

**TEXTES SÉANCE 7:**

**(1)** Roughly speaking, utilitarianism is the view that the rightness or wrongness of an action depends only on the total goodness or badness of its consequences, i.e. on the effect of the action on the welfare of all human beings (or perhaps all sentient beings).

J.J.C. Smart, *An Outline of a System of Utilitarian Ethics*, 1961

**(2)** Our “duty” can only be defined as that action, which will cause more good to exist in the Universe than any possible alternative. And what is “morally permissible” only differs from this, as what will *not* cause *less* good than any possible alternative.

G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica*, §89, 1903.

**(3)** Suppose we could know with certainty the total consequences of two alternative actions A and B, and suppose that A and B are the only possible actions open to us. Then in deciding whether we ought to do A or B, the utilitarian would ask whether the total consequences of A are better than those of B, or vice versa, or whether the total consequences are equal. That is, he commends A rather than B if he thinks that the total consequences of A are better than those of B. But to say “better” is itself to commend. So the utilitarian has to do a double evaluation or piece of commending. First of all he has to evaluate consequences. Then on the basis of his evaluation of consequences he has to evaluate the actions A and B which would lead to these two sets of consequences. It is easy to fail to notice that this second-evaluation is needed, but we can see that it is necessary if we remind ourselves of the following fact. This is that a non-utilitarian might agree with us in the evaluation of the relative merits of the total sets of consequences of the actions A and B and yet disagree with us about whether we ought to do A or B. He might agree with us in the evaluation of total consequences but disagree with us in the evaluation of possible actions. He might say: “The total consequences of A are better than the total consequences of B, but it would be *unjust* to do A, for you *promised* to do B.”

J.J.C. Smart, *An Outline of a System of Utilitarian Ethics*, 1961

**(4)** I have promised a dying man on a desert island, from which subsequently I alone am rescued, to give his hoard of gold to the South Australian Jockey Club. In my return I give it to the Royal Adelaide Hospital, which, we may suppose badly needs it for a new X-ray machine. Could anybody deny that I had done rightly without being open to the charge of heartlessness? (Remember that the promise was known only to me, and so my action will not in this case weaken the general confidence in the social institution of promising). Think of the persons dying of painful tumours who could have been saved by the desert island gold!

J.J.C. Smart, *An Outline of a System of Utilitarian Ethics*, 1961

**1/ Traduction :**

- Etablir un lexique anglais-français comprenant les termes les plus difficiles, puis traduire soigneusement les quatre textes en français.

**2/ Questions :**

- Dans le texte 3 Smart parle d’une « double évaluation » : de quoi s’agit-il ? En quoi l’exemple de la promesse pourrait-il constituer une objection à l’utilitarisme en général ?