



THE PHILOSOPHY OF
WELL-BEING



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Introduction

In this course, we will investigate what it means for one's life to *go well* versus *go badly*. We will try to craft theories that give a general account of what it means to say that a life is going well versus going badly.

0.1 Good lives vs. Bad lives

We may know (or can at least imagine) individuals whose life has gone (or is going) well versus those whose life has gone (or is going) poorly.

Example. *Tek's miserable life*

Tek grew up in crippling poverty. This poverty caused him not to be able to fulfill his dreams. In addition, it caused him not to be able to acquire medication to deal with a very painful medical condition. He suffered most of his life and was angry about his suffering. He often took his anger out on others and this ultimately resulted in Tek dying, alone and in pain.

Example. *Liz's wonderful life*

Liz grew up with modest means but never had any desires/wants that she couldn't meet either through hard work or by chance. She dreamt of discovering a new dinosaur in South Dakota, a dream she ultimately fulfilled. Liz has a cheery disposition and that caused her to meet many people, some of whom become very good friends. She found love in her late 20s, after her career was started, had two children, and is happy with her partner, children, and career. She has had a few setbacks in

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life but nothing she hasn't been able to endure.

Example.

Think of two examples of people, one whose life you know is going well and another you know whose life is going poorly. Try to describe each as much as possible.

Comparing Tek to Liz, intuitively we think that Liz's *life has gone better* than Tek. In saying this, we **are not** saying:

1. that Liz is a *better person from (a productive point of view)* than Tek (she might be but that isn't what we are trying to say)
2. that Liz is a *better person (from a moral point of view)* than Tek (she might be but that isn't what we are trying to say)

Let's consider each of these in turn.

First, we are not considering how much an individual contributes to society. Yes, Liz may be more productive than Tek, but this does not entail her life is going better than his. If Liz were hyper-productive but stressed and suicidal, we might say she is extremely productive but her life is going poorly. In contrast, if Tek is lazy and mooches off of society, but is not sick, is always in a good mood, and fulfills his limited desires, we would say he is unproductive but his life is going well. *Our focus is on how well things are going for a person, not how well they live up to economic-societal standards.*

Second, in investigating what it means for a life to go well, we are **not** considering (at least directly) what it means for an individual to do *ethical good* or obey ethical rules. In investigating what it means for a life to go well, we are not concerned with which individuals are moral saints or sinners for it is possible (at least at the outset) that an individual who is evil lives a good life, and possible (at least at the outset) that an individual who is morally good has a bad life. *Our focus is on how well things are going for a person, not how well they live up to moral standards.*

Exercise.

Try to describe an individual whose is unproductive and unethical but has a good life.

0.2 Prudential value

Our investigation will be into what it means for a life to go well. In contrasting Liz and Tek, we are saying that Liz’s life has something (or more of something) that Tek’s life does not. Her life has more **prudential value**. She has more of whatever it is that makes her life go well.

Definition. *prudential value*

Prudential value refers to a property of something that is good for a person, and thus it is a property that makes one life go better than another. It is what makes a life go well or better than another.

Prudential value often goes by a number of other names:

- well-being
- welfare
- utility

Thus, all of the following are equivalent:

- “being healthy increases an individual’s well-being” is equivalent to “being healthy is prudentially valuable to an individual’s well-being”.
- “being healthy increases public welfare” is equivalent to “being healthy is prudentially valuable to the public”
- “being healthy has more utility than being unhealthy” is equivalent to “being healthy has more prudential value than being unhealthy”

0.3 What we are trying to do

In investigating what it means for a life to go well, our aim is to develop a **theory of prudential value**. We want to be able to look at a life, and use

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our theory to say if a life is going well or if it is going poorly. We want to know *what it is* that makes a life go better than another. We want to know what we have to acquire in order to make our lives better.

0.4 Why should we care?

There is a relatively simple and straightforward reason why we would want a theory of prudential value. The reason is this: if we think having a *good life* is better than having a *bad life* (prudentially speaking), it is reasonable (all other things being equal) to try to increase that which makes lives go better, but we don't have a clear sense of what exactly makes one life go better than another.

Thus, a theory of prudential value would be beneficial for:

1. yourself
2. parents of children
3. political officials
4. anyone with a dependent who cannot make decisions for themselves
5. economists

The primary obstacle to constructing a theory, however, is that **we do not know** what makes one life go better than another.

Exercise.

For each of the five individuals, try to imagine how their lives might be going very poorly:

1. Tek, super rich
2. Liz, tons of friends
3. Jon, super productive
4. Ana, super famous
5. Ted, super great doctor

Lecture 1

Hedonism

1.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the hedonist theory of well-being is articulated. Before articulating this theory, it is necessary to make a few distinctions.

1.2 Hedonism and the distinction between intrinsic and instrumental value

The first is between intrinsic and instrumental value. First, something is instrumentally valuable if and only if it has value for acquiring something else of value. For example, money has no real worth on its own; its value is purely instrumental insofar as it can be used to obtain other things of value.

Definition. *instrumental value*

Something is instrumentally valuable if and only if it has value for acquiring something else of value.

Second, something is intrinsically valuable if and only if it is valuable in itself. That is, a thing has intrinsic value if and only if all other things are done for the sake of that thing. For some people, friendship might be considered intrinsically valuable in that they value being friends with people

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not because of how it makes them feel or for status or for some further reason.

Definition. *intrinsic value*

Something is intrinsically valuable if and only if it is valuable in itself.

Definition. *the hedonist theory of well-being*

The hedonist theory of well-being asserts that (i) the only thing having any prudential value is pleasure while the only thing having prudential disvalue is pain and (ii) a person's well-being is entirely determined by their amount of pleasure relative to their amount of pain.

The hedonist theory thus makes at least three claims. First, it asserts only pleasure and pain are intrinsically valuable. Second, it asserts that only pleasure and pain are the only things that are relevant for determining an individual's well-being (pleasure and pain are the only things with prudential value). Third, it asserts that one's well-being is determined by the relative balance of pleasure and pain.

1.3 Arguments for hedonism

1.3.1 Best explanation for a particular correlation

Let's call one's relative balance of pleasure and pain, one's **hedonic level**.

Definition. *hedonic level*

The relative balance of one's pleasure and pain

The first argument for hedonism is that it offers the best explanation for the intuitive correlation between one's **hedonist levels** and one's **well-being**. That is, intuitively we think that

- if an individual's pleasure increases (all other things being equal), they are better-off than they were before
- if an individual's pain increases (all other things being equal), they are worse-off than they were before

- the higher one's hedonic level, the better off they are
- the lower one's hedonic level, the worse off they are

What would explain this phenomena is that an individual's well-being is *wholly determined* by pleasure relative to pain. And this is precisely what the hedonist says is happening. They are saying that you are better off than someone else because you have a higher hedonic level than they do. You have more pleasure and less pain in your life than they do.

Objection. *Correlation but not causation*

While one's hedonic level may be correlated with one's well-being, it does not follow that one's hedonic level *causes* or *determines* one's well-being. For consider that:

1. *there are completely spurious correlations:* there is a correlation between the US spending on science, space, and technology and the number of suicides by hanging, strangulation, and suffocation. This a correlation with the two variables have nothing to do with each other.^a
2. *the causal variable can be misidentified in a correlation:* there is a correlation between driving at 56mph and my speedometer reading 56mph (the two are correlated), but it would be wrong for me to assume that my speedometer reading 56mph *causes* my car to move at 56mph.
3. *there causal variable may not be a part of the correlation:* suppose there is a correlation between being of a particular race and being a criminal. This might lead some to assert that being of a particular race makes it more likely (causes you) to commit crimes. But this would be mistaken since it is another set of variables (perhaps relating to education, location, poverty, etc.) that is responsible for a group committing crimes.

Applying the above to the correlation argument for hedonism, it may be the case that (i) pleasure/pain and well-being have nothing to do with each other, (ii) the two are correlated but being better-off causes one to have high levels of pleasure or (iii) some third factor determines both high-levels of pleasure and being better off.

^aFor a number of amusing spurious correlations, see Spurious Correlations

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1.3.2 Best explanation for the overlap between welfare subjects and pleasure/pain beings

Let's consider another argument. Consider that the types of beings that can have well-being (e.g. people, animals, etc.) are also the same types of beings that can experience pleasure/pain. The hedonist might argue that this should count as evidence for the hedonist theory being true.

Objection. *one property among many*

The evidence is too weak. Consider that the types of beings that can have well-being (e.g. people, animals, etc.) are also the same types of beings that can form social bonds. Using the same type of reasoning invoked by the hedonist, one could argue that the social bonds determine well-being.

1.3.3 Best explanation for motivation

Another argument for hedonism is based on the idea that people are egoistic (self-interested) in nature and that the only thing that can **motivate** an individual to act is pleasure. In short:

- P1: Human beings aim to maximize their personal self-interest
- P2: An individual is only motivated to act by that which will bring them pleasure or remove pain.
- C: Therefore, hedonism is true.

In support **P1**, individuals often seem to be preoccupied with activities that will advance their interests. People vote for politicians that reflect their political interests. People aim to advance their status in the workplace. And, very often, people are reluctant to help others unless there is “something in it for them”.

With respect to **P2**, it often seems true that people are motivated to increase their own personal pleasure and decrease their own pain. If I poke you in the arm with a needle, you will be motivated to remove it. And, more generally, people often seek to remove or fix things that cause them distress, whether it be conflicts in the workplace, arguments with friends/families, psychological issues.

