

Supererogation for Utilitarianism

Abstract: Many believe that traditional consequentialist moral theories are incapable of incorporating the allegedly important phenomenon of supererogation. After surveying the “ties at the top,” “satisficing,” and “egoistic-adjustment” strategies to avoid the supererogation objection, I argue that a recent formulation of utilitarianism incorporating the self-other asymmetry exhibits interesting supererogatory properties. I then incorporate this asymmetry into a version of egoistically-adjusted act utilitarianism, arguing that such a view exhibits very rich supererogatory properties, properties that should assuage the theoretical worries of a vast number of supererogation critics.

I. Introduction

Consequentialism—the family of ethical theories sharing the characteristic that the moral status of any bit of behavior is determined by the values of the consequences of the alternatives available to a moral agent—has enjoyed tremendous support since the pioneering efforts of classical utilitarians like Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. Continually subjected to theoretical and practical attacks, consequentialism has withstood centuries of serious criticism. Recent critics, however—especially those influenced by contemporary schools of virtue ethics and those attracted to “satisficing” accounts of morality—have lodged a new class of objections against the venerable position. These new objections seem to be motivated in the most part by “maximizing” properties of the paradigm consequentialist theory: Classical Utilitarianism. Classical utilitarianism requires that for any situation in which we find ourselves, we perform a best possible alternative available to us at the time, where a best possible alternative is one than which no other alternative is better.¹

According to classical utilitarianism we are morally *obligated* to engage in a best possible plan of action accessible to us, regardless of how much personal sacrifice such a plan would entail.² Critics have claimed that this maximizing feature of classical utilitarianism—the moral requirement to maximize the amount of value in the world—is unacceptable. Classical utilitarianism has been charged with being too demanding, too difficult for moral agents with

¹ Pioneering formulations of classical utilitarianism can be found in Bentham (1789), Mill (1861), Sidgwick (1907), and Moore (1912).

² Some consequentially minded ethicists reject this, claiming that certain future facts about the actual world (namely, whether or not agents will engage in future immoral behavior) can generate obligations incompatible with the best possible course of action available to us. See Zimmerman (1996), Zimmerman (2006), and Vessel (2007) for critical discussions of this dispute.

naturally selfish inclinations to adopt.³ More specifically, critics charge that utilitarianism is incapable of exhibiting the allegedly important phenomenon of supererogation: In virtue of the fact that utilitarianism requires that we always bring about the best, it appears impossible to do anything that is “above and beyond” the call of moral duty.⁴ Supererogatory action is impossible under a utilitarian scheme—or at least so say such critics; call them ‘supererogation critics’. Many believe that supererogation critics have dealt a death blow to traditional formulations of consequentialism.

This essay is a response to the objection from supererogation against classically-spirited consequentialist moral theories. First, I argue that—despite the popularity of the supererogation objections—classical act utilitarianism does exhibit supererogatory properties. I argue that the “ties at the top” phenomenon entails that many acts in many different kinds of cases are deemed supererogatory on the classical utilitarian scheme before recognizing that supererogation critics will be unsatisfied with the illustration: They will continue to clamor for a richer account of supererogation than can be generated by the classical theory.

Next, I consider a “satisficing” form of consequentialism introduced to absorb the supererogation objection. Anything requiring more personal sacrifice than that which is “good enough” (or satisfactory) for the world is designated as supererogatory on satisficing schemes. Drawing on recent work, I argue that many satisficing theorists have failed in their attempts to make the notion of “good enough” clear enough for serious theoretical uses. Furthermore, I lodge Ben Bradley’s devastating objection that in many cases satisficing theories implausibly permit us to prevent a significant amount of good from obtaining in the world.

Next, I offer satisficers who wish to remain consequentially principled and consistent a cleaner consequentialist view that I call ‘Egoistically-Adjusted Act Utilitarianism’ (EAU), a view that exhibits the very supererogatory features that satisficing theorists find so attractive. After constructing EAU and elucidating its properties, I lodge an impartiality objection against it.

