Is Multiple Strategies Utilitarianism a Satisfactory Moral System?

Sofia Cassel
Thomas Lind
Jing Liu
Joseph Scott

November 27, 2012
Multiple Strategies Utilitarianism

- In classical utilitarianism, the best action is one which brings the most good to the most people
  - Appears to demand complete self-sacrifice at all times
  - Makes no allowance for personal relationships

- Multiple-strategies utilitarianism attempts to address this issue by allowing more than basis for individual actions
  - Sometimes one acts for the good of the group.
  - Sometimes one acts for one’s own good.
    - This (somehow) still benefits everyone.
Optimum List for an individual

Optimum List

Suppose we had a fully specified list of the virtues, motives, and methods of decision making that would enable a person to be happy and contribute to the welfare of others. And suppose, further, that this is the optimum list for that person; there is no other combination of virtues, motives, and methods of decision making that would do a better job.

- The author makes some pretty broad assumptions about what these lists would look like... 
  - familiar virtues, commonly acceptable behaviors...

- “The virtues that are needed to make one’s life go well.”
  - Are virtues inherent traits?
  - Are those who lack the necessary virtues doomed?
Is the best plan really the best plan?

\[ \bigwedge_{\text{optimal lists}} \equiv \text{optimal group list} \]

- This is an assumption, not a consequence.

- Outcome depends on the relative weighting
  - personal welfare vs. group welfare

- Consider the extreme cases:
  - personal welfare always wins = ethical egoism
  - group welfare always wins = classical utilitarianism
What is the optimal scope?

- People/groups/societies that are closer to us are more important to us.

- Classical utilitarianism doesn’t recognize this simple human truth.
  - Demands complete impartiality.
  - No special treatment for your mother!

- Multiple-strategies utilitarianism gives the flexibility to consider smaller groups
  - Unfortunately, now nothing prevents us from maximizing the welfare of a lucky minority, at the expense of the majority.
Is it OK to be different?

- Intention of the different plans is to allow each person to have a different strategy for living.

- However, the assumption seems to be that these plans will be, in a large part, quite similar.

- What happens when groups have very different viewpoints?
  - Different religions?
  - Different world views?

- Is it possible for plans based on antagonistic individual values to somehow average out, maximizing utility?
Conclusion

“In each case, however, the identification of a plan as the best plan will be a matter of assessing how well it promotes the interests of everyone alike.”

- Multiple-strategies Utilitarianism attempts to address the issues that cause most ethicists to reject Classical Utilitarianism

- However, in fact it seems to simply hide these issues inside the "optimum plan"