Objection. *The argument isn't valid*

It is possible for the premises to be true and the conclusion false and so the conclusion doesn't logically follow from the premises. We can imagine that individuals do aim to maximize their self-interest and they are solely motivated by that which brings them pleasure and pain, **but** hedonism is false (something other than pleasure would make the life go better).

For example, suppose that it is in my self-interest to brush my teeth (P1) but I'm not motivated not to do it since I find it boring (painful) (P2), but I'm forced to do it by my parents. Arguably I would be better off even though my hedonic level decreased.

Objection. *P1 is false*

Individuals often engage in pure acts of charity, viz., they undertake activities that do not benefit them at all.

Objection. *P2 is false*

Individuals are often motivated to act in ways that do not take into account whether it will increase their pleasure or decrease their pain.

Exercise.

Consider the objections to P1 and P2. In a group, write down three original examples that help to illustrate these objections.

1.3.4 Most compatible with the experience requirement

Another argument for hedonism is that it is compatible with the **experience requirement** on any theory of well-being. That is, it might be argued that any theory of well-being / prudential value ought not to conflict with certain requirements or conditions, one of which being the experience requirement.

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Definition. *Experience requirement on well-being*

The requirement that any increase or decrease in an individual's well-being must be correlated with a change in their experience.

The implication of this requirement is that *you can't be better-off or worse-off without some experience that contributes to this change in well-being.* For example, Tek cannot be well-off one day and worse-off the next without at least some change in how he feels.

The argument then from hedonism is the following:

- P1: Any theory of well-being must meet the experience requirement
- P2: The hedonist theory meets the experience requirement because to have an increase/decrease in pleasure and/or pain is to have a certain type of experience.
- C: Therefore, the hedonist theory is true.

Objection. *Invalid*

The conclusion does not logically follow from the premises. Simply meeting one of the requirements is not sufficient for it is possible that *other theories may meet the experience requirement.* For example, Fletcher (p.14) points out that perhaps having a feeling of *self-respect* meets the experience requirement and may be a contributing factor to one's well-being. Thus, what is needed is the premise that "no other theory of well-being can meet the experience requirement" but this is not clearly proven.

Objection. *the experience requirement is false*

We can imagine situations where an individual may be better or worse off without knowing or experiencing that they are better or worse off.

Tek may not pay attention to his salary and his employer may be skimming portions of Tek's check. Tek may not feel better or worse because of this but we would regard Tek as being worse off before the employer began stealing from Tek.

1.4 Arguments against hedonism

In the previous sections, objections to specific arguments in support of hedonism were considered. These objections aimed to show that the arguments put forward in support of hedonism are not convincing. In this section, objections to hedonism are considered. These objections aim to show that hedonism as a theory of well-being is false.

1.4.1 The experience machine argument

One objection to hedonism involves considering a thought experiment. That is, it involves considering a hypothetical example to test the consequences of hedonism. Let's consider this thought experiment and then consider the argument against hedonism:

Suppose there were an experience machine that would give you any experience you desired. It would maximize your pleasure and minimize your pain. Or, if you think that experiencing pain is necessary ingredient to experiencing pleasure, it would give you enough pain to maximize your pleasure. You would not actually be doing the things that cause you to feel this pleasure. Instead, you would be floating in a tank, with electrodes attached to your brain. Of course, if you find the idea of being hooked up to an experience machine distressing, the machine would cause you to forget that you were hooked up. While in the machine, you would believe you were in the real world. Others can also plug in to have the experiences that they want, so there's no need to stay unplugged to serve them. (Ignore problems such as who will service the machines if everybody plugs in.)¹

If we put the idea of the experience machine and hedonism together, there are two consequences:

1. according to hedonism, pleasure and pain are the only things that have any intrinsic value; thus, if the experience machine produced more

¹Based on Robert Nozick, "The Experience Machine," pp. 42-5 from *Anarchy, State and Utopia*. New York: Basic Books, 1974.

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pleasure than pain, it would be rational to hook up to the experience machine and irrational not to hook up.

2. according to hedonism, if the experience machine produced the same amount of pleasure as “real” life, there would be no rational reason why you should prefer “real” life over the experience machine.

Some find these consequences implausible. Namely, they contend that there is a rational reason for preferring real life over the experience machine even if the experience machine The argument can be put straightforwardly as follows:

- P1: If hedonism is true, then there would be no rational preference for “real” life over a machine that produces experiences (the experience machine).
- P2: There is a rational preference for “real” life over the experience machine.
- C: Therefore, hedonism is false.

The experience machine objection thus criticizes the hedonist idea that *only pleasure contributes to our well-being*. If pleasure was all that mattered, then we would be perfectly content with having our pleasures produced by a machine. However, so the objection goes, other things matter and this is drawn out by our preference for real experiences over those produced by a machine.

Exercise.

The experience machine objection contends that there is a rational reason for preferring real life over the experience machine (see P2). While many have the intuition that there is a rational reason, it is notoriously difficult to express this rational reason clearly. Nozick contends “First, we want to do certain things, and not just have the experience of doing them.” In addition, “we want to be a certain way, to be a certain sort of person.” Is there a rational reason to prefer real life over the experiences produced by the experience machine? If so, what is it?

How might they hedonist respond to the above argument?

Objection. *status quo bias*

A status quo bias is a bias (or preference) for the current state of affairs

(the status quo) and involves drawing the inference that any change from the status quo is negative regardless of the change's merit. Simply, it is a preference for the status quo because it is the status quo.

The hedonist might object that individuals prefer real life over the experience machine simply because it is the status quo.

Objection. *pain*

While we may intuitively prefer pleasure caused by the real world over pleasure caused by the experience machine, if there were a rational reason to prefer life outside of the experience machine, then we should prefer *real pain* over *experience-machine pain*. But this is not the case. We find pain to be equally bad no matter what its source.

Objection. *evolutionary bias*

The hedonist might argue that the only reason we would prefer the experiences found in real life over those in a machine is due to an evolutionary bias. The idea here is that there are a number of false beliefs that are the result of evolutionary processes that may be *advantageous* for survival or the propagation of the species. For example, suppose I am more inclined to believe that someone is watching me even when no one is watching me. This may be an advantageous inclination as it would make me hyper-aware of predators (even though it may routinely produce false beliefs).

The hedonist may argue that our belief that *real experiences, real friendships, living in the real world* have intrinsic value is nothing more than a false belief produced by a non-truth-tracking evolutionary process.

1.4.2 Base pleasures argument

Another argument against hedonism is that the theory asserts that **all pleasures contribute to our well-being**. But, the argument is that this is **false** since there are a number of pleasures that do not contribute at all to an individual's well-being. That is, there are a number of pleasurable experiences that do not make our lives better off at all. Fletcher (p.19) provides three such pleasures:

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1. immoral pleasures (e.g. pleasures from doing something evil)
2. base pleasures (e.g. pleasure from eating a whole tub of ice cream)
3. undignified pleasures (e.g. pleasure from sulking or being sad)

Thus, the argument against hedonism from base pleasures might be formulated as follows:

- P1: If hedonism is true, then all pleasures increase well-being
- P2: If all pleasures increase well-being, then base pleasures increase well-being.
- P3: Base pleasures do not increase well-being.
- C: Therefore, hedonism is false.

Objection. *base pleasures do increase well-being*

The hedonist can object by denying P3. Namely, the hedonist can argue that the reason we think base pleasure does not increase well-being is because we are preoccupied with any of the following:

1. the possible painful future consequences of the actions, or
2. painful side effects of having a character trait that derives base pleasure from certain types of actions

For example, the individual who derives pleasure from torture may one day be caught, and we think of the pain associated with being caught and so infer that the act of torture does not make the torturer better off. Or, the individual who derives pleasure from torture is likely mentally ill and we imagine that being mentally ill is painful.

Nevertheless, the hedonist objects that while these may factor into how better or worse off the individual is overall (their hedonic level), they do not undermine the fact that the pleasure derived from torture makes the torturer better off.

Objection. *confusion of moral value with prudential value*

The hedonist might respond that one reason people believe P3 is true is because they confuse *moral value* with *prudential value*. But the hedonist will argue that this is mistaken because things can be morally evil but have prudential value for the individual. For example, suppose

Jon was once living a happy life but now he is suffering. He needs an organ transplant or he will die. He kidnaps another individual and steals that individual's organs. His act is, no doubt, evil, but Jon is certainly better off than he was before. He will go on living another 30 years and living happily.

Thus, while an individual might argue that base pleasures do not make one better off, they may simply be judging those pleasures morally rather than whether they do, in fact, increase the well-being of the individual. That is, they are thinking about what would be *best overall to do* rather than what is *best for the individual to do*

1.4.3 Base pleasures equality argument

Another type of objection to hedonism involves comparing different types of pleasures. The argument is that hedonism is false because of its view on how different sorts of pleasures contribute to an individual's well-being. That is, it seems to imply that two equal-sized pleasures will contribute to an individual's well-being to the same extent. But this is false since other things beyond pleasure play a role in determining how a pleasure impacts a person's well-being.

More precisely:

- P1: If hedonism is true, then all pleasures of equal size have the same sized contribution to an individual's well-being.
- P2: If same-sized pleasures make a same-sized contribution to well-being, then a base-pleasure and a non-base-pleasure of the same size will contribute equally to well-being.
- P3: Base pleasures do not contribute as much as non-base pleasures of the same size.
- C: Therefore, hedonism is false.

