

Christian Ethics. How Should We Live?

7. Ethics Based on Consequences

Sunday, June 26, 2005

9 to 9:50 am, in the Parlor.

Everyone is welcome!

St. John in the Wilderness

God,

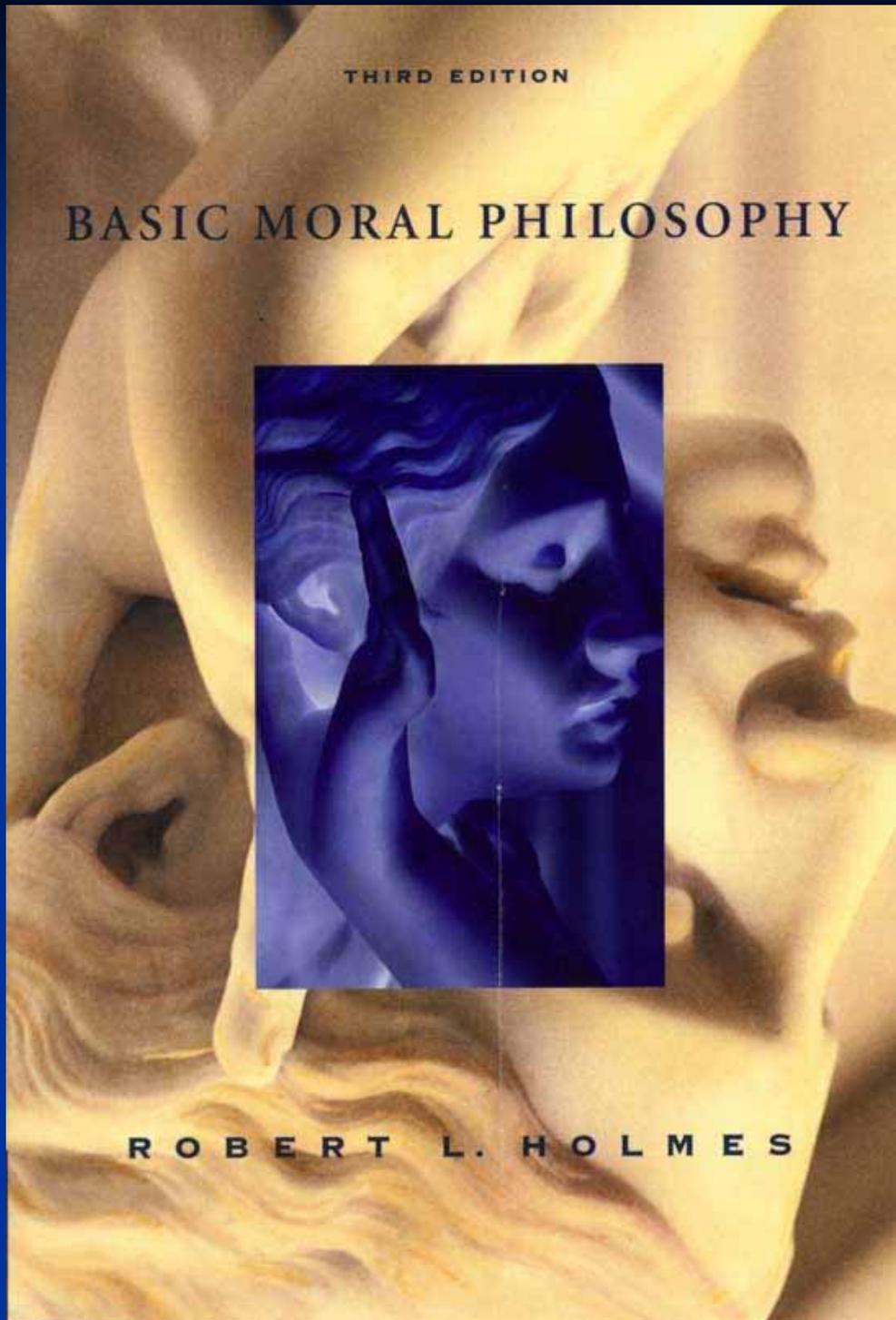
**You are our beginning and you will be our end;
we are made in your image and likeness.**

We praise and thank you for this day.

