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A Critique of Bernard Williams'

Recent Challenge to Utilitarianism

by

James Léger

Submitted to the Department of Philosophy

of St. Mary's University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the Degree of Master of Arts

Halifax, Nova Scotia

1980

Members of the Examining Committee
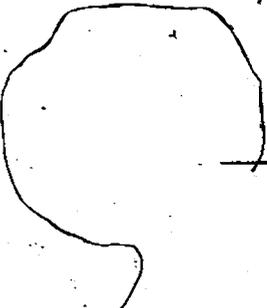
Dr. Rowland C. Marshall

Dr. Arthur P. Monahan

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines B. A. O. Williams'. recent
attack on utilitarianism. It begins by making it clear
just what sort of ethical theory utilitarianism is. Dis-
tinguishing between descriptive, normative, and meta-ethical
theories, it identifies utilitarianism as a normative ethical
theory. Distinguishing teleological from deontological
normative ethical theories, it locates utilitarianism in the
teleological category. It then proceeds to define utilita-
rianism accordingly. In so doing, it provides a clear
contemporary formulation of the utility principle and
considers some traditional and modern defenses of utilita-
rianism which have a direct bearing on Williams' attack.
With the aid of the preceding clarifications and defenses
it then goes on to examine, and in every case find wanting,
Williams' objections to utilitarianism. Williams places
these objections under the following five headings: con-
sequentialism, utilitarianism, negative responsibility,
irrational feelings, and integrity. The examination also
reveals numerous inadequacies in Williams' own position.
Among the more specific issues included in the examination
are the following: Williams' modified denial of conse-
quentialism, his claim that it makes no difference for
consequentialists who produces a state of affairs, the
way in which his odd definition of "utilitarianism" leads
to much more than a verbal dispute, a contradiction in his
conception of the part happiness plays in utilitarianism,
his claim that an agent is specially responsible for what
he does rather than for what other people do, and his
belief that it is misleading to think that one person's
refusal to do something makes another person do something.
Finally, it is shown that Williams begs the question both
in regard to the part which he maintains that "irrational
feelings" ought to play in utility calculations and in
regard to his position that utility requirements ought
never to violate what he calls a person's "integrity".

James Patrick Leger

A Critique of Bernard Williams'
Recent Challenge to Utilitarianism

September 22, 1980

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Preface

Bernard Williams' recent challenge to utilitarianism which contains some new attacks and some interesting reformulations of older attacks warrants close consideration to see if it actually does pertain to utilitarianism as a normative ethical theory, and if so, whether these attacks require that the theory be abandoned or modified. The purpose of this dissertation is to see in what ways, if any, utilitarianism is unable to meet these attacks. As a first step toward achieving our aims, we shall take care to make it reasonably clear what we mean by "utilitiarianism". For as Williams himself points out:

> ...in this subject it is probably more mislead-
> ing not to announce one's terminology, since
> many different technical terms, and different
> uses of the same terms to mark different dis-
> tinctions, have been applied to it, and any
> term one uses will probably turn out to have
> been used by some other writer in a different
> sense.[1]

We shall employ a definition of "utilitarianism" which derives largely from Paul W. Taylor's text, _Principles of Ethics: An Introduction._[2] This definition captures much of what has been understood both past and present under the title "utilitarianism" and as well it provides a reasonably clear working base. Moreover, this definition will be of special use later in the dissertation when we come to criticize Williams' definition of "utilitarianism".

Normative ethics is concerned with both proposals and defenses. Therefore, some defenses of utilitarianism will be

included directly after we have given the principle which utilitarianism proposes as a normative ethical theory. As we shall see, some of these defenses are applicable to certain aspects of Williams' position.

After having presented contemporary utilitarianism as a normative ethical theory and seen its defenses, this dissertation will consider in detail a recent challenge to utilitarianism set forth by Bernard Williams in his now famous debate with J.J.C. Smart. That challenge arises from the moral implications which appear to follow from the notions of consequentialism, utilitarianism, negative responsibility, irrational feelings, and integrity as defined by Williams.

Finally, in our conclusion we shall consider in what ways, if any, utilitarianism is unable to meet Williams' challenge. And if utilitarianism requires modification in order to meet this challenge, we shall suggest ways of so modifying utilitarianism.

Part I. Utilitarianism as a Normative Ethical Theory

1. Ethics: Descriptive, Meta-, and Normative

Since this dissertation is concerned with utilitarianism solely as a normative ethical theory, it must be clearly distinguished from two other sorts of ethical theories, namely, those of descriptive ethics and meta-ethics.

Descriptive ethics consists in the scientific description and explanation of actual morality. It describes how we do think about moral conduct and, therefore, it can be studied empirically. Empirical knowledge of actual morality is sought and obtained through scientific investigation by anthropologists, sociologists, historians, and social psychologists, et al. Actual moral judgments are here described and their causes and effects are investigated.

Meta-ethics has two basic tasks. One task is semantical and the other is logical. The semantical task is concerned with the conceptual analysis of the words and sentences used in moral discourse, while the logical task is concerned with the analysis of the logic of moral reasoning. The logical task studies whether there are methods by which moral judgments can be established as true or false and, if so, what they are. If no such methods are found to exist, it takes up the question whether there are other ways whereby moral judgments might be "established". In order to accomplish its task

it uses the data of normative ethics, both philosophical and pre-philosophical, for its reflection.

In distinction from the essentially descriptive character of both descriptive ethics and meta-ethics, normative ethics is essentially prescriptive. It is concerned with the rational construction of a consistent set of moral norms for all mankind, and it inquires into the rational grounds for justifying a system of such norms. Normative ethics proposes or recommends how we ought to think about moral conduct. The aim is not to describe or explain what moral beliefs people actually have, but to see whether there is a set of standards or rules which any rational person would be justified in adopting as guides to his life. Normative ethics, therefore, consists in making and defending proposals. It proposes fundamental ethical principles on which other ethical principles can be based and it defends these proposals in two basic ways. First, reasons are presented for accepting a proposal, and then, objections to the proposal are answered. As a normatve ethical enterprise, utilitarianism proposes and defends the principle of utility. This principle will be defined later (see Section 4.a.).

It is important to bear carefully in mind the distinction between normative and descriptive ethics and to note that objections to an ethical enterprise as descriptive ethics do not necessarily constitute objections to that enterprise as normative ethics. Thus objections to utilitarianism as a descriptive ethics do not necessarily constitute objections

to what is being proposed in this dissertation since this
dissertation is concerned with utilitarianism as a normative
ethical enterprise. Thus, for example, the objection that
utilitarianism conflicts with "common moral consciousness" in
the sense that it prescribes what "common moral consciousness"
does not, or vice-versa, is an objection against it as a
descriptive enterprise and not as a normative enterprise.
Utilitarianism's failure as a descriptive enterprise can even
be seen as a source of its interest as a possible normative
enterprise: the acceptance of it as a normative enterprise
would have left most men's conduct unchanged if it had been
correct as a descriptive enterprise.

2. Teleology and Deontology

Normative ethical theories are commonly divided into two classes, namely, teleological and deontological ethical theories. Utilitarianism is, as we shall see, a form of teleological ethical theory. However, here again we find that somewhat different descriptions have been given of these sorts of theories; e.g., Narveson and Frankena.[3] We shall employ the descriptions presented by William Frankena in his book, Ethics,[4] because they are reasonably clear and seem to capture much of the common philosophic use of the terms in question.

A teleological ethical theory maintains that "the basic or ultimate criterion or standard of what is morally right, wrong, obligatory, etc., is the nonmoral value that is brought into being."[5] The right, the obligatory, and the morally good are thereby seen as dependent on the nonmoral good in such theories. Hence, one must first know what is good in the nonmoral sense and whether the act in question promotes, or is intended to promote, what is good in this sense in order to know whether something is right, ought to be done, or is morally good. One can therefore understand why such theories are sometimes called "consequentialist". It is because the rightness or wrongness of the action is ultimately determined by the goodness or badness of the action's consequences.