³ Michael Slote famously argued along these lines in his (1984b) and (1989), so has Samuel Scheffler in his (1994) and Tim Mulgan in his (2001). Also see Wolf (1982) and the slew of contemporary ethicists calling themselves “satisficing consequentialists,” particularly Hurka (1990), Vallentyne (2006), plus a variety of theorists in Byron (2003).

⁴ Cf. Baier (1958): 203f., Smart (1973): 55, Feldman (1978): 48ff., McConnell (1980): 36ff., Heyd (1982): 76ff., Mellema (1991): 79ff., New (1974), Kagan (1989), Portmore (2007a), (2007b), and (2007c). See Zimmerman’s rich discussion of supererogation claims in Chapter 8 of his (1996). The following theorists appear to believe that supererogation is incompatible with any theory containing a maximizing requirement: Moore (1965): 78, Scheffler (1984): 21f., and Slote (1989): 3 & 171.

In response to supererogation critics who take seriously impartiality objections, I introduce the alleged “self-other asymmetry” in moral theorizing. I present a version of utilitarianism formulated by Ted Sider—Self-Other Utilitarianism (SOU)—that incorporates this phenomenon before exhibiting its supererogatory properties. Finally, I construct another novel moral view: a version of Egoistically-Adjusted Act Utilitarianism that incorporates the self-other asymmetry. I argue that this view exhibits very rich supererogatory properties, properties that should certainly satisfy the bulk of supererogation critics.

Now onto a simple formulation of classical act utilitarianism, some assumptions, and a formal introduction of the charges that the classical view is both too demanding and fails to exhibit supererogatory properties.

II. Classical Act Utilitarianism and the Supererogation Objection

Our first assumption is that every morally relevant alternative (or act token) has a certain hedonic utility. Let the *hedonic utility of an alternative, A*, be the result of subtracting the total amount of pain that *A* would cause from the total amount of pleasure that *A* would cause, were *A* performed.⁵ A simple version of the classical view can then be formulated in this way:

AU: An alternative, *A*, is morally right iff no alternative to *A* has a higher hedonic utility than *A* has.

AU—the paradigm, classical version of act utilitarianism—is clearly a maximizing theory: AU requires that we maximize the amount of hedonic value in the world, that we refrain from ever performing an act token such that some alternative to it has a higher hedonic utility than it has. In this simple case, we can see the kinds of implications AU generates:

	<u>HU</u>
<i>a1</i>	100
<i>a2</i>	90
<i>a3</i>	70
<i>a4</i>	55

Here we have four alternatives, each of which would benefit the world if performed. AU, however, requires that *a1* be performed; it alone maximizes hedonic utility. It is impossible to do more for the world—from a hedono-doloric perspective—than to perform *a1*. Cases like this

⁵ Assume hedonism is true. Assume some other theory of value is true. I will utilize hedonism as the theory of value anchoring various consequentialist theories because it is simple and because of the role it plays in classical statements of consequentialism.

one have generated discontent in the minds of many contemporary theorists. The elucidation of two further concepts will enable us to understand clearly how this case sparks the “Too Demandingness” and “Lack of Supererogation” objections against AU.

There is a certain hedono-doloric impact that any morally relevant alternative would have upon the agent of the act, were it performed. Let the *hedonic utility of an alternative, A, for agent* be the result of subtracting the total amount of pain that *A* would cause *for the agent of A* from the total amount of pleasure that *A* would cause *for the agent of A*, were *A* performed.

There is also a certain hedono-doloric impact that any morally relevant alternative would have upon everyone other than the agent of the act, were it performed. Let the *hedonic utility of an alternative, A, for others* be the result of subtracting the total amount of pain that *A* would cause *for those other than the agent of A* from the total amount of pleasure that *A* would cause *for those other than the agent of A*, were *A* performed.

