Welfare and Well-Being

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Choices, Models and Morals » Lecture 8

Contents

Consequentialism

Evaluating Acts

› Suppose we are trying to answer the basic ethical question: **what ought I to do?**
› That would involve **evaluating** the possible acts open to us, and moreover, evaluating them **morally**.
  » One view might say: do whichever of them a good person would do. ('Virtue ethics')
  » Another might say: do whichever of them God tells us to do. ('Divine command theory')
› **Consequentialism** says: the moral status of the possible acts open to you (obligatory, permissible, forbidden) supervenes entirely on its consequences.
› X **supervenes** on Y just in case there can be no difference in facts about X without some difference in facts about Y.
› So consequentialists say: there can no difference in the moral status of an act without some difference in consequences.

Kinds of Consequentialism

› Many versions of consequentialism exist. Here is one taxonomy (Hooker 2010).

Direct/Indirect? Is an act obligatory because of its consequences, or because of the consequences of something else related to it – e.g., the good consequences of a **rule** that demands the act?

Maximising? Is an act permissible because it has the **best** consequences among acts open to you, or can it be permissible to perform an act which has 'good enough' consequences?

Actual/expected? Is an act permissible because of the consequences it **will** in fact have – e.g., 'the criterion of the rightness of an act or course of action is whether it *in fact* would most promote the good' (Railton 1988: 113) – or the consequences a reasonable agent **expects** it to have?

Consequences and Values

› A **consequence** will be an **outcome** (in basically the sense of Lecture 2): an entire state of the world that could result from the performance of an action (including the action itself).

› A main division point for consequentialists is over what **grounds** the value assigned to a consequence (Hooker 2010: 445–48).

» The debate over what is good 'in itself', what has **intrinsic value** (Hausman, McPherson, and Satz 2017: 109).

> On virtually every form of consequentialism yet advocated, at least a large part of what makes consequences better or worse is how much welfare, or net benefit, they contain. But what constitutes net benefit? (Hooker 2010: 446)

› Most consequentialisms take it that in any outcome there are some **moral subjects**, and it is the net benefit accruing to these moral subjects that matters for the goodness or badness of the outcome.

› It is not mere consequences that matter: **some entities matter**, and how things go for them in an outcome collectively determines whether the outcome is good or not.

Whose Welfare?

› Anything such that there is a possibility of things going better or worse **for that thing** is a potential bearer or welfare.

  » Obviously people's lives can go better or worse, and every consequentialist thinks that how things go for people in an outcome is an important part of the consequences of any act leading to that outcome.

  » Animal lives too might matter (Bykvist 2010: 17).

  » Maybe other things too: the environment might go well or badly, and it may be that (despite not being sentient) ecosystems have well-being after a fashion. (Or it might be that environmental consequences are themselves a kind of non-welfarist intrinsic value.)

› One interesting question: what about moral subjects who will come to be (or fail to be) as a result of an act? Should they count – or only welfare-havers who already exist?

Agent-Relative or Agent-Neutral? Egalitarian or Elitist?

› Is the goodness of an outcome to be specified in **agent-relative** terms, or **agent-neutral** terms?

» Is an outcome good in my evaluation because of its consequences for me and mine, or can be the good be represented in a way that makes no reference to the evaluator?

› Relatedly, does every potential moral subject in an outcome count **equally**, or do some count more than others?

» This is a distinct issue than agent-relativity – e.g., maybe the well-being of children counts more than that of adults, without thinking that my children count more than other people's.

» Or, if animal lives contribute to welfare in an outcome, maybe they still count less even though their suffering is no less.

Aggregating Welfare

› Extant consequentialisms regard welfare as important. Many also accept

  Welfarism '*only* the consequences on well-being matter for moral evaluation' (Reiss 2013: 214)

› How does welfare determine the value in an outcome? There are lots of ways to **aggregate** welfare. Two of the simplest:

  Sum-ranking 'One outcome is better than another if and only if it contains a greater total sum of well-being.' (Bykvist 2010: 17)

  Average-ranking 'One outcome is better than another if and only if it contains a greater average [i.e., mean] of individual well-being.' (Bykvist 2010: 65)

› These are agent-neutral, impartial, and indifferent to **distribution**: it is the amount of welfare, not who or what bears it, or how equally it is spread, that matters.

