### **Overriding Consequentialism? A Study on Moral Intuitions and Emotions**

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Part I

# **Background and Aims**

### **Classical Utilitarianism**

#### Act-consequentialism

 They held that whether an act is morally right or wrong depends only on its consequences (as opposed to the circumstances or the intrinsic nature of the act or anything that happens before the act or anything that relates to the act).

#### Utilitarianism

 They advocated consequentialism with a welfarist theory of value, that is, a theory that focuses on welfare, well-being, or happiness as the relevant consequence.

#### Hedonism

 They understood happiness in terms of the balance of the amount of pleasure over pain.

### The Overdemandingness Objection (OD)

#### The world today:

- Significant levels of poverty, especially on the global scale.
- The amount of charitable donations are insufficient to eradicate it.
- The institutions that might make things better are not efficient, neither domestically, nor internationally.

#### The objection:

- Given these circumstances, consequentialism is extremely demanding.
- An adequate morality cannot be extremely demanding. People should have room to pursue their personal aims, i.e. their self-interest broadly understood.
- Hence, consequentialism is unacceptable.

## **Understanding OD**

#### Dimension 1: Scope

- It refers to the pervasiveness of a moral theory: to the circle of voluntary human action that the theory regards as open to moral assessment.
- Overdemandingness: even the most mundane human acts, such as brushing teeth or going to a cinema, are judged right or wrong.

#### Dimension 2: Content

- It refers to the stringency of a moral theory: to the amount of inconsistency that exists between moral directives and the agent's non-moral goals, projects and commitments.
- Overdemandingness: morality does not allow the agent to live her life or care for her nearest and dearest.

#### Dimension 3: Authority

- It refers to the inescapability of a moral theory; it concerns the weight of moral and non-moral reasons as compared to each other when they clash.
- Overdemandingness: moral reasons are stronger than the agent's reasons to do what he likes and cares for.

### What We Target

Scope is unproblematic, and so is, for more substantial philosophical reasons, content. This leaves us with authority.

Consequentialism is overdemanding because it requires us, with decisive force, to do things that we do not have decisive reason to perform.

### The Structure of OD



### What We Aim to Show

We empirically target premise (2): OD proposes that there exists a *widely shared intuition* that at least some consequentialist demands are unreasonably extreme. We aim to show that this premise is *not* true.

We aim to show that the structure of demands also matters in understanding premise (2). Consequentialist demands could be based (a) in the objective features of the situation or (b) in the individual's emotional reaction to it.

#### Part II

# **STUDY 1**

### Participants

N = 89

Gender: 53.9% female, 37.1% male, 9.0% missing

# Age: *M* = 25.7, *SD* = 8.8

#### 79.8% students

## Design

4 (scenario) × 2 (emotional demands: high vs. low) × 2 (objective demands: high vs. low):

- 4 different scenarios (Africa, Police, Inheritance, Accident) → between-subjects
- 4 different versions of each scenario: objective demands high vs. low, emotional demands high vs. low → within-subjects

### Africa Scenario

You have completed your studies for becoming a civil engineer. You had applied for a one-year placement in Africa and are indeed offered to go there to build an orphanage for children who will suffer from lack of shelter if the orphanage is not built. There are no other applicants for the position and the project will be cancelled if you do not take up the offer. Just before taking the final decision, a good friend who is already an established civil engineer visits you. When the conversation comes to your professional future, he offers you

- a job in his civil engineering office.
- a job in his civil engineering office. This is the position you have always dreamed of.
- a very lucrative job in his civil engineering office. This would mean that you and your family could live in financial security.
- a very lucrative job in his civil engineering office. This is the position you have always dreamed of and it would mean that you and your family could live in financial security.
- However, if you take up this offer, you will not be able to go to Africa.

### **Police Scenario**

You are an investigator with the federal police. You were assigned to the case of a serial killer. You are the only person who has seen the killer. Because he was wearing a mask you could not describe him well to others, but you know for certain that you will recognise his eyes when you see him again. Catching the killer will save the lives of those whom he is planning to kill next; unfortunately, your superiors did not believe you and took you off the case. Therefore you decide to work on the case unofficially, entirely in your spare time without making use of any police help. You now work day and night. In fact, you spend hardly any time with your family with whom you have not been on holidays for years. You and your family are scheduled to fly to Spain tomorrow for a three-week break. If you cancel your holidays to continue working on the case

- your wife and children will be very disappointed in you.
- your wife and children will be very disappointed in you. You deeply care for your family and this would be extremely painful to you.
- your wife and children will be very disappointed in you. Your wife already had to endure a lot. She will leave you and take the children with her.
- your wife and children will be very disappointed in you. Your wife already had to endure a lot. She will leave you and take the children with her. You deeply care for your family and this would be extremely painful to you.

