

“IT MAKES NO DIFFERENCE WHETHER OR NOT I DO IT”

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There are some arguments used to justify people doing things, otherwise admitted to be wrong, which are puzzling. They are claims that, while a certain act will be bad in its outcome, so that it would be better if it were not performed at all, it makes only an insignificant difference, or even no difference at all, if *I* am the person to do it. One such argument is that used by a scientist who takes a job developing means of chemical and biological warfare, and who admits that it would be better if his country did not sponsor such research, but who says (correctly) “If I don’t do it, someone else will.” This type of argument also appears as an attempted justification of Britain selling arms to South Africa. If we accept this as a justification, it is hard to see what acts, however otherwise wicked, could not be defended in the same way. The job of hired assassin, or controller of the gas supply at Belsen, or chief torturer for the South African Police, will surely be filled by someone, so it seems to make no difference to the total outcome whether *I* accept or refuse such a job. When we think of these cases, most of us are probably reluctant to allow weight to this defence. Yet it is hard for those of us who think that moral choices between courses of action ought to be determined, either largely or entirely, by their different outcomes, to explain what is wrong with such a defence.

“If I don’t do it, someone else will” is only one member of a family of arguments relating to the insignificance of a single person’s act or omission. It is necessary to distinguish between some of these related defences in order to examine them separately.

A. MY DOING IT MAKES AN INSIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE

Here, the argument is that, given the size of a problem, the best I can do in the way of acting or refraining will make only an insignificant difference, and so it does not matter what I do. This argument is found in discussions of the population problem or of world poverty. The suggestion is that the problem of over-population is so vast that my refraining from having another child will not make a significant impact. It can similarly be argued that problems of poverty and hunger are so vast that my sending money to relief agencies is a drop in the ocean, and pointless.

B. MY DOING IT MAKES NO DIFFERENCE

At least two sorts of claim are made here:

- (i) "If I don't do it, someone else will". (Chemical warfare research; arms to South Africa.)
- (ii) "One person makes no difference". This can be used in support of not bothering to vote in any election, except in the extremely rare case where there is a significant chance of one vote tipping the scale.

In this paper, I shall look first at the argument from the insignificant difference, and then at the argument from no difference.

A

1. *The argument from the insignificant difference: context illusions*

In many of the cases where it is used, the argument from the insignificant difference can be dismissed at once. If I can rescue a single person from death or misery, the fact that there are many others I cannot rescue is irrelevant to the moral worth of doing this. Huge problems sometimes produce an irrational paralysis of the imagination. It is so terrible to think of the poverty and starvation that will still exist in the world whatever I do, that it is tempting to despair and do nothing. But the difference that is small compared to the size of the whole problem may be one that in other contexts we would think worth taking very seriously: when we are not thinking

in terms of millions of people, we think it important to save a single life.

But there are other cases where the argument from the insignificant difference is used, and where the harm a single person does seems small in a way that is independent of the size illusions generated by a context of catastrophe. These other cases are best introduced by distinguishing between different kinds of threshold.

2. *Two kinds of threshold*

An *Absolute Threshold* is found where there is a sharp boundary between two different outcomes. The clearest case is that of voting. If there are two candidates, and a thousand votes are cast for one of them, the other will lose if he gets only 999 votes and will win if he gets 1,001 votes. Winning or losing is an all-or-none matter: victory by one vote is still a complete victory. If, for simplicity, we imagine a voter who is fully informed about how everyone else will vote, we see that, except for side effects, there is no point in his voting, except where doing so will lead to either a draw or to the victory of his candidate by one vote. For, in all other cases, his vote will leave the outcome unchanged.

In contrast to an absolute threshold is a *Discrimination Threshold*. This is where a single person's act will push a situation slightly further in a certain direction, but where his contribution, although real, may be too small to be detected when its effects are spread through the community. Here it is not, as with voting, that there is an absolute threshold in reality. In these cases the reality is a gentle slope, and the threshold is defined by the distance apart on the slope two points have to be in order to be seen as separate by us. If there is an electricity shortage, and I keep the heater on when we are asked to economise, the result may be that everyone in the community has a power cut lasting one hundredth of a second longer than it would have done. This is negligible, but the whole thing is a matter of degree, and things get worse as more people do the same as I do.

In cases with an absolute threshold and where my act (say, of voting) does not result in the threshold being crossed, I have contributed nothing to the outcome. Someone who takes the

view that moral grounds for choosing one course of action rather than another must depend on some difference in total outcome will think that, apart from side effects, it does not matter whether or not I vote. There will be a case for my voting to the extent that the outcome of the election is uncertain, but if I know that my vote will not be decisive the argument for voting will have to appeal to considerations other than the desirability of my party or candidate winning.

3. *The principle of divisibility*

It may be thought that there is no difference in this respect between absolute thresholds and discrimination thresholds. Some people are tempted to assimilate the case of the electricity shortage to the voting case. In the electricity case, the harm I do when spread over the community is below the discrimination threshold. Consequentialists who treat the two kinds of threshold in the same way conclude that, apart from side effects, it does not matter whether I use the electricity or not. The suggestion is that the harm done counts as zero.

But against this I want to argue that the harm done in such cases should be assessed as a fraction of a discriminable unit, rather than as zero. Let us call this the *Principle of Divisibility*. It says that, in cases where harm is a matter of degree, sub-threshold actions are wrong to the extent that they cause harm, and where a hundred acts like mine are necessary to cause a detectable difference I have caused 1/100 of that detectable harm.

Anyone who doubts this principle should consider the consequences of assigning zero harm to sub-threshold acts.

Suppose a village contains 100 unarmed tribesmen eating their lunch. 100 hungry armed bandits descend on the village and each bandit at gunpoint takes one tribesman's lunch and eats it. The bandits then go off, each one having done a discriminable amount of harm to a single tribesman. Next week, the bandits are tempted to do the same thing again, but are troubled by new-found doubts about the morality of such a raid. Their doubts are put to rest by one of their number who does not believe in the principle of divisibility. They then raid the village, tie up the tribesmen, and look at their lunch.

As expected, each bowl of food contains 100 baked beans. The pleasure derived from one baked bean is below the discrimination threshold. Instead of each bandit eating a single plateful as last week, each takes one bean from each plate. They leave after eating all the beans, pleased to have done no harm, as each has done no more than sub-threshold harm to each person. Those who reject the principle of divisibility have to agree.

If we accept that the principle of divisibility applies when a discrimination threshold is reached, a mildly scholastic further question arises. What should we say about a case where a sub-threshold increment is not "topped up" by other sub-threshold increments to produce a discriminable unit? (Suppose I am the only person in the country to use electricity when economy is asked for.) Should we, appealing to the divisibility principle, assign some disutility to this? The case for answering "yes" is that it seems incoherent to weight each such act at zero before the threshold is reached, but, if the threshold is reached, then to say that together the acts add up to a detectable disutility.

But there is also a case for saying "no". Ignoring side effects, it seems absurd for a consequentialist who is certain the threshold will not be reached to refrain from using electricity although he knows that this will in no way avoid any detectable discomfort or inconvenience to anyone. My inclination to say "no" makes me want to explain away the supposed paradox in saying "yes". Why should we not say that acts which do not contribute to the discrimination threshold being reached have zero disutility, but that they do have disutility where they do so contribute? This should only seem paradoxical to someone who thinks that the utility of an act must be independent of the behaviour of others.

4. *Evaluation of the argument from the insignificant difference*

The argument that my doing something makes only an insignificant difference is in many cases not an acceptable defence. It is not acceptable where the supposed insignificance is a size illusion created by a special context. Nor is it acceptable where its plausibility depends on a tacit denial of the principle of divisibility.

It is only acceptable in cases where sub-threshold increments do not combine to produce discriminable harm, or where it is part of a larger argument, which includes countervailing reasons outweighing the harm that *is* done.

I turn now to the argument from no difference.

