set of tracks. Pulling the lever will divert the trolley to a different set of tracks, where only one person is tied down.

Do you pull the lever?





Case Study