### **Inheritance Scenario**

You receive a letter from a notary informing you about a significant amount of money you inherited from an unknown relative. After having read the letter a recent conversation with a good friend comes to mind: He was looking for donations to his charity organization that invests money to prevent the spread of deadly diseases in African countries. Now that you have received the inheritance you could support your friend's charity and be certain to save many innocent lives. Alternatively, you could

- buy a vintage car.
- buy a vintage car. This is the car you already wanted to have when you were a kid.
- buy a vintage car. Adding the car to the existing flotilla of your car rental company would boost the revenues of your enterprise.
- buy a vintage car. Adding the car to the existing flotilla of your car rental company would boost the revenues of your enterprise. Also, this is the car you already wanted to have when you were a kid.

### **Accident Scenario**

You have left the electric iron switched on when you left your flat and realized this while you were on the way to your office. Now you are rushing back to your house because you know that the iron will soon start a fire. As you are heading back to your flat you notice a person lying unconscious on the street. You are alone on the street and you are a medical student. However,

- if you do not return home immediately, the alarm in your rented flat will go off. Your landlord will terminate your contract, because this has already happened several times.
- if you do not return home immediately, the alarm in your rented flat will go off. Your landlord will terminate your contract, because this has already happened several times. Your aunt who is your landlord and very dear to you will be extremely disappointed in you.
- if you do not return home immediately, the rented flat will burn out. No one's life will be in danger but all your possessions will be destroyed.
- if you do not return home immediately, the rented flat will burn out. No one's life will be in danger but all your possessions will be destroyed. Also, your aunt who is your landlord and very dear to you will be extremely disappointed in you.

### Hypotheses

#### Hypothesis 1

Increasing demands will lead to increasing dissent with consequentialism

#### Hypothesis 2

Not even very high consequentialist demands lead to dissent with consequentialism in the majority of cases

#### Hypothesis 1a

Higher emotional demands will be associated with a lower ratio of consequentialist decisions

#### Hypothesis 1b

Higher objective demands will be associated with a lower ratio of consequentialist decisions

### **Key Dependent Measures**

(1) Behaviour	<ul> <li><i>"What would you do?"</i></li> <li>Together with (2) filters out (anticipated) weakness of will.</li> <li>If (2) and (3) are conflated, takes over the role of (2).</li> </ul>
(2) Assessment of reasons	<ul> <li><i>"Overall, what is the thing to do?"</i></li> <li>Our central question.</li> <li>Otherwise, see (1).</li> </ul>
(3) Assessment of moral demands	<ul> <li><i>"What does morality demand you to do?"</i></li> <li>Tells us about participants moral decision in particular.</li> <li>Otherwise, see (1).</li> </ul>

### 'Decoding' of Answers to Questions

### Assumption 1

- If the answers to questions (1) and (2) are the same, the answer to (3) does not change the analysis.
- Why? Because then no conflation of moral reasons with overall reasons was made by the participant.

### Assumption 2

- If the answers to questions (1) and (2) are different, but the answers to (2) and (3) are the same, the answer to (1) is decisive.
- Why? Because then the participant has conflated (2) with (3).

### Assumption 3

- If the answers to questions (1) and (2) are different, but the answers to (1) and (3) are the same, the answer to (2) is decisive.
- Why? Because then the participant has conflated (1) with (3).

## The Result of Decoding

# Analysis

- Assumptions 1-3 employed
- All answercombinations are categorized into 'Nonconsequentialist' and 'Consequentialist' groups

### Here is how it looks...



### Some more decoding...

# Lenient analysis

- Assumptions 1-3 employed
- All answer-combinations are categorized into 'Nonconsequentialist' and 'Consequentialist' groups

# Stringent analysis

- Assumption 1 employed
- Only answer-combinations that follow Assumption 1 are categorized into 'Nonconsequentialist' and 'Consequentialist' groups

### Here is how it looks then...

Dissent with consequentialism

Consent with consequentialism

(2,2,1,1,1)(2,2,1,2,1)(2,2,2,1,2)(2,2,2,2,2,2)(2,2,2,2,1,1)(2,2,2,2,2,1)(2,2,1,1,2)(2,2,1,2,2)

$$(1,1,1,1,1)$$
  
 $(1,1,1,2,1)$   
 $(1,1,1,1,2)$   
 $(1,1,1,2,2)$   
 $(1,1,2,1,1)$   
 $(1,1,2,2,2)$   
 $(1,1,2,1,2)$   
 $(1,1,2,2,1)$ 

### **Cross-Scenario Analysis**

#### (Africa, Police, Inheritance, Accident)



Interactions with scenario emerge.

## **Individual Scenario Analysis**



Main Effect Scenario:  $F(1, 81) = 4.69, p < .01, \eta^2 = .418$ Interaction Scenario × Objective Demands:  $F(3, 84) = 3.26, p < .05, \eta^2 = .108$ 

### **Cross-Scenario Analysis**

#### (Africa, Police, Inheritance)



No interactions with scenario.

### **Cross-Scenario Analysis**

#### (Stringent Analysis)



No interactions with scenario.

## **Summary of results**

**Hypothesis 2:** The absolute level of dissent with consequentialism varies from situation to situation. However, with the exception of police scenario, not even the highest demands generate majority dissent with consequentialism.

