**Consequentialism is silly.**

**1. Consequentialism leaves us clueless. For example, if a bandit named Richard spares Angie from death who turns out to be an ancestor of Hitler, a consequence of Richard’s action is the holocaust even though he could have never known that.**

**Lenman,** James. "Consequentialism and Cluelessness." *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 29, no. 4, **2000**, pp. 342-70, www.jstor.org/stable/2672830#metadata\_info\_tab\_contents. Accessed 8 Aug. 2022. ICWNW

**Imagine we are in what is now southern Germany a hundred years be- fore the birth of Jesus. A certain bandit, Richard, quite lost to history, has raided a village and killed all its inhabitants bar one. This final survivor, a pregnant woman named Angie, he finds hiding in a house about to be burned. On a whim of compassion, he orders that her life be spared. But perhaps, by consequentialist standards, he should not have done so. For let us suppose Angie was a great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great  great great great# great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great great grand- mother of Adolf Hitler. The millions of Hitler's victims were thus also vic- tims of Richard's sparing of Angie. It must be stressed that there is nothing unlikely about this story. Let us bear in mind that in Hitler's family tree there are 2100 slots for grand- parents of this order. Because that is a number astronomically larger than the then available population of the world, there must be many people occupying more than one such slot. Nonetheless, it is very likely that there were back then large areas, of Europe at least, where a high per- centage of the population were ancestors of Hitler (very possibly all those whose bloodlines endured into the twentieth century). Anyone who saved the lives of any of these people or any of their intermediate descendants or who missed some opportunity to kill them before they fathered or mothered the relevant child shares in Richard's wrongdoing. Do Hitler's crimes mean that Richard acted wrongly, in consequentialist terms? They do not. For Hitler's crimes may not be the most significant consequence of Richard's action. Perhaps, had Richard killed Angie, her son Peter would have avenged her, thus causing Richard's widowed wife Samantha to get married again to Francis. And perhaps had all this happened Francis and Samantha would have had a descen- dant 115 generations on, Malcolm the Truly Appalling, who would have conquered the world and in doing so committed crimes vastly more ex- tensive and terrible than those of Hitler. Even if the crimes of Hitler were the most dramatic single consequence of Richard's action, there will also have been countless millions of smaller consequences, many of them nonetheless very dramatic. Assuming the survival of Angie's bloodline, there will have been a huge impact on the identities of future people, especially when we think that most or all members of that bloodline will have had all manner of morally significant (for the consequentialist) effects large and small, including effects on who lived, who died, and who reproduced. And these effects in turn will often have massive causal ramifications of their own. Richard changed history in incalculable ways. So did the man who introduced his parents to each other. So did the incompetent giver of directions who caused his mother to miss a meeting, forcing her to lin- ger longer than planned in his father's village, long enough for the betrothal to take shape. So did the friends who did not invite Richard's fa- ther out hunting the afternoon of Richard's conception because one of them was offended by something that Richard's father said in an argu- ment. So did the man who made the casual remark that started the argu- ment. So did his parents. And so on. Of course we know this already. For want of a nail... The decision to spare Angie is an event with massive causal ramifica- tions. It is highly plausible that almost all killings and engenderings and refrainings from these have similarly massive causal ramifications. These actions ramify in massive ways most obviously because they are, let us say, 'identity-affecting'. These are actions that make a difference to the identities of future persons and these differences are apt to amplify ex- ponentially down the generations. A very high proportion of identity- affecting actions are, it is enormously plausible, reliably subject to such massive causal ramification. These will include all engenderings-repro- ductively efficacious sex acts as well as causally more unorthodox engenderings-and at least a very high proportion of killings, including abortions. It is reflection on identity-affecting actions