B

5. *The generalization test*

Sometimes it is said that the only reason why the scientist's claim, that if he does not work on chemical warfare someone else will, seems plausible as a defence is a mistaken concentration on the consequences of the act of a single person. It is suggested that we should not ask "what difference will it make if I do this?", but "what difference would it make if everyone did this?"

But David Lyons has cast doubt on this by his argument that the second question, when adequately formulated, always gives the same answer as the first question. When the generalization test is applied, everything hangs on how the act is described. We would probably give different answers to the crude question "what if everyone broke his promises?" and to the slightly more subtle question "what if everyone broke his promises when this was necessary to save someone's life?" Lyons argues that utilitarians applying the generalization test have to include in the description of the act all those features that affect the utility of the outcome. So, in the case of the scientist and chemical warfare, we have to ask, not the odd question, "what would happen if all scientists worked on chemical warfare?", but some such complicated question as "what would happen if all those biologists who had these special skills, and who were offered jobs in chemical warfare, accepted the jobs in those cases where, if they refused, someone else equally able would accept?" This question is itself no doubt over-simplified, but it seems that the more complete in the relevant respects the description becomes, the closer the generalization test comes to giving the same answer that one gets to the question "what will happen if *I* do this?"

Sometimes the Lyons argument is resisted, as it is by Gertrude Ezorsky, and by J. H. Sobel, by proposing restrictions on those

features of other people's behaviour that can be included in the description of the act when applying the generalization test. Sobel uses Prisoner's Dilemma type cases to show that such restrictions can result in the generalization test sometimes giving different answers from those obtained by the simple question about the consequences of a single person's act.

But the difficulty for those versions of the generalization test that do differ in outcome from the simple consequence question is that using them threatens to produce results that differ by being worse. This is because the features of other people's behaviour that we are debarred from considering often do in fact alter the desirability of the outcome. If I am not allowed to take into account how many other people are voting, the generalization test is likely to tell me to vote at some inconvenience to myself, even where my vote will not influence the outcome. If a nation in a balance of terror situation is not allowed to take into account the predictable response of other nations, the generalization test may tell it to disarm in a situation where the outcome will be that, as the only disarmed nation, it is obliterated. Such acts may be noble, but in opting for them we have abandoned consequentialism.

The generalization test could only help us if there were a version of it that would give answers that sometimes differed from those given to the simple test, and which in such cases would not generate a worse total outcome. Until such a version has been found it would be nice to hear no more of the generalization test.

6. *Side effects*

A more promising way of arguing against the scientist taking the chemical warfare job is to examine all the side effects of taking it, together with the alternatives. For the claim that "if I don't do it, someone else will" is not sufficient to show that the total consequences of *my* taking the job will be no worse than the total consequences of my not taking it.

One factor is the possibility of my doing some socially useful research instead. The probability is that the other people wanting the job are not guided much in their choice of work by considerations of social usefulness. If one of the others gets it, there is only an average chance that the work he would

otherwise have done would have been beneficial. But if I refuse the job, it is in my power to look for the most useful project I stand a good chance of completing.

There is also the question of the influence I have on others. If I take the job, this makes a small contribution to making such work respectable among those of my fellow scientists who know me and give any weight to my views. It may be said that the same contribution to an amoral climate of scientific research will be made by whoever takes the job. But this objection ignores the positive influence a refusal on principle can have. If I get the job, the other applicants will probably just grumble about the shortage of scientific jobs and make no contribution to discrediting chemical warfare as a field of research. If I refuse the job on moral grounds, this may itself make a good, if small, impact on the moral climate of science. It also leaves me free to campaign against others taking such jobs. It is true that if I accept the job (perhaps for some very subtle utilitarian reason) I can still campaign against others taking similar jobs. But my campaign would be weakened by the impression of hypocrisy this would create on unsubtle people.

There is also the effect on myself of doing, for good but subtle reasons, something that in crude terms I disapprove of. Suppose I take the job, while thinking it would be better if such research were not done, partly because I need the money more than the other applicants, and partly because I know that (by inefficient work not quite bad enough to get me sacked) I can ensure that the work is less productive. I may find I have under-estimated the effects of this bad faith, and when deception gets a permanent foothold in that part of my life, I may find it hard to prevent contamination of other relationships. Consequentialists can justify some acts of lying. But an enormously greater case has to be made out for any policy requiring constant deception, just because of the psychological difficulty of keeping one part of one's mind sufficiently cordoned off from the other parts.

And, even if I can keep my mind compartmentalised in this manner, I may be corrupted in a more oblique way. Our emotional responses are not always governed by our beliefs.

An atheist who was strongly conditioned to church-going in childhood may still feel guilty when he lies in bed on Sundays. Similarly, the utilitarian scientist working on chemical warfare may from time to time be filled with self-loathing and disgust, which may not be dispelled even when he rehearses to himself the complex reasons which he thinks justify his having the job. This may not in itself matter very much. But it can be important not to be subjected to too much tension of this kind, not only because it is unpleasant, but also because some constancy of self-esteem may be necessary for going on trying to be moral at all. If among the burdens of being moral there is a heavy weight of self-disgust, the whole policy is likely to break under the load.

But these appeals to side effects although powerful in the chemical warfare case, are not always sufficient to nullify the force of the claim "if I don't do it, someone else will". This is because it is always possible to construct a case where the arguments on the other side are even more powerful. Suppose I am very uninfluential in the scientific community and so my example either way carries very little weight. (The effects of a Bertrand Russell not following a multitude to do evil may be immense, but most other people command less attention.) Also suppose that I have a huge family; that we are very poor; and that there is very little chance of my finding any other job at all, let alone doing any useful research. It is plausible that, in the chemical warfare problem, appeals to side effects will in the normal case provide very good reasons against taking the job, even where it is certain that if I do not take it someone else will. But, as with all such arguments, it cannot be guaranteed that this result will be generated in all instances of the dilemma.

7. *A special class of side effects: spirals*

There are some very important classes of side effects which are often underrated. These are side effects where the *numbers* of actions of a certain type will have an influence on people. If this influence is repeated, we have a spiral.

To illustrate the idea of a spiral, we can again consider the voting problem. At first sight, there seems virtually no consequentialist case for voting in a general election in Britain. The chance of my vote being decisive between governments

can be ruled out: the likelihood of a government coming to power with a majority of one M.P., where that one M.P. gets in by a single vote, is laughably small. And even if I care about the size of the governing party's majority, it is still highly unlikely that a single person will be decisive in my own constituency. When this is recognised, it is common for people to produce a quite different argument for voting. My vote will help keep up the morale of my party, or else it will help to support the system of democratic elections.

People will in future be less inclined to vote for my party if it seems to stand very little chance of winning, so the total votes now cast for it matter. And people will start to feel disillusioned with the democratic system if the percentage using their votes becomes alarmingly small. The danger is of a downwards spiral, like a flight from a currency, where having few participants leads to loss of confidence, which in turn leads to fewer participants. Small political parties are similarly concerned to generate an upwards spiral, where larger numbers of votes lead potential supporters to think they stand a chance of winning, and so their votes increase further.

As so often when the argument from no difference is countered by appeals to side effects, we are back here with problems involving discrimination thresholds. Even where the existence of spiral is recognised, someone may claim that his vote makes an insignificant difference. Potential supporters would have to be *very* sensitive to feel differently about voting for a party which last time scored 8,341,692 votes from how they would feel about one which had scored 8,341,691. We can accept that one vote is below the discrimination threshold, but resist the view that it therefore does not matter at all. Such a view would lead to the baked beans paradox, so we should instead invoke the principle of divisibility. And a spiral magnifies the utilities and disutilities to be divided, sometimes enormously, as when the disutilities of a price increase are turned into the disutilities of the collapse of a currency.

The difficulty with spirals is our uncertainty about their onset and their rate of acceleration or slowing down. A specific number of votes is needed to win an election. It is not certain that there is a specific number marking the point where a small party starts to benefit from an upwards spiral, or the point

where it starts to be hurt by a downwards spiral. We are often unable to identify even the broad region of onset, and equally unable to predict the shape of the upwards or downwards curve.