**This is the day on which you created light
and saw that it was good.**

**This is the day in whose early morning light
we discovered the tomb was empty,
and encountered Christ, the world's true light.**

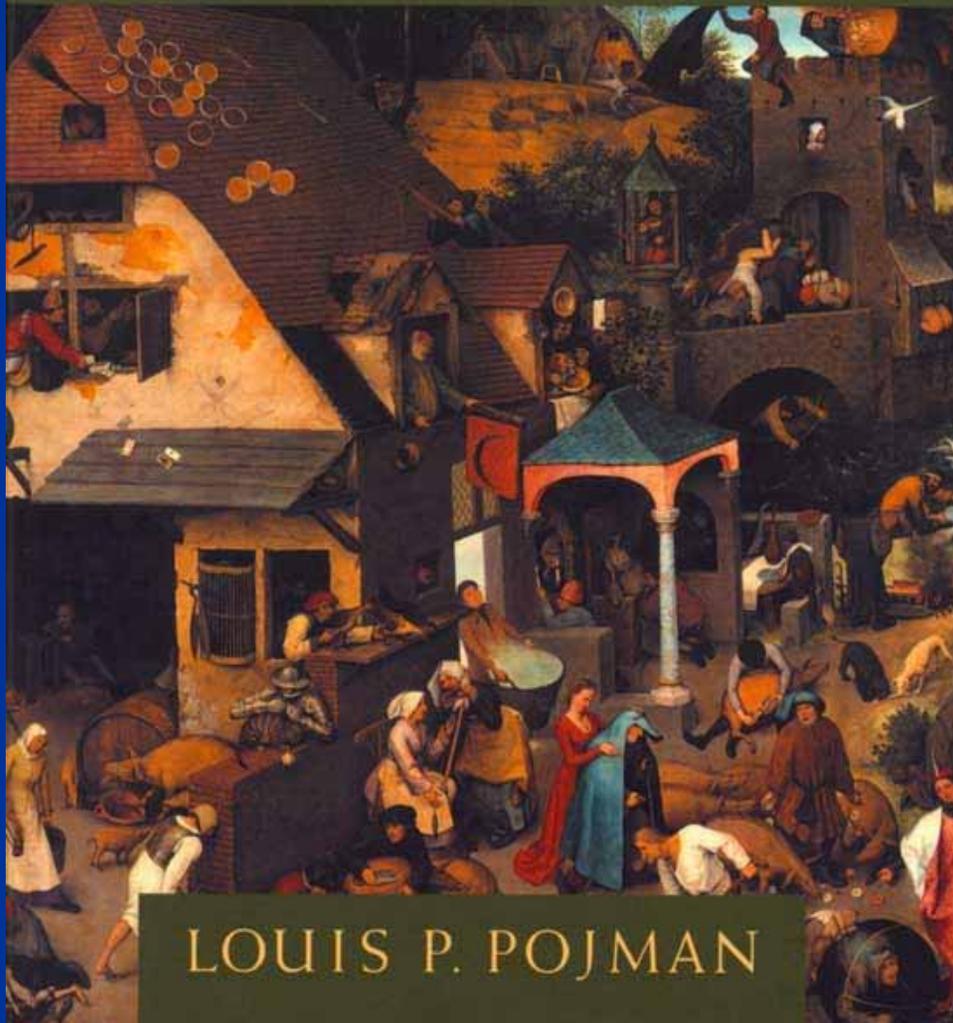
**For us your acts are gracious
and your love endures for ever.**



- **Basic Moral Philosophy, Third Edition, Robert L. Holmes.** Thomson Wadsworth, 2003. ISBN 0-534-58477-2 (Chapter 9: “Consequentialism”)
- Dr. Holmes is professor of philosophy at the University of Rochester.

