



Measuring Impartial Beneficence: A Kantian Perspective on the Oxford Utilitarianism Scale

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Abstract

To capture genuine utilitarian tendencies, (Kahane et al., *Psychological Review* 125:131, 2018) developed the Oxford Utilitarianism Scale (OUS) based on two subscales, which measure the commitment to impartial beneficence and the willingness to cause harm for the greater good. In this article, I argue that the impartial beneficence subscale, which breaks ground with previous research on utilitarian moral psychology, does not distinctively measure utilitarian moral judgment. I argue that Kantian ethics captures the all-encompassing impartial concern for the well-being of all human beings. The Oxford Utilitarianism Scale draws, in fact, a point of division that places Kantian and utilitarian theories on the same track. I suggest that the impartial beneficence subscale needs to be significantly revised in order to capture distinctively utilitarian judgments. Additionally, I propose that psychological research should focus on exploring multiple sources of the phenomenon of impartial beneficence without categorizing it as exclusively utilitarian.

Utilitarianism has always had a bad reputation. In modernity, Victorians called it a doctrine for pigs. Understanding happiness in terms of pleasure fueled the interpretation that human beings should seek carnal pleasures of life. Classical utilitarians placed “mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure” (Bentham 1781/1996, p. 14), but the egocentric reputation rested on a misunderstanding. To be governed by pain and pleasure was meant to inspire an altruistic ideal of promoting everyone’s happiness. If you want people to support maximization of general happiness, then a utilitarian moral sense must include a feeling of unity with all our fellow creatures capable of suffering and happiness (Mill 1861/2008, p. 203).

Now, under the influence of neuroscientific and psychological research on moral judgment, utilitarianism runs a new reputational risk: the label of a doctrine for

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psychopaths. The dominant approach toward studying moral judgment is to document people's reactions to dilemmas that present a choice between sacrificing one innocent person to save five people or doing nothing and letting them die. The answers are not easy. Some refuse to get their hands dirty by pushing an innocent person in front of a runaway trolley. Others believe they have the stomach to choose the greater good. To explain these responses, Joshua Greene (2001, 2004, 2014) has argued that automatic emotional processes cause deontological judgments ('wrong to kill one person to save five'), while cognitive control processes cause utilitarian judgments ('right to kill one person to save five'). Ultimately, Greene (2008) uses this type of dual-process explanation to make the controversial claim that we should distrust (emotional) deontology and embrace the rational processes of utilitarianism.

The sacrificial dilemmas paradigm and Greene's dual-process explanation of moral judgment have been criticized for generating strange findings and confused interpretations of the data (Kamm 2009; Kahane and Shackel 2010; Kahane 2015; Mihailov 2015, 2016; Königs 2018; Paulo 2019). For example, people with greater endorsement of utilitarian solutions had higher scores on measures of psychopathy and Machiavellianism (Bartels and Pizarro 2011). In another study, utilitarian judgments did not assume an impartial concern for the greater good but correlated with psychopathy, greater endorsement of rational egoism, less donation of money to a charity, and less identification with the whole of humanity (Kahane et al. 2015).

How can a moral theory that advocates a feeling of unity with all our fellow creatures be a "doctrine" for psychopaths? Psychological research has focused too much on the sacrificial dilemmas paradigm which essentially asks the negative question of how willing we are to kill others. However, recent research is starting to look at positive utilitarian demands (Kahane et al. 2018; Jaquet and Cova 2021). As Mill pointed out, utilitarianism has a natural affinity with empathic concern for sentient beings. To capture genuine utilitarian tendencies in moral judgment, Kahane and his colleagues (Kahane et al. 2018) proposed an alternative method. They developed the Oxford Utilitarianism Scale (OUS) based on two subscales, which measure the commitment to impartial beneficence and the willingness to cause harm for the greater good. The first subscale—Impartial Beneficence (OUS-IB)—consists of 5 items:

1. If the only way to save another person's life during an emergency is to sacrifice one's own leg, then one is morally required to make this sacrifice.
2. From a moral point of view, we should feel obliged to give one of our kidneys to a person with kidney failure since we do not need two kidneys to survive, but really only one to be healthy.
3. From a moral perspective, people should care about the well-being of all human beings on the planet equally; they should not favor the well-being of people who are especially close to them either physically or emotionally.
4. It is just as wrong to fail to help someone as it is to actively harm them yourself.
5. It is morally wrong to keep money that one doesn't really need if one can donate it to causes that provide effective help to those who will benefit a great deal.