  » They diverge when the size of the population depends on the act: an act that increases total welfare (e.g., an intervention that greatly reduces infant mortality) might decrease total welfare if other resources don't increase to fit the larger population (Hausman, McPherson, and Satz 2017: 112).

Interpersonal Comparisons

› Any welfarist aggregative consequentialism requires some means of **comparing** individual well-being across possible outcomes (Hausman, McPherson, and Satz 2017: 114).

» We cannot compare whether situation 1, in which A has $10 extra and B does not, is better than situation 2, in which it is B who has the extra $10, unless we can tell whether it is better for A or B to have an extra $10.

› We often do make such comparisons, without much difficulty (Hausman, McPherson, and Satz 2017: 115). Yet there are **theoretical** challenges to this practice, more pressing on some conceptions of welfare than others.

› Whether **arbitrary comparisons** are possible – i.e., we can assign every moral subject a precise 'welfare score' in every possibility – may not matter.

» It may be enough that we can make rough and ready comparisons between some outcomes. If act A leads to consequence C_A, then say A is **definitely impermissible** if there is a possible act which leads to an outcome which is comparable and better.

» If we say an act is **allowed** iff it is not definitely impermissible, we may get useful (action-guiding) evaluations even with many 'gaps' in our ranking of consequences (Bykvist 2010: 74–75).

Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism Defined

› Given the above framework, **utilitarianism** is that version of consequentialism on which:

Direct	Acts are right and wrong in virtue of their consequences.
Welfarism	Welfare is all that matters.
Sum-ranking	An outcome is best among some outcomes iff its sum total well-being is highest.
Maximising	An outcome is acceptable iff it is best among the possible outcomes.
Actual	An act is permissible iff its actual outcome is acceptable.

> An action ought to be done if and only if its outcome contains a sum total of … well-being that is greater than that which is contained in the outcome of any alternative action. (Bykvist 2010: 18)

Why Be Utilitarian?

› Utilitarianism is a **simple and clear** theory (especially for an ethical theory); it tells us the one thing that matters, and how it matters (Bykvist 2010: 22).
› It applies to any action, in any circumstance, and gives **universal** guidance (at least, given that all outcomes can be ranked).
› And utilitarianism has some **intuitive** appeal:
    » It often does seem that making people's lives better is fundamental to moral conduct; and
    » Impartiality is generally seen as a moral virtue (to be contrasted with nepotistic partiality). A theory that takes everyone into account equally, so that everyone's gain or loss from an action is significant, is one that resists privilege.

Utilitarianism and Rights

› Utilitarianism is not **absolutist**, 'in the sense of supporting inflexible formulas for conduct' (Hausman, McPherson, and Satz 2017: 116). This may be seen as a virtue or vice in the theory.

› Some people like the fact that utilitarians regard 'equal amounts of happiness [as] equally desirable, whether felt by the same or by different persons' (Mill 1861: §§5.36, fn. 2), as reflecting again impartiality and equal concern for all moral subjects.

› But others note that utilitarian equality of concern is mirrored by a fundamental lack of **respect** for individuals **as individuals**, rather than as merely part of the population of well-being bearers:

> The complaint is rather that the utilitarian cares about individual well-being only because he cares about well-being for its own sake and not because he cares about people for their own sake. (Bykvist 2010: 63)

› The way everyone is treated equally is that no one has any **inalienable right** to any particular kind of treatment or response (Reiss 2013: 258–59).

» Consequentialism in general won't satisfy this desideratum, since we can construct situations where respect for rights requires us to choose a bad outcome (Hausman, McPherson, and Satz 2017: 121).

Flexibility and Trade-Offs

› The flexibility in utilitarianism derives from its allowing **unrestricted** trade-offs (Bykvist 2010: 61): an act that causes a loss of arbitrarily great significance to some people can always be offset by making sufficiently many other people very slightly better off.