To illustrate, suppose you could spend ten hours sitting in your room sulking or five hours learning to play music. Furthermore, suppose that the contribution each makes is the same size in terms of the pleasure it produces. According to hedonism, both of these should contribute the same amount to your well-being. They would make an equal contribution to how better-off you would be. But, the argument contends (at P3) that this is false. You

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would be better off learning to play music than sitting around moping.

Objection. *good for you vs. good overall*

The argument confuses what is good for the individual versus what is good overall, e.g. good for society.

Objection. *intrinsic vs. instrumental*

The argument confuses instrumental and intrinsic value. That is, we might suppose that learning to play music might be instrumentally valuable for other obtaining other pleasures. And so, it is more instrumentally valuable for your future well-being to learn to play music. But this does not take away from the fact that both, at the time, have the same contribution to the individual's well-being.

Objection. *qualitative hedonism*

Another objection that can be made by the hedonist is to deny that when we measure pleasure, we only measure the *quantity* of that pleasure. That is, we might contend when measuring the contribution a pleasure makes to an individual's well-being, we also need to take into account the *quality* of that pleasure.

To see this clearly, let us first distinguish between what we will call *pleasures of the intellect* and *pleasures of the flesh*. Let's say that pleasures of the intellect are pleasures that somehow depend upon our cognitive capacities or the development of those cognitive capacities, whereas the latter do not.

Second, let's assert that certain pleasures of the intellect are greater in terms of *quality* than pleasure of the flesh. That is, the former pleasures make more of a contribution to our well-being than the latter.

Finally, let's consider two arguments put forward by John Stuart Mill in support of this **qualitative form of hedonism** (namely the view that pleasure is the only thing having intrinsic value and pleasures of the intellect are of greater quality than pleasures of the flesh).

The first argument is that individuals who are acquainted with both of the pleasures would (more often than not) choose the pleasures of the

intellect over the pleasures of the flesh.

Second, Mill contends that except in cases of extreme depression human beings would never consent to be turned into a creature that was fully satisfied by the pleasures of the flesh.

“Few human creatures would consent to be changed into any of the lower animals, for a promise of the fullest allowance of a beast’s pleasures; no intelligent human being would consent to be a fool, no instructed person would be an ignoramus, no person of feeling and conscience would be selfish and base, even though they should be persuaded that the fool, the dunce, or the rascal is better satisfied with his lot than they are with theirs.”^a

Thus, the hedonist can deny P2 by saying that the quantity of pleasure is not the only thing that matters when evaluating how pleasure contributes to well-being (quality of pleasure also matters).

^aElsewhere Mill writes “It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied.” Mill saw this feature of the theory to be a part of the Epicurean theory for he writes “But there is no known Epicurean theory of life which does not assign to the pleasures of the intellect, of the feelings and imagination, and of the moral sentiments, a much higher value as pleasures than to those of mere sensation.”

Exercise.

Are pleasures of the intellect (pleasures that depend upon your higher, developed capacities) of a greater quality than pleasures of the flesh? Let’s test this claim. In a group, list a few different things that make you (or others) feel good. Next, consider Mill’s claim that assuming we are experienced with both kinds of pleasures, if we had to choose, we would always choose pleasures that depend upon our higher capacities. Turning to your list of pleasures, how do you rank them? Would you be content to live a life wholly occupied by the pleasures your ranked highest on the list in complete absence of those lower on the list rather than the reverse scenario (live a life wholly consumed by the pleasures lowest on the list in absence of those you ranked highest)?

1.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we looked at the hedonist theory of well-being. The hedonist, to put it simply, equates prudential value with one's hedonic level (one's relative balance of pleasure/pain). We saw that there were a number of arguments in favor of hedonism, e.g. the fact that hedonic level is correlated with well-being, that it applies to non-human beings capable of having well-being, that it follows from truths about the motivation of human beings, and that it meets the experience requirement. In addition, we saw that the hedonist theory faces a number of serious challenges, e.g. that it is susceptible to the experience machine objection and that it makes the implausible claim that all pleasures (regardless of their type) increase well-being.

Lecture 2

Desire-fulfilment theory

2.1 Introduction

Hedonism contends that increasing one's pleasure and minimizing one's pain is what is ultimately valuable. It thus takes no serious account of the **relation one has with one's goals, desires, or aims**. That is, suppose Tek wants to get an A on his philosophy paper. Assuming he would feel the same way about cheating and getting an A versus writing the paper and getting an A, hedonism cannot say that one option is better than the other. If both produce the same amount of pleasure, both contribute the same to how well Tek's life is going.

According to the desire-fulfillment theory, the focus on pleasure as the only good overlooks the complexity of how one's well-being is related to one's goals. The desire-fulfillment theory of prudential value asserts that **fulfilling or satisfying one's desires makes you better off**, while **not fulfilling those desires makes you worse off**.

Definition. *Desire-fulfillment theory (DFT)*

The desire-fulfillment theory contends that (i) something is intrinsically good for a subject S because it fulfills an intrinsic desire of S and (ii) something is intrinsically bad for a subject S because it interferes with (or obstructs) the fulfillment of the intrinsic desire of S.

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First, note that DFT refers to intrinsic (or non-instrumental) desires.

Definition. *intrinsic desire*

An intrinsic desire is something you desire for its own sake rather than for the sake of something else.

Suppose Tek wants a girlfriend *to give the appearance of being well-liked*. In this example, Tek has an *instrumental desire* for a girlfriend. He desires a girlfriend for the sake of something else. Now suppose that Tek wants to be well-liked and not for some additional purpose. It is one of his ultimate desires. In this example, the desire to be well-liked would be *intrinsic* for Tek. He simply wants to be well-liked and not for some further reason.

Second, note that DFT asserts that something is prudentially good for you **because** it causes you to fulfill your desires. This theory is different from hedonism which says that the only thing that is prudentially good for you is pleasure. For example, suppose that hard work helps Tek buy a home and feel safe (the feeling of safety is one of his intrinsic desires). According to DFT, hard work is a trait that makes Tek better off because it causes him to fulfill his desires. It isn't merely an instrumental good that is only good because it yields to the ultimate good of pleasure.

Note.

What is confusing to me about DFT is that it seems to assert that

- what makes a life go better is *that* (e.g. the event or thing) which fulfills one's intrinsic desires.

What I don't understand about this formulation is why it doesn't say that

- what makes a life go better is the **actual fulfillment** of one's intrinsic desires (rather than the thing that causes the fulfillment)

Perhaps they are just two ways of saying the same thing.

Third, one of the more interesting aspects of DFT is that what matters is the **actual fulfillment** of the desire rather than the **perceived fulfillment**.

That is, according to DFT, what matters is that **the world corresponds to the way that you desire it**, not whether you believe or feel that the world corresponds to the way that you desire it.

Example.

You have a child named Renna. You haven't heard from her in two months. You desire that she is safe. You also desire to know that she is safe because not knowing creates anxiety in you. You receive a phone call from her and she tells you that she is fine. You feel a sense of relief. According to DFT, you are better off now because **she is safe** and because you know she is safe. *Her being safe* fulfills your desire and therefore, according to DFT, *makes you better off*.

But there is also a couple other points worth drawing out of DFT here:

1. you are also were better off *before you knew she safe* because you (i) desired her to be safe and (ii) she was safe.
2. if she told you she was safe but she was not safe, you would not be better off even if you believed she was safe because (i) you desire her to be safe, and (ii) she is not safe.

This third point provides a real point of contrast between DFT and hedonism. For hedonism, what matters is simply how you feel and that is wholly guided by your perception of things. For DFT, your well-being is partly determined by external factors (the way the world is, how things actually are) since you often desire for the world to be a certain way rather than appear to you to be a certain way.

A fourth point is that DFT – as a general theory of well-being – leaves open various questions about the fulfillment of various desires and their relation to well-being. One such question has to do with weighting or the *intensity* of the desire-fulfillments. At first glance, we might say that the more intense the desire-fulfillment, the greater the contribution to one's well-being. If my **strongest** desire is to find love, then fulfilling this desire causes me to have a **significantly** better life. On the other hand, this might not be the case since perhaps my the fulfillment of my slight/weak desire to have a successful surgery with zero-complications has a greater overall impact on how well my life goes.

Exercise.

One significant feature of DFT is that an individual's well-being is determined by how things *actually* are rather than merely how the individual *perceives* them to be. In discussing this distinction, an example is provided. Create your own example that helps to illustrate this same point.

Exercise. *DFT as a theory*

We have gone through DFT as a theory, but haven't talked through why you should accept DFT as theory of well-being. Before we do this, take a moment to articulate DFT for yourself and come up with a few examples to help illustrate the theory (that is, use some examples to help make it clear).

2.2 Arguments for DFT

As a theory, DFT has a lot of intuitive force. One of the reasons it has so much force is because how well one's life is going seems to be partially determined by the individual. Who can say how well a life is going besides the individual themselves? If John is poor, sick, isolated, and in pain but does not desire to be well-off, healthy, or social, or alleviate his pain, it seems presumptuous to say his life is going poorly.