The second subscale—Instrumental Harm (OUS-IH)—consists of 4 items:

1. It is morally right to harm an innocent person if harming them is a necessary means to helping several other innocent people.
2. If the only way to ensure the overall well-being and happiness of the people is through the use of political oppression for a short, limited period, then political oppression should be used.
3. It is permissible to torture an innocent person if this would be necessary to provide information to prevent a bomb going off that would kill hundreds of people.
4. Sometimes it is morally necessary for innocent people to die as collateral damage—if more people are saved overall.

The central piece of this new paradigm is the impartial beneficence subscale as the sacrificial dilemmas approach already explored attitudes toward instrumental harm. Adopting the impartial moral standpoint means treating the well-being of every individual as equally important. As Kahane and his colleagues argue, impartial beneficence is the philosophical core of utilitarian thought, whereas acceptance of instrumental harm is one implication of that central core (2018, p. 133). Thus, what makes attractive the paradigm shift is the impartial beneficence subscale and how it interacts with the dimension of instrumental harm. The moral thinking of ordinary people is supposed to approximate the commitment to impartial beneficence to varying degrees. The higher the agreement (1 – strongly disagree; 7 – strongly agree) on the items of each subscale taken separately, the stronger the utilitarian tendencies of that individual. For example, unsurprisingly, moral philosophers who identified themselves as act-utilitarians had higher scores than others on the impartial beneficence subscale: $t(14.93) = 6.06$, $p < 0.001$ (Kahane et al. 2018, p. 150).

Although richer in measuring moral judgment than the sacrificial dilemmas paradigm, the Oxford Utilitarianism Scale has its conceptual issues. In this article, I argue that its most attractive part, the impartial beneficence subscale, does not distinctively measure utilitarian moral judgment. Indeed, it is natural to view impartial beneficence as central only to utilitarianism. Many critics of utilitarianism press the moral importance of partiality in having a good life. Contemporary deontology is often composed of constraints on how much good you can do in the world, personal prerogatives to take care of yourself, and partiality considerations to favor your close ones, but these are not the whole story. Non-utilitarian philosophy has much more to offer. Kantian ethics is a paradigmatic theory of principles of universal obligations applicable to all rational beings regarded as a single moral community (O'Neill 2013; Korsgaard 1998; Wood 2007). As I will argue, Kant's ethical theory is radically impartial and committed to extended responsibilities. Just as utilitarians become frustrated when the sole focus is on killing for the (slightest) greater good, so do Kantians when the focus is on Kant's rule fetishism.

Kahane and his colleagues admit in passing the possibility that Kantianism could be radically impartial, yet they point out that impartiality is not expressed

in the goal of maximizing the well-being of all (2018, p. 134). They are right, but the same is true for their impartial beneficence subscale. As I will clarify, it does not include the maximizing dimension of utilitarianism but only the commitment to impartiality and a demanding requirement to benefit others.

To see that some non-utilitarian views embrace impartial beneficence to a high degree, I will also challenge the assumption that the impartiality of effective altruism is a distinctively utilitarian criterion, as Kahane and his colleagues draw inspiration from (2018, p. 134). Kantian ethics captures the all-encompassing impartial concern that drives effective altruism. Instead, I suggest that differences in commitment to impartial beneficence are due to methodological styles, rather than a general division between Kantian ethics and utilitarianism. Thus, methodological styles could potentially be more relevant to measuring moral judgment. In the last part, I draw implications for future psychological research. I propose that psychological research should focus on the psychological phenomenon of impartial beneficence and its potential distinct features without categorizing it as exclusively utilitarian.

1 Kantian impartial beneficence

Utilitarianism is radically impartial. Promise-keeping, reciprocal altruism, and even institutions of justice, must ultimately promote the overall wellbeing of all sentient creatures. The focus on maximizing pleasure and minimizing pain tends to give short shrift to the normative relevance of social ties, traditions, and group identities. In our daily lives, we form socially acceptable relationships with members of our community. We usually attend to the needs of relatives, colleagues, and neighbors. However, if pain is intrinsically bad, it does not matter who suffers from it. If pain is pain, we have a moral obligation to help strangers even when they are spatially or temporally distant from us.

