

The Undemandingness of Progressive Consequentialism

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Abstract: Michael Slote's Satisficing Consequentialism seems to offer a way to reduce the demands of Consequentialism, by only requiring us to bring about consequences which are good enough. However, it has proved to be a flawed and unpopular theory. Dale Jamieson and Robert Elliot's Progressive Consequentialism, the view that our fundamental ethical imperative is to improve the world, appears to solve some of the problems of Satisficing Consequentialism, including arbitrariness, prevention of goodness and blatant satisficing. This paper shows that despite its apparent successes, Progressive Consequentialism is an implausible theory because it is implausibly undemanding. It does not always require agents to do what they clearly ought to do.

§1. INTRODUCTION

In this essay I will argue that Progressive Consequentialism (PC), the ethical view that right actions are those which improve the world, is implausibly undemanding. Any ethical theory which does not place adequate demands upon agents should be rejected, and thus PC should be rejected.

I will begin (§2&3) by explaining the motivations for PC, particularly focussing on its apparent superiority to Satisficing Consequentialism (SC), the view that right actions are those which produce good enough consequences. In the process of motivating PC, I introduce it (§3) and explain how it functions. Next, I present (§4) a new objection to PC, that of undemandingness, to which I consider (§5{a-b}) several responses. I argue (§5) that these responses are implausible, concluding (§6) that PC is implausibly undemanding and so should be rejected.

For the purposes of space, I will assume that what is of intrinsic value in consequences is human wellbeing, so when I refer to the value of consequences, I refer to wellbeing. It should also be noted that I mostly use 'good' in the same sense as 'value'.

§2. SC AND THE MOTIVATIONS FOR PC

Perhaps the most well-known form of Consequentialism is Maximising Consequentialism (MC), the view that we ought to bring about the consequences with the most value. Under MC, producing consequences with less than the most value is wrong, so it is a very demanding view. If working at the soup kitchen produces even slightly better consequences than devoting time to treasured hobbies, then we may be required to give up these sentimental projects, or at least severely limit the time that we allocate them.

One response to the demandingness of MC has been to argue that we only ought to bring about consequences which are 'good enough', for some consequences whose value is less than the best, but still good enough, will suffice. This view is called Satisficing Consequentialism (SC) and was first defended by Michael Slote ("Satisficing Consequentialism").

While it is true that SC can reduce the demands of MC, it faces several problems, namely: arbitrariness, gratuitous prevention of the good, and blatant satisficing.

The primary motivation for PC is that it can avoid these three problems, while still reducing the demands of MC. I will now explain why these problems seem to apply to SC, then showing, in the following section (§3), how PC can avoid them.

Problem 1 – Arbitrariness

SC may be arbitrary because there appears to be no principled way to decide what amount of value is good enough. If we choose some

quantity, perhaps X% of the most valuable consequences possible in the situation, then we must question the significance of X as against X-1 or X+1. If what is good enough is some fixed amount of good Y, then the same issue will arise (Jamieson and Elliot 244).

Problem 2 – Preventing the Good

Bradley (“Against Satisficing Consequentialism”) has argued that SC permits cases of gratuitous prevention of the good, where agents are permitted to bring about a good enough outcome, by preventing something much better from happening. An example will help to illustrate this problem:

Essay: To pass his history essay, Milo needs a mark of at least 60%. However, getting higher will give him a great confidence boost and increase his wellbeing. For advice, Milo asks his older sister Effie to look over the essay. Calculating that Milo will receive a mark of 90%, Effie alters the answer, calculating that Milo will now receive 60%. Effie, a Satisficing Consequentialist, claims that she has acted rightly, for while 90% would be much better than 60%, 60% is still good enough.

Having assumed that human wellbeing is of intrinsic value, it is clear that getting 90% would be a consequence of greater value than getting 60%. However, because 60% produces a wellbeing increase which is good enough, Effie is permitted to prevent Milo from getting 90%. We intuitively feel that Effie cannot have done the right thing by going out of her way to bring about a worse outcome, yet SC delivers the opposite verdict.

