CHAPTER 8: THE DEBATE OVER UTILITARIANISM

The utilitarian doctrine is that happiness is desirable, and the only thing desirable, as an end; all other things being desirable as means to that end.

John Stuart Mill, Utilitarianism (1861)

Man does not strive after happiness; only the Englishman does that.

Friedrich Nietzsche, Twilight of the Idols (1889)

8.1. The Classical Version of the Theory

Classical Utilitarianism, the theory of Bentham and Mill, can be summarized in three propositions: First, actions are to be judged right or wrong solely by virtue of their consequences. Nothing else matters. Second, in assessing consequences, the only thing that matters is the amount of happiness or unhappiness that is created. Everything else is irrelevant. Third, each person's happiness counts the same. As Mill put it:

the happiness which forms the utilitarian standard of what is right in conduct, is not the agent’s own happiness, but that of all concerned. As between his own happiness and that of others, utilitarianism requires him to be as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator.

Thus, right actions are those that produce the greatest possible balance of happiness over unhappiness, with each person's happiness counted as equally important.

The appeal of this theory to philosophers, economists, and others who theorize about human decision making has been enormous. The theory continues to be widely accepted, even though it has been challenged by a number of apparently devastating arguments. These anti-utilitarian arguments are so numerous, and so persuasive, that many have concluded the theory must be abandoned. But the remarkable thing is that so many have not abandoned it. Despite the arguments, a great many thinkers refuse to let the theory go. According to these contemporary utilitarians, the anti-utilitarian arguments only show that the classical theory needs to be improved; they say the basic idea is sound and should be preserved, but recast into a more satisfactory form.

In what follows, we will examine some of these arguments against Utilitarianism and consider whether the classical version of the theory may be revised satisfactorily to meet them. These arguments are of interest not only for the assessment of Utilitarianism but for their own sakes, as they raise some fundamental issues of moral philosophy.

8.2. Is Happiness the Only Thing That Matters?

The question What, things are good? is different from the question What actions are right? and Utilitarianism answers the second question by referring back to the first one. Right actions, it says, are the ones that produce the most good. But what is good? The classical utilitarian reply is: one thing,
and one thing only, namely happiness. As Mill put it, "The utilitarian doctrine is that happiness is desirable, and the only thing desirable, as an end; all other things being desirable as means to that end."

The idea that happiness is the one ultimate good (and unhappiness the one ultimate evil) is known as Hedonism. Hedonism is a perennially popular theory that goes back at least as far as the ancient Greeks. It has always been attractive because of its beautiful simplicity and because it expresses the intuitively plausible notion that things are good or bad on account of the way they make us feel. Yet a little reflection reveals serious flaws in this theory. The flaws stand out when we consider examples like these:

**A promising young pianist's hands are injured in an automobile accident so that she can no longer play.** Why is this bad for her? Hedonism would say it is bad because it causes her unhappiness. She will feel frustrated and upset whenever she thinks of what might have been, and *that* is her misfortune. But this way of explaining the misfortune seems to get things the wrong way around. It is not as though, by feeling unhappy, she has made an otherwise neutral situation into a bad one. On the contrary, her unhappiness is a rational response to a situation that is unfortunate. She could have had a career as a concert pianist, and now she cannot. That is the tragedy. We could not eliminate the tragedy just by getting her to cheer up.

**You think someone is your friend, but he ridicules you behind your back.** No one tells you, so you never know. Is this unfortunate for you? Hedonism would have to say no, because you are never caused any unhappiness. Yet we feel there is something bad going on. You think he is your friend, and you are "being made a fool," even though you are unaware of it and you suffer no unhappiness.

Both these examples make the same basic point. We value all sorts of things, such as artistic creativity and friendship, for their own sakes. It makes us happy to have them, but only because we already think them good. (We do not think them good because they make us happy - this is how Hedonism "gets things the wrong way around.") Therefore, it is a misfortune to lose them, independently of whether or not the loss is accompanied by unhappiness.

In this way, Hedonism misunderstands the nature of happiness. Happiness is not something that is recognized as good and sought for its own sake, with other things desired only as a means of bringing it about. Instead, happiness is a response we have to the attainment of things that we recognize as good, independently and in their own right. We think that friendship is a good thing, and so having friends makes us happy. That is very different from first setting out after happiness, then deciding that having friends might make us happy, and then seeking friends as a means to this end.

