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Anarchism and Agency-Consequentialism: Partners in Liberation

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Agency-consequentialism is a philosophical ethical framework developed by anarchist writer and activist William Gillis. It is a variant of consequentialism, a type of moral theory that holds that the rightness or wrongness of an action should be judged based on its consequences. Agency-consequentialism differs from traditional forms of consequentialism in that it places a particular emphasis on increasing the agency of all actors, including one's self, others, and to an extent, non-human beings.

Agency refers to the capacity of an individual or group to act independently and make decisions that affect their own lives and the lives of others. According to the ethics of agency-consequentialism, increasing the agency of all actors is a positive value in and of itself, and should be taken into account when evaluating the potential outcomes of an action.

The history of consequentialism can be traced back to ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus, who argued that the pursuit

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of pleasure and avoidance of pain were the ultimate goals of human action. However, it was not until the 18th and 19th centuries that the term “consequentialism” was coined and the theory was developed in more detail. Utilitarianism, a form of consequentialism developed by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill, holds that the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people should be the guiding principle for ethical decision-making.

In terms of its relationship to anarchism, agency-consequentialism aligns with the anarchist belief in the importance of mutual freedom and individual autonomy, as well as the opposition to domination. Anarchism is a political philosophy that advocates for the abolition of all forms of domination and the creation of societies based on voluntary cooperation and mutual aid. Agency-consequentialism is consistent with this goal in that it seeks to interpersonally increase the ability of individuals and communities to make decisions and act independently, rather than being subject to the dictates of a centralized authority. This includes fostering a dynamic environment in which people are empowered to develop their material, ethical, and intellectual capacities.

Adopting agency-consequentialism as a guiding ethical framework requires taking into account the effect of one’s actions on the agency of oneself and others, or their capacity to make independent decisions that shape their own lives. This could involve striving to empower oneself and others through education, communication, and collaboration, rather than seeking to control or dominate. It might also involve considering the impact of one’s actions on the ability of non-human beings to act and exist freely, such as by considering the social or ecological impacts of one’s consumption and production choices.

Expanding agency, as envisioned by the ethical framework of agency-consequentialism, involves increasing the capacity of individuals and groups to act independently and make deci-

sions that affect their own lives and the lives of others. This can take many forms, including increasing access to resources, education, and opportunities, and reducing barriers to decision-making and action. Expanding agency can lead to increased well-being, satisfaction, and happiness for individuals, through facilitating the mutual fulfillment of material, ethical, and intellectual capacities, as well as function to cultivate more equitable and just societies.

Practicing agency-consequentialism in situations with structural power dynamics may be challenging, as individual actors may not have complete control over the circumstances in which they find themselves. However, it is still possible to make decisions and take actions that are consistent with the principles of agency-consequentialism, even when immersed within an organizational hierarchy or a relational power imbalance.

For example, in a situation where an individual is an employer, they would consider the impact of their decisions on the ability of their employees to act independently and make decisions that affect their own lives. This might involve providing opportunities for participation in decision-making, rather than simply taking a conventional dictatorial approach. It could also involve ensuring that employees have access to the resources and support they need to develop their capacities and pursue their own life goals.

Similarly, in a romantic partnership, an individual practicing agency-consequentialism would be mindful of the impact of their actions on the ability of their partner to act autonomously and make choices that impact their lives. This would involve being open to negotiation and compromise, rather than seeking to dominate or control the relationship. It would mean actively supporting and empowering the partner to develop their capacities and pursue their self-actualization.

Ultimately, agency-consequentialism is a nuanced and sophisticated ethical framework that combines elements of tradi-

tional consequentialism with a focus on increasing the agency of all actors. It is a valuable contribution to the field of moral philosophy and has important implications for political theory, particularly within the context of anarchism.