

Reading Guide #5

Nielsen "Against Moral Conservatism"

Hospers, "Rule Utilitarianism"

Petit, "Consequentialism"

1. What is the difference between act-utilitarianism and rule-utilitarianism? Provide an example of a situation about which rule-utilitarianism and act-utilitarianism would disagree.

2. When deciding what to do, a rule-utilitarian says that I have to first decide what rule my action falls under and then ask whether this rule is a good one or a bad one in terms of its universal consequences. But actions fall under many different rules. My act might be to steal a cupcake from a red house on Tuesday on the corner of Avenue X. and Broadway in order to help a stranger from starving. My action is an instance of stealing, stealing on a Tuesday, stealing on the corner of Avenue X. and Broadway, stealing from people who live in red houses in order to help strangers, etc. which of these rules is the right one and how do I determine this according to rule-utilitarianism?

3. Hospers gives an example of a medical student who is asking for a change in grade. The student points out that since no one will find out, the teacher ought to change his grade on utilitarian grounds. Hospers thinks that an act-utilitarian would change the grade. Is Hospers right about this? Can you think of an argument that an act-utilitarian might make in favor of not changing the grade?

4. Come up with an example where 1) one person kills another in order to produce the most good, 2) each person who does so in similar situations would produce the most good, but 3) if everyone kills in this situation it wouldn't produce the most good. Note it is important that the situation is NOT one in which the someone THINKS they are murdering to produce the most good but they are actually mistaken. Each person must really, on her own, produce the most good, but taken collectively they fail to produce the most good.

5. According to Pettit, Consequentialism is "the view that whatever values an individual or institutional agent adopts, the proper response to those values is to promote them" (97). Later, he clarifies that non-consequentialists believe that at least sometimes the proper response to a value is to *honor* it. Give an example in which promoting value involves not honoring the value.

6. What is the relationship between utilitarianism and Consequentialism? What value do utilitarians think we should promote?

7. On page 105, Pettit objects to non-consequentialists on the grounds that they are "playing the game in an *ad hoc* way." What does '*ad hoc*' mean? What is his objection here?

8. Nielsen attacks what he calls "moral conservatism". Give an example of a principle which would fall under Nielsen's definition of moral conservatism. Please use an example that does not occur in the article.

9. Nielsen argues that when it appears that our commonsense intuitions conflict with Consequentialism (which is a kind of utilitarianism), the consequentialist has two strategies. EITHER the consequentialist may show how, upon further reflection, Consequentialism does not really contradict our intuitions OR the consequentialist may argue that our intuitions are wrong. Explain how Nielsen deploys these two different strategies in the case of the innocent fat man and in the case of the magistrate and the threatening mob.