Problem 3 – Blatant Satisficing

Mulgan (Slote’s Satisficing Consequentialism 122-125) argues that SC permits cases of blatant satisficing, where agents are permitted to knowingly bring about less than the most good, even when bringing about the most would come at no additional personal cost or effort. To make this clearer, consider the following example based

on Mulgan’s “Magic Game” scenario (Slote’s Satisficing Consequentialism 125):

Aphrodite: Aphrodite is in a room with two buttons. Pressing button A clears the debts of N people and button B clears the debts of 1000 people. Once a button is pressed, both are deactivated and the situation ends, with both buttons being equally easy to mechanically activate. Aphrodite is a satisficing consequentialist who knows all this. Aphrodite claims there is some number of people N which is considerably lower than 1000 but which is good enough, and presses button A.

Clearing the debts of 1000 people would greatly increase wellbeing and comes at no more effort or cost to Aphrodite than clearing N peoples debts. We intuitively feel that Aphrodite cannot have acted rightly by knowingly bringing about this lower value, when bringing about more would come at no greater effort or cost, yet SC delivers the opposite verdict.

It should be noted that a different intuition is being violated than in problem two. In two, the intuition being violated is that we ought not to go out of our way to *prevent* good outcomes, while in this case the intuition is that if we can bring about more good at no extra effort or cost, then we should.

I do not claim that these problems provide a reason to reject SC wholesale, although they likely contribute to its current relative unpopularity – Slote himself, the originator of the view, has rejected it (*Morals From Motives*). I will now introduce PC and indicate how it might avoid these problems while still reducing the demands of MC.

§3. PROGRESSIVE CONSEQUENTIALISM

PC, first proposed by Jamieson and Elliot, is the view that an action is right if and only if it improves the world (244-245). But what does it mean to improve the world? From an initial consequentialist interpretation, improving the

world might mean bringing about a future world which has a higher value than the past one. However, if factors outside of an agent's control mean that the value of the world will vastly increase regardless of how they act, then the agent will not be required to do anything and will in fact be permitted to have a negative impact on the world (Jamieson and Elliot 246).

As this is implausible, we will need a more nuanced way to define improvement, which Jamieson and Elliot (247) provide¹: An act improves the world if and only if the value of the world after the act is greater than the baseline for improvement, where the baseline is the value of the world at T2 (after the act) on the counterfactual assumption that the agent does not exist at T1 (the time of action). At first seemingly complex, this baseline is actually intuitive and easy to apply. We consider what the world would have been like at T2 if the agent did not exist at T1 and compare it to the actual world at T2. This should be made clear by example:

Cookies: Simon can give Koko some cookies or no cookies. Koko likes cookies, so having some would increase her wellbeing. Should Simon give her some cookies at lunchtime? Suppose that Simon does not exist at lunchtime. Then presumably Simon cannot give Koko cookies. Alternatively, if he gives her cookies at lunchtime, then she will have a higher wellbeing than in the world where he doesn't exist. Thus, by comparing these two worlds, we can see that giving Koko some cookies at lunchtime improves the world, while not doing so does not.

This initial formulation of PC seems to avoid two of the problems faced by SC, those of arbitrariness and prevention of the good. First, as Jamieson and Elliot (244) note, a requirement to improve the world is no more arbitrary than the MC requirement to maximise value, so PC doesn't appear to suffer from the same level-setting problems as SC.

Secondly, we can see how the formulation avoids the problem of prevention of the good by

applying PC to the *Essay* example from section two. If Effie did not exist at the time of action, then she could not have altered Milo's essay, so he would have received 90%. Therefore, the baseline for improvement would be the value of the world plus the wellbeing boost that Milo would receive from getting 90%. As getting less than 90% would produce a lower wellbeing improvement, Effie's action does not improve the world against the baseline, so is wrong.

More generally, if an agent does not exist at T1, then they do not act at T1, and hence, any value in the world at T2 that arises from the agent's inaction is included in the baseline.

