

what are some *uncontroversially*
wrong actions?

Now let's ask: *what do these actions have in common?*

One answer: they all cause suffering.

the suffering principle

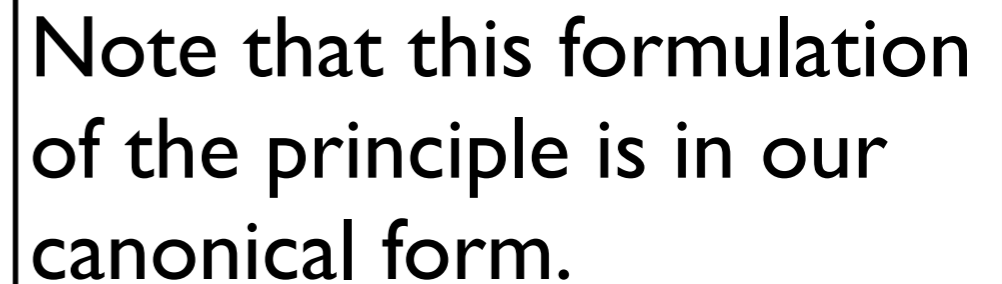
SP: An act is morally wrong if and only if it causes suffering.

(In other words:

an act is morally right if and only if it does not cause suffering.)

Some counterexamples to SP:

- the birthday party
- painlessly killing every living thing in the universe.



Note that this formulation of the principle is in our canonical form.

The lesson: happiness matters too!

a very famous line

“The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that 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; by unhappiness, pain and the privation of pleasure.”

- Mill, *Utilitarianism* (1863)

How best to state Mill's idea?

Like this?: an act is morally right if and only if ...

... it causes pleasure and the absence of pain (?)

NO

Why?

Because no act has ever caused “the absence of pain.”

How best to state Mill's idea?

Like this?: an act is morally right if and only if ...

... it causes pleasure and does not cause pain (??)

NO

Why?

Because it's sometimes ok to cause pain.

(for example: my appendectomy)

How best to state Mill's idea?

Like this?: an act is morally right if and only if ...

... it causes more pleasure than pain (???)

NO

Why?

Because causing more pleasure than pain is sometimes wrong:

for example, if we could have avoided more pain by doing something else

(for example: an appendectomy with no anesthesia).

Hedonic Utility

the **hedonic utility** of an action = the *amount of pleasure* the act would cause - (minus) the *amount of pain* the act would cause

- this is pleasure and pain for *anyone anywhere* (not just for the agent of the act)
- this includes *longterm* pleasure and pain (no matter how far in the future)
- pleasure and pain are understood *very broadly*

Maximization, Alternative

an act **maximizes** hedonic utility when no alternative to it has a greater hedonic utility

one final definition:

an action is an **alternative** of another act when it is something else the agent of the act could do instead of that act;

if two actions are alternatives of each other, the agent can do one or the other, but not both.

Act Utilitarianism

AU: an act is morally right if and only if it maximizes hedonic utility.

For the purposes of AU, we can represent situations in which someone must act as follows:

<u>alternatives</u>	<u>total pleasure</u>	<u>total pain</u>	<u>hedonic utility</u>
a1	75	23	52
a2	0	5	- 5
a3	12	0	12
a4	102	176	- 74

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some important features of AU

- No absolute moral rules (other than AU itself)
- A form of “consequentialism”
 - ▶ only consequences matter
 - ▶ we are to make the world as good as we can make it
- Everyone matters equally.
 - “everyone to count for one, no one to count for more than one.” - Jeremy Bentham
- Morality as *cost-benefit analysis*
(analogy with prudence/self-interest)
- On AU, do “the ends justify the means”?

Act Utilitarianism

AU: an act is morally right if and only if it maximizes hedonic utility.

The Organ Harvest Objection to AU

Let me describe the case in detail ...

The Organ Harvest Objection to AU

The Organ Harvest Argument

P1. If AU is true, then it is morally right for the doctor to kill the one patient in order to save the five others.

P2. But it is not right for the doctor to do this.

C. Therefore, AU is not true.

Rationale for P1?

Rationale for P2?

What do you think? Does this argument refute AU?

