**Chapter Summary**

*Ethical Choices*, Third Edition

Richard Burnor and Yvonne Raley

Chapter 7: Consequentialism – Act Utilitarianism

Chapter 7 presents the consequentialist theory of act utilitarianism. It opens with a story illustrating how a single person’s choice can have a great many consequences. The next section discusses utility as related to pleasure and happiness. Mill’s notion of quality—distinguishing “higher” versus “lower” pleasures—is then assessed in an optional section. After these preliminaries, classical act utilitarianism is presented. To determine what is right, one must evaluate the overall effects of one’s choices in terms of scope, duration, intensity, and probability. The theory’s strengths include its objectivity, impartiality, simplicity, and flexibility; it can also be extended to include nonhuman (animal) utility. There are also several serious objections. There’s a practicability problem with carrying out utilitarian calculations. The theory also seems to make every choice one of moral duty, part of its problem of moral perfectionism. Most seriously, act utilitarianism has difficulties with moral confirmation in that it can require one to break a promise, violate moral rights, and act unjustly. The final optional section discusses ways act utilitarianism might be altered to handle some of these problems (e.g., by redefining utility or characterizing overall utility differently).