

WHAT'S THE RIGHT THING TO DO?

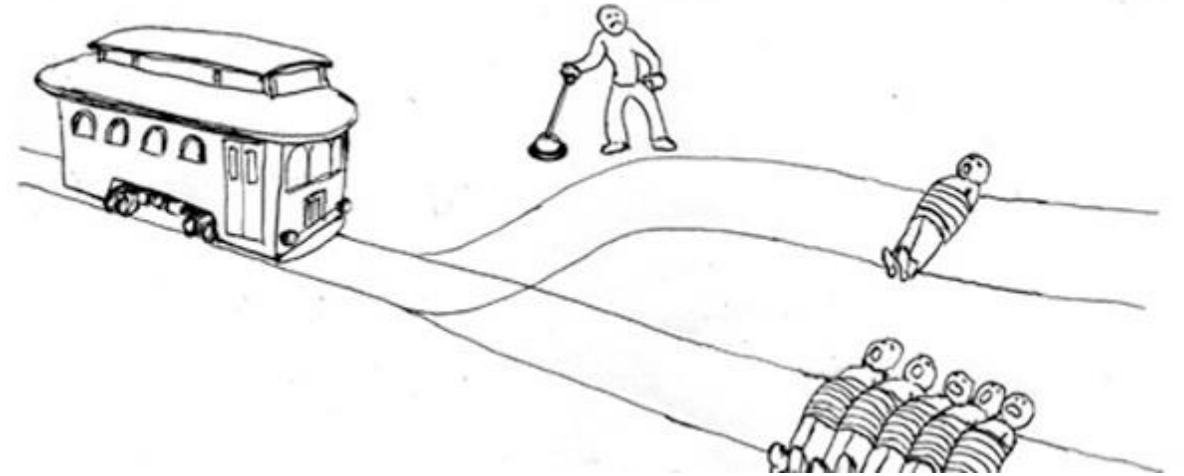
Presented by Hoda Homayoun Ph.D.

Materials derived from Michael Sandel's Justice course in edX



The runaway Trolley

What is the Principle that serves as the basis for your decision?

