

Is Multiple Strategies Utilitarianism a Satisfactory Moral System?

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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”