that, above all, brings out the depth of the Epistemic Argument. There are two reasons for this. The first is that common-sense reasoning demonstrates most clearly that identity-affecting actions are reliably subject to massive causal ramification. Such massive causal ramification is perhaps, as I will go on to suggest, pervasive elsewhere, but in the case of identity-affecting ac- tions, there is no "perhaps" about it. The second reason is that killings and engenderings are among the most intrinsically morally significant things we do, the kinds of action at which a large amount of our most serious moral thinking and theorizing is directed, and, as the same com- mon sense reasoning shows, these are the actions about whose overall consequences the agents are most apt to know, relatively speaking, as good as nothing. So the Epistemic Argument bites hardest in the case of just those actions respecting which we are most likely to want to put any ethical theory to work. To drive the problem home, consider another, homelier, example. Suppose I decide to have a child and have a daughter, Andrea. When she grows up, she marries Duncan and has a son, George. So my identity- affecting action of having sex with Andrea's mother ramifies into the next generation. But this is just the start of it. For perhaps if Andrea did not come along, Duncan would marry Sandra. Duncan being snapped up by  Andrea, however, Sandra will marry Howard, who would otherwise have married Patricia, who will feel so let down by losing out on Howard she will marry nobody. So Andrea's existence has considerable identity-affect- ing effects far beyond the existence of George. Even if she stays childless, she will have such effects by simply taking Duncan off the matrimonial market. Even if she stays single, she will have similar knock-on effects from any dating in which she participates. Even if she stays celibate, she will almost certainly make identity-affecting differences through the par- ties she hosts, the introductions she perpetrates, and in a host of less scrutable, indirect ways. Ten generations hence it is highly likely that the consequences of my engendering of Andrea in terms of the identities of the people alive will be vast. Some of these people will do terrible-or wonderful-things, and it is my seemingly innocent act of procreation that brings all this about. Identity-affecting actions include most acts of killing or engendering people. They will also include, as we have already seen in developing these examples, many apparently less momentous actions. For some actions that seem insignificant have massive causal ramifications by vir- tue of being indirectly identity-affecting in unpredictable ways. Tony and Geraldine would have had sex and conceived a child that wet Tuesday night if Gary had not called and invited them out for a drink. We can scarcely conclude that all our actions are indirectly identity-affecting in this way, but it is certain that many of them are. Equally certainly, it is often quite impossible to know which actions these are. Given this, we can rely on continuing massive causal ramification for the vast majority of identity-affecting actions even when the bloodlines of those immedi- ately affected are-as with the celibate Andrea-far shorter-lived than Angie's. All our lives are certain to contain a great many indirectly iden- tity-affecting actions even when we ourselves, like her, perform no di- rectlyidentity-affecting actions. Indeed, it is arguably a very real possibility that very many actions that seem very insignificant are subject to massive causal ramification. For some causal systems are known to be extremely sensitive to very small and localized variations or changes in their initial conditions.5 Such sen- sitivity will make still more trouble for consequentialism if it is true in even a small number of domains that have a significant influence on the human world. One such domain is perhaps the weather: differences in the weather make extremely widespread differences to the behavior of huge numbers of people. Such differences affect, for example, people's moods, the plans they make for any given day, and the way these plans evolve as the day goes on. For any significant difference in weather over a large populated area, some of these effects are certain to be identity- affecting. Now if small differences in initial conditions could make great differences here, these might include my cooking my dinner, visiting the gym, or smoking a cigarette. Another example of a kind of system widely believed to behave like this is furnished by financial markets, and once again these are influenced by countless, often quite intrinsically insig- nificant, human actions, and