

# Background: Truman and The Doctrine of Double Effect

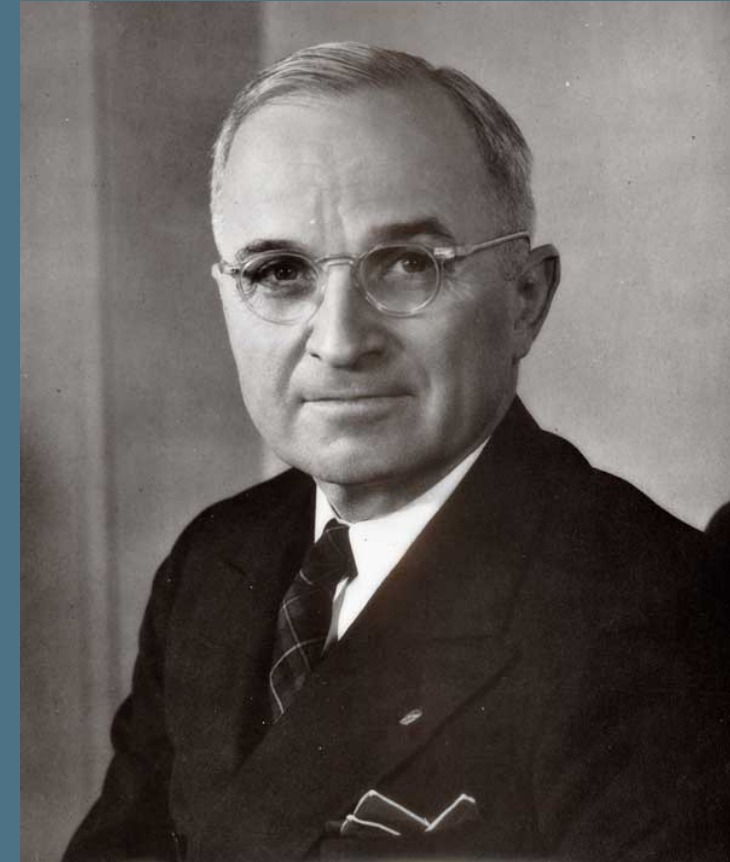
Harry S. Truman ordered the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, and in 1956, Oxford proposed to give him an honorary degree

Anscombe (and some of her colleagues) were furious; as far as Anscombe was concerned, Truman was a mass murderer for dropping the bombs

Here, her Catholic background matters—her opposition to Truman is driven by her embrace of the *doctrine of double effect*

If Truman intentionally did something morally permissible (e.g., send troops into Japan), and this predictably led to something impermissible (e.g., innocent civilians being killed), then his action *might* be permissible

But, Anscombe thought, that's not what Truman did: he *intentionally killed* tens of thousands of innocent civilians, and that's murder



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**Intentional action:** human activity that has the teleological order of practical reasoning

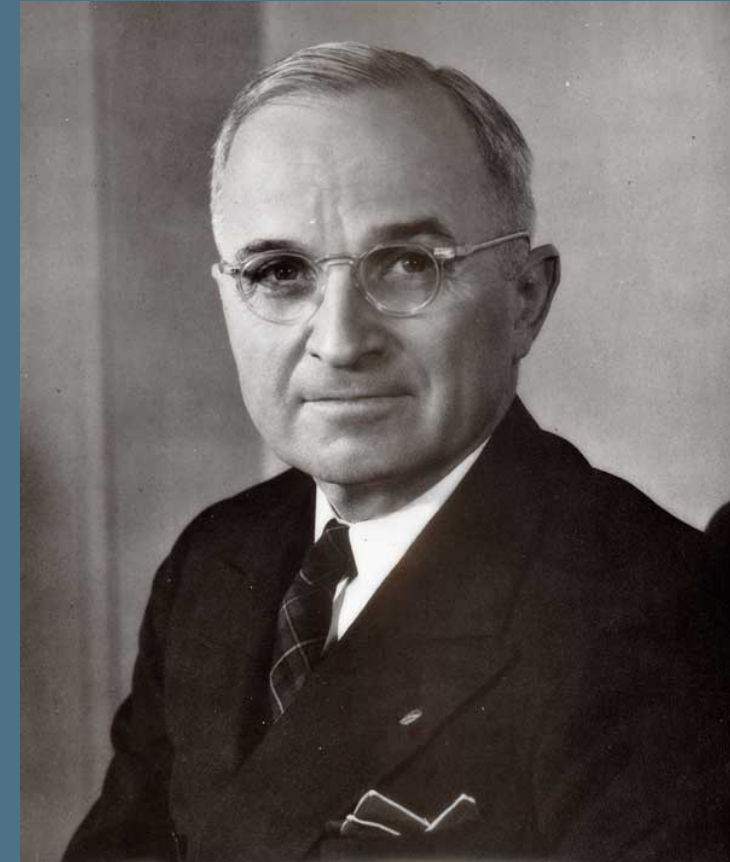
So, when Truman dropped the bombs, was the killing of innocent civilians a predictable side-effect or was it the means toward the desired end (i.e., making the Japanese surrender)?