While this initial formulation of PC can answer objections of arbitrariness and preventing the good, it is, in its current form, guilty of permitting blatant satisficing. Recall the example *Aphrodite* from section two. If Aphrodite did not exist then neither button would be pressed, so pressing either button would be an improvement upon this baseline. Thus, this formulation of PC permits either button being pressed, just like SC.

In response, Jamieson and Elliot (245-46) complete their formulation of PC with an efficiency requirement (ER). Jamieson and Elliot argue that PC requires agents to ensure that no other action of the same effort level improves the world more. They note that this is not a demanding requirement, for agents will not be required to expend *more* effort, just to be efficient in its expenditure. Clearly, if Aphrodite is required to be efficient² in her effort, and both buttons require the same effort, then she ought to press the one which produces consequences of more value.

Finally, it should be clear that PC will be less demanding than MC. Suppose I have £1000 to spend as I like, which I do not particularly need. MC will require me to use the money to bring about the best possible outcomes: donating to the most effective charities and causes, while PC merely (roughly) requires that I bring about a net good.

Through showing how PC might avoid the major problems faced by SC, while still reducing the demands of MC, I have provided both an explanation of, and motivation for PC. I will now end this section by stating PC in its full form.

Progressive Consequentialism (PC):

An action is right if and only if:

- i) It improves the world against the baseline for improvement, and;*
 - ii) There is no other action of the same effort level which improves the world more*
- Where the baseline for improvement is the value of the world at T2 (after the act) on the counterfactual assumption that the agent does not exist at T1 (time of act).*

I will now present a new problem for PC, that of undemandingness.

§4. THE PROBLEM OF UNDEMANDINGNESS

PC considerably reduces the demands of MC and answers several key objections to SC. However, we expect ethical views to be adequately demanding, and PC reduces demandingness too much; it is implausibly undemanding. Specifically, in cases where a small increase in effort yields a huge increase in the value of consequences, PC does not require agents to expend the additional effort. For example, I present another variation on Mulgan's "Magic Game":

Dionysus: Dionysus is in a room with two buttons; a higher and a lower one. Button A is within reach and clears the debts of 1 person. Button B is out of reach and clears the debts of N people. Pressing button B will require Dionysus to make a running leap, expending a small amount of effort. Dionysus is a progressive consequentialist who knows all this, and who believes the number of people N to be

1000. Dionysus presses button A, arguing that he has improved the world and so acted rightly.

Dionysus improves the world because if he didn't exist neither button could have been pressed. The efficiency requirement is also satisfied, for pressing button B requires additional effort. Therefore, under PC, Dionysus acts rightly in pressing A.

This is a deeply unintuitive verdict. If we can bring about vastly better consequences at only a slight effort increase, then it seems we ought to do so. An ethical view that does not demand this of us is implausibly undemanding. The intuition being violated is the following:

Intuition 1: If an agent can bring about vastly better consequences at only a slight effort increase, then they ought to do so.

However, it should be noted that this intuition is not universal, for it does not seem to apply in some cases. Firstly, if the lower button (A) produces a very high level of good, then it may be argued that the agent is not required to bring about the better consequences. Secondly, if the value of the world is sufficiently high, then the agent may not be required to bring about very high value consequences.

As a response, it will suffice to point out that the intuition does still certainly apply in cases where the lower button brings about consequences of moderate value or less, and that it is very implausible to suggest that the actual world has such a high value. In fact, it is generally agreed that we are very far away from such a morally perfect world. Therefore, this intuition still applies in many cases, and thus PC is implausibly undemanding in many cases.

There is also a second intuition which PC violates. In the example, regardless of how high the value of N is, PC will not require Dionysus to press the button requiring more effort. This is because an increase in the value of N does not change the fact that pressing the lower button

still improves the world and satisfies the ER. We can formalise this intuition as follows:

Intuition 2: If exerting some small extra effort E produces consequences of value N, then there is some value of N for which we ought to exert extra effort E.

Even if the world has a very high value, or the lower button produces a very good outcome, it seems there must be some amount of good for which we are required to exert a small amount of extra effort to bring about. This intuition seems to apply more generally than intuition one, providing additional evidence that PC is implausibly undemanding in many cases. We will return to a version of this second intuition in the next section (§5) when discussing possible responses to undemandingness. It should be noted for later reference, that this intuition also seems strong when the extra effort is larger, for we think people ought to make large sacrifices for *some* level of good.