  » This can be counterintuitive and pressing, e.g., in healthcare settings – could we really be morally required to close ICU beds if their funding could improve overall well-being by being used to cure ingrown toenails (Hausman, McPherson, and Satz 2017: 122)?

› Not only can we trade-off harms and benefits within an existing population. Utilitarianism seems to permit us to harm **everyone** as long as total well-being is increased. E.g., 7 billion people living lives of high welfare might be outweighed by 70 billion people living miserable lives.

  » Parfit calls this 'the repugnant conclusion' (Parfit 1984: pts 2, ch. 17).

› Average utilitarianism avoids the repugnant conclusion.

  » On the other hand, can it be impermissible to make a new person with high well-being just because it unnoticeably decreases the well-being of existing people (who still have high well-being)?

Average Utilitarianism and Preference for Who To Be

› Consideration of rational choice, Harsanyi has argued, also provide an argument for average utilitarianism (Harsanyi 1953).

› Suppose you – a consequentialist – are asked to evaluate the **overall goodness** of an outcome for all moral subjects. *How would you go about doing it?*

› Consider that you might be biased: 'If somebody prefers an income distribution more favorable to the poor for the sole reason that he is poor himself, this can hardly be considered as a genuine value judgment on social welfare' (Harsanyi 1953: 434).

› So you need to evaluate outcomes **impartially**, from behind a 'veil of ignorance': if you had equal probability of occupying any role in the population, how would you regard that population?

› You then face a **choice under risk**,and you should regard the value of any outcome as the equi-probability weighted well-being of each role, i.e., the expected welfare coming to occupy a role if that outcome were actualised.

› Obviously the ranking of outcomes by expected welfare is the same as the ranking by average welfare, given the equi-probability assumption (Harsanyi 1955: 316).

Distributions and Utilitarianism

› Utilitarians are not indifferent to the distribution of **wealth**, because improvements in wealth make less contribution to improved well-being if they go to the already wealthy (Hausman, McPherson, and Satz 2017: 114).
› But utilitarians do not care about the **distribution of well-being**, only the total/average amount, as in table 1.

Table 1: Some well-being distributions

Individual	Current well-being	Outcome A	Outcome B
Alice	10	29	10
Bob	6	1	10
Cathy	2	1	10

› The utilitarian seems to have to say that, given the choice, we **must** secure outcome A, and avoid outcome B, if they are both open to us (Reiss 2013: 259). And this seems counterintuitive.
› We'll return to issues about distributive justice in lecture 11.

Making Utilitarian Decisions

› Utilitarianism ranks acts by their actual outcomes. How can we make **utilitarian decisions**, which are obviously in advance of such outcomes?

› One idea: you should choose to perform only those acts you ought to perform, so that the criterion for rightness of **actions** and **choices** align.

  » Problem: recall Jackson's drug case, where the doctor has a morally risky decision to make about which drug to prescribe (Jackson 1991: 462–63). The only right action is to prescribe whichever of B or C is in fact the complete cure. But, intuitively, neither would be the right decision.

› The other idea: you should choose those acts which you **subjectively expect** you ought to perform, so that the criterion for rightness of **actions** is **distinct from** the criterion for **choices**.

› Your choice should involve 'maximization of expected moral utility' (Jackson 1991: 464) – in the drug case, prescribing the partial cure leads to better expected consequences though it is guaranteed not to lead to the best consequence.

› Luckily, in many cases aiming to maximise expected welfare also leads to **maximising welfare**.

Utilitarian policy analysis

› **Utilitarianism** permits any potential action to be evaluated in terms of its potential global impact on utility.
  » Simply add up the gains and losses of utility, and enact the policy that has the best balance of gains over losses.
› As a tool for policy analysis, therefore, it is extremely powerful, since for any intervention, it can evaluate whether it improves on the *status quo*, and whether it improves more on the *status quo* than alternative interventions.
› It needs significant inputs – in particular, it needs some measure of wellbeing that allows for **interpersonal comparisons**.
  » Because an evaluation of a consequence involves, for the utilitarian, aggregation of individual impacts on wellbeing into a global wellbeing measure.