What teleological theories affirm, deontological theories

deny. Deontological theories deny that the morally good, the obligatory, and the right are wholly, whether directly or indirectly, a function of what promotes the greatest balance of nonmoral good over nonmoral evil. They assert that besides the goodness or badness of its consequences there are other considerations that may make an action or rule morally right or obligatory. Thus certain features of the act itself other than the nonmoral value it brings into existence may ultimately determine its moral value. Teleologists believe that the comparative nonmoral value of what is, probably will be, or is intended to be brought into being, is the only ultimate right-making characteristic. Deontologists either insist that there are other ultimate right-making characteristics as well, or deny that this characteristic is right-making at all. A deontologist contends that even if an action or rule of action does not promote the greatest possible balance of nonmoral good over nonmoral evil, it is possible for it to be the morally right or obligatory one. It may be right or obligatory because of its own nature or simply because of some other fact about it. In a deontological ethical theory an action is wrong if it violates a moral rule based on an ultimate principle of duty and it is right if it accords with such a rule.

As we mentioned above, utilitarianism is a kind of teleological ethical theory. Since we have now made it clear what we understand by "a teleological ethical theory", we must turn our attention to what kind of teleological ethical theory it

is.

Teleological ethical theories direct us to perform ac-
tions which produce nonmorally good consequences and/or
avoid nonmorally bad consequences. But now the question
arises: who are to be the beneficiaries of such actions?
The different responses to this question constitute the
different kinds of teleological ethical theory. The kind of
teleological ethical theory in which it is only the agent
himself, the performer of the action, who receives the
benefits produced by the actions is called egoistic. A
teleological ethical theory in which everyone but the agent
receives the benefits produced by the actions is called
altruistic. A teleological ethical theory in which only
a special group of individuals receive the benefits produced
by the actions is called élitist. The kind of teleological
ethical theory in which the benefits produced by the actions
are received by everyone including the agent is called
utilitarian. Thus it is not without reason that Smart dis-
tinguishes benevolence, the primary concern of the utili-
tarian, from altruism. (Smart and Williams, pages 32, 52)

3. Kinds of Utilitarianism

Reflection on the writings of utilitarians, both past and present, has led many twentieth century writers to divide utilitarianism in two different ways, i.e., to produce two different kinds of division of utilitarianism. We must now briefly consider these divisions because, as this dissertation develops, the relevance of one of these divisions will emerge whereas the other division will not be relevant, and we must explain why this is so.

The first division is based on different standards for evaluating the consequences. By asking for the standard of value by which utilitarians judge the nonmoral goodness of the consequences of a morally right action, we are directed to the consideration of three members of this division of utilitarianism. "They are called 'hedonistic utilitarianism' (from the Greek word hedone, meaning pleasure); 'eudaimonistic utilitarianism'(from the Greek word eudaimonia, meaning happiness or well-being); and 'ideal utilitarianism' or 'agathistic utilitarianism' (from the Greek word agathos, meaning good)."[6] The importance of these divisions will emerge in our criticism of certain aspects of Williams' position.

The second division of utilitarianism is based on different ways of evaluating acts. Each member of the division, known respectively as act-utilitarianism and rule-utilitarianism, has its own answer to the question about the nature of moral rules of conduct. Not surprisingly, since both mem-

bers claim the title "utilitarian", both accept the principle of utility as the ultimate test of the rightness or wrongness of human conduct. However, act-utilitarians apply the principle of utility directly to particular acts, whereas rule-utilitarians restrict the application of the principle of utility to rules of conduct and have those rules determine whether a particular act is right or wrong. It is a fact about the consequences of a particular action that constitutes for the act-utilitarian the moral reason for, or against, the action. In contrast, the logical process of moral reasoning is for the rule-utilitarian a two stage affair: first, rules of conduct are evaluated by appeal to the principle of utility, and then the relevant rule(s) which has (have) passed the utility test is (are) applied to the particular case in question. A rule-utilitarian's moral reason for, or against, an action would be that the action is in accord with (or not in accord with) a rule(s) grounded on the principle of utility.

Because it is often difficult or impossible to predict the consequences of alternative ways of acting, and also because the agent often does not have time to consider such consequences adequately, both act-utilitarians and rule-utilitarians recognize the value of moral rules. They differ in regard to the status which they would attribute to such rules. Thus the act-utilitarian regards these rules simply as rules-of-thumb, i.e., as rules which an individual agent should generally follow, but which may be overturned in particular cases as the result of a direct application of the

utility principle. The rule-utilitarian, on the other hand, regards such rules as absolutes in the sense that, assuming the rules are justified by the utility principle, everyone ought always to obey them.[7]

There has been much debate over the distinction between act-utilitarianism and rule-utilitarianism. Carl Wellman points out, for example, that rule-utilitarianism can only be significantly distinguished from act-utilitarianism at the price of inconsistencey. Thus he observes:

> To many philosophers this theory is inconsistent because it both accepts and rejects utility as the ultimate moral criterion. It holds that the right act in any given situation conforms to a moral rule which is part of a set of moral rules that maximizes utility. Now the obvious way for a set of moral rules to maximize utility is for the rules to require in each and every situation the act that produces more good or less bad than any other act possible under the circumstances. But if the set of moral rules requires the most useful act in every situation, then it will turn out to justify exactly the same acts, including stealing from the rich and punishing the innocent, that act-utilitarianism justifies. It would then lose its advantage over that more traditional form of utilitarianism. Presumably, then, the moral rules contemplated under rule-utilitarianism will sometimes require the agent to act in ways that do not maximize the utilities possible in the situation. It is at just this point that its critics charge rule-utilitarianism with inconsistency. On the one hand, rule-utilitarianism asserts that the justified set of moral rules is the set that will maximize utility. On the other hand, it asserts that the justified set of moral rules will require acts that do not maximize utility. Thus it appears both to accept and to reject utility as the ultimate standard of right action.[8]

In a similar vein, David Lyons maintains that whatever would lead an act-utilitarian to break a rule would lead a rule-

utilitarian to modify the rule.[9] This is to say that act-utilitarianism and rule-utilitarianism are extentionally equivalent. Since we agree with both Wellman and Lyons that rule-utilitarianism is either inconsistent or for all practical purposes equivalent to act-utilitarianism, we shall not give separate treatment to each. The arguments against utilitarianism which we shall consider apply to both for the reason just stated.

4. Utilitarianism and Its Defenses

(a) The Principle of Utility

The principle of utility may be defined as follows: an act is morally right if and only if, it brings about, or is intended to bring about at least as great a balance of non-moral good over evil for all conscious beings who are affected by it as any other possible alternative and wrong if it does not. This definition of the utility principle has been chosen because it is reasonable clear, in the context of what has thus far been presented, and it captures much of the common philosophic use of the term. The phrase "all conscious beings who are affected by it" has been selected in preference to such misleading phrases as Bentham's "the happiness of the party whose interest is in question" — misleading because this expression could apply to egoism or élitism as well — and to such vague phrases as Frankena's "the world as a whole" because such expressions leave it unclear exactly what is to be included in "the world" (e.g., trees?). The phrase, as both Sidgwick and Smart insist, is intended to include not only all human beings, but also all sentient beings.

(b) Defenses

Earlier in this dissertation it was maintained that ethics as a normative ethical enterprise not only proposes a fundamental principle, or principles, such as the principle of utility, but also defends its proposal(s), both by pre-

senting reasons for accepting the proposal(s) and by answering objections to the proposal(s). Therefore, since we are examining utilitarianism as such an enterprise, we must consider its defenses. However, completeness is not the only reason, nor indeed the most important reason, for such a considera-tion. Rather it is because of the relevance of certain of these defenses to certain attacks of Williams against utili-tarianism that we must consider these defenses. For example, it will become apparent later that Williams' "new" challenge of integrity has much in common with the principle of sympathy and antipathy whose deficiencies were pointed out long ago by Jeremy Bentham. Let us then consider these defenses of utilitarianism.

Bentham presents three main reasons in defense of utilitarianism. First, utilitarianism is often misunderstood in any of these possible ways: it may be simply misunderstood; it may be only partly understood; or people may fail to understand how to apply the principle of utility properly. Secondly, opponents often unwittingly presuppose the principle of utility in the very arguments they use against it. Thirdly, the principle of utility is the only acceptable moral principle of the trichotomy which is composed of the principle of utility, the principle of asceticism, and the principle of sympathy and antipathy.

