

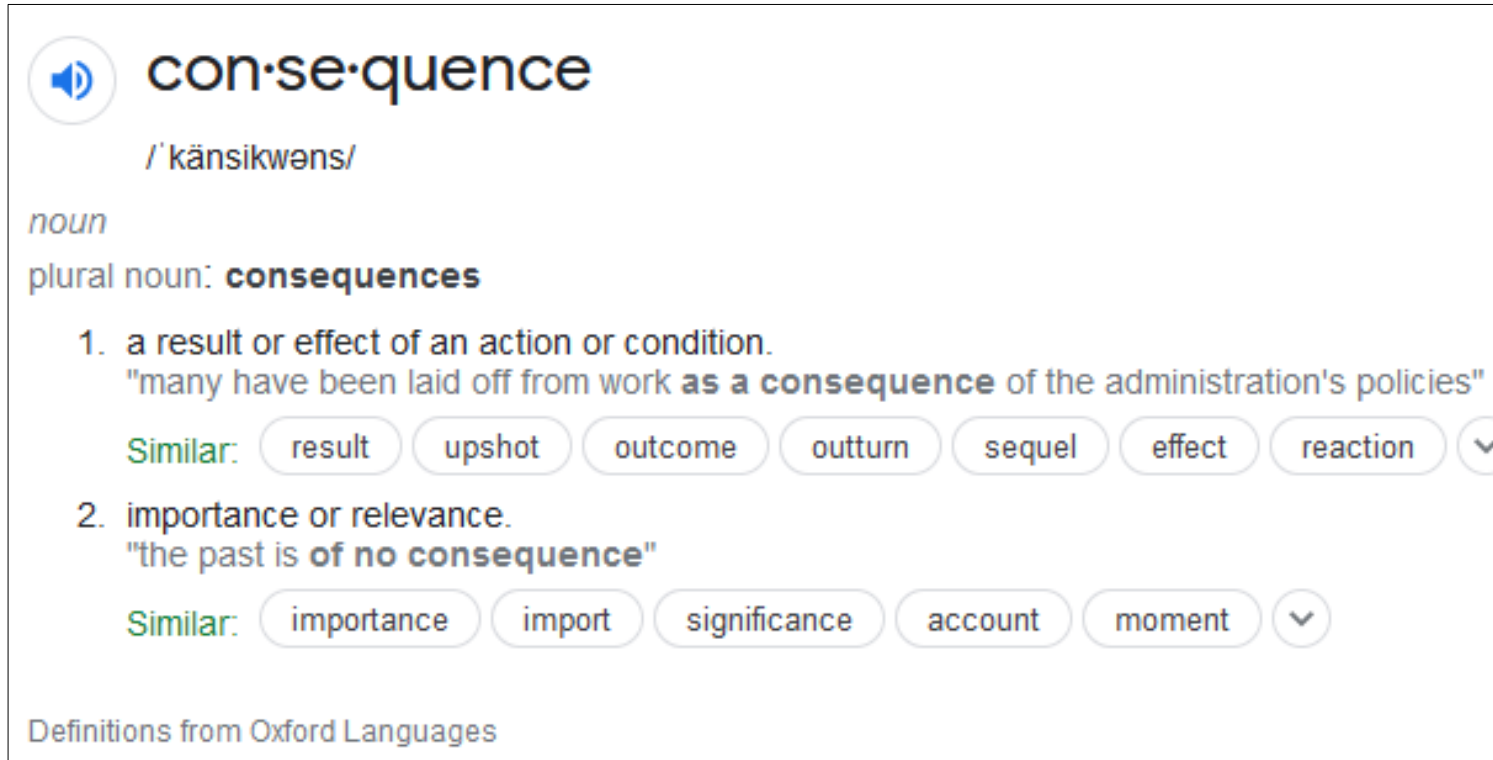



Consequentialism

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November 13, 2021

Consequentialism



 **con·se·quence**
/ˈkɒnsɪkwəns/
noun
plural noun: **consequences**

1. a result or effect of an action or condition.
"many have been laid off from work **as a consequence** of the administration's policies"
Similar: result upshot outcome outturn sequel effect reaction
2. importance or relevance.
"the past is **of no consequence**"
Similar: importance import significance account moment

Definitions from Oxford Languages

Title image:

<https://benjaminspall.com/consequentialism/>

Consequentialism, a.k.a. teleological ethics, is ethics with the end outcome in mind.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/teleological-ethics>