> what does it mean to compare the satisfaction of person A's preference of apples over bananas with the satisfaction of person B's preference of cherries over strawberries? Many economists would deny that such inter-personal comparisons can be done. (Reiss 2013: 259)

The Role and Structure of Welfare

Welfare and Satisfaction

› There is, however, a fundamental gap at the heart of utilitarianism so conceived: ***What is welfare or well-being?***

› Moral philosophy generally concerns better and worseness of **situations**.

› Welfare or well-being concerns what is better and worse **for a person in a situation**.

  » We only get a moral philosophy directly from a theory of welfare if we – like the classic utilitarians – accept **Welfarism**, that overall welfare supervenes on individual welfare.

› Hence, the question of the nature of welfare is an outstanding issue for utilitarianism.

› But in fact the issue is wider than that: for any moral theory provides some conception of what it is to live a good life, and what kind of life moral behaviour **promotes for others**:

> even nonutilitarian views… recognise the importance of benevolence, which requires some view about what makes people better off. (Hausman, McPherson, and Satz 2017: 126)

Moral Philosophy and Welfare

› **Any** moral theory will provide some sort of role for welfare, utilitarian or otherwise:

> The definition of human welfare as the satisfactory condition or conditions of being human is as neutral a definition as I can think of. What counts as satisfactory will depend upon what we see as the condition of being human. (Dowding 2009: 514-15)

› Different theories of the 'human condition' will give different accounts of the notion of a satisfactory life for a human being.

› One might simply measure the **quantity** of life: the longer the better!

› Since 'most people might consider that there is more to life than simply living' (Dowding 2009: 514), this is probably not sufficient to characterise a satisfactory life, though surely we think a life 'cut short' is in that respect unsatisfactory.

A Taxonomy of Theories of Welfare

› There are lots of ways of classifying theories of welfare. One major divide is between what Hausman *et al*. call 'formal or substantive' (2017: 127)theories, or what Dowding calls 'experiential and choice-based' (2009: 515) accounts.

Formal/choice-based Welfare for an individual involves the **satisfaction of preferences** that individual would make for themselves: 'welfare consists in getting what one wants' (Heathwood 2010: 650).

Substantive/Experiential Some particular thing or things are involved in a satisfactory life, **regardless of individual preference**: e.g., pleasure, or happiness, or satisfaction, or freedom, or proper functioning.
Since most of these – pleasure, happiness, satisfaction, even freedom – are features of **lived experience**, many substantive views are experiential.

Objective List/Proper Functioning Theories (Reiss 2013: 222–25)

› One approach is to **list** the features which **make a life worthwhile**.
› These wouldn't necessarily be pleasures – we can **enjoy** things which aren't (objectively) **good for us**.
  » A life of indulgence may be enjoyable, but what is the **point**?
› The exact contents of this **objective list** (Parfit 1984: 4) are disputed, but it might include: 'happiness, knowledge, friendship, freedom, rational activity, creative activity, and being respected' (Heathwood 2010: 646).
› It's a tricky issue if items on this list need to be traded-off against one another (Reiss 2013: 224)

What Goes on the List?

› Such lists may be motivated by a distinctively **Aristotelian** approach to what makes human life worthwhile.

» Aristotle thinks all kinds have something which counts as excellence for that kind; a good existence for that kind is one which exhibits such excellence.

» So for us, members of the kind *human being*, a good life is one that exhibits those features which **contribute to successful human flourishing** (Nussbaum 2000: 78–80).

» The extreme Aristotelian view, **perfectionism** (Heathwood 2010: 647), puts a life of contemplation at the heart of what is distinctive of human existence, and thus links well-being to opportunities for intellectual activity.