Because utilities and disutilities are magnified by spirals, a rational consequentialist would give weight to this wherever it seemed plausible that they would occur. It is this feature of consequentialism that is fatal to D. H. Hodgson’s ingenious argument in support of the view that act utilitarianism is self-defeating. His claim that some over-riding important utilities depend on expectations that act utilitarians are incapable of generating. For example, communication depends on people expecting to be told the truth. Act utilitarians will only tell the truth where it is useful to do so, *ie*, where people expect it. But the expectation can only be generated by the practice, which in turn depends on the expectation. Hodgson claims that act utilitarians are on a downwards spiral that they cannot stop. But, as Peter Singer has pointed out, the very danger of the downwards spiral gives them a good reason for telling the truth, and the fact that they have this good reason should generate the right expectations in those they talk to.

When the importance of spirals is understood, it is less hard to see how act utilitarians (and others concerned with the contribution that their particular act makes to total outcome) can manage to generate the many benefits that flow from co-operative social practices. But, as with side effects in general, there is no guarantee that these effects will *always* generate a sufficient case for giving support to a co-operative practice. Even where the question of a spiral arises, there may be countervailing side effects that over-ride such a factor.

8. *The appeal to justice*

Suppose I do not vote because I have something else I want to do instead. I know my party will get in anyway, and there are no spirals or other side effects which outweigh the case for my not voting. Some people object here on grounds of justice. My argument for not voting depends on my belief that the other members of my party will mostly turn out to vote. It has been said by Colin Strang and by Lyons that there is something

unfair in my allowing others to do the work and not making a contribution myself.

Lyons thinks that the claims of fairness are such that I have a *prima facie* obligation to co-operate in social practices from which I benefit even where the threshold would be reached without my doing so. But this derives part of its plausibility in the case of voting from Lyons' assimilation of the voting case to a car pushing case. In the context of discussing surplus votes for a winning candidate, Lyons asks, "If it takes six men to push a car up a hill and, not knowing this, eight lend a hand and do the job, what are we to say?" But to assimilate these cases is to ignore the distinction between absolute thresholds and discrimination thresholds. Having made this distinction, we are free to accept the argument from injustice in the car pushing case without accepting it in the voting case. If I do not push the car, the others will have to push a bit harder. Many of us are against the kind of injustice that involves giving benefits to some at the cost of additional hardship to others. But no-one has to vote harder because I do not vote. It seems a dog-in-the-manger version of justice that objects to one person benefiting because others are left unchanged.

9. *Ritual*

Appeals to side effects (including spirals) will often not be powerful enough to generate an adequate consequentialist argument for voting, and the direct appeal to the question of who will win the election will carry weight only on very rare occasions. This is something a consequentialist may just accept, but many others find this rather shocking. Perhaps this is because, for many people in our society, voting is a kind of sacred ritual. There are emotional satisfactions in ritual professions of belief, and people who experience these satisfactions are disturbed by other people taking them lightly. This is a very minor factor to take into account, and it cuts both ways. It is a pity to cause minor disturbance to believers, but it is often beneficial to encourage people to question their rituals.

10. *Absolute prohibitions*

In considering the argument from no difference, it has so far been claimed that neither the generalization test nor the appeal to justice will defeat the argument. But it has also been suggested that, in very many cases, the act which apparently has no upshot will turn out to have side effects too important to dismiss.

Many people will object to the contingency of such a line of defence against the argument from no difference. To them it will seem wrong that the question of working on chemical warfare, or of selling arms to South Africa, should be decided by calculating consequences, however likely the result is to fit in with their prior disapproval. They may be tempted to invoke absolute prohibitions, independent of the total outcome of those actions.

The difficulty with absolute prohibitions is that the exclusion of appeals to outcome seems to rule out attempts to justify them, except either by direct appeal to intuitive responses or by appeal to some authority. Appeals to authority are not worth discussing here, so let us look at the alternative: the intuitive acceptability of absolute prohibitions.

The acts that can be defended by the argument from no difference are so varied that, at first sight, the list of absolute prohibitions needed to defeat the argument seems enormous. It ranges from “Never work on chemical warfare projects” through “Never sell arms to countries with evil governments” to “Never fail to vote in a general election where you care about the outcome”. A long list of absolute prohibitions of this kind should appal us. This is not merely because of the aesthetic preference most of us have for economy of principles, the preference for ethical systems in the style of the Bauhaus rather than Baroque. It is partly because we cannot see how to select our long list of absolute prohibited acts or omissions. And it is partly because we are rightly alarmed about what disasters we may be letting ourselves in for, where all escape routes are blocked by our having so many absolute prohibitions.

An alternative is to produce a coherent system of manageable size, where there is a small number of prohibitions stated in very general terms, together with priority rules where prohibitions conflict. Prohibitions would no longer refer to

chemical warfare, but to some such act as indiscriminate killing. In recent philosophy such a system is sometimes gestured at, especially in discussions of war or abortion, where the prohibition on killing the innocent is mentioned. But we have not been presented by those sympathetic to this kind of outlook with even the outlines of a properly worked out system. For this reason, we are still justified in any scepticism we feel. In the absence of a whole system to scrutinise, we still do not know what disasters such systems might make inescapable. And we still do not know what principle of selection is supposed to operate when we make up our list of forbidden acts.

11. *The Solzhenitsyn principle*

Bernard Williams has recently argued that it is desirable to find some middle way between a morality of absolute prohibitions and a morality where total outcome is decisive. Such a morality would have to leave more room, he argues, than a consequentialist morality can, for considerations of personal integrity. In such a morality, outcome is not all that matters. It is also important what role my decision or action play in bringing it about.

Considerations of this sort seem central to people's resistance to consequentialist morality. In Solzhenitsyn's Nobel lecture, he says (echoing one of his own characters in *The First Circle*) "And the simple step of a simple courageous man is not to take part in the lie, not to support deceit. Let the lie come into the world, even dominate the world, but not through me."

The Solzhenitsyn principle does not commit people who hold it to the view that some acts are wrong for reasons entirely independent of outcome. It is open to us to incorporate this principle in a kind of tempered consequentialism. I may think that a certain outcome is bad, and then invoke the Solzhenitsyn principle to say that *I* must not be the person who brings it about. But this is obviously a departure from the strictest consequentialism, which is concerned with total outcomes, rather than with what would ordinarily be described as the consequences of *my* act.

How can we choose between the strictest consequentialism and the Solzhenitsyn principle? If they always generated the

same answer, there would be no need to choose. But clearly they do not. In the chemical warfare problem, if there are cases where side effects give overall support to taking the job, this leads to a clash with the Solzhenitsyn principle. In those cases, to obey the principle is to do so at the cost of the total outcome being worse. The strict consequentialist will say that the principle tells us to keep our hands clean, at a cost which will probably be paid by other people. It is excessively self-regarding, placing considerations either of my own feelings or purity of character far too high on the scale of factors to be considered.

Williams has considered an argument of this kind, which he calls the "squeamishness appeal" in the context of an example of his own. A man, arriving in a small South American town finds that soldiers are about to shoot twenty captive Indians as a reprisal for recent anti-government protests there. The man, as a foreign visitor is offered the privilege of shooting one Indian. If he does this, the others will be let off. There is no escape from the dilemma of accepting or refusing the offer.

Williams plausibly says that the utilitarian would think that he obviously ought to accept the offer. Williams does not himself say that the offer should be refused, but that it is not *obvious* that it should be accepted. He then refers to the criticism that a refusal might be "self-indulgent squeamishness". But he suggests a reply to this squeamishness appeal. He says that this appeal can only carry weight with someone already seeing the situation in terms of strict consequentialism. He says that, for anyone not seeing things from that point of view, "he will not see his resistance to the invitation, and the unpleasant feelings he associates with accepting it, *just* as disagreeable experiences of his; they figure rather as emotional expressions of a thought that to accept would be wrong". Williams goes on to say, "Because our moral relation to the world is partly given by such feelings, and by a sense of what we can or cannot 'live with', to come to regard those feelings from a purely utilitarian point of view, that is to say, as happenings outside one's moral self, is to lose a sense of one's moral identity; to lose, in the most literal way, one's integrity".