His defense of this latter point is as follows. By considering all fundamental moral principles under three headings and then showing two of them to be unacceptable Bentham in-

directly defends the utility principle. Thus he holds there
to be but two ways in which a principle may differ from the
utility principle. "1. By being constantly opposed to it:
this is the case with a principle which may be termed the
principle of asceticism. 2. By being sometimes opposed to
it, and sometimes not, as it may happen: this is the case
with another, which may be termed the principle of sympathy
and antipathy."[10] The purpose of Bentham's principle of
utility is to maximize pleasure and minimize pain, whereas
the purpose of the principle of asceticism is to maximize
pain and minimize pleasure. It is Bentham's position that if
the principle of asceticism was consistently pursued by even
a small fraction of the earth's inhabitants, say one tenth,
then the earth would no longer be a tolerable place in which
to live. Moreover, he believes the principle of asceticism
is at bottom but the principle of utility misapplied. Thus
he states:

> The principle of asceticism seems originally
> to have been the reverie of certain hasty
> speculators, who having perceived, or fancied,
> that certain pleasures, when reaped in certain
> circumstances, have, at the long run, been
> attended with pains more than equivalent to
> them, took occasion to quarrel with everything
> that offered itself under the name of pleasure.
> Having then got thus far, and having forgot
> the point which they set out from, they pushed
> on, and went so much further as to think it
> meritorious to fall in love with pain.[11]

Not only does Bentham hold that the principle of sympathy and
antipathy is not a positive principle, he considers it to sig-
nify the negation of all principle. This is because the said
"principle" simply presents each of the internal sentiments

of approbation and disapprobation as a standard and ground for itself, whereas what one would expect to find in a principle is some external determinant which would guide the internal sentiments. Having, therefore, no objective external standard whereby to judge the "recommendations" of the internal sentiments, and particularly conflicting recommendations arising from different agents' internal sentiments, ultimate ethical disagreement in the sense of disagreement allowing for no rational solution becomes possible whereas such disagreement is not possible for those who accept an objective external standard such as the utility principle.

Mill defends the principle of utility by presenting two additional reasons for accepting it. First, it is not really much of an objection against utilitarianism to say that there is usually not time, previous to an action, for calculating and weighing the effects of any line of conduct on the general happiness of mankind. For there has been ample time, namely, the whole past experience of mankind. The utilitarian is, therefore, able to use at least rules-of-thumb generated via the experience of mankind.[12] Moreover, to the degree that this objection does present a problem, it presents what is a problem for any ethical theory. Secondly, Mill draws attention to the fact that common sense morality pretends to be infallible whereas it really is fallible. Utilitarianism does not claim to be infallible, yet because it appeals to empirical science it is stronger than common sense morality. Therefore, when someone objects to certain aspects of utili-

tarianism on the ground that they conflict with our "ordinary or common sense moral view" they may be begging the question because that view is not infallible.

J.J.C. Smart proposes and defends utilitarianism from the meta-ethical point of view of a non-cognitivist. We shall complete Part One by considering some of Smart's defenses and the nature of non-cognitivism since non-cognitivism is the meta-ethical position being assumed in this dissertation. According to this view, ultimate ethical principles depend on our ultimate attitudes, feelings, or preferences. Though clear-headed disagreement about ultimate moral preferences is a definite possibility, non-cognitivists nevertheless believe it important to present the resulting normative ethical system in a consistent and lucid manner, and in such a way as to show how objections can be met. Smart's concern is not, as we have just indicated, to prove utilitarianism to be the correct ethical position. Rather his concern is to state utilitarianism in a form in which it may appear persuasive to some, hopefully to many, people. It is not an objection to utilitarianism that it will not be accepted by everybody or even by all philosophically clear-headed people. For, as Smart himself admits, there just may not be any ethical system which appeals to all people or even to the same person in different moods. (Smart and Williams, pages 72, 73)

His chief persuasive argument in favour of utilitarianism is: "that the dictates of any deontological ethics will always,

on some occasion, lead to the existence of misery that could, on utilitarian principles, have been prevented". (Smart and Williams, page 62) This is a persuasive type of argument which is convincing to those people who have the welfare of humanity at heart and these are the people to whom a non-cognitivist utilitarian is appealing.

Part II.   Some Recent Challenges by Bernard Williams

5. Consequentialism

In this second part of the dissertation we shall again
move from more general to more specific issues. Thus we shall
begin with Williams' attack on utilitarianism as a species
within the genus of consequentialism for Williams maintains
that some of the unacceptable features of utilitarianism
can be traced to the fact that it is a kind of consequential-
ism. Then we shall examine Williams' other attacks which
pertain to utilitarianism as such. These will include
what amounts to an attack by Williams on the very definition
of "utilitarianism" as well as various attacks on what he
takes to be implications of utilitarianism. These will appear
under such headings as "negative responsibility", "irrational
feelings", and "integrity".

Let us begin by seeing what it is that Williams is gener-
ally against, i.e., consequentialism. Consequentialism, ac-
cording to Williams, is the doctrine that the moral value of
an act is to be determined solely in virtue of the conse-
quences produced by the act. The relation of this concep-
tion of "consequentialism" to our definition of "teleology"
is obvious. What is not obvious, however, is the way in
which Williams wants to oppose consequentialism. For he
distinguishes a modified denial of consequentialism from an

extreme denial of it. He wants to show both what is and what is not necessarily involved in this sort of denial of consequentialism. The extreme denial of consequentialism maintains that we should always do, or never do, certain actions "whatever the consequences" of the actions may happen to be. In Part One we spoke of this as deontology. But it is Williams' view that the extreme denial is much stronger than necessary to deny consequentialism. All that is involved with respect to his denial of consequentialism is that there are some situations in which the right thing to do would be that which would produce a state of affairs worse than some other accessible state of affairs. This is a modified denial of consequentialism. When we look for the reasoning which led Williams to support this moderate position we find only the following: "while not being a consequentialist...it is always possible to think of some situation in which the consequences of doing the action so specified would be so awful that it would be right to do something else". (Smart and Williams, page 90) But why would the fact that the consequences were "so awful" have anything to do with the determination of the moral rightness of the action, at least in the case of one who denies consequentialism? If Williams replies that this denial still allows him to maintain that in some cases consequences do provide the ultimate moral determinant while in other cases they do not, then in order to avoid arbitrariness he must provide us with a criterion, or criteria, for distinguishing the two sorts of cases.

Williams further clarifies his conception of the distinc-
tion between consequentialism and non-consequentialism by
showing the possible difference in the relation between "the
good" and "the right" for these two kinds of ethical theory.
Thus for consequentialists the moral rightness of the action
is always determined by the nonmoral goodness of the state
of affairs which it brings into existence. For non-conse-
quentialists, however, it is sometimes the moral rightness
of the act which determines the moral goodness of the state
of affairs which is brought into existence, i.e., the state
of affairs derives its goodness precisely from the rightness
of the act itself.

A problem arises in his attempt to render more precise the
distinction between consequentialism and non-consequentialism.
After proceeding through his three-step process of rendering
the distinction more precise, he concludes that it is a
peculiar feature of consequentialism in general and utilitar-
ianism in particular that there is an emphasis on the neces-
sary comparability of situations. This simply means that the
only way a consequentialist knows which act is right is by
comparing consequences to see which act will maximize the
desired standard of value. But this is no more a peculiar
feature of utilitarianism than it is a peculiar feature of
egoism, altruism, or élitism. Moreover, it is not clear in
what sense "the necessary comparability of situations" is an
argument against utilitarianism. If it is because this is
sometimes very difficult, then it is not a good argument

since there is sufficient reason to do difficult things in
morality. Consider the contrary view in which there is no
need to compare situations and we just blindly in all rele-
vant cases keep promises, tell the truth, etc. The following
(Williams' position) is the result:

> Thus a non-consequentialist can hold both that
> it is a better state of affairs in which more
> people keep their promises, and that the right
> thing for X to do is something which brings it
> about that fewer promises are kept. Moreover,
> it is very obvious what view of things goes
> with holding that. It is one in which, even
> though from some abstract point of view one
> state of affairs is better than another, it
> does not follow that a given agent should
> regard it as his business to bring it about,
> even though it is open to him to do so.
> More than that, it might be that he could
> not properly regard it as his business. If
> the goodness of the world were to consist in
> people's fulfilling their obligations, it
> would by no means follow that one of my
> obligations was to bring it about that
> other people kept their obligations. (Smart
> and Williams, page 89)

Such a position goes against the very reason for the existence
of morality. The position maintained in this dissertation
is that morality is made for man and not that man is made for
morality, whereas for Williams the opposite appears to be true.
Williams' position amounts to a kind of rule-worship, whereas
we maintain that our fundamental moral obligation is to pro-
duce the best possible world in which to live and that rules
are acceptable only in so far as compliance with them contri-
butes to such a world. Though Williams may be prepared to
"live with" the position expressed in the above quotation, we
are not because it is irrational in the sense of recommending
that we at times make the world worse by introducing more

over-all evil than good into it. Finally, the necessary com-
parability of situations may also be an argument for utili-
tarianism insofar as it offers the consequentialist a way
out of his dilemma when his "absolutes", or "projects",
conflict.

