"What is the strongest objection to act utilitarianism? Does the act utilitarian have a convincing response to this objection? If yes, what is it? If no, why not? Would the objection apply equally to nonutilitarian forms of consequentialism?"

In this paper, I argue that the strongest objection to act utilitarianism is that it is inconsistent with genuine human relationships because it uses relationships as a means to an end. The definition of act utilitarianism I will use is that under act utilitarianism (AU), a person's act is morally right if and only if it maximizes pleasure and minimizes pain in the world. A factual premise I'll use is that genuine love and friendship with people cannot happen if one party is using the other party as a means to an end. If you, the reader, do not agree with this premise, then I have nothing more to say. If you do agree, read on.

To explain the contradiction with genuine human connect, I will first clarify what genuine human connection is and what it is not. According to AU, love and friendship can be morally correct because it increases the net well-being of both parties. Well-being will be synonymous with happiness minus pain. If I love Bob, I will feel happier when I'm around Bob, and Bob (hopefully) feels happier as well, thus the net happiness is increased. However, not all relationships increase happiness. If I am forced to marry Bob, I might not be satisfied with Bob or I might be annoyed that I could not choose my own partner. This implies that not all relationships increase well-being.

I will now define and prove the existence of genuine relationships. I define genuine relationships as relationships where each party cares about and tries to increase the well-being of the other party. I now argue for the existence of genuine human relationships. It is clear that if

two people love each other, they will engage in actions to maximize the well-being of the other. Therefore genuine relationships exist.

I now argue that genuine relationships increase net well-being. A factual premise I use is that helping other people increases your own happiness. According to evolution, humans have a biological mechanism that increases a human's happiness if they perform pro-social behavior because living in groups increases the chance that the individuals in the group will survive. Therefore, helping someone else will increase your own happiness. By the very nature of helping someone, you are increasing their happiness. So if I help Bob, both of our happiness increases.

We have established that genuine human connection exists, and that it increases net well-being. This implies that AUs can and will engage in genuine human connection solely because it increases net well-being. However, this leads to a contradiction with the premise that was established at the beginning of the paper, that genuine love and friendship cannot happen if a party is using the other party as a means to an end. In this case, one party is using the other party as a means to increase net well-being, thus this relationship, and every relationship, cannot be genuine. This is a contradiction with how we determined the existence of genuine relationships earlier, implying that act utilitarianism is inconsistent.

I now engage with a counterargument. A counterargument is that the goal and inherent purpose of genuine human connection is to maximize net well-being, thus genuine human connection is not inconsistent with AU. An example might help explain this argument. Let's say that Bob, an act utilitarian, is happily married to Alice and makes her breakfast in bed and takes her out to nice dinners. The earlier argument claims that this relationship between Bob and Alice

is not genuine because Bob's goal is to maximize net well-being. However, the counterargument argues that the fundamental purpose and underlying assumption of genuine relationships is that it increases well-being. For example, if making Alice breakfast in bed did not make her happy, it would make sense for Bob to stop engaging in that action. To have a genuine connection, both parties must automatically agree to engage in actions that increase net well-being, thus it is permissible for Bob to focus on increasing net well-being and still have a genuine connection.

I will now refute this counterargument by arguing that establishing genuine human connection as a method to increase net well-being is a slippery slope that results in a total loss of free will and our sense of humanity, which then brings about a contradiction. Genuine human connection is one of the most altruistic actions people can engage in and is one of the best examples for when people perform a behavior without a purpose in mind. According to the counterargument, even genuine human connection aims to increase well-being, implying that it and most, if not all, other actions can be boiled down to an equation to maximize well-being.

I argue that this quantitative measuring of actions leads to complete determinism and the loss of free will. Since each action can be measured on a scale of well-being, we can create a hierarchy of actions for each situation where each action is better or worse than any action it is compared to. This implies that for every situation, there is only one action that produces the maximum well-being. According to AU, people must choose the action that maximizes well-being, thus people must always choose that one action. This implies that all our actions should be predetermined and that people should have no choice in what they do, eliminating free will.

I now argue that the absence of free will brings about a contradiction with the counterargument. Being able to choose where one wants to eat or what one wants to study induces happiness and increases well-being. We know that there is only one correct action in any situation, but if the desire and well-being created from choosing one's own action is greater than the difference between that action and the optimal action, then the new action becomes the new optimal action. In essence, this person has just chosen their own action which was different from the optimal action, contradicting the fact that that person could not choose their action. Thus the original counterargument that the goal of genuine human connection is to increase net well-being is inconsistent, and our original argument holds.

The original objective to AU holds because under nonutilitarian forms of consequentialism, people are still trying to promote goodness, so the argument holds because people are still trying to achieve a goal, and view relationships as a means to achieve that goal.

(1063 words)