Chapter 2 – Consequentialist Theories of Morality

General Overview
The objective of this chapter is to introduce students to one of the broad and most important group of theories in philosophical morality. Consequentialist theories raise challenging questions about the role, use and function of consequences in moral reasoning and in living the moral life. Should we only consider the consequences of our actions? Should we consider consequences only for ourselves? Should we consider consequences for others? Which others? Should we consider short-term consequences or long term, etc. This range of questions can be extended, and this is perhaps best done in the context of the specific moral problems that are dealt with later in the course.

Class Suggestions
It will be useful for instructors to draw on the board a representation of a ‘moral decision’ or judgment or such like that depicts: motive -------- action ---------consequences

This immediately helps students visualize and concretize what can be a difficult abstraction for some of them. With this in their notes you can use it to set off contrasts with the nonconsequentialist theories that you will deal with in more detail in the next chapter. After highlighting consequences as the central part of moral decision making you might begin to introduce some of the key terms like ‘egoist’ and ‘utilitarian’ sketching out how they differ in the way they think about the ‘other’, consequences for whom, etc.

There are lots of different ways that students can engage this material through activities that will help them to see strengths and weaknesses. I know instructors who ‘role play’ with ‘imagine you are the captain of a submarine on a difficult mission….’ etc. My favorite is to place students on a ‘health committee’ with limited resources making decisions on utilitarian lines about which patients to treat. If carefully thought out these kinds of activities really can be used to bring out pros and cons that students might not ordinarily see. The material on ‘care’ at the end of the chapter could be easily developed into classroom discussion. Most students are very interested in differences between men and women, and introducing questions early in the course about whether ethics is in some sense ‘male’, or marginalizes ‘female’ perspectives, could be useful later on.

The philosophical material in this chapter is rich and lends itself to a wide range of activities, seminars, group work, etc., limited only by how imaginative you can be.
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**Key Concepts:** Consequences, Psychological egoism, Selfishness, Ethical Egoism (individual, personal, universal), Rational ethical egoism, Others, Utilitarianism, Usefulness, Greatest good, Happiness, Acts, Rules, Costs, Benefits, Means, Ends, Care, Justice.

**Key Questions:**
1. What is egoism? Explain the differences between the various ‘egoisms’. Are you an egoist?
2. What is act utilitarianism? Analyze its strengths and weaknesses. Is it a good theory?
3. What is rule utilitarianism? Analyze its strengths and weaknesses. Is it a good theory?
4. What is ‘care ethics’? Can justice and care be integrated?
5. What are the strengths and weaknesses of consequentialism generally?

**Chapter Summary**
Ethics divides into two major views:

1. Consequentialism – Concerned with consequences
2. Non-Consequentialism – Not concerned with consequences

Consequentialism divides also into two major views:

1. Ethical egoism – Act out of self interest.
2. Utilitarianism – Act for interest of all.

**Psychological egoism (Pe)**
Pe is not to be confused with Ethical egoism (Ee).
Pe is a scientific, descriptive theory.
Ee is a normative theory.

Pe has both a strong version (sPe) and a weak version (wPe).
Strong version: Always act out of self-interest.
Weak version: Often, but not always, act out of self-interest.

Problems:
Some use sPe as a basis for Ee. Redundancy: why tell people to do what they cannot help doing?
Some use wPe as a basis for Ee: Is /ought fallacy: The way I often may act has little to do with how I should act.

**Ethical egoism (Ee)**
Ee has three main forms:
1. Individual ethical egoism (iEe): Everyone ought to act in my self-interest.
2. Personal ethical egoism (pEe): I ought to act in my own self-interest.
3. Universal ethical egoism (uEe): Everyone should act in their own self-interest.

*Problems with individual and personal egoism:*

1. Lack of general applicability
2. Egoists may need to conceal their egoism out of self-interest
3. Is egoism consistent?
4. Egoists do not consider how their actions may affect others

**Universal ethical egoism (uEe)**
Most common version of egoist theory: Everyone should act in their own self-interest.
Problems:
1. Inconsistency
2. What is meant by everyone?
3. Difficulty in giving moral advice
4. Blurring the moral and nonmoral use of ‘ought’ and ‘should’
5. Inconsistent with helping professions

Advantages of UEE
1. Easier to determine self-interest
2. Encourages individual freedom and responsibility

EE overall: Works plausibly when individuals are isolated. Conflicts arise when interests overlap. Communities are now increasingly interconnected socially, politically, economically, etc., so egoism less plausible.

Ayn Rand’s rational ethical egoism
Ayn Rand (1905-1982) is the most prominent modern universal ethical egoist. Rand argued that conflicts wouldn’t arise between individuals if they were ‘rational’. But conflicts do arise amongst rational individuals.

Conclusion: Ee can only work if you advocate some other theory and don’t tell anyone.

Utilitarianism.
Utilitarianism derives from ‘utility’ or usefulness. Morality is or ought to be useful. Most prominent philosophers of utilitarianism were Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806-1873).

Two kinds of utilitarianism:
1. Act utilitarianism: Everyone should perform that act that will bring about the greatest good for everyone.
2. Rule utilitarianism: Everyone should follow that rule that will bring about the greatest good for everyone.

Act Utilitarianism (AU).
Perform that act that will bring about the most good for everyone affected by that act. AUs believe that each situation is different. Each individual must try to bring about the greatest amount of good consequences for all involved in this situation at this time.

Criticisms of AU
1. Difficulty of determining consequences for others.
2. Impracticality of beginning anew: Are all acts and situations completely different?
3. Difficulty of educating young or uninitiated if there are no rules or guidelines

Rule Utilitarianism (RU).
RU emerges out of criticisms of AU. Rather than acts RU believes that everyone should establish and follow that rule that will bring about the greatest good for all concerned. Human motives, beliefs, actions and situations are sufficiently similar to justify setting up rules to generate the greatest good.

Criticisms of RU
1. Difficulty of determining consequences for others.
2. Are there any rules that are exceptionless?

Cost- benefit analysis or end justifies the means – a problem for utilitarianism
Is the utility criterion understood as the ‘greatest good for the greatest number’ always the right thing to strive for? Are individuals ‘ends in themselves’ such that the ‘cost-benefit’ type of analysis treats individuals merely as means?
Conclusion
Although utilitarianism, unlike egoism, tries to consider others it runs into difficulty determining what would be
good for others. In AU there are no rules as such. In RU, which rules cover all situations? Does the end always
justify the means?

Difficulty with consequentialist theories in general.
Can we discover all the consequences of our decisions in the present? This is especially difficult for utilitarians
because they are concerned with the effects of their decisions on others.

Care Ethics
Primarily consequentialist. Most prominent exponent is Carol Gilligan (1936-).

Men and women are different when it comes to ethical decision making
Men and women think differently but unequally when it comes to morality (Kohlberg). For Kohlberg women’s
moral reasoning is inferior. Gilligan women’s moral reasoning is different but equal. Different answers to moral
dilemmas explained not by inferior moral development by women but by tendency for men to focus on ‘justice’ and
women on ‘care’. For Gilligan we need both justice and care.

Criticisms of Gilligan
Is it a woman’s ‘nature’ to be caring? This could be divisive socially, politically, etc.