A further claim that Williams makes against consequen-
tialism is that it makes no difference according to conse-
quentialism as to which agent produces a state of affairs.
This is to say that it makes no difference which one of agents
A, B, or C, etc. produces a state of affairs and it also
makes no difference if the state of affairs is produced by
agent A through the intervention of agents B and/or C, et
cetera. But this is a very odd objection since, as it stands,
it could be said of any normative ethical theory including
deontological or non-consequentialist ones. It is a foolish
objection because a normative ethical theory simply recommends
what one should do: it does not say which one. The context
in which such a theory is considered assumes agency, res-
ponsibility, praise, blame, freedom, and many other things.
Presumably if it does not matter who brings it about, it does
not matter who fails to bring it about. But, contrary to
Williams, there are at least two reasons to support the view
that there is a sense in which it matters who produces or
fails to produce the state of affairs. First, there is the
difference as to who receives the praise or blame for causing
or not causing the state of affairs. Second, if we are refer-
ring to several states of affairs of the same kind, e.g., in-

juries to persons, then our judgment of a person's character
may be affected by our view of whether he caused them or not.
Of. course, these reasons imply that Williams' notion of "con-
sequentialism" is not restricted only to actual, or likely
results, but also includes intended results. If this is not
true of "consequentialism", then "consequentialism" differs
from teleology in that respect. We therefore would reject
it as inadequate and would replace it with teleology as for-
mulated in Part One. For according to the position maintained
in this dissertation, utilitarianism is a kind of teleology
and teleological theories take account of intended results
as well as actual results.

6. Utilitarianism

In this section we will examine Williams' challenges to utilitarianism as such. We will first consider his definition of "utilitarianism" both in order to see clearly what it is that Williams believes himself to be attacking and in order to see whether any problems arise from his conception of "utilitarianism". Then we shall consider his view that utilitarianism cannot "fit in" some values which other people think are seriously connected with human life. This will be directly followed by consideration of an important difference which Williams emphasizes between himself and Smart. This difference concerns certain characteristics of utilitarianism and involves Smart's reply to the problem of the "fitting in" of justice. Next, we shall analyze Williams' conception of the part happiness plays in utilitarianism since there seems to be a contradiction within that conception. Finally, this section will be brought to a close with some observations on Williams' insistence on the moral priority of the immediate.

Problems arise from Williams' definition of "utilitarianism" because it is both too broad and too narrow. He defines "utilitarianism" to be one sort of consequentialism, the sort specifically concerned with happiness. (Smart and Williams, page 79) Thus Williams states: "I shall use the word 'utilitarianism' indeed to mean 'eudaimonistic-consequentialism'". (Smart and Williams, page 90) But in Part One of this dissertation it was made clear that utilitarianism is but one kind

of teleology — or as Williams would say consequentialism.
Thus his definition of "utilitarianism" (= consequentialism)
includes egoism, altruism, and élitism as well as utilitar-
ianism. It is in that sense too broad. In addition, his
concern is limited to the eudaimonistic standard for evalu-
ating the consequences. But in Part One we also made it
clear that the division of utilitarianism based on different
standards for evaluating the consequences had not one but
three sub-divisions: hedonistic, eudaimonistic, and ideal
or agathistic. His definition of "utilitarianism" is in
this sense too narrow.

Moreover, Williams' definition of "utilitarianism"
causes the following problems which are far more significant
than a mere verbal dispute. First, while we have granted
that there are some differences in the understanding of
these terms in present day philosophy, Williams' radical
departure from the more common uses of these terms is more
likely to mislead than to lead. And he provides no good rea-
son for taking such a risk. Moreover, since his definition
allows us to include what we would call egoism, his attacks
on "utilitarianism" in a curious way attack his own position
because this position, in contrast to utilitarianism, would
have us seek happiness via commitments solely to one's own
projects. Secondly, as the result of Williams speaking of
"utilitarianism" rather than eudaimonistic-utilitarianism,
one is led to think utilitarianism must answer all his ob-
jections. And this is not the case since his formulation

implies that he is not challenging hedonistic-utilitarianism or agathistic-utilitarianism. Finally, his formulation would exclude Moore and possibly even Bentham from being classed as utilitarians, since Moore, for example, maintains that at least two other kinds of things are good in themselves — beauty and friendship.[13]

The fundamental point of much of Williams' criticism of utilitarianism is grounded in his basic criterion for acceptability of a moral theory. This basic criterion of acceptability is determined by what one is prepared to "live with", and our decision in this regard will be based on the implications of utilitarianism "for one's views of human nature, and action, other people and society". (Smart and Williams, page 78) It is his view that utilitarian requirements are too much against human nature. But he appears, by his definition of "utilitarianism", to accuse every kind of utilitarian as maintaining that the only thing in life worthwhile in itself is making people happy — eudaimonistic-consequentialism — and therefore as having a deficient theory of human nature and human motivation. Our reply is that we are not prepared to "live with" his excluding hedonistic-utilitarians and ideal or agathistic-utilitarians from utilitarianism, that is, we agree with him that making people happy is not necessarily the only worthwhile thing in life.

Another objection raised by Williams against utilitarianism is that utilitarianism is unable to accommodate or "fit in" "certain other values which people either more or less

optimistic than Smart might consider to have something ser-
iously to do with human life". (Smart and Williams, page 82)
We assume that by "fitting in" other values with utilitarian-
ism he means one can hold all of them simultaneously. Wil-
liams seems to assume these other values ought to "fit in".
But whether justice ought in all cases to "fit in" would
appear to beg the question. We shall return to this question
shortly. And in regard to integrity, we will let the reader
decide, after he has seen the section on integrity, whether
or not integrity ought always to be "fitted in". Moreover,
there are many sorts of values which are seriously connected
with human life such as: aesthetic values, sports values,
cooking values, et cetera. Must utilitarianism or any other
moral theory always accommodate all of these?

Let us now consider Smart's reply to the problem of "fit-
ting in" justice with utilitarianism. When Williams maintains
that utilitarianism has certain implications which he and
many other people would not want to "live with", he is allu-
ding, among other things, to perhaps the best known objection
to utilitarianism, namely, that utilitarianism implies that
under certain conditions we ought to be unjust. Smart res-
ponds with the following admission: "Even in my most utili-
tarian moods I am not happy about this consequence of utili-
tarianism". (Smart and Williams, page 71) But he then adds
that we should not fail to consider that the injustice al-
lowed in the utilitarian solution, when it does arise, is the
lesser of two evils whereas the non-consequentialist position

is also unpalatable, for it would have us choose in some circumstances the greater of two evils.