This reply does have some force, but also severe limitations.

In the first place, it does not show that the *utilitarian* who regards certain of his own feelings in this way has lost his integrity. He can agree that his morality is partly based on such feelings, but say that when he reflects on his feelings he finds that they cannot all be combined into anything coherent. It then seems legitimate to disregard some of them as anomalies. When I hear of some medical experiments on an animal, I may feel a revulsion against all vivisection, but this may conflict with my feelings when I reflect on the implications of this for medical research. I do not lose my integrity by deciding that my first response was exaggerated.

The second limitation of the Williams reply is that it seems to presuppose that we can readily distinguish feelings that have moral import from other feelings. But this is not clear. The atheist already mentioned is surely right to attach no moral significance to his guilt feelings when he does not go to church. But his guilt feelings may not be phenomenologically distinct from those of a man whose whole morality centres around his religion.

The final doubt about the Solzhenitsyn principle is that it appears to presuppose a conventional but questionable doctrine about the moral difference between acts and omissions. According to this doctrine, I have made a worse moral choice if something bad foreseeably comes about as the result of my deliberate act than I have if something equally bad foreseeably comes about as the result of my deliberate omission. If we eliminate a complication by removing the difference of numbers, the Solzhenitsyn principle seems to suggest that it would be worse for me to shoot an Indian than for me deliberately to refuse an invitation with the foreseen and inevitable consequence that a soldier would shoot the same Indian. To look closely at arguments normally offered for this conventional view might increase our scepticism about the principle so closely related to it.

(The criticism of a possessive attitude to one's own virtue seems to be the point of the story of the old woman and the onion in *The Brothers Karamazov*. After a wicked life, an old woman was in the lake of fire. But God heard about her only good deed: she had once given an onion from her garden to a beggar. He told her guardian angel to hold out the onion for

her to catch hold of it, and to try to pull her up from the lake to paradise. She was being pulled out when other sinners in the lake caught hold of her to be pulled out. The woman kicked them, saying "It's me who is being pulled out, not you. It's my onion, not yours." When she said this, the onion broke and she fell back into the lake.)

12. *Judging actions and judging people*

Our inclination to make the choice I am arguing against (to prefer the Solzhenitsyn principle to strict consequentialism) is perhaps partly caused by a tendency to confuse judging actions with judging people. We ought in our thinking to keep separate the standpoints of the agent deciding between different courses of action and of the moral critic or judge, who comments on the moral quality of people's character.

The moralities of other people may lead them to perform acts that arouse our admiration, whether they are obeying absolute prohibitions or the Solzhenitsyn principle. Solzhenitsyn's own conduct while in Russia is a case in point. A more calculating, strict consequentialist morality might not have generated such a fine display of independence and bravery. (*Might not*: for the paradox here is that Solzhenitsyn's own example has done good in Russia that we cannot calculate, and has probably, in consequentialist terms, been well worth the risks taken. And even in our society, where the penalties are so much less, acts of moral independence help to create a climate where social pressures are less, and where the views of the powerful and the orthodox are treated with appropriate lack of reverence.)

Because we often admire the moral character of people following the Solzhenitsyn principle, we easily slide over into thinking their action right. But there is no equivalence here. Unless we are narrow-minded bigots, we will often admire the moral qualities of people following many different sets of beliefs: it does not follow that we are justified in following all or any of them when we have to act ourselves. The corollary of this is the platitude that we can sometimes disagree with a moral view while respecting those who act on it. Sometimes the reluctance to reject the Solzhenitsyn principle rests on neglect of this platitude.

Is there an oddity in saying that we can admire the character of those who accept the Solzhenitsyn principle just after quoting the story of the old woman and the onion?

We should distinguish here between admirable character traits on the one hand and a policy which gives exaggerated weight to preserving them on the other. Someone acting on the Solzhenitsyn principle can display such traits as honesty, loyalty, or a revulsion against killing or hurting people. These are all traits whose existence is in overall effect immensely beneficial. A consequentialist has every reason to encourage them. (This is the point sometimes exaggerated by crude consequentialists when they wrongly suggest that we admire these traits *because* of their contribution to social welfare.) We can admire these traits while thinking that they sometimes lead to the wrong decision, as happens if, in the Williams case, the man refuses to shoot an Indian. If, in explaining this, he says "I just could not bring myself to do it", we see an admirable character trait that has too strong a grip on him. But if he says "Before coming to South America I read an interesting article by Bernard Williams, and so I understood that I must preserve my integrity, even at the cost of nineteen lives", the onion criticism then applies.

13. *Esoteric morality*

It may be said that the consequentialist approach to these questions defended here is in some way incoherent, since if it were propagated widely, it would have disastrous consequences in its own terms. (Jonathan Harrison, in his discussion of these questions, said "No principle is fit to be a moral principle unless it is fit that it should be universally adopted and universally applied".) The consequentialist approach leaves such decisions as whether or not to vote, or whether or not to work on chemical warfare, to be decided by sophisticated reasoning about the outcome, rather than by simple and clear rules. The suggestion is that most people do not think in a very sophisticated way, and are likely to be biased by self-interest, so that if these views were propagated, disasters would follow. Elections might collapse. If not, they might be decided by people who were either not consequentialists or else not intelligent.

One reply is that propagating the consequentialist approach would include telling people about spirals. Where sophisticated utilitarian abstention started to become common, sophisticated utilitarians would detect this. They would revise their estimates of the chances of their party winning by a narrow margin, and they would also consider the danger of helping to start a downwards spiral. The tendency not to vote would be to some extent self-correcting.

Another reply is that people are not as dim as the criticism suggests. You do not really have to be a very sophisticated person to grasp say the essential point of the principle of divisibility. A recent anti-litter poster showed bits of paper falling, thick and fast, each accompanied by a speak-bubble saying “My one bit of paper won’t make any difference”. People who were not philosophers probably got the message.

But, apart from these points, there is a more central reply. A morality is not incoherent simply because, in its own terms, it would be better not propagated. I can consistently adhere to a morality which, among other things, enjoins me to practice it secretly. It is true that, if much of the morality is esoteric in this way, the bad effects on me of deceiving others will start to operate. But if the cases where deception will be justified are as few as I think they are, I can allow for them in my consequentialist calculations.

Sidgwick put the matter in an engaging sentence: “Thus the Utilitarian conclusion, carefully stated, would seem to be this; that the opinion that secrecy may render an action right which would not otherwise be so should itself be kept comparatively secret; and similarly it seems expedient that the doctrine that esoteric morality is expedient should itself be kept esoteric”. Sidgwick appropriately buried this sentence in page 490 of *The Methods of Ethics*.

14. *Conclusions*

To summarise the position argued for:

- (A) THE ARGUMENT FROM THE INSIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE:
 - (i) fails where it depends on size illusions
 - (ii) fails where it depends on ignoring the principle of divisibility.

(B) THE ARGUMENT FROM NO DIFFERENCE:

- (i) is not defeated by the generalization test
- (ii) is not defeated by the appeal to justice
- (iii) often is defeated by consideration of alternatives and side effects, especially spirals.

And (iv) where the side effects are inadequate to defeat the argument from no difference, this should then be accepted in preference to looking for absolute prohibitions or adopting the Solzhenitsyn principle.

- (v) In cases where the argument from no difference is accepted, this should sometimes not be publicised.

(I follow Sidgwick's example, and bury this last conclusion at the end of a paper in the Supplementary Volume of the Aristotelian Society.)

