

The background features a low-angle shot of several modern skyscrapers reaching towards a cloudy sky. A large, solid blue rectangle is superimposed over the center of the image. In the bottom right corner of this blue rectangle, there is a triangular graphic element that appears to be a folded corner, colored in a vibrant orange. The word "UTILITARIANISM" is written in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters across the middle of the blue rectangle.

UTILITARIANISM

UTILITARIANISM

- Although the ultimate aim of Aristotelian virtue ethics was *eudaimonia*, later philosophers began to question this notion of happiness.
- If happiness consists of leading the good life, what is good? More importantly, who decides what is good?

UTILITARIANISM

- Jeremy Bentham (1748–1842), a British philosopher of the Enlightenment period, advocated for the rights of women, freedom of expression, the abolition of slavery and of the death penalty, and the decriminalization of homosexuality.

UTILITARIANISM

- Bentham believed that the concept of good could be reduced to one simple instinct: **the search for pleasure and the avoidance of pain**. All human behavior could be explained by reference to this basic instinct, which Bentham saw as the key to unlocking the workings of the human mind.
- Do you think Bentham is right?

UTILITARIANISM

- Bentham created an ethical system based on utility, called utilitarianism. Bentham's protege, John Stuart Mill (1806–1873), refined Bentham's system by expanding it to include human rights.
- In so doing, Mill reworked Bentham's utilitarianism in some significant ways.

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HISTORICAL CONTEXT

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HISTORICAL CONTEXT

- During Bentham's lifetime (1748-1832), revolutions occurred in the American colonies and in France, producing in the United States the Declaration of Independence (1776) and Bill of Rights (1791) and in France the *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme* (Declaration of the Rights of Man) (1789) – both were based on liberty, equality, and self-determination.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme (1789)

- Men are born and remain free and equal in rights.
- Liberty consists of doing anything which does not harm others: thus, the exercise of the natural rights of each man has only those borders which assure other members of the society the fruition of these same rights. These borders can be determined only by the law.
- The law has the right to forbid only actions harmful to society. Anything which is not forbidden by the law cannot be impeded, and no one can be constrained to do what it does not order.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Declaration of Independence (1776)

- “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. — That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”

BENTHAM

- His ethical system was an attempt to quantify happiness and the good so they would meet the conditions of the scientific method.
- Ethics had to be empirical, quantifiable, and verifiable
- Bentham rejected religious authority and wrote a rebuttal to the Declaration of Independence in which he railed against natural rights as “rhetorical nonsense, nonsense upon stilts.”
- Instead, the fundamental unit of human action for him was *utility* which was empirically based.

CONSEQUENTIALISM

- Bentham's fundamental axiom, which underlies utilitarianism, was that all social morals and government legislation should aim for producing the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people.
- Utilitarianism, therefore, emphasizes the consequences of an act rather than the character of the actor or their motivation.

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UTILITY

WHAT IS UTILITY?

- Utilitarianism emphasizes the consequences of an act above all else.
- It has these characteristics:
 1. universality, because it applies to all acts of human behavior, even those that appear to be done from altruistic motives;
 2. objectivity, meaning it operates beyond individual thought, desire, and perspective;
 3. rationality, because it is not based in metaphysics or theology; and
 4. quantifiability in its reliance on utility.

HOW IS UTILITY MEASURED?

- Bentham was interested in reducing everything to a single index of utility so that units of it could be assigned a numerical and even monetary value, which could then be regulated by law.
- He intended utilitarianism to provide a reasoned scientific basis for making judgments of value rather than relying on subjectivity, intuition, or opinion.

UTILITY FUNCTION

- This **utility function** measures in “utils” the value of a good, service, or proposed action relative to the utilitarian principle of the greater good, that is, increasing happiness or decreasing pain.
- Bentham measured the utility of proposed actions according to conditions of intensity, duration, certainty, and probability that consequences would result from actions.
- In theory this provides a way of determining whether a proposal would produce overall good or harm for society.