› This philosophical approach

> faces an obvious legitimacy problem: how can we make plausible to any-one, including members of cultures that subscribe to very different sets of values, that the reflecting philosopher knows more about their well-being than they do themselves? (Reiss 2013: 225)

Preference and the Role of Well-being

› Objective list theories are quite good at accounting for the moral requirement of **beneficence**: we often think that there are things which will benefit someone that they aren't aware of.

» This makes them **paternalistic**, an aspect some find unattractive (Hausman, McPherson, and Satz 2017: 129–30).

› But well-being is also linked with other morally significant notions:

> The promotion of our own welfare is what *rational self-interest* demands…. When we want to *reward* or *punish* a person, it is his welfare that we ultimately want to affect. (Heathwood 2010: 646)

› It is harder for objective list theories to play these roles, since they are **heedless** of individual preference. They predict you can **punish** someone by withdrawing from them something they never cared about, or **reward** someone by forcing them to do something they have no interest in doing.

› In general, 'something can contribute to a person's well-being only if it bears some connection to what the person cares about' (Heathwood 2010: 648).

The Coincidence of Preference Satisfaction and Welfare

› If we are to explain the relationship between what people care about and what promotes their well-being, we will need to postulate a 'coincidence of preference satisfaction and welfare' (Hausman, McPherson, and Satz 2017: 128).

  » This is to say, **people's lives go well iff they get what they actually want** (at least when they are rational and fully informed).

› Obviously formal/choice theories can explain this, because they think welfare **just is** preference satisfaction (Reiss 2013: 215–20).

  » This is **preferentism** (Heathwood 2010: 650), or the **constitutive view** (Hausman, McPherson, and Satz 2017: 128): that Jill's informed rational preference for x over y **makes it the case** that x is better for her than y.

Evaluating Preferentism

Clarifying Preferentism

› Preferentism should be distinguished from two others views of welfare which involve preference:

Satisfactionism Well-being 'consists in the feelings of satisfaction one has when one gets what one wants' (Heathwood 2010: 650).

Rational Preferentism Well-being for people consists in the satisfaction of 'what it is rational for them to prefer' (Hausman, McPherson, and Satz 2017: 131)

› Neither of these views makes preference satisfaction **constitutive** of well-being.

  » On Satisfactionism, people in fact aim at pleasure (Hausman, McPherson, and Satz 2017: 133), and it is a quirk of psychology that they get pleasure iff they have a desire that is met.

  » On rational preferentism, there may not even be the coincidence between actual preference satisfaction and well-being – it is more like an objective list theory, where one ought to have preferences for the things on the list.

Motivating Preferentism

› Preferentism is an attractive theory of well-being, even setting aside the explanation it offers of the coincidence of preference and well-being.

1. 'Preferentism has also been attractive to empirically minded theorists of welfare, such as economists, who seek a theory that makes welfare amenable to measurement. The thought is that one's preferences ... are **observable** relatively directly, through one's choices.' (Heathwood 2010: 651)
2. Preferentism 'can be deployed without taking sides in the different substantive ends that people pursue' (Hausman, McPherson, and Satz 2017: 131)– it is **non-paternalistic**.
3. It may explains the value of other qualities of life as **instrumentally good** for well-being. E.g.,

» **Freedom** is good because when people are free to pursue their own choices, they satisfy more of their preferences and hence tend to increase their well-being;
» **Pleasure** is good because when people satisfy their preferences they typically enjoy it.

› But it faces significant difficulties.

Problems for Preferentism: Self-Interest

› We have **distant preferences**:

> we have desires for things so remote from our lives that it seems implausible to hold that having them satisfied makes any difference to how well our lives go. (Heathwood 2010: 651)

› So we might try to restrict preferentism to say that well-being is constituted by **self-interested** preference satisfaction.

› But this may now be **circular**: for a self-interested preference is presumably those among the agent's preferences that are good for their well-being, rather than good in general.

  » The view then turns out **trivial**: X's well-being involves the satisfaction of preferences that contribute to X's well-being (Hausman, McPherson, and Satz 2017: 132).

› Can we find another account of self-interest that doesn't involve circular appeal to well-being?

