

# Well-Being Outline

## Hedonism

Hedonism claims that the balance of pleasure over pain and nothing else non-instrumentally makes a life go better for the person whose life it is.

## Philosophy of Swine

- The "philosophy of swine" objection alleges that hedonism treats the base pleasures and the elevated pleasures no differently.
  - According to hedonism, pleasure non-instrumentally makes a life go better for the person whose life it is entirely in virtue of its pleasantness.
  - So it seems base pleasures and elevated pleasures make the same sort of prudential contribution, and so contribute commensurably.
  - Intuitively, we think elevated pleasures are incommensurably more prudentially valuable.
  - Offer the example of Haydn and the Oyster.
- Feldman's desert adjusted intrinsic attitudinal hedonism can treat base and elevated pleasures differently.
  - According to attitudinal hedonism, only attitudinal pleasure non-instrumentally makes a life go better for the person whose life it is.
  - Attitudinal pleasure is a propositional attitude. Illustrate with an example.
  - Explain the difference between intrinsic and instrumental attitudinal pleasure with an example.
  - According to Feldman's desert adjusted intrinsic attitudinal hedonism, only intrinsic attitudinal pleasure non-instrumentally makes a life go better for the person whose life it is, but how much better it makes this life go is desert-adjusted.
  - Then, Feldman can maintain that elevated attitudinal pleasures are incommensurably more prudentially valuable than base attitudinal pleasures.
  - So Feldman would reach the correct judgement in the case of Haydn and the Oyster.
- Olsaretti argues that Feldman's hedonism deviates from pure hedonism.
  - According to Feldman's hedonism, a pleasure's worthiness, and not only its pleasantness, determines how much it contributes to well-being.
  - If this is not simply ad hoc, it is motivated by the thought that such things as veridicality and dignity are important to a good life. This motivation is not consistent with the central hedonist claim.
- Mill's qualitative hedonism can treat base and elevated pleasures differently.
  - Feldman's response fails because it allows veridicality and dignity (and not only pleasantness) to affect the prudential value of pleasure. This suggests an alternative approach under which "worthiness" affects the pleasantness of pleasure, and only pleasantness affects prudential value.
  - According to Mill's qualitative hedonism, base pleasures are lower quality hence incommensurably less pleasant than elevated pleasures.
  - This is not obviously arbitrary or ad hoc because we think such "arbitrary" things as the volume of the music and the smell of the theatre relevant to the pleasantness of a concert. It is then quite natural to think that "worthiness" is also relevant to pleasantness.
  - So Mill would reach the correct judgement in the case of Haydn and the Oyster.
- Mill's qualitative hedonism seems unmotivated because there is no apparent reason to think the relationship between "worthiness" and prudential goodness is intermediated by pleasantness. Intuitively, this relationship is direct and unintermediated.
  - If whether an object (of pleasure) is elevated or base affects how pleasant it is, why not think it also (directly) affects how prudentially good it is.
- This objection begs the question against the hedonist. The reason for thinking the relationship between worthiness and prudential goodness is so intermediated is simply the central hedonist idea that only pleasure and pleasantness are directly relevant to well-being.

## Veridicality

- Hedonism fails to attach adequate weight to the veridicality of pleasure.
  - Illustrate with Kagan's Happy Businessman example.
- Feldman's veridicality adjusted intrinsic attitudinal hedonism can attach weight to veridicality.
- Feldman's adjusted hedonism is a departure from pure hedonism.
- The hedonist can undermine our intuition that veridical pleasures are prudentially better than non-veridical pleasures.
  - In the Happy Businessman case, our intuitions misfire because we are not able to fully step out of the knowledge of the businessman's being deceived into the blissful ignorance of the businessman.
  - Additionally, we care about veridicality (potentially) because we are sophisticated hedonists and not because veridicality is in fact prudentially relevant.

