Ethics of Utilitarianism

• I. Bottom-Up
  – CMW
  – Line-drawing
• II. Top-Down
  – Utilitarianism
  – RP

Solving Conflict Problems:
Utilitarian Analysis

A. Act Utilitarianism
B. Rule Utilitarianism

Act Utilitarianism:
Right action = action with best consequences
  = action that maximizes happiness
  (“utility”) action that minimizes unhappiness

Whose happiness?
Everyone
Everyone affected by the action (“audience”)

Case 8: The Trolley

• Option 1- Kill one child
• Option 2- Kill five children

Act Utilitarian Method:
1. Identify conflicting values, obligations
   life of one child
   life of 5 children
2. Determine alternate courses of action.
   Take upper track
   Take lower track
3. Determine relevant audience
   children on tracks
   children’s families and friends
   trolley driver
4. Determine consequences of each alternative act for everyone in audience.
   a. Effects of taking upper track
      • 1 child dies
      • child’s family and friends (30 people) unhappy
      trolley driver upset
   b. Effects of taking lower track
      • 5 children die
      • 150 family members and friends unhappy
      trolley driver even more upset
5. Select the act that maximizes happiness (minimizes unhappiness).
   Taking upper track minimizes unhappiness
   Therefore, trolley driver morally ought to take upper track
Case 9: (6.5 in text)

- Kevin is the engineering manager for the county road commission. He must decide what to do about Forest Drive, a local, narrow, two-lane road. For each of the past 7 years, at least one person has suffered a fatal automobile accident by crashing into trees, which grow close to the road. Many other accidents have also occurred, causing serious injuries, wrecked cars, and damaged trees. Kevin is considering widening the road. Thirty trees will have to be cut down for him to do this. Kevin is already receiving protests from local citizens who want to protect the beauty and ecological integrity of the area. Should Kevin widen the road or not?

Act Utilitarian analysis of Case 9:
1. Conflicting values:
   - Public health and safety, protection of private property
   - Beauty and ecological integrity
2. Alternative actions:
   a. Widen the road
   b. Don’t widen the road
3. Determine relevant audience:
   - 65,000 users of road, families and friends of accident victims, county taxpayers

4. Consequences of alternative actions:
   a. Effects of widening the road:
      - save 1 life, 2 serious, 5 minor injuries per year
      - 250 friends of victims unhappy
      - avoid lawsuits against county (risk of $ millions in penalties)
      - spend $1,000,000 on construction
      - 65,000 users lose aesthetic pleasure
      - lose 30 trees
   b. Effects of not widening road: reverse
5. Consequences of widening road are better than consequences of not doing so.
   Therefore, Kevin is morally obligated to widen road.

Problems:
1. How do you measure happiness?
   How do you compare one person’s happiness with another’s?
   -- You do it all the time
   -- Cost-benefit analysis: Calculate all values as monetary values.
   To see how much something is worth, ask how much money someone would be willing to pay for it.

Case 10:

- ACME manufacturing has a plant in the small town of Springfield that employs about 10% of the community. As a consequence of some of its manufacturing procedures, the ACME plant releases malodorous fumes that annoy its neighbors, hurt the local tourism trade, and have been linked to a rise in asthma in the area. The town of Springfield is considering issuing an ultimatum to ACME - “Clean up your plant or we will levy a million dollar fine.” ACME had made it known that the business will shut its doors if it is fined by Springfield. What should Springfield do?

Cost-Benefit Analysis of Case 10:
1. Conflicting values: health v. economic well being.
3. Relevant Audience: employees of ACME, other residents of Springfield
4a. Consequences of not levying fine:
   Costs:
   - Health Expenses: $1 million
   - Nuisance Odor: $50,000
   - Housing values: $1 million
   - Decline in Tourism: $50,000
   Benefits:
   - Wages: +$10 million
   - Taxes: +$2 million
   Total: +$8.9 million
4b. Consequences of levying fine:
   Costs:
   - Health Expenses: $1 million
   - Nuisance Odor: $50,000
   - Housing values: $1 million
   - Decline in Tourism: $50,000
   Benefits:
   - Wages: +$10 million
   - Taxes: +$2 million
   Total: +$8.9 million

Therefore, Springfield should levy the fine.
4b. Consequences of levying fine

Costs:
- Wages: -$10 million
- Taxes: -$2 million
- Housing: -$2 million

Benefits:
- Amount of Fine: +$1 million
- Rebound of Tourism: +$50,000
- Health Savings: +$900,000

Total: -$12,050,000

5. Consequences of fining ACME are much worse than consequences of ACME’s fumes

Therefore, Springfield morally ought not to levy the fine against ACME.

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Case 11: Brown County needs to develop a new dump. The civil engineering division had limited the county’s choices to 2 workable locations. The dump can be placed either just outside Goldsville, a city of 2 million people, or at Bluefield, a town with 1,000 residents. After performing a cost-benefit analysis we see get the following results;

a. place dump in city of Goldsville
   $100 worth of costs to each resident
   $100 \times 2 \text{ million residents} = $200 million net cost

b. place dump in town of Bluefield
   $100 worth of costs to each resident
   $100 \times 1,000 \text{ residents} = $100,000 net cost

Conclusion: Place dump in Bluefield

A year later, Brown County needs to decide where to put the new sewage treatment plant. A cost-benefit analysis shows:

a. place treatment plant in the city of Goldsville:
   $50 worth of costs to each resident
   $50 \times 2 \text{ million residents} = $100 million net cost

b. place treatment plant of Bluefield:
   $50 worth of costs to each resident
   $50 \times 1,000 \text{ residents} = $50,000 net cost

Conclusion: Place treatment plant in Bluefield

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Case 12: The Hospital Case

- In Dr. Jones' hospital, 5 patients will soon die because they are in need of transplants. One needs a heart, two need lung transplants, and two need kidneys. That day, a man comes in to see Dr. Jones for a routine checkup. The man is in perfect health. Dr. Jones also comes to notice that this man is a perfect tissue match for each of the 5 patients in need of transplant. Dr. Jones also comes to learn that this man is new in town, that he has no family or close friends, and that no one knows that he came to Dr. Jones for a check-up today.

Act Utilitarianism doesn’t always recognize the importance of “role-centered” obligations (special obligations one has in virtue of filling a certain role- e.g. parent, employee)
Case 13:

• Company A is a huge, prosperous aerospace engineering firm. Company B is a small aerospace firm that does quality work but is in deep financial trouble. A and B are competing for a government contract. If B doesn’t get the contract, it will fold, throwing hundreds of employees out of work. If A doesn’t get the contract, the thousands of employees and stockholders will barely take any notice.
• Jennifer is in charge of the proposal for the prosperous firm A. No one will notice if she intentionally botches the job. Should she do it?