

## The 1851 Chronicle's Budget: Why It's Morally Wrong to Cut

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### **Introduction:**

The 1851 Chronicle is Lasell University's student run newspaper that was reestablished in 2006. Since 2006, The 1851 Chronicle has produced consistent student journalism covering everything from the 2008 Presidential election, to COVID-19 on campus, to faculty and infrastructure changes, and athletic championships.

Despite The 1851 Chronicle's success and Organization of the Year Awards in 2009-10 and 2016-17, the paper's budget is set to be cut by 10%, eliminating \$400 of the budget. While \$400 does not seem like a lot of money, that \$400 is used to print the monthly issue, around 500 copies per month that consistently fly off newsstands and into hands of students, faculty, and prospective students. Because of the Chronicle's importance to not only current students, but its influence on prospective students and being a true example of connected learning, one of Lasell's values, we must ask ourselves, is it morally right to cut the 1851 Chronicle's budget by 10%?

### **Position:**

My position on the following argument is that it is wrong to cut the 1851 Chronicle's budget and that by cutting the budget, more unhappiness, disadvantage, and inefficiency is being produced than happiness and overall utility.

### **Argument:**

1. If cutting the 1851 Chronicle budget does not produce more net utility than any other available alternative, then cutting the 1851 Chronicle budget is morally wrong.
  2. Cutting the 1851 Chronicle budget does not produce more net utility than any other available alternative.
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3. Therefore, cutting the 1851 Chronicle budget is morally wrong.

### **Validity & Definitions:**

The above argument is valid because it is in the correct Modus Ponens form, meaning it will always be valid. The argument can be understood better by clearly defining all the terms included. First, “cutting the 1851 Chronicle budget” can be defined as the 10% decrease in budget that has been proposed by administration, a total of \$400 that would be taken from our overall printing budget. “Net utility” can be defined as the existing order of the newspaper and the benefits it provides. Finally, “any other alternative” can be defined as the alternative of keeping the current budget intact.

### **Justification of Premise One:**

Premise one states the ethical theory of Utilitarianism, that an action is morally right if it produces the most net utility, or net happiness, especially when compared to any other alternative. Louis Pojman defines Utilitarianism as “an act is right if and only if it results in as much good as any available alternative” (Pojman, 130). This is the definition of specifically Act Utilitarianism and asks that we apply the principle to the alternatives in any given scenario, allowing us to choose the option that produces the most utility, even if it is not considered the go

to action. This means that rather than immediately acting on the action we believe is right, we must stop and think about alternative actions and their consequences: if the action will produce the most net utility or happiness for the largest amount of people.

John Stuart Mill expands on this idea of Utilitarianism and defines it as the “happiness which forms the utilitarian standard of what is right in conduct, is not the agent’s own happiness, but that of all concerned. As between his own happiness and that of others, utilitarianism requires him to be strictly impartial as a disinterested benevolent spectator” (Mill, 48). This means when a person decides what action to do, they must choose the action that produces the most happiness among everyone involved, even if that means the one completing the action is unhappy. Mill goes on to say that because of this, the one committing the action must remain impartial or unbiased, and put his own wants and needs aside for that of the happiness of the greater good.

The most common example used to demonstrate Utilitarianism is that of the drowning child. In this example presented by Peter Singer, you are introduced to a person who is walking by a shallow pond and notices a child drowning. Because Utilitarianism says you must complete the action that produces the most net happiness, you must enter the pond and save the child, despite ruining your clothes in the process. Singer adds an additional characteristic to Utilitarianism in that the action can only be right if it not only produces the most net happiness but does not give up anything of moral significance. In this scenario, not only does saving the child produce the most net happiness, but ruining your clothes is morally insignificant compared to the loss of a child.

Utilitarianism can be applied to a wide range of scenarios in real life as well. First, a simple example in which you are tasked with ordering a cake for a get together with friends. You

ask everyone to tell you what kind of cake they like. Four people say chocolate cake; however, you and one other person want red velvet cake. Because you would cause more unhappiness amongst the group by choosing the cake flavor that would make you and one other person happy, in this case red velvet, it is morally right to choose to buy a chocolate cake, as doing so would create the most net happiness, the main characteristic of Utilitarianism.

