

Phil 2, September 13, 2006

Utilitarianism and Singer's Stronger Principle (or so I speculated) are based on:

Consequentialism: We are morally required to produce the best outcome.

When we ask: "Which outcome is best?" rather than "Why outcome is best *for me*?" we ignore which person we are. We evaluate the outcomes as though we were mere spectators—like the President contemplating the outcome in which the meteor hits the fisherman and the outcome in which the meteor hits L.A.—even if *we are* the fisherman, or Angelinos.

But is Consequentialism true?

Problems with Consequentialism: Does it ask us to sacrifice too much?

Construction Case: saving someone from harm by suffering a comparable harm

Permissive Consequentialism: We are morally required to produce the best outcome, except when we would have to sacrifice too much.*

Problems with Consequentialism: Does it tell us to harm others?

Transplant Case: harming the one to save the three from *natural* harm.

- Isn't this wrong?

Does Permissive Consequentialism solve the problem?

- No: It seems that we are not even *permitted* to harm the one to save the three from harm.

Does it solve the problem if *killings* make the outcome worse?

- First, is this plausible? Is it a worse outcome if one person is killed but three are saved from dying from natural causes? *Fire case*.
- Second, a new case:

Railway Case: harming the one to save the three from being harmed *by other people*.

- Now by killing one person, you can prevent three other killings.

This is paradoxical:

- If killing is bad, then why shouldn't we be required, or at least permitted, to kill to prevent more killings?
- The only difference (besides the numbers involved) is who *I* kill, who is harmed *through my agency*.
- Why should it matter whether someone is harmed through my agency or another person's?
- Why should the single victim care whether he is killed through *my* agency? Isn't his complaint simply that he will be killed by someone? And can't each of the three victims make the same complaint: that he will be killed by someone?

* Slightly more precise: We are morally required either to produce the best outcome, or to produce any other outcome (if there is any) in which the ratio of the extent to which the outcome is better for us to the extent to which the outcome is worse is greater than some constant.

Problems with Consequentialism: Does it tell us to be disloyal to our loved ones?

I do more for my daughter than for any stranger's daughter. But if I did the same for each, then the outcome would be better.

- Am I *permitted* to do more for my daughter?
- Am I *required* to do more for my daughter? Would I be acting wrongly if I did the same for each?

A consequentialist response: "Actually, the outcome will be better if you do more for your daughter. You know her needs better, she'll be hurt if you reject her, etc."

- Must this be true?
- Williams's point: Should I even *think* this way? Do I really *love* my child if I think this way?

But this construction provides the agent with one thought too many: it might have been hoped by some (for instance, by his wife) that his motivating thought, fully spelled out, would be the thought that it was his wife, not that it was his wife and that in situations of this kind it is permissible to save one's wife (18).

Why is Consequentialism attractive?

"Morality requires us *to treat* people equally"

=? to produce the best outcome

=? to treat people the same unless there is some good reason for treating them differently.

- Why can't the fact that Colette is my daughter be a good reason for treating her differently?

"Morality requires us *to recognize* that everyone is equally important"

=? to produce the best outcome

=? to believe that everyone is equally important

- When I treat Colette specially, must I believe that she is *more important* than other people? Or simply that she is *my daughter*?
- If I believed that she was more important than other people, then I would believe that *you* ought to treat her specially too. But *this* isn't what I believe. Instead, I believe you ought to treat *your* loved ones specially.

"Morality *requires* us *to do as much good* as we can"

- Is this obvious?

"Morality *permits* us *to do as much good* as we can"

- This seems much harder to deny.
- At least in the *Railway Case*—of harming the one to save the three from being harmed by someone else—it is hard to explain why we should *not* be permitted from doing as much good as we can.