**Hypothesis 1ab:** In most of our scenarios both increasing emotional demands and increasing objective demands lead to increasing dissent with consequentialism.

**Hypothesis 1:** Effects are additive. It simply seems to be the overall level of demands that predicts the tendency to reject consequentialist requirements.

Part II

# **STUDY 2**

### **Participants**

N = 368 Gender: ? % female, ? % male, ? % missing

Age: *M* = ?, *SD* = ?

#### ? % students

## Study 2

Aims: Investigate actual behaviour rather than responses to fictitious scenarios

Used experimental game to pose actual decision

Participants could divide a possible lottery win of €100 between themselves and a UNICEF program buying measles vaccines for children in the developing world

## Design

### Structure identical to Study 1

Emotional demands: Think about how €100 could be used (high emotional demands) versus think about irrelevant issue (low emotional demands) *Objective demands*: Earn right to participate in the lottery (high objective demands) *versus* receive lottery ticket as a windfall endowment without effort (low objective demands)

## Design (cont.)

We assessed participants' actual decision and their moral judgment of what would be right to give.

Rewards were actually paid out to one randomly selected participant.

## Analysis



### **Summary of results**

**Hypothesis 2:** there was a significant percentage of participants (51.6 %) who kept half or less of the money for themselves and who thereby chose the consequentialist distribution

**Hypothesis 1(ab):** both material and subjective demands increased participants' tendency to act in a nonconsequentialist manner (i.e., to keep a larger part of the endowment for themselves).

Part III

# **STUDIES 3 and 4**

### Studies 3 and 4

These two studies adapted the scenarios used in Study 1 in such a way that consequentialist demands clashed with deontological moral requirements (Study 3) and, in addition, also with special obligations (Study 4).

 For example, in the scenario that posed the decision of going to Africa to build an orphanage or taking up a job closer to home, we introduced an additional demand by indicating that a third option would be to support one's elderly mother who requires assistance.

The aim is to empirically map a large part of the moral terrain in terms of the dimension of authority: to see how different moral requirements weight against each other and against non-moral considerations.

Part III

# **FUTURE RESEARCH**

### **Future Research Directions**

This study is supposed to measure intuitions.

Why do intuitions matter? What are intuitions?

Difficulties of detecting and measuring intuitions.

**Emotions and Intuitions.** 

Virtues, emotions, and intuitions.

### **Why Intuitions Matter**

There are (moral) truths at which people arrive by an immediate process somewhat akin to perception.

Such (moral) intuitions are taken to have (at least *prima facie*) evidential value.

Intuitions are the 'raw data' that competing moral theories (should) try to accommodate.

Intuitions were always important in moral philosophy and have seen a revival in moral psychology.

### What Intuitions Are – Main Characteristics

#### • quick, effortless, automatic (emphasized in Immediate psychology) moral judgments based on intuitions are Nonnot accepted on the ground that they follow from some moral theory or principle inferential (emphasized in philosophy) Strong and robust intuitions have the quality of considered judgments (emphasized in stable philosophy)



### **Emotions and (Moral) Decision-Making**

Both psychologists and philosophers re-emphasize the role of emotion in moral decision making.

#### This role can (at least) be twofold. Emotions

*mediate* between (perceived) demands and (moral) decisions. *involve* (moral) judgments. This leads to the so-called cognitive theory of emotion.

### **Emotions and intuitions**



### **Anticipated Emotion Measures**

If you chose to take the job and not go to Africa, how much would you expect to experience...



If you chose to take the job and not go to Africa, how much would you expect others to react with...



## Further Hypotheses in Study 1 (same in Study 2)

#### Hypothesis 1(ab) and 2, from Study 1

Hypothesis 3: Anticipated emotions (partly) are responsible for the effects of demands on dissent with consequentialism

Hypothesis 3a: Emotional and objective demands decrease the negativity of both own and others' anticipated emotions (if not following the consequentialist requirement)

Hypothesis 3b: Less negative anticipated emotions increase dissent with consequentialism

### **Anticipated Own Emotions**

(Guilt, Shame, Embarrassment, Pride *reversed*; Mean  $\alpha$  = .84)



No interactions with scenario.

### **Anticipated Emotions of Others**

(Blame, Anger, Disgust, Contempt, Approval *reversed*; Mean  $\alpha$  = .86)



No interactions with scenario.





Others' Anticipated Emotions



unstandardized coefficients



unstandardized coefficients



unstandardized coefficients

## **Summary: Role of Emotions**

High emotional demands lead to lower anticipated negative own emotions. Lower own negative emotions lead to higher likelihood of nonconsequentialist decision.

High objective demands lead to lower anticipated negative emotions of others. Lower negative emotions of others lead to higher likelihood of nonconsequentialist decision.

At the same time, there remains a direct influence of the manipulation on decisions.

### Virtues, emotions, and intuitions

Virtue understood as superior access to practical knowledge.

Intuitions are our primary access to practical knowledge.

Intuitions are emotions.

We are in the search for virtuous intuitors. In order to avoid circularity, we must find developmental patterns and indicators of virtuous intuitors.