Phil. 6100
Notes #1: Obligations to Future People (Parfit)

The Non-Identity Problem
- 3 kinds of choices:
    1. *Same-person choices:* in which the same people will exist regardless of how one acts. Most moral theory has discussed these.
    2. *Different-people choices:* in which different people will exist depending on one's action(s). Two varieties:
        a. *Same number choices:* where you have different people but the same number of people
        b. *Different number choices:* where you have different numbers of people.
- The Non-Identity Problem: How should we make same-number choices? In particular, does it make a moral difference that different people would exist? See examples below.

The Future Persons Paradox
This is an argument for the counterintuitive conclusion that we have no obligations to future generations. Parfit seeks to avoid this. Premises:

A. The "time-dependence claim": If any particular person had not been conceived at about the time they were in fact conceived, then they would never have existed.
B. An action is wrong only if it harms someone.
C. An action harms a person only if they would have been better off had the action not been performed.
D. Non-existent people cannot be harmed.

Conclusion: We have fewer obligations to future generations than previously thought (see below).

The 14-year-old girl
This girl wants to have a baby. If she has a baby now, the baby will be much worse off than if she waited several years. However, the child will still have a life worth living. The girl decides to have a baby now.
Q: Is her action wrong? Why?

An Argument: (the future persons paradox)
1. An action is wrong only if it harms someone other than the agent.
2. The 14-year-old girl's action harms no one other than herself. For
    a. It does not harm her child, since her child would not have existed otherwise. (The Time-Dependence Claim)
    b. It does not harm the child she *would have* had, since that child doesn't exist.
3. Therefore, her action is not wrong.

Depletion
Assume that we (society) have a choice of two policies, Depletion and Conservation. If we choose Depletion, we will have slightly better lives for the next 200 years, as a result of consuming natural resources more quickly. After that time, people will have *much* lower quality of life, due to the depletion of resources. If we choose Conservation, we will have less benefit now, but future generations (after 200 years from now) will be much better off. Suppose we choose Depletion.
Q: Is our choice wrong? Why?

An Argument: (the future persons paradox)
1. A policy is wrong only if it harms someone.
2. Our policy harms no one. For
    a. It doesn't harm anyone existing now or in the next 200 years.
    b. It does not harm people existing after that time. (The Time-Dependence Claim)
    c. It does not harm the people who *would have* existed if we chose Conservation.
3. Therefore, the policy is not wrong.

Objection #1
Perhaps we have an obligation to produce good. We act wrongly by not producing the better-off people.

Problem:
This means the girl acts wrongly if she merely fails to have a child.

Objection #2
Perhaps people have rights to a certain level of well-being. Perhaps we act wrongly by creating people whose rights won't be satisfied.

Problems:
1. These people would probably waive their supposed right.
2. Suppose the people's well-being will be above the level that they have a right to, but still not as great as would otherwise be the case. (See Parfit's Lesser Depletion example.)
3. This implies that it would have been better to produce no one at all (e.g., sterilize everyone after adopting Depletion).

Parfit's View
If in either of two possible outcomes the same number of people would ever live, it would be worse if those who live are worse off than those who would have lived.

- He does not say, however, whether we are *obligated* to produce the better outcome. And this would be hard to defend, for:
1. The 14-yr-old girl has at least 3 options:
    a. Have a child in several years, who will have a good start in life.
    b. Have a child now, who will have a poor start.
    c. Have no child.
2. (c) is permissible.
3. (b) is better than (c).
4. Therefore, (b) should also be permissible. At least, (b) cannot be wrong merely because it is worse than (a).

Discuss:
- Is Parfit's implicit account of harm correct (Premise (C))? How else might harm be defined?
- The argument can be reformulated in terms of better and worse, rather than in terms of obligation.
- Is the person-affecting principle correct?
- What else might be wrong with the argument?

Phil. 6100
Notes #2: The Continuum Argument against Transitivity (Rachels)

I. Background

- Stuart Rachels: Philosophy prof at U-Alabama, Tuscaloosa. Son of James Rachels. Former instructor at CU-Boulder. Original source of this argument, which made Larry Temkin famous.
- *Transitivity:* If A is better than B, and B is better than C, then A is better than C.
- This is very widely accepted in ethics, decision theory, & common sense.
- Often treated as a non-substantive, logical principle. But that is wrong. It is a highly plausible, first-order axiological principle.

II. The Continuum Argument against Transitivity

- A set of possible experiences:
    - E_1 1 year of ecstasy.
    - E_2 10 years of slightly less intense pleasure.
    - E_3 100 years of slightly less intense pleasure.
    - !   !
    - E_{100} 10^{99} years of barely noticeable pleasure.

- An argument:
    1. For each n, E_{n+1} is better than E_n.
    2. But E_{100} is worse than E_1.
    3. Therefore, *better-than* is non-transitive.
- Similar argument for pains.
- Parfit's second paradox is another alleged counter-example.

III. Explanations for Non-Transitivity

- When different factors are relevant in comparing A to B, and B to C.
- When quantitative differences add up to qualitative differences.

IV. Consequences

- Value is not quantitative.

V. Objections

- Transitivity built into the meaning of "better than".
    - This is like the claim that absolute simultaneity is built into our concept of time.
    [Discuss: What is his point here? What is he assuming you believe about simultaneity? Is this a correct analogy?]
- Transitivity is intuitively obvious.
    - Belief in transitivity is based on induction. It can be undermined by a single counter-example.
- The argument is just a Sorites paradox.
    - Sorites arguments: Each step (seemingly) makes no difference to the application of a concept.
    - This argument is not of the Sorites type.
- The scenarios are too unrealistic.

- We have clear intuitions about them.
- They are physically possible, though improbable.
- If we change the time of the pain to 3 seconds, it seems that some long period of mild discomfort is worse than 3 seconds of agony.
  - Rachels doubts this.
  - Also, consider 3 seconds of some physically possible pain that is worse than anything anyone has ever experienced.

VI. Error Theories

- Inability to grasp long time periods. This could be (partially) remedied by making all the time periods in the example shorter.
- Similarity-based decision-making.
- Judgments based on emotional reactions.

Phil. 6100
Notes #3: The Self-Torturer (Quinn)

I. The Self-Torturer

- The torture device has a series of settings:

0	No electric current, $0.
1	Undetectable electric current, $10,000.
2	Unnoticeably greater current, $20,000.

  ...
  1000 Agonizing electric current, $10,000,000.
- An intransitivity:
  - The Self-Torturer (ST) rationally prefers 1 to 0, 2 to 1, etc.
    * The ST can't tell the difference in electric current between n and $n+1$.
    * Unnoticeable "changes" in pain are not bad (or are not real changes at all).
    * $10,000 is always good.
  - But the ST prefers 0 over 1000. $10 million isn't enough money to make up for permanent agony.
  - Hence, the ST has intransitive preferences.
- An argument for value intransitivity:
  1. The ST is rational and has intransitive preferences.
  2. If a rational being prefers x to y, then x is better than y.
  3. So better-than is intransitive.