Possible Act Utilitarian Replies to the Organ Harvest Argument

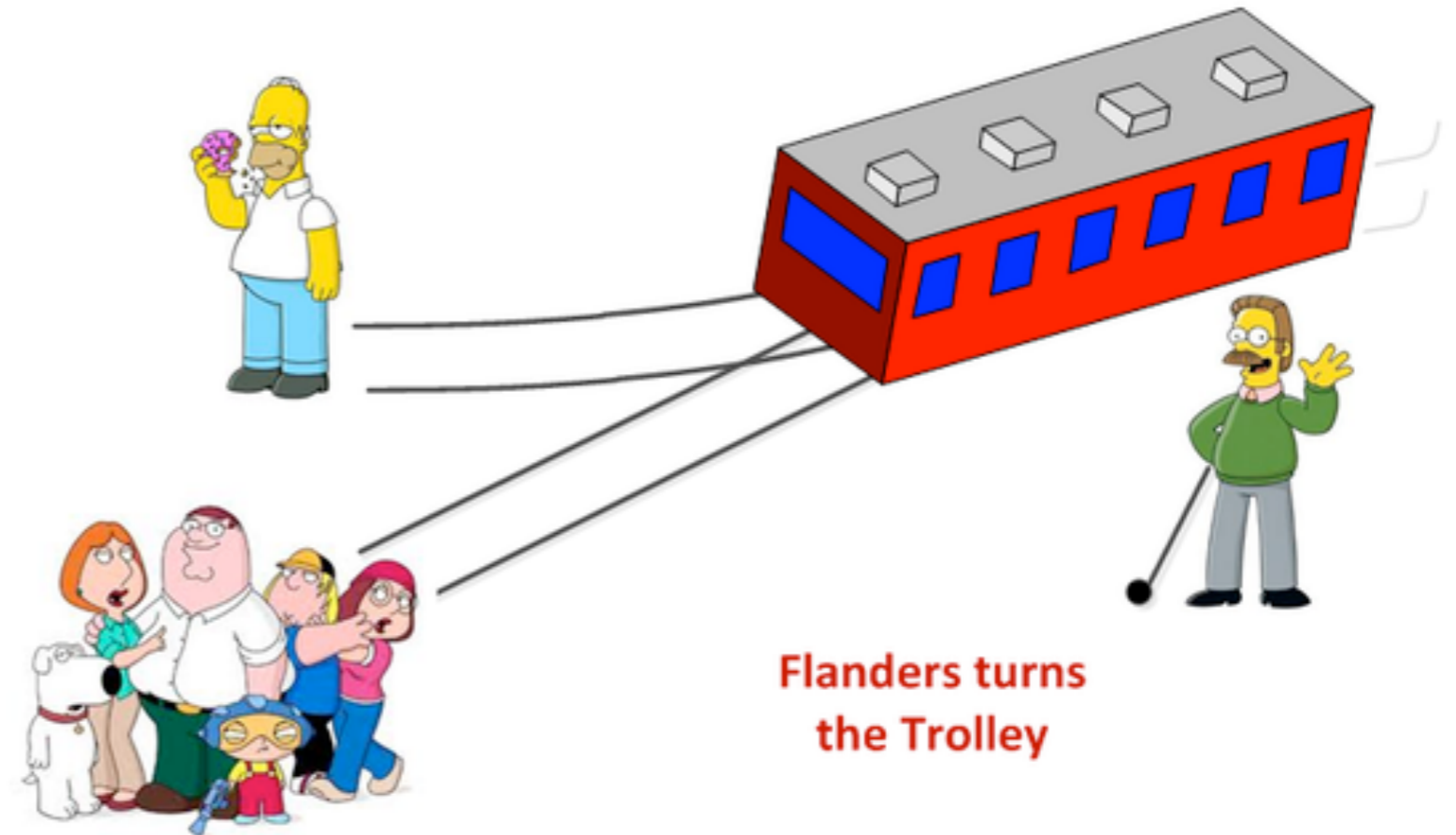
1. Give up the theory
 - a. become Rule Utilitarians instead (we'll discuss this next)
 - b. become Deontologists instead
(we'll study Deontology too)
2. Say the case doesn't count because it's too weird
3. Present considerations that suggest that our intuition that the act would be wrong might be mistaken.