A contradiction emerges in Williams' conception of the part happiness-plays in utilitarianism. Thus Williams speaks of a kind of utilitarian who is disturbed by "the mention of other people's interest". (Smart and Williams, page 111) Yet he states that utilitarianism would do well to recognize that other things besides "making other people happy" make people happy. (Smart and Williams, page 112) But how is it possible for one simultaneously to willingly devote his whole life to making other people happy and to be disturbed at the mention of their interests? Furthermore, the only kind of consequentialist who would necessarily be disturbed by the mention of another's interest would be an egoist and not a utilitarian. On the other hand, the only kind of consequentialist concerned only with making other people happy would be an altruist and not a utilitarian. Moreover, if Williams' assertion about what makes people happy is to apply as an objection to utilitarianism rather than to altruism, then it must be modified. Thus Williams ought to maintain that something besides making people happy makes people happy. But Henry Sidgwick replied to this objection long ago when he observed: "...it is not necessary that the end which gives the criterion of rightness should always be the end at which we consciously aim".[14]

Finally, we wish to consider briefly Williams' insistence on the moral priority of the immediate as opposed to utili-

tarian calculation. Thus he remarks:

> Of course, time and circumstances are un-
> likely to make a grounded decision, in Jim's
> case at least, possible. It might not even
> be decent. Instead of thinking in a rational
> and systematic way either about utilities or
> about the value of human life, the relevance
> of the people at risk being present, and so
> forth, the presence of the people at risk may
> just have its effect. The significance of
> the immediate should not be underestimated.
> Philosophers, not only utilitarian ones,
> repeatedly urge one to view the world <u>sub</u>
> <u>specie aeternitatis</u>, but for most human
> purposes that is not a good <u>species</u> to view
> it under. If we are not agents of the uni-
> versal satisfaction system, we are not pri-
> marily janitors of any system of values,
> even our own: very often, we just act, as a
> possibly confused result of the situation in
> which we are engaged. That, I suspect, is
> very often an exceedingly good thing. (Smart
> and Williams, page 118)

Our response to this view is twofold. First, utilitarians

have always admitted that "time and circumstances" may often

not allow for much calculation. But, as we have seen in Part

One, Mill pointed out that mankind has had a long time to

"calculate", and even act-utilitarians have rules-of-thumb.

Secondly, because much of what should concern us morally

takes place beyond the limited range of the immediate,

Williams' insistence on the moral priority of the immediate

to the point of maintaining that a grounded decision in Jim's

case "might not even be decent" borders on the irresponsible

(cf. responsibility, page 38).

7. Negative Responsibility

Another objection raised by Williams against utilitarianism is that it entails what he calls "negative responsibility". Since this is a new objection, we shall consider it in some detail.

Williams defines, and partly explains, "negative responsibility" in the following passage:

> It is because consequentialism attaches
> value ultimately to states of affairs,
> and its concern is with what states of
> affairs the world contains, that it es-
> sentially involves the notion of nega-
> tive responsibility: that if I am ever
> responsible for anything, then I must
> be just as much responsible for things
> that I allow or fail to prevent, as I
> am for things that I myself, in the
> more everyday restricted sense, bring
> about. (Smart and Williams, page 95) .

He further claims that since according to consequentialism the state of affairs alone matters, it does not matter whether I alone or I together with other agents produce it. (Smart and Williams, page 94) And he claims, for the same reason, that it does not matter whether I or some other agent(s) produce(s) it. (Smart and Williams, pages 95-96)

We agree with Williams that, in one sense, "it does not matter" who produced the state of affairs in question. For that state of affairs is what it is regardless of who produced it, e.g., the death of ten people. But we disagree with Williams that, in another sense, "it does not matter" who produced the state of affairs in question. Thus in so far as who gets the praise or blame for producing the state of

affairs, it does matter who produced it because the world is not, by the nature of the case, the same when one person gets the praise or blame rather than another person. Moreover, if one person rather than another gets the praise or blame for an act, that person's behavior will be affected and not, ordinarily, the other person's behavior. Hence again the state of affairs will be different. Recall that our definition of the utility principle in Part One referred to "all affected", and this includes the agent.

At one point Williams objects to utilitarianism on the ground that it conflicts "with ordinary moral thought". (Smart and Williams, page 105) Yet the position taken by Williams regarding negative responsibility surely conflicts with "ordinary moral thought". For consider the following example: a baby is crawling toward water in which the baby will drown. Let it be the case that the father pushes the baby into the water and the baby drowns. In this case the father has positive responsibility for the baby's death. On the other hand, it is a case of negative responsibility if the father fails to prevent the baby from crawling into the water and drowning when the father knows perfectly well what is happening and could prevent it. Our "ordinary moral view" would say something like "that is just the same as if he pushed him in". Here Williams' position conflicts with "ordinary moral thought". And if, as Williams has maintained, such a conflict constitutes an objection to a moral position, then he certainly has a problem.

Finally, we might note Williams has pointed out that the ultimate basis upon which one accepts or rejects a moral system or principle is what one is prepared to "live with". (Smart and Williams, page 78) Since negative responsibility reflects ordinary moral thought, apparently very many people are prepared to "live with" this aspect of utilitarianism.

As an aid toward the clarification of certain aspects of negative responsibility, Williams presents in detail two examples. Since the details are important, summarizing these examples is likely to distort and mislead rather than to convey what it is that Williams wants to convey. Hence we shall present these examples as Williams presented them.

> (1) George, who has just taken his Ph.D.
> in chemistry, finds it extremely difficult
> to get a job. He is not very robust in
> health, which cuts down the number of jobs
> he might be able to do satisfactorily. His
> wife has to go out to work to keep them,
> which itself causes a great deal of strain,
> since they have small children and there
> are severe problems about looking after
> them. The results of all this, especially
> on the children, are damaging. An older
> chemist, who knows about this situation,
> says he can get George a decently paid
> job in a certain laboratory, which pursues
> research into chemical and biological
> warfare. George says that he cannot
> accept this, since he is opposed to chemi-
> cal and biological warfare. The older man
> replies that he is not too keen on it him-
> self, come to that, but after all George's
> refusal is not going to make the job or the
> laboratory go away; what is more, he happens
> to know that if George refuses the job, it
> will certainly go to a contemporary of
> George's who is not inhibited by any such
> scruples and is likely if appointed to
> push along the research with greater zeal
> than George would. Indeed, it is not
> merely concern for George and his family,

but (to speak frankly and in confidence)
some alarm about this other man's excess
of zeal, which has led the older man to
offer to use his influence to get George
the job...George's wife, to whom he is
deeply attached, has views (the details
of which need not concern us) from which
it follows that at least there is nothing
particularly wrong with research into
CBW. What should he do?
(2) Jim finds himself in the central
square of a small South American town.
Tied up against the wall are a row of
twenty Indians, most terrified, a few
defiant, in front of them several armed
men in uniform. A heavy man in a sweat-
stained khaki shirt turns out to be the
captain in charge and, after a good deal
of questioning of Jim which established
that he got there by accident while on a
botanical expedition, explains that the
Indians are a random group of the inhabi-
tants who, after recent acts of protest
against the government, are just about to
be killed to remind other possible pro-
testors of the advantages of not protesting.
However, since Jim is an honoured visitor
from another land, the captain is happy to
offer him a guest's privilege of killing
one of the Indians himself. If Jim accepts,
then as a special mark of the occasion,
the other Indians will be let off. Of
course, if Jim refuses, then there is no
special occasion, and Pedro here will do
what he was about to do when Jim arrived,
and kill them all.. Jim, with some des-
perate recollection of schoolboy fiction,
wonders whether if he got hold of a gun,
he could hold the captain, Pedro and the
rest of the soldiers to threat, but it
is quite clear from the set-up that noth-
ing of that kind is going to work: any
attempt at that sort of thing will mean
that all the Indians will be killed, and
himself. The men against the wall, and
the other villagers, understand the situa-
tion, and are obviously begging him to
accept. What should he do? (Smart and
Williams, pages 97-99)

Despite this lengthy presentation, certain limitations

of these two examples are important to what we have to say

about them. Williams himself admits that they may beg as
many questions as they illuminate. He states two ways in
which examples in moral philosophy tend to beg important
questions. First, they arbitrarily cut off and restrict
courses of action. Second, we are presented with the situa-
tion as a going concern, and questions are cut off about
(a) how the agent got into this situation and (b) moral con-
siderations which might arise from how the agent got into
this situation. Williams goes on to say we must rework the
examples in richer and less question begging form if we find
them cripplingly defective.

