

MORAL FANATICISM: THE UTILITARIAN'S NIGHTMARE?

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As I shall employ the phrase "moral fanaticism", it refers to a doctrine about the extent of our moral obligations and the degree to which we may reasonably be held blameworthy when we fail, either partially or completely, to fulfill these obligations. The problem of moral "fanaticism" arises in its most acute form when we apply certain widely accepted normative ethical principles to various well-known facts about the world today, especially the fact that to our knowledge millions of our fellow human beings are suffering greatly (e.g., from hunger and the diseases associated with malnutrition) and will continue to suffer unless they receive help. Given this sort of empirical framework and given a standard of moral rightness¹ according to which we must concern ourselves [equally] with the well-being of every person in the world², the moral "fanatic" sees every human choice or decision as requiring moral justification - few, if any, actions will be morally indifferent. To put the point starkly: we may be morally obligated to make ourselves as wretched as the most wretched of our fellow human beings, and may even be held morally blameworthy when we relax with a newspaper or permit ourselves some small luxury.

In this paper I argue that all utilitarian theories, whether "positive" or "negative", entail moral fanaticism in circumstances such as those obtaining in the world today; and, a fortiori, that moral fanaticism is a consequence of theories of obligation which attempt to combine a principle of benevolence (utility) with one of justice (equality).

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I

Virtually all moral systems assign a central place to the obligation to help others in need of help, but some systems derive this obligation from the principle that we have a duty to minimize unhappiness or pain, while others derive it from the more inclusive principle that it is our duty not simply to minimize unhappiness and pain, but also to maximize happiness or pleasure or the good.³ Both kinds of principle may be classified as "utilitarian", but the former has a negative and the latter a positive quality. According to the doctrine of positive utilitarianism (and it is this form which utilitarianism has traditionally taken) it is one's duty to do that act, of all those open to one in a given situation, which would produce (or which one believes would produce) the greatest balance of happiness over unhappiness on the whole. Negative utilitarianism is more restrictive: it limits our attention to overall consequences which are undesirable - pain, suffering, hardship, frustration, inconvenience, evil, and the like - and it replaces the injunction to maximize happiness by the injunction to eliminate suffering or, where this is not possible, to aim at the least amount of avoidable suffering for all.⁴ In this section I propose to discuss the distinction between positive and negative utilitarianism with reference to our duty to help others in need of help. I shall argue, against the modern proponents of negative utilitarianism, that the distinction is often arbitrary and artificial and that, in any event, it fails to "save" utilitarianism from the accusation that consistent adherence to it leads to moral fanaticism.

Perhaps the most important reason which its proponents have advanced for preferring negative to positive utilitarianism is that the latter leads

to moral fanaticism. Acceptance of positive utilitarianism is held to entail that very few actions are ever indifferent or trivial. If we are always obligated to do the optimific act, then we are morally blameworthy whenever we relax with a newspaper (unless we are simply recouping our strength for the next round), since on such occasions there will almost always be opportunities to produce greater good by acting than we can by relaxing. In order to avoid this seemingly absurd position, some utilitarians have denied that one has a duty to maximize good consequences; our moral duty, they claim, is simply to minimize undesirable or bad consequences.⁵

The negative utilitarian's case rests to some considerable extent on the distinction between "positive loss" or an act's having undesirable consequences, on the one hand, and an "absence of positive gain" or an act's being merely not positively beneficial, on the other. M. G. Singer, for example, insists on the importance of this distinction, which he illustrates with an example taken from Richard Whately:

To throw out of cultivation land already productive is a positive loss. Leaving waste-land as it is, is merely the absence of a positive gain. The one procedure, if carried on to any considerable extent, would cause ruin to the occupiers, and distress to the whole community; the other is merely negative, and hurts nobody.⁶

