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*(Before reading the following lecture, you should review the RealPlayer presentation for Module Ten, entitled “Utilitarianism Then and Now”)*



J. S. Mill

## The Truth of Consequences

In the slide show for this module, I outlined the most recent developments in utilitarian theory that we first encountered in Hume and in **Module Seven**. This section of readings also includes criticisms of this powerful and suggestive theory, which counts among its adherents the editor of your textbook, Peter Singer. Utilitarianism differs from the theories of right discussed in **Modules Eight and Nine** is

that it is a **consequentialist** theory—it treats consequences of our actions as most important in determining right and wrong.

### I. Bentham: the hedonistic calculus

#### A. BACKGROUND

Please see the **first section** of **Module Seven** for background on **Jeremy Bentham**.

#### B. THE ARGUMENT

1. If **David Hume** was the grandfather of utilitarianism (he was apparently the first one to use the term “utility” to mean “productive of happiness”), then Jeremy Bentham is its proud father and one of its best-known exponents. In this excerpt from his *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, he provides a succinct yet wide-ranging discussion of the “principle of utility,” the supreme moral principle of utilitarianism (just as the categorical imperative was the supreme moral principle in Kant’s ethics). Here’s Bentham’s statement of the principle: “. . .[T]hat principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency which it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question; or what is the same thing in other words, to promote or to oppose that happiness. I say of every action whatsoever; and therefore not only of every action of a private individual, but of every measure of government” (p. 307). There are a few key points about utilitarianism that are lodged in here, and a few others that Bentham doesn’t state but that are implied:
  - By “augment or diminish the happiness,” Bentham means “increase or decrease pleasure and pain.” (see p. 306).
  - Bentham’s phrasing of the principle is a bit vague when he says “the happiness of the part whose interest is in question,” since the principle tells us not only to consider our own interest, but also that of others.

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- And what others? Most utilitarians think that we need to consider the interests of any **sentient** beings—that is, any beings who can feel pleasure and pain. That includes many animals, as well as all humans.
  - Finally, note that Bentham intends this principle to apply not only to private moral decisions, but also “every measure of government.” Here is his concern with public policies aimed at social reform coming out in full.
2. The utility principle, then, is the ground of obligation: we have certain duties to others (say, to help someone in need or help pass laws on welfare reform) because those duties would, above all other alternatives, produce the greatest amount of happiness (“maximization”) or at least the least amount of pain. Bentham thinks, contrary to Kant, that this is the only sense that words like “obligation,” “right” and “wrong” can have; “otherwise, they have none” (p. 308). In fact, Bentham is very confident that the utility principle is foundational to all morality worth being called morality and that the principle is beyond refutation. Those who try and reject the principle, he notes on pp. 308-309, typically employ one of two different strategies: they either substitute their own, arbitrary principle that prefers their own gender, class or species over others, or through misapplying the utility principle, they use it against itself. The nature of this latter error might not seem clear at first, but if you recall Mill’s arguments from Module Seven, you’ll see how this could be so. Some critics of utilitarianism called it a “philosophy fit only for pigs,” remember, claiming that our duties to promote art and high culture outweighed any arguments in favor of pleasure. But Mill turned this criticism on its head, distinguishing “higher” and “lower” pleasures. What looked like an argument against pleasure as the basis for morality turned out to be simply a conflict between two different kinds of pleasures; yet as Mill happily concludes, both sides in that conflict are still aiming at pleasure.
  3. What is most striking about Bentham’s presentation of utilitarianism is how he employs *calculation* in his ideas. For any situation in which a decision to act is needed, he says, there are a number of alternatives. Let’s say, for example, that I come home late from work to my apartment and want to unwind by playing “Stairway to Heaven” by Led Zeppelin at volume level 10 on my stereo (this isn’t *Spinal Tap*, so my stereo doesn’t go up to 11). I actually have a few options here: option A is to do as I please, but of course I’ll disturb all my neighbors who are trying to sleep; option B is not to play the music at all, which is fine by my neighbors but will make me unable to unwind and sleep; option C is to play the music loud, but over the headphones. How should I decide between these alternatives. Take a close look at the list on p. 311. To use the utility principle to make a moral decision, Bentham says, I need to assign reasonable weights to the expected pleasures and pains for myself and my neighbors for each of the options A through C. I can assign weights along seven different variables: *intensity* and *duration* of the pleasure or pain expected; the *certainty* or *uncertainty* of the pain or pleasure occurring as a consequence; the pleasure or pain’s *propinquity* (nearness in time to my action) or *remoteness* (distance in time from my action); the pleasure or pain’s *fecundity* (likelihood to produce other similar pleasures and pains); its *purity* (likelihood *not* to be followed by its opposite, pleasure or pain) and its *extent*, or the number of people effected by it. After assigning these

