The use of human beings as means to an end is one of the most controversial ethical issues. Utilitarianism justifies the actions which will yield the most happiness but at the expense of individual rights presents a moral and practical dilemma. I believe that while the utilitarianism is a good approach to decision making, the individual rights should not be completely sacrificed because, most of the time, these rights are important for the common good.

One can see that there are many examples of the adverse effects of utility-oriented approach instead of people’s rights in the history of medicine. The Tuskegee Syphilis Study from 1932 to 1972 is a clear example of the dangers of overlooking individual rights in the name of utility. Researchers did not treat African American men with syphilis, on the grounds that the study would provide insight that would benefit public health. Though the research was conducted in the interest of the society, it was a form of cruelty to the participants and the researchers denied the participants their right to autonomy and dignity. This case, therefore, shows that ignoring individual rights may jeopardies trust and equity.

Critics of my position might argue that individual rights should be secondary in crises. For instance, during a pandemic, enforcing mandatory vaccinations or lockdowns may infringe upon personal freedoms but serve the broader goal of public health. While such measures can be ethically justified under specific circumstances, they must be implemented with safeguards to minimize harm and respect autonomy. Transparency and fair treatment are necessary to maintain a balance.

Crossley highlights that rights are not just obstacles to utility but are foundational to a society's moral structure. Ignoring rights can lead to utilitarianism’s "tyranny of the majority," where marginalized groups disproportionately bear the burden (Crossley 45). A more balanced approach, blending utilitarian outcomes with respect for individual rights, seems wiser.

In conclusion, sacrificing individual rights should be approached cautiously. The greatest good is not solely about happiness but also about ensuring justice and fairness for all members of society.

Works Cited

Crossley, David J. "Utilitarianism, Rights and Equality." Utilitas, vol. 2, no. 1, 1990, pp. 40–54.