

CONSEQUENCES FOCUS

(e.g. John Stuart Mill, Jeremy Bentham)

“ALL ABOUT THE RESULTS”

Focuses on the results/consequences of actions. Doing the right thing involves making the most people happy. Do what produces the greatest good for the greatest number. Cost/benefit analysis (sum of the consequences, each individual counts as one). Consistent with many principles of democracy; majority rule.

QUESTIONS?

ASK YOURSELF:

What might the consequences/results be?

What will bring the best results and least harm for all who might be affected?

SAYINGS

ASSOCIATED WITH THIS FOCUS:

“Majority rule” “Whatever works”

“All’s well that ends well”

“The ends justify the means”

“For the greater good”

PROS +

CONSEQUENCES MATTERS. Can help us focus on results of our decisions and the greatest good for the most people.

You care a lot about helping kids so you volunteer at an orphanage for 4 days. You become really close to a young child. On the last day the child holds on to your leg and starts bawling because they don't want you to leave. Over the 4 days you learned that this child had been abandoned by his family and others. By volunteering for a few days & showing lots of love, and then leaving the child (just as so many have done before), you realize that you contributed to their feelings of abandonment. Even though your intent was good, you conclude that you actually did more harm than good. So, it can be essential to consider consequences, not just intent.

IMPARTIALITY. Can help us focus on acting impartially while considering consequences for all.

You are helping to hire someone at your job. Your family member or close friend needs a job and you feel some responsibility for helping them. However, you reason that someone else is more qualified and will do a better job, which will create better consequences for all.

CONS -

RIGHTS VIOLATIONS. Majority of people might get more overall happiness from something that violates the rights of the outnumbered.

Due to local purchasing regulations your organization must vote on one restaurant to cater an event. A burger place with a very limited menu gets the most votes by far (almost everyone is very happy). That restaurant does not offer choices for a few people with dietary restrictions.

SOMETHING MORE. Isn't there more to a good life than results & consequences (e.g. motives/intent, character)?

Your friend visits you after a recent breakup or injury. You are so happy to see them. You ask why and they say: "You are my friend and I really care about you" (e.g. feelings of compassion). Different than: "I calculated the greatest good I could do today and this is it"

SPECULATION. Speculation about future consequences can be very wrong.

You and your friends advocate for more parking lots on campus. You believe this will help everyone get to class, work, etc. faster. You are successful in convincing people to build more parking lots. However, you did not realize that parking fees go up, there is less classroom space and less green space, resulting in worse overall consequences.

CONCLUSION

This is a very well respected focus that is an essential component of WeTake5.com's "5Cs" pluralistic approach to ethical decision-making.