

As a utilitarian, is it legitimate for me to make all my decisions using only customary morality?

- Thesis: for a utilitarian it is legitimate to make most decisions using only customary morality, but not all. (I'm going to frame it mainly as a debate between self-effacing and multi-level utilitarianism)
- Define utilitarianism: an action is right insofar as it maximizes happiness. Maybe briefly mention rule-utilitarianism but not really relevant to the question.
- Explain that a version of act-utilitarianism without a decision-making procedure is not viable (explain difference between decision-making procedure and criterion of rightness): (1) we often lack information, (2) it takes too much time, (3) human limitations such as biasedness.
- That is why we need a decision making procedure. Explain self-effacing act-utilitarianism. From that idea it would be legitimate to make all decision using just customary morality. Discuss what we should understand by customary morality and whether those should be the rules for self-effacing utilitarianism (what about rule-utilitarianism). Maybe discuss later that even if the rules in customary morality are perfect, do not need to be changed, even then they can be in conflict etc. but only after the next section.
- However, a few issues:
 - o What if the rules in customary morality are contradictory, maybe also use in the rule-worship objection against self-effacing act-utilitarianism.
 - o What if you are in the position to make a big difference?
 - o Customary morality can also be wrong (Mill recognized this, feminism), and so we have to use first principles to change it.
- -> Therefore we need multi-level act-utilitarianism, you cannot just use customary morality.

'Rule utilitarianism is less demanding and less counterintuitive than act utilitarianism, so all utilitarians should be rule utilitarians.' Do you agree?

'Rule utilitarianism collapses into act utilitarianism only in its most unsophisticated forms.' Is that so?

- Thesis: rule utilitarianism does not collapse into act utilitarianism when it is interpreted more reasonably.
- Define difference between rule and act utilitarianism: criterion of rightness. An action is right when it is in accordance with the rules which maximize happiness. An action is right when it maximizes happiness.
- Explain the different interpretations of 'rules which maximize happiness':
 - o The compliance with the rules lead to the greatest happiness
 - o The acceptance of the rules lead to the greatest happiness

- The first one is receptive to the collapse objection, which can be interpreted in two ways:
 - Rule utilitarianism collapses because it would result in just a single rule: “maximize happiness”, and would therefore mean that you have act-utilitarianism as your decision procedure. This rule would make sense in the first interpretation of rule-utilitarianism: the compliance with this rule leads to the greatest happiness.
 - The second interpretation of rule-utilitarianism helps here. As Hooker argues, one needs to take the *internalization* costs of rules into account when designing the rules which should be accepted. If not impossible, it is very hard to instil a complete impartial rule of maximizing happiness into people. Humans are naturally inclined to have meaningful relationships etc. so this rule would not lead to the greatest happiness and the internalization costs would be incredibly high.
 - The other way to develop the collapse objection argues that utility would be gained by adding certain exceptions to rules. For instance: “you should not lie, unless a murderer is at your door and asks where your children are”. By adding more and more exceptions to rules, rule-utilitarianism would eventually collapse into act-utilitarianism.
 - Firstly, internalization costs are again relevant here. The more complicated the rules are, the harder it is to learn them. So eventually, the costs of complicating the rules further would outweigh the benefits.
 - Secondly, one can ask what would happen to a society with these rules. How much mutual trust would there be in a society where agents would accept endless exceptions to rules against harming and lying. One of the advantages of rules as a decision procedure is that when certain rules are accepted, people do not follow the rules because they want to maximize happiness but because they start having genuine moral feelings about the rules. People become conditioned not to do bad things and are outraged when other do it. Allowing for exceptions would certainly undermine this advantage, leading to a lower overall happiness.
 - “unsophisticated”, what does that mean? I would argue that the “acceptance” approach to rule-utilitarianism is more straightforward and leaves us with easier rules to follow. Therefore, I argue that when one interprets rule-utilitarianism in its most straightforward way, it does not suffer from the collapse objection.

‘No ethic could ever be accepted that required us to bring about a worse situation

when we could bring about something better. Therefore Rule Utilitarianism ought to be rejected.’ Discuss.

- Thesis: I will argue that rule utilitarianism ought not to be rejected on the grounds that it required us to bring about a worse situation when we could bring about something better.
- Analyse the question, the argument is:
 - o If a moral theory required us to bring about a worse situation when we could bring about something better, we could never accept it.
 - o Rule utilitarianism is such a theory.
 - o Therefore, rule utilitarianism should be rejected.
- Both of the premises are problematic.
- For the first premise. We accept moral theories which require us to bring about a suboptimal situation all the time. The question assumes consequentialism, and many people don’t agree with consequentialism. An example could be torturing an innocent person:
 - o A terrorist has placed a bomb in NYC, the only way to find out where he put it is by torturing his 5-year-old daughter.
 - o If we don’t torture his daughter, many more children would die.
 - o Yet, many people would seriously object. The daughter has done nothing wrong. Clearly then, it happens all the time that we accept moral theories which do not bring about the optimal situation.
- The second premise is also very problematic. The question seems to raise a version of the rule-worship objection against rule-utilitarianism.
- Argue the Hooker case

‘Since a person would have to decide on each occasion whether the rule ought to be obeyed, rule utilitarianism has no advantage over act utilitarianism.’ Discuss.