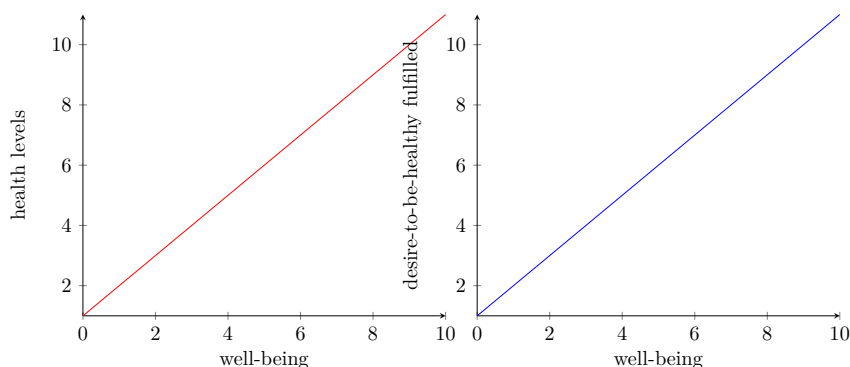
In this section, various arguments are given in support of DFT.

2.2.1 The correlation argument for DFT

The first argument given in support of DFT is that the **fulfillment of our desires** correlates with things that are **straightforwardly good for us**. Intuitively, being healthy is better than not being healthy. Individuals who are healthy are better off than those who are not. Now consider that

- there are individuals who have their desire to be healthy *fulfilled*
- there are individuals those who have their desire to be healthy *frustrated*.

According to DFT, those that have their desire to be healthy fulfilled are better off than those who have their desire to be healthy frustrated. And so, there is a correlation between the healthy individuals who are intuitively think are better off and those who have their desire to be healthy fulfilled.



2.2.2 The experience machine argument for DFT

A second argument in support of DFT is that it is **immune to the experience machine objection**.

Recall that the experience machine objection was an objection directed at hedonism. The objection was that if pleasure is the only thing that matters to an individual's well-being then this could be produced in a machine that elicits those experiences. What matters is the feeling one gets from being in a friendship rather than friendship itself. DFT, by contrast, makes the well-being of an individual depend (at least in some cases) on the status of the world. If one desires to have a friend, the fulfillment of that desire depends upon actually being in a friendship rather than *feeling that one is in a friendship*.

Example.

If Tek desires that Renna is safe, it is not sufficient for his well-being that he feels she is safe or feels happy believing she is safe. Such a feeling could be produced by an experience machine. Instead, what matters to Tek's well-being is that she really is safe.

2.2.3 The individual-dependence argument

We might imagine that what makes an individual better off will vary somewhat. That is, there is variation concerning what makes individuals better off.

Example.

Tek may be better off with 100K, married, and working in a competitive industry while Liz may be better off with 50K, single, and working in a setting where social relationships come before work life.

Let's call the condition that well-being is partly dependent upon the peculiar features of the individual the **individual-dependence requirement on well-being**.

Definition. *individual-dependence requirement on well-being*

The individual-dependence requirement on well-being is a requirement for any theory of well-being. This requirement states that every theory of well-being must take into account the fact that what makes one individual better off might not be the same thing that makes another individual better off.

One argument for DFT then is that DFT meets the individual-dependence requirement. This requirement states that any theory of well-being must build in a kind of variation depending upon features found in the person. DFT does exactly this! What improves an individual's well-being will vary based upon what it is they desire. What is prudentially good for Tek will be what fulfills his desires while what is good for Liz will be what fulfills her desires.

Exercise.

Let's consider a possible criticism of this argument. Consider hedonism and then consider whether it meets the individual-dependence requirement on well-being. If so, what sort of criticism can we make of this argument for DFT?

2.2.4 The reasons-motivation argument

Next, let's consider what we will call the **reasons-motivation argument**.

- P1: We always have some reason (whether we know it or not) to make ourselves better off.
- P2: We only have a reason to do an action A if we have a desire that is satisfied by doing A (e.g. we only have a reason to eat if we have a desire that would be satisfied by eating).
- IC: Therefore, the only things that makes us better off are those things that are satisfy our desires
- C: Therefore, DFT is true.

Let's analyze this argument. First, **P1** asserts that there always at least one reason to do something that would make us better off. This doesn't mean that we always will do what will make us better off. Rather, it only says that there is always some sort of justification or rationale for doing what would improve our lives.

P2 asserts that we only have a reason to do something if that something would satisfy one of our desires. For example, Jon only has a reason to eat a sandwich if eating that sandwich would satisfy one of his desires.

IC is an intermediate conclusion. It asserts that the only things that make our lives better are those that satisfy our desires.

Objection. *IC doesn't entail C*

IC asserts that the only things that make our lives better are those that satisfy our desires. But, DFT says this and more. It also says that something is good for us *only because* they satisfy our desires. That is, DFT says something *stronger* than IC:

- IC: the only things that makes us better off are those things that are satisfy our desires
- DFT: something is good for us *only because* they satisfy our desires

IC can be true while DFT can be false. That is, suppose X satisfies your desires and X is good for you. Thus IC is true. But DFT can be

false since the reason X is good for you is independent of you desiring it.

For example, suppose Tek desires to be healthy and being healthy would make him better off. Here we might say that the only thing that makes Tek better off is something that would satisfy his desires. But, we might say that this is because being healthy is good for Tek not because Tek desires it. *Being healthy is good for you regardless of whether you desire it!*

2.3 Arguments against DFT

We now turn to several criticisms of DFT. These criticisms draw out counter-intuitive consequences of DFT and reason that because these consequences are false, DFT is a flawed theory.

- P1: If DFT is true, then X is the case.
- P2: X is not the case.
- C: Therefore, DFT is false.

2.3.1 Scope problem: Not desiring something good for you

Suppose Jane could really benefit from a massage or a run or eating better. She does not desire these things, but intuitively they would make her better off. The massage would make her relaxed, the run decrease her blood pressure, and eating better would make her healthy.

If Jane fails to desire these things, then DFT says they don't make her better off. But, intuitively, they would make her better off. DFT thus **underdetermines** the number of cases that should count as improvements to well-being.

2.3.2 Scope problem: Better off without any change

The first argument against DFT is that DFT seems to imply that individual's are better off in cases where there is no change to their lives at all.

Example. *desire-fulfillment with no effect on well-being*

It is the end of the semester and a student wishes me well. I reciprocate and wish the student well. We both desire that the other has a happy life. After the semester we go our separate ways and never meet again, see each other again, or even think about each other again. The student lives a happy life and so my desire is fulfilled. And, I go on and live a happy life and so their desire is fulfilled.

If DFT, then the student and I are better off. But, we do not seem any better off since there is no change to our lives at all. If the student went on to have a horrible life, I would go on living in the exact same way as if they had a happy life. Therefore, DFT must be false.

Putting the above argument in the form above, we can write:

- P1: If DFT is true, then the student and I are better off because our desires are fulfilled.
- P2: Neither the student nor I are better off.
- C: Therefore, DFT is false.

So, the moral of the argument against DFT is that it makes the **scope** of desire-fulfillment larger than the scope of well-being improvement. That is, some things may fulfill our desires but not improve our well-being. In other words, DFT **overdetermines** the number of cases that should count as improvements to well-being.

2.3.3 Scope problem: Desiring something bad for you

A similar example involves, not a case where a desire-fulfillment fails to cause an change in one's well-being, but one where it is detrimental to one's well-being.

Example. *desire-fulfillment with a negative effect on well-being*

Suppose Tek is a first-time drug user. He doesn't desire to be addicted to drugs. He is simply interested to know what using recreational drugs feels like. After a few uses, Tek is hooked. His sole desire in life now is to acquire drugs to become high. According to DFT, feeling high is

2.4. OBJECTIONS TO ARGUMENTS AGAINST DFT

good for Tek because it fulfills his non-instrumental desires.

But this is counter-intuitive. Tek is not better off in continually being high even if that is his entire desire.

- P1: If DFT is true, then Tek is better off because he has fulfilled his desire to use drugs and be high.
- P2: Tek is not better off.
- C: Therefore, DFT is not-true.

This argument points to the same basic conclusion. DFT **overdetermines** the number of cases that should count as improvements to well-being.

Exercise.

Consider another example where DFT entails a case where someone's desires are fulfilled but they are not better off because of this fulfillment.

2.4 Objections to arguments against DFT

In this section, we consider two responses to the argument that DFT overdetermines the number of cases where well-being is increased. That is, we consider various attempts by a proponent of DFT to save the theory.

Objection. *P2 is false. Overlooking small increases in well-being*

P2 is false. Both the student and I are better off. We just don't really appreciate being better off because the increase in our well-being is very small. For example, suppose that unknown to me my bank fixed an error in my checking account. In fixing that error, they added one cent to my account. I am better off with the one cent than without it, but not by an amount I would notice.

One response to this objection is that while it would address cases where the desire is not very strong, it seems as though it would fail to address cases where the desire is significant. Consider the following example.

Example.

Tek hopes Renna is having a happy life. It is his strongest and deepest desire. He never hears from her again. Even though she is safe, there is no real change to Tek's life.

In the above example, it seems implausible to say that the reason we don't recognize that Tek is better off is because the fulfillment of Tek's desire only has a small, easily-overlooked effect on his well-being.

Objection. *P1 is false. Refining the view.*

P1 in the argument against DFT states "if DFT is true, then X is the case" (where X is some problematic cases where well-being is not improved by desire-fulfillment). One response is that P1 is false when DFT is understood in a more sophisticated (idealized) way. That is, P1 is false when DFT is replaced by an idealized desire-fulfillment theory.

Definition. *idealized desire-fulfillment theory (IDFT)*

Something makes an agent (i) better off if and only if and because it fulfills the desires they would have if they were (a) have full information about the objects of their desires and (b) instrumentally rational in that they take the means that would improve their lives overall and (ii) worse off if and only if and because it frustrates their desires they would have if they were both (a) and (b).