reasonable values, Bentham says we are to “sum up all the values of all the *pleasures* on the one side, and those of all the pains on the other. The balance, if it be on the side of pleasure, will give the *good* tendency of the act upon the whole, with respect to the interests of that *individual* person; if on the side of pain, the *bad* tendency of it upon the whole” (p. 311). Then I have to do the same thing for each person affected by the proposed alternative (Whew! That’s a lot of work!). So morality is like a math problem, for Bentham, adding pleasures and subtracting pains, taking everyone’s interests into account equally and impartially (including our own). Can you see any potential problems with this way of deciding between right and wrong?

## II: Sidgwick: an ideal community of enlightened utilitarians

### A. BACKGROUND

Please see the **third section** of **Module Five** for background on **Henry Sidgwick**.

### B. THE ARGUMENT

1. This final selection from Sidgwick’s *The Methods of Ethics* gives us an insight into some of the promise—and problems—of a utilitarian moral philosophy that is more sophisticated than Bentham’s original formulation. For example, Sidgwick notes that if the ultimate criterion of maximizing happiness is pleasure and lack of pain, then it seems as if *any* creature that feels pleasure and pain remotely like humans do is worth of moral consideration (note here I don’t say “respect,” for fear of confusing Kant’s position with this one). This means that utilitarians had an early advantage with respect to questions of animal rights. While utilitarians don’t need to hold that animals have rights *per se*, many do argue that when weighing alternatives and considering the impact of consequences (as we saw Bentham doing in the last reading), we need to take the interests of animals into account. What could these interests possibly be? Well, animals want to survive, reproduce, and be free from pain and misery. Perhaps animals’ interests do not even count *as much as humans’*, since, as John Stuart Mill said, we are capable of pleasures and feats they are not. But this does not mean animals should be seen *merely* as objects or means to human satisfaction, as Kant or the natural law tradition holds. Here is one strong contrast between theories of right.
2. Another perennial problem for utilitarians raised by Sidgwick is the issue of future generations. The issue is something like this: “What we do today impacts the happiness of those living today, but also will impact the happiness of those not yet living [the abuses of the environment leading to global warming are a great example]. Do future generations count at all? Should their interests count as much as those living today?” This is a great question that helps drive the field of environmental ethics. Sidgwick says that the happiness of future generations must count, but he’s not sure how. One thing he *is* sure of may seem a very strange bit of reasoning to us, though: given that life for most people is on balance full of more pleasure than pain (and that things continue to be like this in the