At this point, having presented an initial example of undemandingness, and isolated the intuitions which are violated, it would be prudent to deflect the initial response that the example is unrealistic and implausible. Perhaps, for the PC advocate it is too abstract and divorced from real life situations, and hence does not form a strong case against PC. While it is understandable to balk at the abstract treatment of the example, we can easily respond with more fleshed out, concrete examples of PC's undemandingness. For instance, take the following:

Choice: Jackson turns a corner onto a mostly empty street, to see two incidents. First, a worker who is in a rush has dropped his papers all over the pavement and clearly requires help. Second, a blind old lady with hearing aids is slowly but surely walking further into a busy main road. Jackson recognises that he only has time to help one person, and that saving the old lady will require slightly more effort, for she is somewhat further away than the worker. However, Jackson is an adherent of PC and bends

over to help the man pick up the papers, while a lorry obliterates the old lady. Jackson is a progressive consequentialist and claims to have acted rightly.

There was no one else on the street to help, so if Jackson did not exist, then the lady would have died, and the worker would have picked up his papers alone. Clearly, he has improved the world, for the wellbeing of the worker is greater than in the baseline. Also, as the example stipulates, saving the lady would have required more effort, so the ER is satisfied. Therefore, under PC, Jackson acts rightly.

This is a realistic example of the undemandingness of PC. Only a small amount of effort would be required to save a human life, the prerequisite for wellbeing, yet PC does not require Jackson to bring about this vastly better outcome. Furthermore, even if we suppose that Jackson could have saved ten or twenty lives by expending this small effort, PC could not have required him to do so, because helping the worker both improves the world and satisfies the ER.

Choice is a realistic example of the implausible undemandingness of PC. Unless the PC adherent can provide a plausible response, PC is implausibly undemanding and should be rejected. I will now consider several possible responses to the problem of undemandingness, arguing that they are all implausible.

§5. RESPONSES TO UNDEMANDINGNESS

§5a. The effort differences in the counterexamples are the wrong kind of effort.

The effort differences in *Choice* and *Dionysus* are of the physical kind: running as against bending over, jumping rather than standing still. The defender of PC may argue that we are focussing on the wrong *kind* of effort. If this is true, then perhaps the examples given so far do not provide evidence that PC is implausibly undemanding.

To refute this objection, I will consider two plausible accounts of effort suggested by Chappell (253), showing that neither renders PC any less susceptible to undemandingness.

Willpower: The kind of effort that is of normative significance is the exertion of willpower, or the expenditure of mental effort. For Elliot Kipchoge, jogging down the street will require an insignificant amount of willpower, while for someone with a crippling phobia that running will cause them to go into cardiac arrest, it will take enormous mental effort.

This account still leaves PC susceptible to undemandingness. Consider the following example, once again based on Mulgan's "Magic game":

Cronus: Cronus is naturally a nasty and vicious individual, who does not wish for good outcomes. He is in the familiar room with two buttons of equal pressing ease. One button removes the debts of 1 person, the other 1000 people.

Cronus, being a despicable, bad-natured person does not want to produce consequences of higher value. In fact, doing so would require a significant amount of mental exertion. Bringing about the higher value consequences therefore comes at a significant effort cost to Cronus. Nonetheless, it is clear that Cronus ought to bring about the higher value outcome. However, PC will not produce this verdict, as both actions improve the world, and are of differing effort levels. Hence, this account of effort will not solve the problem of undemandingness.

Cost: The kind of effort that is of normative significance is the degree of personal welfare that the agent sacrifices. Running down the street comes at no welfare cost to most people, nor does jumping or bending over.

As a response consider another variation on Mulgan's situation:

Apollo: Apollo can press two buttons, of equal pressing ease: one clearing the debts of 1000 people, but slightly increasing his personal debt; two removing the debts of 1 person and not affecting Apollo's personal debt.