With these three concepts of hedonic utility in hand, we can flesh out the example in more detail. Consider this chart:

	<u>HU</u>	<u>HU-for-Agent</u>	<u>HU-for-Others</u>
<i>a1</i>	100	-10	110
<i>a2</i>	90	20	70
<i>a3</i>	70	0	70
<i>a4</i>	55	25	30

AU, of course, is concerned only with the first column, igniting the critics’ responses. Despite the fact that *a1* maximizes hedonic utility—that it ushers into the world the greatest possible balance of pleasure over pain—critics have charged that no one is morally obligated to perform such an act: It is simply too demanding, especially considering the possibility of performing *a2*. If anything—critics claim—*a1* should be considered supererogatory. The agent incurs a serious personal sacrifice with the performance of *a1* so that others will prosper. It has been suggested that in doing *a1*, the agent goes above and beyond the call of moral duty. *a2*—critics clamor—is also morally permissible. Both the agent and others prosper to a serious extent as a result of the performance of *a2*. Because AU requires that a maximizing alternative be performed (*a1*), critics conclude that AU is too demanding and fails to exhibit rich supererogatory properties.

AU is a very demanding theory, requiring that we do the best that we can for the world from a hedono-doloric perspective. Whether or not it is, in fact, *too* demanding has yet to be conclusively argued in my opinion, but we will return to this topic soon enough. Note, however, that while AU fails to generate the result that any alternative in our current case is morally

supererogatory, it does have the resources to generate such implications in a host of other somewhat similar types of case.

In many cases, the “ties at the top” phenomenon emerges. Consider this case:

	<u>HU</u>
<i>a5</i>	100
<i>a6</i>	100
<i>a7</i>	70
<i>a8</i>	55

This case differs from our original case in that it contains two maximizing alternatives: *a5* and *a6*, each of which is morally permissible on the classical scheme. (Note that in this situation, no alternative is morally obligatory according to AU.) With the insertion of our additional utility categories, how an alternative might be deemed supererogatory under AU can be easily understood.

	<u>HU</u>	<u>HU-for-Agent</u>	<u>HU-for-Others</u>
<i>a5</i>	100	-10	110
<i>a6</i>	100	20	80
<i>a7</i>	70	0	70
<i>a8</i>	55	25	30

a5 requires substantial personal sacrifice from the agent so that others will be much better off. *a6*, on the other hand, benefits the agent to a considerable degree but also benefits others a great deal. Again, each is morally permissible according to AU. Thus, it can be seen how “ties at the top” cases generate supererogatory action for AU. *a5* is supererogatory under AU. In doing *a5*, the agent goes above and beyond the call of moral duty in efforts to benefit others, for she is permitted by AU to perform the self-benefiting *a6*.⁶ Whether extra praiseworthiness should be bestowed upon an agent who knowingly performs alternatives like *a6* is a matter for another day. What seems clear, though, is this: AU generates the result that in many “ties at the top” cases supererogatory action is possible. At least in these cases, AU does not appear to be quite as demanding as many critics suggest.

Some might find this evaluation of the case a bit too cavalier, suggesting that despite the argumentation given, AU remains incapable of generating the implication that some alternatives are supererogatory. This sort of objection rests upon the controversial conceptions of supererogatory action itself. Most concur that supererogatory action must be morally optional:

⁶ Cf. Slote (1989), Harwood (1993), §8.2.1 of Zimmerman (1996), and Portmore (2007a).

neither morally obligatory nor morally forbidden.⁷ Furthermore, supererogatory action must be in some way especially valuable, more valuable in this way than some competing morally permissible alternative. The sense in which supererogatory action must be more valuable than a competing morally permissible alternative, however, is a matter of rich controversy. Some believe that supererogatory action must be morally better than a competing permissible alternative.⁸ Some believe that the performance of supererogatory action confers more moral praiseworthiness upon its agent than would the performance of a morally permissible competitor.⁹ Still others believe that supererogatory action must benefit others to a greater extent than a morally permissible alternative.¹⁰ I'm inclined to endorse this latter analytic requirement on the term 'supererogatory'.¹¹