II. Objections & Replies

- The ST's preferences change. (So he's not rational?) His evaluation of stage 1000 changes when he is at 999.
  - Not true. He always prefers 1000 over 999.
- Ignoring behavioral changes: Maybe ST doesn't introspectively notice a change in pain, but there are behavioral differences.
  - Assume there are no behavioral differences either.
- The ST's discomfort-index must increase at some point from 0 to some positive number.
  - No, because discomfort level is indeterminate.
- Triangulation: You can tell that s3 is worse than s2, because s3 *is introspectively worse than s1*, but s2 isn't.
  - Make the voltage increments small enough that s3 isn't introspectively worse than s1 either.
- ST's preferences reverse: There is a first setting such that he prefers that setting over 0.
  - Appeal to indeterminacy again.
- ST has paradoxical preferences [or judgments]. They create a Sorites paradox. (s1 feels the same as s2, which feels the same as s3 . . . But s1 doesn't feel the same as s1000.) He shouldn't rely on such paradoxical preferences/judgments for decision-making.
  - Bizarre to suggest that he shouldn't rely on judgments about his comfort level in deciding what to do.

III. Quinn's Solution

- The ST should imagine a "filtered series": he groups together collections of stages.

- He chooses the most fine-grained filtered series such that his preferences are transitive.
- He selects the best member of that series.
- Advantages of this: Gets him some advantage, but avoids the "unacceptable" outcome of stage 1000.
- This doesn't get him "the best" choice, because there is no best choice, because of intransitivity.
• Once he gets to that stage, he stops.
  - Why not go just one step more?
  - Because his earlier plan was rational, and he has gotten no new information.

IV. Analysis: Q's Argument Requires 2 Controversial Assumptions

• That there cannot be an unnoticeable (increase in) pain.
  Why assume this?
• Q's need for indeterminacy:
  1 Assume that (apart from money), s1 is exactly as bad as s0, but s1000 is worse than s0.
  2 There is a first stage n such that sn is worse than s0.
  3 sn is worse than s(n-1). This is because sn is worse than s0, whereas s(n-1) isn't.
  - This refutes Quinn's contention that no stage is worse than the immediately preceding stage.
  - To avoid this, Quinn relies on indeterminacy: there is no first stage that is worse than s0.
• Indeterminacy = rejection of LEM.
  - Suppose that for each n sn is either worse than s0, or not worse than s0. Then, obviously, there is a first n that is worse. (Since there are only finitely many ns in the series.)
  - So Quinn has to reject Excluded Middle (LEM).
  - Note that three truth-values won't be enough: Suppose that for each n, sn is either (i) worse than s0, (ii) not worse, or (iii) neither worse nor non-worse (indeterminate). Then, again, there must be a first sn that is worse.
  - Infinitely many truth-values don't work either. There would still have to be a first n such that "sn is worse than s0" has a truth value other than "false". (It is false when n=0.)
  - It is unclear how to make this coherent.
• Rejection of LEM = rejection of LNC.
  "~(sn is worse than s0) and ~(sn is not worse than s0)" is of the form:
  ~Rxy & ~~Rxy.

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Notes #4: Arguments for Transitivity

I. The Money Pump

1. Assume that A is better than B, which is better than C, which is better than A.
2. Possibly, some rational being always (rationally) prefers the better of two options. (Premise.)
3. A rational being acts on the basis of his (rational) preferences. (Premise.)
4. Therefore, there could be a rational being who prefers A to B, B to C, and C to A, and acts on the basis of those preferences. (From 1, 2, 3.)
5. If S prefers A to B, B to C, and C to A, and acts on the basis of those preferences, then S would act as a "money pump", i.e.,
   - S would trade A plus a small amount of money for C.
   - S would trade C plus a small amount of money for B.
   - S would trade B plus a small amount of money for A.
   - Etc.   (Premise.)
6. So there could be a rational being who would act as a money pump. (From 4, 5.)
7. But there could not be a rational being who would act as a money pump. (Premise.)
8. Therefore, it is not the case that A is better than B, which is better than C, which is better than A. (From 1-7, reductio.)

- Rachels denies #3. He says a rational being would refrain from acting on the basis of his preferences, in one special circumstance: when doing so would result in being a money pump.

II. The Dominance Argument

- *The Dominance Principle:* Suppose $x1 > y1$, $x2 > y2$, ... $xn > yn$. Then the combination of the x's is better than the combination of the y's.
  - Qualifications: the x's do not form an 'organic unity', etc. They are independent. Or if they do form an organic unity, then the y's also form one in the same way.
- *Irreflexivity:* Nothing is better than itself.
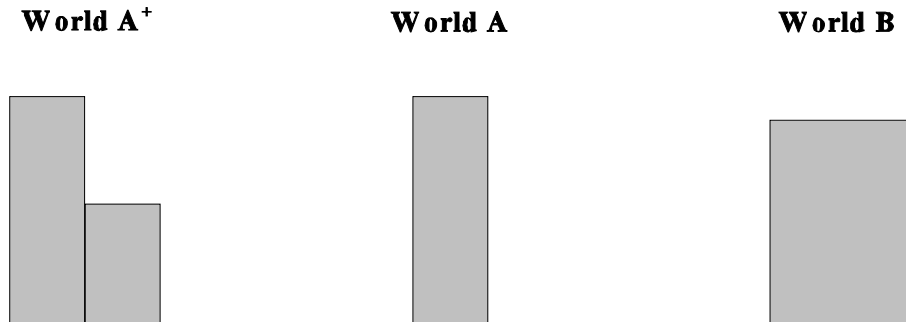- *Asymmetry:* If $x > y$, then y is not better than x.
- Two dominance arguments:

First argument: Assume $E1 < E2 < E3 < . . . < E100 < E1$.
  - Compare: $x = E1 + E3 + . . . + E99$
                       $y = E2 + E4 + . . . + E100$
  - y comes out better than x.
  - Now compare: $x = E1 \quad + E3 + . . . + E99$
                       $y = E100 + E2 + . . . + E98$
  - x comes out better than y.
  - This violates Asymmetry.

Second argument: Assume $a > b > c > a$.
  - Compare: $x = a+b+c$
                      $y = b+c+a$
  - x is better than y (Dominance).
  - This violates Irreflexivity.

Phil. 6100
Notes #5: Transitivity & Population: Temkin versus Norcross

I. Temkin Said

| World A$^+$	World A	World B

- *Person-Affecting Principle:* x is better than y only if x is better than y *for someone.*
- Using PAP:
  1. B is better than A+.
  2. A+ is as good as A.
  3. But ~(B is better than A). B is worse than A.
- PAP ⊇ counterexample to transitivity.

## II. Norcross Says

- Step 3: B < A, if starting from A. But B > A if starting from B.
- Isn't this a contradiction? Must relativize:
  A is Abetter than B. But B is also Bbetter than A.
- No counter-example:
  1. B is Bbetter than A+.
  2. A+ is Aequal to A.
  3. ~(B is Abetter than A).
  We would need for #1: B is Abetter than A+.
- What does "B is Abetter than A+" mean?
  - "Better for the A-people"? No, because then B is *not* Abetter than A+.
  - "If you move from A to B, then to A+, the second change is bad"? No, because then B is Abetter than A.
- Alternative interpretation: A, B, and A+ are possible states that could all evolve from the present. None evolves from any of the others. Then
  1. A is better than B.
  2. B is better than A+.
  3. But ~(A is better than A+).

- Argument against the PAP:
  1. Great is better than OK.
  2. But PAP says neither is better.
  3. So PAP is false.