For this reason, there are not many hedonists among contemporary philosophers. Those sympathetic to Utilitarianism have therefore sought a way to formulaic their view without assuming a hedonistic account of good and evil. Some, such as the English philosopher G. E. Moore (1873-1958), have tried to compile short lists of things to be regarded as good in themselves. Moore suggested that there are three obvious intrinsic goods - pleasure, friendship, and aesthetic enjoyment - and that right actions are those that increase the world's supply of these things. Other utilitarians have bypassed the question of how many things are good in themselves, leaving it an open question and saying only that right actions are the ones that have the best results, however that is measured. Still others bypass the question in another way, holding only that we should act so as to maximize the satisfaction of people's preferences. It is beyond the scope of this book to discuss the merits or demerits of these varieties of
Utilitarianism. I mention them only in order to note that, although the hedonistic assumption of the classical utilitarians has largely been rejected, contemporary utilitarians have not found it difficult to carry on. They do so by urging that Hedonism was never a necessary part of the theory in the first place.

8.3. Are Consequences All That Matter?

The idea that only consequences matter is, however, a necessary part of Utilitarianism. The theory's most fundamental idea is that in order to determine whether an action would be right, we should look at what will happen as a result of doing it. If it were to turn out that some other matter is also important in determining rightness, then Utilitarianism would be undermined at its very foundation.

Some of the most serious anti-utilitarian arguments attack the theory at just this point. They urge that various other considerations, in addition to utility, are important in determining right and wrong. Here are three such arguments.

1 Justice. Writing in the academic journal Inquiry in 1965, H. J. McCloskey asks us to consider the following case:

Suppose a utilitarian were visiting an area in which there was racial strife, and that, during his visit, a Negro rapes a white woman, and that race riots occur as a result of the crime, white mobs, with the connivance of the police, bashing and killing Negroes, etc. Suppose too that our utilitarian is in the area of the crime when it is committed such that his testimony would bring about the conviction of a particular Negro. If he knows that a quick arrest will stop the riots and lynchings, surely, as a Utilitarian, he must, conclude that he has a duty to bear (also witness in order to bring about the punishment of an innocent person.

This is a fictitious example, of course, although it was obviously inspired by the lynch-law that prevailed at one time in some parts of the United States. In any case, the argument is that if someone were in this position, then on utilitarian grounds he should bear false witness against the innocent person. This might have some bad consequences - the innocent man might be executed - but there would be enough good consequences to outweigh them: The riots and lynchings would be stopped. The best outcome would be achieved by lying; therefore, according to Utilitarianism, lying is the thing to do. But, the argument continues, it would be wrong to bring about the execution of an innocent person. Therefore, Utilitarianism, which implies it would be right, must be incorrect.

According to the critics of Utilitarianism, this argument illustrates one of the theory's most serious shortcomings: namely, that it is incompatible with the ideal of justice. Justice requires that we treat people fairly, according to their individual needs and merits. McCloskey's example illustrates how the demands of justice and the demands of utility can come into conflict. Thus, an ethical theory that says utility is the whole story cannot be right.

2 Rights. Here is a case that is not fictitious; it is from the records of the U.S. Court of Appeals, Ninth Circuit (Southern District of California), 1963, in the case of York v. Story:

In October, 1958, appellant [Ms. Angelynn York] went to the police department of Chino for the purpose of filing charges in connection with an assault upon her. Appellee Ron
Story, an officer of that police department, then acting under colour of his authority as such, advised appellant that it was necessary to take photographs of her. Story then took appellant to a room in the police station, locked the door, and directed her to undress, which she did. Story then directed appellant to assume various indecent positions, and photographed her in those positions. These photographs were not made for any lawful purpose.

Appellant objected to undressing. She stated to Story that there was no need to take photographs of her in the-nude, or in the positions she was directed to take, because the bruises would not show in any photograph.

Later that month, Story advised appellant that the pictures did not come out and that he had destroyed them. Instead, Story circulated these photographs among the personnel of the Chino police department. In April, 1960, two other officers of that police department, appellee Louis Moreno and defendant Henry Grote, acting under colour of their authority as such, and using police photographic equipment located at the police station made additional prints of the photographs taken by Story. Moreno and Grote then circulated these prints among the personnel of the Chino police department.