There are non-utilitarian views that are also radically impartial. They consider impartial beneficence a central part of morality. We ought to do good in such a way that recognizes the equal importance of every human being. What generates impartiality is the call of duty interpreted in radical egalitarian terms. This is Kant's view. At its core, Kantian ethics is an Enlightenment project to ground universal obligations that consider the good and potential of all human beings in a unifying moral community.

Utilitarianism interprets beneficence in a maximizing way and makes it the whole of morality. As a critic of the principle of hedonic happiness, Kant grounds morality differently. For him, autonomy as a capacity for universal self-legislation is the supreme principle of morality. You should act only in such a way that your action could become a universal law for all rational beings. Despite fundamental differences, the theoretical importance of impartial beneficence is not reduced to mere derived duty. Ethical theories include more than a foundational principle and a set of derived normative propositions. In developing an ethical theory, you consider many different levels of generality and address a diversity of philosophical challenges. For example, you need a conception of human nature, a value account, an epistemology to explain how moral knowledge can be secured, and an ontology to identify

what entities count in the moral domain. These components are not exhaustive and you could arrange them in many different ways.¹ The point is to recognize a theoretical space between foundational principles and derived duties that can *elevate* the importance of beneficence. Consequently, Kantian ethics enjoys philosophical resources to promote impartial beneficence at a deeper level than the status of mere duty among others.

Therefore, while there are irreconcilable differences *from the point of view of philosophical foundations*, Kantian ethics is strongly committed to impartial beneficence *from the point of view of measuring moral judgment*. When measuring moral judgment in an ordinary population, foundational differences between ethical theories do not matter that much, as long as the requirements they endorse overlap significantly in most cases. Lay moralizers rarely commit themselves to a unified moral outlook. They are rather versatile, exhibiting different moral rules and considerations in different contexts (see Kahane and Shackle 2010).

My argument that impartial beneficence does not distinctively capture utilitarian judgment is helped by the fact that the Oxford Utilitarianism Scale is not a unitary psychological construct. According to Kahane and colleagues' results (2018, p. 155), impartial beneficence and instrumental harm subscales measure independent psychological factors that are inversely associated with a range of traits. That is, people who endorse the ideal of impartial concern for all human beings equally may not be willing to sacrifice innocent people or accept collateral damage more easily for a greater good. From the point of view of lay moral thinking, positive and negative components of utilitarian decision-making come apart and are in some tension. The implication is that the impartial beneficence subscale functions independently from the instrumental harm sub-scale, and, as such, you can assess it in its own right.

Before I continue, I want to address some data in Kahane et al. (2018) which appears to be at odds with a Kantian endorsement of impartial beneficence. To further validate their psychological construct, Kahane et al. compared OUS scores with the self-reported moral views of experts. They expected utilitarian philosophers to have excellent scores on a utilitarian scale, while Kantians not to have so good scores. Self-described Kantians had the worst scores, followed by other forms of deontology and virtue ethics (Kahane et al. 2018, p. 150).

Does this contradict the idea of a Kantian commitment to impartial beneficence? First, this methodology is very loose. When you rely on self-reports you have no control over what counts as Kantian ethics, which is notoriously controversial. This is especially important because the experts were mainly recruited from applied ethics institutions (for example, the Centre for Effective Altruism, the Ethox Centre, or The Hastings Center). So, there is a high risk that participants were influenced by popular and fashionable versions of Kantian ethics from the broad field of applied ethics. Most often, fashionable versions mistakenly paint Kant as downright hostile to human happiness (Wood 2007, p. 2). Second, introducing the impartial

¹ John Rawls (2009) claims that moral theory arranges the basic notions of the right, the good, and moral worth to form different moral structures, while Mark Timmons (2013) focuses on higher order components such as a theory of right conduct and a theory of value.

beneficence subscale as a unique measurement of utilitarian judgment *in conjunction* with the instrumental harm sub-scale already biases subjects who report non-utilitarian views against it, most of all because anti-utilitarians were recruited from conservative centers (e.g. the Anscombe Bioethics Centre). Third, not all items on the impartial beneficence sub-scale measure an impartial concern. Item 4 (“it is just as wrong to fail to help someone as it is to actively harm them yourself”) refers to the issue of whether acts and omissions are morally equivalent. However, the rejection of the act/omission distinction is conceptually distinct from impartial beneficence and therefore it artificially lowers the overall score on the endorsement of impartial beneficence.