While a simple scenario, Utilitarianism can also be applied to more difficult situations. You are having a conversation with one of your friends when they ask you a question you are not prepared to answer. You want to tell them the truth, however, know that the truth might hurt them or cause them to feel left out in some way. You don't want to lie but you know that by doing so and omitting the truth, you will produce a greater level of happiness. While most people have been taught since they were children that it is not okay to lie, because of Utilitarianism and the action of lying creating the most net happiness, it is morally right to lie in this situation.

This reasoning supports premise one as it shows that if cutting the 1851 Chronicle's budget does not produce the most net happiness or utility of most people compared to any other alternative, then it is unethical, or morally wrong.

### **Justification of Premise Two:**

Premise two states that cutting the 1851 Chronicle budget does not produce more net utility than any other available alternative, for example keeping the budget intact as cutting the budget would negatively impact more than just the club itself.

Lasell University has always prided itself on its Connected Learning philosophy, or Learn by Doing, a philosophy that according to the university's website, "takes [students] beyond the classroom and into the field" and "deepens classroom learning through real-world

experience.” Cutting the 1851 Chronicle’s budget puts the Connected Learning philosophy in danger and eliminates the opportunity for students to continue gaining valuable real-world experiences.

The Connected Learning philosophy acts as a useful marketing tool for the university, attracting students that are looking to gain hands on experience that will set them apart from others upon graduation. While it is true that Lasell does offer this opportunity, cutting the budget will begin to eliminate that same opportunity and turn those students away. The utility that a full 1851 Chronicle budget provides goes beyond just the students that are in the club, but impacts the greater utility of the entire university, as cutting the budget that allows for a strong connected learning opportunity will eventually influence enrollment and the overall success of not only the 1851 Chronicle, but the Communications program and the university.

Negatively adjusting the 1851 Chronicle’s budget also forces the staff to pivot the way they produce the paper. Currently, the 1851 Chronicle puts out six issues a year, four eight-page issues and two twelve-page issues, one of which features a special commencement issue. Last month, over 500 copies were printed and distributed across campus and within two days, there was not a single copy to be found. Students, faculty, and staff on campus care about what is going on and what is being reported. Lasell Village, the senior living and learning community, likes to know what people are talking about and stay informed. This evolution of the paper and its reach shows its value; that people want to know what is going on and care to learn about things they may not know about or read answers to the rumors circulating. Decreasing the budget would impact how the paper is created and distributed and take away from the evident value the Chronicle’s work demonstrates. Clearly the 1851 Chronicle’s print and distribution is not a

problem, however decreasing the budget would make this a problem. If it is not broken, why fix it?

Decreasing the 1851 Chronicle's budget does not produce more net happiness and utility, but rather creates more harm than good. Decreasing the budget only creates more problems, both short term and long term, not only for its staff but for the entire university. By eliminating the budget, the true existence and meaning of the 1851 Chronicle also begins to be eliminated, only creating more unhappiness and inefficiency than happiness and utility.

### **Objection to Premise One:**

Even if cutting the 1851 Chronicle budget does not produce more net utility than another alternative, for example keeping the budget in place, that still does not mean cutting the budget is morally wrong. In Pojman's *Strengths and Weaknesses of Utilitarianism*, he says a common problem with Utilitarianism is the Absurd-Implications Objection, stating philosophers like W.D. Ross have argued Utilitarianism is counterintuitive. Pojman includes an example of two actions that produce the same amount of pleasure and utility. The only difference between the two acts is one has you tell a lie and the other has you tell the truth, but Utilitarianism asks that we maintain the view that the actions are of equal value, even though one seems to be inherently good. Because of this, we must remember that all actions are of equal value, even if some may believe that the action seems to be inherently bad.

Furthermore, we must remember that a variety of alternatives may produce equal levels of happiness and utility, not providing a clear "correct" action based on the definition of Utilitarianism. Consequently, it remains unclear as to what to do in a situation where equal levels of happiness and utility are produced as it is against Utilitarianism to base the action to commit

on whether it is inherently good or bad. Just because an action does not produce more net happiness and utility, does not mean the action is morally wrong.