Problems for Preferentism: Discriminating Among Preferences

› If having preferences satisfied is having well-being, then we ought not to **discriminate** among preferences.

» Well-being is well-being, there aren't better and worse types of it. (Better and worse is for things which are more or less effective at producing well-being.)

› But we do rightly discriminate when we act to **benefit others**. The objective list theory is right in thinking that beneficence does not require us to indulge every preference.

> even if members of a destitute religious group prefer subsidies to build religious monuments over receiving food and shelter, their beneficent fellow human beings … might acknowledge a moral obligation only to provide food and shelter. … What we owe to others is understood in terms of objective factors such as relieving hunger or homelessness, not in terms of the subjective preferences that agents happen to have. (Hausman, McPherson, and Satz 2017: 135)

Problems for Preferentism: Bad Preferences

› Beneficence also doesn't seem to require us to satisfy **expensive tastes** or **immoral preferences** (Hausman, McPherson, and Satz 2017: 136–37).

› If you become unemployed from your investment bank, should the welfare system subsidise your previous caviar-and-champagne level of consumption?

› **No** – and not merely because of **fairness** considerations, but because (intuitively) your level of well-being isn't harmed by the switch to potatoes-and-beer, even if you prefer to eat fancier food.

› Similarly for **anti-social preferences**: there is no requirement that beneficence requires us to subsidise the satisfaction of preferences we disagree with.

  » Nor does having our base desires satisfied seem to make us better off (Heathwood 2010: 652).

› Perhaps these can be responded to by saying that other moral values are **trumping** beneficence here – fairness and morality overwhelm what beneficence in fact requires.

  » But how could concern for the general welfare ever give us even a tiny or overwhelmed reason to support racist outcomes?

Problems for Preferentism: Preference Formation

› The constitutive view doesn't care about the **origins** of preferences.

› Often our preferences are formed in light of our actual constraints: we come to prefer that which we can achieve. These **adaptive preferences** might not be what's best for us, but reflect only what is realistic (Hausman, McPherson, and Satz 2017: 138).

» Oppressed peoples may embrace the circumstances to which they are confined, to avoid the psychological harms of always wanting what they can't have (Khader 2011).

› Still, **freeing people from oppression** improves their well-being, even if they have come to prefer it.

› Also consider preferences based on false beliefs: > Suppose I have a desire to drink the stuff in the glass before me. I believe it to be water, but in fact it is sulfuric acid. Surely satisfying this desire would not be good for me.' (Heathwood 2010: 652)

» If we insist that preference must be based on true beliefs to be **respected**, then we again split actual preference satisfaction and well-being – my actual preferences are based on my actual beliefs, which are unlikely to be all true.

A Fundamental Problem: Want and Good

› The fundamental problem seems to be this: **why should the mere fact that someone wants something make it good?**
› This point can be made first-personally and third-personally.
    1. Suppose I want to go to Shangri-La, and it is a matter of indifference to me whether I take the mountain road or the canyon road – both are scenic, equally arduous, equally long. They are **merely different**. Suppose, on a whim, I choose the mountain road. I thereby reveal my preference; but as my preference is **ungrounded** in any feature of the acts, it is hard to believe this reveals that taking the mountain road improves my well-being (Hausman, McPherson, and Satz 2017: 132).
    2. Suppose you want something. The mere fact that you want it, stripped of whether it is worth wanting, that getting it will make a further difference to your life, is morally **irrelevant** to me (Hausman, McPherson, and Satz 2017: 136). I have no moral reason to try to satisfy mere preferences, even if beneficence gives me a moral reason to promote well-being.
› Let's turn, then, to substantive theories.

Substantive Theories: Experiential Views of Well-being

Substantive Theories and Evidence

› Substantive theories **can explain** the coincidence of preference and well-being too; if they make some more or less plausible suppositions:

   1. The thing which is substantively good for people is **evidentially accessible to them**.
   2. It is **rationally obvious** that the substantively good thing **is** good for them.
   3. People are generally rational and knowledgeable about their own circumstances.
   4. People are able to rationally **regulate** their preferences.
   5. People are generally self-interested.