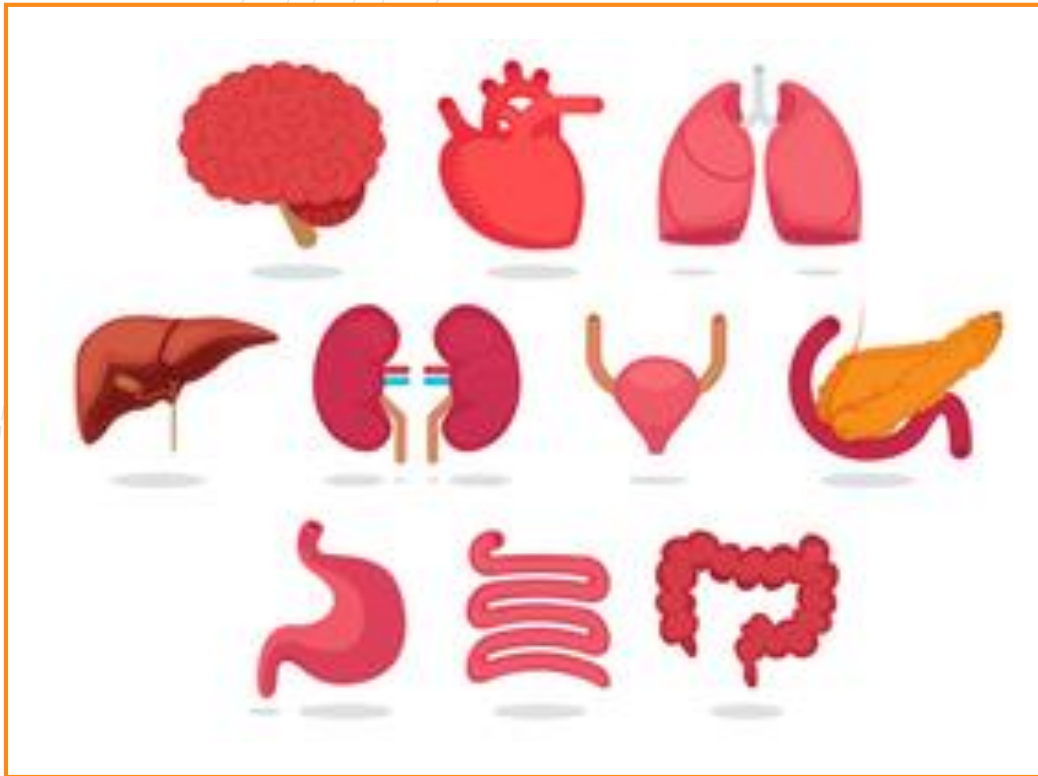


The Dilemma

- A mental conflict between moral imperatives.
- Compels us to find/create principles to guide decision making.
- Forces us to dig into a question with more questions to discover our assumptions, clarify our values and unravel critical concepts.
- Feeling the force of that confusion, and the pressure to sort it out, is the impulse to philosophy.