Singer goes on to comment that "in exactly the same way it is possible for the consequences of doing some act to be positively desirable even though the consequences of not doing it would not be undesirable."⁷ This point he illustrates by arguing that, although you would no doubt be benefited to some extent if I assign half my income to you, "it does not follow that

you would be harmed if I do not."⁸

These illustrations bring out the force of the distinction between positive loss and the absence of positive gain, but they also point to its limitations. Consider Whately's case of the landowner who decides to leave his land uncultivated. If land and food are abundant then it may well be true that the landowner's decision will not produce undesirable consequences. Nor would cultivation have advantageous consequences, given full abundance. On the other hand, if land and food are in short supply, his decision may result in very real harm to those whose needs must go unsatisfied because of the scarcity of food.⁹ Singer also uses the example of a man who gives away half his income to another to illustrate a situation in which it would be positively desirable on the whole for a person to do some act, but in which his not doing the act would not be undesirable. Consider, however, the kind of circumstances in which it would be positively desirable for someone, P, to give away half of his income to another person, Q. Presumably such an act of benevolence would be positively desirable on the whole only if it were the case that Q's need for the money is significantly greater than P's need for it. We must also suppose that Q deserves to receive the money and cannot obtain it in any more desirable way. But, given these suppositions, Singer's assumption that the consequences of P's not giving away the money would not be undesirable (in at least one sense) is false. The circumstances which would make it morally desirable on the whole for P to give away half his income would also make it morally undesirable for him not to do so. If Q does not need the money more than P, or if Q does not deserve to receive the money (his present greater need results, e.g., from prior selfish behaviour), or if Q can obtain the money in some better way, then it would not, on the whole, be

desirable for P to give the money to him. From this it does not follow that the distinction between positive loss and the absence of positive gain has no application whatsoever, but it does suggest that the range of its application may be much narrower than the proponents of negative utilitarianism seem to allow.

This conclusion is reinforced by an examination of the nature and scope of the "undesirable consequences" (the suffering, unhappiness, pain, hardship, frustration, etc.) which, according to negative utilitarians, it is our duty to minimize. Consider the case of the man who is frustrated and unhappy because he cannot satisfy certain of his desires. Presumably the negative utilitarian would hold that our duty to minimize undesirable consequences requires that we try to help such a person. Unfortunately, however, such things as suffering, unhappiness, and frustration depend upon a bewildering variety of factors - including individual temperament, expectations, desires, hopes, aspirations, habitual living standards, and so on - and, as a consequence, the concept of "undesirable consequences" (or, in Whately's phrase, "positive loss") is extremely vague. In effect, negative utilitarianism requires us to ignore considerations of utility above some assumed norm or level. The problem is to find a criterion which will fix this level in a way which will not be either arbitrary or entirely artificial. There are, of course, many clear-cut cases of suffering and pain, on the one hand, and of happiness and pleasure on the other, but there is also a great middle-ground constituted of cases where fellow-feeling would incline us to help our fellows in need of help, but where it would be difficult to know whether to describe this help as "promoting happiness" or "relieving unhappiness". How frustrated must a man be in order for us to have a duty (on negative

utilitarian grounds) to help him? How are we to determine when someone has reached the "subsistence level" of well-being, after which we are no longer morally required to feel any concern for his welfare? When the government embarks on a programme to build low-cost housing, should we describe this as the "promotion of happiness and welfare" or as the "relief of suffering and distress"? Questions of this sort suggest that if the netting of the criterion of undesirable consequences is very fine, the denial that we have a duty to maximise happiness or pleasure may exclude very little.

Thus, even Singer's absurd "concert ticket" example can be captured as easily by negative as by positive utilitarianism.

Suppose I had one ticket for a concert, and suppose I knew that Q would appreciate the concert just as much as I should and no more. Ought I to give him my ticket or go myself?... There is absolutely no reason why I ought to give Q the ticket, and even if Q would appreciate the concert much more than I should, there would still be no reason.¹⁰

In the first part of this argument Singer is attacking a straw-man. No one, least of all a positive utilitarian, would contend that a person who has a concert ticket and who has, in consequence, probably formed the expectation of attending the concert, should give the ticket away to someone who would derive no more enjoyment from it than he would himself. Surely the injunction to maximize happiness would give us a very strong reason to keep the ticket in these circumstances. The case in which Q would appreciate the concert much more than I would is more contentious.