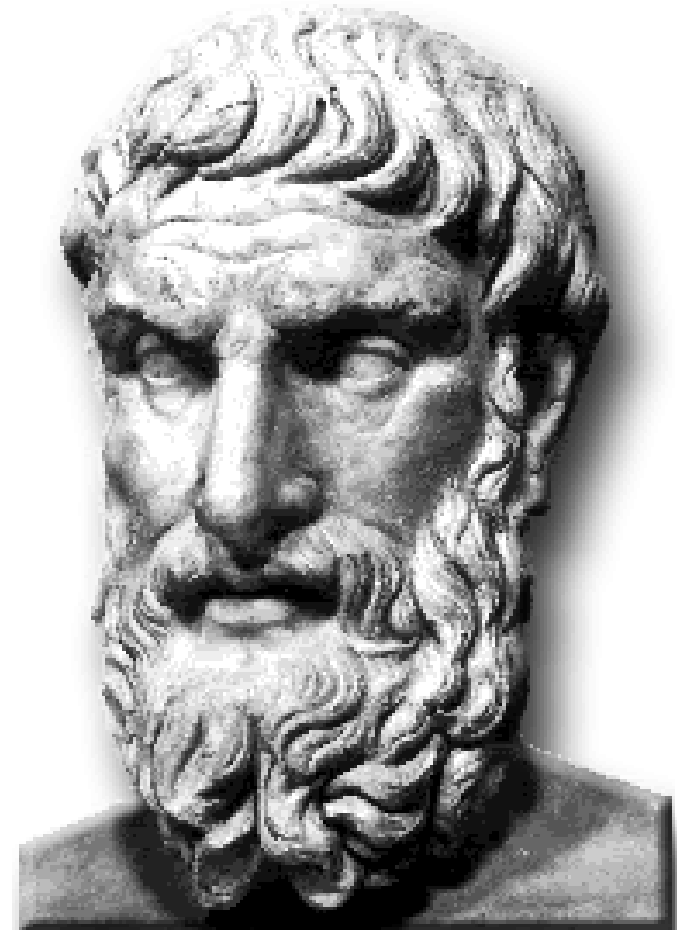
Epicurus: The Pleasure Principle

- “a view of the goal of human life (happiness, resulting from absence of physical pain and mental disturbance)
- “an empiricist theory of knowledge (sensations, together with the perception of pleasure and pain, are infallible criteria)”

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/epicurus/>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epicurus>

<https://archive.org/details/epicureanism00walluoft/page/n21/mode/2up>



Hedonism

“Epicurus was a [hedonist](#), meaning he taught that what is pleasurable is morally good and what is painful is morally evil. He idiosyncratically defined ‘pleasure’ as the absence of suffering and taught that all humans should seek to attain the state of [ataraxia](#), meaning “untroubledness”, a state in which the person is completely free from all pain or suffering.” - Wikipedia



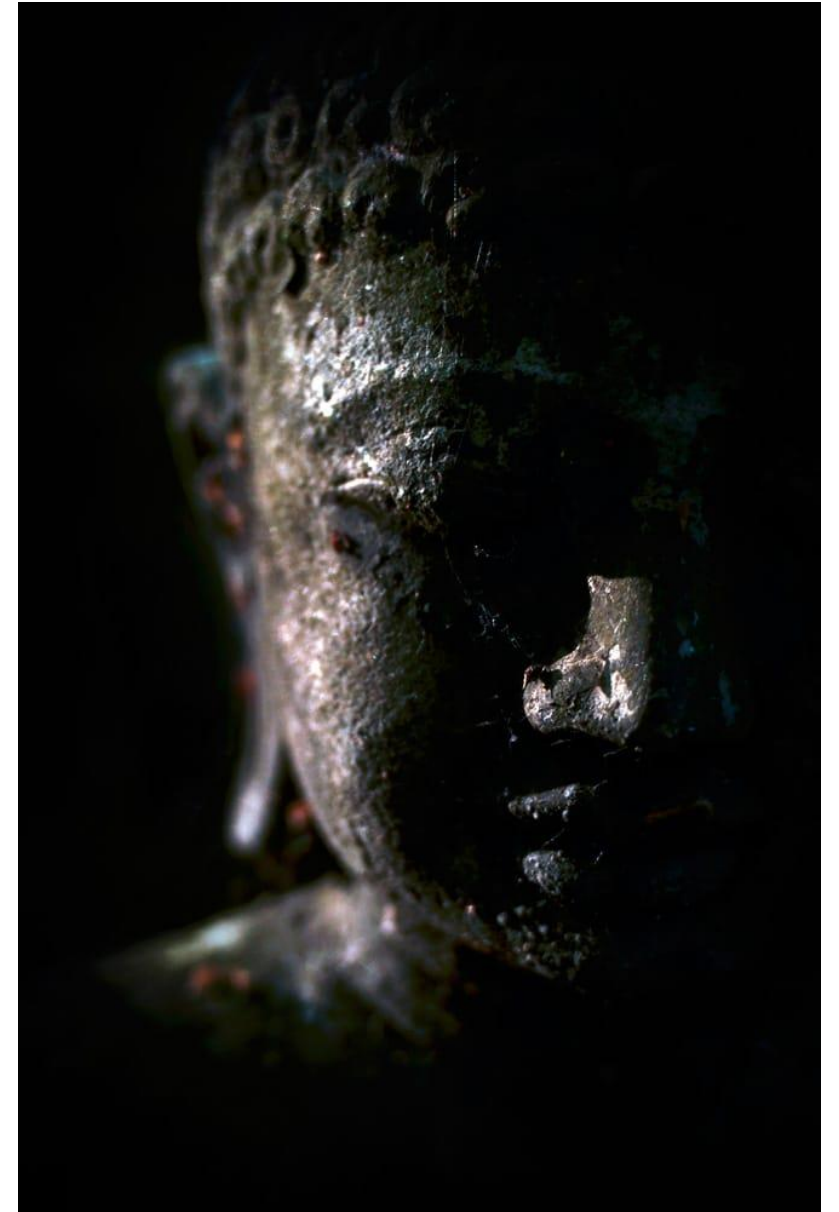
<https://owlcation.com/humanities/Epicurean-Hedonism-vs-Modern-Hedonism>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyrenaics> - a sensual hedonist Greek school of philosophy founded in the 4th century BCE by Aristippus of Cyrene,

