

Consequentialism, Cluelessness, Clumsiness, and Counterfactuals

Prof. Alan Hájek

The Australian National University

According to objective consequentialism, a morally right action is one that has the best consequences. (These are not just the immediate consequences of the actions, but the long-term consequences, perhaps until the end of history.) I will argue that on one understanding this makes no sense, and on another understanding, it has a startling metaphysical presupposition concerning counterfactuals. Objective consequentialism has faced various objections, including the problem of "cluelessness": we have no idea what most of the consequences of our actions will be; they could be catastrophic, wonderful, or anywhere in between. I think that on these understandings, objective consequentialism has a far worse problem: its very foundations are highly dubious. Even granting these foundations, a worse problem than cluelessness remains, which I call "clumsiness". Moreover, I think that these problems quickly generalise to a number of other moral theories. But the point is most easily made for objective consequentialism, so I will focus largely on it.

I will consider three ways that objective consequentialism might be improved:

- 1) Appeal instead to short-term consequences of actions;
- 2) Understand consequences with objective probabilities;
- 3) Understand consequences with subjective/evidential probabilities.

I will argue that 1) still fails, but that 2) and 3) are the best prospects for consequentialism.

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16:30-18:00
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Zoom Webinar



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T: 2616 7445 | E: hkcrc@LN.edu.hk