Classical act utilitarianism cannot generate the implication that *a5* is morally better than *a6*: They are identical in moral value under AU. But *a5* possesses interesting properties, leading to my endorsement of it as supererogatory on a classical utilitarian scheme. In performing the morally optional *a5*, the agent of *a5* incurs a serious personal sacrifice so that others will prosper. There's a sense in which such action is especially valuable. Consequentialist moral theories frequently require that we help (or benefit) others to a certain extent. When an agent engages in a permissible line of action that exceeds the extent to which others must be benefited (perhaps at some cost to herself), I'm inclined to label such action 'supererogatory'. Thankfulness is the appropriate attitude of recipients who benefit through the graciousness of supererogatory action (provided that such beneficiaries are in the know). Supererogatory action generates a certain kind of praiseworthiness: Those who engage in such action are wholly worthy of the praises of those whom they are benefiting. Supererogation seems possible on the classical scheme.¹²

⁷ Cf. some of the most extensive treatments on supererogation: Heyd (1982), Mellema (1991), and Zimmerman (1996).

⁸ Portmore (2007a), (2007b), and (2007c).

⁹ Heyd (1982), Montague (1989), and Mellema (1991).

¹⁰ Heyd (1982).

¹¹ Feinberg suggests in his (1968) that agents must endure serious personal sacrifice or take a serious risk in the performance of a supererogatory alternative.

¹² Some critics will not be moved by these considerations. In virtue of the fact that AU does not imply that *a5* is morally superior to *a6*, they will continue to claim that it is impossible to perform supererogatory action under a classical utilitarian evaluation. This dispute over the analytic restrictions related to the term 'supererogatory' remains contested. Even if such critics are closer to the truth, the type of supererogation (or supererogation*) I am arguing for is extraordinarily conceptually close to their notion of supererogation, so close that I firmly believe that its properties should be seriously explored.

Critics will respond, however, that while AU might exhibit the phenomenon of supererogation, a richer notion of supererogation is required, one that will generate the result that *a2* in our first case is morally permissible. It is only in “ties at the top” cases that supererogation is possible on the classical scheme. Supererogation (and “demandingness”) critics claim that there are many more cases of supererogation than those containing ties at the top. Some have chosen to abandon the consequentialist family of moral theories for this reason; others, however, have developed mutations of the classical theory capable of accommodating these supererogation intuitions.

III. Satisficing and Egoistic Adjustments

	<u>HU</u>	<u>HU-for-Agent</u>	<u>HU-for-Others</u>
<i>a1</i>	100	-10	110
<i>a2</i>	90	20	70
<i>a3</i>	70	0	70
<i>a4</i>	55	25	30

Satisficers and egoistic adjusters have put forth consequentialist theories designed to generate results consonant with the intuitions of supererogation critics. Satisficing versions of consequentialism do not require that we maximize value in the world; rather, we are merely obligated to do that which is “good enough” for the world.¹³ Anything requiring more personal sacrifice than that which is good enough for the world is designated as supererogatory on satisficing schemes. A generic form of satisficing act utilitarianism can be formulated in this way:

SatU: An alternative, *A*, is morally right iff *A* has a hedonic utility that is “good enough”.

How SatU might assign normative values to the alternatives in our case—and generate the desired supererogation results—can now be explored. Without a clean explication of the phrase “good enough,” it is not exactly clear how the normative statuses of the alternatives in our case are generated by SatU. Intuitively, it might be thought that SatU has these implications: *a1* should come out as morally permissible (but not morally obligatory!) according to SatU. It is impossible to do more for the world than to perform *a1*; *a1* is the sole maximizing alternative. Because it is the best thing one can do for the world, it must have a hedonic utility that is good enough for the world. *a2* is the interesting alternative. It seems that SatU implies that *a2*, too, is morally permissible; heck, is that not the reason why theories like SatU were introduced? From

¹³ Slote (1984) and (1989), Hurka (1990), and Vallentyne (2006), among others.

a certain perspective, *a2* does seem to qualify as “good enough”: It is almost as good for the world as the maximizing *a1* and is substantially better for the world than the remaining alternatives.¹⁴

On the assumption that the hedonic utility of *a2* satisfies the “good enough” requirement, the supererogatory properties of SatU become apparent: *a1* is deemed supererogatory in light of the facts that (i) it is morally permissible, (ii) it requires more personal sacrifice than another morally permissible alternative, and (iii) it benefits others to a greater degree than another morally permissible alternative.¹⁵ SatU exhibits a very rich notion of supererogation. It generates the same “ties at the top” implications as AU. Furthermore, it designates a slew of alternatives as supererogatory in many cases where a non-maximizing alternative meets the “good enough” requirement.