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“IT MAKES NO DIFFERENCE WHETHER OR NOT I DO IT”

Jonathan Glover and M. J. Scott-Taggart

II—M. J. Scott-Taggart

COLLECTIVE AND INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

When a person remarks, to himself or to others, “It makes no difference whether or not I do it”, he might be doing one of several things. One thing he might be doing is offering an excuse either for doing it or for not doing it. Another might be attempting to provide a partial justification for not doing it. A third thing he might be doing is expressing his indifference whether he does it or not. In this third way the remark is ambiguous between its mattering to him neither whether he does it nor whether he does not, and its mattering to him both whether he does it and whether he does not. Roughly: the difference between “I don’t give a damn whether I do it or not” and “I shall be damned both if I do it and if I do not”. Both of these third uses are interesting, but I shall not consider the expression used in either of these two ways except through examining its use in the first two ways—ways which are in themselves interesting, and to which some sort of priority would seem to attach because they are so frequently involved, and frequently so speciously involved, in sustaining either the “neither/nor” or the “both/and” state of mind.

The remark taken in either of the first two ways has this *prima facie* oddness about it: it would appear to be self-defeating. If a person says “It makes no difference whether or not I do it” as a part of a justification for performing some action, then it is surely implied that his doing it does make a difference, but that it is a difference whose weight is overborn by other considerations. While, again, if a person makes the remark as an excuse for doing whatever it is, then it is surely implied that his doing it makes a difference, morally speaking, but that in the circumstances he cannot reasonably be expected to do as morality requires of him (where it is worth remarking

the rather shabby picture we have of ourselves that we are so often tempted to accept such an appeal to what a man may "reasonably be expected to do"). Its use in the context of excuses is often flagged by remarks like "After all, if I don't do it, then someone else will", while in the justification context it might be backed up by one of several different kinds of remark, as, for example, "If I don't do it, then someone else will do something else which will have even worse results than my doing it". I use the example deliberately as a contentious one, for one of the issues about consequentialism lies in the definition of a suitable consequence relation and whether, and if so in what sense, another person's actions may be said to be the consequences of my own. But I shall begin by looking at a related problem, which is that of when a certain state of affairs is brought about through some joint action, and where it can only be brought about through some joint action, and inquiring into the consequence relation which links any of the individual parties to the act to the outcome of their joint action.

Glover deals with this second sort of case in relation to a range of examples which are said to have in common an extremely undesirable possible or actual state of the world whose degree can be diminished only through the joint action of a number of people. His list of examples covers aid to famine relief, turning off that extra heater during a national fuel crisis, and doing without that extra child in view of the dangers of overpopulation. It is an interesting list, for it raises crucial questions about the use of examples in moral philosophy. Here, for example, a theory is produced which is supposed to rationalise our convictions about these cases, and yet the theory is then used to outlaw convictions that we hold about other cases. The procedure needs to be defended in itself, while needing particular defence in the case at hand. For we shall get a lop sided theory if the examples are not homogeneous but are treated as being so, and a question begging theory if the examples are not sufficiently heterogeneous to provide a representative array of cases. Both faults are present here. The list lacks homogeneity, although it is treated as if all the cases were of the same kind, because in famine relief the donor is not also a beneficiary, while in the fuel rationing case the donor is himself a beneficiary, while in the population case it is arguable

that people's child-bearing habits are related to so many variables that the effective control of population can only take place through the manipulation of these variables, and that these variables are so related to one another that any one person's breeding habits make not an insignificant difference but no difference at all to the rate of population increase. The list, on the other hand, is not sufficiently representative because it ignores, for example, highly integrated groups whose members have specialised and complementary functions within the group, as in the case of a team of saboteurs, and all those groups between this extreme and that other extreme of total seriality which he does consider.

Let us focus on the roughly similar cases of famine relief and electricity rationing. The first step to getting clear about them must be to eliminate as irrelevant the theoretical apparatus that Glover introduces to deal with them: regrettable, if only because time-consuming, but unfortunately necessary. Let us however first glance at one of his conclusions which is acceptable. This is that the argument “It makes an insignificant difference whether or not I do it” does provide a justification for failing to do whatever is in question (A^1) if it occurs in a context where there is some alternative, A^2 , such that the good I would achieve if I did A^1 is insignificant compared to the good I would achieve if I did A^2 . Having let this argument through one might suppose that that was the end of the matter, for we are now to suppose that the argument is being deployed where there are no alternatives open to me which are significantly better in their outcome: we are dealing with what I shall call “closed situations”. In real life, of course, closed situations rarely if ever occur, but we may examine them to discover whether in such situations any *prima facie* obligations may be established which would become actual obligations if opening the situation did not reveal any morally significant alternatives. Glover, however, comes up with the rather surprising result that even in closed situations the argument “It makes an insignificant difference whether or not I do it” may be “acceptable”: these are cases where “sub-threshold increments do not combine to produce discriminable harm”.

There is some ambiguity and a fair deal of nonsense behind this sort of language. The word “acceptable” is ambiguous

between a justification or a mere excuse: Glover tends to take it as the first, while I shall argue that it must be taken as the second. And excuses do not justify, although justifications excuse. It is typical of even if it is not necessary to utilitarianism that it makes this conflation. As for the nonsense: this is involved in the distinction between absolute and discrimination thresholds. The definition of a discrimination threshold is given in terms of the jargon of statistics and relates to the sort of curves that we obtain in situations where the more people who perform an action of a given variety the worse the situation slowly becomes, and a discrimination threshold is defined as "the distance apart on the slope two points have to be in order to be seen as separate by us". The language is the language of statistics, but of course the language must be taken as metaphorical. Glover is clearly not talking about the distance apart on a graph that two points have to be in order to be seen as separate by us: that would make the distinction entirely arbitrary, for it would depend upon the scale of the graph, the size of the bit of paper on which we drew it, and the sorts of optical instruments available to us. Nor does the statistical distinction between discrete and continuous variables help him, although it may have been something he had in mind, since even if a graph does not show any sharp discontinuities we are able to introduce at will sharp discontinuities by stipulating for various reasons that certain points on the continuous curve are to be taken as marking sharp boundaries. We not only can do so, we do in fact do so, and for good reason, as when on the roughly smooth curve of the cost of living index we introduce absolute thresholds which trigger off sharp discontinuities in wage structures.

The distinction that Glover is after therefore clearly belongs to the semantics rather than the syntax of statistics, and the introduction of the statistical metaphor does nothing but conceal the real problem behind that yearning for mathematisation that is the nostalgia of utilitarians. The reality behind the metaphor consists of those situations where a certain harm will occur unless a certain number of people act in a certain way, and the more people who fail to act in that way, the more harm is brought about. And to deal with this sort of case we do not need any specious talk about discrimination thresholds. The

concept that the utilitarian needs here is that of the *utilitarianly optimal point*.

There are in fact two optimal points in every closed situation, given the usual utilitarian assumptions about the commensurability of different goods, there being only a fixed amount of these goods about, and the comparability of different distributions of these goods. Let us allow all these assumptions and look at the case of world poverty. The ideal optimal point (O^I) is that where the harm to be diminished (H^1) is balanced against the harm (H^2) to those who could act to diminish H^1 , where H^2 will generally be constituted out of the loss of income and the happiness that, in our utilitarianly naive moments, we believe money can buy. Where the difference between H^1 and H^2 is at its lowest point we have O^I .

It is worth reminding ourselves of how, in utilitarian terms, H^2 is constituted. We calculate H^2 by distributing the harm over the population at large taking into account that frequently used and misused utilitarian device: marginal utilities. H^2 is achieved by taking from each person a sum representing an equal loss of utility, where because of marginal utilities this sum will not be the same for everybody.

Relative to O^I —remembering that we are dealing with closed situations and making the standard utilitarian assumptions about the availability of information and quantifiability of harms—the normatively required contribution of every member of the group is precisely calculable. Anyone who subtracts even one penny from what is required of him commits a utilitarian sin.

In practice O^I will never be reached except accidentally and in a way which involves injustice. There will always be the morally indifferent, the ruthlessly selfish, the factually uninformed, and those beguiled by the argument “my doing it makes an insignificant difference”. I will group all these together as the morally derelict. Amongst them there will be some from the last two classes who have an excuse: there will however be none who has a justification. This directly contradicts Glover’s conclusion. His conclusion is, however, mistakenly arrived at because he fails to keep clearly before his mind the difference between closed and open situations, because he ignores altogether the distinction between excuses

and justifications, and because he makes that distinction between absolute and discrimination thresholds which totally obscures the question at issue.