We have to use a different methodology to empirically investigate whether there is a Kantian endorsement of impartial beneficence. We need to ask a sample of Kantian ethics experts how easily each item from the impartial beneficence subscale can be justified in Kantian terms, without asking them to rate the instrumental harm subscale. We should not add up the ratings for each item in an overall score. In this way, we could see which items (rejection of act/omission distinction – 4; degree of self-sacrifice – 1, 2, 5; impartial concern for all human beings – 3) are specifically endorsed or rejected in Kantian terms.

1.1 The cosmos of duty²

Utilitarianism is not the only theory that favors impartial beneficence. Kant defended the view that we should help every human being because the moral law “is so extensive in its significance that it must hold not merely for human beings but for all rational beings as such” (4:408).³ The essential feature of a moral duty is universality. An imperative is a proper moral duty when it holds for all subjects of morality. Thus, universality opens a cosmos of duty. It extends the scope of duty beyond the class of human beings to include all rational beings in the whole universe. You have to value the wellbeing and autonomy not only of humans but also of alien rational creatures.

Kant interprets the very concept of duty in radical impartial terms: “the maxim of common interest, of beneficence toward those in need, is a universal duty of human beings, just because they are to be considered fellow human beings, that is, rational beings with needs, united by nature in one dwelling place so that they can help one another.” (6:453) Duty is not a local or a conditional imperative as it is often understood. From the point of view of ordinary morals, duties determine what you ought to do as a result of some role you play in a group or relationship. On many occasions, you help others only if you know them. In Kantian ethics, however, the duty

² It is not accidental that the title of this section is inspired by Roger Crisp’s comprehensive book on Henry Sidgwick’s utilitarian ethics, *The Cosmos of Duty* (2015).

³ References to Kant’s works give the standard German abbreviated title, followed by the volume and page in the Academy Edition of Kant’s works. I used the English translation of the Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant.

of beneficence is a categorical imperative, that is a requirement to be universally applicable to all rational beings.

Faceless strangers have no story. A vivid illustration of an identified victim is what motivates us. However, if you think of duties in terms of universality and rational nature you reach a radically impartial point of view according to which the well-being of every human being is equally important, regardless of ties, personal relationships, or social membership.

If rational nature constitutes the essential characteristic of human beings, then national, racial, and ethnic criteria no longer determine who belongs to the moral community. Kant called the single moral community a kingdom of ends, an ideal that inspires us to imagine a systematic union of all rational beings through common universal laws. From a practical standpoint, the kingdom of ends is a republic of all rational beings engaged in the harmonious and cooperative pursuit of the good (Korsgaard 1996, p. 23). For Kant, to attain membership in this unifying moral community you have to distance yourself from local and private identities: “if we abstract from the personal differences of rational beings as well as from all the content of their private ends we shall be able to think of a whole of all ends in systematic connection” (4:433). Differences in birth, wealth, honor, power, or education do not mark a person’s moral status. As a rational being, you are an equal member of this basic moral community, which has priority over all other practical identities. The harmonious and cooperative pursuit of the good is thus envisioned impartially.

1.2 A friend of humanity

Most research within the sacrificial dilemmas paradigm accentuates the dark side of utilitarianism: its readiness to sacrifice innocent lives. The Impartial Beneficence subscale has the advantage that it ties utilitarianism to positive moral tendencies. For this reason, Kahane and his colleagues explored how utilitarian judgments cohere with other psychological constructs. An interesting choice was to see how utilitarian tendencies associate with the *Identification with All Humanity Scale* (IWAH), a psychological scale based on a concept that is not typically utilitarian. IWAH measures the extent to which people show a deep concern for all human beings regardless of their race, religion, or nationality. This concern is driven by a sense “of belonging to one human family”, rather than exhibiting more parochial attachment to one’s community (McFarland et al. 2012).