Singer holds that to assert that I ought to give Q the ticket on grounds of benevolence would lead to the inescapable paradox that Q ought to give it back to me for the same reason; and by the logic of the argument we ought to spend the evening trading the ticket back and forth, with the result that neither of us would get to the concert. Singer alleges that this is a consequence of positive utilitarianism, but in this I think he is mistaken. There are, indeed, circumstances in which positive utilitarianism would require one to give the ticket away. If, for example, Q is a great music lover and is desperately eager to attend the concert but cannot obtain a ticket, while I am generally indifferent to music and am only slightly inclined to attend, then I think that it would not be unreasonable to say that I ought, in these circumstances, to give my ticket to Q. Nor would there be any good reason for Q to feel that he ought to give the ticket back to me, though there would be good reasons for Q to keep the ticket, viz., the same reasons as I have for giving it to him in the first place. It is important to notice, moreover, that in these circumstances, the conclusion that I ought to give the ticket to Q would follow equally from negative utilitarianism, for ex hypothesi, Q is going to feel frustrated and unhappy if he cannot attend the concert. If Q's desire to attend the concert is, as we have supposed, much stronger than my own, then his unhappiness at not obtaining the ticket may require me, even on negative utilitarian grounds, to give my ticket to him. It is more likely, however, that the amount of happiness or unhappiness involved in such cases would be so small as to be dismissed on any criterion of significance. No reasonable moral system could require us to make exceedingly fine discriminations between the utility (whether positive or negative) of acts.

give a much greater priority to helping satisfy the needs of those who are suffering than to promoting the interests of those who are relatively happy.

II

Let us accept, for the sake of argument, the negative utilitarian's distinction between positive loss and the absence of positive gain, and let us grant his conclusion that one's duty to help others in need of help arises from the principle that, if the consequences of not doing an act would be undesirable, then one ought to do it. The question which must now be put is this: would this negative utilitarian principle, if consistently adhered to, also lead to moral fanaticism, to the view that almost everything one does is morally wrong, since one might have done something better? If we turn from Singer's rather implausible problem of the concert ticket to the very real and acute problem of mass starvation and near-starvation in the undeveloped and exploited countries of the world, and if we apply the principle of negative utilitarianism to this situation, it would seem that we shall be compelled to draw a conclusion very similar to the one which Singer deprecated with the label "moral fanaticism".* Before attempting to show that this is so, it will be useful to make several preliminary distinctions.

A utilitarian standard of moral rightness, whether or not modified by some principle of distribution (fairness), will require ceteris paribus, that we help our fellows when they are suffering and in need of help. In order to determine the existence and extent of our duty to help someone who is suffering, however, it is first necessary to "unpack" the ceteris paribus condition by considering the kind and source of the

* The reader may wish to compare my treatment of this issue with that of Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality", Philosophy and Public Affairs, Vol.1, No.3, Spring, '72.

suffering involved and the forms and source of help which may be available.¹² Many would argue, for example, that the suffering which results from envy or selfishness or jealousy does not have the same urgent claim on our attention as the suffering of persons who, through no fault of their own, are starving or seriously ill or who have been assaulted, and so on.

A second question which it may be important to ask when someone is suffering and in need of help is: Who ought to relieve the suffering or minimise the pain or otherwise give help? Who, if anyone, has a moral duty or obligation to help? In some situations the answer to this question will be relatively clear-cut. Sometimes the person who is suffering will be able to help himself, either directly through his own actions, or indirectly by, for example, paying for medical treatment. Often the person or organisation whose business or duty it is to give help when someone is suffering will be established within some sort of institutional framework or by some specific relationship. For example, it is the obligation of a parent to care for the interests and well-being of his children and to help them when they need help; and if a parent badly mistreats his child, it may well be the obligation of some appointed government agency or official to protect the child.

In certain situations, then, the person whose responsibility it is to give help is determined by some institutional arrangement. But where the need for help arises from some disruption or breakdown such as, for example, a natural disaster or an automobile accident, it may be one's duty to help simply because one happens, by chance, to be in a position to give it. If one were the only person suitably placed to

aid an accident victim then it would clearly be one's prima facie duty to give such aid (considerations of utility would require it), and one would have failed to do one's duty, and would therefore be blameworthy, if one failed to give such help as was necessary and possible.

Where an individual is merely one of several persons each of whom is suitably placed and able to give the help required, but none of whom has a specific (prior) obligation to the victim, the case is more difficult. Let us expand the example. It is known that the accident victim will in all probability die painfully unless he is assisted. If everyone in a position to help were to co-operate in doing so - if each would do his "fair share" - the burden on each would, let us suppose, be quite small. Suppose also, however, that all depart hastily, except oneself. In this situation, created by the failure of others to do their duty, the task of providing the assistance needed may be quite onerous for one person. It seems clear, however, that if a man's life (or something of comparable significance) were at stake, considerations of utility (negative as well as positive) would require that one shoulder the burden.