Dukkha

- The Pali word *dukkha* is most commonly translated to English as “suffering.”
- We living beings are trapped in the cycle of existence known as samsara
- In samsara, we experience unbearable suffering because of the tight grip of our grasping at self.

<https://www.lionsroar.com/what-is-suffering-10-buddhist-teachers-weigh-in/>



The Range of Suffering

unsettledness

irritation

impatience

annoyance

frustration

disappointment

dissatisfaction

aggravation

tension

stress

anxiety

vexation

pain

desperation

sorrow

sadness

suffering

misery

agony

anguish



Moderation



- Abu Bakr al-Razi on pleasure:
 - moderation is ‘the way to have the most pleasure: going too far with pleasures turns out to be more painful in the long run.’ -vs-
 - pleasure is not the good to be sought in itself - pleasure can be had only as the result of a process of removing a harmful state.

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/abu-bakr-al-razi/#Ethi>

<https://philarchive.org/archive/DRUTEO-3>

Happiness



- Francis Hutcheson: “that action is best, which procures the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers.”
- David Hume: introduces the term ‘utility’ to describe the pleasing consequences of actions as they impact people. (Pojman & Fieser, 2012, 103)

<https://www.irishtimes.com/culture/the-moral-sense-of-down-man-francis-hutcheson-1.1889280>

https://www.researchgate.net/post/Humes_Utility_Of_what_does_it_consist

Utilitarianism

- The *consequentialist principle*: the rightness or wrongness of an act is determined by the goodness or badness of the results
- The *utility principle*: the only thing that is good in itself is the specific state of pleasure, happiness or welfare (Pojman & Fieser, 2012, 103)

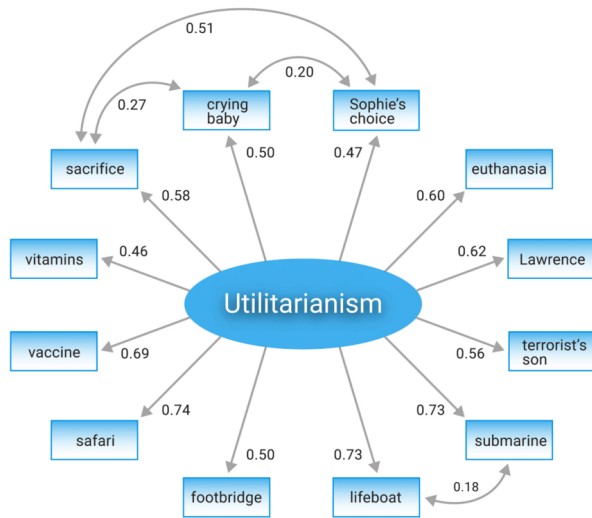
what are other
words for
utilitarianism?