What motivated Kahane and his colleagues to explore this relationship is that such an all-encompassing impartial concern captured by IWAH is often acclaimed by classical utilitarianism. Indeed, greater endorsement of impartial beneficence was associated with greater identification with all of humanity. At the same time, greater acceptance of instrumental harm was associated with less identification with all of humanity. This means that people who identify with one human family refuse to use others as means to promote the greater good. As Kantian ethics endorses impartial beneficence and rejects instrumental harm, you can say that it fits even better than classical utilitarianism with the psychological construct of identification with all of humanity. Thus, from the point of view of measuring moral judgment, the

versions of deontological philosophy that the Enlightenment movement has inspired are strongly committed to an all-encompassing impartial concern.

Humanity is not a primary concept for utilitarianism. Utilitarian thinkers even suspect it of an inbuilt speciesism that arbitrarily elevates human beings above all other sentient beings. In contrast, Kantian ethics feeds on the moral idea of humanity. In searching for a candidate for the supreme principle of morality, Kant developed the famous formula of the categorical imperative to treat humanity in your person and others always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means. To treat humanity as an end in itself is to acknowledge the non-comparable worth of every human being regardless of their race, religion, or nationality, making one another's equals. When you consider human beings as ends in themselves, you have to fulfill their needs and potential actively. Thus, for Kant, the idea of humanity encapsulates all-encompassing beneficence: "lawgiving reason, which includes the whole species (and so myself as well) in its idea of humanity as such, includes me as giving universal law along with all others in the duty of mutual benevolence, in accordance with the principle of equality" (6:451).

Kant's principle of humanity as an end in itself fosters the ideals of cosmopolitanism. This made him emblematic for developing the moral concept of a friend of humanity, which mirrors the psychological construct of identification with the whole of humanity. Historically, the concept of one human family helped to extend moral consideration in the struggles to end slavery in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (McFarland et al. 2013). Kant himself used the metaphor of a patriarchal family to claim that we should display "thought and consideration for the equality among them (...) as if all were brothers under one father who wills the happiness of all" (6:473). Further, Kant's preferred model for the ethical community is the friendship relationship that ultimately includes the entire human race (Wood 1999, p. 316). As he puts it, "A friend of human beings as such (i.e., of the whole race) is one who takes an effective interest in the well-being of all human beings" (6:472). A friend of humanity not only shows appreciation toward all humans everywhere but also has an active concern to help people all over the world. This is what the "identification with all of humanity" scale aims to measure.

2 The impartial concern of effective altruism is not distinctively utilitarian

We should not paint Peter Singer's philosophical achievements with blanket utilitarianism. Although, in the beginning, mostly utilitarian thinkers promoted the social movement of effective altruism (now being a more heterogeneous community), it is conceptually problematic to claim that it is exclusively utilitarian.⁴ The famine argument to help faraway strangers, which became the normative backbone of effective altruism, is not utilitarian. It is, thus, misleading to pit it against deontological philosophy across the board. Under the influence of Singer's aura as a utilitarian philosopher, we tend to overstate things. For example, to explain why he selected

⁴ Jeff McMahan (2016) astutely pointed out that it is insufficient to refute the claims of effective altruism simply by invoking objections to utilitarianism.

“Famine, Affluence, and Morality” under the rubric of consequentialism in his ethical theory anthology, Russ Shafer-Landau writes: “Singer applies the act utilitarian doctrine (without explicitly mentioning that he’s doing so) to the subject of famine relief” (2013, p. 415). But I will argue that the famine argument is independent of a utilitarian outlook. Singer himself considers his argument “quite general in its application” (2016, p. x). Note that he endorses preference utilitarianism – the version of utilitarianism that we reach by universalizing our preferences – as opposed to classical utilitarianism (maximize pleasure and minimize pain) (Singer 2011, p. 13). Thus, for Singer, a distinguishing feature of ethics is that ethical judgments are universalizable (2011, p. 279). You reach the impartial point of view through the requirement of universalizability, associated today with Kantian ethics. A proposed action is universally accepted by the affected parties if it is fully impartial between individuals. This brings preference utilitarians even closer to Kantian approaches in grounding a duty of impartial beneficence, against the accepted dogma that Kantians and utilitarians stand at opposite poles.⁵