HOW SHOULD WE LIVE?

AN INTRODUCTION TO ETHICS



- **How Should We Live? An Introduction to Ethics**, Louis P. Pojman, Wadsworth Publishing, 2005. ISBN: 0-534-55657-4. (Chapter 6 “Utilitarianism”)
- Dr. Pojman is professor of philosophy at the United States Military Academy

Introduction

Introduction

Ethics of Doing (Ethics of Conduct)

- What makes an act *right* or *good*?
- There are two general answers to this question that create the two main divisions in the **Ethics of Doing** (= **Action-based Ethics** = **Ethics of Conduct**):
 - 1. **Teleological Ethics** = **Consequentialist Ethics**. The morality of an act is based on the *outcome* or *consequence* of the act.
 - 2. **Deontological Ethics** = **Nonconsequentialist Ethics**. The morality of an act is based in the *act itself*.

Introduction

Deontological Ethical Systems

- In our last three sessions, we have discussed three **deontological** systems of ethics (= acts themselves are *intrinsically* good or bad):
 - The **Divine Command Theory** (A good act is whatever God wills, and a bad act whatever God prohibits)
 - **Natural Law Ethics** (Our reason can discern which acts are good or bad because God has imprinted this information in our natures and in the world about us)
 - The **ethics of Immanuel Kant** (There is a “moral law” that is part of the fabric of reality in the same way as are the laws of logic and mathematics, a law that is encapsulated in the “Categorical Imperative”)

Introduction

Kant's Deontological Ethics

- Last session we discussed one of the most radical deontological ethical systems, the ethics of Immanuel Kant.
- For Kant, a rational creature trying to obey the **moral law** (= doing one's duty for duty's sake, having a **Good Will**) is an event that has an intrinsic "holiness" within reality.
- Kant: it "sparkle[s] like a jewel with its own light, as something that had full worth in itself."

Introduction

Kant's Deontological Ethics

- If you hide an escaped Jew “Mr. A” in your house in Nazi Germany, and the police come to your door and ask the straightforward question: “Is Mr. A in your house?” your duty is to answer truthfully.
 - Your duty is to obey the **moral law**, *not* to try to predict consequences.
 - To act with a **Good Will**, duty for duty's sake, is intrinsically holy, a jewel shining in the unseen fabric of reality. To lie would be unholy, would darken the unseen fabric of reality.

Introduction

Ethics Based on Consequences

- For many, the idea we should ignore the likely consequence of telling the truth to the Nazi police (the capture, imprisonment and perhaps execution of “Mr. A”) grates on our sense of morality.
- *Today*: we pursue this inner dissonance, and discuss ethical systems which base the morality of an act on the *consequence* of the act: **Teleological Ethics** or **Consequentialism**.

The Attraction of Consequentialism

Attraction of Consequentialism

Consequences

- Many of the things we do have profound consequences:
 - Whether we marry,
 - Who we marry,
 - Whether we take illegal drugs,
 - Whether we join the marines or instead go to law school.
- How should we decide what we to do?
- *One answer: Always do the act that has the best consequences.*

Attraction of Consequentialism

Consequences and Morality

- **Consequentialism** applies this principle to ethics, and says that the rightness or wrongness of an act (= the morality of a act) should be determined by the *consequence* of the act.
- The Consequentialist would say it is perfectly moral to lie to the Nazi policeman, because the consequence of the lie (the continued safety of “Mr. A”) is better than the consequence of truth (the capture of “Mr. A”)

**What is a Good
Consequence?**

What is a Good Consequence?

Two Questions

- What exactly is a “good consequence”?
- There are two parts to this questions:
 - 1. What should we value as “good?”
 - 2. Good for who? Who should be included in the evaluation of good?

What is a Good Consequence?

Good for Who?