Great

Ok
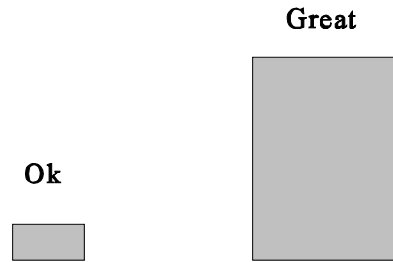
- Temkin says: PAP fails, only for different-people choices.
- Consider another comparison:

Great

Fred

Fred

Ok
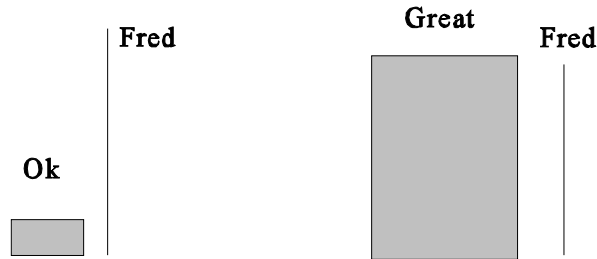
- Ok+Fred isn't better than Great+Fred. So PAP is false when *some* of the people are different.
- These are the sort of cases in which Temkin tries to apply the PAP (e.g., A versus A+).

III. Temkin Replies

- "all things considered better" = "Abetter OR Bbetter OR ...", etc.
- So when we have:
    1. B is Bbetter than A+.
    2. A+ is Aequal to A.
    3. ~(B is Abetter than A).
  this is a counter-example to transitivity of better-than.
- Norcross rejects this, because it violates Asymmetry:
    A is Abetter than B.
    B is Bbetter than A.
    So, A is (all-things-considered) better than B *and* B is (all-things-considered) better than A.
- *Essentially Comparative* view of betterness: All-things-considered betterness depends on the starting point. But this does not make it mere "Abetterness" or "Bbetterness".
    - If we start from A, move to A+, then move to B, the two moves are each improvements, but the move from A to B isn't.
    - This is a violation of transitivity.
    - [Discuss: Or is the conclusion rather that it depends on whether you move from A to B directly, or by going through A+?]
- Response to argument against PAP:
    - Maybe PAP applies in *some* cases when some of the people are different, but not in others. [Discuss: Philosophical methodology. Who has the burden of proof? How much generalization should be ascribed to a principle? Does Temkin's reply render PAP unfalsifiable?]
- Even if we restrict PAP, we might get intransitivity anyway: Maybe PAP is relevant in comparing A and C, but not for A & B or B & C.
    - People who accept PAP only as a special case of the principle of utility needn't worry.

- But many people think PAP is an independent consideration. Three comparisons:

World A   World B

I

World A   World B

II

World A   World B

III
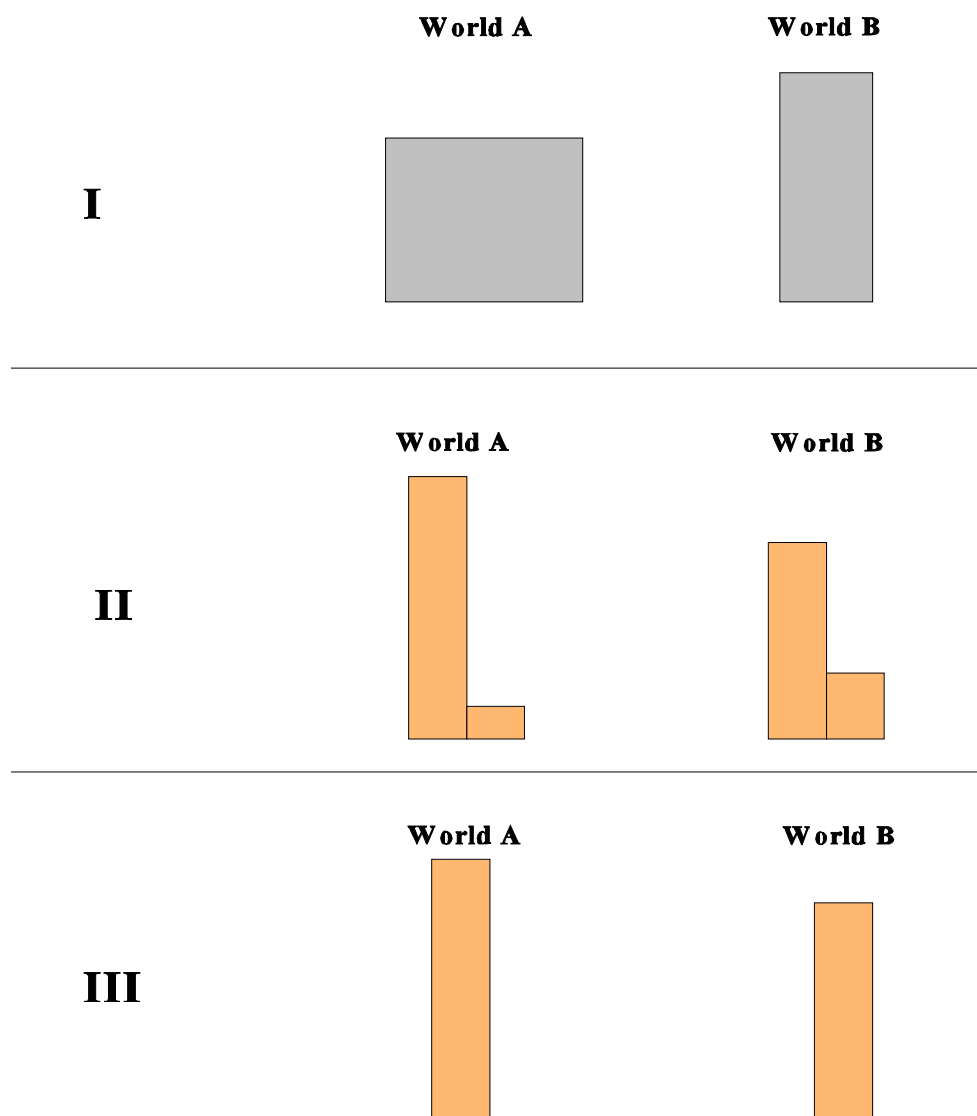
- In all three cases, total utility is higher in A.
- Many people would find it more obvious that A is better than B in case III. This suggests that the PAP is an independent factor (beyond total utility).

Phil. 6100
Notes #6: Utilitarianism & New Generations (Narveson)

Q: Suppose that if we produced a person, that person would be happy. Is that a reason to produce a person?

I. No reason to make happy people

First argument (?):
1. We have reason to create happy people, only if happy people "ought to be created."
2. "x ought to be created" is never true.
    * If x exists, then he's already been born.
    * If x doesn't exist, then "x" doesn't refer.
3. Therefore, it is not the case that happy people ought to be created.
4. So we have no reason to create happy people.

Second argument:
1. We have reason to do x only if x would benefit someone.
2. Making happy people (without affecting the original people) benefits no one.
   * The existing people are (by hypothesis) no better off.
   * The new people are not benefitted, for:
        a. A benefits S only if S is better off as a result of A than S would be if A did not occur.
        b. If S did not exist, S would have no welfare level (not even 0).
        c. So no one can be "better off" at any time than S would be if S did not exist.
        d. So S cannot be better off as a result of being created than S would be if S were not created.
3. Therefore, we have no reason to make happy people (without affecting the original people).

Third argument:
1. We ought to create happy people only if we are obligated to create more obligations.
   * Once they are created, we'll be obliged to benefit them.
2. We have no obligation to create obligations.
3. So it is not the case that we ought to create happy people.

II. We should not create unhappy people

Argument:
1. We should not act in such a way that an obligation of ours will be unfulfilled.
2. If someone is suffering, we have an obligation to alleviate the suffering.
3. Therefore, we ought not to act so that there will be a suffering person whose suffering we fail to alleviate. (So we should not create a person we know will suffer.)