2.1 Redrawing the call of duty

Many people admit that to relieve poverty in other parts of the world is beautiful, but it should be optional for those who want to do it. Peter Singer challenged this particular way of living ethically, which might be suspiciously convenient. To be a good person, even modest, it might not be enough to help people occasionally and immediately to hand. Imagine that you walk past a shallow pond and see a drowning child. If you intervene and pull the child out, you ruin your clothes. But this cost is insignificant, whereas the benefit of saving a human life is extremely significant. If you have the power to prevent something very bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything morally significant, then you ought to do it (Singer 2016, p. 6). This principle, however, conflicts with widespread moral intuitions. Suppose you determine that a famine relief fund can easily save a child’s life. Even though this child is ten thousand miles away, you can donate online an insignificant sum of money for your living standards. Most people would not claim that you have a moral obligation to donate or that you are a terrible person if you refuse to donate. However, it seems morally irrelevant that someone is physically near us. Thus, we should reject the *beautiful thing to do but not obligatory* intuition.

The stake of the famine argument is not to apply *incognito* a utilitarian view to a practical issue but to revise the *moral strength* of our responsibilities to the world’s poor. Singer uses the methodology of identifying a moral inconsistency in our practices and solving it in the most plausible direction. On the one hand, we recognize a moral duty to help in up-close situations. On the other hand, we consider aid optional in faraway cases. If both cases are morally equivalent, then either we have to reconsider up close aid as being optional or recognize a moral obligation to donate and get involved in faraway cases. Since we cannot believe that saving a drowning child is optional, we are seemingly left with only one solution: to

⁵ Richard Hare, one of Peter Singer’s mentors, famously argued that Kant could have been an utilitarian (1993).

transform charity into a duty. Singer (1975, p. 30) uses the same methodology to extend the principle of equality to nonhuman animals. Curiously, it might be that a significant part of Peter Singer's philosophical legacy is not distinctively utilitarian.⁶

2.2 The impartial concern of effective altruism without maximization

The effective altruism movement capitalized the most from Singer's famine argument. However, it should be clear that the philosophical achievement of extending the responsibilities of affluent people is independent of a utilitarian outlook. As Singer himself underlines, "if we accept any principle of impartiality, universalizability, equality, or whatever, we cannot discriminate against someone merely because he is far away from us." (Singer 2016, p. 8).

He is right. Kant held these views. When discussing casuistry questions about how to practice the duty of beneficence, Kant claims that you should help others to a great extent (6: 454). For him, poverty is a profound problem of justice that should disturb the comfort of affluent living: "One always talks so much of virtue. One must, however, abolish injustice before one can be virtuous. One must set aside comforts, luxuries and everything that oppresses others while elevating myself, so that I am not one of those who oppress their species." (20: 151) This is more demanding than Singer's famine argument that we ought to help others on the condition that we can do so without sacrificing anything morally significant.

The global movement of effective altruism promotes the transformation of supererogatory charity into a duty, similar to any other universalistic ethics. Most items of the Impartial Beneficence subscale tap into this redrawing of the traditional distinction between morally obligatory and morally optional: (1) to sacrifice one's own leg to save another person's life; (2) to donate one of our kidneys to a person with kidney failure since we do not need two kidneys to survive; (5) to keep money that one doesn't need is morally wrong when one can donate it to help those who will benefit a great deal. Interestingly, only one item refers to impartial beneficence: (3) to care about the well-being of all human beings on the planet equally, without favoring those who are especially close to us either physically or emotionally.

What underpins the items of the impartial beneficence subscale is not a cost-benefit analysis or some sort of maximizing thinking but accepting an extended responsibility and looking impartially at the world. Those who raise the moral bar of responsibility and identify with the whole of humanity feel obliged to save someone's life at significant costs and help people all over the world.