Satisficing forms of consequentialism might satiate the supererogatory cravings of some, but satisficing views face serious theoretical difficulties. First, there has yet to be explicated a concept of “good enough” that is crisp enough for interesting yet plausible theoretical use.¹⁶ Perhaps more importantly, extant satisficing views generate repugnant implications in a variety of cases. Assume—for the sake of discussion—that some interesting explication of “good enough” is available. Now consider this case:

	<u>HU</u>	<u>HU-for-Agent</u>	<u>HU-for-Others</u>
<i>a9</i>	100	-10	110
<i>a10</i>	90	20	70
<i>a11</i>	100	5	95
<i>a12</i>	110	5	105

Assume, just as in the last example, that the utility of *a10* is good enough, generating the result that *a10* is morally permissible according to SatU.¹⁷ *a9*—just as before—is deemed morally permissible but not obligatory by SatU. In this case, the problems are generated by SatU’s

¹⁴ Whether or not *a3* or *a4* come out as morally permissible on this satisficing scheme is unclear. The concept of being good enough is just a bit too mysterious for confident judgments regarding the normative statuses of *a3* and *a4*, especially considering that SatU is a very generic form of satisficing consequentialism.

¹⁵ Note that *a1* is also deemed to be morally better than *a2* according to SatU: It generates more hedonic value for the world than does *a2*.

¹⁶ Note, however, that there are no fewer than six explications of the concept in Bradley’s excellent (2006).

¹⁷ Bradley lodges this type of objection against the whole range of satisficing conceptions of consequentialism in his (2006).

implications regarding *a11* and *a12*. If *a10* is good enough, then clearly *a11* and *a12* are good enough, and thus permissible on this satisficing scheme. But the designation of *a11* as permissible is anathema to the consequentialist spirit. It costs the agent *nothing* to bring about the greater benefits for others contained in the consequence of *a12*. SatU nonetheless permits the agent to engage in this “gratuitous prevention of goodness” for the world.¹⁸ I take this to be a devastating objection to theories like SatU. Moreover, Ben Bradley has illustrated how this objection and correlating analogues of it can be successful lodged against the gamut of satisficing accounts of consequentialism. Despite its supererogatory properties and contemporary popularity, satisficing versions of consequentialism simply do not seem well suited to do the requisite consequentialist work.

I suggest that satisficing theorists who wish to remain consequentially principled and consistent should adopt a cleaner consequentialist view that I call ‘Egoistically-Adjusted Utilitarianism’ (EAU), one that utilizes a novel ranking system rather than simply a maximizing scheme and generates the supererogation results that satisficers crave.¹⁹ The key element distinguishing EAU from classical theories like AU is its egoistic weighting. Similar to motivations underlying satisficing theories, EAU will not require the maximizing of value in all cases; instead, it will merely require that agents perform personal sacrifices that qualify as “good enough” for the world in many cases.²⁰ This notion of “good enough”, however, can be articulated in a fairly clear fashion. Reconsider the case used to motivate satisficing maneuvering:

	<u>HU</u>	<u>HU-for-Agent</u>	<u>HU-for-Others</u>
<i>a1</i>	100	-10	110
<i>a2</i>	90	20	70
<i>a3</i>	70	0	70
<i>a4</i>	55	25	30

The egoistic intuition here is that we can count our own possible future goods and evils as more important—more weighty—from a moral perspective than those of others. Suppose that we can count our own possible future goods and evils as twice as important as those of others when

¹⁸ Bradley (2006).

¹⁹ Scheffler defends a view of this kind in his (1994). Also see Portmore (2007b).

²⁰ See Mulgan (2001) for a similarly motivated but very distinct view from the one about to be formulated.

considering what morality requires of us.²¹ Given this supposition, a new utility category is added to the mix: The *egoistically-adjusted hedonic utility for the agent* of an alternative.