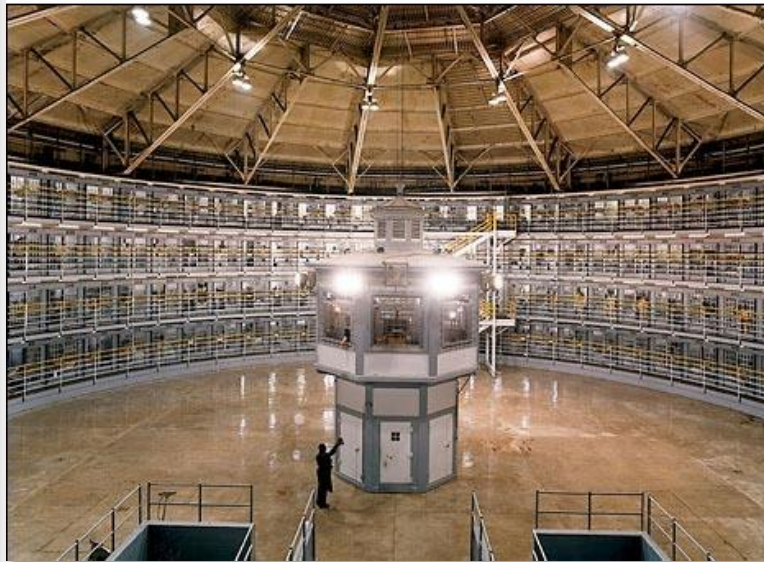
CONSEQUENTIALISM

- Utilitarianism is a consequentialist theory.
- In **consequentialism**, actions are judged solely by their consequences, without regard to character, motivation, or any understanding of good and evil and separate from their capacity to create happiness and pleasure.
- In utilitarianism, it is the consequences of our actions that determine whether those actions are right or wrong.
- Consequentialism differs from Aristotelian and Confucian virtue ethics, which can accommodate a range of outcomes as long as the character of the actor is ennobled by virtue.

CONSEQUENTIALISM

- For Bentham, character had nothing to do with the utility of an action. Everyone sought pleasure and avoided pain regardless of personality or morality. In fact, too much reliance on character might obscure decision-making.
- Rather than making moral judgments, utilitarianism weighed acts based on their potential to produce the most good (pleasure) for the most people.
- In Bentham's mind, no longer would humanity depend on inaccurate and outdated moral codes. For him, utilitarianism reflected the reality of human relationships and was enacted in the world through legislative action.

BENTHAM'S PANOPTICON



BENTHAM'S PANOPTICON

- The panopticon concept of design is to allow all prisoners of prison to be observed by a single security guard, without the inmates being able to tell whether they are being watched.
- Although it is physically impossible for the single guard to observe all the inmates' cells at once, the fact that the inmates cannot know when they are being watched means that they are motivated to act as though they are being watched at all times. Thus, the inmates are effectively compelled to regulate their own behavior.
- How does this reflect Bentham's philosophy? How can it be applied in the workplace? Should it be?

BENTHAM'S PANOPTICON IN THE REAL WORLD

- Computers can be used for employee monitoring to track the behavior and output of workers. In theory, the workers will not be able to tell if they are being spied on, but at any time, their manager is able to check their work output continuously.
- Is it wrong for an employer to monitor its employees computers at work?

BREAK TIME

ILLUSTRATING CONSEQUENTIALISM

ILLUSTRATING CONSEQUENTIALISM

- To illustrate the concept of consequentialism, consider the hypothetical story told by Harvard psychologist Fiery Cushman. When a man offends two volatile brothers, Jon and Matt with an insult.
 - Jon wants to kill him; he shoots but misses.
 - Matt intends only to scare the man but kills him by accident.
- Matt will suffer a more severe penalty than his brother in most countries.
- Applying utilitarian reasoning, can you say which brother bears greater guilt for his behavior? Are you satisfied with this assessment of responsibility? Why or why not?