3 Methodological styles of ethical theory and impartiality

Kahane and his colleagues assume that differences in moral judgment as measured by OUS reflect distinct psychological mechanisms that underlie utilitarian and non-utilitarian moral judgments more generally. This is true only when

⁶ Of course, there are many qualifications to this prognosis. Singer definitely revived act-utilitarianism in bioethics and applied ethics, more generally.

you consider the instrumental harm subscale. As I have argued, Kantian ethics endorses the ideal of impartial beneficence to a degree that overlaps with utilitarianism from the point of view of moral psychology. This shows that the Oxford Utilitarianism Scale does not consider two distinct features of a normative framework, the content and the procedure that generated this content. Contemporary deontological philosophers have defended the priority of our special relationships and prerogatives against making the world a better place. Nevertheless, differences in commitment to impartial beneficence between utilitarian and deontological judgments are due to methodological styles of ethical theorizing rather than to a general division between utilitarian and deontological frameworks.

Kantian ethics and utilitarianism embrace a foundational model of ethical theory. In this model, ethical theory does not aim to systemize moral intuitions about particular cases but to transcend them. Philosophical inquiry finds a supreme principle to ground the whole of morality and defends it by providing a rational proof or deduction for its validity. Kant's and Mill's theories are both grounded in a fundamental principle. For Kant, this principle refers to rational nature, which makes every rational being from the entire universe worthy of being treated as an end in itself. For Mill, general happiness should determine what you have to do, not how an action affects your dearest projects. If minimizing pain is the ultimate value, it does not matter that much whose pain is relieved. Similarly, if every human being should be treated as an end in itself in virtue of their rational nature, we have to abstract from personal relationships.

Although contemporary deontology finds its spiritual roots in the work of Immanuel Kant, in part it has adopted a different methodological style, namely an intuitional model that grants authority to common moral experience. When we propose a solution to a practical issue, we compare it with our immediate ethical beliefs. If the verdict does not align well with some widespread moral intuition, then we are inclined to revise it. Moral intuitions seem to function as some kind of data that has to be integrated by any general moral claim, just as empirical theories need to accommodate our observations of the world (Kagan 2001). Many contemporary deontological philosophers develop theories or principles using intuitive judgments about particular cases. They tend to trust intuitive judgments to the extent that they test general moral theories against them (Rawls 1951, 2009; Kamm 2007).

If our moral experience and common-sense ethical beliefs are trustworthy, then naturally the domain of the personal will have more significance within the intuitional methodological framework. When the implication of a principle conflicts with a moral intuition, we have to develop alternative principles. In everyday moral life, most of us believe that we stand in special relations with parents, spouses, children, and friends, especially in the distribution of beneficence. Additionally, most of us believe that how well our personal lives go is central to our existence. Consequently, a general moral claim about practicing beneficence will have to integrate the intuitive force of partiality. Contemporary deontology thus uses intuitional methodology to justify prerogatives not to maximize the good and constraints on producing the good (see Scheffler 1994; Kamm 2007).

Methodological style influences the content of a normative framework. Depending on which model of ethical reasoning you adopt, your commitment to impartiality can change significantly (Jaquet and Cova 2021). Foundational theorizing tends to press the demand for the impartial standpoint most firmly against everyday ethical beliefs, downplaying the significance of the personal in moral thought (Williams 2006), whereas intuitional theorizing limits what we may do in pursuit of the impartial good. You don't have to be a utilitarian to endorse a strong moral obligation to help distant strangers from starvation. You can envision a cosmopolitan ethic of universal human obligations. Kant deeply believed that our moral sense must be educated to include "an inclination to promote the well-being of the entire world" (27:674). As Onora O'Neill acknowledges, "whether poverty and hunger are in the next street or far away, whether we articulate the task in utilitarian, in Kantian, or in other terms, the claims of justice and of beneficence for the two cases are similar" (2013, p. 519). Unfortunately, most psychological research tends to conflate the division between deontological and utilitarian judgments with differences in methodological styles (intuition-driven vs. liberationist and cosmopolite).⁷

4 Implications for future research: the multiple psychological sources of the impartial beneficence phenomenon

Kahane and colleagues' proposal to develop a multi-dimensional approach to utilitarianism is a significant step in the direction of a complex framework for studying utilitarian psychology, but the measurement criteria relevant to impartial beneficence fail to capture a distinctively utilitarian outlook. The items of the IB subscale are not based on the maximizing dimension of utilitarianism, but on accepting *extended* responsibility and a *commitment* to impartial beneficence. I have argued that Kantian ethics shares with utilitarianism the commitment to radical impartial attitudes and that differences in the commitment to impartial beneficence are better explained by differences in cognitive styles rather than by a utilitarian/deontological divide.

