



Unit 5

Read Bernhardt pages 25-29, Norton II pages 1037-1044 (you only need to read "Mother to Son," "I, Too," "Democracy," and "Theme for English B"), and read Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a Dream Speech" (posted on Blackboard in the Content section).

The ethical principle outlined in Bernhardt's book (pages 25-29) is that of Consequentialism. This is a fairly straight-forward theory that states that an action is morally good if the consequence of that action is a good one. This means that even an action that might seem morally bad could be good if it leads to a good outcome. An obvious example would be a mother stealing food from a store to feed her hungry children. Most people believe stealing is morally wrong, but under Consequentialism, it would be considered morally good to do so if it means that children will not be hungry.

Think about your own life. Are there things you have done that may seem morally wrong but were actually morally beneficial in some way? Did you tell a lie in order to spare someone's feelings? Did you break a rule in order to help someone out? Did you disobey your parents because you believed they were wrong about some moral issue?

One big aspect of Consequentialism is **the greatest happiness principle**. This idea just means that you should make decisions in order to benefit the greatest amount of people. Here's an example: Let's say you have fifty dollars. You can either spend the money on a birthday dinner for your best friend or give the money to a local food bank. Most people would probably spend the money on their best friend, but giving the money to the food bank would benefit more people, so consequentialism would say that is the better moral choice.

Assignment 12

Answer the following questions with a paragraph or two each.

1. Consider the following scenario. You are married and have no kids. Your house and your neighbor's house are both on fire. Your neighbor has a spouse and six kids. You can only run into one house and save the people inside (you can either save your spouse or the eight people who live next-door). You don't really know your neighbors. Who do you save - your spouse or the eight strangers who live next-door? What would consequentialism tell you to do? Why?
2. Consequentialism states that it's not the decision that matters (in terms of morality) but instead what happens because of the decision. Do you agree with this idea? Write about a time when you (or someone you know) made a decision that seemed morally wrong but actually had the better moral outcome.