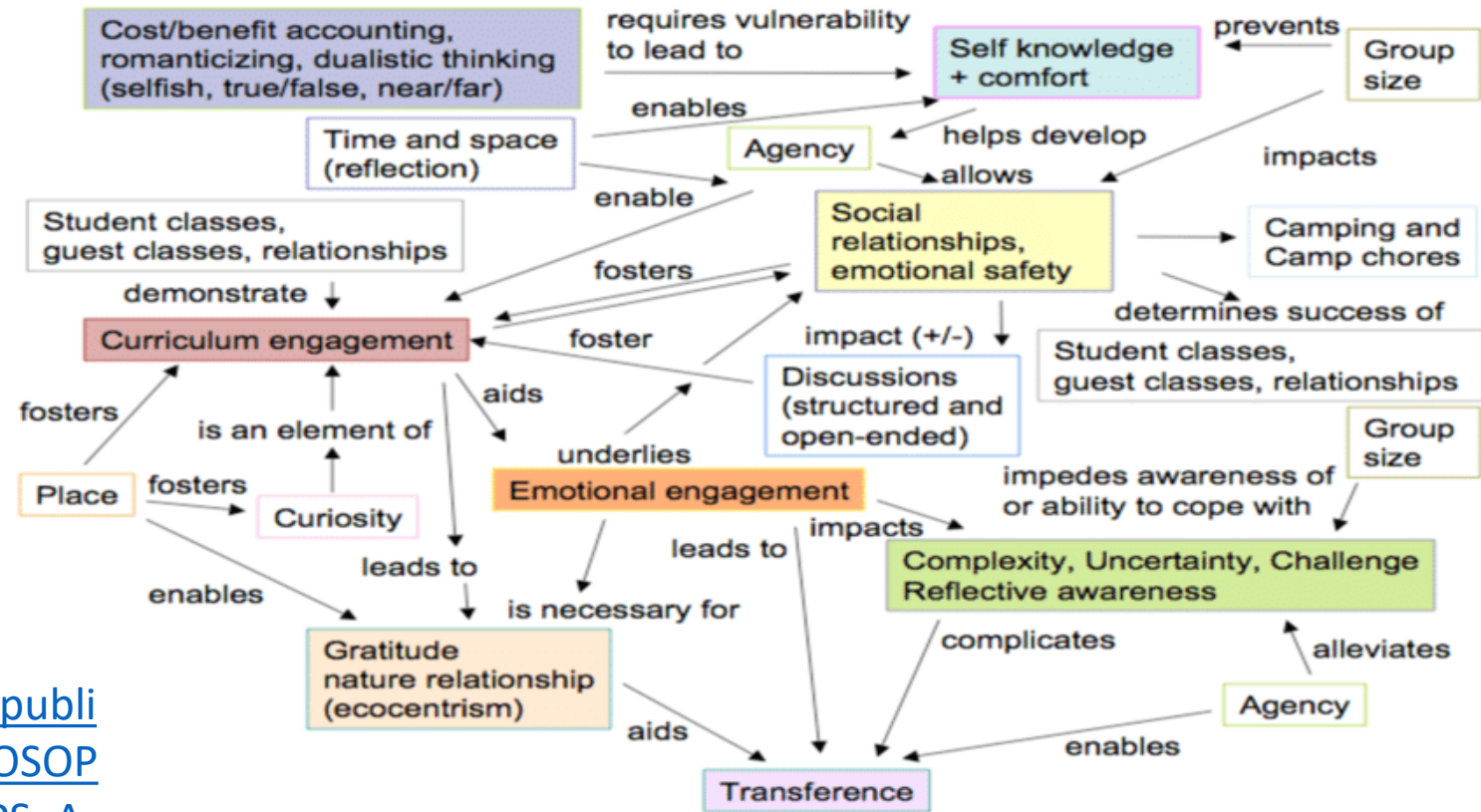
pragmatism, advisability,
benefit, convenience,
effectiveness, fitness,
helpfulness, opportunism



Calculating Utility



https://www.researchgate.net/publication/277558381_FIELD_PHILOSOPHY_EXPERIENCE_RELATIONSHIPS_AND_ENVIRONMENTAL_ETHICS_IN_HIGHER_EDUCATION_dissertation



How do we calculate the many possible causes of pleasure and pain?

Bentham: The Felicific calculus

A.k.a. the utility calculus or the hedonic calculus.



Intensity: How strong is the pleasure?

Duration: How long will the pleasure last?

Certainty or uncertainty: How likely or unlikely is it that the pleasure will occur?

Propinquity or remoteness: How soon will the pleasure occur?

Fecundity: The probability that the action will be followed by sensations of the same kind.

Purity: The probability that it will not be followed by sensations of the opposite kind.

Extent: How many people will be affected?

