

Pleasure and the Greatest Happiness of the Greatest Number

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As previously discussed two very influential ethical theories - Aristotelian virtue theory and utilitarianism - both argue that living a happy life is essential to living a good life.

For Aristotle, "happiness" is not simply an inner sensation. We tend to think that happiness is simply a feeling, Aristotle's concept of "Eudaimonia" is actually more complex. To live a good life, the happy life, one must meet two criteria.

- 1) The first of these criteria is drawn from the idea of the 'purpose' of human beings. Aristotle, attempts to figure out what it means to be good insofar as something is human.
 - a. In our reasoning, we might discuss what makes a car a good car: gas mileage, better construction, safer, more reliability, style, comfort, performance.... These are all factors that help us to decide how good a car is.
 - b. In the case of humans, Aristotle compares us to other animals, and asks what specific purpose (skills, abilities...) do humans bring that allows to say that a human is an especially good representative of our species.
 - i. Aristotle argues that "Man" is the rational animal. Contributing to human reason is the main purpose of any individual person.
- 2) The second criteria IS personal, it relates to living the sort of life and accomplishing the things that an individual desires. I.e. we want to be "happy" whatever that might mean for a particular person.

There are a number of objections to utilitarianism.

- One concern is that utilitarians allow luck to play too large a role in their theory. Consequentialism can be effected by very strange results.
 - o This is where the theory of "indirect" or "rule" utilitarianism comes into play.
 - o Stated basically: rule utilitarianism claims that the "right" thing to do is that which tends to lead to the greatest happiness for the greatest number.
- A related concern with Utilitarianism - and really with any consequentialist theory - is in determining how long you're required to wait in order to determine the consequences of your actions.
 - o On famous example along these lines: saving the life of young Hitler, well before anything even approaching Naziism existed?
 - o A similar example relates investing money.
- Yet another related concern is the "Problem of Posterity" - the problem asks whether we need to consider people who

Utilitarians, advocate for the "principle of utility" - that which is good is that which brings the greatest happiness to the greatest number.

- Most utilitarians are hedonists, so that by "good" or "happiness" they really mean pleasure. And conversely by "bad" they would mean pain.

The modern theory of utilitarianism traces back to Jeremy Bentham. He was among the first philosophers to formalize the theory around the principle of utility.

- According to Bentham, all decisions that effect our pleasure or our feelings of pain were ethical decisions and, as such, should be evaluated in terms of their consequences - i.e. in terms of how much pleasure would produce or how much pain they would prevent.
- So, Bentham proposed "The Hedonistic Calculus" or the "Felicitous" Calculus. The point of the calculus was to consider our available options and to pick the one that would maximize our happiness, maximize our outcome.

	Chipotle	Chic-Fil-A
How much pleasure do we expect	7.5	8
How much pain comes with the pleasure	-1	0
Nearness in time and space	-	-
Probability of getting what you expect	9	8
Are there any long-term pleasures or pains associated	1	1
Duration	-	-
Extent - how many people are effected by the decision	-	-
	16.5	17

- One key factor to help understand utilitarianism is to recognize that it is a "Consequentialist" theory. That means that whether you made the correct choice or not is determined by the actual consequences of your action.

The philosopher most strongly associated with the theory of utilitarianism is John Stuart Mill. He makes a couple of key changes to the theory:

- He rejects the calculus of utility. First he says that its not really necessary, that we very naturally take into account all the factors (and possibly more) that are already included in the calculus. Further, the calculus gives us a false sense of objectivity.
- He responds to a common objection: that utilitarianism reduces us to our most crass and basic desires. That all that matters is simple pleasure.
 - o Mill draws a distinction between different kinds of pleasures, "higher" and "lower" pleasures. This is a qualitative difference, not a quantitative difference. Basic "animalistic" pleasures, the sorts of things your dog or cat can enjoy, are perfectly fine but they're not as valuable as the sorts of pleasures that we're capable of experiencing.
 - o So, when given a choice we will typically prefer higher

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- Yet another related concern is the "Problem of Posterity" - the problem asks whether we need to consider people who do not exist when evaluating our ethical decisions.
- Many philosophers - including Blackburn - will raise the following question: WHY should we care about the general happiness? Even given that we each care about our own happiness, that's no reason to think that we do or should care about everyone else's happiness?

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- So, when given a choice we will typically prefer higher pleasures to lower - EVEN IF the lower might mathematically produce more pleasure
 - Easy example that fits with Mill's reasoning: going to an amusement park, versus visiting great museums.
- Some philosophers do object to Mill, on the grounds that Mill is not drawing an empirical distinction but is instead arguing in favor of the things he - and his social friends - prefer.