That's what we're going to do now ...

One Response to the Organ Harvest Argument

Consider the trolley case *Switch*.

Here are two things to consider about this:



- (1) *What does our reaction to Switch say about possible rationales for P2 of the Organ Harvest Argument?*
- (2) Next, consider this argument ...

One Response to the Organ Harvest Argument

An Argument for the Utilitarian View on the Organ Harvest

P1. The bystander in *Switch* should flip the switch, thereby killing the one, in order to save the five others.

P2. There are no morally relevant differences between the *Switch* case and the Organ Harvest case that would justify differing moral judgments about the cases.

C. Therefore, the doctor in the Organ Harvest case should kill the one patient in order to save the five others.

Another Reply to the Organ Harvest Argument

Case I:

You learn that one of two outcomes might happen:

A: there is a car accident and five people die.

B: there is an accident in a hospital involving anesthesia, and one person dies.

First question: *Which outcome is better?* (B, right?)

Second question: *Which outcome should you prefer, or should you hope occurs (given that one of them has to occur)?* (also B, right?)

Another Reply to the Organ Harvest Argument

Case 2: Like Case 1, only this time ...

... a genie appears.

She heard your wish. She says she will grant it. She utters her magic words, and outcome B rather than A occurs.



Third question: *Was it right for the genie to grant that wish?*

(It seems that it would be hard to say No, given that we agreed that it was right to *have* the wish in the first place.)

Another Reply to the Organ Harvest Argument

Case 3:

Like Case 2, except the genie now gives you the power to grant your wish directly:

She presents you with a button. If you press it, outcome B will occur instead of outcome A.

Fourth question: *Is it ok for you to press the button, so as to bring about the preferred outcome?*

(How could it be ok for the genie to bring it about, but not you?)

Another Reply to the Organ Harvest Argument

Case 4:

Like Case 3, only now we learn how the button works: it magically puts extra anesthesia into the doctor's needle without the doctor knowing it, causing her patient to get too much. This patient's organs are a match for five others who would otherwise die from a car accident. The organs are used to save them.

Fifth question: *Is it still ok for you to press the button?*

(How could simply learning how the mechanism works change anything?)

Another Reply to the Organ Harvest Argument

Case 5:

Like Case 4, only now ...

... *you* are the doctor in the hospital. You see that if you just inject a little extra anesthesia, your patient will die, and his organs will save five others who would otherwise die.

Fifth question: *Is it ok for you to inject the extra anesthesia, thereby causing your patient to die, so that five others can live?*

(If it's ok to press the button in Case 4, how can the act in Case 5 be wrong?)

we can put this reply into the form of an argument ...

P1. Outcome B is better than outcome A.

P2. If outcome B is better than outcome A, then you should hope that B rather than A occurs.

P3. If you should hope that B rather than A occurs, then it's ok for the genie to grant this wish.

P4. If it's ok for the genie to grant the wish, then it's ok for you to grant it yourself by pushing the genie's button.

P5. If it's ok for you to grant it yourself by pushing the genie's button, then it's ok for the doctor to inject extra anesthesia into her patient.

P6. If it's ok for the doctor to inject extra anesthesia into her patient, then the Organ Harvest Argument is unsound.

C. Therefore, the Organ Harvest Argument is unsound.

Rule Utilitarianism

“Some utilitarians, moved perhaps by objections similar to those discussed in the preceding chapter, have attempted to reformulate the utilitarian principle. They have seen that some of the results generated by the application of a thoroughgoing act utilitarianism are morally unacceptable. They may also have seen that there appears to be a pattern in the objections. For each objection seems to show, in its own way, that act utilitarianism is too atomistic. That is, act utilitarianism requires that each act be judged entirely on its own consequences. Wouldn't it be better, some have urged, to consider whole classes of action rather than isolated individual acts? It seems that we can show in some such way that promising in general is useful, and that there is thus moral justification for keeping each promise, even those unusual ones that fail to maximize utility. Thus, we may be able to deal with the promise-to-the-dead-man objection.”

— Feldman, p. 61