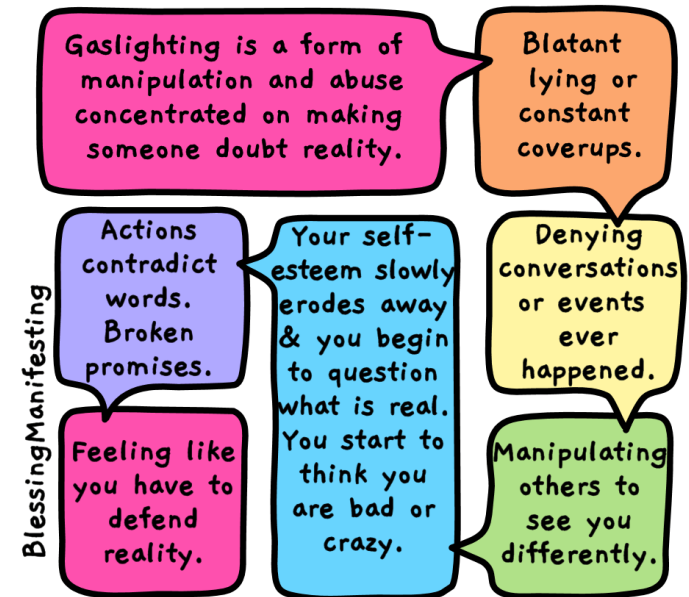
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Felicific_calculus

Machiavellianism

“Machiavellians are characterized by manipulation and exploitation of others, with a mocking disregard for morality and a focus on self-interest and deception.”

“But Machiavelli’s arguments have also been seen as recognition of the realities of political life.”

THE SIGNS OF GASLIGHTING



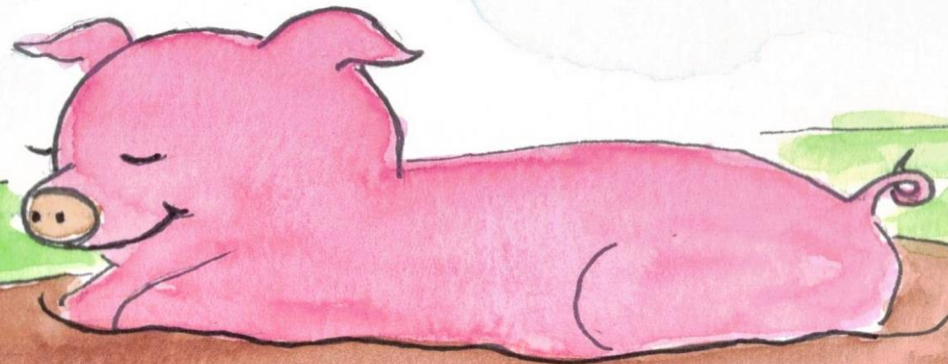
<https://contemporary-wellness.com/how-to-tell-if-youre-dating-a-machiavellian/>

<https://www.ckju.net/en/dossier/machiavellianism-what-it-how-recognize-and-cope-machiavellians>

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/psychology/machiavellianism>

Higher and Lower Pleasures

“It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied.” – John Stuart Mill



On Liberty



John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty*: "The only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it." (p. 23)



Egoism

- Psychological Egoism – the motive for all of our actions is self-interest
- Ethical Egoism – the motivation for all of our action *should* be self-interest

<https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-ethical-egoism-3573630>