In order to better understand this theory, let's test it against the problematic cases considered earlier.

First, concerning the student and the instructor who both wish each other well at the end of the semester, if we assume that both agents have full information about the objects of their desires (as IDFT says), then they will *know* that their desire has been fulfilled and this knowledge does make a difference to their well-being.

Second, concerning Tek who is addicted to drugs, if we assume that Tek is instrumentally rationale and fully knowledgeable about the objects of his desires (as IDFT says), then we can say either of the following:

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1. Tek is lacking in instrumental rationality because he is not taking the means to satisfy his ultimate desires. For example, perhaps he has other desires but lacks the will-power or strength to fulfill these desires because the desire to be high is all-consuming. If he were more powerful, he could also satisfy those other desires.
2. Tek is lacking in knowledge. For example, perhaps he is unaware of other things he might desire more than using drugs.

In short, the DFT theory can be modified to an idealized version of the theory where we assume that what makes something good for someone is what they would desire given that they are fully rational and fully knowledgeable.

2.5 Arguments against IDFT

Let's assume that DFT is revised to IDFT. That is, we assume that what makes people better off is the fulfillment of the desires they would have in an idealized (rational and knowledgeable) state. In this section, we consider arguments against IDFT.

2.5.1 Lack of predictive value

The first argument against IDFT involves two related criticisms. First is that the theory lacks any predictive value since it is difficult to determine how we would know what some idealized person would desire. For example, how do we know that Tek would desire differently if he were a completely rational being. Second, how do we know that Tek's desires in a highly idealized state are better for him than those in a less idealized state? For example, perhaps being fully rational and knowledgeable leads one to desire things contrary to one's well-being.

2.5.2 IDFT is worse than DFT

A second argument against IDFT criticizes the theory for making a mess of cases that DFT handled in a straightforward manner. Consider that there were a number of cases that DFT seemed to give the right responses. Why is eating a sandwich when Tek is hungry good for Tek right now? Well, as

DFT says, because it fulfills Tek's desires. However, if IDFT were to no longer be able to explain such cases, we would be highly skeptical of the theory as an account of well-being. Let's consider an example.

Example.

Let's consider Tek and idealized-Tek. Tek is Tek while idealized-Tek is the version of Tek that is fully rational and knowledgeable. It is very well possible that the desire of Tek are not the same as idealized-Tek. Tek desires spending nights with his wife watching on Netflix, he enjoys a greasy cheeseburger every week, and walking in the woods. Idealized-Tek does not desire these things. Instead, idealized-Tek only watches documentaries, enjoys a good salad, and spends most of his time listening to fine classical music.

The argument against IDFT then is that IDFT says that the desire-fulfillments of idealized-Tek determine what makes Tek better off. And this is supposed to be true even if Tek does not desire these things and even desires not for these events to occur. That is, watching documentaries, enjoying salad, and listening to fine classical music is good for Tek even if he desires not to do these things.

2.6 Conclusion

2.6. CONCLUSION

Lecture 3

Objective list theories

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Objective List Theory

Objective list theory contends that there are some prudential values that are independent from individual desire.

Definition. *objective list theory (OLT) of well-being*

Objective list theory contends that there is at least one thing that is good for agents that is good for them (prudentially valueable) even if they do not desire that thing.

3.2.1 Points of clarification

Before we get into variations of this general theory, it is worthwhile to make a few points of clarification.

First, OLT does not say that there is something that is good for you (makes you better off) and you do not desire it. Instead, it asserts that there is at least one thing that is good for you whether you desire it or not. That is, it asserts that there is something that is good for you (prudentially valuable)

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regardless of whether you desire it.

Example.

Suppose *friendship* is prudentially valuable in the sense that is meant by OLT. According to OLT, being in a friendship is good for you regardless of whether or not you desire it. You may desire it, and it is good for you. Or, you may not desire it, and it is still good for you.

Second, OLT involves the denial of desire-theory. According to desire theory, something is good for you *if and only if* and because you desire it. This means that in order for something to be good for you, it is necessary that you desire it. In contrast, OLT says that it is not necessary for you to desire something in order for it to be good for you.

Third, one version of OLT is equivalent to hedonism. For consider that hedonism asserts that pleasure is good for you and it asserts this independently of whether or not you desire pleasure. Thus, hedonism is a species of OLT.

3.2.2 Developments of OLT

With these points of clarification in place, it worthwhile to note that OLT can be developed in a number of ways.

First, an OLT might specify the **number** of desire-independent things that are good for you. Along these lines, OLT can be divided into two main types: monistic-OLTs and pluralistic-OLTs.

A monistic-OLT is a type of OLT that says that is one and only one desire-independent thing that is good for you.

Definition. *monistic objective list theories (m-OLT)*

A monistic objective list theory contends that there is *exactly* one thing that is good for agents that is good for them even if they do not desire that thing.

In contrast to m-OLTs, there are pluralistic-OLTs.

Definition. *pluralistic objective list theories (p-OLT)*

A pluralistic objective list theory contends that there is *more than* one thing that is good for agents that is good for them even if they do not desire that thing.

To illustrate the difference, consider the following things that might be considered desire-independent goods (let's assume that the list is exhaustive):

1. friendship
2. pleasure
3. achievement
4. sense of self-worth
5. health
6. knowledge
7. belief in the afterlife
8. love

A p-OLT would consist of at least two goods from the list above while a m-OLT would consist of one and only one good from the list above.

Exercise.

Construct your own personal OLT. First, state the theory. Second, state whether it is a pluralistic or monistic OLT. Third, indicate which thing(s) have prudential value.

3.3 Arguments for objective list theory

In this section, a number of arguments for OLT are considered.

3.3.1 The experience machine argument for OLT

The first argument for OLT is that **versions** of OLT are preferable over hedonism in that versions of OLT are not susceptible to the experience machine objection. In short, the argument can be summarized as follows:

3.3. ARGUMENTS FOR OBJECTIVE LIST THEORY

- P1: Hedonism is susceptible to the experience machine objections.
- P2: Versions of OLT are not susceptible to the experience machine objection.
- P3: All other things being equal, we should accept the less objectionable theory.
- C: Therefore, we should accept versions of OLT not susceptible to the experience machine objection.

The premise in need of clarification is **P2**. Suppose that there is some good besides pleasure that is a desire-independent good. Let's say it is *friendship*. Now let's consider two individuals: Tek and Tek-machine. Tek is outside of the experience machine while Tek-machine is inside the experience machine. Assuming their levels of pleasure are the same, hedonism would assert that they are both equally well off. However, if friendship is a good (not merely the pleasure associated with being in a friendship is a good), then according to OLT, Tek is better off than Tek-machine for Tek has a good that Tek-machine lacks.

So, in short, some versions of OLT depend upon having certain goods outside of the machine (actual events) and so entering the machine would be to lose out on those goods.

It is worth noting, however, that one version of OLT is not susceptible to the experience machine objection. Namely, a monistic-OLT that says pleasure is the only desire-independent would still be susceptible to the experience-machine objection.

Objection.

While this argument shows that some versions of OLT are preferable over hedonism, it doesn't show that they are preferable over desire-fulfillment theory.

3.3.2 The argument from scope

If the first argument in support of OLT aimed to show why the theory should be accepted over hedonism, the second argument in support of OLT aims to show why the theory should be accepted over DFT.

- P1: DFT is susceptible to scope objections (an individual desires X but X does not make them better off).
- P2: Versions of OLT are not susceptible to scope objections
- P3: All other things being equal, we should accept the less objectionable theory.
- C: Therefore, we should accept OLT.

Earlier we saw how DFT is susceptible to scope objections by considering various scenarios where an individual desires something but that thing doesn't make them any better off (and in worst cases scenarios, it may make them worse off). The response to this by DFT was IDFT, which came with its own host of problems. Since OLT simply states what is good for the agent and what would make them better off is independent of their desires, there is no scope problem for OLT.

Putting the experience-machine and scope arguments together, we now have a reason for preferring OLT over hedonism and desire-fulfillment theory, respectively.

3.3.3 The argument from intuitions (desire-independent goods)

While we have an argument for OLT over hedonism and desire-fulfillment theory, we don't have any independent reason to accept the theory. In this section, we consider such an argument.

If we ask an individual what they ultimately want for their loved ones, we are often given a list of fundamental goods: happiness, health, pleasure, knowledge, love, etc. If we are asked whether we would want these things for our loved ones **even if** our loved ones did not desire them, we affirm that these things would be good for them even if our loved ones didn't desire them.

Example.

Tek is the son of Liz. Tek desires to party, to do drugs, to not study, to do whatever he wants when he wants. Liz, however, says she wants best for Tek. She makes him stay home, she gets him clean, she forces him to study, and she helps to shape her son into a particular type of person.

3.3. ARGUMENTS FOR OBJECTIVE LIST THEORY

Exercise.

Think of another concrete example where we would want certain goods or things for someone regardless of whether that person desires them.

The argument then from intuitions is this:

- P1: Intuitively, we think things that are good for people independent of whether they desire them.
- P2: All other things being equal, we should accept the theory that best accords (fits) with our intuitions.
- C: Therefore, we should accept OLT.

Objection. *P2 is false: inconsistency*

It is worth noting that there is a problem with accepting P2. Even if there is some intuition that there are some desire-independent goods, there is no agreement on what they are. And, our intuitions often lead us **inconsistency**. Thus, our intuitions are not a good guide on this matter and thus should not be used to support OLT.

