



1. *Utilitarianism is too Cold and Calculating*
2. *Our Forever Wars*

## Utilitarianism is too Cold and Calculating

By FRANKIE SHAW  
GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

In the second chapter of *Utilitarianism*, John Stuart Mill fails to defend his moral system against the suspicion that it is too cold and calculating. According to Mill, those who make this criticism charge utilitarians with being too impersonal in their moral evaluations, and too exacting in their principles. Holding this objection myself, I must clarify that the words “cold and calculating” do not refer to a lack of sympathy in utilitarian applications. They rather explain a kind of diffused, managerial calculus where

*Utilitarianism does not make room for these simple considerations, so it renders itself incapable of identifying moral action altogether.*

a colorful moral compass should be. Consequentialism does not rob its advocates of their sympathy; instead, it muddies the concept of intrinsic human value, and robs individuals of unified moral feeling altogether.

Mill begins his defense against the “cold and calculating” objection by stating that it cannot be applied to utilitarianism’s treatment of action. He assumes that his system is offensive to critics only because it measures right and wrong against an objective principle, rather than a set of personal qualities. In light of his response, it seems necessary to say that I do not reject theories of universal justice when I criticize utilitarianism. Actions must be weighed against objective standards: an action is not inherently “right” if it is done by a benevolent man, or “wrong” if it is done by an abhorrent one. This is not a point of contention – to frame it as such would misrepresent the objection.

The “cold and calculating” criticism deals with the problem of moral action quite directly when it indicts utilitarianism for ignoring the

“qualities from which [...] actions emanate.” In other words, the fundamental flaw in utilitarianism lies not in its tendency to judge actions objectively, but in its inability to measure anything *except* for action. This is a serious issue for any theory of virtue, since moral standards necessarily apply to human agents, not to isolated events. For example, if a tornado inflicts an immense amount of pain on a community, it would not be called an immoral tornado. It would be absurd to pass moral judgments on events that bear no relation to a human will. Thus, to isolate an action from its human component is, by definition, to strip it of its moral qualities.

Utilitarianism unfortunately violates actions in this way. According to Mill, “he who saves a fellow creature from drowning does what is morally right, whether his motive be duty or the hope of being paid for his trouble.” In other words, under utilitarianism, moral events must be

*Morality should not focus on calculating positive outcomes; it should cultivate human beings.*

judged as if they happened upon the world spontaneously. Thus, to deem an action “morally right” under this line of thought is no different than to call a natural disaster “morally wrong.” To give a practical example of this absurdity: if a man commits murder without meaning to, it seems intuitively true that his action is not morally equivalent to a premeditated murder. Utilitarianism does not make room for these simple considerations, so it renders itself incapable of identifying moral action altogether.

Far from Mill’s accusation that the “cold and calculating” objection comes from a distaste for universal moral standards, it rather comes from an

## Our Forever Wars

By CASIMIR ZABLOTSKI  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Joe Haldeman’s *The Forever War* is a timely novel of remarkable depth, despite its brevity. Its premise is simple: humanity discovers interstellar travel by speeding toward collapsed stars, seemingly covering light-years in moments, though actually with extreme time dilation. War soon breaks out with the Taurans, a strange alien race from near Aldebaran that supposedly attacked human ships.

William Mandella, a physics student, is conscripted for an elite United Nations task force to fight the Taurans. After returning from what was for him a two-year expedition, he finds that 26 years have passed on Earth. Extensive class wars have led to the abolition of most private property, most are unemployed and living on government income, hunger has been eradicated through technological developments, and many nations encourage homosexuality to control population size and prevent more class conflict. Mandella and his occasional lover Marygay grow closer, sharing a feeling of alienation in a changed world, and eventually reenlist with the promise of a safe posting on Luna. When they quickly receive updated orders to return to combat, Mandella laments that he does not know which is worse: the feeling that this was bound to happen, or that he was returning to the only place he can call home.

After another tour, Mandella is separated from Marygay, so with time dilation they will likely never see each other again. Mandella throws himself into his military service, the only life he knows now, but he is too different from those under his command, who are all homosexual, ethnically identical, and speak a new form of English. He does not hate these soldiers; in fact, he knows that he is the real “other,” so out of time that he cannot rightfully judge them. Mandella returns from his final tour to learn that his arrival marks the end of the “Forever War.” Mankind

avid defense of them. Fundamentally, to exclude the human agent from any moral maxim is to make that maxim *incompatible* with morality.