	<u>HU</u>	<u>HU-for-Agent</u>	<u>E-Adjusted HU-for-Agent</u>	<u>HU-for-Others</u>
<i>a1</i>	100	-10	-20	110
<i>a2</i>	90	20	40	70
<i>a3</i>	70	0	0	70
<i>a4</i>	55	25	50	30

With this egoistic adjustment in play, the concept of the overall egoistically-adjusted hedonic utility of an alternative can be constructed, providing the framework for this new egoistically injected mutation of classical utilitarianism. Let the *egoistically-adjusted hedonic utility of an alternative, A*, be the result of adding the egoistically-adjusted hedonic utility for the agent of *A* to the hedonic utility for others of *A*. Here is the chart resulting from the addition of our new category:

	<u>HU</u>	<u>HU-for-Agent</u>	<u>E-Adjusted HU-for-Agent</u>	<u>HU-for-Others</u>	<u>E-A HU</u>
<i>a1</i>	100	-10	-20	110	90
<i>a2</i>	90	20	40	70	110
<i>a3</i>	70	0	0	70	70
<i>a4</i>	55	25	50	30	80

A theory can be constructed that requires maximizing egoistically-adjusted hedonic utility—but such a theory would veer us farther from the classical theory than need be: That kind of view would prohibit the performance of *a1*, rather than merely elevate *a2* into a position of moral permissibility. Consider, instead, this non-maximizing method for ranking any two alternatives: Let it be the case that *alternative A E-outranks alternative B* iff (i) $HU(A) > HU(B)$ and (ii) $E-A HU(A) > E-A HU(B)$.²²

According to this method of comparing alternatives, one alternative is E-outranked by another iff it has both a lower hedonic utility and a lower egoistically-adjusted hedonic utility than the other. With this method of ranking at our disposal, a full blown version of egoistically-adjusted act utilitarianism can be clearly stated.

EAU: An alternative, *A*, is morally right iff no alternative to *A* E-outranks *A*.

²¹ It might be objected that the double weighting here is somewhat arbitrary. Why not count our own possible future goods and evils as three times as important, or as one and a half times as important? First, I am providing a foundation from which a plethora of egoistically-adjusted versions of utilitarianism might be constructed. Second, there might be some way to narrow the range of plausible possible weightings. This matter will be addressed shortly.

²² Ted Sider introduces this type of method of ranking for a different reason in his (1993), a reason to be pursued shortly.

Abandoning a maximizing scheme for this kind of ranking (or outranking) system preserves a conceptual closeness to the classical theory. The implications of EAU in our case are obvious. *a1* transforms into a supererogatory act—just as SatU implied. (Note that according to EAU, one is always permitted to perform an alternative that maximizes hedonic utility: Any alternative that is morally permitted by the classical view is permitted by EAU.) *a1* is deemed supererogatory by the new view because it demands more personal sacrifice for others than *a2*, which is deemed morally permissible on this scheme. Moreover, EAU does not fall prey to the objection that it permits the gratuitous prevention of goodness in the world in the same way that satisficing views do.²³ But despite its many attractive features (clarity, supererogatory properties, conceptual closeness to AU, conceptual superiority to SatU), serious objections can be lodged against EAU.

Perhaps the most serious is the classical objection from impartiality forcefully presented by J.S. Mill in his *Utilitarianism*:

I must again repeat, what the assailants of utilitarianism seldom have the justice to acknowledge, that 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.

Mill suggests here that agent impartiality is an essential property of any plausible moral theory. Mill and others moved by the impartiality objection are likely to deem impartiality as a much more attractive property than the kind of supererogation generated by a theory like EAU.

Theorists attracted to EAU, however, have some resources with which to respond to the impartiality objection. They can argue that it's universalizability—not necessarily impartiality—that is required by acceptable normative theories. Perhaps it can be argued that EAU is universalizable on a Kantian scheme, that rational agents can consistently will that everyone always act in accordance with EAU. Some might argue that the principle is one that rational planners would unanimously select from behind the veil of ignorance, satisfying Rawlsian universalizability requirements. (Note also that similar resources might be utilized to argue for a particular non-arbitrary egoistic weighting.) Regardless of who stands the higher ground in this impartiality debate, the following remains clear: While some satisficing theorists might find EAU attractive, no consequentialist moved by this impartiality objection will, leaving some still

²³ I leave it for the reader to inspect EAU's implications regarding the alternative set *a9-a12*. EAU does not permit the gratuitous prevention of goodness contained in the consequence of *a11*.

dissatisfied with the fact that impartial consequentialist theories seem to lack a rich notion of supererogation. More supererogation, though, is conceptually nearby.