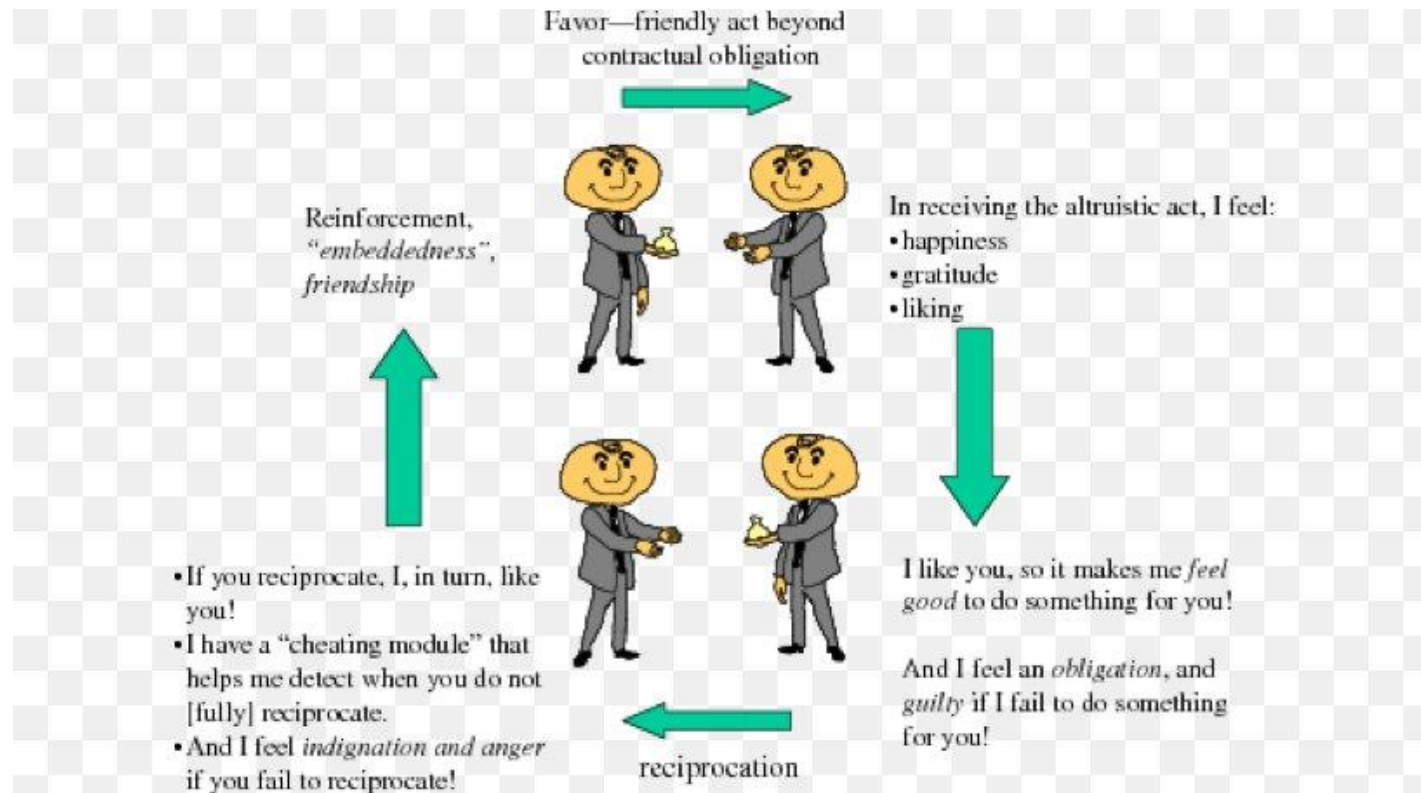
Selfishness and Greed

Egoism allows for selfishness and greed to be elevated to ethical principles.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/apr/10/new-age-ayn-rand-conquered-trump-white-house-silicon-valley>

