NEW INCONSISTENCIES IN INFINITE UTILITARIANISM

ABSTRACT

Utilitarianism is a branch of philosophy where moral decisions are made by solving optimization problems. A world is a collection of locations (such as people, places, or points in time) each location having an associated real number measuring the goodness (or utility) in that location. The goal of Utilitarians is to find sets of rules (consistent with certain fundamental Utilitarian principles) that adjudicate between worlds, deciding if one world is on balance at least as good as another. Thus if one has a choice between two actions then the rules will say which resulting world is better, hence which action is better.

We show that under core Utilitarian principles there are basic worlds that are neither good, bad, or neutral. Thus a Utilitarian confronted with a choice between an action leading to one of these worlds and an action leading to a neutral world will have a dilemma. The tools we use are philosophical, logical, and mathematical.

This is joint work with Joel David Hamkins and Barbara Montero.