Let us suppose that O^I is reached as regards the welfare of the beneficiaries despite there being the morally derelict. It will only have been reached if those who contribute towards O^I suffer more hardship than even utilitarian justice will allow, for the lack of contributions from the morally derelict has been made up by extra contributions from the good utilitarians. But here marginal utilities work the other way round: the second dollar taken from a man makes a greater difference than the first, but the good utilitarians have laid out that second dollar, and the morally derelict have therefore harmed those who do make up the contributions.

Let us secondly suppose that O^I is not reached as regards the welfare of the beneficiaries because of the morally derelict and the lack of "surplus" subscriptions from the good utilitarians. Here we invoke Glover's queer sounding principle for devolving responsibility from a group to its members. This declares that we take the group which is causally responsible for the utility which the world lost through O^I not being reached, divide the loss in potential utility by the number of members of that group, and then each member of the causally responsible group is deemed to be causally responsible for that fraction of the lost utility.

The sheerly mechanical nature of this process which gives it its air of oddness reflects Glover's awareness that he is dealing with closed situations and the *prima facie* obligations they contain, i.e. none of the morally derelict can appeal to alternative actions with significantly better outcomes than the action being considered. Even so, it could well be argued that the principle is too mechanical: I have suggested already that within the morally derelict there are some with excuses and some without, and no doubt some with better excuses than others.

The process does provoke one interesting question, for Glover assumes without question that the causally responsible group if an ideal optimal point fails to be reached are those who don't switch off their electricity or those who don't send their donations to Oxfam. Why should we make this supposition? Could we not make a case the other way round?

Arguing this way round we would start by pointing to the pride that utilitarianism arrogates to itself for taking the world as it finds it. But the world as it is found does contain the moral derelicts, so why should the utilitarians not take this fact into account and be made causally responsible for not taking up the slack and distributing the harm if O^I is to be achieved amongst themselves? Why should we suppose that the causal responsibility attaches to those who don't shiver or put their pence in the collection box?

The utilitarian reply is that when he does take the fact of the existence of moral derelicts into account, then he must sit down and re-calculate. Not for him the heroic task of taking upon himself the sins of the world: he would rather define a realistic optimal point (O^R). Here the harm to be diminished, H^1 , remains constant, but it will be balanced not against H^2 , or the harm to those who *could* act to diminish H^1 , but rather against H^3 , or the harm to those who *will* act to diminish H^1 . Where the harm to be diminished is constant, at O^R we shall find that H^3 is larger than was H^2 at O^I , because the harm to the donors is distributed over a smaller number of them, while also H^3 will still be smaller than if the utilitarian took it upon himself to make up the contributions of the moral derelicts so that O^I rather than O^R should be achieved. At O^R of course there will be a lesser diminution of harm to the recipients than if O^I were achieved.

I have already suggested that any action detracting from O^I being achieved is without justification—if not necessarily without excuse—and it would follow that those actions which cause the goal to be redefined in terms of O^R are also without justification. I should now like to draw attention to another point. This is that whether O^I is achieved or whether the utilitarian redefines his task in terms of O^R , the burden on the donors is increased proportionately to the number of derelicts. When this is seen then it is seen that the derelict really is without excuse—let alone that justification which was claimed for him. For here it has to be argued not that the derelict's action makes an insignificant difference to the utility of those who are the *beneficiaries* of aid, but rather that it makes an insignificant difference to the utility of those who are the *donors* of aid. The normatively required burden upon the donors increases with

the number of derelicts. Glover rather non-committally concedes that “many of us”—surely all of us with any moral feelings whatsoever—“are against the kind of injustice that involves giving benefits to some at the cost of additional hardship to others”. This dictum does not solve for him what he sees as the voting problem, since nobody has to vote harder because I do not vote, but I fail to see even the beginnings of a problem there in any case. What is to my present purpose is that this dictum shows that the argument from insignificant difference is always specious when applied to closed situations: utilitarian rationality requires a redefinition of O^R for every single increase in the number of derelicts, and with every single increase in the number of derelicts it is the case both that the benefits to the beneficiaries decreases, and *also* that there is an increase in the burden on the benevolent. Glover might be able to make a case for an excuse on some rare occasions: he will never be able to make a case for a justification on any occasion.

A word in passing about the principle of divisibility, the 100 bandits, the 100 villagers, and the 10,000 baked beans. The example is not only grotesque, it is also irrelevant. The principle of divisibility is a rule for devolving responsibility for some outcome upon the individual members of a group where it is only through the group functioning as a group that the outcome was possible. Glover seems to believe that we need the principle of divisibility if each bandit takes only one bean from each villager, but that we do not need it if each bandit takes 100 beans from some particular villager. The answer is that we need it as much in the second case as in the first. The idea that we don't springs from the fact that it might seem that each villager can identify some particular bandit as the man who injured him. This fact is not significant. What is significant is that if that particular bandit had not injured him, then some other bandit would have instead. If this counterfactual is true, as it is, then who actually ate whose beans is irrelevant: the causal chain terminates in the group although, since we cannot punish the group without punishing its members, the chain of responsibility goes farther. The principle of divisibility in its crude form enables us to do this if and only if the bandits are interchangeable: and if the bandits are interchangeable, then the counterfactual is true.

I speak of the principle of divisibility "in its crude form" because, of course, it does not apply in the form described by Glover to situations which are "open" rather than "closed", for as soon as a closed situation is opened, then all sorts of considerations enter which function to distinguish one individual from another: not only the realm of excuses, but also the realm of justifications, is extended, and questions about degrees of responsibility and strict liability are raised. It would be the height of naïvety to suppose that what held of a closed situation with its well defined optimal points also applies to an open situation where there is more than one actual or potential morally undesirable state of affairs whose degree may be ameliorated or diminished by collective action. It might seem that there is no difference, because after opening a situation and incorporating other morally significant features, we can then close it again and deal with it as before, although the apparatus will have to be complicated a little, and we shall have to call in slightly more sophisticated mathematicians. But of course there are differences, and I speak of those who suppose there are none as being naive because they must invoke a premiss about the comparability of harms which nobody of utilitarian persuasion has satisfactorily resolved even to the extent of persuading those others of utilitarian persuasion. It is this that makes utilitarianism so dangerous a doctrine, although even if there were such knowledge of what constituted desirable consequences, there would remain the not so intractable problem, as Williams has put it, "of who, how, and with what authority, would apply such knowledge in planning whom". In the absence of such knowledge the utilitarian, like Glover, who argues that he and others like him, operating in secret and with a theoretical apparatus that I believe I have already shown to be in part totally untenable, should simply arrogate authority to themselves and manipulate others in so far as those others could not be brought within the Holy Circle. . . . Such consequences are so absurd that I cannot but believe that I have failed to understand his position, although I fail altogether to see where.

But let us turn to Glover's second sort of case: that where a person argues that it is excusable or justifiable for him to perform some action because if he doesn't perform it then somebody else will. What does utilitarianism have to say about

this? It would seem that as in the previous case there is an ideal optimal point, for it is a presupposition of this sort of case that the world would be in a better state if nobody performed the action: there is thus an O^I . This question, which seems of more significance to Glover than the others since all the examples of his opening paragraph are of this variety, is that of whether, if there is an advertisement in the positions vacant column requesting applicants for the post of hired assassin, chief torturer for the South African police, or head of research in a chemical warfare experimental station, I am ever justified in applying for such a post and accepting it if it is offered to me, on the grounds that were I not to do so then there is certainly someone else who will.

If O^I is not achieved, then mankind is responsible for the distance between O^I and whatever state of affairs should obtain. Are we able to devolve responsibility from the species to some particular member of it? In practice, in the majority of cases, the isolation of the offending member is a pretty arbitrary business: we are all implicated because we must bear the responsibility for the social conditions of which the legally responsible party is a product. We must draw a line between primary and secondary responsibility where primary responsibility attaches to the causal instrument through which society inflicts this harm upon itself but where secondary responsibility is distributed more widely until everybody is implicated even if we should wish to distinguish degrees of "complicity".