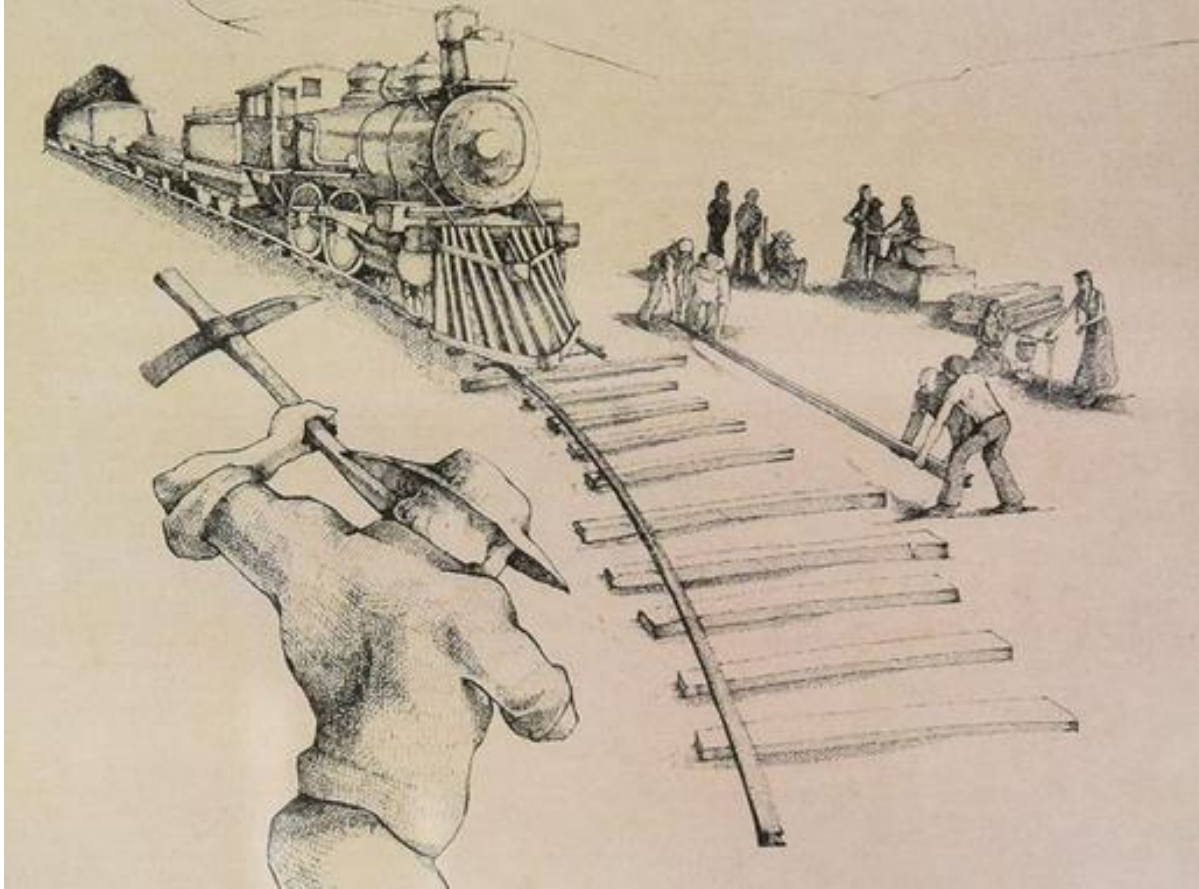


Enlightened Self-Interest



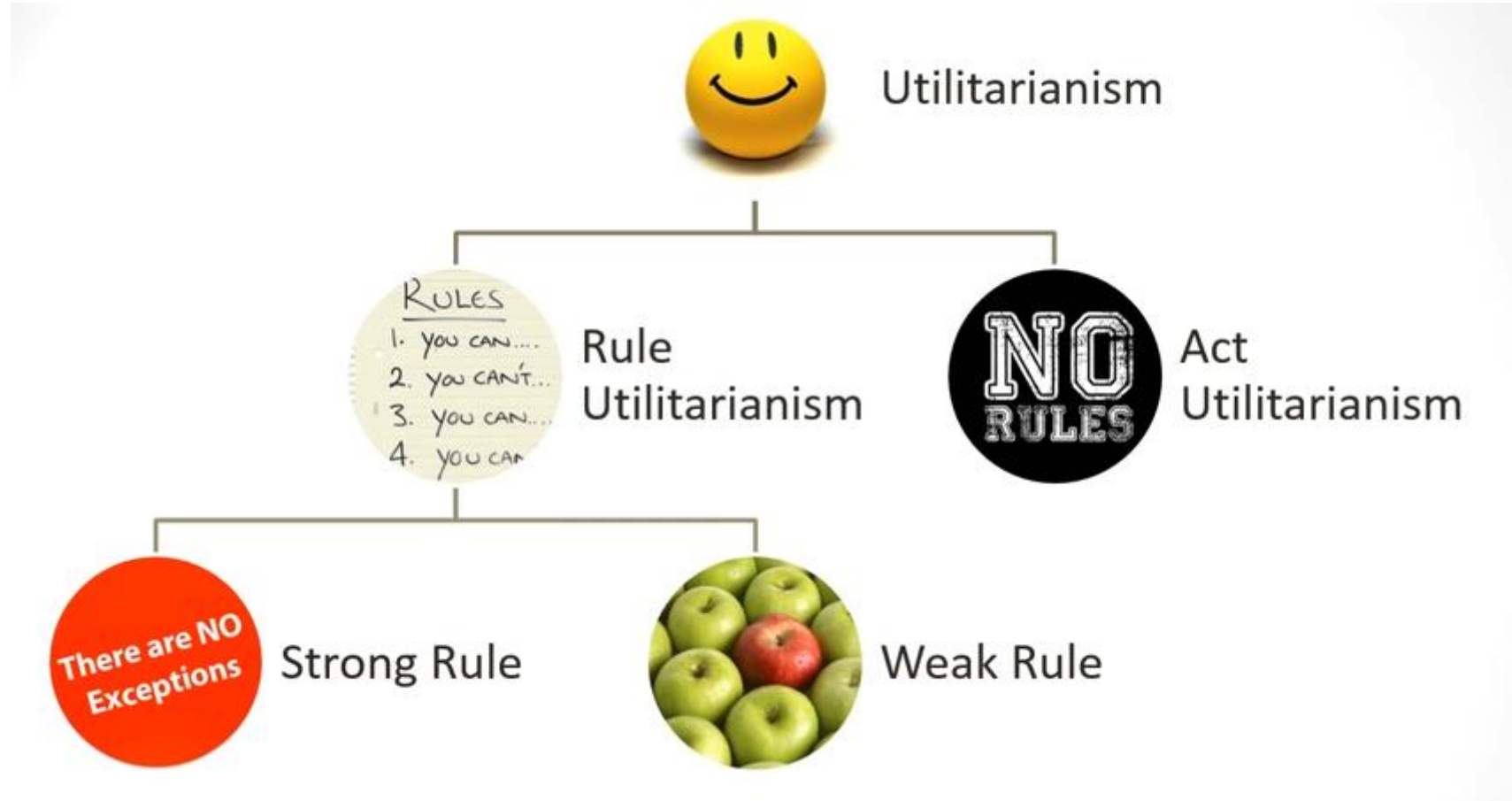
E.g. In 1971, Robert Trivers coined the term 'reciprocal altruism' to describe a process that favors costly cooperation among reciprocating partners. [https://www.cell.com/current-biology/pdf/S0960-9822\(13\)00354-0.pdf](https://www.cell.com/current-biology/pdf/S0960-9822(13)00354-0.pdf)

