

Institutional Consequentialism and Global Implications

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Outline

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- Institutional consequentialism
- What are institutions?
- Reasons to adopt institutional consequentialism
- The best form of institutional consequentialism
- Global alternatives
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Consequentialism

Normative properties depend on consequences only:

- The moral rightness of an act depends exclusively on the valuable consequences of that act (or something related to that act as judged from an impartial perspective.
- We focus on maximizing consequentialism:
 - Requires agents to maximize the good as born by the consequences of acts, motives, rules and so on.
- We focus on welfare for the time being:
 - The relevant consequences are those that bear on welfare
 - Can be relaxed later.

Institutional consequentialism

- Institutional division of labor (taken from Rawls):
 - The demanding consequentialist principle regulates the design of the institutional structure.
 - Individuals ‘only’ have the duty to set up and maintain these institutions.
- The institutional division of labor reduces moral demands on individuals.
- There are independent—of demandingness considerations - reasons to endorse institutional consequentialism.
- The best form of institutional consequentialism is two-level consequentialism.

What are institutions?

- A *public system of rules* which defines positions together with their rights and duties.
- They can include organisations as well as systems of organizations, but they do not need to have such parts (e.g. barter economy).
- They involve roles together with rights and duties attached to them.
- They are constituted by the conduct of individuals upholding them (i.e. they are not abstract entities).
- They include formal sanctions to enforce their rules.

Reasons to adopt institutional consequentialism

- Institutions enable the more effective promotion of consequentialist goals by counteracting informational, cognitive and motivational limitations in individual agents .
- They are also necessary for a division of labour allowing individual agents to specialize and exploit their comparative advantages.
- Institutional rules allocate responsibilities within a larger group:
 - Political and economic institutions coordinate the behaviour of large numbers of agents in strategic settings.
 - They solve collective action problems and implement policies that would otherwise not be implemented.

The best form of institutional consequentialism

- Aim is to keep the act-consequentialist *criterion of rightness* (as opposed to bifurcating the criterion - have one for institutions and another for individuals).
- There are good independent reasons to introduce *rules* for private citizens as well as for public officials.
- We have seen that there are good reasons to require private individuals not to follow in their every-day decisions the act-consequentialist criterion but to follow one rule: to set up and maintain the right institutions. Similar reasoning, but leading to different rules, applies to public officials.
- Hence we get *two-level consequentialism*: one set of rules for institutions and another for individuals.

Alternative global frameworks

1. The status quo ('global governance'):
 - The nation-state system
 - Supplemented with supranational institutions
2. Multilayered sovereignty/neo-medievalism
3. World state

Other options?

4. Bull: System but not a society
5. Bull: States but not a system
6. Non-historical alternatives and hybrid versions

Caney's conceptual framework

Four defining features of sovereignty in the state system:

- *Legality*: authority over its jurisdiction
- *Supremacy*: final and absolute authority, with no final and absolute authority elsewhere
- *Territoriality*: authority over a territorially defined unit
- *Comprehensiveness*: authority over all issues, not just some

The state system and the world state do not depart from this model of state sovereignty. Other institutional frameworks can abandon some features while keeping others.

The full picture

	Desirability	Necessity	Possibility
State system	X	?	X
Neo-medievalism	?	?	X
World state	X	X	?

Pogge against radical change

- Pogge argues that multilayered sovereignty can be reached gradually from where we are now
 - through ‘second-order decentralization’
- By contrast, a global state is reachable only through revolution in the wake of some global catastrophe
- Is this really so? Alternatives:
 - By contract: one great political effort
 - Step by step: e.g. Yunker’s evolutionary model
 - Unintentionally, step by step: cf. the EU
- At least the last two seem to be doable and realistic

Risse against radical change

- Proposals for radical changes to the existing political structures face epistemic and moral difficulties
 - It is impossible to have a reasonably clear understanding of what a world with no states or with a world state would look like
 - Counterfactual outcomes are impossible to evaluate
 - Radical uncertainty: it is impossible to attribute probabilities
 - Breakdown of imagination: it is impossible to even imagine what outcomes probabilities attach to
- Such utopias cannot be action-guiding in a meaningful way; we need instead a *realistic utopia* (a la Rawls)
- Radical proposals are therefore also morally wrong since they are *irresponsible*

Questions for Risse

- Risse's adoption of Rawls's notion of realistic utopia can be attacked in the same ways Rawls's own notion is attacked (both from 'below' and from 'above').
- It is far from clear why we have to have all the relevant details of an ideal in place before we do anything – why we cannot just make a leap and not be held morally irresponsible for our epistemic 'sins'.
- Is a radical vision really so removed from our reality? Risse certainly thinks so but he doesn't provide details.
 - World state: extrapolation from the extended state system?
 - Neo-medievalism: historical precedent?

Thank you for your attention!

And thanks to the organizers of this conference!