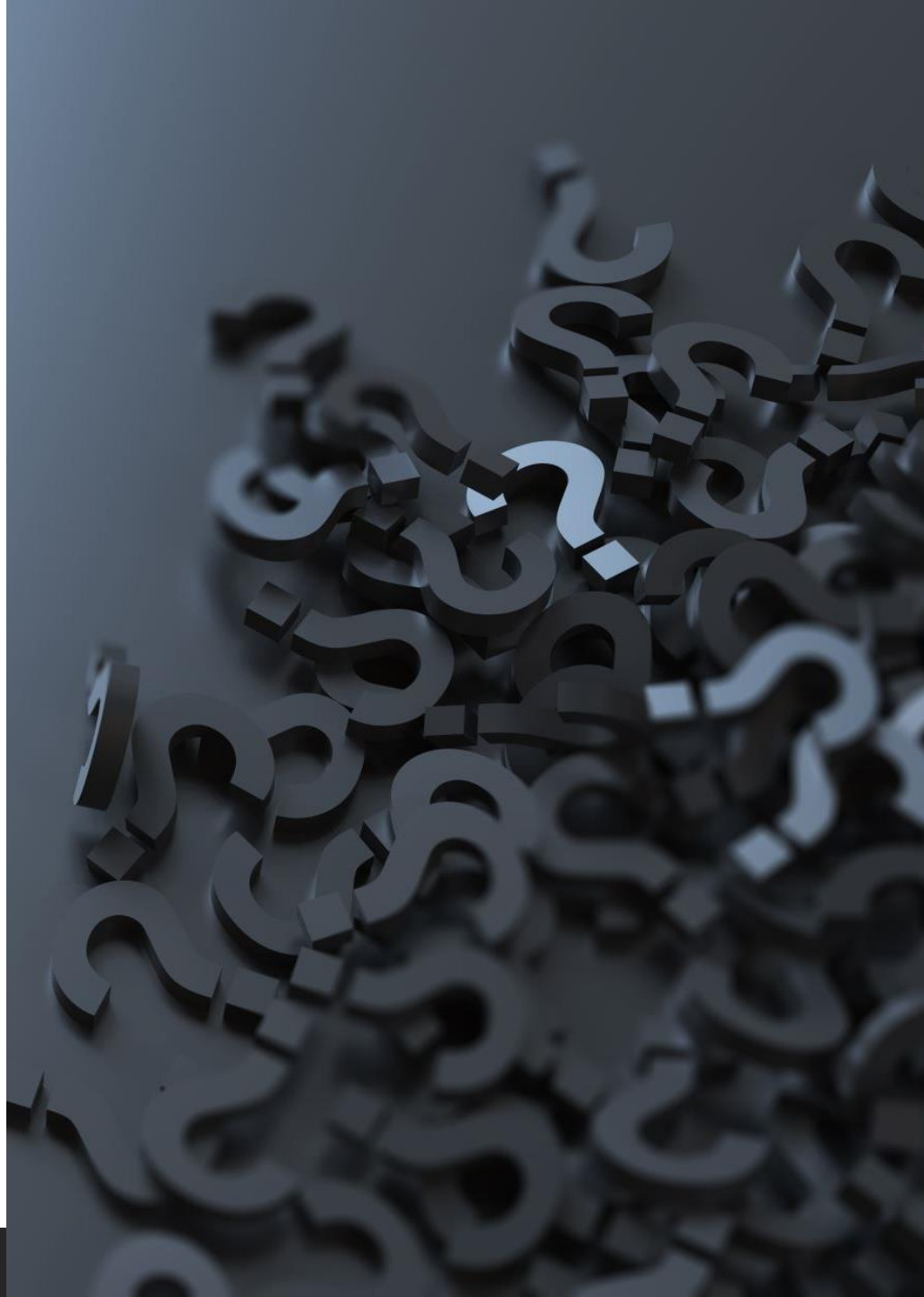
Doctor in an emergency room



- Helping 1 severely injured vs. 5 slightly injured
- 5 patients with need of the transplant organs



Emerged moral principles



1- Consequential moral reasoning: The moral thing to do depends on the consequences of the action.

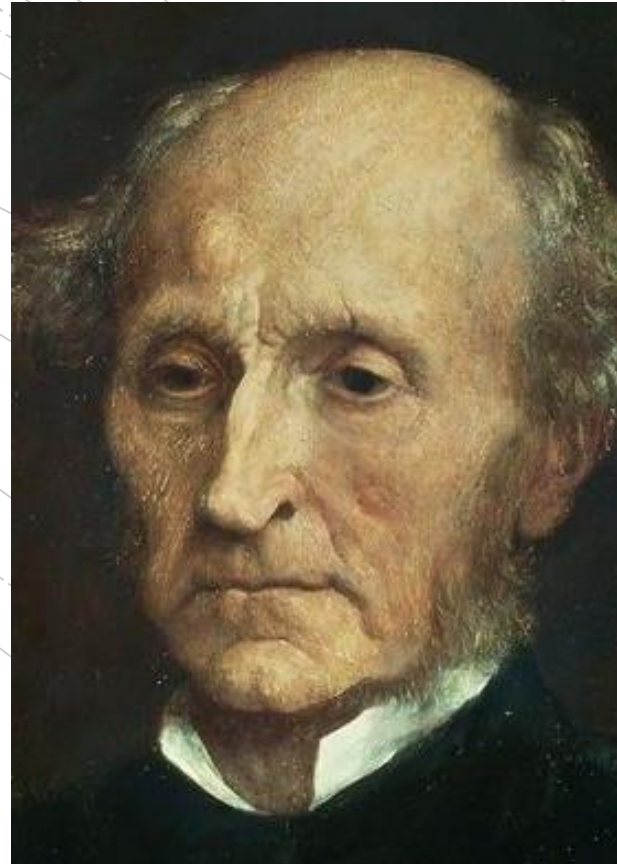
2- Categorical moral reasoning: The intrinsic quality of the act itself (Categorically right or wrong)



Aristotle
384–322 BC



Immanuel Kant
1724-1804 AC



John Stuart Mill
1806-1873 AC



John Rawls
1921-2002 AC

Books from Political Philosophers

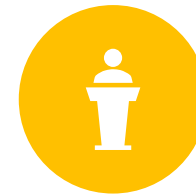
Contemporary and legal Controversies



Equality and
inequality



Affirmative
action




Free speech vs.
hate speech



Same sex
marriage



Military
conscription



Pursuing Philosophy- Learning What You Already Know

Philosophy estranges us from the familiar by provoking a new way of seeing.