At this point a critic might wish to dig in his heels. It could be argued that one is obligated to give only a certain amount of help, viz., that amount which, if everyone involved contributed it, would be sufficient to meet the victim's needs. One would not, according to this line of argument, be morally required to give more than this amount. If one does give more, then one will be morally praiseworthy for having done an act of supererogation; but one would not be blameworthy for not doing more than one's fair share.

I do not believe that this fair share argument can be adopted without inconsistency by a utilitarian. In the circumstances described above, to do one's fair share and then depart, in the knowledge that the victim will almost certainly die painfully because one has declined to do more, would surely be morally wrong (and blameworthy, too) on any sort of utilitarian standard. When one is calculating the extent of one's moral duty in any given situation, an important part of the data with which one must operate concerns the behaviour of others who may be involved. To act "as if" others were going to do their fair share when one knows full well that they are not, would lead to disastrously counter-utilitarian consequences.¹³

Moreover, if one asks not "Was it fair for the others to leave the entire burden to fall on me?" (clearly it was not fair), but rather "Is it fair for me to prefer my personal convenience to this man's desperate need?", it will be seen that considerations of fairness, like those of utility, militate in favour of assuming the burden necessary to save the victim's life and relieve his suffering.

The most difficult sort of case to deal with is that in which there exists no relationship other than fellow-feeling between those who are suffering and in need of help and those who have the means to help them. Consider the need for help of those who are suffering from hunger and disease in the poor nations of Asia and Latin America. The question I want to examine is whether (or to what extent) these people have a moral claim or right to help from their more affluent fellow human beings in other parts of the world; or, conversely, whether those who are relatively affluent have a moral duty to help their geographically distant but suffering fellows of a different nationality. I shall assume that those

who are relatively affluent know of the suffering in the poor nations and know of the existence of means whereby they could give effective aid to relieve this suffering.

There are several points which may be noted at once. Our first and most stringent obligations are generally to our family, friends and associates. We have definite obligations to these people in virtue of the special relationships in which we stand to them. We are typically in the best position to appreciate and care for the needs of our family, and they depend on us, and are tied to us by special bonds of affection and mutual trust. The same is true, though to a much lesser extent, of our friends and associates. It is also plausible to suppose that we have special obligations to our fellow-countrymen in virtue of our common participation in a system of government and our joint co-operation in a variety of other activities. It follows from this that in societies distant from our own the most urgent claims for relief of suffering will fall upon the non-sufferers in those societies or those who are immediately confronted with the suffering, as was the man in the Good Samaritan parable.

The moral problem generated by this sort of case arises when the nonsufferers in those distant nations are, as a matter of fact, either unable or unwilling to give the help necessary in order to relieve the suffering. Perhaps it will be said that matters of such serious concern are too important to be left to private charity and should be dealt with at governmental level. This is certainly true. Governments of relatively prosperous nations which have surpluses of food and medical supplies ought to ensure that the people of poor nations do not starve to death or live in conditions of abject poverty, hunger, or disease. But what is one's

duty as an individual when, as is unfortunately all too often the case, governments fail to meet this obligation? Perhaps one ought first to attempt to prevail upon the governments and individuals who are directly confronted with the emergency to meet their moral obligations. But what if such efforts fail? Can we be absolved of a duty to help a fellow human being who is in need of help, simply on the grounds that these others cannot or will not give the necessary help, which we are able to give and which if it is not forthcoming will result in terrible suffering and misery and possibly even death?

An analogy with the Good Samaritan type of situation may be useful in answering this question. We are morally blameworthy, ceteris paribus, if we fail to come to the aid of an accident victim knowing that without our help his suffering will not be relieved and may result in death. Would our duty to give help be diminished or eliminated if the accident occurred at some distance from us and we learned of it only indirectly, say via a radio message? Given the supposition that we know that without our help the victim's suffering will not be relieved, it does not seem that geographical distance would absolve us of our duty to help. In the situation postulated it would also be morally irrelevant that the accident occurred beyond the borders of one's country or that the victim was of a different nationality from oneself. Again, if the victim's suffering could only be relieved by expensive medical treatment, it would be one's duty, ceteris paribus, to provide the necessary funds if he were too poor to do so and if the money would not otherwise be forthcoming.