- Good for Who?
 - **Ethical Egotism**: a “good” consequence is defined as the one that *increases what is good for me*.
 - **Utilitarianism**: a “good” consequence is defined as the one that *increases what is good for the greatest number of people*.
- We will look at **Utilitarianism**, and will not further consider **Ethical Egotism**.

What is a Good Consequence?

What Do We Value as “Good”?

- What do we value as “good”?
- We value most things not because of something about the thing itself (its **“intrinsic” properties**), but because of what we can do with it when we put it together with other things (its **“extrinsic” properties**)
- *Example:* we value a pen not because we value “pen-ness,” but because a pen, put into our hands and upon a piece of paper, serves as useful vehicle to express our thoughts.

What is a Good Consequence?

What Do We Value as “Good”?

- There are very few things we value for their **intrinsic properties**, that is, purely for the thing-in-itself.
- Some things that have been suggested as having *intrinsic* value:
 - Pleasure
 - Virtue
 - Knowledge

What is a Good Consequence?

Hedonism

- From the Greeks to modern times, **pleasure** is the most widely acknowledged thing valued simply for itself, independent of its relationship to other things (= for its intrinsic properties)
 - This view in philosophy is called **Hedonism**.

What is a Good Consequence?

Hedonism

- **Pleasure** is usually also taken to be the chief, or the only ingredient in **happiness**, which is the:
 - “highest good” for the ancient Greek philosophers,
 - “highest human good” for St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas)

What is a Good Consequence?

Utilitarianism

- **Utilitarianism** defines the “best” consequence as that consequence which:
 - Maximizes happiness for
 - The greatest number of people

What is a Good Consequence?

Hedons

- Jeremy Bentham (1748 - 1832) was the first to systematize **utilitarianism**. He defined the “best” consequence as that consequence which maximizes pleasure and minimizes pain.

What is a Good Consequence?

Hedons

- “Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as what we shall do.”
 - Jeremy Bentham (first to systematize utilitarianism)

What is a Good Consequence?

Hedons

- Bentham tried to quantitate pleasure and pain through the **hedonic calculus**
- For each pleasurable or painful experience, obtain a score by summing up its seven aspects:
 - Intensity
 - Duration
 - Certainty
 - Nearness
 - Fruitfulness
 - Purity
 - Extent

What is a Good Consequence?

Hedons

- This score gives you the number of **hedons** of a given act.
- The “moral” action is always the one that results in the greatest number of **hedons** (thus maximizing pleasure, minimizing suffering)

What is a Good Consequence?

Hedons

- *Problem:* how do you in practice assign a score? What is the score for a:
 - Cool drink on a hot day?
 - Warm shower on a cold day?
 - Child's delight with a new toy?
 - Young man's delight with a new lover?

What is a Good Consequence?

A Pig Philosophy?

- Bentham's calculus was also criticized as a "Pig Philosophy."
 - If only **pleasure** (the number of **hedons**) counts, then wouldn't a pig enjoying its life be in a better moral state than a somewhat dissatisfied Socrates?

What is a Good Consequence?

A Pig Philosophy?

- John Stuart Mill (1806 – 1873) rescued **Utilitarianism** from being a “pig philosophy” by arguing there were “higher order pleasures” that were *better* than mere sensual pleasure. He distinguished between:
 - 1. Lower or elementary pleasures (eating, drinking, sexuality, resting ...)
 - 2. Higher-order pleasures / satisfactions (high culture, scientific knowledge, creativity, spirituality, intellectuality)

Problems with Utilitarianism

Problems with Utilitarianism

Act Utilitarianism

- We have been discussing what is called **Act Utilitarianism**:
 - An *act* is morally right only if its consequence is a greater good than any available alternative acts.
- **Act Utilitarianism** “feels right” when applied to the problem of whether to lie or tell the truth to the Nazi policeman at your door.
- **Act Utilitarianism** however can be more problematic applied to other scenerios.