Williams states that the utilitarian replies to the prob-
lems raised by his examples are that George should take the
job and Jim should kill the Indian. But it is well known
that in ethics, as in politics, two people may accept the
same principles but not necessarily draw the same conclusion
about what course of action ought to be pursued. This is
because they assess the situation in question differently.
Thus, for example, two deontologists may accept as a moral
principle the rule that promises are to be kept and still
prescribe different courses of action because different
assessments have been made as to whether or not a promise was,
in fact, made. And, as Carl Wellman points out, utilitarians
are in a similar predicament: agreement on the utility prin-
ciple does not guarantee prescriptive agreement in particu-
lar cases.[15]

Williams goes on to say that, provided the situations are

essentially as described and there are no further special fac-
tors, the answers he has given are for utilitarians <u>obviously</u>
the right answers. But, as the examples are given, i.e., in
their restricted state, utilitarian reactions and Williams'
reaction are indeed much the same. The solution to George's
problem is no more obvious to utilitarians than it is to
Williams and Williams says it is not obvious that George
should take the job. Hence, some utilitarians might favour,
and others oppose, George's taking the job. On the other
hand, it is interesting to note that, in arriving at a solu-
tion to the problem presented in Jim's case, Williams him-
self, while continuing to claim that it is not obvious that
one ought to kill one Indian, in the stated circumstances,
in order to save nineteen Indians, nevertheless finds him-
self unable to disagree with the "obvious" utilitarian solu-
tion in spite of the fact that he believes that " each one
of us is specially responsible for what <u>he</u> does, rather than
for what other people do". (Smart and Williams, page 99)
One wonders just what the basis for such an agreement could
be: surely not a utilitarian basis. But if not, then what is
it? Williams does not tell us. Of course if we find these
examples "cripplingly defective", then by Williams' own au-
thorization we may free them from the restrictions he has
placed upon them. But if additions were made to the examples,
almost any moral conclusion by persons holding any moral prin-
ciples can be envisioned depending on what additions are made.

Finally, we might inquire why the solution to George's

problem is not obvious — even to utilitarians. The reason is
that our ingrained moral beliefs, even those whose utility is
not in doubt, may at times conflict. Consider the examples of
George: (1) it is wrong to kill via CBW because of the extent
of the damage, and (2) it is right to earn a living and help
your wife and children, et cetera; these are two conflicting
utilities. If either of these utilities were present alone,
then George would know what to do. But when they are pre-
sented together, as they are in the George example, we en-
counter an extraordinary (extra-ordinary) situation. Because
of the circumstances it is not obvious what to do. In regard
to Jim's case, it is true that a conflict between our moral
beliefs also occurs, i.e., between a belief that we ought not
to kill people and a belief that we ought to save lives. But
the solution to our problem turns out to be fairly obvious be-
cause the peculiar circumstances of the case happen to allow
the clear quantitative difference of the same value to make
it obvious, i.e., one versus twenty.

Focusing on what he perceives to be another aspect of a
fairly common conception of "responsibility", Williams con-
structs another objection to negative responsibility. Thus
he observes:

> A feature of utilitarianism is that it cuts
> out a kind of consideration which for some
> others makes a difference to what they feel
> about such cases: a consideration involving
> the idea, as we might first and very simply
> put it, that each of us is specially respon-
> sible for what he does, rather than for what
> other people do. (Smart and Williams, page 99)

But if it is true that each of us is "specially responsible

for what _he_ does", why is it true? Is it not because I can control what I do and do not do? And is it not because I cannot control what others do that I am not specially responsible for what they do? But it is obvious that I can, in certain cases, control to a degree what others do. Therefore I am to that degree specially responsible for what happens. For we often talk about greater and less responsibility for what others do. And in the case we are now considering, it is clear that Jim can to a degree control what Pedro does. Therefore, he is to a degree specially responsible for what happens. Moreover, what is the purpose of fostering the feeling of responsibility? Why do we want people to feel responsible for what they do? It is because we think that if we develop people who are responsible, they will perform actions which will produce a better world. Now surely in the case we have before us (with all its built-in restrictions) it is obvious that the world will be better as the result of actions which cause the death of only one person as opposed to actions which would cause the death of twenty persons.

Considering yet another aspect of the example of Jim in South America, Williams raises a further objection to negative responsibility. Thus he speaks of there being no acceptable sense in which Jim's refusal would _make_ Pedro shoot the Indians for this would leave Pedro out of the picture in his essential role of one who has intentions and projects of his own.

Even without "reworking" Williams' examples there is a
perfectly good English sense of "make" whereby to say in the
Jim-Pedro context that if Jim chooses not to kill one Indian
then Jim made Pedro kill all twenty Indians. For "make" may
mean "cause" in the sense of placing a necessary, but not
sufficient, condition for an event to occur. Indeed it is
precisely because Pedro has these particular "intentions and
projects" — and Jim knows that he has these — that if Jim
were to choose not to kill one Indian, it would make perfect-
ly good sense in English (indeed it would be true) to say
that Jim made Pedro shoot the Indians. Perhaps what has
occurred here is that Williams has confused a second sense
of "make" with the sense of "make" to which we have just re-
ferred. This latter sense of "make" means "cause" in the
sense that the efficient cause in question is both necessary
and sufficient for the event to occur. Applying this sense
of "make" in the description of one human being acting on
another implies that the agent has total control of the situ-
ation and thereby forces the person acted on to do whatever
it is that is done. And, of course, Jim does not do this to
Pedro. But then no one would have said or implied that he
did, if one were to say that Jim made Pedro shoot the Indian.

Williams points out that negative responsiblity is just
one more aspect of the utilitarian's "boundless obligation"
to improve the world. (Smart and Williams, pages 109-110)
He also speaks of the utilitarian's "unlimited responsibility"
to act for the best as just another aspect of the determina-

tion to an indefinite degree of one's decisions by other people's projects. (Smart and Williams, page 115) But responding to the charge that utilitarianism places such "boundless obligation", and therefore "unlimited responsibility", on moral agents and hence creates an inhuman situation wherein, because of such demanding moral requirements, one can never relax, Smart remarks:

> The first (reply) is that perhaps what we
> ordinarily think is false. Perhaps a ra-
> tional investigation would lead us to the
> conclusion that we should relax much less
> than we do. The second reply is that act-
> utilitarian premises do not entail that
> we should never relax. Maybe relaxing and
> doing a few good works today increases
> threefold our capacity to do good works
> tomorrow. (Smart and Williams, page 55)

8. Irrational Feelings

Having completed his examination of the proper utili-
tarian replies to the problems he has raised — replies
based on considerations of the more immediate or direct
effects of possible courses of action — Williams goes on to
examine the question whether or not considerations of certain
more remote or indirect effects of these same possible courses
of action might be sufficient to alter the utilitarian deci-
sions which would be arrived at by paying attention only to
the former kinds of effects, i.e., only to the more immediate
or direct effects. In particular, he considers possible re-
mote psychological effects on a person's behavior. Williams
introduces such considerations because he believes that there
might be some utilitarians who would want to hold that George
should not take the job or even possibly that Jim should not
kill the Indian, but who, nevertheless, would be rationally
unable to do so if they limited their considerations to the
immediate or direct effects of possible courses of action.

The kind of utilitarian whom Williams has in mind may
want to claim that the psychological effects on an agent,
e.g., Jim or George, after he has taken one course of action
rather than another may, in fact, be bad enough to cancel
out what was initially considered to be the utility advan-
tage of the former course of action. Thus consider the
case in which an agent will feel so badly over what he has
done because he will have violated one of his moral beliefs

in order to secure another that his subsequent conduct will become increasingly irrational and his relations with others seriously impaired. Taking this anticipated effect into account in his utility calculations, a particular utilitarian may want to argue that George should not take the job or even that Jim should not kill the Indian. But, according to Williams, a utilitarian agent who aspires to be purely rational ought not to take such "irrational" feelings into account in his utility calculations. Such feeling are called "irrational" by Williams precisely because they stand in direct opposition to the course of action recommended by the principle which provides the rational foundation for any course of action which is proper for a utilitarian to pursue, namely, the principle of utility. Hence if a utilitarian has, in a given situation, calculated, according to the utility principle, that in order to secure one of his moral beliefs another must be sacrificed, then any bad feelings that may be anticipated to occur as the result of such a sacrifice ought not themselves to be allowed to enter into his utility calculations, but, on the contrary, they ought to be excluded because they might move the agent in a direction opposed to that required by the utility principle.