- future), we have a moral duty to *produce more people to be happy!* We have this duty right up to what economists call “the point of diminishing returns,” when the increase in the number of people is so great that it actually makes living conditions for most, on balance, full of more misery than happiness (Sidgwick makes this point in reference to famous economist Thomas Malthus on p. 315).
3. Do you remember the distinction between “act-utilitarianism” and “rule-utilitarianism” from the slide show? Sidgwick is definitely a rule-utilitarian who, if you recall from way back in Module Five, sought for self-evident “axioms of ethics” that would serve as rules maximizing happiness in the long run. Dealing with objections to rule-utilitarianism from the then-prevalent Scottish “Common Sense” school of ethics, Sidgwick asks, wouldn’t it often be the case that making an exception to a rule like “Always keep your promises” or “Always obey the law” would produce more happiness than simple obedience? The “Common Sense” philosophers thought the obvious answer to this question was “yes” and that, because of it, rule-utilitarianism could not justify its supposedly “self-evident” rules. But Sidgwick beats them at their own game, allowing exceptions to rules which are not simply arbitrary or convenient, but instead are “...merely the establishment of a more complex and delicate rules, instead of one that is broader and simpler; for if it is conducive to the general good that such an exception be admitted in one case, it will be equally so in all similar cases” (p. 315). Very, very general rules like “Always keep your promises” aren’t taken to be absolute by a rule-utilitarian like Sidgwick. Remember Kant’s solution to the problem posed by the neighbor who entrusted you with his guns? Sidgwick would reply that Kant’s stubbornness there was not only unwarranted but tragic; what a rule-utilitarian needs to do in such a case is rely on a “more complex and delicate rule” like “Always keep your promises...unless someone (including yourself) will get hurt or killed by doing so.”
  4. Last but not least, Sidgwick deals with another perennial problem for utilitarians, the “double standard” (here we’re not discussing the sexual double standard from the Donald Symons reading in Module Four). The need for such a double standard is implied by the points made in the last paragraph, (3) above. Sidgwick affirmed the need to amend general rules and make them more nuanced, but this shouldn’t simply be done on a whim or without moral considerations. When such a rule is modified, it needs to be done as the result of some kind of complex calculations like those suggested by Bentham. This can be done by “enlightened Utilitarians” (like Sidgwick?) but success is less likely in the case of the common person, Joe Sixpack, who needs simple and easy-to-apply rules for daily use. *This* is Sidgwick’s double-standard: one set of general rules for the populace, another more sophisticated set for the “ideal community of enlightened Utilitarians.” “Thus, on Utilitarian principles,” he writes, “it may be right to do and privately recommend, under certain circumstances, what it would not be right to advocate openly; it may be right to teach openly to one set of persons what it would be wrong to teach to others; it may be conceivably right to do, if it can be done with comparative secrecy, what it would be wrong to do in the face of the world...” (p. 316). What the “enlightened Utilitarian” does, of course, is not shirk the rules in favor of her own self-interest, but rather she *does good*—good in secret, good

more complicated to figure out than most of us Joe Sixpacks could handle. Of course, if this is a utilitarian truth, it is a troubling one, since the idea of two sets of morality, one public and the other private, seems to imply more problems than it solves.

### III. Smart: desert island promises

#### A. BACKGROUND

**J. J. C. Smart** is emeritus professor at the Australian National University, where he was professor of philosophy in the Research School of Social Sciences from 1976 to 1985. He is an honorary fellow of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and was also professor of philosophy at the University of Adelaide and reader in philosophy at La Trobe University (from Singer, p. 404).