Ms. York brought suit against these officers and won. Her legal rights had clearly been violated. But what of the morality of the officers' behaviour? Utilitarianism says that actions are defensible if they produce a favourable balance of happiness over unhappiness. This suggests that we consider the amount of unhappiness caused to Ms. York and compare it with the amount of pleasure taken in the photographs by Officer Story and his cohorts. It is at least possible that more happiness than unhappiness was caused. In that case, the utilitarian conclusion apparently would be that their actions were morally all right. But this seems to be a perverse way of thinking. Why should the pleasure afforded Story and his cohorts matter at all? Why should it even count? They had no right to treat Ms. York in this way, and the fact that they enjoyed doing so hardly seems a relevant defense.

Here is an (imaginary) related case. Suppose a Peeping Tom spied on Ms. York by peering through her bedroom window, and secretly took pictures of her undressed. Further suppose that he did this without ever being detected and that he used the photographs entirely for his own amusement, without showing them to anyone. Now under these circumstances, it seems clear that the only consequence of his action is an increase in his own happiness. No one else, including Ms. York, is caused any unhappiness at all. How, then, could Utilitarianism deny that the Peeping Tom’s actions are right? But it is evident to moral common sense that they are not right. Thus, Utilitarianism appears to be unacceptable.

The moral to be drawn from this argument is that Utilitarianism is at odds with the idea that people have *rights* that may not be trampled on merely because one anticipates good results. In these cases, it is Ms. York’s right to privacy that is violated; but it would not be difficult to think of similar cases in which other rights are at issue - the right to freedom of religion, to free speech, or even the right to life itself. It may happen that good purposes are served, from time to time, by violating these rights. But we do not think that our rights should be set aside so easily. The notion of a personal right is not a utilitarian notion. Quite the opposite: It is a notion that places limits on how an individual may be treated, regardless of the good purposes that might be accomplished.
3 Backward-Looking Reasons. Suppose you have promised someone you will do something - say, you promised to meet her downtown this afternoon. But when the time comes to go, you don't want to do it; you need to do some work and you would rather stay home. What should you do? Suppose you judge that the utility of getting your work accomplished slightly outweighs the inconvenience your friend would be caused. Appealing to the utilitarian standard, you might then conclude that it is right to stay home. However, this does not seem correct. The fact that you promised imposes an obligation on you that you cannot escape so easily. Of course, if a great deal was at stake—if, for example, your mother had just been stricken with a heart attack and you had to rush her to the hospital—you would be justified in breaking the promise. But a small gain in utility cannot overcome the obligation imposed by the fact that you promised. Thus Utilitarianism, which says that consequences are the only things that matter, once again seems to be mistaken.

There is an important general lesson to be learned from this argument. Why is Utilitarianism vulnerable to this sort of criticism? It is because the only kinds of considerations that the theory holds relevant to determining the rightness of actions are considerations having to do with the future. Because of its exclusive concern with consequences, Utilitarianism has us confine our attention to what will happen as a result of our actions. However, we normally think that considerations about the past are also important. (The fact that you promised your friend to meet her is a fact about the past.) Therefore, Utilitarianism seems to be faulty because it excludes backward-looking considerations.

Once we understand this point, other examples of backward-looking considerations come easily to mind. The fact that someone did not commit a crime is a good reason why he should not be punished. The fact that someone once did you a favour may be a good reason why you should now do him a favour. The fact that you did something to hurt someone may be a reason why you should now make it up to her. These are all facts about the past that are relevant to determining our obligations. But Utilitarianism makes the past irrelevant, and so it seems deficient for just that reason.

8.4 Should We Be Equally Concerned for Everyone?

The final component of utilitarian morality is the idea that we must treat each person's welfare as equally important—as Mill put it, that we must be "as strictly impartial as a disinterested and benevolent spectator." This sounds plausible when it is stated abstractly, but it has troublesome implications. One problem is that the requirement of "equal concern" places too great a demand on us; another problem is that it disrupts our personal relationships.

The Charge That Utilitarianism Is Too Demanding. Suppose you are on your way to the theatre when someone points out that the money you are about to spend could be used to provide food for starving people or inoculations for third-world children. Surely, those people need food and medicine more than you need to see a play. So you forgo your entertainment and give the money to a charitable agency. But that is not the end of it. By the same reasoning, you cannot buy new clothes, a car, a computer, or a camera. Probably you should move into a cheaper apartment. After all, what is more important - your having these luxuries or children having food?