## Desire Theory

Desire theory claims that desire satisfaction and nothing else non-instrumentally makes a life go better for the person whose life it is. Actual desire theory claims that the satisfaction of a person's actual desires and nothing else non-instrumentally makes life go better for this person.

### Non-Intrinsically Defective Desires (Ill-Informed, Irrational)

- There appear to be defective desires. A defective desire is one whose satisfaction does not make the life of the person whose desire it is go any better. These include ill-informed and irrational desires.
  - Illustrate with the example of Polluted River and Dental Checkup.
- Heathwood persuasively argues that such (non-intrinsically) defective desires are no threat to desire theory.
  - Our intuitions about such defective desires track all-things-considered goodness, and actual desire theory can accommodate these intuitions because it is committed only to the ceteris paribus goodness of desire satisfaction.
  - Something is all-things-considered good for some person iff the life this person were to lead if this thing obtained is better than the life this person were to lead if this thing did not obtain. Something is ceteris paribus good for some person iff, all else being equal, this person's life is better if this thing obtained than if it did not.
  - Illustrate with the Polluted River example that actual desire theory tracks intuition about all-things-considered well-being.

### Intrinsically Defective Desires (Base, Pointless)

- A desire is intrinsically defective iff its satisfaction is, intuitively, of no ceteris paribus prudential value. Base desires are a category of intrinsically defective desires.
  - Illustrate with the Porky example.
- The desire theorist could respond by undermining our intuitions about base desire satisfactions.
  - Porky's case is unrealistic, so our intuitions are muddled by considerations that have been excluded by supposition, we struggle to accurately represent Porky's case to ourselves.
  - Considerations about shame, guilt, loneliness, and disease sneak in. And we imagine Porky as unwilling or coerced.
  - We struggle to disentangle intuitions about well-being from intuitions about other values like achievement and dignity.
- Another category of intrinsically defective desires is pointless desires.
  - Illustrate with the Grass Counter example.
- If the pointlessness of such desire is instrumental pointlessness, then intrinsic desire theory will agree with intuition.
  - Explain and illustrate the difference between intrinsic and instrumental desire satisfaction.
  - Intrinsic desire theory could be motivated by the thought that what non-instrumentally promotes well-being is non-instrumental desire satisfaction. In other words, what ultimately promotes well-being is what we are ultimately after, not the "intermediate steps".
- If the pointlessness of such desire is understood as lacking excellence, then the desire theorist can respond by undermining our intuitions about such pointless desires.
  - Our intuitions misfire because we fail to disentangle our judgements about the aretaic value of a life from the prudential value of a life. We care strongly about both, so are inclined to say simply "that life went poorly" about a prudentially decent but aretaically awful life. And in general, the two sorts of value are correlated, so we have little need to disentangle them.

## Ideal Desire Theory

- A desire theorist can respond to the problem of intrinsically defective desires by defending an ideal desire theory.

- According to some ideal desire theory, the satisfaction of a person's ideal desires, i.e. the desires this person would have under some suitably ideal circumstance, and nothing else makes this person's life go better for him.
- Ideal desire theory could be motivated by the thought that what makes our lives go better for us is not simply getting what we want, but getting the things that we should want.
- Then, presumably, a suitably idealised, fully informed agent, would not have pointless desires.
- But such idealised desires lose their "grip" on agents. For example, the Grass Counter, if credibly informed that "the ideal version of yourself would do something far more meaningful than this", we imagine, would respond "well good for him, but why should I care what he does?"
  - A minimal sort of idealisation involves full information and full rationality. This is plausible because by idealisation we hope to eliminate the defects in our desires, and lack of information is certainly one such defect.
  - Full information is a demanding requirement because it requires a fully vivid understanding of all relevant details in all possible life paths.
  - Illustrate with the example of the Olympic Athlete.
  - The ability to appreciate information is a function of personality, so the fully informed ideal agent has a different personality from the real agent. Illustrate with the example of Unempathetic.
  - Prima facie, ideal desires have a "grip" on us because we conflate ideal desires with retrospective desires of our future selves. We have straightforward reason to care about the latter because we will soon be these future selves.
  - We think that what promotes our well-being is something we have reason to care about, and we have no reason to care about such idealised desires, so ideal desire theory is not plausible.