Note that, if one accepts the principle of diminishing marginal utility, then one is committed to a position that one's own needs and

wants and those of one's dependents would not override one's duty to provide such assistance so long as the sacrifice imposed on oneself and one's dependents does not equal or exceed in weight the needs of the accident victim.¹⁴

Are there any relevant dissimilarities between this Good Samaritan type of case and our example concerning poor nations? It may be that our information about the needs of those in societies far removed from own is less certain than it is when we are face to face with the person requiring help. This will sometimes be the case. On the whole, however, our information about conditions in the poor countries of Asia and Latin America is more than sufficient for the purpose of deciding to give help. Very often we shall not be able to identify the recipient of our help or even the exact nature of the assistance which our money has made possible. We will not know, for example, whether our donation to Oxfam has been used to provide food for hungry children in Biafra, or whether it has gone to pay an administrator's salary. Such questions are, I believe, beside the point. If the administrator's salary must be paid in order for hungry children to be fed, then the fact that one's donation may be used in this way hardly seems a cogent objection. If one supposes (what is in fact the case) that the need is enormous and that insufficient funds will be available to meet it properly, and if there is no better alternative method of helping these suffering people, then one's duty to contribute would not cease even if one knew that some of the money would actually be wasted.

Of course many people believe that giving aid fosters dependency rather than self-reliance and is, for this reason, counter-productive. Two responses may be made to this point. First, it seems likely that there

are forms of aid which promote or facilitate self-reliance rather than dependency. (Some will favour, e.g., birth control assistance; others believe that fostering and supporting groups working for revolutionary social change is the best method of help.) Thus, even if one believed that all conventional material aid was counter-productive one would still have the moral duty to employ one's full efforts and resources opposing such harmful aid and promoting those forms of assistance with greatest efficacy.

What is the relevance of all this to the dispute between positive and negative utilitarianism? At this point it can be seen quite clearly that even the allegedly more restrictive criterion of negative utilitarianism leads to moral fanaticism. It is an unfortunate but indisputable fact about human life on this planet that most people are subsisting at this historical period in conditions of very acute deprivation and misery and that many are dying as a direct result of poverty. Whether we derive our duty to help others in need of help from the positive principle of maximizing happiness or from the negative principle of minimizing unhappiness or pain or suffering, it will follow that we have a duty to contribute, to the maximum extent of our ability and resources, to the relief of the suffering of our impoverished and/or oppressed fellows. This duty will be particularly stringent because their suffering is so extreme; and because their numbers are so great it is unlikely that, however much one does, one will be able to help more than a small fraction of those in need of help. Everything else that one does will have to be weighed against the moral claim for help of those whose needs one knows will not otherwise be met, i.e., will not be met unless one contributes more than one's fair share. This conclusion may appear so extreme as to warrant

the label "moral fanaticism", but it would seem to follow from an application of utilitarianism to the empirical fact of widespread human suffering.

FOOTNOTES

¹ I shall assume that a standard of moral rightness and wrongness is also, eo ipso, a standard of moral obligation or duty; that is, I assume that to say of an act, X, that it is morally obligatory or one's duty to do it is extensionally equivalent to asserting that it would be morally right to do X and morally wrong not to do X. I also assume that one is prima facie morally blameworthy if one fails to do an act which it is one's duty or obligation to do.

² The special obligations one has to one's family, friends, fellow-countrymen., etc., are discussed below.

³ I do not, in this paper, distinguish between "Act" and "Rule" utilitarianism. David Lyons has argued persuasively, in Forms and Limits of Utilitarianism, that these two families of principles are extensionally equivalent. Actually, although Lyons does not claim that every rule principle has an act analogue with which it is extensionally equivalent, he shows that rule theories that are not equivalent to related act theories differ from them in wrong ways. Thus, adequate rule theories are no more secure from fanaticism than act theories.

⁴ We might formally characterise Negative Act Utilitarianism as follows. The time is T; the agent S; the acts A_1, A_2, \dots, A_n ($n \geq 2$) are mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive for S at T. For each i, the doing of A_i at T has the overall consequences C_i . Let V be a function such that: $V(C_i)$ measures the degree of intrinsic goodness of C_i by positive numbers; $V(C_i)$ is zero if and only if C_i is not to any degree intrinsically good or intrinsically bad. Negative Act Utilitarianism can now be taken to assert: (a) that a person S at time T is under an obligation to refrain from doing A_i at T if $V(C_i)$ is a negative number; and (b) that if $V(C_i)$ is a negative number for every i, S at T is under an obligation to do

that A_i such that $V(C_i)$ is the largest.