In fact, faithful adherence to the utilitarian standard would require you to give away your resources until you have lowered your own standard of living to the level of the neediest people you could help. We might admire people who do this, but we do not regard them as simply doing their duty. Instead,
we regard them as saintly people whose generosity goes beyond what duty requires. We distinguish actions that are morally required from actions that are praiseworthy but not strictly required. (Philosophers call the latter supererogatory actions.) Utilitarianism seems to eliminate this distinction.

But the problem is not merely that Utilitarianism would require us to give up most of our material resources. Equally important, abiding by Utilitarianism's mandates would make it impossible for us to carry on our individual lives. Each of our lives includes projects and activities that give it character and meaning; these are what make our lives worth living. But an ethic that requires the subordination of everything to the impartial promotion of the general welfare would require us to abandon those projects and activities. Suppose you are a cabinetmaker, not getting rich but making a comfortable living; you have two children that you love; and on weekends you like to perform with an amateur theatre group. In addition you are interested in history and you read a lot. How could there be anything wrong with this? But judged by the utilitarian standard, you are leading a morally unacceptable life. After all, you could be doing a lot more good if you spent your time in other ways.

**Personal Relationships.** In practice, none of us is willing to treat all people as equals, for it would require that we abandon our special relationships with friends and family. We are all deeply partial where our friends and family are concerned. We love them and we go to great lengths to help them. To us, they are not just members of the great crowd of humanity - they are special. But all this is inconsistent with impartiality. When you are impartial, intimacy, love, affection, and friendship fly out the window.

The fact that Utilitarianism undermines our personal relationships seems to many critics to be its single greatest fault. Indeed, at this point Utilitarianism seems to have lost all touch with reality. What would it be like to be no more concerned for one's husband or wife than for strangers whom one has never met? The very idea is absurd; not only is it profoundly contrary to normal human emotions, but the institution of marriage could not even exist apart from understandings about special responsibilities and obligations. Again, what would it be like to treat one's children with no greater love than one has for strangers? As John Cottingham puts it, "A parent who leaves his child to burn, on the ground that the building contains someone else whose future contribution to the general welfare promises to be greater, is not a hero; he is (rightly) an object of moral contempt, a moral leper."

8.5. The Defense of Utilitarianism

These arguments add up to an overwhelming indictment of Utilitarianism. The theory, which at first seemed so progressive and commonsensical, now seems indefensible: It is at odds with such fundamental moral notions as justice and individual rights, and it seems unable to account for the place of backward-looking reasons in justifying conduct. It would have us abandon our ordinary lives and spoil the personal relationships that mean everything to us. Not surprisingly, the combined weight of these arguments has prompted many philosophers to abandon the theory altogether.

Many thinkers, however, continue to believe that Utilitarianism, in some form, is true. In reply to the above arguments, three general defenses have been offered.

1 The First Line of Defense: Fanciful Examples Don't Matter.
The first line of defense is to argue that the anti-utilitarian arguments make unrealistic assumptions about how the world works. The arguments about rights, justice, and backward-looking reasons share
a common strategy. A case is described, and then it is said that from a utilitarian point of view a certain action is required - bearing false witness, violating someone's rights, or breaking a promise. It is then said that these things are not right. Therefore, it is concluded, the utilitarian conception of rightness cannot be correct.

But this strategy succeeds only if we agree that the actions described really would have the best consequences. But why should we agree with that? In the real world, bearing false witness does no/have good consequences. Suppose, in the case described by McCloskey, the "utilitarian" tried to incriminate the innocent man in order to stop the riots. He probably would not succeed; his lie might be found out, and then the situation would be even worse than before. Even if the lie did succeed, the real culprit would remain at large, to commit additional crimes. Moreover, if the guilty party were caught later on, which is always a possibility, the liar would be in deep trouble, and confidence in the criminal justice system would be undermined. The moral is that although one might think that one can bring-about the best consequences by such behaviour, one can by no means be certain of it. In fact, experience teaches the contrary: Utility is not served by framing innocent people.

The same goes for the other cases cited in the anti-utilitarian arguments. Violating people's rights, breaking one's promises, and lying all have bad consequences. Only in philosophers' imaginations is it otherwise. In the real world, Peeping Toms are caught, just as Officer Story and his cohorts were caught; and their victims suffer. In the real world, when people lie, others are hurt and their own reputations are damaged; and when people break their promises, and fail to return favours, they lose their friends.

