Introduction: *What is Consequentialism?*

1 Questions in Moral Theory

A moral theory might be

- a theory of virtue: when is an agent morally good/virtuous?
- a theory of rightness: when is an action right?
- a theory of goodness: what makes a state of affairs good?

Consequentialism is normally understood to be a theory of rightness. It tells us when an action is right or wrong.

2 Theory of the Right

A theory of the right (a *deontic* theory) tells us how we should classify actions into the categories of the required, the permissible, and the forbidden (or right and wrong).

1. Does anything matter aside from consequences?

(1.1) Teleology. Rightness (or wrongness) is *solely* determined by the goodness of consequences. (*All* consequentialists accept teleology.)

(1.2) Deontology. There are factors aside from the goodness of consequences which determine rightness and wrongness.

We'll discuss this in sessions 4 and 6.

2. What are the objects which we consider?

(2.1) Act-Consequentialism ("Direct C."). The primary object of consequentialist evaluation are actions. (Majority opinion.)

(2.2) Rule-Consequentialism ("Indirect C."). The primary object of consequentialist evaluation are rules. (Hooker, Brandt, early Rawls.)

Other evaluative focal points are possible. We'll discuss this topic in session 3.

3. Does it matter how things objectively are, or how individuals subjectively perceive them to be?

(3.1) Objective Consequentialism. The consequences which matter are the actual consequences. (Majority opinion.)

(3.2) Subjective Consequentialism. The consequences which matter are the expected consequences. (Jackson.)

We'll discuss this topic in session 11.

4. Do we have to do our best, or do we merely have to do "good enough"?

(4.1) Maximising Consequentialism. Only actions or rules which maximise the goodness of consequences are right. (Majority opinion.)

(4.2) Satisficing Consequentialism. All actions or rules which reach a certain threshold of goodness of consequences are right. (Slote.)

3 Theory of the Good

A theory of the good (an *axiological* theory) is a theory about what makes a state of affairs *good* or *bad* in the moral sense.

5. Does anything matter aside from well-being?

(5.1) Welfarism. The goodness of a state of affairs is solely determined by well-being. (Mainstream view.)

(5.2) Desert. Desert plays a role over and above well-being in determining the goodness of a state of affairs (Feldman.)

Other pluralistic theories are possible. We'll discuss this topic in session 2.

<u>6. Do we simply add up well-being?</u>

(6.1) Sum-Ranking ("yes"). The goodness of a state of affairs is the aggregate sum of well-being in it. (Majority view.)

(6.2) Prioritarianism ("no"). Gains to less well-off individuals matter more for the overall goodness of a state of affairs than gains to better-off individuals. (Hooker, Parfit.)

Other non-aggregative theories are possible. Sessions 12/13 touch on some questions of aggregation.

<u>7. What is well-being?</u>

(7.1) Hedonism. Well-being is pleasure and the absence of pain. (Bentham, Mill, Crisp, Feldman.)

(7.2) Preference Fulfillment. Well-being is having one's desires (or preferences) fulfilled. (Brandt, Griffin.)

(7.3) Objectivism. Well-being is engaging in objectively valuable activities. (G. E. Moore.)

There are many other theories of well-being. We'll discuss this in session 2.

4   Utilitarianism and Consequentialism

Bentham's and Mill's *classic utilitarianism* is the combination of (1.1), (2.1), (3.1), (4.1), (5.1), (6.1) and (7.1). In one sentence,

Classic/Hedonistic Utilitarianism. An action is right if and only if doing it objectively maximises the total sum of pleasure over pain in the world.

Nowadays, hedonism (7.1) is only one view amongst others. So it's better not to include it in our definition of utilitarianism. So let's define

Utilitarianism. An action is right if and only if doing it objectively maximises the total sum of well-being.

What is consequentialism? All consequentialists accept at least (1.1). Beside this, there is little agreement. So we can roughly say

Consequentialism. Whether an action is right is merely a function of the value of its consequences.

Some philosophers claim that agent-neutrality (or impartiality) is a further commitment of consequentialism. This gives us

Standard Consequentialism. Whether an action is right is merely a function of the agent-neutral value of its consequences.

5   Summary

1. We have to distinguish a theory of the right from a theory of the good. The two theories are partially independent.
2. A consequentialist theory consists of different "building blocks"—I here distinguished seven, but more distinctions are possible.
3. Bentham's and Mill's utilitarianism has historically been very influential, but most contemporary philosophers no longer accept all of their claims.
4. Utilitarianism and consequentialism must be distinguished. Utilitarianism is *just one form* of consequentialism.