## List Theory

- List theory claims that each item on some objective list of goods and nothing else non-instrumentally make a life go better for the person whose life it is.

## Elitism and Paternalism

- A common objection to list theory alleges that it is objectionably elitist in that it appears to license an "elite" to think of themselves and others in objectionable ways.
  - Illustrate with the example of the British monarchy.
- The allegation of elitism is unsuccessful.
  - First, a plausible list theory could include "the esteem of others" as a prudential good. Then, insofar as the "elite" are concerned with the well-being of the hoi polloi, they are not "licensed" by list theory to take an objectionably dim view of the hoi polloi.
  - Second, what attitudes persons ought to have towards each other is a matter of interpersonal morality, and is to some extent agnostic to theories of well-being. A plausible theory of interpersonal morality will demand that we treat others with respect, so list theory simply does not have the authority to "license" objectionable elitism.
- Another common objection to list theory alleges that it licenses objectionable paternalism.
  - If all and only items on some list promote well-being, then persons can be mistaken about their own well-being, so it seems we have reason to paternalistically interfere in the lives of others.
  - One fears list theory invites too much such interference.
  - Illustrate with the example of the Grass Counter.
- The allegation of paternalism is unsuccessful.
  - First, a plausible list theory could include "autonomy" as a prudential good.
  - Second, a plausible theory of interpersonal morality would demand respect for the rights of others which guarantee them some degree of freedom from paternalistic interference.

## Attitude Insensitivity

- Underlying the allegations of elitism and paternalism is the worry that list theories are inadequately sensitive to the attitudes of persons whose well-being they purport to be about. One objection arising from this worry is that a person's having certain pro-attitudes towards something is necessary for it's being good for this person. It seems list theory is uniquely guilty of being so insensitive.
  - Contrast list theory with (attitudinal) hedonism and desire theory. These theories require that a person have a positive attitude to the things which promote his well-being.

- It is simply not true that list theory is uniquely insensitive to a person's attitudes. According to hedonism and desire theory, pleasure and desire satisfaction are good for a person regardless of that person's attitude to pleasure and desire satisfaction.
  - Illustrate with the Ascetic.
- A more sophisticated objection alleges that list theory fails to establish a sufficiently substantive connection between a person and the things that are good for him. The worry seems to be "how could something be good for me if I do not care at all about it, if it is not something I desire, and/or it brings me no pleasure?"
  - Illustrate with the example of Bloodless Philosophy.
- The list theorist would respond by noting that intuitively plausible goods have certain attitudes as necessary components.
  - Illustrate with the examples of Graduation and Company of Friends.
- This response seems inadequate because it suffices only to establish that an instance of achievement, friendship, or whatnot contributes to a person's well-being only if that person cares about that instance. Then, it could still be the case that such instances contribute to a person's well-being even if that person does not care about the values of achievement, friendship, or whatnot.
  - This is an analogue of the Ascetic problem.
- The list theorist's response is more powerful than its opponents recognise. The list theorist can and will agree that Graduation and the Company of Friends are only good for a person if this person recognises the value of achievement and friendship.
  - A plausible list theory with only such goods is thoroughly sensitive to a person's attitudes (and more so than hedonism or desire theory).

## Perfectionism

- One motivation for perfectionism is the thought that list theory as such is objectionably ad hoc because it offers no explanation of what makes the items on the list intrinsic prudential goods. According to perfectionism, such things are good for a person because they perfect human nature (and things that perfect human nature are so good).