Additionally, according to Pojman the No-Rest Objection states that there is always a more favorable action you could be doing to produce good. The infinite number of preferable actions leads to the conclusion that “I should get little or no rest, and certainly, I have no right to enjoy life when by sacrificing, I can make others happier” (Pojman, 132). So, even if you choose to complete an action, it is unclear if you really chose to do the right thing as there are additional actions that could prove to be more favorable or something else you could be doing to continue to create happiness and utility for others.

We can apply these concepts to a similar scenario involving money. For example, you work a part time job and consistently go above and beyond to make sure operations run smoothly and customers enjoy their experience. Because you have been there for a long time and continuously work hard, you are paid more than the minimum wage for your role. The company is struggling however, and the owner wants to cut everyone’s pay and only pay people minimum wage. It can be argued that cutting your pay is morally wrong as it does not produce the most happiness and utility, however saving the business and investing the pay they take from you back into the company to keep it alive produces similar amounts of happiness and utility. Because of this and the concept that we must view all actions as having equal value and not deciding if one is inherently good or bad, cutting your pay is not morally wrong, and increases the overall utility and stability of the company and your role within it.

Whether you agree or not that the action of cutting the 1851 Chronicle’s budget is morally wrong, it is clear Utilitarianism allows for the approval of these actions under the perception that more happiness and utility is evoked by doing so. If cutting the budget allows for

growth and positive outcomes in other departments while still allowing the 1851 Chronicle to do their work and do it successfully, the inherently bad action must be accepted and therefore, is not morally wrong.

### **Objection to Premise Two:**

One might argue that cutting the 1851 Chronicle's budget does produce more net utility and happiness. The 1851 Chronicle, however, is not the only club that is being impacted by budget changes. Clubs from Student Government Association to the Class Committees to Student Activities are all getting cut by 10%, with the hopes of using the money in some other way to further benefit students and their experience.

Administration and the Board of Trustees would not cut the budgets of a variety of important clubs and organizations without a good reason. It is evident that these clubs mean a lot to the community as they assist with student life, activities, and enrollment. Taking a small chunk of money from organizations with seemingly larger budgets, especially compared to smaller organizations, to use for other ventures to improve overall student experience is not a bad thing, especially as we are still coming out of a pandemic and enrollment numbers have been declining.

Cutting a small portion of the 1851 Chronicle's budget to improve the overall student experience and keep our university alive is not morally wrong, as it produces more overall net happiness and utility not only among current students, faculty, and staff, but for future Lasers as well.

### **Rebuttal to Objection One:**



The primary objection made to premise one is that Utilitarianism requires us to view all actions as having equal value, meaning one is not inherently good or bad even if they produce the same amount of happiness and utility. The example of lying versus telling the truth is mentioned in objection one and brings awareness to rule utilitarianism, the idea that the actions we choose must not only create the most utility and happiness, but also adhere to a set of rules (Pojman, 131). Again, while it is evident that one action seems to be better than the other, we must choose the action that is perceived as worse especially when it “clearly promotes utility without undermining the general adherence to the rule” (Pojman, 133). Because of this, it is evident that it is nearly impossible to remain objective and if the action is inherently bad and does not produce the most happiness and utility, then it is morally wrong.

Furthermore, the objection says there is no rest when taking a Utilitarian approach, as there is always another favorable action, meaning there is always something more you could be doing for the benefit of others. To elaborate, it also argues that it aims to not only benefit the current community, but the future community as well. Despite this, Pojman says, “Although we should be concerned about the needs of future and distant people, it actually would promote disutility for the average person to become preoccupied with these concerns” (Pojman, 133). This demonstrates that it is better to focus on what is currently in front of you, rather than what you wish or expect to be in front of you as aiming to further benefit more and more people will only create more problems and unhappiness. By focusing on the task and group at hand, you can best benefit them and their needs.