Serving Others



- The funny thing about time is that if you spend it on yourself it will always feel like a waste of time.
- It's when we are doing things for others that our use of our time seems meaningful.

Rule Utilitarianism



The idea that the happiness principle can be expressed as rules instead of calculated on an act-by-act basis. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GrZp12isYb4>

Moral Conservatism

The idea that there are some rules that it would always be wrong to break, no matter what the particular consequences



(It being a matter of a
'higher good')

https://www.washingtonpost.com/resizer/_5HCdr5arfCfCuSahK7CMCRH4iQ=/arc-anglerfish-washpost-prod-washpost/public/WYD4GOA6TMI6LLVZUQI2QTE5KU.jpg

Responsibility



- The idea that individuals and (maybe) corporations are ethically accountable for the consequences of their actions
- Of relevance is whether the consequences were *predictable* and whether the party *intended* the outcome (or displayed *indifference* to a bad outcome)

The One Versus the Many

- Is it better to give one person a million dollars or to give a million people one dollar?
- Is it worth the sacrifice on one life to save five (c.f. the Trolley problem)? Is it better to hang an innocent man to avoid freeing five?
- Is the hedon a common currency – e.g., can we trade one life to slightly improve the happiness of everyone else?

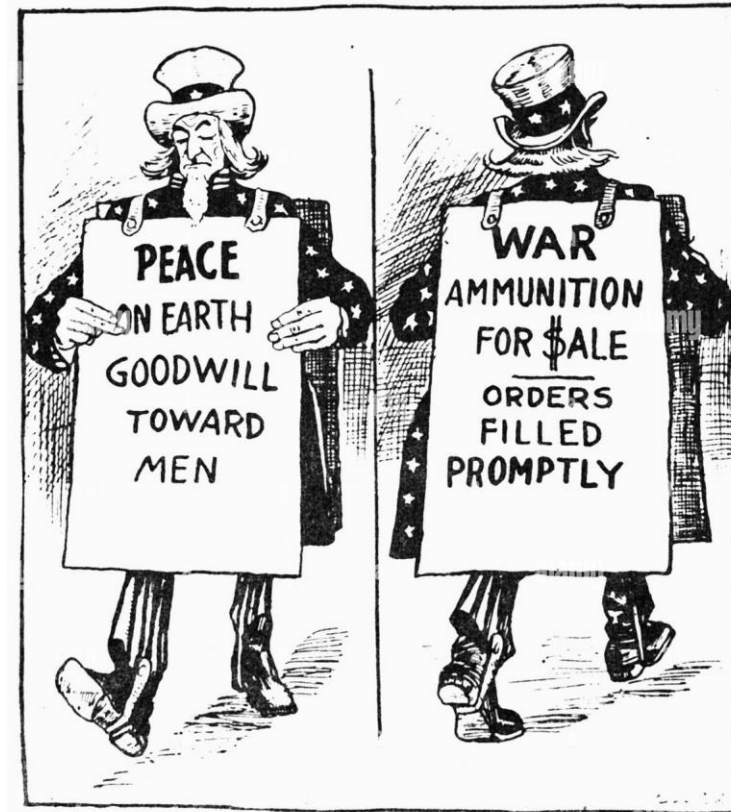


- Are there things that *cannot* be expressed as a value?

Conflicting Calculations

The core question here is whether utilitarianism is measuring an actual *objective* standard, or whether it just depends on your point of view:

- If two rules conflict, how do we decide?
- If two calculations of happiness conflict, how do we decide?



Moral Luck

- One person drives drunk and kills someone and spends several years in jail
- Another also drives drunk but does not kill anyone and spends no time in jail

The difference between them is just a matter of luck

So whatever utilitarianism is, it's not ethics

How "self made" billionaires got their start