## Explanatory Inadequacy

- The perfectionist explanation of some thing's being prudentially good is unsatisfying.
  - We are not seeking merely a statement of perfectionist necessary and sufficient conditions and an explanation of why something satisfies these conditions.
  - We are instead seeking an explanation of why something's meeting the perfectionist criteria is reason for thinking it contributes to well-being. In other words, we are asking the perfectionist to explain why the perfectionist conditions are the right ones.
- But hedonism and desire theory appear to fare no better.
  - Hedonism does not explain why some thing's being pleasant makes it good. Desire theory does not explain why some thing's satisfying a desire makes it good.
  - Then it seems no theory can offer an adequate explanation, after all "ultimate ends do not admit of proof" and "all explanation stops somewhere".
  - Illustrate with the hypothetical "something's being pleasant makes it X, and something's being X makes it good for a person".
- This response fails to de-fang the objection. What the objector is after is some reason to think perfectionism is an account of well-being, which requires some conceptual link between the ideas of well-being and perfecting human nature.
  - In other words, we worry that perfectionist, hedonist, and desire theoretic goods are just those, but not prudential goods.
- Brink's Normative Perfectionism appears to offer such a link.
  - Human beings are rational agents, and it is as rational agents that we act in the world. So it is our capacity for rational agency that determines how we act in the world. In determining how we act in the world, our rational agency also determines the sorts of things we pursue. Brink's critical move is to defend a normative conception of rational agency. According to Brink, our rational agency would not determine us to undermine itself, and would determine us to cultivate itself. Our rational agency is authoritative because it is what determines how we act in the world and the sorts of things we pursue. Then, we have authoritative reason to cultivate our rational agency.
  - Explain how the authority of reasons to pursue achievement and knowledge flow from the authority of reasons to cultivate rational agency.

- Then we have authoritative reason to pursue such perfectionist goods. We think that our reasons to pursue prudential goods are also authoritative, i.e. that we should care about what is good for us. So perfectionist goods are in a sense "fit for purpose", and this constitutes reason to think that the perfectionist goods are indeed prudential goods.
- It is not clear that Brink's Normative Perfectionism is successful. That rational agency would determine us to cultivate and not undermine it seems questionable. Further, it is not clear that Brink's Normative Perfectionism yields a plausible list of prudential goods. It seems, for example, that friendship is not essential to cultivating rational agency.
- Even if Brink's Normative Perfectionism fails to establish the required conceptual link, it is not clear that competing theories get any further than perfectionism.
  - Plausibly, we view perfectionism less favourably because of a contemporary bias under which "what makes me happy" and "what I want" are eminently plausible candidates for well-being, so we demand a conceptual link only between "what make me a better person" and well-being.

## Undervalues Pleasure and Desire

- One objection to perfectionism alleges that perfectionism counterintuitively undervalues pleasure and preferences.
  - Illustrate with the Would-Be Retiree example.
- One response to the allegation that perfectionism fails to attach adequate weight to pleasure notes that humans have the capacity to experience pleasure.
  - Under a suitable conception of perfectionism, given that experiencing pleasure develops this capacity, taking pleasure contributes to well-being.
  - Illustrate with the Would-Be Retiree example.
- This response is unsuccessful because no plausible conception of perfectionism includes the development of this capacity as a non-instrumental component of well-being.
  - The capacity to experience pain is a human capacity in an exactly analogous way, so if development of the former is a non-instrumental component of well-being, so is the latter. But this is absurd.
- A more successful response notes that it is part of human nature to pursue pleasure and avoid pain.
  - Under a suitable conception of perfectionism, given that the exercise of this capacity develops it, pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain is a non-instrumental component of well-being.
  - Illustrate with the Would-Be Retiree example.
- One response to the allegation that perfectionism fails to attach adequate weight to desire satisfaction notes that humans are rational agents and desires supply reasons, so the exercise of rational agency for desire satisfaction develops rational agency and non-instrumentally contributes to well-being.