Therefore, far from being incompatible with the idea that we should not violate people's rights, or lie, or break our promises, Utilitarianism explains why we should not do those things. Moreover, apart from the utilitarian explanation, these duties would remain mysterious and unintelligible. What could be more mysterious than the notion that some actions are right "in themselves," severed from any notion of a good to be produced by them? Or what could be more unintelligible than the idea that people have "rights" unconnected with any benefits derived from the acknowledgment of those rights? Utilitarianism is not incompatible with common sense; on the contrary, Utilitarianism is commonsensical.

So that is the first line of defense. How effective is it? Unfortunately, it contains more bluster than substance. While it can plausibly be maintained that most acts of false witness and the like have bad consequences in the real world, it cannot reasonably be asserted that all such acts have bad consequences. Surely, at least once in a while, one can bring about a good result by doing something that moral common sense condemns. Therefore, in at least some real-life cases Utilitarianism will come into conflict with common sense. Moreover, even if the anti-utilitarian arguments had to rely exclusively on fictitious examples, those arguments would nevertheless retain their power; for showing that Utilitarianism has unacceptable consequences in hypothetical cases is a valid way of pointing up its theoretical defects. The first line of defense, then, is weak.

2 The Second Line of Defense: The Principle of Utility Is a Guide for Choosing Rules, Not Individual Acts. The second line of defense admits that the classical version of Utilitarianism is inconsistent with moral common sense and proposes to save the theory by giving it a new formulation which will be in line with our commonsense evaluations. In revising a theory, the trick is to identify precisely which of
its features is causing the trouble and to change that, leaving the rest of the theory undisturbed. What is it about the classical version that generates all the unwelcome results?

The troublesome aspect of classical Utilitarianism, it was said, is its assumption that each individual action is to be evaluated by reference to the Principle of Utility. If on a certain occasion you are tempted to bear false witness, the classical version of the theory says that whether it would be wrong is determined by the consequences of that particular lie; similarly, whether you should keep a promise depends on the consequences of that particular promise; and so on for each of the examples we have considered. This is the assumption that caused all the trouble; it is what leads to the conclusion that you can do any sort of questionable thing if it has the best consequences.

Therefore, the new version of Utilitarianism modifies the theory so that individual actions will no longer be judged by the Principle of Utility. Instead, we first ask what set of rules is optimal, from a utilitarian point of view. What rules should we prefer to have current in our society, if the people in our society are to flourish? Individual acts are then judged right or wrong according to whether they are acceptable or unacceptable by those rules. This new version of the theory is called Rule-Utilitarianism, to distinguish it from the original theory, now commonly called Act-Utilitarianism. Richard Brandt was perhaps the most prominent defender of Rule-Utilitarianism; he suggested that "morally wrong" means that an action

would be prohibited by any moral code which all fully rational persons would tend to support, in preference to all others or to none at all, for the society of the agent, if they expected to spend a lifetime in that society.

Rule-Utilitarianism has no difficulty coping with the anti-utilitarian arguments. An act-utilitarian, faced with the situation described by McCloskey, would be tempted to bear false witness against the innocent man because the consequences of that particular act would be good. But the rule-utilitarian would not reason in that way. He would first ask, "What general rules of conduct tend to promote the greatest happiness?" Suppose we imagine two societies, one in which the rule "Don't bear false witness against the innocent" is faithfully adhered to, and one in which this rule is not followed. In which society are people likely to be better off? From the point of view of utility, the first society is preferable. Therefore, the rule against incriminating the innocent should be accepted, and by appealing to this rule, we conclude that the person in McCloskey's example should not testify against the innocent man.

Analogous reasoning can be used to establish rules against violating people's rights, breaking promises, lying, and all the rest. Rules governing personal relationships - requiring loyalty to friends, loving care of one's children, and so on - can also be established in this manner. We should accept such rules because following them, as a regular practice, promotes the general welfare. But once having appealed to the Principle of Utility to establish the rules, we do not have to invoke the principle again to determine the Tightness of particular actions. Individual actions are justified simply by appeal to the already-established rules.