probably-directly or indirectly-by a very high percentage of intrinsically more significant ones. And the effect of market movements on human life is again enormous and certainly often identity-affecting. And, of course, we do not need scientific theory but just common sense to tell us that any action that is, however indirectly, identity-affecting is liable to massive causal ramification. So while the Epistemic Argument is strengthened if such systems are pervasively in- stantiated in nature, it does not depend on this. We may conclude that massive and inscrutable causal ramification is plausibly the norm for identity-affecting actions. And many of the most morally significant actions are patently identity-affecting. Such ramifi- cation will also infect actions that feature in the causal ancestry of iden- tity-affecting actions, including a very large number of actions that seem relatively insignificant. And to the extent that the human world affects and is influenced by causal processes that are highly sensitive to initial conditions, the range of actions that are subject to massive and inscru- table causal ramification may be very large indeed. The question of the extent of pervasive extreme sensitivity to initial conditions quite gener- allyis one I gratefully leave to scientists and philosophers of science. We can afford to be-and perhaps we ought to be-cautious here. For in the case of identity-affecting actions-the actions that often interest moral philosophers the most-the fact of massive causal ramification is ines- capable. And this by itself makes serious trouble for consequentialism. The seriousness of the trouble we can easily make clear. Massive causal ramification is inescapably the norm for identity-affecting actions. By the same reasoning, even more astronomical causal ramification must reliably attach to actions that are identity-affecting on a large scale: ac- tions such as mass murder. Hitler, for example, was responsible for the deaths of millions of people. But just how terrible-by consequentialist standards-were Hitler's crimes? The full consequences of each death are plausibly no less vast and impenetrable than the consequences of the sparing of Angie. How many Malcolm the TrulyAppallings might have been among the descendants of his victims? Not that it would help us to know this. For the causal ramifications of what Malcolm the Truly Ap- palling himself does are so astronomically great that its moral value is- by consequentialist standards-utterly inscrutable. So we have only the feeblest of grounds, from an objective consequentialist perspective, to suppose that the crimes of Hitler were wrong. Here, if anywhere, surely, there is a considered moral judgment at stake that is well-enough en- trenched not to be up for grabs in the cut and thrust of reflective equilib- rium, a judgment far enough from the periphery of the web of our moral beliefs to furnish a compelling reductio of any theory that might under- mine it. We can now see how Kagan seriously understates the objection. The problem is, he says, that "you can never be absolutely certain as to what all the consequences of your act will be" and that you can never "say for sure that any given act was right or wrong" (emphases mine). This sug- gests that the problem is merely an absence of certainty about conse- quences, an absence consistent with our having a pretty good idea what the consequences will be. And this is just what he claims in dismissing the Epistemic Argument: Although we may lack crystal balls, we are not utterly in the dark as to what the effects of our actions are likely to be; we are able to make reasonable educated guesses.6 However, that does not begin to do justice to the worry. The worry is not that our certainty is imperfect, but that we do not have a clue about the overall consequences of many of our actions. Or rather-for let us be precise-a clue is precisely what we do have, but it is a clue of bewilder- ing insignificance bordering on uselessness-like a detective's discovery  of a fragment of evidence pointing inconclusively to the murderer's hav- ing been under seven feet tall. We may not be strictly without a clue, but we are virtually without a clue. The trouble for consequentialism then is that the foreseeable conse- quences of an action are so often a drop in the ocean of its actual conse- quences. All Richard knows about his action is that it makes the difference between life and death for Angie. That is, of course, tremendously im- portant for Angie. But this contribution to the good is only a tiny detail in the overall consequences of Richard's actions. So it gives only the weak- est of reasons for him to think his action, by consequentialist standards, right or wrong.**