#### B. THE ARGUMENT

1. J.J.C. Smart and **Bernard Williams**, an Australian and a British philosopher, respectively, co-edited a well-known book entitled *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (we'll see a selection from Williams' criticism of utilitarianism in section VI below). Smart's essay from the book contributes two interesting ideas to the field of utilitarian ethics: the example of the desert island promise and its meaning, and a meditation on why sacrifices for future generations may make sense from the utilitarian perspective. Remember that it was Sidgwick who first seriously introduced this question into the debate.
2. Smart's purpose in contributing these two ideas is clear. He wants to demonstrate the "chief persuasive argument" in favor of utilitarianism against deontological theories, like that of Kant. According to him, "...the dictates of any deontological ethics will always, on some occasions, lead to the existence of misery that could, on utilitarian principles, have been prevented" (317). The example of the desert island promise is one demonstration of this. If Kant is right and I have an absolute duty to keep my promise to a dying millionaire that I will use his hoard of gold, upon being rescued from the island we are both trapped upon, to fund the South Australian Jockey Club, then there is no arguing with that. I should not use the fortune for some other purpose, no matter how much more morally worthy (here read: stamps out more misery) my choice might be, such as the Royal Adelaide Hospital. Smart's example, however, has me rescued from the island and I decide to give the money to the hospital. According to a utilitarian line of reasoning, this is OK—after all, "could anybody deny that I had done rightly without being open to the charge of heartlessness? ... Think of the persons dying of painful tumors who could have been saved by the desert island gold!" (p. 318). Notice that this is a "desert island promise"—Smart says that I made the promise when no one else was around, so in defaulting on it, "my action will not in this case weaken the general confidence in the social institution of promising" (p. 318). In other words, a reason given by both Kant and some utilitarians for why breaking promises is wrong—that it undermines trust and the convention of

promise-keeping generally—doesn't matter here. Of course, most promises made aren't desert island promises; does this make a difference to the criticism of deontology that Smart is trying to make here? After all, aren't there many, many promises that are so "low profile" as to impact the social institution of trust very little if they are not kept? And more to the point, isn't a broken promise more likely to impact the personal relationship of trust you have with the promise-breaker, more than affect society as a whole? Isn't the "undermining trust" reason just a cliché? What do you think?

3. Smart's other point regards future generations, and the idea that, "in the interests of future generations," utilitarians might condone the death of millions by starvation or forced labor by millions of others (p. 318). After all, it is a series of small, barely significant steps from ignoring the promises we make to desert island millionaires to ignoring the rights of individuals that guard them from atrocities such as these. But this seems inhumane, or so the deontologist might argue. Smart has a surprising reply to this. He agrees with Sidgwick—the welfare of future generations does matter, he says, at least as much as we do. But do they matter enough to countenance starvation, forced labor, and other "atrocities" today in the name of sparing future generations from even worse misery? Here is the surprise: "If it were known to be true, *as a question of fact*, that measures which caused misery and death to tens of millions today *would* result in saving from great misery and from death hundreds of millions in the future, and *if this were the only way in which it could be done*, then it *would* be right to cause these necessary atrocities" (p. 318, some italics added for emphasis). Think about this—Smart is saying that if we were sure of the causal connection between taking action A today and preventing catastrophe B in the future—and here, we mean *absolutely sure*—then we would be right to do A, no matter how bad A appeared to be. To not do A would simply be a failure of nerve at best, and immoral at worst. What is key here is whether or not "atrocities"—and there have been plenty of examples on all sides in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, in times of both war and peace—*really will* result in a better state. Smart says the real reason for rejecting this kind of thinking is that the future is not so clear, although demagogic politicians and religious leaders often succeed at convincing us that they can predict the future with great accuracy. Another reason is that large-scale atrocities have many negative consequences, including "...the brutalization of the people who ordered the atrocities and carried them out" (p. 319) like what happened to Serbian soldiers serving under warlords during the "ethnic cleansing" in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. But what is also clear, at least to Smart, is that the basic utilitarian reasoning is sound—sacrificing the good of a smaller number for the clearly obtainable good of a larger number, even for those of future generations, is right. This is a troubling issue; how do you weigh in on it?

## IV. Dostoevsky: what would you give for utopia?

### A. BACKGROUND

**Fyodor Dostoevsky** (1821-1881) was one of the great Russian nineteenth century novelists, and has been seen at a forerunner of modern existentialism because of his insistence on our ability to choose what we are. Dostoevsky combined this theme with an insistent defense of passionate religiosity, for which some have compared him to the Danish fellow pre-existentialist **Søren Kierkegaard**, as well as gloomy meditations on the fates of socialism, revolution and morality in the 19<sup>th</sup> modern world.