Corollary:
4. We should not act in such a way that an obligation of ours will be unfulfilled.
5. Suppose that we have a duty to make people as happy as possible.
6. Then we ought not to create any person who won't be "as happy as possible."
7. Therefore, we shouldn't create anyone.
• Discuss: How confused is this? How does Narveson understand "utilitarianism"? What does he think "as happy as possible" means?

Objection:
- (2) is false. We only need *try* to alleviate the suffering. Narveson says this (70).
  - Therefore, we may create unhappy people, as long as we *try* to alleviate their suffering.
  - Later, he says that a person will be suffering and *we could have prevented this.* Is he shifting from premise (1) to something else?

A related argument:
8. We should not act in such a way that someone will have an unsatisfied right.
9. People have a right not to suffer.
10. Therefore, we should not create a person who will suffer.

Discuss:
- This argument is not Narveson's. Which one is better?
- Does this mean we should not create anyone?
- What if people have a right to have at least a certain level (greater than zero) of welfare? How does this affect the argument?
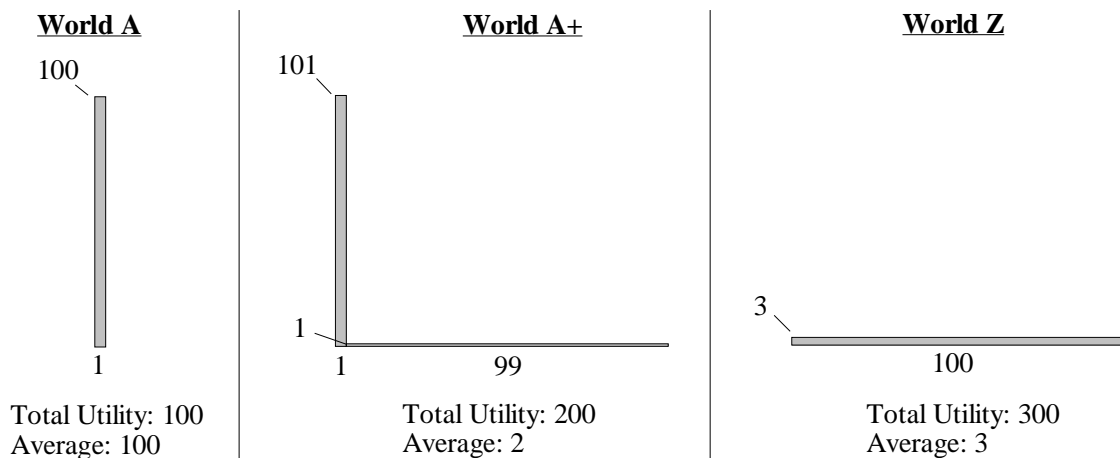
III. Objections

- Narveson's combination of (I) and (II) above seems inconsistent.
- Narveson does not explain why it might not be that we have a reason to bring about good states of affairs.
- The prudential analogy:
    1. You have prudential reason to do x only if x will benefit you.
    2. Prolonging your life will not benefit you.
        a. A will benefit S only if S will be better off as a result of A than S will be if A does not occur.
        b. If your life does not continue, you will have no future welfare level (not even 0).
        c. So you cannot be "better off" at any time than you would be if you did not exist.
        d. So you cannot be better off as a result of prolonging your life.
    3. Therefore, you have no prudential reason to prolong your life.
  - Here the analogy is between *your welfare (at a time when you don't exist),* and *a person's welfare (in a possible world where they don't exist).*
  - This is an Epicurean sophistry.

Phil. 6100
Notes #7: Defence of Repugnance (Huemer)

I. Basic Ideas

- *The 'Repugnant' Conclusion:* Given any population of happy people, it would be better to have a population consisting of a sufficient number of people with lives barely worth living.
- *Total Utility Principle:* The value of a population = its total utility.
      Total utility: the sum of all individuals' welfare levels.
- *Average Utility Principle:* The value of a population = its average welfare level.
      Average utility: Total utility divided by population size.
- *Pareto Principle:* If x would be preferred to y by everyone who exists in either world, then x is better than y.
- *Transitivity:* If x is better than y and y is better than z, then x is better than z.
- *Non-Anti-Egalitarianism:* If x has a higher total utility, higher average utility, and more equality than y, then x is better than y. (Intuitive idea: equality isn't bad.)

Qualification for all these principles: Only value derived from allocation of utility is considered. (All other factors held equal.)

II. The Benign Addition Argument

World A	World A+	World Z
Total Utility: 100	Total Utility: 200	Total Utility: 300
Average: 100	Average: 2	Average: 3

1. A+ better than A. (Pareto)
2. Z better than A+. (Non-anti-egalitarianism)
3. Therefore, Z better than A. (Transitivity)

III. Revising Intuitions

Some signs that an intuition should be revised:
- Conflicts with firm, widespread other intuitions.
- Multiple lines of argument against it.
- Bare intuition, no further grounds for it.

• Plausible error theory.
• Natural theoretical explanation for contrary view.

IV. Error Theories

Inuitions biased against RC because of:
• *Egoistic Bias:* We evaluate worlds by which we want to occupy.
• *Large Numbers Bias:* We treat all large numbers as the same.
• *Compounding Small Numbers:* We fail to appreciate how small quantities add up to large ones.
• *Underrating Low-Quality Lives:*
  - We may imagine low-utility lives as being worse than they are.
  - We may have difficulty picturing low-quality lives, distinguishing them from slightly lower quality lives.

IV. Failure of Non-Repugnant Theories

Some theories of population axiology designed to avoid RC:

• Average Utility Principle. Problem:
  The Sadistic Conclusion: Sometimes, it is better to create some unhappy people, rather than create some happy people.
• Critical Level theories. Problem:
  The Strong Sadistic Conclusion: Given any world of tormented people, it would be *worse* to have a world full of a sufficiently large number of people with slightly *good* lives.
• The Person-Affecting Principle. Problem:
  It would be good to create a billion horribly tormented people, if it would slightly increase some existing person's welfare.
• Variable Value Theories. Problems:
  - Ng & Hurka: Sadistic conclusion (for large populations). (Theory approximates Avg. Util. for large populations.)
  - Sider: Anti-egalitarianism.
  - All versions: The Egyptology Objection: whether you should have children could depend on how the ancient Egyptians fared, and/or how many there were.
• Perfectionism. Problems:
  - Anti-egalitarian.
  - Posits infinite value gap, where there are continuous variations in quality.
• Lexicality (Rachels, Temkin). Problems:
  - [Discussed in earlier class.] Entails intransitivity. Intuitions shift depending on the lengths of the experiences in their examples. Etc.
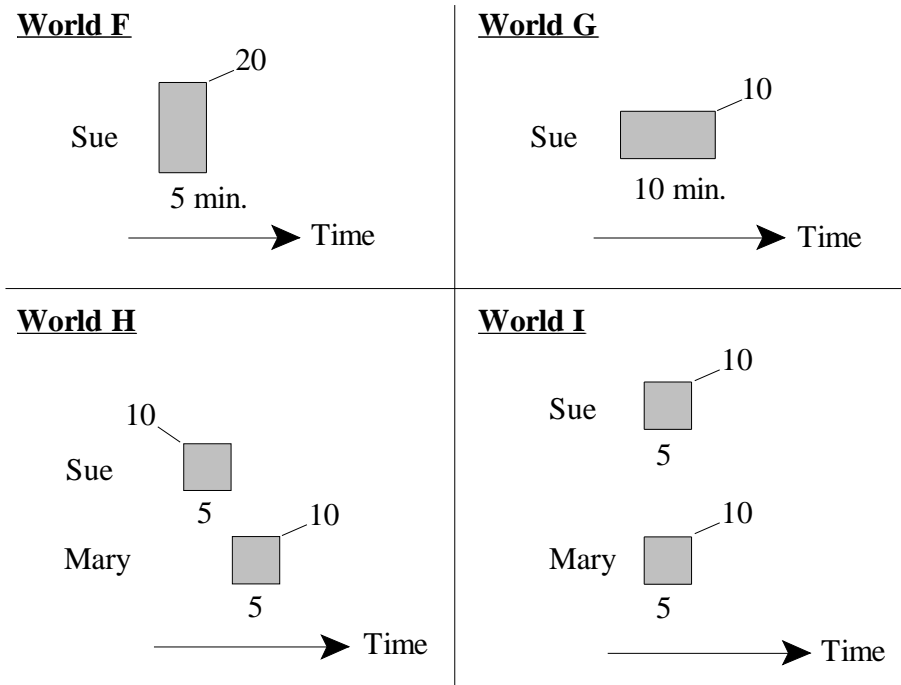
Theoretical motivation for these theories? To avoid RC.