To illustrate, first consider that if we were to ask two individuals Tek and Liz to list all of the fundamental desire-independent prudential goods. It is likely the case that there would be **disagreement** between them.

Second, we need not even consider two different individuals. Note that what an individual takes to be a fundamental good may change over time.

Thus, P2 seems true if there is no disagreement but false if individual intuitions are inconsistent with each other.

3.3.4 The argument from particular theories

Another set of arguments for OLT involves citing particular desire-independent goods and arguing for OLT on the basis of these goods.

The basic form of this argument involves considering a particular good, then imagine that the good is taken away. Intuitively, we might say that

if the thing is taken away, then individual is harmed (worse off) and so this provides evidence that the thing is a good regardless of whether the individual desires it.

For example, Fletcher (p.54) considers the example of privacy.

Example.

Imagine that your phone is hacked. You don't know it but someone steals your personal information, is spying on your texts, is looking at your private pictures. You might be worse off even if the hacker doesn't do anything with your information.

Exercise.

How might the desire theorist respond to the argument that privacy is a desire-independent good and, in particular, the case of an individual's private information being hacked without them knowing it?

3.4 Arguments against objective list theory

In this section, various objections to OLT are considered.

3.4.1 The argument from arbitrariness

The first argument against OLT is that the desire-independent goods cited by any OLT appears completely arbitrary. That is,

1. there is no explanation why the good appears on the list rather than not on the list
2. when there are multiple goods, there is no non-trivial explanation for what is common about both of the goods
3. when there are multiple goods, there is no explanation for the weighting of the goods

Let's consider each of these in turn.

Arbitrary why specific goods are on the list

Let's take (1). This says that there is no explanation for why a good like *friendship* appears on the list rather than *being alone*. The goods seem to *magically* appear on the list. Its appearance on the list is not explained, has no justification, and is arbitrary.

The argument against OLT then is this:

- P1: We should not accept a theory that says things are prudentially valuable for no reason (no arbitrariness)
- P2: OLT posits goods arbitrarily.
- C: Therefore, we should not accept OLT.

To this an OLT theory might give the following response:

Objection. *brute vs. explanatory OLT*

The OLT can distinguish between two types of OLT: brute objective-list theories (b-OLT) and explanatory objective-list theories (e-OLT). b-OLT would agree that there is no explanation for why the particular good appears on the list. It is simply a fundamental truth (a truth that is used to explain all other truths) or simply a brute fact. e-OLT would contend that there is at least some explanation for why desire-independent prudential goods appear on the list.

Thus, while b-OLT has a response to the objection (no explanation is needed), e-OLT can provide a response by providing a non-trivial response as to why the prudential good is on the list.

The idea then is that **at least potentially** e-OLT can respond to the charge that OLT is arbitrary. What we haven't provided here is an explanation.

Arbitrary what the goods have in common

Next, (2) demands for an explanation of what all of the goods on the list have in common (besides the property of making people better off). The objection is that the list is arbitrary because it fails to explain what all of the items in the list have in common.

Objection. *b-OLT and e-OLT objections*

In response to this objection, b-OLT might contend that there is no explanation for why any two properties together are on the list. It is simply a brute fact.

In contrast, e-OLT might contend that there is some common property (e.g. all of them do X or all of them have X, or all of them are capable of being experienced) held among all of the goods on the list.

Complete lack of weighting

Finally, (3) contends that when there are multiple goods, there is no explanation for the weighting of the goods. This is a demand for a hierarchy of goods (which is the most important and which is the least important).

Objection. *unreasonable demand*

An OLT might simply respond by stating that this demand is too unreasonable. That is, no other theory can really provide this sort of response. For example, DFT cannot give a better account of the hierarchy of desire-fulfillments than OLT can give a hierarchy of desire-independent goods. Thus, it would be an objection that applies to all theories equally.

Exercise.

The argument from arbitrariness contends that the items on the OLT list are arbitrary. This is unpacked by saying that OLT is lacking in its capacity to explain the items in the list in some way. In response, OLT can divide itself into b-OLT and e-OLT. Which of these two versions of OLT do you find preferable and why?

3.4.2 The argument from alienation

The argument from alienation is that an individual can be well-off according to various versions of OLT but **completely alienated**. And, no theory should say an individual is well-off but alienated. Therefore, OLT is flawed.

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In order to understand this argument more fully, it helps to get a clearer sense of what it means to be alienated. Since it is hard to give an exact definition of “alienation”, it is sometimes more helpful to give some characteristic properties and then further clarify it with examples.

An individual is alienated when:

1. they are not actively engaged in what they do
2. they are unable to take any pleasure or joy in what they do
3. their actions are unrelated from their desires, concerns, or aims

Next, let’s consider an example of an individual that is alienated.

Example.

Suppose Tek works in a cubicle. He looks at numbers all day. He hates his job but has developed various strategies to make the work he does automatic. He arrives to work at 9AM, mindlessly works until 5PM, and then leaves. He is paid a salary and the work he does is not appreciated. Nor does he take part in the riches he has made for the company.

In the above example, Tek is alienated in that he doesn’t take any joy in what he does, it lacks his active engagement, and his actions seem unrelated to his goals. Namely, his work alienates him since it isn’t sensitive to his concerns as an individual.

The argument then against OLT from alienation is that according to OLT an individual can be well-off yet alienated. That is, the desire-independent prudential goods on an OLT can say an individual has a high-level of well-being yet they are completely depressed, miserable, bored, and unhappy.

Example.

Let’s consider an example of alientation that applies to a version of OLT. Suppose an m-OLT that says friendship is the only good. On this theory, Tek may have friends but might still be unhappy. He may have desires unrelated to having friends and so while he is extremely well-off, he is unhappy.

This argument appears to both count **against OLT and in favor of DFT**. For DFT contends that something is good for you only if it fulfills your

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desires. And, it seems implausible that having your desires fulfilled would alienate you for it is engaging precisely the thing you want engaged. Thus, we might summarize the entire argument against OLT as follows:

- P1: If a theory of well-being is alienating it fails as a theory of well-being.
- P2: A theory of well-being is alienating if and only if it is not consistent with the view that something is good for you only if you desire it.
- P3: OLT is a theory of well-being that is alienating.
- C: Therefore, OLT fails as a theory of well-being.

Objection. *P2 and P3 are false*

The general objection to this argument is that it fails to be universal. That is, the objection would only apply to *some* forms of OLT. Various forms of OLT might not be alienating yet might be disconnected from an individual's explicit desires.

Consider the OLT that says pleasure is the only good (hedonism). According to Fletcher (p.60), an individual may not desire pleasure, receive pleasure, and while the pleasure is disconnected from his/her desires, it would not be alienating them.

Or, consider the OLT that says that self-respect and happiness are the only goods. According to Fletcher (p.61), we could imagine Norman who is in a religious cult that brainwashes him into desiring to be worthless and not feel good about himself. According to this version of OLT, self-respect and happiness would not be alienating to Norman.

Exercise.

Fletcher (p.60) claims that "hedonism is inconsistent with attitude-dependence but seems to be a clear case of a non-alienating theory". In order to support this, he uses the case of Miserable Maude. Review this case and consider whether it effectively supports his claim. Can you think of a better example?

3.5 Conclusion

We examined various forms of objective-list theories. These theories were divided into various types:

brute explanatory
monistic
pluralistic

Lecture 4

Perfectionist theories of well-being

4.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, objective list theories were examined. In that chapter, we examined two principal objections to OLT. First, it was argued that OLT is false because OLT invites arbitrariness, viz., OLT fails to give an explanation as to why specific prudential goods are on the list (the arbitrariness objection). Second, it was argued that OLT is false because OLT is consistent with being well off but also being alienated.

One response to the arbitrariness objection involves first distinguishing between brute-OLT and explanatory-OLT. Brute-OLT contends that there simply is no explanation for why certain goods appear on the list. Explanatory-OLT contends that an explanation can be given for their appearance. However, in the prior chapter, we did not offer up any sort of compelling explanation.

In this chapter, perfectionist theories of well-being are considered. Perfectionist theories are types of **explanatory** and **pluralistic** objective list theory, and so they try to respond to the arbitrariness objection by providing an account of *why* having a certain set of desire-independent prudential goods make individuals better off.

4.2 Perfectionist theories of well-being

People often talk about their “best self”. And, the talk is such that if one were one’s best self, one would have a higher level of well-being than one currently has. This talk of the “best self” can thus be put on a spectrum that correlates to one’s well being. At one end of the spectrum, there is one’s best self, at the other end of the spectrum, there is one’s worst self.

But what does it mean to be one’s best self? One way to think about one’s best self is in terms of the desires of an idealized self. However, another way of understanding one’s best self is in terms of **the fulfillment of one’s human nature**. And so, if one were true to one’s nature, one would be one’s best self.

But what does **human nature** involve and what does acting according to it involve? To this we can give the following highly general answers:

1. One’s human nature is nothing more than a specific set of capacities or abilities determined by (or conditioned by) being a human being
2. One acts according to one’s nature if and only if one exercises (or develops) those capacities or abilities

In short, all that it means to be human is to have a certain set of capacities and we act according to our human nature when we use (or develop) these capacities.

From these two general answers, Human perfectionism can be formulated in a general way.

Definition. *Human perfectionism (HP)*

Human perfectionism is the theory of well-being that states that

1. what is prudentially good for a human is determined by human nature
2. Human nature is defined in terms of a specific set of capacities or abilities determined by (or conditioned by) being a human being
3. the exercising (or develops) of those capacities increases the individual’s well-being

In short, what is good for us is determined by our nature, our nature is not-

ing more than a set of capacities, and acting (or developing) these capacities makes us better off.