› Some who meets conditions 1–3 is a **competent evaluator** of their own well-being.

› Someone who meets conditions 4 and 5 additionally has preferences which **foster** their well-being.

› So if someone meets these conditions 1–5, their preferences are thus **evidence for** what promotes their well-being.

   » Even if all we know is someone meets conditions 1, 2 and 4, their preferences remain **defeasible** evidence for their well-being.

Requirements on a Substantive Theory

› Conditions 3–5 are conditions on **people**:
  » That they are generally rational (a supposition we've been making throughout);
  » That their preferences are up to them (so they can respond to their knowledge of what is good);
  » That they are self-interested (so that their preferences indicate their own well-being, not other people's well-being).

› Conditions 1 and 2 are conditions on **well-being**. A good theory of well-being had better meet them, if it is going to explain why preference satisfaction does line up with well-being (to the extent it does).
  » One problem with objective list theories, then, is that it is not known to everyone what is good for them, and generally not known to subjects when they are in a good state – hence their preferences won't generally line up with well-being.

Experiential Accounts of Well-being

› One natural way to satisfy the first requirement is an **experiential** theory of well-being.
› If what is good for you is a certain kind of experience, then typically you will know – by experience! – when you are having it, and when you aren't.
  » Hence it is something you **can** care about, because you can track its presence or absence.
› Since you can tell whether or not you are having the right kind of experience, then as long as it is also obvious to you that it is a **good experience**, you can reasonably form preferences for having more of it.
  » It is something you **will** care about, because it is obvious to you that it is good to have that sort of experience.
› Such experiences will be **intrinsically desirable** for rational persons, and hence a natural candidate to be intrinsically valuable for those persons, i.e., to be welfare-conducive for persons.

Candidates

› The main candidates, historically, are **pleasure** and **happiness** (Reiss 2013: 220–22):

Hedonism 'The only thing that is fundamentally intrinsically good for us is our own pleasure [i.e., pleasurable experiences] and the only thing intrinsically bad for us is our own pain' (Heathwood 2010: 648)

Eudaimonism The only thing that is fundamentally intrinsically good for us is our own happiness and the only thing intrinsically bad for us is our own unhappiness.

› These views are doubtless very similar. Indeed, if pleasure is happiness, they are the same.

› But some have thought happiness is to be understood non-hedonically: e.g., the view that 'to be happy is to be satisfied with one's life as whole' (Heathwood 2010: 649).

› Nevertheless, their similarity means they have many of the same strengths and weaknesses.

Hedonism

› **Pleasure**, for the welfare hedonist, isn't the kind of debauchery and bodily gratification that hedonism is commonly associated with.
› It is rather whatever something like **present immediate enjoyment**.
› It can be generated by partying, no doubt, but also by more refined pleasures: Beyoncé and Bach.
› It is intrinsically good, and **more of it is always better**.
› Pain is intrinsically bad, and more of it is always worse.
› The total well-being of an individual is determined by the **balance of pleasure over pain** (i.e., not by the total pleasure – a life that alternates significant amounts of pleasure with even more significant pain might have a lot of pleasure but be worse than a life of less intense pleasure with no pain).
› This is an attractively **unified** theory: anything goods for us is so because they make our lives more pleasant.
  » The items on standard objective lists are there because they, typically, do make life more pleasant.

Problems for Hedonism: Base Pleasures

› Some problems we have already encountered **recur** for hedonism.

› Just as some preferences ought to be discounted, it seems that **some pleasures ought to be discounted** too.

  » If someone takes pleasure from immoral or sadistic experiences, or takes pleasure from their expensive tastes, we have no duty of beneficence to foster such experiences.

› The hedonist can reply that these 'bad pleasures' are still good for the person having them, even though they may not integrate well with overall social well-being.

› This seems to require a view on which morality permits trade-offs, like **utilitarianism** – since that would permit us to trade-off the well-being of the sadist against the well-being of his victims. (And indeed many classical utilitarians do accept broadly experiential accounts of welfare.)