V. The Actualist Bias

• We have an actualist bias: we count the interests of actual people more than those of potential people.
• This must be wrong: Whether A is better than B cannot depend on which is actual.
• Our judgments about actual people are correct.

- So we should count potential people's interests just as much as actual people's.
- This favors increasing population, even at some cost to average utility for existing people.

[This isn't much of a positive argument for RC. It's more of an attack on a bias that I think confuses people when thinking about RC.]

VI. The Equivalence Argument

World F

Sue

20

5 min.

⟶ Time

World G

Sue

10

10 min.

⟶ Time

World H

Sue 10

5

Mary 10

5

⟶ Time

World I

Sue 10

5

Mary 10

5

⟶ Time

1. F = G.
2. G = H.
    - Sue's five minutes in H = Sue's first five minutes in G.
    - Sue's five minutes in H = Mary's five minutes in H.
    - Additivity.
3. H = I.
4. Therefore, F = I.

- This supports the Total Utility Principle. I trades off avg. utility vs. population.

VII. More Is Better

1. More happy lives are better.
    - Space/time symmetry.
    - The pleasure/pain symmetry.
    - Sub-argument:
        a. Existence at level $x/2$ is at least as good as non-existence.
        b. Existence at level x is better than $x/2$.
        c. Therefore, existence at x is better than non-existence. (This holds for all $x>0$.)
2. The value of happy lives does not diminish (with an upper bound).

- No reason to posit diminishing value of utility. (Contrast reasons for diminishing value of instrumental goods.)
- Avoiding the Absurd Conclusion, viz.: That for some n, n unhappy lives + n million happy lives is bad.
3. If happy lives have non-diminishing value, then RC is true.
4. Therefore, RC is true.

VIII. The Case for Revision

As suggested above, we should revise an intuition when:
1. It conflicts with firm, widespread other intuitions.
2. There are multiple lines of argument against it.
3. It is a bare intuition, no further grounds for it.
4. We have a plausible error theory.
5. We have a natural theoretical explanation for a contrary view.

IX. Practical Implications

- The Total Utility Pr. does not imply that "you should keep having children as long as their utility is positive." Their impact on other people's utility may be negative & outweigh their own utility.
- The best world will not be a low-average world. It will have the maximum value of

    Average Utility * Population

    This will have a moderately high Avg. Util. & a moderately high Pop.

Phil. 6100
Notes #8: Incommensurability & Incomparability (Chang)

I. Incommensurability vs. Incomparability

Incommensurability: When there is no precise evaluative *ratio* between x and y. x is not better than y by any specific amount.
Arguments for incommensurability:
Beaches, love, and civil rights have no monetary value.
Consequences:
We cannot do cost-benefit analysis with these things.
We must reject (maximizing) consequentialism.

Incomparability:
x and y are incomparable with respect to covering value V iff, for every positive value relation relativized to V, it is not true that it holds between them.
Notes:
• This allows for indeterminacy.
• Also allows for more than three positive value relations.
• All comparisons are relative to a covering value.
Positive Value Relations:
x is better than y.
x is worse than y.
x is exactly as good as y.
x and y are "on a par". (roughly equal)

II. Practical Import of Incomparability

• *Comparitivism* justification of choice always depends on value comparison.
• Two arguments for comparitivism:

First argument:
• Assume:
    a. A and B are incomparable,
    b. you have A,
    c. a choice between A and B can be justified
    d. A' is slightly worse than A.
• You trade A for B. This could be rational.
• You then trade B for A'. This (seemingly?) could be rational.
• But it is irrational to trade A for A'.

1. If choices between incomparables can be justified, then you could rationally trade A for B, and you could rationally trade B for A'. (Premise.)
2. If it is rational to do X, and given that one does X it is rational to do Y, then it is rational to do both. (Premise.)
3. Therefore, if choices between incomparables can be justified, then you could rationally trade A for B and B for A'. (From 1, 2.)
4. Trading A for A' *directly* is no more or less rational than trading A for A' indirectly, through some

intermediary step. (Premise.)

5. Therefore, if choices between incomparables can be justified, then you could rationally trade A for A'. (From 3, 4.)
6. You cannot rationally trade A for A'. (Premise.)
7. Therefore, choices between incomparables cannot be justified. (From 5, 6.)

Second argument:
- Assume that A and B are incomparable, but we choose A based on some principle P. Why doesn't this imply that A is *at least as good as* B with respect to satisfying P?
- (Inductive argument?) The justifying force of any reason seems to depend on a comparison of alternatives.
  - I choose to go out to dinner because it'll be fun: Doesn't this require that going out to dinner will be more fun than grading papers?
  - I become a lawyer rather than a philosopher because "that choice expresses my understanding of what matters in life": Doesn't this imply that the lawyer career is *at least as good* with respect to expressing that understanding?
  - I do X because of a duty to keep a promise: X must be at least as good with respect to fulfilling the duty of promise-keeping.

III. Selected Arguments for Incomparability

A. The Diversity of Values
- Some values are too different to be compared. Mozart & Michelangelo.
- Reply:
  - Talentlessi is worse than Mozart.
  - If x is comparable with Mozart, then something slightly better than x on a continuum is comparable with Mozart.
  - There is a continuous series of painters, Talentlessi+, Talentlessi++, etc., leading from Talentlessi to Michelangelo.
  - Therefore, Michelangelo is comparable with Mozart.

B. Rational Irresolvability
- Sometimes we have no rational grounds for comparing X and Y.
- Reply: Assumes verificationism, which is stupid.

C. Multiple Rankings
- A covering value may be vague.
  - On some precisifications, A comes out better than B. On others, B comes out better than A.
  - Then A and B are incomparable.
- Reply: In spite of this, A and B might be "nearly equal". Therefore, "how can they be incomparable?"

D. Small Improvements
- Example:
  - Clarinetist career no better or worse than lawyer career.
  - Clarinetist career + $10 still no better or worse than lawyer career.
  - Therefore, the two are not equally good either.
  - So they must be incomparable.

• Reply #1: This is only an epistemic problem: We are not justified in saying that the one career is no better or worse than another, only that we don't know which is better.
  - Counter-reply: This requires revising intuitive judgments. [Does it?]
• Reply #2: Introduce a fourth relation, "parity": the two careers are "on a par".