Here, PC permits Apollo to choose the option that does not harm his wellbeing, while a slight harm to it would result in much more valuable consequences, so PC is also too undemanding under this account of effort.

Clearly, these examples are not as fleshed out as *Choice*. However, this is not a problem, for I am just demonstrating that merely changing the *kind* of effort will not be an adequate response to undemandingness. It should be easy to see how such examples could be adapted to be more realistic, so here it is only in the interests of space that I prefer simplicity to realism.

Merely changing the *kind* of effort that is appropriate will do nothing to resolve the underlying problem that PC cannot require us to exert *more* effort when we ought to do so. Therefore, I conclude that this response to undemandingness is implausible.

§5b. The effort differences in the counterexamples are negligible.

Perhaps though, the defender of PC can argue that none of the effort differences in the examples thus far shown are compelling. They are admittedly (and intentionally) slight differences, and maybe for the PC advocate too slight to be significant. Plausibly, the ER considers actions of negligible effort difference to be actions of the same effort level. Thus, if my previous counterexamples present negligible effort differences, then none of them demonstrate PC's undemandingness, provided that the ER requires the agent to exert insignificantly more effort when doing so produces more valuable consequences.

There are two main counter-responses to this response to undemandingness. First, unless the advocate of PC puts forward some principled

way to divide negligible amounts of effort from significant ones, there will be an element of arbitrariness to the response. Of course, Jamieson and Elliot (244) profess arbitrariness as the central problem for SC, so this would be a blow to their hopes for PC. However, they may be wrong. Perhaps, a small amount of arbitrariness is not too unsettling, especially in the case of borderline counterexamples. Therefore, if we wish to thoroughly refute this line of argument, we must pursue the second counter-response: demonstrating the undemandingness of PC through counterexamples with clearly significant effort differences.

Let us suppose for a moment that the appropriate form of effort is personal wellbeing sacrifice. As I have shown, changing the kind of effort does not solve the problem of undemandingness, so it matters little which kind we choose. Recall the *Choice* example and suppose the following is also the case:

Jackson must catch a specific bus to a job interview for a coveted position. Jackson can help the worker and still catch the bus, for the two are near. However, saving the lady – who is far away down the street – will mean missing the interview and losing the job opportunity.

Plausibly, losing the job interview is a significant sacrifice of personal wellbeing. Perhaps Jackson is deeply personally invested in getting the job or is in a desperate financial position. On the other hand, helping the worker will require no such sacrifice, and is only a minor exertion. Thus, it seems that the effort difference is now a clearly significant one. However, this would not mitigate Jackson's obligation to save the lady from certain death. Since he ought to save the lady, and the effort difference is significant, PC is implausibly undemanding.

I suspect the initial response from the PC adherent would be to argue that allowing the lady to die would weigh heavy on Jackson's conscience, and that he would suffer a com-

parable wellbeing loss due to guilt. Maybe Jackson is a good enough person that allowing the lady to die costs just as much effort as saving the lady. Then, by the ER, Jackson ought to save the lady, as this would improve the world more, and the two actions are of the same effort level.

However, there is an apt counter. Suppose Jackson is an amoral, capricious and unprincipled individual. Then he will suffer no wellbeing cost from letting the woman die. Therefore, as he still ought to save her, and the ER is satisfied, PC is once again implausibly undemanding.

There are now two lines of further response open to the defender of PC. First, they may still claim that the effort difference is negligible. This seems implausible though, for if the earlier claims of negligibility were bordering on arbitrariness, then this claim (in unqualified form) is almost outlandishly arbitrary. Of course, the advocate of PC may give some principled account of negligibility; but how plausible could such an account be, if it sets its lowest level of effort at the intuitively significant cost of losing a coveted job opportunity? However, perhaps the defender may maintain that the difference is negligible by constructing some principled way to define negligibility as a moving baseline, so that negligibility is somehow indexed to the situation. Here I simply note that this seems to be moving too far away from the notion of negligibility, for such a construction would be a principled specification of which effort levels are good enough in any situation, which is very different to the minor claim that two effort levels are simply insignificantly different. Therefore, I shall consider this as a different response in the subsequent section (§5c).