Thus Rule-Utilitarianism cannot be convicted of violating our moral common sense. In shifting emphasis from the justification of acts to the justification of rules, the theory has been brought into line with our intuitive judgments to a remarkable degree.
The Third Line of Defense: "Common Sense" Can't Be Trusted. Finally, a small group of contemporary utilitarians has had a very different response to the anti-utilitarian arguments. Those arguments point out that the classical theory is at odds with ordinary notions of justice, individual rights, and so on; and this group responds: "So what?" In 1961 the Australian philosopher J. J. C. Smart published a monograph entitled An Outline of a System of Utilitarian Ethics; reflecting on his position in that book, Smart said:

Admittedly utilitarianism does have consequences which are incompatible with the common moral consciousness, but I tended to take the view "so much the worse for the common moral consciousness." That is, I was inclined to reject the common methodology of testing general ethical principles by seeing how they square with our feelings in particular instances.

Our moral common sense is, after all, not necessarily reliable. It may incorporate various irrational elements, including prejudices absorbed from our parents, our religion, and the general culture. Why should we simply assume that our feelings are always correct? And why should we reject a plausible, rational theory of ethics simply because it conflicts with those feelings? Perhaps it is the feelings, not the theory, that should be discarded. In light of this, consider again McCloskey's example of the person tempted to bear false witness. McCloskey argues that it would be wrong to have a man convicted of a crime he did not commit because it would be unjust. But wait: Such a judgment interests well enough, but what of the innocent people who will be hurt if the rioting and lynchings continue? Surely we might hope that we never have to face a situation like this. All the options are terrible. But if we must choose between (a) securing the conviction of one innocent person and (b) allowing the deaths of several innocent people, is it so unreasonable to think that the first option, bad as it is, is preferable to the second?

And consider again the objection that Utilitarianism is too demanding because it would require us to use our resources to feed starving children rather than go to movies and buy cars and cameras. Is it unreasonable to believe that continuing our affluent lives is less important than those children?

On this way of thinking, Act-Utilitarianism is a perfectly defensible doctrine and does not need to be modified. Rule-Utilitarianism, by contrast, is an unnecessarily watered-down version of the theory, which gives rules a greater importance than they merit. There is a serious problem with Rule-Utilitarianism, which can be brought out if we ask whether its rules have exceptions. After the rule-utilitarian's "ideal social code" has been established, are its rules to be followed no matter what? There will inevitably be cases where an act that is prohibited by the code would nevertheless maximize utility, maybe even by a considerable amount. Then what is to be done? If the rule-utilitarian says that in such cases we may violate the code, it looks like he has (alien back into act-utilitarianism. On the other hand, if he says that we may not do the "forbidden" act, then, as Smart puts it, the utilitarian's original concern for promoting welfare has been replaced by an irrational "rule worship." What sort of utilitarian would allow the sky to fall for the sake of a rule?

Act-Utilitarianism engages in no such rule-worship. It is, however, recognized to be a radical doctrine that implies that many of our ordinary moral feelings may be mistaken. In this respect, it does what good philosophy always does—it challenges us to rethink matters that we have heretofore taken for granted. If we consult what Smart calls our "common moral consciousness," it seems that many considerations other than utility are morally important. But Smart is right to warn us that "common
"common sense" cannot be trusted. That may turn out to be Utilitarianism's greatest contribution. The deficiencies of moral common sense are obvious, once we think for only a moment. Many white people once felt that there is an important difference between whites and blacks, so that the interests of whites are somehow more important. Trusting the "common sense" of their day, they might have insisted that an adequate moral theory should accommodate this "fact." Today, no one worth listening to would say such a thing, but who knows how many other irrational prejudices are still a part of our moral common sense? At the end of his classic study of race relations, An American Dilemma (1944), the Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal reminds us:

There must be still other countless errors of the same sort that no living man can yet detect, because of the fog within which our type of Western culture envelops us. Cultural influences have set up the assumptions about the mind, the body, and the universe with which we begin; pose the questions we ask; influence the facts we seek; determine the interpretation we give these facts; and direct our reaction to these interpretations and conclusions.

Could it be, for example, that future generations will look back in disgust at the way affluent people in the 21st century enjoyed their comfortable lives while third-world children died of easily preventable diseases? Or at the way we slaughtered and ate helpless animals? If so, they might note that utilitarian philosophers of the day were criticized as simple-minded for advancing a moral theory that straightforwardly condemned such things.