Classical utilitarianism holds that moral assessment ought to be rooted in a determination of the value of states of the world, and that the value of such a state is the sum of excess pleasure over pain that it contains. The view has, in pleasure and pain, a clear and intuitive account of what might ground the truth of ethical propositions, but it is subject to a number of persuasive objections. Two of these are related: Classical utilitarianism is notoriously insensitive to the distribution of pleasure and pain, and hence seems to offend our moral intuition that distribution matters. This insensitivity is underwritten by a second counterintuitive feature of the view - its arithmetization of pleasure and pain. If value can be added and subtracted, then the value of a whole is not a function of distribution, just as the weight of a whole is not. But many suspect that it does not make sense to speak of an exact sum of pleasures and pains, in the way that classical utilitarianism requires and that supports distribution insensitivity. This paper proposes a modification of classical utilitarianism which fares better in these two ways, which does not require an arithmetization of pleasure and pain and which is sensitive to distribution.

If utilitarianism is right about moral assessment, then the initial problem in such assessment is determining the value of possible states of the world. To simplify matters, I will focus on a simpler question: Which possible states of the world are better than which others? The answer to this question may not be sufficient to fix the value of those states, but it is at least a necessary condition of that. To further simplify matters, I will restrict our consideration only to maximal possible states of affairs, often called ‘possible worlds’. The relative value of possible worlds may not fix the relative value of all possible states of affairs, but, again, determining the former is at least a necessary condition of
determining the latter. So our initial question is this: Which possible worlds are better than which others?

Our resources for answering this question are, on the perhaps oversimplified modification of classical utilitarianism to be considered here, two: First, the possible worlds contain value of only one quite specific sort, tied to pleasure and pain but not arithmetizable in the way classical utilitarianism demands. Second, there are certain constraints on the manner in which the value in the worlds determines their relative value. I will discuss each of these resources in turn.

First, in accord with classical utilitarianism, I assume that pleasure and pain are phenomenal experiences and that they are the only things with intrinsic value or disvalue, that they determine the value of a world containing them. But, contrary to classical utilitarianism, I assume that pleasure and pain are not arithmetizable: they do not have a cardinal value that can be summed to determine the value of a world.

Since the non-cardinal value of the parts of a whole cannot be summed to determine the value of the whole, it is an important and sensitive matter which particular parts of persons' lives have such value. I will assume that the phenomenal experience of each person can be divided into 'moments' of equal duration and that each such moment has a single non-cardinal value. Given that a person may experience both pains and pleasures at once, this assumption is at best controversial. But it isn't an arbitrary choice. I have argued elsewhere that phenomenal value of roughly this sort is the only plausible sort of objective value, as was also suggested by C. I. Lewis in the unjustly neglected later sections of *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation*. But even if this choice isn't quite correct, under this assumption the form of our modification of utilitarianism is relatively easy to discern, and the adjustments needed if the assumption is wrong are clear once my perhaps oversimplified model is understood. So I will ignore this difficulty. More specifically, my assumptions are these:

1. Each moment of a person's phenomenal experience presents itself as positively or negatively valuable to some degree. Each moment has either (a) a lesser or greater degree of intrinsic value, associated with happiness and pleasure, (b) a lesser or greater degree of intrinsic disvalue, associated with unhappiness and pain, or (c) a null valence, without intrinsic value or disvalue. But these are the only elements of value a world contains.

2. A moment of phenomenal experience presents itself as better