## B. THE ARGUMENT

1. The brief snippet of dialogue from brother Ivan we get here from *The Brothers Karamazov* by Dostoevsky isn't aimed at utilitarianism, but rather at the religious idealism of Ivan's monkish sibling Alyosha. What would you trade for the perfect world you envision, Ivan asks? If the utopia you envision could be accomplished by putting one small child to torture, or even just by keeping them in distress, would you do it? What does this have to do with utilitarian calculation?

## V. Rawls: how utilitarians don't respect persons

### A. BACKGROUND

**John Rawls** is often credited with single-handedly reinventing political philosophy from an American perspective in the early 1970s with his famous work *A Theory of Justice* (1971). This book merged Kantian ways of thinking with a contract-based model of public deliberation to generate a full-blown theory of justice for the modern age. He followed this book up with a meditation on the role of liberal democracy in an age of multiculturalism with *Political Liberalism* (1993). Rawls died in 2001.

## B. THE ARGUMENT

1. Rawls spends a decent amount of time in the early pages of his magnum opus, *A Theory of Justice*, attempting to refute utilitarianism as an adequate ethical theory of justice, that is, of assessing and allocating resources and opportunities fairly in a society. This excerpt is part of his argument. Here, Rawls wants to make two observations about utilitarianism: the first, in itself, simply draws attention to a feature of utilitarian calculation that no one (even utilitarians) would disagree with. But the second observation, which attempts to understand the reasoning behind the first, draws what many may find a objectionable conclusion. Rawls certainly objects to it, and forms his *Theory of Justice* in opposition to it.
2. Here is the first observation: "The striking feature of the utilitarian view of justice is that it does not matter, except indirectly, how this sum of satisfactions is distributed among individuals any more than it matters, except indirectly, how one man distributes his satisfactions over time." Rawls is pointing out something that all utilitarians (even Smart, in a sense, in his talk about "atrocities") must acknowledge: that if what really matters in our actions and public policies is the



*greatest possible sum of satisfactions* (e.g., that happiness be maximized), then it does not matter how the particular distribution of benefits and burdens, pleasures and pains occurs. Rawls doesn't give us an example of what he means here, but in my lectures on political philosophy I often refer to "systematically disadvantaged groups," members of which would be members of groups that, over and over, "get the short end of the stick," as it were, when it comes to laws and public policies. In the history of the United States, this has meant women, Native Americans, immigrants, and ethnic and racial minorities. Although systematically disadvantaged groups aren't necessarily disadvantaged because of utilitarian public policies, it's easy to imagine a situation in which they were. Think in terms of a new immigrant group from the small central European country of Deckervania: the Deckervanians settle in this area, bringing with them lots of money from the "old country" but little knowledge of American ways. The county council, thinking in utilitarian terms, wants to impose new taxes that apply strictly to Deckervanian immigrants, then use the money to build new swimming pools and improve the old ones. The Deckervanians don't know much about our system of law and government and are left plenty of money to live off of. Although they grudgingly pay the "special" tax, they don't publicize their situation to others who might be upset at their plight, nor do they get forced into the poorhouse, either. The Deckervanians are what I call a systematically disadvantaged group. Is there anything wrong here? For most utilitarians, there cannot be, because building pools helps the vast majority of people and their sweaty little kids, and all at a fairly negligible cost to the Deckervanians. But Rawls *is* bothered by this, and perhaps we all should be. But why?