IV. The Nature of Parity

• Differences can be:
  - zero or nonzero
  - biased or unbiased
    biased: x is 3 feet longer than y.
    unbiased: London & Glasgow are 345 miles apart.
• Maybe there are unbiased, nonzero evaluative differences.
  - They are not incomparable, because incomparability = no difference.
  - Instead, they are "on a par".
• Discuss:
  - If parity is being "roughly equal", are there other relations, "roughly twice as good", "roughly 3 times as good", etc.?
  - How does this view fit with the vagueness idea in III.C above?
  - If we accept the vagueness theory, could there be cases where A is not determinately better than, worse than, equal to, *nor on a par with* B?

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Notes #9: Non-Archimedean Value Theories & Risk (Huemer)

I. Non-Archimedean Theories

- *Non-Archimedean Thesis:* There is some practical reason R and some good G, such that R outweighs any quantity of G.
- Two kinds of non-archimedean theories:
  - Absolute deontological: Nozick, Anscombe, Kant
  - Axiological: Mill, Parfit, Rachels, "sanctity of life"

II. Preliminaries about Reasons

- Internal reason: Makes it rational to act. Contains subject's beliefs/knowledge/evidence.
- External reason: Would provide internal reason if subject knew of it.
- Interpret the non-Arch. thesis to apply to:
  - Internal reasons
  - in cases of certainty about outcomes & circumstances.
- *Higher reasons:* Reasons that have categorically greater force than

III. Problem of Risk

- Assume:
  - A will promote some large quantity of G.
  - A has a probability p of transgressing a higher reason R.
- For what values of p is A permissible? Three views:
  - Zero Risk Tolerance
  - Maximal Risk Tolerance
  - Risk Threshold
- Some examples
  - The fire truck and the child in the road
  - The judge & the innocent defendant
  - Oxfam vs. the struggling artist

IV. Zero Risk Tolerance

- Problem: Normal life becomes impossible.
- Examples
  - The fire truck: Driving is impermissible.
  - The judge: Criminal justice system must be abolished.
  - Oxfam vs. struggling artist: Must devote all resources to artists.

V. Maximal Risk Tolerance

- Problem: renders the view uninteresting. Nothing is certain.

VI. Risk Threshold

- Problem: violates

Two Rights Don't Make A Wrong: If S may do A (whether or not S does B), and S may do B (whether or not S does A), then S may do A and B.
  • Illustration: Suppose risk threshold is .6.

Action	Risk	Payoff
A	.5	1 million
B	.5	1 million
A+B	.75	2 million

  - **The fire truck**
  - **The judge**
  - **Oxfam & the artist**

VII. Double Effect, Etc.

  • DDE:
    Absolutely impermissible harms: intended as an end or a means.
    Sometimes permissible harms: as a merely foreseen side effect.
  • **Maybe this avoids the problem.**
  • **Reply:**
    - **We are not absolutely certain of our intentions.**
    - **The DDE requires a justified-belief condition, not merely intention: You have justified belief that someone is innocent. We can then ask what the degree of justification must be.**

VIII. Conclusion

  • **Adopt an Archimedean theory. This includes:**
    - **Standard consequentialist theories.**
    - **Moderate deontological theories (Ross).**
  • **What evidence favors non-Archimedean theories?**

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Notes #10: Non-Egalitarianism: The Temporal Argument (Huemer)

I. Basic Concepts & Principles

Concepts:
    Utility: The integral of level of wellbeing (welfare) over time.
    Total Utility: The sum of the utilities of various individuals in a society.
    Utility-Value: The value resulting solely from the allocation of utility (including both what the total utility is and how it is distributed).
    Egalitarianism: Equality in the distribution of utility across persons has intrinsic value. *Consequence:* If two worlds have the same total utility, the world (if any) with a more even distribution of utility has more utility-value.
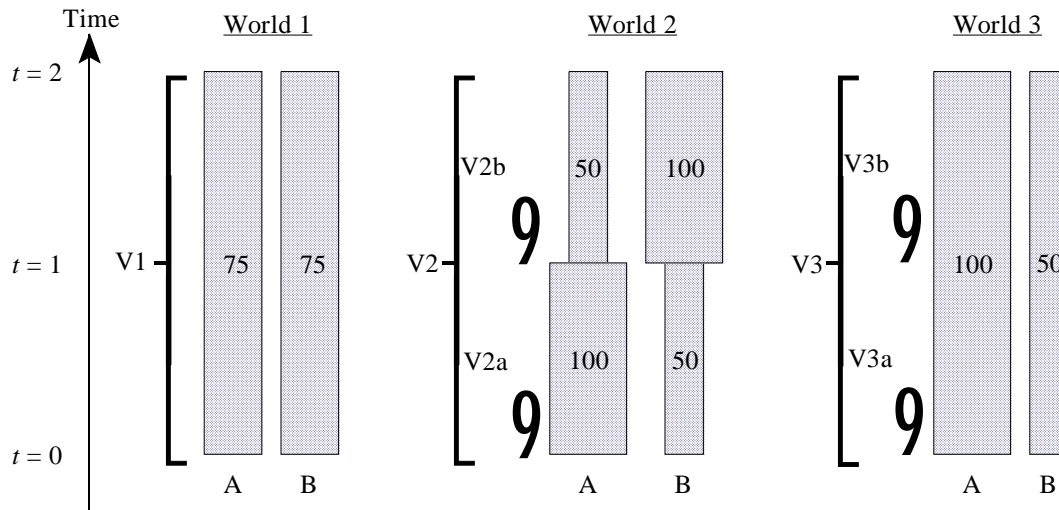
Principles:
    Intrapersonal Non-Egalitarianism: It doesn't matter how utility is distributed *within* a life.
    Strong Supervenience: The utility-value of an event supervenes on its qualitative character.
    Temporal Additivity: When A and B are events in disjoint time periods, the value of (A+B) = the value of A + the value of B.

II. Central Argument

Figure 7. The vertical dimension on the page represents time. The width of the bars indicates the level of well-being that each individual enjoys; the height of the bars indicates duration. Total utility enjoyed during a period of an individual's life is the area of the bar representing that period.

1. V1 = V2	Given Intrapersonal Non-egalitarianism, etc.
2. V2a = V3a	From Strong Supervenience of Utility-Value.
3. V3a = V3b	From Strong Supervenience of Utility-Value.
4. V2a = V2b	From Equal Consideration of Interests.
5. V2b = V3b	From 2, 3, 4.
6. V2a + V2b = V3a + V3b	From 2, 5.
7. V2 = V2a + V2b	From Cross-Temporal Additivity.
8. V3 = V3a + V3b	From Cross-Temporal Additivity.
9. V2 = V3	From 6, 7, 8.
10. V1 = V3	From 1, 9.

III. For Temporal Additivity
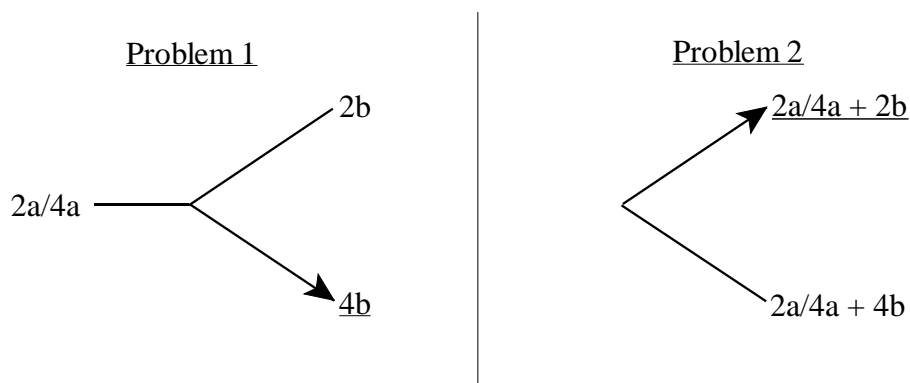
- Egalitarian might deny Temporal Additivity:
  - Inequality *obviously* does not add over time.
- But egalitarian should not deny Temporal Additivity *solely* on this ground, if there is an independent argument for it.

