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In this paper, I'm going to argue that a problem with Utilitarianism is not that it is psychologically unrealistic but that it is physically unrealistic. To do so, first I will state and explain a typical form of Utilitarianism. Second, I will extract, explain, and evaluate an objection to Utilitarianism from a passage from J.O. Urmson, "Saints and Heroes" reprinted in *Essays in Moral Philosophy*, ed. by A.I. Melden, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1958) p.102, and I will discuss one way that a utilitarian might respond. Finally, I will express what I think about this response, address a deep flaw in Utilitarianism, and suggest a possible solution.

A typical form of Utilitarianism is as follows: a token-action, a, is morally right if, and only if, a produces at least as great a balance of pleasure over pain as any alternative. Some technical terms to know are token-action and alternative. A token-action is a non-repeatable spatiotemporal (existing in both space and time) action that is an instance of a type. An alternative is another available action that a person could do. For example, if a person were to do a, but instead, at the same time, could do b, b is an alternative to a.

The passage objecting to Utilitarianism is as follows:

> We may imagine a squad of soldiers to be practicing the throwing
> of live hand grenades; a grenade slips from the hand of one of
> them and rolls on the ground near the squad; one of them
> sacrifices his life by throwing himself on the grenade and protecting
> his comrades with his own body...But if the soldier had not thrown

himself on the grenade would he have failed in his duty? Though clearly he is superior in some way to his comrades, can we possibly say that they failed in their duty by not trying to be the one who sacrificed himself? If he had not done so, could anyone have said to him, 'You ought to have thrown yourself on that grenade'? Could a superior have decently ordered him to do it? The answer to all these questions is plainly negative.

Utilitarianism suggests that sacrificing one person's life to protect the lives and/or wellbeing of multiple people is morally right, because that action produces a greater balance of pleasure over pain than the alternative of not protecting the soldiers from the grenade's explosion and subjecting them all to possible injury and death. An argument in opposition to this claim is the following:

1. If Utilitarianism is true, then it is a soldier's duty to throw himself on the grenade.
2. It is not a soldier's duty to throw himself on the grenade.
3. Therefore, Utilitarianism is not true.

The rationale for the first premise is that the soldier produces a greater balance of pleasure over pain than any alternative by throwing himself on the grenade, so it is morally right for him to do so based on the form of Utilitarianism used. The rationale for the second premise is that asking a soldier to sacrifice his life for his comrades is asking too much of him, and humans should not be expected or required to sacrifice their lives for others. Additionally, the standards

of Utilitarianism are "too high for humanity," meaning humans should not be required to always act in the best interest of society. Ultimately, Utilitarianism is psychologically unrealistic.

This argument is valid because is in the form of Modus Tollens: if A (if Utilitarianism is true), then B (then it is a soldier's duty to throw himself on the grenade); not B (it is not a soldier's duty to throw himself on the grenade); therefore, not A (Utilitarianism is not true). It is impossible for this argument's premises to be true but its conclusion to be false. Nevertheless, deciding whether or not this argument is sound is more controversial than deciding whether or not it is valid, because opponents of Utilitarianism think all its premises are true but a utilitarian will contend that at least one of the premises is wrong.

One way a utilitarian might respond to this argument is by claiming that the second premise is not true. Instead, a utilitarian believes that it *is* a soldier's duty to throw himself on the grenade. This is not asking too much of a person, because it is their moral obligation. And this standard is not "too high for humanity" as humans *should* always act to better the general interest of society. With this perspective, Utilitarianism is psychologically realistic and therefore should not be considered false.

I agree with this response. I do think one of the soldiers has a moral obligation to throw himself on the grenade. And I think that, if possible, that soldier should be the one who dropped the grenade in the first place, because it is his fault that the grenade is threatening the safety of his comrades. If a

different soldier sacrificed himself, that may not be morally right, because then the soldier who dropped the grenade may feel guilt whereas in the alternative situation he would not feel guilt. Even so, I think there is also the possibility that an alternative action, in which the most useless or replaceable soldier sacrifices himself, would be morally right instead. Perhaps the soldier at fault for dropping the grenade was extremely valuable and irreplaceable. In that case, assuming the soldier at fault would have no guilt over losing a comrade due to his own mistake, or assuming that he could overcome this guilt, the squad might be better off losing a different soldier. Regardless of which soldier it is, *someone* has to make the sacrifice, and that soldier might just be the soldier closest to where the grenade rolls after it slips.

Unfortunately, this justification reveals a deep flaw in the theory: although Utilitarianism is not *psychologically* unrealistic, in some cases it is *physically* unrealistic. In this situation, there is not enough time to calculate the utilities of all the possible actions before acting. First, the agent needs to be able to calculate the blast of the bomb to determine its effects. Perhaps the grenade could explode and nobody would die. In that case, the agent would need to decide whether he would be producing at least as great a balance of pleasure over pain having one soldier die as the alternative of having multiple soldiers be seriously injured. Then, if the agent establishes that it is morally right for a soldier to sacrifice himself, he would need to determine which soldier that should be. This requires asking the question "whose life is worth sacrificing in order to

save the others?" The answer is not something that can be easily calculated and especially not under a time constraint.

Fortunately, there is a possible solution. This flaw could be fixed up by calculating all the possible scenarios and the appropriate course of action for each beforehand. In other words, the agent could decide before anyone starts throwing the grenades if someone should jump were a grenade to slip, and if so, who that person should be: the person who dropped the grenade, the person closest to the grenade, the person easiest to replace, etc. Once a clear set of guidelines is established, acting according to Utilitarianism becomes more physically realistic.

In conclusion, a problem with Utilitarianism is not that it is psychologically unrealistic but that it is *physically* unrealistic, and this problem can be solved with extensive forethought.