Problems with Utilitarianism

The Trolley Problem

- The “**Trolley problem:**”
 - You are the conductor of trolley which has lost its brakes going down a hill.
 - If you do nothing: the trolley will run over and kill 5 people who are crossing ahead of you.
 - If you turn onto a side track, you will kill one person who is standing there.
 - What should you do?
- An **Act Utilitarian** would say turn to the side track: that will cause the least amount of pain and save the greatest number of lives.

Problems with Utilitarianism

Bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki

- The same logic was used to justify dropping the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki: millions more would have died, it was argued, if the alternative of a direct invasion of Japan was attempted.

Problems with Utilitarianism

The Physician with 5 Patients

- You are a physician with 5 patients under your care:
 - One needs a heart transplant
 - Two need a lung transplant
 - One needs a liver
 - One needs a kidney
- A healthy bachelor comes in needing an immunization.
- As a utilitarian physician, you do a utility calculation, and conclude that you could do the most good by killing the healthy bachelor and giving your five patients his organs.

Problems with Utilitarianism

The Sheriff in a Racially Torn Community

- You are a utilitarian sheriff in a racially volatile community.
- A rape and murder occurs, widely believed to be racially motivated, and a riot is about to break out.
- You could frame a derelict with the crime, and with a speedy trial and execution head off the riot.
- Using a utilitarian calculus, would not the death of one innocent be a morally better action (= result in more happiness) than allowing the deaths of many innocents in a riot?

Problems with Utilitarianism

The Lunatic with an Atomic Bomb

- A lunatic with an atomic bomb is threatening to blow up New York City.
- A psychiatrist who knows the lunatic well says there is one sure way to stop him: torture his 10 year old daughter and televise it until he turns in the bomb.
- For the sake of argument, assume you cannot fake the torture of the child.
- As a utilitarian, shouldn't you consider the torturing the 10 year old to save millions of lives?

Problems with Utilitarianism

The Scientist in South America

- A scientist named Jim on a botanical expedition in a remote part of South America is captured by the troops of repressive government, and finds himself in a central town square where a random group of 20 Indians have been lined up for execution as an example of what might happen if they protest against the government.
- On determining that Jim is an esteemed guest of the government, they offer him this honor:

Problems with Utilitarianism

The Scientist in South America

- He can shoot one of the Indians himself, and if he accepts, as a mark of the occasion, they will let the other Indians go free.
- If he refuses to shoot the Indian, they will proceed with their original plan and shoot all 20.
- A utilitarian would readily say the only moral action is for Jim to shoot the Indian.

Problems with Utilitarianism

Rule Utilitarianism

- Some of these problems can be meliorated by a new formulation of Utilitarianism called **Rule Utilitarianism**
 - **Rule Utilitarianism:** an *act* is morally right if it accords with a *rule*, the general following of which produces – in summation – more good consequences than bad consequences.
 - **Act Utilitarianism:** an *act* is morally right only if its consequence is a greater good than any available alternative acts.

Problems with Utilitarianism

Rule Utilitarianism

- A **Rule Utilitarian** could argue that:
 - The **rule against murdering** should be followed by the scientist Jim, even if violating it could save the lives of 19 other Indians, because generally following the rule leads – in summation – to more good consequences than bad.
 - The **rule against injustice** should be followed by the sheriff, even if it leads to a race riot because of the lack of a suspect for a racially motivated crime, because generally following the rule leads – in summation – to more good consequences than bad.

Problems with Utilitarianism

Rule Utilitarianism

- The Stoics declared: “Let justice be done though the heavens fall.”
- **Rule utilitarianism** does not solve the problems of utilitarianism when faced with the possible bad consequence of “the heavens falling.” Consider:
 - The Rule Utilitarian would have to concede that it is moral to torture a 10 year old when an entire city (or we could hypothesize, the world) is at stake.
 - For what good, in summation, could ever negate the bad consequence of the destruction of a city, or the world?