This can once again be applied to the example of pay from the first objection. While the goal is to save the company by saving and using the additional funds from your paycheck, how much good are you creating? Rather than saving the company, you are creating unhappiness and

disutility in the workplace, further creating problems that must be solved to save the company. In this scenario, it is more beneficial to remain paying your employees what they deserve and finding additional, more creative ways to save your business, rather than simply only thinking about those in the future.

This validates the ethical theory of Utilitarianism and therefore, premise one, as it proves that it is more important to focus on those in front of you and their happiness and utility with less regard to those of the future, while also questioning your actions and whether they are good or bad.

### **Rebuttal to Objection Two:**

While it is evident that there seems to be a good use for the money taken from the 1851 Chronicle budget, that still does not mean that less happiness and utility would be caused by taking it. The difficulties eliminating part of the budget would pose to not only the 1851 Chronicle's staff, but the entire Lasell community, showcase the unhappiness and disutility this action would cause.

For example, there are eight distribution stands around campus, including Hamel House (home to the Office of Undergraduate Admission), and the President's Office. In addition to these two prominent spaces, there are distribution stands located in buildings across campus. Not only do the papers pose as a resource for the current Lasell community as the paper includes a wide variety of stories from highlighting unique opportunities and programs, to individual students, to breaking news and important changes, to sports, but the paper serves as a marketing tool for the university. Prospective students are encouraged to pick up the paper on their tour route and have access to it in Hamel when waiting for their tour or for their admissions

counselor. Prospective students also can take the paper with them and not only see first-hand an important example of connected learning, but also learn more about their future home.

Furthermore, the 1851 Chronicle printed around 500 copies of our October issue. We distributed the papers to the eight distribution sites and in less than three days, there was not a single issue to be found. The demand for the paper and the anticipation that people have waiting for its release has never been as high as it is now during my three years here.

In addition to these two major issues that could arise from eliminating the budget, the university is also taking away a valuable resource of their Connected Learning philosophy. Eliminating part of the budget would alter how the entire staff works and how the paper is created, while also eliminating a valuable aspect of the Connected Learning process. The skills learned as part of the 1851 Chronicle go beyond writing, interviewing, and editing. Students learn how to work with others, how to speak up for themselves, how to work under tight deadlines, how to use complicated software like Adobe InDesign and Photoshop, and arguably most importantly, how to be a leader. Removing part of the budget would put all these valuable takeaways in jeopardy and cause an immense amount of unhappiness and disutility among the students within the organization while also causing problems for the university in regard to the “importance” of connected learning.

Because of these examples that highlight the 1851 Chronicle’s importance, it is evident that eliminating part of the budget and altering how the club works and how the paper would be used would in fact create more unhappiness and disutility than it would positive outcomes. Eliminating part of the budget goes beyond only impacting the print budget and forcing the organization to eliminate an issue but impacts how the school not only markets the 1851 Chronicle, but how they market themselves and the importance of connected learning. The 1851

Chronicle and its inherent value runs deeper than what is at the surface and eliminating part of the budget and would not send a message of the promise of future investments, but rather send a message of student journalism lacking importance and meaning on a small campus that relies on the news and production of the paper.

**Conclusion:**

In conclusion, it is clear that eliminating part of the 1851 Chronicle budget is morally wrong as it produces more unhappiness and disutility than happiness and utility. By eliminating the budget, the university is forcing the 1851 Chronicle to alter their production, reach, and covered content, sacrificing a resource that is not only used by current students, faculty, and staff, but by Villagers and prospective students as well.

Arguments have been made against this stance, stating the ethical theory of Utilitarianism is wrong or that the university eliminating part of the budget is a good sign as it points to further development to improve student experience, however by sacrificing one valuable resource to hopefully create another one, you are creating a hostile environment that sacrifices the important work of current students for the possible benefit of future students. While Utilitarianism does provide some concerns, for example, the idea of not judging an action based on what is inherently good or bad and the chance the action may produce the same amount of happiness or unhappiness, that does not mean that the action is not morally wrong. It is evident that by eliminating part of the 1851 Chronicle's budget, you are not only creating unhappiness and disutility among the organization, but among the entire community that relies on the consistent work of the 1851 Chronicle.

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