ILLUSTRATING CONSEQUENTIALISM

Jon wants to kill him; he shoots but misses.

Matt intends only to scare the man but kills him by accident.

- What should Jon's penalty be? What should Matt's be?

Reasons for criminal penalties: deterrence, retribution, incapacitation, and rehabilitation. Using each of these, who should get the longer prison sentence?

ILLUSTRATING CONSEQUENTIALISM: ORGAN HARVESTING

- A brilliant transplant surgeon has five patients, each in need of a different organ, each of whom will die without that organ. Unfortunately, there are no organs available to perform any of these five transplant operations. A healthy young traveler, just passing through the city the doctor works in, comes in for a routine checkup. In the course of doing the checkup, the doctor discovers that his organs are compatible with all five of his dying patients.
- Do you support the morality of the doctor to kill that tourist and provide his healthy organs to those five dying people and save their lives?

ILLUSTRATING CONSEQUENTIALISM

R v Dudley and Stephens (1884)

English criminal case which established that necessity is not a defense to a charge of murder. Dudley and Stephens were shipwrecked along with two other men. When one of them, the cabin boy, fell into a coma, Dudley and Stephens decided to kill him for food.

ILLUSTRATING CONSEQUENTIALISM

R v Dudley and Stephens (1884)

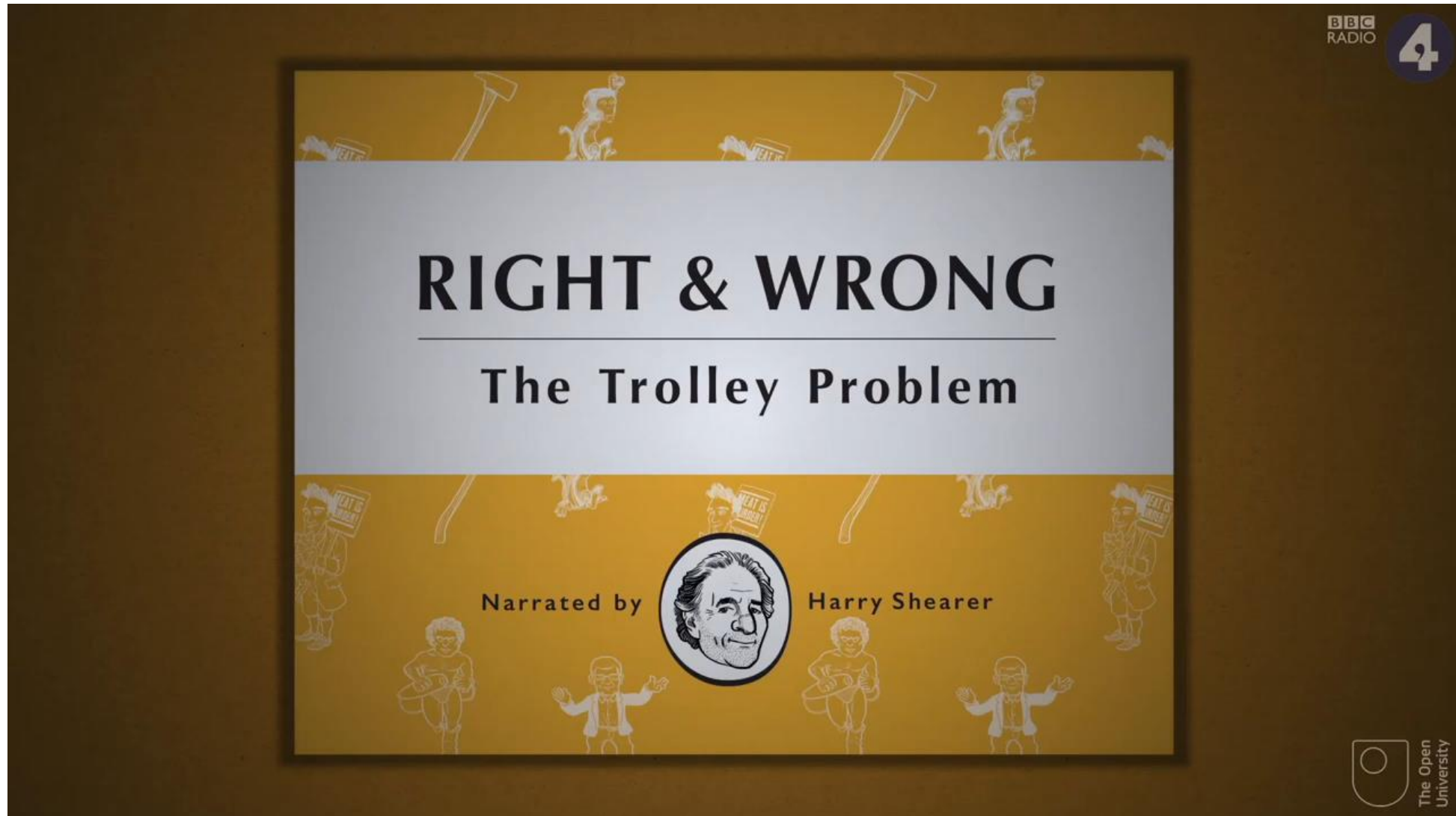
The Court found that there is no common law defense of necessity to a charge of murder and stated:

“To preserve one's life is generally speaking a duty, but it may be the plainest and the highest duty to sacrifice it. War is full of instances in which it is a man's duty not to live, but to die. The duty, in case of shipwreck, of a captain to his crew, of the crew to the passengers, of soldiers to women and children . . . these duties impose on men the moral necessity, not of the preservation, but of the sacrifice of their lives for others, from which in no country, least of all, it is to be hoped, in England, will men ever shrink, as indeed, they have not shrunk. . .”

ILLUSTRATING CONSEQUENTIALISM: DUDLEY AND STEPHENS

Did the Court get it right?

TROLLEY PROBLEM



ILLUSTRATING CONSEQUENTIALISM: SELF DRIVING CARS

- People argue that problems analogous to the trolley problem arise in self driving cars. If a potentially fatal collision appears to be unavoidable should the software value the safety of the car's occupants more, less, or equal to the lives of potential victims outside the car? Would you pay more for a car that puts a premium on your safety?

ILLUSTRATING CONSEQUENTIALISM: DOSTOYEVSKY

Ivan speaking to his brother Alyosha, in *The Brothers Karamazov*:

“Tell me straight out, I call on you—answer me: imagine that you yourself are building the edifice of human destiny with the object of making people happy in the finale, of giving them peace and rest at last, but for that you must inevitably and unavoidably torture just one tiny creature, [one child], and raise your edifice on the foundation of her unrequited tears—would you agree to be the architect on such conditions?”

CRITIQUES OF UTILITARIANISM

- Critics of Utilitarianism pointed out what the “absurdity” of insisting that “the rights of man are derived from the legislator” and not nature.
- Another critic accused Bentham of mixing up morality with law.
- Others objected that utilitarianism placed human beings on the same level as animals and turned people into utility functions.
- There were also complaints that it was mechanistic, antireligious, and too impractical for most people to follow.
- John Stuart Mill sought to answer these objections on behalf of his mentor but then offered a synthesis of his own that brought natural rights together with utility, creating a new kind of utilitarianism, one that would eventually serve to underpin neoclassical economic principles.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT FOR LIFE OF MILL (1806-1873)

- Born in England in 1806,
- He published his most famous work “On Liberty” in 1859.
- It is a philosophical essay which applies Mill's ethical system of utilitarianism to society and state and discusses the relationship between authority and liberty.
- Mill emphasized the importance of individuality, which he considers prerequisite to the higher pleasures. He considered it the singularly most important aspect of utilitarianism.



THANK YOU!