Consider now the following imaginary situation:

$A_1 \rightarrow C_1 ; V(C_1) = + 100$

$A_2 \rightarrow C_2 ; V(C_2) = - 50$

$A_3 \rightarrow C_3 ; V(C_3) = 0$

$A_4 \rightarrow C_4 ; V(C_4) = + 10$

According to Negative Act Utilitarianism, I would be under an obligation not to do A_2 . I would be under an obligation to do A_1 or A_3 or A_4 . But I would not be under an obligation to do A_1 , to do A_3 , or to do A_4 .

⁵ Vide, e.g., Kurt Baier, The Moral Point of View (New York: Cornell University Press, 1958), pp.203-4; M.G.Singer, Generalization in Ethics (London, Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1963), pp.178-90; H.B.Acton, "Negative Utilitarianism", Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Vol. XXXVII, 1963

None of these authors notes that the distinction between positive loss and the absence of positive gain differs importantly from the distinction between utility levels above and below the "minimum acceptable" (or, say: the turnover point between happy and unhappy states). Someone's move from way above that line to only rather above it is a loss; someone's not moving from way below it to only rather below it is an absence of positive gain. Gain and loss are relational notions.

⁶ Richard Whately, Paley's Moral Philosophy: With Annotations, 1859; quoted in Singer, op.cit., p.188.

⁷ Singer, loc. cit.

⁸ loc.cit.

⁹ Can refrainings result in anything? It might be objected that this locution does not make good sense. However, it does not seem in the least odd to me for

one to say, e.g., that "He refrained from replying to the provocation and this resulted in the restoration of order."

Some philosophers might wish to insist upon the importance of excluding refrainings from the scope of one's acts (except, perhaps, in cases of special obligation). Consider the following alternative formulations of negative utilitarianism:

i) It is one's duty to minimize evil;

ii) It is one's duty to minimize the evil consequences of one's acts.

The difference between i) and ii) will be drastic if one interprets the phrase "consequences of one's act" in such a way that C is a consequence of one's act if one brought about C by one's action but not if C would have occurred if one had done nothing or didn't exist. Under this interpretation, formulation i) will entail moral fanaticism but formulation ii) will not.

But could, or should, a utilitarian accept formulation ii) ? It provides an ad hoc device for avoiding fanaticism, but it does so at the cost of producing other, and worse, difficulties. E.g., it seems clearly counter-intuitive for a utilitarian to advocate a principle which would render it morally permissible to ignore the plight of an accident victim whose life could be saved at very little cost to the agent but to whom the agent had no antecedent moral obligation.

¹⁰ Singer, op.cit., p.185.

¹¹ The Open Society and Its Enemies, (ed.4) I, pp.284-5.

¹² I have benefited considerably from H.B.Acton's discussion of this question in his article "Negative Utilitarianism", op.cit., although the conclusions I reach differ from his in a number of crucial respects.

¹³ On this point, see the excellent discussion in Lyons, op.cit., *passim*.

¹⁴ It is worth noting that the good which would be done to the recipient of aid must be offset by the pain we cause to the benefactor in the way of moral obloquy, guilt, or whatever, if the latter is necessary in order to induce him to become such a benefactor.

Perhaps part of the reason why moral fanaticism is thought to be an undesirable implication of utilitarianism is that it might itself be a major source of unhappiness. One might imagine a world of people made guilty by the thought that they are probably not doing the best they possibly could for humanity. And one might then reckon that such a world would be more miserable than the world, with its miserable millions, would be on some less demanding morality. If these were indeed the two options, it would seem that a utilitarian must favour a less demanding morality.

Thus, if moral fanaticism is a consequence of utilitarianism, then it may be the duty of utilitarians to conceal this fact. A utilitarian would be justified in advocating moral fanaticism and working for its widespread intellectual acceptance by a community if and only if the "acceptance utility" of moral fanaticism is favourable. When, if ever, this circumstance will obtain is an empirical issue, and one which depends on a bewildering variety of cultural factors. An experimental approach to the issue would seem appropriate.