3. Rawls' second observation can be found at the end of the sentence I quoted from him at the beginning of (2) above. Remember, he said that how utilitarians distribute happiness and unhappiness in society through public policies didn't matter "any more than it matters, except indirectly, how one man distributes his satisfactions over time." The latter part of this sentence alludes to the fact that a person, faced with different needs and desires, may feed some and ignore others, usually at her discretion. So, for example, I want to both lose weight and eat a huge slice of Cyrus O'Leary's chocolate custard pie every evening for dessert. Obviously, I cannot do both. Both desires are legitimate. It's just that to have one, I have to "shut down" the other. I hope that the choice that I make ends up making me happier in the long run. In saying that a utilitarian society makes its decisions as if it were "one man distribut[ing] his satisfactions over time," it turns out Rawls wasn't just coming up with a good analogy. On p. 338, he elaborates: "The most natural way, then, of arriving at utilitarianism... is to adopt for society as a whole the principle of rational choice for one man." According to him, utilitarianism presupposes the idea that we are all a part of a "social organism," some states of which are objectively better for all than others. It's true that when I consider my own body, for example, as an organism, I think it's better that it be healthy and that my psychological states be tinged by happiness than other possibilities. To achieve these states, I have to build up some systems of my body (muscles, for example, by running every morning) and subordinate others (my sweet tooth). But remember that if we think of society like an organism, we are

comparing *people* to systems of the body. The reverse side of utilitarian impartiality, which is a good thing, is treating people as faceless placeholders for a certain proportion of pleasure and pain. Rawls, more technically, says, “This view of social cooperation is the consequence of extending to society the principle of choice for one man, and then, to make this extension work, conflating [lumping together] all persons into one through the imaginative acts of the impartial sympathetic spectator” (p. 339). Rawls’s conclusion is that utilitarianism is objectionable because it does not take seriously the idea that we are, in our feelings, projects, commitments, and values, more than just systems of a larger social body. In his terms, “utilitarianism does not take seriously the distinction between persons.”

## VI. Williams: the integrity of persons

### A. BACKGROUND

**Bernard Williams** is well known for his unusual take on moral philosophy, much of which was inspired by his study of Nietzsche and the Ancient Greeks. Two of his best-known works in the area are *Moral Luck* (1981) and *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* (1985). Williams died in 2002.

### B. THE ARGUMENT

1. Williams seems to agree with Rawls that utilitarianism does not take what we can call the “separateness of persons” seriously. He would probably agree with Rawls’ understanding of utilitarianism as thinking about society in terms of a “social organism” and would probably, like me, be worried about how utilitarianism might exploit systematically disadvantaged groups. However, Williams’s main focus is on the moral value for our characters of a trait that utilitarianism seems to ignore: integrity. He makes his points through the use of two thought experiments: George the chemist and Jim and the Indians. The latter example has become very famous in the history of ethics. Both hypothetical situations serve double-duty: they are both “what would you do in his shoes” scenarios, and they both point out a problem with utilitarianism. Make sure you’re familiar with both scenarios (pp. 339-340) before you proceed.
2. How does the utilitarian come down on both these scenarios? Williams says, “[U]tilitarianism replies, in the first case, that George should accept the job, and in the second, that Jim should kill the Indian. Not only does utilitarianism give these answers but...it regards them, it seems to me, as *obviously* the right answers.” Williams does not think there is a clear-cut correct resolution to either, but what he *does* take into account that utilitarians do not is the value of *integrity* to people, including George, Jim, me and you. What is integrity? As I understand Williams’ long analysis in this excerpt, it is our ability to justify our actions in terms of our *projects*. Utilitarians do their calculating as if there were only alternative actions—turning my stereo up loud, listening to “Stairway to Heaven” at a moderate volume level, or using the headphones—and not “first

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order” projects, more basic values and commitments, backing up those actions. Most of us are engaged in these kind of projects, either personally or through church, school, or organizations like the ACLU or Amnesty International. And these projects, according to Williams, aren't just cases of pursuing “higher pleasures,” as Mill might object. They are extended, ongoing commitments toward becoming something different ourselves and toward remaking our locality, nation, or world, and sometimes, perhaps quite often, they involve no pleasure whatsoever. “...[I]f such commitments are worth while,” Williams writes, “then pursuing the projects that flow from them, and realizing some of those projects, will make the person for whom they are worth while, happy” (p. 342). This is importantly different, however, than saying one engages in first-order projects *in order to pursue happiness*. This is a different sense of happiness, a more Aristotelian sense: happiness is a byproduct of worthwhile activities, not the aim of all action.