**Two implications a) Culpability: If people are held responsible for things they can’t control and viewed as bad when they try to do good and vice versa they will give up on ethics and just do whatever they want because it doesn’t affect their goodness or badness. b) Normativity: When we literally don’t know what will happen it’s impossible to guide action because you can’t tell people what to do if you’re going off of something we don’t know or at the very least aren’t very sure of.**

**2. People are terrible at making predictions.**

**Menand, Louis. "Everybody's an Expert." *The New Yorker*, 27 Nov. 2005, www.newyorker.com/magazine/2005/12/05/everybodys-an-expert. Accessed 8 Aug. 2022. ICWNW**

**“Expert Political Judgment” is not a work of media criticism. Tetlock is a psychologist—he teaches at Berkeley—and his conclusions are based on a long-term study that he began twenty years ago. He picked two hundred and eighty-four people who made their living “commenting or offering advice on political and economic trends,” and he started asking them to assess the probability that various things would or would not come to pass, both in the areas of the world in which they specialized and in areas about which they were not expert. Would there be a nonviolent end to apartheid in South Africa? Would Gorbachev be ousted in a coup? Would the United States go to war in the Persian Gulf? Would Canada disintegrate? (Many experts believed that it would, on the ground that Quebec would succeed in seceding.) And so on. By the end of the study, in 2003, the experts had made 82,361 forecasts. Tetlock also asked questions designed to determine how they reached their judgments, how they reacted when their predictions proved to be wrong, how they evaluated new information that did not support their views, and how they assessed the probability that rival theories and predictions were accurate. Tetlock got a statistical handle on his task by putting most of the forecasting questions into a “three possible futures” form. The respondents were asked to rate the probability of three alternative outcomes: the persistence of the status quo, more of something (political freedom, economic growth), or less of something (repression, recession). And he measured his experts on two dimensions: how good they were at guessing probabilities (did all the things they said had an *x* per cent chance of happening happen *x* per cent of the time?), and how accurate they were at predicting specific outcomes. The results were unimpressive. On the first scale, the experts performed worse than they would have if they had simply assigned an equal probability to all three outcomes—if they had given each possible future a thirty-three-per-cent chance of occurring. Human beings who spend their lives studying the state of the world, in other words, are poorer forecasters than dart-throwing monkeys, who would have distributed their picks evenly over the three choices. Tetlock also found that specialists are not significantly more reliable than non-specialists in guessing what is going to happen in the region they study. Knowing a little might make someone a more reliable forecaster, but Tetlock found that knowing a lot can actually make a person less reliable. “We reach the point of diminishing marginal predictive returns for knowledge disconcertingly quickly,” he reports. “In this age of academic hyperspecialization, there is no reason for supposing that contributors to top journals—distinguished political scientists, area study specialists, economists, and so on—are any better than journalists or attentive readers of the New York *Times* in ‘reading’ emerging situations.” And the more famous the forecaster the more overblown the forecasts. “Experts in demand,” Tetlock says, “were more overconfident than their colleagues who eked out existences far from the limelight.” People who are not experts in the psychology of expertise are likely (I predict) to find Tetlock’s results a surprise and a matter for concern. For psychologists, though, nothing could be less surprising. “Expert Political Judgment” is just one of more than a hundred studies that have pitted experts against statistical or actuarial formulas, and in almost all of those studies the people either do no better than the formulas or do worse. In one study, college counsellors were given information about a group of high-school students and asked to predict their freshman grades in college. The counsellors had access to test scores, grades, the results of personality and vocational tests, and personal statements from the students, whom they were also permitted to interview. Predictions that were produced by a formula using just test scores and grades were more accurate. There are also many studies showing that expertise and experience do not make someone a better reader of the evidence. In one, data from a test used to diagnose brain damage were given to a group of clinical psychologists and their secretaries. The psychologists’ diagnoses were no better than the secretaries’. The experts’ trouble in Tetlock’s study is exactly the trouble that all human beings have: we fall in love with our hunches, and we really, really hate to be wrong. Tetlock describes an experiment that he witnessed thirty years ago in a Yale classroom. A rat was put in a T-shaped maze. Food was placed in either the right or the left transept of the T in a random sequence such that, over the long run, the food was on the left sixty per cent of the time and on the right forty per cent. Neither the students nor (needless to say) the rat was told these frequencies. The students were asked to predict on which side of the T the food would appear each time. The rat eventually figured out that the food was on the left side more often than the right, and it therefore nearly always went to the left, scoring roughly sixty per cent—D, but a passing grade. The students looked for patterns of left-right placement, and ended up scoring only fifty-two per cent, an F. The rat, having no reputation to begin with, was not embarrassed about being wrong two out of every five tries. But Yale students, who do have reputations, searched for a hidden order in the sequence. They couldn’t deal with forty-per-cent error, so they ended up with almost fifty-per-cent error.**