IV. The Objection from Selfishness and the Self-Other Asymmetry

We have seen that many are prepared to reject classical utilitarianism on the ground that it is too demanding. Others, however, have argued that the classical view is simply too selfish—and should be rejected for that reason. Consider this case:

	<u>HU</u>	<u>HU-for-Agent</u>	<u>HU-for-Others</u>
<i>a13</i>	100	100	0
<i>a14</i>	90	20	70
<i>a15</i>	70	0	70
<i>a16</i>	55	25	30

Classical AU requires that *a13* be performed; it is the sole maximizer of hedonic utility.

Nonetheless, many believe that *a14* should be deemed morally permissible. Sure, *a13* brings about the best for the world, but all of the benefits are incurred by the agent of the act. Shouldn't the agent be permitted to forgo a portion of those benefits (80) so that others will prosper (70)? Many believe the answer to this question is "yes." Here is Michael Slote on the alleged self-other asymmetry in moral thinking:

This further, and ultimately, I believe, highly perplexing element of common-sense morality consists in the permissibility, according to ordinary thinking, of *not* benefiting *oneself* and of favoring *other people* even when this leads to less than optimal results. If I have a choice between conferring a great benefit on myself or a lesser benefit on someone else, and these are the only relevant factors in the situation, common-sense morality tells us that it is quite permissible to sacrifice one's own greater benefit to the lesser benefit of another. In the absence of some special relation or obligation to that other, common sense might concede that it was irrational, stupid, or gratuitous to do so, but surely not that it was morally wrong. Similarly, in a situation where no one else is concerned (or even, if you will, where no one else exists) if I ignore an opportunity to enjoy a pleasure or do not bother to avoid a pain, then (other things being equal) I do wrong by consequentialist standards, but, again, not by ordinary standards. Thus ordinary moral thinking seems to involve an asymmetry regarding what an agent is permitted to do to himself and what he is permitted to do to others.²⁴

Some—including Slote himself—have thought that traditional formulations of utilitarianism are incapable of incorporating this self-other asymmetry, spelling doom for consequentialist projects. It is true that classical AU lacks the resources to incorporate this allegedly important

²⁴ Slote (1984a): 180-181. Also see New (1974) and Portmore (2007b).

phenomenon, but Ted Sider illustrates a way by which consequentialists can incorporate this self-other asymmetry into their classical, normative frameworks. The view that Sider formulates—Self-Other Utilitarianism (SOU)—is a close cousin to the classical AU. Like EAU, it too is built upon a non-maximizing ranking system. Consider this method of ranking any two alternatives:

Alternative A S-outranks alternative B iff (i) $HU(A) > HU(B)$ and (ii) $HU\text{-for-Others}(A) > HU\text{-for-Others}(B)$.

According to this method of comparing alternatives, one alternative is S-outranked by another iff it has both a lower hedonic utility and a lower hedonic utility for others than the other. SOU can now be clearly stated:

SOU: An alternative, *A*, is morally right iff no alternative to *A* S-outranks *A*.²⁵

Returning to our latest case, it can be seen how SOU answers the “too selfishness” objection and generates an interesting type of supererogation.

	<u>HU</u>	<u>HU-for-Agent</u>	<u>HU-for-Others</u>
<i>a13</i>	100	100	0
<i>a14</i>	90	20	70
<i>a15</i>	70	0	70
<i>a16</i>	55	25	30

Like EAU, SOU deems permissible any alternative that maximizes hedonic utility; *a13* comes out as morally permissible on this scheme. Note also that SOU does not require that hedonic utility be maximized in all cases, particularly those in which the maximizing alternative has a lower hedonic utility for others than some other available alternative. Such is the case in our example. While *a13* maximizes hedonic utility, it does nothing for others. SOU deems *a14* to be morally permissible; it is not S-outranked by the maximizing *a13* or any other alternative: No available alternative has a higher hedonic utility for others than it has. The selfishness objection is answered: While it is permissible to perform *a13* according to SOU, it is not required, generating the possibility for action that will benefit others to a serious extent.