Here is the risk:

- Once the familiar turns strange, it's never quite the same again.
- Self knowledge is like a lost innocence. However unsettling you find it, it can never be unthought.
- There is a possibility that political philosophy may make you a worse citizen rather than a better one! (A worse citizen before it makes you a better one)
- Because philosophy is a distancing and even debilitating activity.
- Skepticism



Pursuing Philosophy

Giving up on moral reflection is no solution. Because:

- They are unavoidable
- Emanuel Kant: “Skepticism is a resting place for human reason where it can reflect upon its dogmatic wonderings, but it is no dwelling place for permanent settlement. Simply to acquiesce in skepticism, can never suffice to overcome the restlessness of reason”

The aim of this course is to awaken the restlessness of reason and to see where it can go!

The Philosophy of Utilitarianism





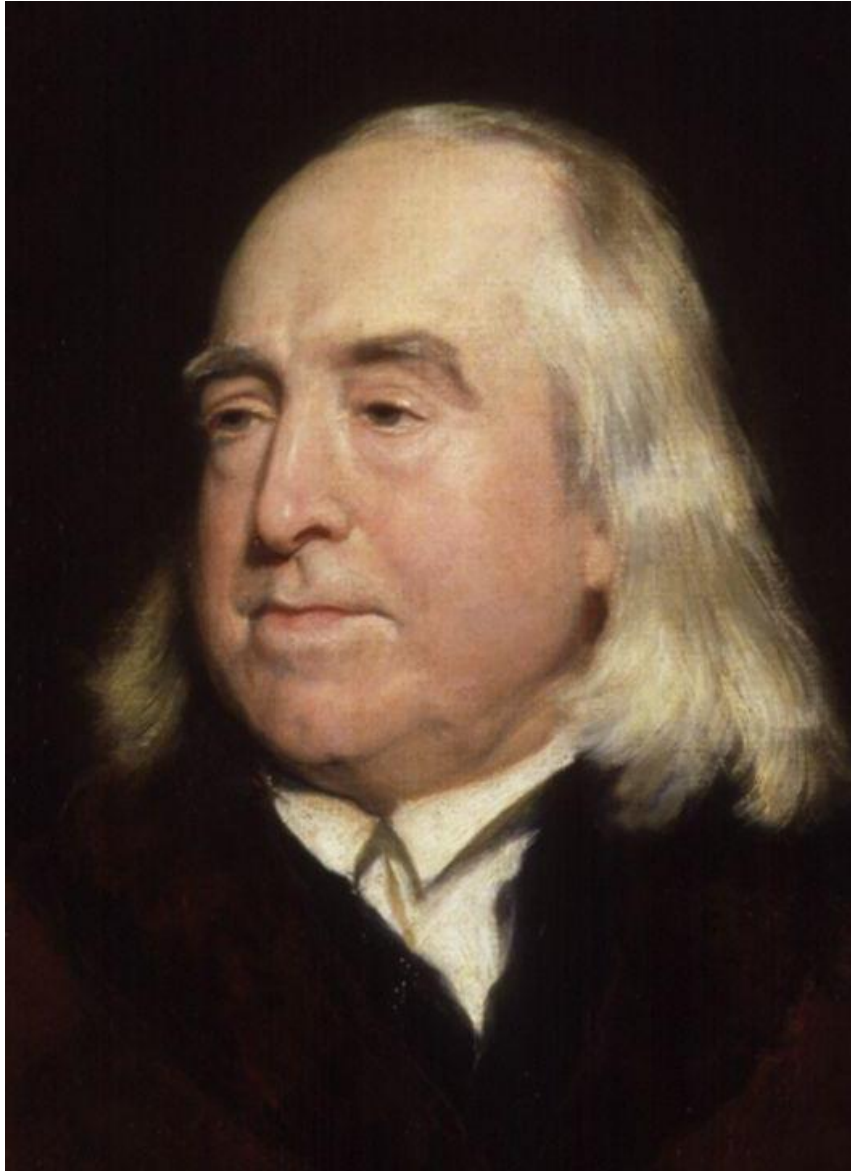
The Queen versus Dudley and Stephens

- 19th century British law case
- The ship foundered in the south Atlantic thirteen hundred miles from the cape
- 4 in the crew
- The fourth member: the cabin boy 17 years old- an orphan