If O^I is not achieved in these cases, then there is some individual who has done something wrong, and to whom primary responsibility attaches for the resulting morally impoverished state of affairs.

Someone who argues in these cases "It makes no difference whether or not I do it" purely and simply on the grounds that if he were not to do it, then there is someone else who will do it, is without defence. This is because his argument amounts to "If X does A then X does something wrong, while if I do A then I shall not do something wrong". If such an argument were acceptable then it would follow that if utilitarianism is alive then virtually everything is permissible. We have here neither justification nor excuse: except it be an excuse that some might have read Glover's paper and been persuaded by it, whereupon

secondary responsibility of a fairly hefty sort would attach to Glover. If I do that which will prevent O^I from being achieved, and there are no side-effects to be taken into account (i.e. the situation is a closed one), then there is nothing, according to Glover, that is “sufficient to nullify the force of the claim ‘if I don’t do it, someone else will’”. That is to say, Glover seems happy to assert that it is in these circumstances quite acceptable—perhaps justifiable, certainly excusable—to perform some action which it would be wrong for anybody to perform. The argument is defective: such closed situations do give rise to prima facie obligations which may, of course, be over-ruled when the closed situation is opened to other morally relevant considerations. It may be that when the closed situation is opened then the prima facie obligation is consolidated into an actual obligation: it may be that it is consolidated in this way through the potentially operative effect of what Williams calls “Gresham’s Law” to induce what Glover calls a “spiral”. It may also be the case that the prima facie obligation is overridden, although we still lack an account of when this might occur. Glover paints a touching picture of my huge family and immense poverty imprisoned by unemployment and an economic situation that is liable to leave me that way. Such factors might well introduce what we feel to be morally significant differences between myself and the other applicant for the job doing research on chemical warfare: certainly sufficient to excuse my taking it, for the field of excuses occupies that enormous terrain that separates man from God. But suppose that I am a frivolous bachelor who is capable of deriving infinitely more pleasure from the salary than my rather melancholy opponent, who derives little or no pleasure from beer and darts, and to whom the world is given as *öd und leer*. In this case there will be more happiness in the world if I take the job rather than he, and more happiness in the world than if neither of us took the job: do we really wish to say that this factor is sufficient to out-balance the prima facie obligation that the situation contains? If utilitarianism should declare so then utilitarianism is radically counter-intuitive and communication must break down because the utilitarian will consider no examples which do not fit with his theory. And that is a breakdown in rationality.

But let us look at a case that Glover describes, albeit sketchily, where our intuitive convictions do not appear to square with consequentialist morality. This raises the large issue of negative responsibility, as the secular equivalent of the principle of double effect, where discussion of the whole issue must be short-circuited. So let us short-circuit it by taking the quotation that Glover uses to illustrate a commonly held view, although I shall re-quote it in order that some part of its relevant context is also before us. Thus Solzhenitsyn declares that "the simple step of a courageous man is not to partake in falsehood, not to support false actions! Let that enter the world, let it even reign in the world—but not with my help". This, he believes, is within the power of each of us, "but writers and artists can achieve more: they can conquer falsehood! In the struggle with falsehood art always did and it always does win! Openly, irrefutably for everyone! Falsehood can hold out against much in this world, but not against art".

It would be my contention that the "something more" which it is claimed the artist can achieve that our simple honest man cannot achieve is something more only in a quantitative sense: and we have been warned by Glover not to be alienated from moral endeavour through size illusions. There is no absolute truth which is mirrored in art, but what art enables us to do is to see things more clearly in that we are led to see and to feel perspectives on the world alien to but with an equal validity to that perspective which imprisons our vision. One might say that art humiliates self-conceit: it discloses to us the subterfuges that we employ in order that our egos should be able to satiate themselves. But then one is reminded of Kant's dictum that the moral law "strikes down and humiliates self-conceit". I am not here concerned to defend Kant's particular views of the moral law—indeed let the content of the moral law be as utilitarian as you please—but solely to point out that the self-conceit that is humiliated is not merely one's own, but also that of others. A man who does as he believes he ought against manifest temptation to do otherwise: such a man humiliates us, and forces us to reappraise our moral position. Of course not every man who does as he professes he ought is in fact doing as he believes he ought—as one might say, "morality itself" can be a temptation. But we can decipher men as we can decipher

texts: the genuine article may easily be distinguished if we exercise a little discernment, and employ a little of what Shaftesbury was wont to call "humour" as an antidote for the disease of enthusiasm. My point: we cannot divide appraisal of men and appraisal of actions as neatly as Glover supposes. The men in the actions or, if you will, a certain style or manner of acting, is more effective in eliminating the danger of spirals than actions as they might be recorded by the man on the street corner with his questionnaire. But this is a point which has been argued for extremely cogently by Williams in his *Auseinandersetzung* with Smart. In Glover's terminology, rule utilitarianism is crude utilitarianism. Parity of abuse will perhaps permit me to call act utilitarianism crass utilitarianism. Williams' argument, which I endorse although I shall not repeat it here, is to the conclusion that there is no distinctive place for crass utilitarianism unless it is a thesis about what men should do when confronted with a moral problem, and thus necessarily involves views on the appraisal of agents. His strategy is to drive utilitarianism in a Kantian direction, and then strangle both birds with a rope woven from dogmatically stated theses. I would agree with his argument right up to the last phase, but it is not to the point to argue that particular issue here. What is to the point is that there are considerable arguments about to show that Glover cannot get away with his bland statements to the effect that, as for the appraisal of men, that is *quite* another matter. My view is that it is a combination of size illusions and a lack of appreciation of the subtleties involved in the relation of act and agent appraisals which in part explains Glover's resistance to Solzhenitsyn's statement.

This resistance is something which requires explanation because it is a resistance without apparent justification. Glover talks about the Solzhenitsyn Principle: I am far from clear what this principle is. What we have is a statement: "Let the lie come into the world, even dominate the world, but not through me". Is there anything objectionable about such a statement?

We clearly cannot find out if there is anything objectionable about the statement unless we know what it means: a trivial remark which of course leads up to my claim that what Solzhenitsyn means is not what Glover takes him to mean. And this of course leads to unclarity, for the statement as made by

Solzhenitsyn is directed against the form of argument "my doing it makes an insignificant difference" whereas Glover takes it to be directed against the form of argument "my doing it makes no difference because if I don't do it then somebody else will". So let us find out first what Solzhenitsyn means, and then discover what Glover takes him to mean, and if there is anything clear which Glover takes him to mean then we may label it "the Glover principle". If there is nothing clear which Glover takes him to mean, then we won't have a principle at all and there will be no problem about seeking suitable nomenclature.

When Solzhenitsyn makes the statement "let the lie come into the world, even dominate the world, but not through me" how is it that we should understand the word "lie"? If Solzhenitsyn were an English analytic philosopher belonging to the Oxford school of a decade ago, then we should be entitled to suppose that in talking about lying he was talking about making false statements with the intention to deceive. But it is surely clear that it is not in this way that Solzhenitsyn intends it to be understood: the word "lie" is being used in an unusual way, although a way which is entirely legitimate, and legitimate because language has to be used in an unusual way when there is no word that is entirely adequate to one's intentions, or a word that could be adequate to one's intentions only if it had not suffered damage of an inevitable kind through too frequent mishandling in the market place of human interactions. The market place is necessary for the writer: here the rich connotations of the word "lie" are constituted which make it possible for the word to be used in a way which has impact although it is used in a way which at the same time has a concrete meaning of a very specific sort that bears only a family resemblance to those which it possesses in the market place. We all surely feel the need on occasions to manipulate language in this way. I am myself inclined to rank honesty as the cardinal virtue although consulting the Oxford English Dictionary would provide anybody with only a first crude approximation to what I meant by the word: his reading would have to be supplemented by my describing in some detail a number of different cases amongst which, in fact, several might very well fail to exhibit honesty in the dictionary sense of this word. What, then, does Solzhenitsyn

mean by "lie"? This is not, in view of what I have said, a question which can be answered both adequately and briefly, but since brevity is required of me I can only make a gesture in the way of an adequate answer by saying that lying, for Solzhenitsyn, means something along the lines of failing to explicitly dissociate oneself from any form of activity of whose nature or purpose one disapproved. If you are able to follow my gesture to its destination, it will be clear that lying, for Solzhenitsyn, is related to what I have described as "hiding oneself in the crowd", which is to say, is related to those invalidated arguments which are compressed in the formula "my doing it makes an insignificant difference".