Interesting supererogatory features become evident as well. SOU bestows supererogatory status upon *a14*: By performing *a14* (rather than *a13* or the perhaps irrational

²⁵ Sider (1993). New (1974) attempts to formulate a version of utilitarianism that incorporates the self-other asymmetry: Optative Altruistic Utilitarianism. I find SOU theoretically superior to Optative Altruistic Utilitarianism in that SOU entails that some alternatives are capable of being morally permissible even if they fail to maximize either hedonic utility or hedonic utility for others.

a15), the agent sacrifices 80 units of hedonic value that he is morally permitted to acquire so that others will prosper. Clearly, this is consonant with going above and beyond the call of moral duty.

Note also that cases like the one above are extremely common. We frequently find ourselves in position both to benefit ourselves and maximize hedonic utility simultaneously. We are so close to ourselves; we know ourselves so well; we are almost always in a position to benefit ourselves. It is no surprise that strict forms of egoism and classical forms of utilitarianism generate identical implications in a wide range of cases. Possibilities for supererogatory action are abundant according to SOU.²⁶

Again, it must be noted that it is unclear as to whether extra praiseworthiness should be bestowed upon agents who knowingly engage in alternatives deemed supererogatory by SOU. I suspect that many classically-minded utilitarians would think that it should not. Regardless, SOU exhibits rich supererogatory properties and should thus satisfy a vast number of supererogation critics, especially those inclined to reject EAU for impartiality reasons. But what can be done for those who find attractive both the supererogatory properties of EAU and SOU? A combination is in order.

V. Combining the Supererogatory Properties of EAU and SOU

Super supererogation for a view somewhat similar to the classical AU can now be trotted out. Consider this combinatory method for ranking any two alternatives:

Alternative A E&S-outranks alternative B iff (i) $E-A HU(A) > E-A HU(B)$; and (ii) $HU\text{-for-Others}(A) > HU\text{-for-Others}(B)$.

The resulting egoistically-adjusted self-other version of utilitarianism can be stated in this way:

EASOU: An alternative, *A*, is morally right iff no alternative to *A* E&S-outranks *A*.²⁷

The supererogatory properties of EASOU are rich indeed and very evident, combining the supererogatory properties of EAU and SOU while maintaining some affinity to classical

²⁶ Somewhat curiously, Portmore (2007b) suggests that *a13* is deemed supererogatory by SOU in virtue of the facts that it is morally optional and—in a sense—morally better than *a14*: It generates more overall value for the world than does *a14*. Both Portmore (2007b) and Kawall (2003) appear to endorse the controversial claim that completely self-regarding acts are capable of being morally supererogatory, entailing their rejection of the popular position that supererogatory action must benefit others to some extent.

²⁷ Compare this with Schefflerian Utilitarianism (SU), which is formulated, motivated, and defended in Portmore (2007b).

utilitarianism: Anything morally permitted by AU is morally permitted by EASOU.²⁸ I suspect that such properties should satisfy the bulk of critics whose supererogation cravings have yet to be satiated.

VI. Conclusion

Currently, many theorists reject the entire family of consequentialist ethical theories on the ground that none of these theories exhibits attractive supererogatory properties. Some consequentialists have rejected classical versions of consequentialism on the same grounds, opting for satisficing versions instead. Here I have articulated theoretical options open to consequentialists and supererogation critics that have yet to be carefully explored. By doing so, I hope to have provided both a defense of consequentialism and a service to anyone looking for supererogatory possibilities within the family of consequentialist moral theories conceptually close to classical formulations of act utilitarianism.

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²⁸ The curious reader can see that alternatives maximizing hedonic utility cannot be E&S-outranked.

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