If Mill were to give the fairer version of the claim that his philosophy is cold and calculating, he would say not that it charges utilitarians with being hollow, but that it charges utilitarianism itself with being so.

Whether or not their interpersonal conduct differs outwardly, utilitarians fundamentally operate with a moral compass that does not measure who

they are, or how they treat others. In other words, strict utilitarians are not robbed of feeling, but of moral feeling. Moral value, in this system, is not granted to those with true inner virtue or beauty of character, but rather to those who are maximally effective in their utility (or whose behavior is the most productive). The vast and colorful human conscience is reduced to a calculus.

Morality should not focus on calculating positive outcomes; it should cultivate human beings.

What could be more cold and calculating than to ascribe virtue not to human agents, but to the circumstances their actions yield? In a system of this nature, it is hard to imagine that inner goodness will not be reduced to a mere accessory, and that respect for intrinsic human value will not be chilled or hollowed.

FOREVER WARS . . . cont.

had become a fully cloned species that could communicate with the similarly collective Taurans, whose first utterance was a somber “Why?” The Taurans had not initiated the war. Generals had blamed the accidental disappearance of human ships on the aliens to create a war, in order to spur a weak economy. Catharsis does come for Mandella, however, as he eventually reunites with Marygay, who dramatically slowed her aging by continuously jumping between

are most damaging because they persist without any conception of what victory looks like. An oft-parroted and more often mocked phrase from American generals in the late 1960s was that they could see a “light at the end of the tunnel,” satisfactory exit from Vietnam. Much of the same can be said about American involvement in Afghanistan. After our twenty years of fighting and attempting to build a stable government and capable army, Kabul fell in less than ten days amid an embarrassingly

poppy fields, and we came home and became addicted to prescription opioids.”

War always profoundly affects the individuals involved. Haldeman’s story is most valuable as a reflection on this tragic human element. There is usually no happy ending for those veterans who return home battered and broken. Society often rejects them, or has become unrecognizable to them. America should not allow wars to drag on forever due to

*America should not allow wars to drag on forever due to moneyed interests or vapid ideology. And for the veterans, who have given their all for these protracted conflicts, the least we can do is be compassionate.*

collapsed stars until he returned. But many soldiers do not enjoy such a happy ending to their struggle.

Many view *The Forever War* as a foil to Robert Heinlein’s *Starship Troopers*, rejecting its glorification of war. But ultimately, it is an expression of Haldeman’s experience fighting in the Vietnam War, which shares obvious similarities with the novel’s conflict. Both wars started with spurious ideological justifications and economic greed. Both dragged on for many years with no real goal beyond attrition. Both ended with no meaningful change other than lives lost. Both destroyed the lives of many veterans while alienating them from normal society. These forever wars

haphazard American exit. And the persistent ineptitude of the Afghan army, from general incompetence to its notorious failure to address child sexual abuse, signifies both a lack of good management and a deep cultural divide that ridiculous amounts of time and resources could never bridge.

Did anything substantively change over the course of this conflict, or was it another forever war? This seems to be a story that repeats itself. I was eleven months old when America entered Afghanistan; the conflict lasted almost until my graduation from college. I knew people who were born and passed away in that same period.

An Afghanistan veteran once joked with me that “we fought to protect

moneyed interests or vapid ideology. And for the veterans, who have given their all for these protracted conflicts, the least we can do is be compassionate.

CONTINUE<sup>THE</sup>  
CONVERSATION

1. *Utilitarianism is too Cold and Calculating*  
**#Utilitarianism**
2. *Our Forever Wars*  
**#OurForeverWars**

# ENQUIRY

Vol. IX  
A publication of the AHI Undergraduate Fellows

Casimir Zablotzki  
Editor-in-Chief

Philip Chivily  
John Madigan  
Associate Editors

## STAFF WRITERS

Carter Briglia  
Sophie Christensen  
Walker Cummins  
Philip Gow  
Taicheng Jin  
Federico Alejandro Romero

*The opinions expressed in these articles are the views of their authors and do not represent the views of Enquiry or the Alexander Hamilton Institute.*

Enquiry accepts articles of 500 to 800 words at [czablots@hamilton.edu](mailto:czablots@hamilton.edu). Please be aware that we do not accept anonymous submissions.