**Key Terms**

*Ethical Choices*, Third Edition

Richard Burnor and Yvonne Raley

Chapter 7: Consequentialism - Act Utilitarianism

**act utilitarianism** A consequentialist theory that defines the morally right act, for a particular situation, as that which produces the greatest overall utility.

**actual utility** Used to define the utilitarian right act, this is the exact overall utility that a given choice or act will in fact produce.

**calculations problem** The difficulty with determining the scope, intensity, duration, and probability of an effect.

**consequentialism** A general approach to ethics for which only consequences determine what is morally right or wrong.

**disutility** Whatever makes consequences undesirable.

**duration** Used in utilitarian calculations, that aspect of an effect that reflects the period of time over which that effect lasts.

**expected utility** Our best assessment, given our limitations and knowledge at the time, of the overall utility that a given choice or act will produce.

**extendable** Able to include non-humans among the individuals to be considered.

**flexible** Able to take specific circumstances into account in determining what is right.

impartiality Depending only upon an act’s effects, not who the actor is.

**intensity** Used in utilitarian calculations, that aspect of an effect that reflects the degree of strength or force of that effect.

**moral perfectionism problem** The objection to act utilitarianism that claims that it demands far too much of us.

**objectivity** Depending purely upon facts or experience.

**probability** Used in utilitarian calculations, that aspect of an effect that reflects the chance or likelihood of that effect actually taking place.

**promises, justice, and rights problem** The objection to act utilitarianism that claims some moral wrongs can produce the greatest utility and so make them right, according to the theory.

**quality** For use in utilitarian calculations, a proposed aspect of an effect that reflects Mill’s distinction between higher and lower pleasures; higher-quality pleasures are to be given more moral weight.

**rules of thumb** Informal rules that tell us how to act, based on what usually best promotes utility in similar situations.

**scope** Used in utilitarian calculations, that aspect of an effect that reflects how many individuals are affected.

**simplicity** Able to explain all of morality by just one or a few principles.

**torture lite** Interrogation techniques that cause no visible physical harms (e.g., sleep deprivation, isolation, waterboarding).

**utility** Whatever makes consequences desirable.