Three Worlds:
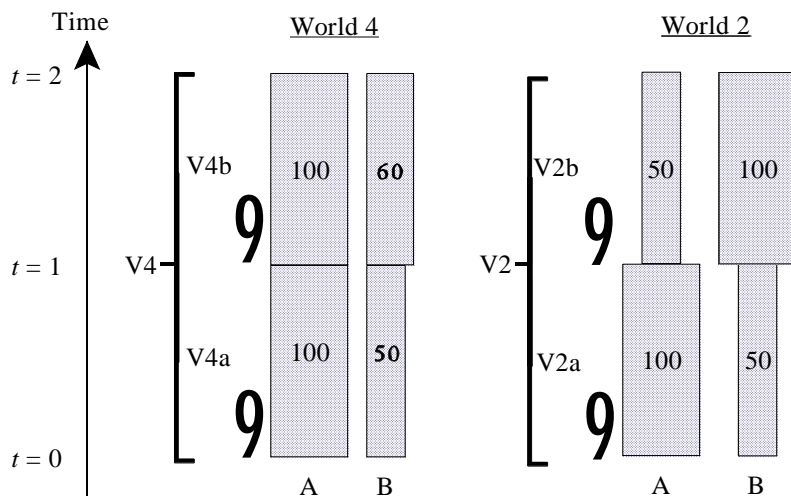
Figure 8. World 4 contains more total utility than world 2, but not enough more to compensate for the interpersonal inequality in world 4.

Some Choice Problems:

Problem 1	Problem 2

Problem 1:

2a/4a —— 2b

2a/4a —→ 4b (underlined)

Problem 2:

→ 2a/4a + 2b (underlined)

2a/4a + 4b

Three Consequentialist Decision Rules:

    (i)   **Choose the action such that, if you choose it, the world will be best.**
    (ii) **Choose the action with the best consequences.**
    (iii) **Choose the action such that, if you choose it, the future will be best.**

An Argument:

1. **If Temporal Additivity fails, then the above situations are possible.**
2. **If so, then in problem 1, you should choose world 4b. (Choice rules (ii), (iii).)**
3. **And in problem 2, you should choose world 2. (Choice rules (ii), (iii).)**
4. **Problems 1 and 2 should have the same solution.**
5. **Therefore, these scenarios are not possible.**
6. **Therefore, Temporal Additivity holds.**

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Notes #11: Against Priority & Equality: The Pareto Argument (Huemer)

I. Basic Ideas

- *Egalitarianism:* Equality in the distribution of utility across persons is intrinsically good.
- *Priority View:* Benefits for the worse-off are more important than equal-sized benefits for the better-off. In other words: there is diminishing marginal *value* of *utility* for an individual.
- An example: A is much better off than B. We can redistribute wealth, making A and B equal. This will help B slightly less than it will harm A. (Administrative costs, decreased incentives, etc.) Would this be good?

Average utility
of first world

A   B   A   B
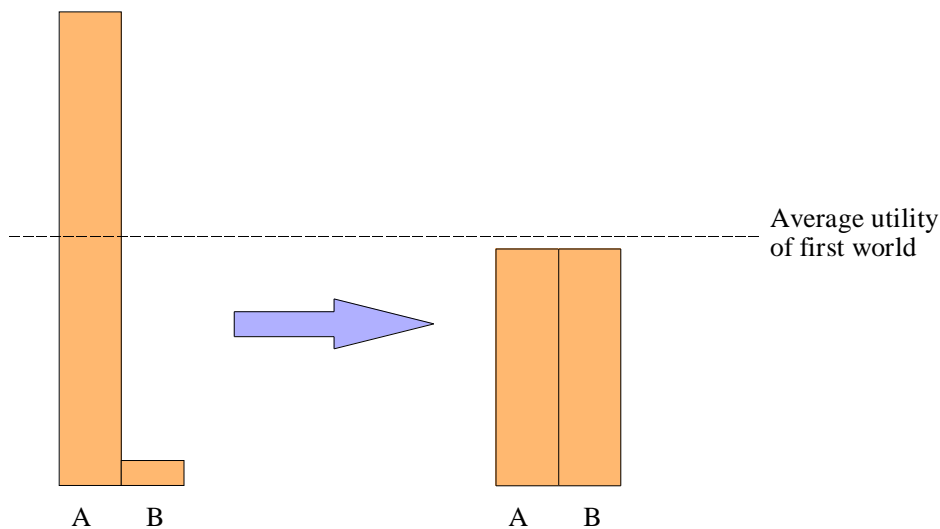
- Egalitarianism: Yes.
- Priority View: Yes. (For different reason.)
- A practical application: Socialism vs. Capitalism
  Socialism: Low productivity, less freedom, more equality.
  Capitalism: High productivity, more freedom, large inequalities.
- Which is better?

II. The Leveling Down Objection

Leveling Down: Achieving equality by lowering the welfare of the better-off.

1. X is good in some respect only if there is *someone* for whom it is good in some respect. (Premise: the "Person Affecting Principle.")
2. If equality is intrinsically good, then *Leveling Down* is good in one respect. (Premise.)
3. But Leveling Down is good for no one. (Premise.)
4. So Leveling Down is not good in any respect. (From 1, 3.)
5. So equality is not intrinsically good. (From 2, 4.)

For the Priority View:
- The Priority View gives results very similar to Egalitarianism.

• But it completely avoids the Leveling Down Objection.

III. Premises

- *The Benign Addition Principle:* Other things being equal, if possible worlds *x* and *y* are so related that *x* would be the result of increasing the utility of everyone in *y* and adding some number of people all of whom have valuable lives, then *x* is better than *y*.
- *The Unrepugnant Premise:* Other things being equal, if possible worlds *x* and *y* are both perfectly egalitarian, *x* has a larger population than *y*, but *x* has both a lower average utility *and* a lower total utility than *y*, then *x* is worse than *y*.[1]
- *Transitivity:* If *x* is better than *y* and *y* is better than *z*, then *x* is better than *z*.

IV. Three Possible Worlds
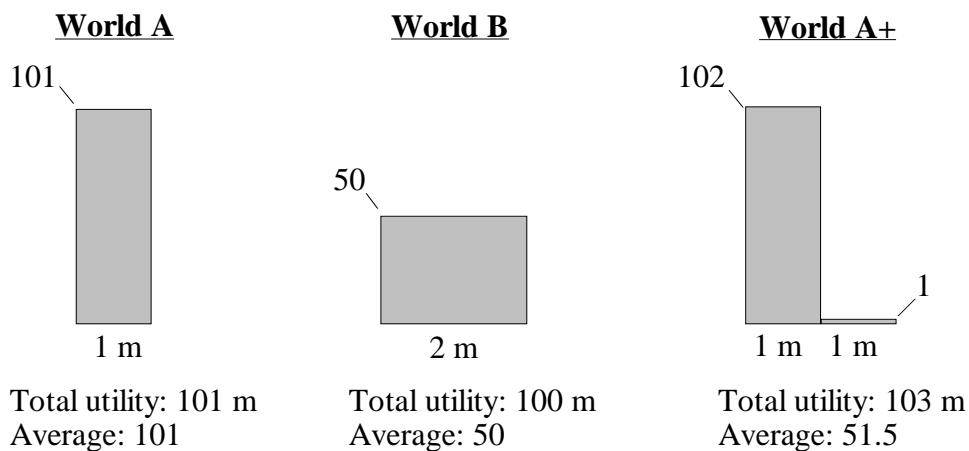
Figure 11. Graphical depiction of worlds A, B, and C. The width of each bar represents a population size; the height represents a level of well-being.