How, however, should we understand Glover's understanding of Solzhenitsyn? We are given a number of clues of more or less usefulness. We are told (1) that it is open to us to incorporate the Solzhenitsyn principle in a kind of "tempered consequentialism" which is distinct from "the strictest consequentialism" and (2) that results arrived at through employing tempered consequentialism may differ from deploying the strictest consequentialism to certain situations. Let us attack each of these in turn.

Glover claims that "the Solzhenitsyn principle" may be incorporated in a kind of tempered utilitarianism, in that "I may think that a certain outcome is bad, and then invoke the Solzhenitsyn principle to say that *I* must not be the person who brings it about. But this is obviously a departure from the strictest consequentialism, which is concerned with total outcomes, rather than with what would ordinarily be described as the consequences of *my* act".

We may suppose that we are here dealing with a closed situation: open situations are considered in (2). And before the crucial objection to this passage is made, there is another objection that Glover must face which I should first mention. This is that whatever "the strictest consequentialism" amounts to, it is almost certainly not a normatively reasonable doctrine. We are told that the strictest consequentialism deals in "total outcomes": it is unclear what a "total outcome" is. Some sense has, however, been given to it by Bergstrom who argues that whatever normatively reasonable sense of "consequences" we adopt, that sense must give results which do not conflict with

what he calls "The Future State Principle". And I suppose that something like the Future State Principle is what Glover has in mind when he talks of "total outcomes". But Bergstrom argues that to *interpret* "the consequences of a" as something like "the total future state of the world if a is done" is "*neither descriptively nor normatively reasonable*" for any teleological theory. On this one point at least I find myself totally in agreement with Bergström's argument which, although it is too long to rehearse here, poses a challenge that Glover will have to meet.

But there is a more immediate reply to Glover available to us. This is that Glover is clearly accepting as valid the argument "if I don't do it, someone else will": an argument which we have seen to be invalid when applied to closed situations because it amounts to "if X does A then X does something wrong, while if I do A then I shall not do something wrong". This is nonsense unless we can point to some difference between X's situation and my own which, *ex hypothesi*, we are unable to do because the situation is a closed one. Or rather, now that we have introduced Bergström, it is either nonsense or the onus is upon Glover to show that it is normatively reasonable to take "the consequences of a" as "the total future state of the world if a is done", and I do not believe he can evade the charge of nonsense by opting for the second disjunct for reasons that Bergström has outlined.

Our conclusion on (1): there is a distinction between "tempered" and "the strictest" consequentialism only if the argument "if I don't do it someone else will" is valid. The argument is not valid, so we have not yet got any distinction between two kinds of consequentialism, and no clash as yet between Solzhenitsyn's dictum and consequentialism.

Glover, however, argues that on some occasions "the strictest consequentialism" generates a different answer from "the Solzhenitsyn principle". This is now case (2) where we are dealing with open situations rather than with closed ones. And if we take the chemical warfare example, Glover argues that "if there are cases where side effects give overall support to taking the job, this leads to a clash with the Solzhenitsyn principle. In those cases, to obey the principle is to do so at the cost of the total outcome being worse. The strict consequentialist will say

that the principle tells us to keep our own hands clean, at a cost which will probably be paid by others". Does this give us the clue to what the Solzhenitsyn principle is? A clue sufficient to enable us to appraise the argument?

Let me first deal with Solzhenitsyn's statement on my own understanding of it. On this construction, Solzhenitsyn's argument on the chemical warfare case with the strict consequentialist will be that of whether or not my taking the job makes an insignificant difference. The question turns into a question that may almost totally be resolved by appeal to the facts. The situation is an open one, so alternatives have to be weighed and the operative effect of Gresham's law established as accurately as possible. There would seem to be no difference in principle to the two approaches to the matter, although the decision of each may be different because Solzhenitsyn—despite, or perhaps because of his experiences in Russia—has greater faith than Glover in the effectiveness of "the simple step of a simple courageous man" to humiliate self-conceit and thus prevent the consequentialist's tendency to slide away from doing whatever is necessary to procure the ideal optimal point of the utilitarian. If there is disagreement, then, it will be over *whether* my taking the job is purchased "at the cost of the total outcome being worse". If it is *agreed* that the total outcome will be worse if I take the job rather than do not, then there is also agreement over what ought to be done. There is thus not, on my own construction of Solzhenitsyn's statement, any clash between what Glover argues to be two different doctrines, because there are *not* two different doctrines: there may well be a clash, however, of personalities, but that is quite a different matter.

Which leaves us still with the problem of trying to locate Glover's understanding of Solzhenitsyn's statement: the problem, as I shall henceforth put it, of locating the Glover principle which, in some situations, will give results at variance with those of the strictest consequentialism. And it seems to me that the only plausible way of getting a principle which will have results at variance with the strictest consequentialism from the statement "Let the lie come into the world but not through me" is to extract the dictum: If a *prima facie* obligation is established in a closed situation, then under no circumstances do

other than what has been *prima facie* established even when the closed situation is opened to admit other morally significant factors.

This, the Glover principle, is indeed (1) absurd, (2) in no way implied by Solzhenitsyn's statement, while (3) it seems the only way to understand Glover's understanding of Solzhenitsyn given that the declared difference in result of tempered consequentialism and strict consequentialism arises when side effects, i.e. other morally relevant considerations, are introduced into a situation and it is declared that tempered utilitarianism will not budge from its original verdict in the face of the new data.

Again, therefore, it seems that there is no difference between tempered utilitarianism and strict consequentialism: or, if there is a difference, it is not a difference between a more or less strict consequentialism, but is a difference between a morality of absolute prohibitions and a morality that takes each case as it comes. Solzhenitsyn is certainly not committed to the first on the evidence to hand: and even if he were, we should still have to establish that this was a bad thing by establishing just what a morality of absolute prohibitions amounted to. In so far as I have an idea of a morality of absolute prohibitions, however, it does seem to me to have a number of advantages over one-principle theories: if only because with a morality of absolute prohibitions I know what I am letting myself in for, while with one-principle theories there is always a covert set of rules for dividing up situations in such a way that the principle will be applicable to them. I am rather inclined to believe that utilitarianism in fact smuggles in through the back door what it explicitly disavows to be in the house in the form of such a covert set of rules, and one had liked to see set out just what these rules are and how it is that they are selected. One had liked to see just exactly how the trick is worked whereby the utilitarian can escape any situation with clean hands where for the rest of us, operating from an always unstable point of equilibrium between theory and our particular judgements about particular situations, tragedy is always a possibility.

In conclusion, therefore, my position is that Glover's arguments to the effect that the arguments "my doing it makes an insignificant difference" and "if I don't do it someone else

will" are sometimes acceptable are themselves unacceptable. I have done so using a minimal number of premises and assumptions that would not be acceptable to any utilitarian, i.e. I have tried to show that his position is internally incoherent. I shall have to leave to another occasion the advantages of crude over crass utilitarianism, and the advantages of a Kantian ethic over both.

I should like to express my gratitude to Peter Bell and David Hirschmann for arguing me out of the belief that it made no difference whether or not I wrote this reply. I should also like to acknowledge considerable benefit I have derived from the publications of Michael Stocker—and in particular "Consistency in Ethics" [*Analysis* 25 (1965)] which essentially contains the argument I have deployed in the first part of this reply and does so—to my shame—both more succinctly and more suggestively.

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