Williams has indeed presented an ingenious objection. However, closer inspection will reveal that he has also begged the question. For he has defined the feelings in question as "irrational" because he claims that such feelings go against recommendations based on the utility prin-

ciple. But, according to our description of the utility prin-
ciple, how does that principle arrive at its recommendations?
Recall our definition of the utility principle: an act is
morally right if/and only if, it brings about, or is inten-
ded to bring about at least as great a balance of nonmoral
good over evil for all conscious beings who are affected by
it as any other possible alternative and wrong if it does
not. The crucial phrase in this definition that relates dir-
ectly to the problem raised by Williams is: "for all conscious
beings who are affected by it". The agent is, of course, in-
cluded among these conscious beings. For, as we said earlier,
utilitarians are concerned with promoting benevolence rather
than altruism as such. Moreover, as the definition stands,
utilitarians want to promote "more nonmoral good (in this
case, happiness) than evil". Note that the definition places
no restrictions on the notions of nonmoral good (happiness)
or of nonmoral evil (unhappiness). Hence if bad feelings —
whatever their source — are likely to occur as the result of
a decision to pursue a particular course of action, and if
such bad feelings are seen as a source of nonmoral evil or
unhappiness (indeed what else could they be?), then our de-
finition of the utility principle requires that such feelings
be taken into account in utility calculations. It is only
after such feelings (and usually many other things as well)
have been taken into account, duly weighed, and a decision
arrived at that one can apply to them, or withold from them,
the label "irrational" in the sense in which Williams is

using that term in the problem which he has raised. For when such feelings are included in the utility calculations, the outcome is not thereby predetermined. The determination occurs, as we have said, only after all relevant factors have been taken into account. If such possible feelings are weighty enough to determine the decision, then, of course, they will not occur. So it is hard to see how they can be meaningfully spoken of as either rational or irrational. On the other hand, if these possible feelings are not weighty enough to determine the decision, then indeed they will occur, and they can be called "irrational". But this will only mean that they tend unsuccessfully to push us in a direction opposed to a recommendation arising from the utility principle. 'But the key point is that the rationality or irrationality of the feelings in question can only be determined in the required sense after they have been included in the utility calculations. For, as is now evident through our definition of the utility principle, utility calculations which excluded these possible feelings would be essentially incomplete. Hence to speak of other things, e.g., feelings, being rational or irrational based on such calculations, as Williams does, is meaningless.

Moreover, even when our beliefs become clear, our feelings do not usually change immediately. This is very likely due to feelings long reinforced by habits and the way experience reveals us to be made. Consider the case of a changed racist. The agent was raised a racist but comes to

see racism is bad. This doesn't mean the agent's feelings immediately change — as is shown by experience. The causes of such "irrational" feelings are, we might add, at least twofold: they may be due to a recommendation based on the utility principle which goes against feelings with which we were raised; or in a similar manner they may be due to a recommendation based on the utility principle that we sacrifice one moral belief to secure another.

We might pause briefly to consider why it is that moral feelings which are normally "rational", i.e., such as to promote compliance with recommendations based on the utility principle, sometimes may appropriately be labelled "irrational" in the required sense. Thus consider the relevant moral feelings of George and Jim. George's moral feelings are that it is wrong to kill via CBW because of the extent of the destruction and that it is right to earn a living, help his wife and children, et cetera. Jim's moral feelings are that it is wrong to kill innocent people and that it is right to save lives. These feelings are from a utilitarian point of view "rational" because they normally promote the utilitarian good. Hence a utilitarian would not maintain, as Williams claims he should, that nothing is advanced by having them.[16] Moreover, as the examples make clear, it is possible that in some situations two or more of our moral beliefs — and the feelings which reinforce them — come into conflict such that in order to realize one of them the other(s) must be violated. As a result, the respective bad feelings are produced and are

indeed appropriately labelled "irrational" in the required
sense. However, because of the nature of these kinds of situ-
ations bad feelings of the sort in question will inevitably
be produced and, therefore, a certain amount of "irrational-
ity" is unavoidable. What the utilitarian recommends is to
reduce this sort of irrationality as much as possible by
correctly applying the utility principle in such cases.

Finally, the utilitarian might ask: how would Williams
propose to solve such conflicts? Certainly he cannot appeal
to our moral feelings or "commitments" as he at times appears
to do. (Smart and Williams, pages 103-104) For it is pre-
cisely these which are in conflict. What, then, remains:
intuition, flip a coin, weighing the conflicting beliefs —
but without a utilitarian scale? Perhaps he has another
scale. But if so, he never tells us what it is. Williams'
position appears to be not unlike those who espoused (wit-
tingly or otherwise) what Bentham referred to as the prin-
ciple of sympathy and antipathy and who, therefore, could only
solve conflicts of fundamental moral beliefs arbitrarily.
And, as Bentham recommended to them the principle of utility
in order to avoid the arbitrariness in question, so we offer
the utility principle to Williams in order to avoid a similar
arbitrariness.

9. Integrity

Rather than attack utilitarianism via the well-trodden
path of utilitarianism's alleged inadequacies in regard to
justice, Williams introduces a new line of attack through
the introduction of a new notion to which he attaches the
label integrity. He then makes the following claims:

1. Utilitarianism cannot "make sense, at any serious level,
of integrity" because it can only make "the most superficial
sense of human desire and action at all" and hence can make
"only very poor sense of...happiness". (Smart and Williams,
page 82)

2. To include one's project or commitment in a utility cal-
culation is to attack one's integrity. (Smart and Williams,
page 115)

3. To set aside one's project or commitment in favour of a
recommendation of the utility principle is to destroy one's
integrity. (Smart and Williams, pages 116-117)

4. Any sort of subjection of one's projects or commitments
to the utility principle constitutes a violation of human na-
ture. (Smart and Williams, pages 78,116)

The obvious question at this point is, of course, what
Williams has in mind when he speaks of "integrity", "project",
and "commitment". Unfortunately, he fails to provide any clear
definitions of these terms. However, certain contexts in which
the terms in question are used make their meaning fairly ob-
vious. Thus contrasting integrity with utilitarianism, Wil-.

liams observes that utilitarianism fails to take sufficient account of the moral implications which arise from "the distinction between my projects and someone else's projects".. (Smart and Williams, page 117) Again contrasting integrity with utilitarianism, Williams remarks that, while the utilitarian's notion of moral responsibility includes negative responsibility, the notion of moral responsibility associated with integrity excludes negative responsibility. (Smart and Williams, pages 115-117) From such statements it appears that integrity, in Williams' sense, consists in a person sticking to his projects and not allowing others' projects to intrude into one's projects. What, then, is a project? A project appears to be an undertaking to which one is seriously committed. Finally, "commitment" seems to be used in the contemporary existentialist sense of strongly binding oneself to pursue a goal or carry out an undertaking.

In his discussion of projects Williams distinguishes what he calls "lower-order" or "first-order" projects from "higher-order" or "second-order" projects. (Smart and Williams, pages 110-111) He also speaks of the "general project" of utilitarianism to bring about "maximally desirable outcomes" and appears to regard this "general project" as a higher-order project. (Smart and Williams, pages 110, 112) Other examples of higher-order projects are a commitment to Zionism or to the abolition of chemical and biological warfare. Examples of lower-order projects are "the obvious kinds of desires for things for oneself, one's family, one's

friends, including the basic necessities of life, and in more relaxed circumstances, objects of taste". (Smart and Williams, page 110) The point of this distinction is twofold. First, he points out that the lower-order projects provide content for the higher-order projects. Otherwise the higher-order projects would be vacuous. For example, one cannot just seek happiness as such whether for oneself or for others. Rather happiness consists in the harmonious fulfillment of many particular desires. Secondly, because of the foregoing fact "one has to...want....other things, for there to be anywhere that happiness can come from". (Smart and Williams, page 113) Therefore, even if it were true that all worthwhile human activity contributes to happiness, it is not true that all worthwhile human activity is itself an activity of pursuing happiness — as the utilitarian maintains.

