

better," Mill tells us, "to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are of a different opinion, it is because they know only their own side of the question."<sup>32</sup>

As elegant and straightforward as the utilitarian approach might appear, there are a few puzzles that pose some difficulty for applying it. How, for example, is a moral thinker to determine which consequences are relevant to the calculation of a choice's utility and which ones are not? Should we confine our thinking only to actual consequences, or also consider hypothetical results? Should we confine our deliberations to immediate results, or must we extend our thinking to the longest term possible? Does the requirement that each individual's concerns count equally make it difficult to differentiate among relevant and irrelevant consequences and stakeholders? There is still quite a lot of disagreement on these points (and many others), and I do not propose to settle matters here. Many later consequentialists also point out that there is much more to the human good than simple pleasures and pains. The notion of human well-being or welfare must itself be just as complex as human beings are, and may include concerns that, while not obviously connected to pleasure or pain, are nonetheless vitally important. For this reason, contemporary consequentialists tend to argue in terms of broader conceptions of human welfare or flourishing rather than relying on the simpler utilitarian pleasure/pain calculus.

There is a further problem for consequentialists of all stripes: to what should we apply the principle of utility? If we apply the principle of utility to individual choices or actions (a position called *act utilitarianism* or *act consequentialism*), we may inadvertently miss cases in which acceptable short-term consequences are followed by very bad long-term consequences. In order to avoid that sort of situation, *rule utilitarians* (also called *rule consequentialists*) hold that the principle of utility ought to be applied to *rules* for action rather than to particular actions. What is good as a rule, however, may not always be good in some given situation. It might be good, for example, to follow a rule that says that one ought always to stop the car at crosswalks, but in a situation in which stopping at just that point might lead to harm somehow (accidentally blocking an ambulance on an emergency call), going through and getting out of the way without stopping might have better consequences. I will explore the difference between rule and act utilitarianism more fully in the application example that follows.

<sup>32</sup> Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 102.