

The Purpose Project: Handout 2a

Thought Experiment of the Day: You decide that you will donate \$10,000 to charity. Questions:

- (1) Which of the following charities would you pick? (Let's stipulate that you can only pick one). Place a check mark next to the charity that you would pick. What was your decision-making process for picking a charity?
- (2) Now, how would a utilitarian decide which charity to support – which factors would be important to a utilitarian? Place a "U" next to the top charity that you think a utilitarian would pick. Do you agree or disagree with this utilitarian approach?

Against Malaria Foundation. The Against Malaria Foundation (AMF) is a United-Kingdom based charity that provides long-lasting insecticidal nets (LLINs) to populations at high risk of malaria, primarily in Africa (people sleep under LLINs and this prevents mosquitos from biting them, which in turn prevents them from becoming infected with malaria). As of December 2021, the foundation has raised \$425 million, and distributed or committed to fund more than 137 million LLINs since its founding in 2004. By the end of 2021, the organization had completed the distribution of 36.3 million nets in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Togo and Uganda. Nets are distributed through partnerships with the International Red Cross, the Malaria Consortium, and others, with partners responsible for the costs of distribution. Distributions include malaria education for the local population, and they are documented through reports, photos, and video.

St. Jude Children's Research Hospital is a pediatric treatment and research facility located in Memphis, Tennessee. Founded by entertainer Danny Thomas in 1962, it is a 501(c)(3) designated nonprofit medical corporation which focuses on children's catastrophic diseases, particularly leukemia and other cancers. Daily operating costs average \$1.7 million, but patients are not charged for their care. St. Jude treats patients up to age 21, and for some conditions, up to age 25. St. Jude has been named a top pediatric cancer hospital on U.S. News & World Report's annual "Best Hospitals" list. St. Jude is recognized as one of the world's premier pediatric research and treatment institutions with a focus on acute lymphoblastic leukemia, brain tumors and infectious diseases. With eight affiliate clinics across the country, St. Jude treats thousands of children each year.

The Good Food Institute (GFI) currently operates in the U.S., Brazil, India, Asia-Pacific, Europe, and Israel, where they work to increase the availability of animal-free products through supporting the development and marketing of plant-based and cell-cultured alternatives to animal products. They achieve this through corporate engagement, institutional outreach, and policy work. They also work to strengthen the capacity of the animal advocacy movement through supporting research and start-ups focused on alternative proteins. According to Animal Charity Evaluators (an organization that ranks animal charities), the main interventions used by GFI are likely to be highly effective in strengthening the animal advocacy movement and increasing the availability of animal-free products.

Video! Peter Singer and the Drowning child

Think/Pair/Share

- What is the purpose of this thought experiment?
- Do you think this is an effective argument? Why or why not?

Utilitarianism is the theory that people should promote utility.

What is good? Utility, pleasure, flourishing, well-being, etc.

What should we do? Maximize/ increase the total

Expected utility: When you're unsure, do whatever has the best chance at promoting utility

- Diminishing Marginal Utility

Chappell: Utilitarianism

Reflective Equilibrium (recall Thomson on the trolley problem!)

What matters?

- Suffering/ Death is bad. Happiness is *impartially* good. It's not just that my suffering is bad and my happiness is good, it's the *overall* suffering and happiness that matters morally. Many

seemingly non-utilitarian moral rules are good because they generally reduce suffering or promote happiness. Utilitarianism should therefore be our moral default

Impartiality: If we imagine ourselves in the position of every other person, when choosing a moral theory, we should choose preference utilitarianism.

o Preference vs. hedonic utilitarianism

The Moral Circle: Many of the moral mistakes in the past involved a failure to consider the wellbeing of different kinds of beings. This suggests that the moral mistakes we make today involve a similar failure. These considerations support i) Long-termism, ii) Animal rights iii) Cosmopolitanism: The rights of foreigners

Agency: In general, better outcomes are more worth choosing (lifeboat scenarios)

"We have seen that there is a strong presumptive case in favor of utilitarianism. If no competing view can be shown to be superior, then utilitarianism has a strong claim to be the "default" moral theory that we should fall back on."

The failure of deontology: Deontologists are just being squeamish/trying to keep their hands clean

Hope: If morality didn't require promoting the best outcome then people would sometimes have reason to hope that the worse outcome happened. People do not have reason to hope for the worse outcome. Therefore, morality requires promoting the best outcomes.

Doing/Allowing The distinction between doing and allowing harm is illusory. Often things that are mere 'allowings' are clearly just as wrong (*consider eg. Rachels drowning case*)

Status Quo Bias The aversion to utilitarianism partly rests on the misplaced assumption that people have an entitlement to the status quo distribution, which protects against interventions that would bring about better results.

Evolutionary Debunking Psychologically, we have inconsistent emotional responses to particular cases which distorts our moral judgment. We evolved in ways that reward self-interest and partiality, but that doesn't mean that that's what morality requires. Evolution is a poor guide to right and wrong.

Exercise: Career Choice: *"The Trader Who Donates Half His Pay"* (New York Times 2015) by Nicholas Kristof

Matt Wage was a brilliant, earnest student at Princeton University, a star of the classroom and a deep thinker about his own ethical obligations to the world. His senior thesis won a prize as the year's best in the philosophy department, and he was accepted for postgraduate study at Oxford University.

Instead, after graduation in 2012, he took a job at an arbitrage trading firm on Wall Street.

You might think that his professor, Peter Singer, the moral philosopher, would disown him as a sellout. Instead, Singer holds him up as a model.

That's because Wage reasoned that if he took a high-paying job in finance (becoming an arbitrage trader), he could contribute more to charity. Sure enough, he says that in 2013 he donated more than \$100,000, roughly half his pretax income.

Wage told me that he plans to remain in finance and donate half his income. One of the major charities Wage gives to is the Against Malaria Foundation, which, by one analyst's calculation, can save a child's life on average for each \$3,340 donated....

"One thought I find motivating is to imagine how great you'd feel if you saved someone's life," Wage says. "If you somehow saved a dozen people from a burning building, then you might remember that as one of the greatest things you ever did. But it turns out that saving this many lives is within the reach of ordinary people who simply donate a piece of their income."