Example.

Suppose Tek is human. If Tek is human what will make Tek better off is determined by his human nature. Tek's human nature is nothing more a set of abilities or capacities he is capable of acting on. Insofar as he acts on these capacities, his life gets better, while if he fails to act on these capacities (or acts against them), his life gets worse.

Obviously, this **general account** will give rise to a demand for a more specific account in terms of the capacities that constitute human nature. That is, what are those specific capacities that human nature sets that when we exercise our well-being is improved?

1. If to be human is to be *social*, then socializing is a capacity determined by being a human being, and so making friends will increase the well-being of human individuals.
2. If to be human is to be *reflective*, then living the life of the mind will increase the well-being of human individuals.
3. If to be human is to **procreate** and foster one's progeny, then reproducing and parenting will increase the well-being of human individuals.

Exercise.

Perfectionism contends that what is good for us is determined by our human nature, and our human nature is nothing more than a set of capacities or abilities. The capacities of socializing, reflecting, and procreating were listed as capacities of human beings, but what other core abilities / capacities do humans have?

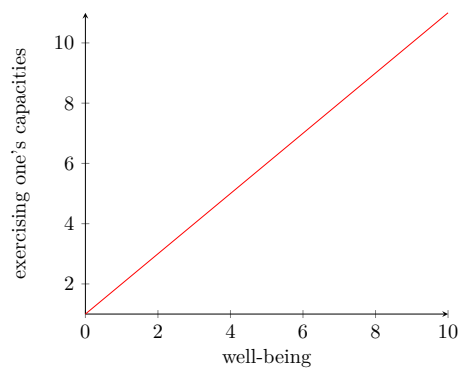
4.3 Arguments for perfectionism

In this section, various arguments for HP are considered.

4.3. ARGUMENTS FOR PERFECTIONISM

4.3.1 Argument from correlation

The first argument draws on the correlation between those with **high levels of well being** and those who are **exercising or developing their human capacities**. The idea here is that when we look at people with high levels of well-being, they seem to either be exercising their various capacities (e.g. reflection, learning, socializing, etc.) or working on the development of these capacities. In contrast, those with low levels of well-being are often not exercising these capacities.

**Example.**

Let's suppose one of the core capacities of a human being is **socializing**. Now suppose Tek and Liz at time t1 have identical levels of well-being. At time t2, Tek goes out with a group of friends and has a great time. Meanwhile Liz stays in and watches Netflix by herself. She has a great time. According to HP, even though their levels of pleasure are identical, Tek is better off than Liz.

Objection. *Mere correlation*

Only an argument from correlation and so (i) the correlation could be spurious, (ii) HP may have misidentified the causal variable, or (iii) there may be a third variable (neither variable is causal)

Objection. *Correlation between capacities and being worse off*

Humans have a number of capacities, e.g. capacity to feel pain. There is a correlation between those exercising their capacity to feel pain and

being worse off.

4.3.2 Argument from generality

A second argument for HP draws on the first argument but works to dismiss the idea that the correlation between well-being and exercising one's human nature is not a false correlation. Consider that not only does HP apply to human nature but it also extends to **animal nature as well**. The idea here then is that when we look at dogs, cats, horses, etc., their well-being correlates with the extent to which they exercise or develop their specific natural capacities.

Example. *Dogs are better off when they do dog things*

A dog is better off when it does what is in its nature to do: run, or play, or hunt, or socialize, or fetch, etc. And, it is worse off when it is doing what is not in its nature to do, e.g. sit by itself in a room with books.

Thus, while we might be skeptical of the fact that HP is true given the simple correlation between high levels of well-being and the exercising of one's natural capacities, this skepticism is tempered by the fact that this correlation extends to other areas.

- P1: A theory of well-being ought to extend not only to human beings but also to animals (or at least other human-like beings).
- P2: In HP, the correlation between high-levels of well-being and exercising one's natural capacities applies not only to humans but also to animals.
- C: Therefore, HP is true.

Objection. *Other candidates*

Assuming P1 is true, then it isn't entirely clear whether C follows from the premises. For C to follow, P2 needs to be strengthened to something like HP is the only theory that applies to both human beings and animals. But this premise is not defended.

4.3.3 Argument from development

A final argument in support of HP is that we often talk of human beings as being **fully human** or **truly human** or **really human** when they exercise their natural capacities. And, we talk of humans being “inhuman” when they deviate significantly from these natural capacities.

For example, consider that we often refer to pedophiles or murders or rapists as “inhuman” (we also refer to them as “inhumane”). On the one hand, we are referring to the fact that they are engaging in morally grotesque behavior. That is, they are violating the ethical norms that govern human beings to such a degree that they are taken to be evil. But, according to HP, we are also making a broader claim, namely that **they are acting contrary to their nature**. For consider that we also might extend the claim of being “inhuman” or “not human” or “acting against human nature” to individuals who engage in perverse but not necessarily morally wrong behaviors.

Adding onto this talk of certain individuals being “inhuman” is the claim that those individuals that are inhuman have bad lives. The pedophile, the rapist, the murderer, the individual engaging in perverse but not necessarily evil acts is worse off than individuals exercising and cultivating their natural capacities. And, those individuals we deem as being “truly human” or “fully human” are better off than those who are either inhuman or struggling to be fully human.

But note that both hedonism (H) and desire-fulfillment theory (DFT) can entail that individuals engaging in overly cruel or evil or grotesque acts that are seemingly against human nature to have good lives. If Tek derives pleasure from torture, then according to the hedonist, his life is better off when he is torturing. If Tek desires to torture, according to DFT, the fulfillment of this desire makes his life better off.

But HP seems to block this by treating torturers as though they are acting against their nature.

- P1: Any theory of well-being ought not to say that individuals engaging in cruel, evil, or grotesque acts have good lives.
- P2: Hedonism and desire-fulfillment theory (but not HP) entail allow for individuals engaging in cruel, evil, or grotesque acts have good lives.

- C: Therefore, HP is true.

Objection. *Arbitrary selection of what constitutes human nature*

There is no explanation why engaging in cruel, evil, or grotesque acts have good lives is against human nature. That is, there is no explanation why torturing is not a human capacity.

4.4 Developing the theory of human perfection

One of the main challenges for HP is being **more precise** about explaining human nature. That is, what are the specific set of capacities that make someone a human being? In responding to this challenge, one can take a very highly specific approach by pointing out a specific property (e.g. being 5'11) or indicate a more precise yet still general property.

In this section, we develop HP's account of human nature by taking the latter approach.

4.4.1 The unique human perfectionist theory

The challenge to HP is to be more specific about the properties that define human nature; namely, the goal is to be more specific about the specific set of capacities or abilities that make someone human.

As a first attempt, we might note that there are a number of traits that we share with animals. In addition, HP might contend that although there is some overlap, there are *unique* or **individuating** capacities that distinguish human beings from all other beings. Thus, HP might contend that to **exercise these unique capacities is good for human beings**. Let's call this version of human perfectionism: **unique human perfectionism**.

Definition. *Unique human perfectionist theory (u-HP)*

u-HP is the theory of well-being that states that

1. what is prudentially good for a human is determined by human nature.

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2. Human nature is defined by those capacities that are unique to human beings
3. exercising (or developing) of these capacities increases the individual's well-being

There are several problems with this account of HP.

Objection. *no unique capacities*

Consider the following two-part argument.

First, assume u-HP is true and there are no capacities that are unique to human beings. If this is the case, then there is nothing that makes human beings better or worse off. But, there are things that make human beings better or worse off. And so, it cannot both be the case that u-HP is true and there are no capacities that are unique to human beings.

Second, there are no good candidates that distinguish human beings from all other beings. For any relevant capacity that is said to be unique to human beings, that capacity can be found in some other being.

Thus, we have the following argument:

- P1: If u-HP is true and there are no individuating capacities, then there is nothing that makes humans better or worse off.
- P2: There are things that are better or worse off.
- P3: There are no individuating capacities.
- C: Therefore, u-HP is false.

Note that this objection means that much of the debate concerning u-HP will revolve around the specific capacity said to belong uniquely to human beings. The debate will move in terms of (i) identifying that specific property and (ii) debating over whether or not that property is found in other, non-human beings.

Exercise.

Given the above objection, part of the plausibility of u-HP rests on there existing capacities that are unique to human beings (individuating

capacities). What capacities are found in human beings but not in other beings?

Objection. *relevance of the capacity to well-being*

Suppose we are able to identify the capacity that makes human beings unique. There is no reason to believe that that exercising that unique capacity will improve an individual's well-being. That is, it very well may be that that capacity **has no bearing on an individual's well-being**.

Fletcher (p.82), for example, gives the example of throat-singing. For suppose that throat-singing is the only capacity that humans have that non-humans lack. According to u-HP, exercising this capacity would be the only thing that increases our well-being. But, intuitively, this seems false.

Exercise.

Not only does u-HP depend upon the existence of humans having individuating capacities, but also that the acting upon those capacities are what make our lives better/worse. If you think there is some capacity that individuates human beings from all other beings, is the exercising of that capacity or set of capacities solely responsible for increasing an individual's well-being?

Objection. *unique capacities is not the whole story*

Suppose we were to identify what does and does not make us unique. If u-HP is true, then were we to discover this, we ought to change our beliefs about what makes us better off in relation to these capacities. But, in many cases, we believe that certain things make us better off even if they are not unique to us.