**Anscombe:** it was the means to the end

So, it was intentional, because it belonged to the overarching logic of the action

So (by definition), it was murder

**BUT**, what of the argument that, had Truman not dropped the bomb, millions more would have died?



# Thesis 3: Modern English Moral Philosophy Is Basically All the Same



The “but more people would have died otherwise” argument is a *consequentialist* argument

Anscombe invents the term ‘consequentialist’ in this essay

She says that what unites English moral philosophers since Henry Sidgwick is that they are all consequentialists

She also says that “[i]t is a necessary feature of consequentialism that it is a shallow philosophy”

**OK:** what’s the problem?



# Thesis 3: Modern English Moral Philosophy Is Basically All the Same



**First thing to note:** according to consequentialism, responsibility primarily lies in the agent's estimation of *expected* consequences

In many cases, it is inappropriate to hold someone accountable for accidental consequences that they did not anticipate

In some cases, a person might be accountable because they should have expected consequences that they simply didn't consider

But even here, the responsibility stems from their lack of consideration, not just from the consequences themselves

# Thesis 3: Modern English Moral Philosophy Is Basically All the Same



**First thing to note:** according to consequentialism, responsibility primarily lies in the agent's estimation of *expected* consequences

**Second thing to note:** if only (expected) consequences matter, then there is no action type that is intrinsically bad

Suppose that if you deliberately killing Jack and harvest his organs it will save the lives of five others

According to consequentialism, the only good thing to do is to kill Jack – this is a point about action guidance

And, afterwards, the only thing for others to consider is what you expected to happen from killing Jack – this is a point about ethical evaluation



holds good of every single English academic moral philosopher since Sidgwick.) Now this is a significant thing: for it means that all these philosophies are quite incompatible with the Hebrew-Christian ethic. For it has been characteristic of that ethic to teach that there are certain things forbidden whatever *consequences* threaten, such as: choosing to kill the innocent for any purpose, however good; vicarious punishment; treachery (by which I mean obtaining a man's confidence in a grave matter by promises of trustworthy friendship and then betraying him to his enemies); idolatry; sodomy; adultery; making a false profession of faith. The prohibition of certain things simply in virtue of their description as such-and-such identifiable kinds of action, regardless of any further consequences, is certainly not the whole of the Hebrew-Christian ethic; but it is a noteworthy feature of it; and if every academic philosopher since Sidgwick has

It is noticeable that none of these philosophers displays any consciousness that there is such an ethic, which he is contradicting: it is pretty well taken for obvious among them all that a prohibition such as that on murder does not operate in face of some consequences. But of course the strictness of the prohibition has as its point *that you are not to be tempted by fear or hope of consequences*.

Sidgwick explains the difference between old-fashioned Utilitarianism and that *consequentialism*, as I name it, which marks him and every English academic moral philosopher since him. By it, the kind of consideration which would formerly have been regarded as a temptation, the kind of consideration urged upon men by wives and flattering friends, was given a status by moral philosophers in their theories.

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**First thing to note:** according to consequentialism, responsibility primarily lies in the agent's estimation of *expected* consequences

**Second thing to note:** if only (expected) consequences matter, then there is no action type that is intrinsically bad

**Third thing to note:** Western moral systems from the Greeks to the Abrahamic religions do not agree with consequentialism on these two points

**Claim:** Consequentialism is, by necessity, a shallow philosophy



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One function of moral philosophy is to offer guidance in confusing situations

One way traditional ethics does this is through prohibited categories of action

**Step one:** Ask yourself, “Is doing XYZ a forbidden action (e.g., theft, murder, etc.)?”

**Step two:** If yes, don’t do XYZ

This is senseless from a consequentialist perspective, for there are no prohibited categories of action

There are no moral dilemmas: one simply performs a moral calculus and then does whatever maximizes moral returns