

Defining rule utilitarianism

[Science](#), [Social Science](#)



Defining Rule utilitarianism Rule utilitarianism is a kind of utilitarianism which defines if an action should be considered to be ethical or not based on the idea of rule that the majority of the people has been following (Smart, 1973, 9). Hospers presents three examples of ethical dilemma. The first of them is focused on the following situation: ten people are stuck in a cave. They have two options: kill a fat man to save nine of them or not kill him and all ten will die eventually. The second example deals with lying. Thus, people always have an option of lying or refraining from this activity as there is no strict rule about that. Finally, Hospers brings up the last example when people vote. Thus, on an election day people may or may not be willing to go and vote. The first example might be considered to be an objection to act utilitarianism since according to it killing the fat man would be quite useful for the group of people, but the majority of people would agree on the fact that killing is wrong. The second example also shows that act utilitarianism might be regarded as a false approach: it is true that sometimes for a particular individual lying might bring considerable more benefits than tell the truth; however, the society condemns lying. Finally, the third example may also be regarded as a valid claim that rebuts act utilitarianism.

According to the latter, it would be more ethical not to vote for a person, but it is quite obvious that such approach would ruin the legal system.

Rule utilitarianism would provide a different solution for this problem. In case of the fat man, it would encourage people to let that man live. The reason for this is quite simple: it is generally accepted that killing other people is not an ethical action. That is why killing the person in question will violate the general rule which contributed to the security in the society. In the second

example about lying, rule utilitarianism would urge a person to tell a truth even though it might be some problems. The logic behind it is rather simple: the social life is being productive and stable because people generally do not lie to each other. That is why if people chose to make an exception from that rule, they might undermine the very foundation of the society. Finally, in the example of voting, rule utilitarianism would encourage people to go and vote in spite of the fact that they may not be willing as if all the other people chose not to vote this is likely to break the democratic system and result in the collapse of the government.

In my opinion rule utilitarianism is much better theory as act utilitarianism because the latter is likely to bring chaos as the consequences of it are not controlled and might contributed to the destruction of the entire system of human relationships while rule utilitarianism is oriented at preserving the harmony among people.

References

Smart, J. (1973). *Utilitarianism; for and against*. Cambridge: University Press.