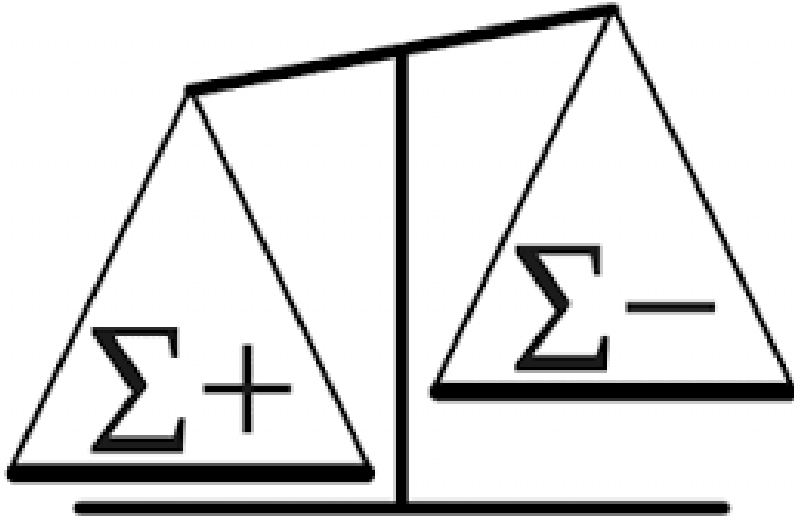
- Do we have certain fundamental rights?
- Do a fair procedure justify any result?
- What is the moral work of consent?

Questions raised:



The Philosophy of Utilitarianism

- Jeremy Bentham: English Philosopher, jurist, and social reformer (1748-1832)
- His idea: The right thing to do is to maximize utility
- Utility: The balance of pleasure over pain, happiness over suffering
- Basic principle: “The greatest good for the greatest number”



Utilitarian Cost-Benefit Analysis

Requires assigning a \$ value to all utilities.

Phillip Morris Study

Cost

Increased Health Care Costs

Benefits

Tax Revenue from cigarette Sales

Health Care Savings (from early deaths)

Pension Savings

Savings in Housing Costs for the elderly

Net gain if citizens smoke: \$147 million

Savings from premature deaths: \$1227\$ per person



Incorporating the Value of Life into Cost-Benefit Analysis

- The Ford Pinto Case
- (A study in Applied Ethics, Business, and Technology)

Repairing The Ford Pinto

Costs

\$11 per part
X 12.5 million cars
=\$137 million (to improve safety)

Benefits

180 death x \$200,000
+180 injuries x \$67,000
+2000 Vehicles x \$700
=49.5 million

Objections to Utilitarianisms

- Fails to respect individual/minority rights
- Not possible to aggregate all values into \$\$
 - Using a single measure like \$\$
 - Isn't there a distinction between higher and lower pleasures?

“The quantity of pleasure being equal, pushpin is as good as poetry.”

-Jeremy Bentham

It's a presumption to judge whose pleasures are intrinsically higher or worthier.

Thorndike's Study

- Conducted in 1930's
- **Translating All Goods, All Values, All Human Concerns into a \$ Value**
- A survey of how much people are going to pay to go through a list of unpleasant experiences such as:
 - One upper tooth pulled out **\$4,500**
 - One little toe cut off?
 - To eat a live earth worm, six inches long **\$100,000**
 - To live the rest of your life on a farm in Kansas **\$300,000**
 - To choke a stray cat to death with your bare hands

Does Thorndike's study support Bentham's idea that all goods, all values, can be captured according to a single uniform measure of value?



John Stewart Mill's response

- Born 1806
- His father James Mills was a disciple of Bentham
- He tried to humanize utilitarianism
- By enlarging and modifying utilitarianism's calculus
- "The sole evidence it is possible to produce that anything is desirable is that people actually do desire it."

Distinguishing Higher Qualities from Lower Ones

“Of two pleasures, if there be one to which all or almost all who have experience of both give a decided preference, irrespective of any feeling of moral obligation to prefer it, then that is the more desirable pleasure.”

