

## Phil 2, September 18, 2006

*A conflict between love and consequentialism?*

- We love our families and we care about our friends.
- This means, in part, that we *treat* them specially: that we *do* more for them than we would for otherwise similarly situated strangers.
- According to Consequentialism, are these *actions* morally permissible? Only if they produce the best outcome that we can produce.
- Perhaps they do...
  - (i) We know our relatives' wants and needs better.
  - (ii) Treating our relatives specially simply channels motivations we already have.
  - (iii) Treating our relatives specially gives us and them pleasure, and it is part of what makes our and their lives worthwhile.

*Two worries:*

*First*, will treating our loved ones specially *always* produce the best outcome?

*Second*, isn't it alienated to treat our loved ones specially *because* it will produce the best outcome?

- Love means more than *acting* in certain ways. Love also means being *motivated* in certain ways to act in these ways.
- If what *moves* us to treat our loved ones specially is the thought that this will produce the best outcome, then we don't really love them. In other words, if we are motivated by Consequentialism, then we are *alienated* from our intimate interpersonal relationships as well as from our relatives themselves.
- This was Williams's point about "one thought too many."

*Is alienation an objection to consequentialism?*

Railton agrees that:

- (1) *If* we deliberated in consequentialist terms, *then* we would be estranged from our close relationships as well as our relatives themselves.

But Railton asks why this is an *objection* to consequentialism. It might be pointed out, and Railton accepts, that:

- (2a) If we are estranged, then we agents suffer a great loss.
- (2b) If we are estranged, then the world suffers a great loss; it is less good.

And suppose we assume, further, that:

- (3) Consequentialism requires us to deliberate in consequentialist terms.

Then we get the conclusions:

- (4a) Consequentialism requires us to impose a great loss on ourselves; it is "overly demanding."
- (4b) Consequentialism requires us to make the world worse; it is "self-defeating."

But why, Railton asks, should we accept premise (3)? After all, what Consequentialism requires us to do, at the most basic level, is whatever would do the most good. So deliberating in consequentialist terms would make the world worse, then Consequentialism will not require us to deliberate in consequentialist terms. Indeed, it will require us *not* to deliberate in consequentialist terms.

*What to do v. how to think about what to do*

Distinguish:

- (A) What are we morally required *to do*?
- (B) How are we morally required *to think about* what to do? Better put: What *deliberative tendencies*, or patterns of decision-making, are we morally required to cultivate in ourselves?

Consequentialism answers:

- (A) We are morally required to do what will produce the best outcome.
- (B) We are morally required to cultivate whatever *deliberative tendency* with which we will produce the best outcomes (over some span of time, since deliberative tendencies cannot be changed immediately).

The best deliberative tendency:

- is probably *not* to ask oneself what will produce the best outcome.
- probably involves the more immediate motivations constitutive of love.
- will probably lead us, on occasion, to *act* in a way that does *not* produce the best outcome that we can
- and thus will lead us, on occasion, to *act* morally wrongly.

Notice that this may assuage not only the second worry, but also the *first*: that because *treating* our loved ones specially will sometimes not produce the best outcome, Consequentialism forbids normal human relationships.

*Where does this leave us?*

- You make your boyfriend or girlfriend a Valentine's gift. You could have done more good if you devoted the time and money to some relief effort.
- So you *acted* wrongly.
- But should you be *blamed* for acting wrongly? Can a consequentialist fault *you*?
- If you were *disposed* otherwise, then you would do less good in the long run.
- And if you had *cultivated* a different disposition, then you would have acted wrongly.
- You are (to use Derek Parfit's phrase) a "blameless wrongdoer." (Compare Railton, p. 161.)

Perhaps this answers some worries about Consequentialism. But why should we accept Consequentialism in the first place? Why think that the only moral considerations are what would produce the best outcome?

### **Review:**

We've come to the end of our focused exploration of the question, "What is the morally right thing for me to do?" We are not done with it, however. It is closely linked to many of the questions that we will go on to discuss.

### **Preview:**

Next, we'll turn to Diana's question: *Why* should we do the morally right thing? We'll start with Aristotle's proposal: Because a good life for us is one that fulfills our natural purpose, and our natural purpose is to exercise the virtues.