Argument:
1. A is better than B. (From the Unrepugnant Premise.)
2. A+ is better than A. (From the Benign Addition Principle.)
3. A+ is better than B. (From 1, 2, and Transitivity.)
4. Egalitarianism and the Priority View are false. (From 3.)

Comment:
- Step (3) directly shows that the extra 3 points of total utility + 1.5 points of average utility outweighs the inequality in world A+.
- This form of argument can be repeated for arbitrarily small increments in utility. Hence, the value of equality is zero.

---

[1]An "egalitarian" world is a world in which utility is evenly distributed across persons.

V. In Defense of Benign Addition

Benign Addition is supported by:
The Pareto Principle: If one possible world would be preferred over another by everyone existing in either world, then the former world is better than the latter.

VI. In Defense of the Unrepugnant Premise

- This principle is accepted by everyone in population ethics.
    - Follows from Average Utility Principle.
    - Follows from Total Utility Principle.
    - Follows from any principle anywhere in between.
- Endorsed even by those who accept the "repugnant conclusion."

VII. In Defense of Transitivity

The Money Pump:
- Suppose you have intransitive preferences: You prefer A to B, B to C, and C to A.
- You presently have A.
- You would be willing:
    - to pay a small amount of money to trade A for C.
    - to pay a small amount of money to trade C for B.
    - to pay a small amount of money to trade B for A.
    - etc.
- This seems irrational.
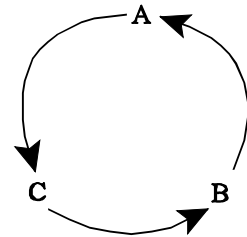
The Dominance Argument:
- Suppose A is better than B, which is better than C, which is better than A. Consider the values of the following two combinations:

    A + B + C
    B + C + A
- We can construct an argument that the first combination is better than the second. Why: It is better with respect to each of the three comparisons:

    A > B
    +   +
    B > C
    +   +
    C > A
- This is absurd, because the two combinations are the same.
- Conclusion: The supposition is impossible: A cannot be better than B, B better than C, and yet C better than A.

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Notes #12: Infinite Value (Kagan/Vallentyne)

I. Basic Ideas

Locations of goodness: may be people, spatial or temporal locations, etc.
Aggregative theory: Makes goodness a function of values at locations.
Additive theory: Aggregates by adding.

II. Problem

How to compare options with infinitely many locations?
- 1+1+1 ... versus 2+2+2 ...?
- Both sums are undefined in standard mathematics.
- We could appeal to nonstandard mathematics.
- Problem: does not deal with cases of unbounded number of locations.
- [Another problem: Nonstandard mathematics is crazy. One collection could be greater than another, although they are intrinsically, qualitatively identical?]
- This might be practically relevant: The universe is infinite. Here is a silly argument:
  - All infinite sums are undefined.
  - The universe is infinite.
  - The value of a possible world-history is the sum of the values at its locations.
  - So the value of any possible history of the universe is undefined.
  - So all possible histories are incomparable.
  - So there is no consequentialist reason for doing or not doing anything.

III. Some Cases & Principles Accommodating Them

First scenario:

     w1   ... 2, 2, 2, 2 ...

     w2   ... 1, 1, 1, 1 ...

w1 is better because better at every location.

Second scenario:

     w1   ... 2, 2, 2, 2, 1, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2 ...

     w2   ... 1, 1, 1, 1, 2, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1 ...

w1 is better because: any finite set of locations can be expanded so that, relative to all further finite expansions, w1 has a higher sum over those locations.

Third scenario:

     w1   ... 5, 1, 5, 1, 5, 1, 5, 1 ...

     w2   ... 2, 3, 2, 3, 2, 3, 2, 3 ...

w1 is better: You have to expand in the "natural order" (may not skip over locations). Any finite set of locations can be expanded so that, relative to all further *connected* finite expansions, w1 has a higher

sum.

- **This principle requires there to be a 'natural order'.**
- **Examples: spatiotemporal locations.** *Not* **persons.**

Fourth scenario:

```
            w1                                      w2
      . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .        . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
  . . .   1   1   1   1   1   1   1   1 . .      . . . 0   0   0   0   0   0   0   0   0 . . .
                                      .
  . . .   1   1   1   1   1   1   1   1 . .      . . . 0   0   0   0   0   0   0   0   0 . . .
                                      .
  . . .   1   1   1   1   1   1   1   1 . .      . . . 0   0   0   0   0   0   0   0   0 . . .
                                      .
  . . .  -1  -1  -1  -1  -1  -1  -1  -1 .        . . . 0   0   0   0   0   0   0   0   0 . . .
                                     . .
  . . .  -1  -1  -1  -1  -1  -1  -1  -1 .        . . . 0   0   0   0   0   0   0   0   0 . . .
                                     . .
  . . .   1   1   1   1   1   1   1   1 . .      . . . 0   0   0   0   0   0   0   0   0 . . .
                                      .
  . . .   1   1   1   1   1   1   1   1 . .      . . . 0   0   0   0   0   0   0   0   0 . . .
                                      .
  . . .   1   1   1   1   1   1   1   1 . .      . . . 0   0   0   0   0   0   0   0   0 . . .
                                      .
      . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .        . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .
```

- **w1 seems better.**
- **Allow only** *uniform* **expansions (expansions that expand the same amount in all directions).**

IV. A Problem

Three Worlds

			P_1	P_2	P_3	P_4	P_5	P_6	P_7	
w1	Location	...	P_1	P_2	P_3	P_4	P_5	P_6	P_7	...
	Value	...	5	1	5	1	5	1	5	...
w2	Location	...	P_1	P_2	P_3	P_4	P_5	P_6	P_7	...
	Value	...	2	3	2	3	2	3	2	...
w3	Location	...	L_1	L_2	L_3	L_4	L_5	L_6	L_7	...
	Value	...	2	3	2	3	2	3	2	...

An argument:
1. w3 is incomparable to w1. (On Kagan/Vallentyne's view?)
2. w3 is equal to w2. (Strong supervenience of value?)
3. Therefore, w2 is incomparable to w1. (From 1, 2. Contrary to Kagan/Vallentyne.)

• A similar argument can be formulated using rearrangement of the values in w1.

w1			P_1	P_2	P_3	P_4	P_5	P_6	P_7	
	Location	...	P_1	P_2	P_3	P_4	P_5	P_6	P_7	...
	Value	...	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	...

w1'										
	Location	...	P_1	P_2	P_3	P_4	P_5	P_6	P_7	...
	Value	...	2	2	1	2	2	1	2	...

  - Assume w1' results from spatial rearrangement of the goods in w1. Then
    * w1' is better than w1 (according to Kagan/Vallentyne).
    * But w1' is equal to w1 (spatial rearrangement does not improve worlds).