3. In the final two pages of the excerpt (pp. 344-345), Williams brings us back to consideration of the examples of George and Jim. Given his alternatives, George ought to take the job in chemical and biological weapons manufacture. But George is “not the kind of person who does that sort of thing.” George’s integrity is found in the fact that he will reject some actions (like taking the job) not because they do not maximize happiness, but because they are antithetical to his project of building a more peaceful world that is also more conducive to life. To utilitarians, Jim ought to kill one rebel native rather than allow all twenty to be killed. But what if Jim is the kind of person who simply doesn’t kill? “The decision so determined is, for utilitarianism, the right decision. But what if it conflicts with some project of mine?” (p. 344). Indeed, “project of mine” seems a narrow and selfish way to put it, for many of the projects like those Williams mentions of wiping out cruelty, injustice and killing involve many, many others beyond myself, many in the past, and more in the future. Some projects are bigger than any of us. George is put into a particularly bad spot because if he takes the job, more people may benefit from his dragging his heels on weapons research than the other fellow who is enthusiastic about it. Jim’s pickle comes not from his own actions but from the police captain who is holding the rebels at gunpoint. Is it right that their decisions should be determined, not by their own actions, decisions and projects, but those of others? Williams’ point about integrity and its conflict with utilitarianism thus reaches this point: “For...how can a man, as a utilitarian agent, come to regard as [merely] one satisfaction among others, and a dispensable one, a project or attitude round which he has built his life, just because someone else’s projects have so structured the causal scene that that is how the utilitarian sum comes out?” Isn’t there something personal about our own ethical lives that is destroyed when we do all our thinking via the method of calculation, ignoring the separateness of persons and their own critical projects? What do you think?
4. While there is a lot to be said for utilitarianism, a strictly modern ethical philosophy, a better version of it would take account of the value of integrity for us. Integrity is an ancient value, one that if we discussed enough would inevitably take us back to Aristotle’s discussion of what it takes to be virtuous and Socrates

and his belief that “the unexamined life is not worth living.” These were, of course, among the very first of the ethical philosophers we read and discussed in this course. Their example and your own hard work at grappling with the great ethicists equally demonstrate a kind of integrity. Such a high point seems like a good spot to mark the conclusion of our studies. And so here endeth the lesson...

### C. Module 10 Writing Assignment (10 points)

1. In 1970, Ford Motors began making the compact model called the Pinto. The model became a focus of a major scandal when it was alleged that the car's design allowed its fuel tank to be easily damaged in a rear-end collision which sometimes resulted in deadly fires. Critics argued that the vehicle's lack of a true rear bumper as well as any reinforcing structure between the rear panel and the tank meant that in certain collisions, the tank would be thrust forward into the differential, which had a number of protruding bolts that could puncture the tank. Ford allegedly was aware of this design flaw but refused to pay for a redesign. Instead, it was argued, Ford decided it would be cheaper to pay off possible lawsuits for resulting deaths. *Mother Jones* magazine obtained the cost-benefit analysis that it said Ford had used to compare the cost of an \$11 repair against the monetary value of a human life, in what became known as the Ford Pinto memo. The characterization of Ford's design decision as gross disregard for human lives in favor of profits led to significant lawsuits. While Ford was acquitted of criminal charges, it lost several million dollars and gained a reputation for manufacturing "the barbecue that seats four." Was Ford's reasoning in refusing to pay for a redesign an example of utilitarianism? Explain why or why not.
2. Here are three important moral factors that utilitarians have been accused of ignoring: *intentions*, *character*, *individual rights*. Pick one of these factors that you think you could be defended on utilitarian grounds—does it always maximize happiness, for example, to have good intentions?—sketch what the criticism might be, and give your short defense of utilitarian thinking.



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