

BEYOND SACRIFICIAL HARM: THE 2D MODEL OF UTILITARIANISM & THE OXFORD UTILITARIANISM SCALE

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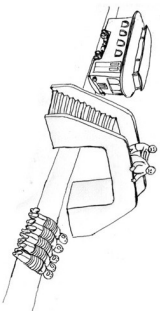


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1. DUAL PROCESSES AND RUNAWAY TROLLEYS

“Trolley-style” sacrificial dilemmas have been widely used in moral psychology to understand utilitarian and non-utilitarian modes of thinking.

These results have been taken to shed light on utilitarian psychology (and philosophy!) generally – but sacrificial dilemmas are just one example where the tension between utilitarianism and common-sense (deontological) moral intuitions is seen.



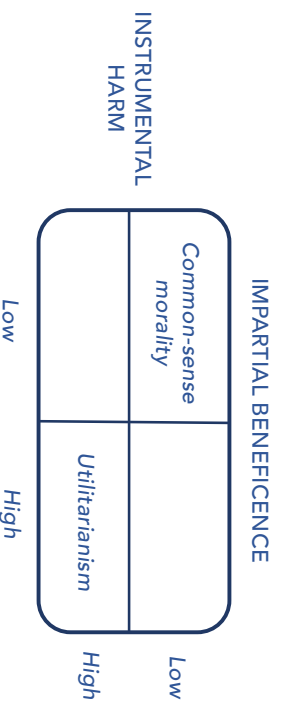
Can sacrificial dilemmas tell us about utilitarian psychology generally?

2. TWO DIMENSIONS OF (PHILOSOPHICAL) UTILITARIANISM

There are at least two key ways that utilitarianism departs from common-sense moral intuitions.

The first is decisions about *instrumental harm*, where utilitarianism requires acts that common-sense morality forbids – e.g. decisions about whether to sacrifice one to save a greater number.

The second is that utilitarianism requires acts that common-sense morality doesn't. This is the more fundamental positive core of utilitarianism, which we call *impartial beneficence*: the idea that we must impartially maximize the well-being of all sentient beings, often at high cost to ourselves.



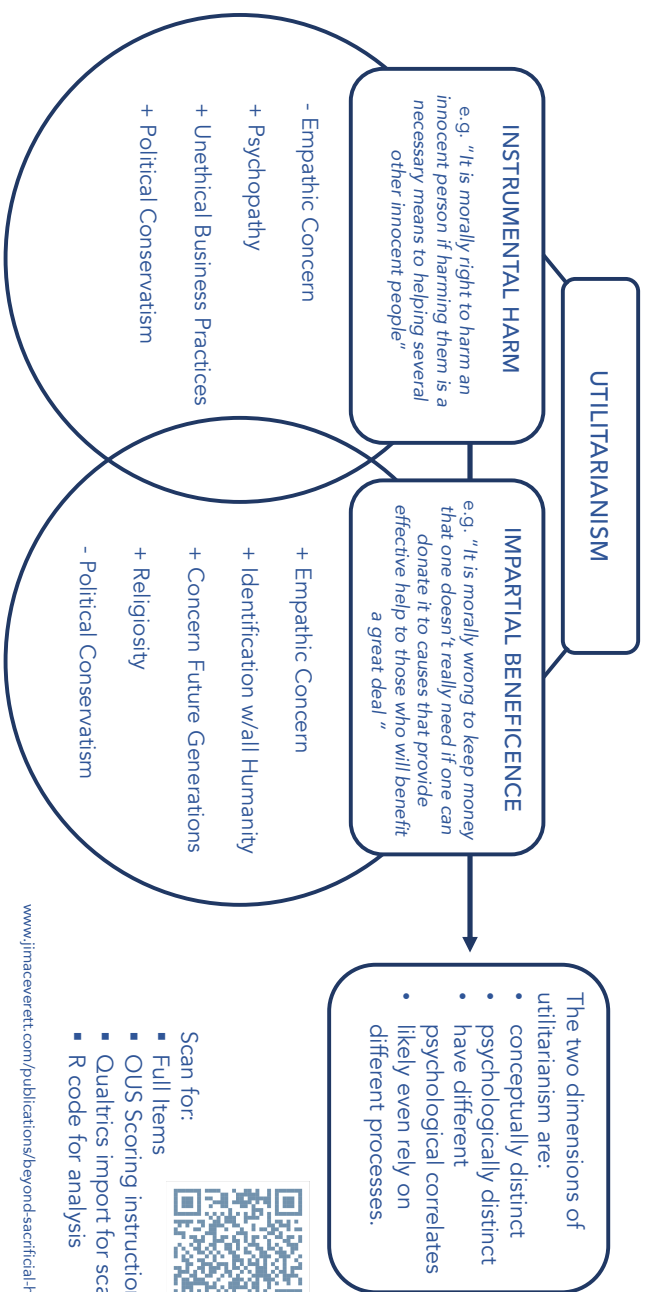
3. THE OXFORD UTILITARIANISM SCALE

The Oxford Utilitarianism Scale (OUS) helps researchers go beyond simply studying sacrificial dilemmas.

We started with a large (90+) pool of items based on a thorough analysis of the relevant literature in ethics and vetted by leading professional moral philosophers, and then applied rigorous scale development procedures.

This allowed us to ensure the final scale is empirically driven, reflecting clusters of moral evaluations that were statistically robust in large samples taken from the lay population.

The final OUS has 9 items in two sub-scales: Instrumental Harm and Impartial Beneficence (rated on 1-7 Likert scale)



4. THE TWO-DIMENSIONAL (2D) MODEL

On our 2D model, utilitarian moral decision-making is not an all-or-nothing category but a matter of degree, and involves two largely independent 'positive' and 'negative' dimensions.

In order to understand utilitarian decision making more generally, it is critical to look at both instrumental harm and impartial beneficence.

Previous research has told only half of the story about the psychology of utilitarianism and - because impartial beneficence is the philosophical core of utilitarianism thought - arguably the less important half.