The second further response would be to argue that Jackson is not required to save the lady, for his own wellbeing cost mitigates his obligation to save her. We really don't have to give up our coveted personal projects to save a life that only we can save. This move recognises that the greater the cost of the higher value action,

the weaker our intuition that we ought to bring about the higher value consequences. When the effort difference is zero, the intuition is practically axiomatic, but in the altered *Choice* there is at least some uncertainty, which gives the PC advocate some leeway to make a stand.

However, we should not forget that PC violates a second intuition that is less affected by changes in effort difference³. Once the PC advocate accepts that a certain level of effort difference is significant, non-negligible, they are also committed to the claim that no matter how much more good that agent can bring about by exerting this extra effort, they are not required to do so; provided that the lower effort action also improves the world.

Thus, provided Jackson has a low effort, world-improving action available, he would never be required to sacrifice his job opportunity, even to bring about the highest possible good, provided that the effort difference is non-negligible. Jackson might be able to save 1000 old ladies and yet PC would have nothing more to say on the matter. This is what makes PC so implausible: that once a certain amount of effort difference is conceded to be significant, there is no value that this extra effort can bring about, for which PC would require an agent to exert the extra effort.

Maybe Jackson is not required to sacrifice the job for the lady's life. But he surely is required to sacrifice his job for some level of good; for some number of lives, and it is precisely this which PC cannot require of him. Therefore, in this sense, PC is still implausibly undemanding, and hence this counter-response fails.

Claiming that the effort differences in the counterexamples are negligible is not a plausible response because there are other counterexamples with clearly significant effort differences, and the counter-responses to these new examples fail.

§5c. PC can be altered such that it is no longer implausibly undemanding.

The failure of the previous two responses to undemandingness appears to leave us with just one alternative: PC must be altered such that it no longer suffers from the undemandingness problem.

The natural way to do this⁴ would be to place some requirements upon effort, for PC does require agents to exert enough. Clearly though, for our requirements upon effort to be practical, they must somehow be relative to factors that change across situations, as our intuitions about the appropriate level of effort change significantly across situations. Thus, we might define the effort requirement as a necessary condition, attached to PC, and of the following form:

Effort Requirement: An action is right only if it exerts enough effort.

The idea here is that “enough” is a placeholder for a later principled specification of appropriate effort level, similar to how the adherent of SC uses “good enough”. That is, “enough” stands in for the moving baseline yet to be specified.

By attaching this additional necessary condition to PC, we create a new ethical view, with three conditions instead of PC's two. This new view will be termed Altered PC (APC), and take the following form:

Altered PC (APC):

An action is right if and only if:

- i) It improves the world, and;*
- ii) It satisfies the ER, and;*
- iii) It satisfies the Effort Requirement*

The motivation for APC is the hope that it can raise the demands of PC to a more plausible level, while still avoiding the problems of SC. Presumably, in cases where PC appears implausibly undemanding APC will produce

more demanding verdicts, as a higher level of effort will be required. Additionally, because APC retains the improvement criterion and the ER from PC, it seems that it will avoid at least two of PC's problems; for as we have already seen (§3), the baseline which Jamieson and Elliot advocate appears to rule out cases of prevention of the good, and the ER cases of blatant satisficing.

However, I will now argue that adopting APC is nonetheless an implausible response to the problem of undemandingness.

The obvious worry for APC is that it appears to be an *ad hoc* construction formulated to increase the demandingness of PC. However, I will now present two more powerful objections to APC, both of which also provide additional support for the worry that APC is *ad hoc*. Together these objections form a strong cumulative case that adopting APC is not a plausible response to the problem of undemandingness.