Perhaps the goal of developing a psychological construct that matches a philosophical view is not what we should want most. If the conceptual framework of the impartial beneficence sub-scale does not distinctively measure utilitarian judgment, then it might be better to focus on the psychological phenomenon of impartial beneficence as such and its potentially distinct features. An exclusive link between impartial beneficence and utilitarianism obscures some important avenues of research about the multiple psychological sources (utilitarian and non-utilitarian) of radically impartial moral views. It is unlikely that the centrifugal forces that push people to expand the impartial standpoint are based on a single (utilitarian)

⁷ Before developing the Oxford utilitarianism scale, Kahane made similar claims about methodological styles in moral decision making. He suggested that people's responses to moral dilemmas are largely due to differences between intuitive and counterintuitive judgments, not to general differences between utilitarian and deontological judgment (Kahane et al. 2012; Kahane 2014; see also Unger 1996).

psychological mechanism (Waytz & Epley 2012; Hackett et al. 2015; Hollar 2017; Graham et al. 2017; Crimston et al. 2018; Waytz et al. 2019). The varieties of impartiality, the degrees of impartiality toward animals, and what personality traits and experiences help develop greater empathic concern (Bruner & Lindauer 2020; Killoren & Streiffer 2020; Crisp 2018; Graham et al. 2017; Hannikainen et al. 2020) indicate a cluster of issues that encompasses the psychology of impartial beneficence. Instead of classifying the commitment to impartial beneficence as utilitarian, we should try to investigate what cognitive (methodological) styles generate radically impartial attitudes and how the psychology of empathic concern (utilitarianism) and universalist identity (Kantian ethics) can shed light on an all-encompassing concern about the well-being of all human beings. Kantian ethics shows that one way to generate impartial beneficence is by interpreting moral duties in radical egalitarian terms and considering all human beings in a unifying moral community (the whole of humanity).

I do not want to dispute the legitimacy of a dual model approach to utilitarianism, but Kahane and his colleagues need to significantly revise the impartial beneficence sub-scale if they want to capture distinctively utilitarian judgments. First, they need to add more items related to impartial beneficence. Most items of the subscale refer to demanding self-sacrifice and act/omission distinction. Oddly, there is only one item that refers to impartial concern for the well-being of all human beings. Second, and most importantly, they need to develop items that explicitly embed the impartial *maximization* of the good of all, not the mere commitment to care about the well-being of all human beings on the planet equally (as it is in the current version). Third, they need to pit partialist reasons against impartialist reasons in the process of maximizing the overall good. When Peter Singer's mother developed advanced Alzheimer's, he spent a considerable amount of money paying nurses to take care of her. Failing to enact the impartial maximization of the good of all, Singer explained: "Perhaps it is more difficult than I thought before, because it is different when it's your mother" (Specter, 1999).

5 Conclusion

The narrow focus of psychological research on sacrificial harm contributes to a Machiavellian picture of utilitarianism. By developing the Oxford Utilitarianism Scale, Kahane and his colleagues have shown how important it is for the study of moral judgment to include the inspiring ideal of impartial concern. However, this significant contribution goes beyond the utilitarian/deontological divide. We learn to divide moral theories depending on whether they are, at the root, either Kantian or utilitarian. Kant famously denounced lying, even if it would save someone's life (8:427), whereas utilitarianism accepts transgression of moral rules if it maximizes the greater good. However, in regard to promoting the ideal of impartial beneficence, Kantian ethics and utilitarianism overlap because both theories contributed to the Enlightenment project of moral reform. In Kantian ethics, the very concepts of duty and moral community are interpreted in radically impartial and cosmopolitan terms.

Thus, a fruitful area for future research opens on exploring the diverse psychological sources of impartial beneficence.

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Declarations

Conflict of Interest statement I have no conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval Statement Ethics approval was not needed as this is a theoretical study, not an empirical study with human subjects.

Informed Consent Informed consent was not needed as this is a theoretical study, not an empirical study with human subjects.

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