Problems for Hedonism: Pure Experience

› In arguing that well-being consists in encouraging a certain kind of epistemically accessible experience, hedonism discounts the **source** of that experience:

> Those who maintain that well-being consists in mental states are committed to the view that two individuals who are in the same mental state are equally well-off, even if their objective circumstances differ. (Hausman, McPherson, and Satz 2017: 140)

› Obviously mental states should be **part** of well-being: if A and B are two individuals in the same circumstances, and A is severely depressed and takes no pleasure from those circumstances, then B is better off than A.

› But if **only** experience matters, then it doesn't matter what prompts it. This gives rise to two sub-problems: the problem of swinish pleasure, and the problem of the experience machine.

Swinish Pleasures (Mill 1861: §§2.4–2.5)

Haydn and the Oyster You are a soul in heaven waiting to be allocated a life on Earth. … the angel in charge offers you a choice between two lives, that of the composer Joseph Haydn and that of an oyster. Besides composing some wonderful music and influencing the evolution of the symphony, Haydn will meet with success and honour in his own lifetime, be cheerful and popular, travel and gain much enjoyment from field sports. The oyster's life is far less exciting … its life will consist only of mild sensual pleasure, rather like that experienced by humans when floating very drunk in a warm bath. When you request the life of Haydn, the angel sighs, 'I'll never get rid of this oyster life. It's been hanging around for ages. Look, I'll offer you a special deal. Haydn will die at the age of seventy-seven. But I'll make the oyster life as long as you like'.

If all that matters to my well-being is enjoyable experience, must there not come a point at which the value of the oyster life outweighs that of the life of Haydn? And if so, is that not a strong objection to the reductionist view that only enjoyment matters? (CRISP 2006: 630–31)

The Experience Machine

The Experience Machine Suppose there were an experience machine that would give you any experience you desired. Superduper neuropsychologists could stimulate your brain so that you would think and feel you were writing a great novel, or making a friend, or reading an interesting book. All the time you would be floating in a tank, with electrodes attached to your brain.... Would you plug in? What else can matter to us, other than how our lives feel from the inside? (Nozick 1974: 42–43)

› A life that merely **seems** to go well isn't **really** going well.
› We could respond with **experiential externalism**: that what your experience is depends on your actual external circumstances. But:
  1. Pleasurable experience is still actually present in the machine; and
  2. Even if not, externalism makes the state of pleasure epistemically **inaccessible**, which blocks the hedonist explanation of the coincidence of well-being and preference.

Measurability

› A final objection to hedonism concerns the difficulties of **measuring** well-being if it consists in mental states alone.

› How do you **calibrate** the measurement instruments?

› There has been some progress on this in the **psychology of happiness** (Feldman 2010), but even there self-report is the primary means of proceeding, and this can clearly be fraught.

» For one thing, facts about their own happiness may not be accessible to people – again, a significant problem for hedonism which requires well-being to be known.

› But worse, how do we **compare across individuals** – remembering that this is of primary importance in understanding how we are to **aggregate** welfare.

» Our interest in welfare was prompted by an interest in welfarist utilitarianism, remember, which needs interpersonal comparisons.

Back to Objective Lists?

› Note that objective list theories of welfare do well in accommodating the idea that well-being should be **intersubjectively calibrated**, by going beyond experience to be **grounded** in objective conditions.

» Many of the objections to preferentism and hedonism are avoided by objective theories, which give accounts of the good that separates them from merely subjective wants or experiences.

› On the other hand, objective list theories are divorced from **motivation** – people may rationally have no interest in seeking to improve their well-being.

› One possible way out is to see how much work we can do with a **neutral** conception of well-being, one that links it to both preference and measurable social indicators (GDP, human development indices (Hausman, McPherson, and Satz 2017: 143)), but tries to avoid the substantive commitments of philosophical accounts of well-being.

› That **quietism** is characteristic of orthodox normative welfare economics, and we examine how it might work next time).

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