APC Moves too Far Away from PC and Consequentialism

The first objection to APC concerns whether it is truly a form of PC or even a form of Consequentialism. By introducing the effort requirement to PC, APC moves away from the core motivation of PC: that what is ethically important is to improve the world. Like the improvement criterion, the effort requirement is a fundamental, non-instrumental ethical imperative. Thus, under APC we have two equally important fundamental ethical imperatives: to improve the world, and to exert enough effort. This sets APC significantly apart from PC, for it seems to be more of a hybrid than a true form of PC. If this is the case, then adopting PC would not be a plausible move *for the progressive consequentialist*, as it would fail to respond to undemandingness from within PC. If I solve the problem of rights violations by adopting a deontological approach, then I have not provided

a response *for the consequentialist*, regardless of the plausibility of the view adopted.

Jamieson and Elliot can tell a plausible story to explain why our fundamental ethical imperative is to improve the world. However, it is hard to see how such a story could emerge for APC's dual imperatives. This lends support to the worry that APC simply is not fundamental, but instead an *ad hoc* construction designed to raise the demands of PC.

A further worry, which Mulgan (How Satisficers 44) has raised against forms of SC, questions whether consequentialist views which appeal to notions of effort are truly consequentialist. The SEP (Sinnott-Armstrong) defines Consequentialism as the view that: "normative properties depend only on consequences". Clearly though, APC does not fall under this definition, as, under APC, all normative properties depend on both properties of consequences and effort properties of the agent, the latter of which are not properties of consequences. In fact, the effort requirement's satisfaction is entirely dependent upon non-consequences, so half of APC's fundamental criteria are non-consequentialist. If APC isn't Consequentialism, then once again, adopting it as a response to PC's undemandingness will not be a response for the consequentialist, and hence also not for the adherent of PC.

APC is Not Genuinely Explanatory

The second objection to APC is adapted from one raised by Mulgan against certain forms of SC. Mulgan (How Satisficers 44) has argued that ethical views which introduce a notion of *enough* effort, as a fundamental ethical criterion, will fail to be genuinely explanatory. While PC can provide a genuine explanation as to why morality is not unreasonably demanding – we are only required to improve the world, which is not very demanding – APC does not provide a genuine explanation as to why morality does not demand very little of us. Under APC, morality does not

demand very little of us because it requires that we sacrifice enough, that we exert enough effort. As Mulgan (How Satisficers 44) puts it: “This is not an explanation”, for we might as well say that morality does not demand very little from us because morality demands enough from us.

This further supports the claim that APC is not a system of fundamental significance, but merely an *ad hoc* construction, for we presumably think that such a system ought to provide genuine, non-circular explanations for its demands. That is, a system of fundamental significance is qualitatively distinct from a mere list of intuitions, or a complex instrument which produces verdicts as close to actual intuitions as possible.

Section 5c. Conclusion

Thus, APC appears to be an *ad hoc* construction; its status as both a form of PC and of consequentialism is in doubt; and it fails to provide a genuine explanation for its own demands, the latter two of which further strengthen the claim that it is *ad hoc*. Therefore, we have good reasons to reject the adoption of APC as a plausible response to undemandingness.

Section 5. Conclusion

In this section (§5) I have shown that none of the responses considered (§5{a, b, c}) provide a plausible response to the problem of undemandingness.

§6. CONCLUSION

I first showed (§4) that Progressive Consequentialism faces the problem of undemandingness, which renders it implausibly undemanding in the absence of a plausible response.

I then showed (§5) that none of the responses are plausible, so I conclude that PC is implausibly undemanding, and hence should be rejected. This conclusion is correct only for a human wellbeing account of intrinsic value, but

perhaps could be shown for other accounts by employing similar arguments and examples to those developed here.

ENDNOTES

1. They do not specify this exact baseline, but the baseline I give is in the spirit of the vaguer formulation they give (Jamieson and Elliot 247).
2. The ER must also require that agents ensure no action of a lower effort level improves the world more. This seems to be implicitly assumed by Jamieson and Elliot, and I also make this assumption.
3. Strictly, the second intuition applied to ‘small’ effort differences. However, as noted earlier (§4) the intuition is also strong for significant effort differences.
4. The other way would be to change the baseline for improvement. However, Jamieson and Elliot (246-8) provide strong reasons for the rejection of other baselines, and it is unclear how changing the baseline could solve the problem of undemandingness.

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