-John Stewart Mill



Mill's experiment

- Shakespeare
- Fear factor
- The Simpsons

- Which one do you prefer?
- Which one is a higher pleasure?

“It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied. Better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool or the pig are of a different opinion, it is because they only know their side of the question.”

-John Stuart Mill

“While I dispute the pretensions of any theory which sets up an imaginary standard of justice not grounded on utility, I account the justice which is grounded in utility to be the chief part, and incomparably the most sacred and binding part, of all morality...”

-John Stuart Mill

Adhering to the
philosophy of
utilitarianism live
and dead!





Additional Slides



The Afghan Goatherds

Part of what made the soldiers' dilemma so difficult was uncertainty about what would happen if they released the Afghans.

The Afghan Goatherds



No rope to tie them up.

Let them go, and they could
away location of Seals to Taliban.

Kill them or let them go?

100 goats, two farmers,
one 14 year old boy.

All unarmed.



Quiz Time!

A consequentialist is likely to approach the trolley car case by focusing on:

- a) The number of lives that would be saved by diverting the trolley car.
- b) The rights of the people who would be killed if the trolley car is diverted.
- c) A moral rule, telling us not to kill under any circumstances.
- d) Whether the people on the tracks consented to be there, and consented to being put at risk.
- e) The inherent evil in killing one person in order to save a greater number of people.

Quiz Time!

One who engages in categorical moral thinking is likely to approach the trolley car case by focusing on:

- a) Whether the trolley car driver can maximize the number of lives saved by diverting the trolley.
- b) Whether the trolley car driver can minimize the amount of suffering by diverting the trolley.
- c) Whether diverting the trolley car leads to the best consequences.
- d) Whether more people are made happy if the trolley car is diverted.
- e) Whether diverting the trolley car would violate people's rights.

Quiz Time!

Someone who argues that the trolley car driver should divert the trolley because more lives would be saved by doing so would be engaging in:

- a) Categorical moral reasoning.
- b) Consequentialist moral reasoning.
- c) Both categorical moral reasoning and consequentialist moral reasoning.
- d) Neither categorical moral reasoning nor consequentialist moral reasoning.
- e) Immoral reasoning.

Quiz time

Which of the following best characterizes the difference between Bentham and Mill with respect to their views on individual natural rights?

- a) Bentham thinks that natural rights must be respected, whereas Mill does not.
- b) Bentham thinks that natural rights are supported by his utilitarian theory, whereas Mill does not.
- c) Bentham thinks that there are no natural rights, whereas Mill thinks there are natural rights and that utilitarian moral theory cannot accommodate this.
- d) Bentham thinks that there are no natural rights, whereas Mill thinks that utilitarian moral theory supports the idea that we should recognize individual rights.
- e) Bentham and Mill agree that that utilitarian moral theory supports the claim that we should recognize individual rights, but disagree about which rights individuals have.

Quiz time

Which of the following best characterizes the difference between Bentham and Mill with respect to the issue of the “quality” of certain pleasures?

- a) Bentham thinks we should only concern ourselves with the quantity of pleasure, and remain nonjudgmental about the quality. Mill believes that some pleasures are of a higher quality than others.
- b) Bentham believes in higher and lower pleasures, whereas Mill thinks we should be nonjudgmental.
- c) Bentham believes that we should only maximize the highest quality pleasures, whereas Mill thinks we should maximize all pleasures.
- d) Both agree that some pleasures are higher than others, but they disagree about which pleasures are the higher ones.
- e) Both agree that some pleasures are higher than others, but they disagree about how to determine which pleasures are the higher ones.

Quiz time

Given two pleasurable experiences, how does Mill believe that we determine which is the higher pleasure?

- a) By asking people which pleasure they think is the higher pleasure.
- b) By taking a poll of the general public.
- c) By asking people which experience produces the highest quantity of pleasure.
- d) By doing cost-benefit analysis.
- e) By asking those who have experienced both pleasures which they prefer.