

UTILITARIANISM & TRIAGE

PPE 101

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REVIEW OF UTILITARIANISM
TRIAGE QUESTIONS

UTILITARIANISM: DEEPER LOOK

Value Claim:

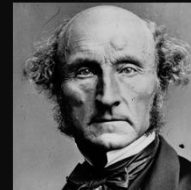
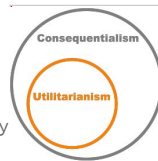
The value of a complete world-history is determined by the amount of pleasure and suffering it contains.
(*Hedonism*)

Aggregation:

Everyone's pleasure/suffering matters, and matters equally.

Action Claim:

An action is morally right when its outcome has greater value than the outcome of any of the alternative acts available; it's wrong otherwise.
(*Consequentialism*)



John Stuart Mill

Actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain.

AZ QUOTES

UTILITARIANISM IN ACTION

UTILITARIANISM: EXAMPLES



Suppose that you are a doctor on a remote island community. Nobody is monitoring you. No one will remember what you do.

Case 1:

You have a terminally ill patient who is in significant, untreatable pain. You can painlessly euthanize the patient.

What would the Utilitarian recommend that you do?

UTILITARIANISM: EXAMPLES



Suppose that you are a doctor on a remote island community. Nobody is monitoring you. No one will remember what you do.

Case 2:

Same as before, except that patient does not consent to being euthanized. She asks you to keep her alive as long as possible.

What would the Utilitarian recommend that you do?

UTILITARIANISM: EXAMPLES



Suppose that you are a doctor on a remote island community. Nobody is monitoring you. No one will remember what you do.

Case 3:

You have enough blood to save either Arden or Baldwin, but not both. Arden is younger, happier, and healthier than Baldwin. Arden has a large family and many friends. Baldwin doesn't.

What would the Utilitarian recommend that you do?

UTILITARIANISM: EXAMPLES



Suppose that you are a doctor on a remote island community. Nobody is monitoring you. No one will remember what you do.

Case 4:

Same as before, except that the blood originally belonged to Baldwin. They asked you to hold on to it for them, and made you promise that you wouldn't give it to someone else.

What would the Utilitarian recommend that you do?

UTILITARIANISM: EXAMPLES



Suppose that you are a doctor working at Scripps Mercy hospital.

Case 5 - 8:

Same as before, except that you work at a hospital. People are monitoring what you do.

What would the Utilitarian recommend that you do?

UTILITARIANISM: EXAMPLES

Trump:

“WE CANNOT LET THE CURE BE WORSE THAN THE PROBLEM ITSELF.”

How would a Utilitarian think about this?



TRIAGE CASES

QUESTIONS ABOUT RATIONING DURING COVID-19

Because maximizing benefits is paramount in a pandemic, we believe that removing a patient from a ventilator or an ICU bed to provide it to others in need is also justifiable and that patients should be made aware of this possibility at admission.^{3,28,29,33,35} Undoubtedly, withdrawing ventilators or ICU

Question:

Is there a moral difference between *withholding* care and *withdrawing* care from someone in order to give it to someone else?

QUESTIONS ABOUT RATIONING DURING COVID-19

Limited time and information in a Covid-19 pandemic make it justifiable to give priority to maximizing the number of patients that survive treatment with a reasonable life expectancy and to regard maximizing improvements in length of life as a subordinate aim. The latter becomes relevant only in comparing patients whose likelihood of survival is similar. Limited time and information

Question:

Should we be aiming to maximize the sheer *number of lives saved*, ignoring facts about expected life years and quality of life?

QUESTIONS ABOUT RATIONING DURING COVID-19

Recommendation 2: Critical Covid-19 interventions — testing, PPE, ICU beds, ventilators, therapeutics, and vaccines — should go first to front-line health care workers and others who care for ill patients and who keep critical infrastructure operating, particularly workers who face a high risk of infection and whose training makes them difficult to replace.²⁷ These workers should be given priority not because they are somehow more worthy, but because of their instrumental value: they are essential to pandemic response.^{27,28} If physicians and nurses are incapacitated, all patients

Question:

Should we prioritize the lives of the police, delivery workers, those involved in the supply chain for food, etc.? What about famous people?

QUESTIONS ABOUT RATIONING DURING COVID-19

Recommendation 3: For patients with similar prognoses, equality should be invoked and operationalized through random allocation, such as a lottery, rather than a first-come, first-served allocation process. First-come, first-served is used for such resources as transplantable kidneys,

Question:

Why should a lottery be used rather than some other method?

QUESTIONS ABOUT RATIONING DURING COVID-19

Recommendation 6: There should be no difference in allocating scarce resources between patients with Covid-19 and those with other medical conditions. If the Covid-19 pandemic leads to absolute scarcity, that scarcity will affect all patients, including those with heart failure, cancer, and other serious and life-threatening conditions requiring prompt medical attention. Fair allocation of

Question:

Should we prioritize patients with COVID-19 over other patients requiring similar healthcare resources?

THINGS THAT (MIGHT) MATTER IN TRIAGE

- What are the patient's chances of survival?
- What is the patient's life-expectancy (if they survive)?
- What will the patient's *quality* of life be like (if they survive)?
- How old is the patient? (Why might this matter?)
- How much overall happiness would be produced?

What else might matter?

QUESTIONS?