Having seen the four objections which Williams makes against utilitarianism in the name of integrity and, as well, the meanings of the key terms used in making these objections, let us now see what defense Williams offers in support of his objections. Why does Williams maintain that utilitarianism cannot "make sense" out of integrity or out of human desire and action? And why does he maintain that the inclusion of one's project in a utility calculation constitutes an attack on one's integrity, or that the setting aside of one's project in favour of a recommendation based on the utility principle destroys one's integrity? Finally, why does he hold that any sort of subjection of one's projects to the utility

principle constitutes a violation of human nature? Briefly summed up, Williams' answer seems to be that to require people to submit their projects, in any way, to the utility principle is simply asking too much of people, i.e., it is asking them to treat their projects as if these projects were not their projects. In asking too much of people, the underlying utilitarian view of human nature is thereby revealed as distorted and hence as unrealistic. To attempt to comply with such a utilitarian request would, therefore, be a violation of human nature. Thus he remarks:

> The point is that he (the agent) is identified
> with his actions as flowing from projects and
> attitudes which in some cases he takes seriously
> at the deepest level, as what his life is about
> ...It is absurd to demand of such a man, when
> the sums come in from the utility network which
> the projects of others have in part determined,
> that he should just step aside from his own
> project and decision and acknowledge the decision
> which utilitarian calculation requires. It is
> to alienate him in a real sense from his actions
> and the source of his action in his own convic-
> tions. It is to make him into a channel between
> the input of everyone's projects, including his
> own, and an output of optimific decision; but
> this is to neglect the extent to which his actions
> and his decisions have to be seen as the actions
> and decisions which flow from the projects and
> attitudes with which he is most closely identified.
> It is thus, in the most literal sense, an attack
> on his integrity.
> (Smart and Williams, pages 116-117)

In response to Williams' claims that utilitarianism cannot "make sense" out of human desire and action and hence when it requires us to submit our projects to utility/considerations, it requires us to violate human nature, four things, at least, should be said. First, the very way in which Williams has

defined "project" requires the utilitarian, as anyone else, to take projects seriously and hence to allow them to influence considerably any utility calculation into which they enter. Secondly, Williams objects to treating my project(s) "as one lot among others" in my utility calculations. (Smart and Williams, page 115) But what is the alternative? Williams maintains that somehow my projects ought to have more moral weight in my moral calculations than others' projects. And the reason for his position seems to be simply the fact that they are mine. (Smart and Williams, page 116) But surely if there is no other reason — Williams provides us with none — then his own position is subject to the very accusation which he levels at what he perceives to be one form of utilitarianism, to wit, that it is "in the most straightforward sense egoistic". (Smart and Williams, page 111) Thirdly, when Williams claims that utilitarianism cannot "make sense" out of human desire and action, and hence out of human nature, because it requires too much of people, it is unclear whether the "too much" refers to requirements which are impossible, or to requirements which, though possible, do not have a reason sufficient to make compliance with them rational. If he has in mind the former, then, of course, all will agree that this is to ask too much of people. But Williams would have to demonstrate this impossibility. If he has in mind the latter, then, of course, the utilitarian will respond that benevolence is a sufficient reason for a person at times to set aside his projects. In this regard

note that when Williams criticizes utilitarianism, on the
ground that at times its requirements may conflict with a
person's "integrity", he begs the question. For he <u>assumes</u>
that integrity ought to be preferred to benevolence, i.e.,
to utilitarianism. Finally, the utilitarian might argue that
utilitarianism is very much in accord with human nature be-
cause it appeals via benevolence to two very fundamental
human inclinations: self-concern and concern for others.
Regarding the former, utilitarianism makes it clear that
sometimes one's overall self-concern is best served by sacri-
ficing parts of it. In regard to the latter, utilitarianism
through its requirement of benevolence satisfies our natural
altruistic desires.

What Williams has presented us with in his examples of
George and Jim, is the stuff of which moral problems are
made, i.e., conflict between moral beliefs or commitments.
And it might be interesting to know how Williams himself
would propose to solve such conflicts. Suppose, for example,
that the preservation of Zionism were to rest on the limited
employment of chemical and biological warfare, and one in a
position to use such warfare was committed to Zionism and to
the abolition of chemical and biological warfare: what would
Williams advise? His answer is more than a bit disappointing.
Thus he remarks "...there may be no adequate answer at all".
(Smart and Williams, page 116) Indeed, later he observes that
a "grounded decision" in Jim's case "might not even be decent".
(Smart and Williams, page 118) Perhaps, given Williams' posi-

tion, it might not be "decent" in the sense of "fitting" precisely because he has no ultimate or basic principle on which to base such a decision. Such, of course, is not the plight of the utilitarian.

In view of the essentially social nature of morality, it is curious that Williams is so concerned to prevent the projects of others from influencing our own projects. For morality is mainly, if not totally, concerned with how we are to treat other people rather than how we are to treat ourselves. And this is manifested in the very nature of what projects are all about. Take, for example, the project of the abolition of chemical and biological warfare. Normally the concern here is to prevent everyone rather than simply oneself from getting killed by such means. Hence, as moral persons, we are concerned primarily with the welfare of others. But an important part of that welfare consists precisely in the realization by others of their own projects. Therefore, far from excluding the projects of others from having an influence on our projects, the very nature of morality itself requires such an influence. This is the reason why "integrity" ought to be preserved only after it has passed the test of utility or some such test.

Two final points should be mentioned. First, Williams' idea of integrity seems to oppose moral change and to favour the status quo. In fact, from what Williams has said about projects, it seems that the only legitimate way in which one can abandon one's project is by getting tired of it. For he

points out that a project may only occupy a "section" of one's life and that "seriousness is not necessarily the same as persistence". (Smart and Williams, page 116) Secondly, in response to Williams' point that one has to want other things "for there to be anywhere that happiness can come from", Sidgwick, as we have seen, gave the utilitarian reply long ago when he observed: "...it is not necessary that the end which gives the criterion of rightness should always be the end at which we consciously aim...".[17] Utilitarians have, therefore, for a long time taken note of Williams' point. Hedonistic utilitarians have also for a long time insisted that these "other things" are only sought to the degree that happiness can be obtained from them.

10. Conclusion

We have seen what sort of ethical theory utilitarianism is. And we have seen how it may be defended — both positively, i.e., by arguing for it and negatively, i.e., by answering objections to it. Moreover, we have considered Williams' objections to utilitarianism and, in every case, found them wanting. In addition, we have seen the inadequacies of Williams' own position. One thing remains to be said: it may be the case that difficulties exist which, in order to be accommodated, require a modification of utilitarianism. Williams, as we have noted, has failed to identify any such difficulties. We suspect that such exist. To consider these, however, would require another dissertation.

1   J.J.C. Smart and Bernard Williams, <u>Utilitarianism: For and</u>
    .   <u>Against</u> (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1973), p. 79.

    All but one of the remaining references to J.J.C. Smart and
    Bernard Williams' work will be to the above and will be
    cited in the body of the text by page numbers.

2   Paul W. Taylor, <u>Principles of Ethics: An Introduction</u>
            (Encino, Ca.: Dickenson, 1975), chapters 1,4.

3   Jan Narveson, <u>Morality and Utility</u> (Baltimore: Johns
            Hopkins, 1967), chapter 4.

    William K. Frankena, <u>Ethics</u> (2d Edition; Englewood Cliffs,
            N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973), chapter 2.

4   William K. Frankena, <u>Ethics</u>, chapter 2.

5   <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 14.

6   Paul W. Taylor, <u>Principles of Ethics: An Introduction</u>,
            p. 60.

7   William K. Frankena, <u>Ethics</u>, p. 39.

8   Carl Wellman, <u>Morals and Ethics</u> (Glenview, Il.: Scott
            Foresman, 1975), p. 42.

9   David Lyons, <u>Forms and Limits of Utilitarianism</u> (Oxford:
            Clarendon, 1965), chapter 3.

10 J.H. Burns and H.L.A. Hart, (Editors), <u>An Introduction to</u>
            <u>the Principles of Morals and Legislation</u> (London:
            Athlone, 1970), p. 17.

11 <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 21.

12 John Stuart Mill, <u>Essays on Ethics, Religion and Society</u>,
            Editor of the text J.M. Robson (Toronto: University of
            Toronto, 1969), p. 224.

13 George Edward Moore, <u>Principia Ethica</u> (Cambridge: Cambridge
            University, 1959), chapter 6.

14 Henry Sidgwick, <u>The Methods of Ethics</u> (Chicago: University
            of Chicago, 1962), p. 413.

15 Carl Wellman, <u>Morals and Ethics</u>, p. 29.

16 J.J.C. Smart and Bernard Williams, <u>Utilitarianism: For and</u>

Against, pp. 101-102.

"Now such feelings, which are from a strictly utili-
tarian point of view irrational — nothing, a utili-
tarian can point out, is advanced by having them —
cannot, consistently, have any great weight in a
utilitarian calculation."

17 Henry Sidgwick, The Methods of Ethics, p. 413.

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