Fletcher (p.82) gives the example of the capacity to experience pain. Since the capacity to experience serious pain is not unique to us, then according to u-HP, exercising or developing this capacity does not make us any better or worse off. But, intuitively, this is false. Experiencing

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extreme amounts of pain would likely make us much worse off.

Exercise.

Many individuals often stress the importance of being human as opposed to being an animal or being non-human. u-HP tries to use this perceived importance in terms of a theory of well-being.

1. To what extent is u-HP a viable theory?
2. Is what distinguishes us from other beings solely responsible for determining our well-being?

4.4.2 The simple essentialist human perfectionist theory

If the capacities that makes us unique are not what is tied to our well-being, perhaps it is those that **we must have**. That is, perhaps the important properties are not the unique ones but the ones that we simply could not be human without. That is, perhaps it is the capacities that are **essential** or **necessary** for being a human being.

Definition. *Essentialist Human perfectionism (e-HP)*

e-HP is the theory of well-being that states that

1. what is prudentially good for a human is determined by human nature.
2. Human nature is defined by those capacities that are essential to human beings
3. exercising (or developing) of these capacities increases the individual's well-being

There are some obvious problems with this approach.

Objection. *Overdetermines the theory*

The theory includes too many things that are tied to well-being. It overdetermines the number of things that should increase well-being. As Fletcher (p.83) points out having the *capacity to act as a paperweight* is a capacity that everyone has but exercising this capacity has no bearing

on one's well-being.

Objection. *Underdetermines the theory*

The theory includes too few things that are tied to well-being. It underdetermines the number of things that should increase well-being. The capacity to feel pain, or perhaps live a full and healthy life, or find one's true love is not essential to all individuals but it nevertheless seems tied to well-being.

Perhaps then the problem with the essentialist theory is that it is **too simple**. That is, it is not the case that what determines whether one has a good life are all the essential features that all humans have but **some of the essential features** that all humans have. That is, we can revise the essentialist theory by focusing only a limited set of essential capacities, specifically those related to us as **living beings**.

Definition. *Hurka's restricted essence human perfectionist theory (h-HP)*

h-HP is the theory of well-being that states that

1. what is prudentially good for a human is determined by human nature.
2. Human nature is defined by those capacities that are essential to human beings as *living* things
3. exercising (or developing) of these capacities increases the individual's well-being

The general idea here is that there are a number of properties that are essential to human beings that they share with non-living things. For consider that being a physical object, being in space, being extended, being in time, etc. are all properties that are essential to humans but are **also essential to a number of other non-living things**. h-HP then says that we should take a narrower (or more restricted) sense of essence. That is, h-HP says that the properties to consider when defining human nature are **those capacities that all human beings have when they are alive as opposed to dead**.

4.5 Arguments against Hurka's perfectionism

In this section, arguments against perfectionism more generally and h-HP are considered.

4.5.1 The argument from lack of clarity: being worse off

The first argument against perfectionism is that the theory states what makes an individual better off but fails to clarify what makes an individual worse off. This particular argument is not devastating but rather a criticism of the theory for its failure to give a complete explanation of well-being in general.

How might h-HP give such an account?

First, it might contend that the failure to develop capacities that are essential to living human beings makes an individual worse off. On this account, an individual is worse-off if s/he has capacities but does nothing will them. Intuitively, this makes a lot of sense since if Tek is potentially a great tennis player, he is worse off for failing to developing this potential than if he developed said potential. And, intuitively, we are all worse off for not having developed all of our capacities (even if this is impossible feat to accomplish).

Objection. *No worse off, just not better off*

It is a little strange to say that Tek has a worse life if Tek fails to develop or exercise a particular capacity. It seems more accurate to say that Tek is, in fact, no worse off but also no better off for failing to exercise his capacities. That is, the non-development of your capacities does not make your life worse, it simply makes your life no better.

Second, h-HP might contend instead that the loss, ruin, or degradation of an essential, living human capacity makes an individual worse off. Intuitively, this seems preferable over the lack of development account. If Tek is a great tennis player and his arm is shattered, his capacity to exercise his capacities are ruined, and he seems worse off on this account.

Exercise.

How do you think h-HP should address the issue of when an individual is worse off? Do you think that failing to develop an essential living human capacity makes you worse off (having a worse life)? If so, is there room for merging the two accounts into a hybrid account?

4.5.2 The argument from pleasure and pain

One argument against h-HP is as follows:

- P1: Either pleasure/pain are an essential, living capacity of humans or they are not.
- P2: If they are not, then pleasure and pain have no bearing on our well being (which is highly implausible).
- P3: If they are, then as h-HP says the exercising of these capacities is good for us, and so it is **good for us to feel severe, non-redeeming pain** (but this is also implausible).
- C: Therefore, h-HP is false.

The idea behind this argument is that h-HP gets us the wrong results concerning the relation of pleasure/pain to our well-being. P1 simply asserts that the capacity to feel pleasure and pain are either an essential capacity for living human beings or it is not essential.

P2 considers a possible h-HP theory were h-HP says that pleasure/pain are not essential capacity. This would seem to be true given that not all people feel pleasure or pain. Since not all individuals feel pleasure or pain, according to h-HP, pleasure/pain have no bearing on an individual's well-being. But this seems to be false since an individual who is being tortured (or in severe pain) is clearly worse off than an individual feeling pleasure from drinking chocolate milk after a hard workout.

P3 considers the possibility that h-HP would say that pleasure/pain are an essential human capacity. But even if this were the case (and there is reason to believe it is not), h-HP leads us to the wrong results since exercising the capacity to feel pain would make us better off. But this is extremely implausible.

4.5.3 The argument from the dilemma of rationality

The following argument attacks h-HP on the grounds that it gives counterintuitive results with respect to the capacity of using one's reason (rationality).

- P1: Either rationality is an essential, living capacity of humans or it is not.
- P2: If it is essential, then living humans with severe mental disabilities (and thereby lacking rationality) are not human (which is absurd).
- P3: If it is not essential, then exercising the capacity of reason has no bearing on one's well-being (but this is in conflict with what most perfectionists think).
- C: Therefore, h-HP is false.

The argument hinges on two key premises.

First, P2 asserts that individuals with severe mental disabilities are not rational. And so if rationality is taken to be an essential trait found in all humans, it would follow that individuals with severe mental disabilities are not human. This conclusion is false, but what the perfectionist might question is the assumption upon which the premise relies, namely whether, in fact, severely disabled individuals lack rationality. That is, while they may lack certain higher-order rational capacities, e.g. to do high-level mathematics, it isn't clear that such individuals are altogether lacking in rationality.

Second, P3 asserts that if rationality is not an essential capacity of living humans, then it has no relevance to human well-being. According to Fletcher (p.89) this runs in conflict with what most perfectionists believe and as they think exercising this capacity is one of the central capacities linked to making one's life better off.

Exercise.

Consider P3. How important do you think exercising one's rationality is to having a better life? Compare two individuals: one where an individual makes use of their rationality and another where it is damaged or neglected. Which of the two have a better life?

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, we examined the human perfectionist (HP) theory of well-being. In general, HP is an explanatory, pluralistic objective-list theory in that it identifies a set of desire-independent goods. The theory aimed to explain the existence of these goods through an account of human nature. Namely, it contends that all prudential value (all the goods on the list) are determined by our human nature.

Initially, we formulated the theory in general terms but found that its plausibility rested on a more specific formulation. After formulating various more specific versions of HP, the theory was criticized.

4.6. CONCLUSION

Lecture 5

The happiness theory of well-being

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the happiness theory of well-being is introduced. However, before the theory is fully introduced, it is necessary to distinguish between *a theory of happiness* and *a theory of well-being*.

It is not necessarily the case that **happiness** and **well-being** are equivalent. For example, in the desire-theory of well-being, an individual's well-being is determined by their desire-fulfillments. But, if they fail to desire to be happy, then they may have a high level of well-being without being happy. At the intuitive level, we might imagine that this is true as well. Someone's life may be **going well** but they might **not** characterize themselves as (and might not actually be) **happy**.

Example.

Tek may have a good job, a nice house, be in good health, and a family who loves him and whom he loves. But while Tek may not be depressed or extremely unhappy, he may not be happy for long stretches of time. That is, Tek has a high-level of well-being but not a high-level of happiness.

5.2. HAPPINESS THEORY AND THREE VIEWS ABOUT HAPPINESS

None of this is to say though that happiness is completely unrelated to how good one's life is going. Intuitively speaking, we might contend that if one is **extremely unhappy (miserable)**, then it may be hard to say that one's life is going well.

Exercise.

Try to think of an example (perhaps of someone you know) of

1. an individual that (i) has a high level of well-being (prudential value, utility, welfare, good life) but (ii) they are not happy.
2. an individual that (i) has a low level of well-being but (ii) is not happy.

5.2 Happiness theory and three views about happiness

First, let's provide a general definition of the happiness theory of well-being:

Definition. *Happiness theory of well-being (HTWB)*

The happiness theory of well-being contends that

1. **happiness** is the only thing that has prudential value for us (it is the only thing that make our lives better or worse)
2. a person's well-being at a particular time is determined solely by their overall level of happiness at that time.

In putting forward this definition, it is important to consider how this theory relates to other theories that may make happiness an ingredient in their theories of well-being. Fletcher (p.95) proposes four ways that happiness is related to well-being:

It is worth pointing out that HTWB is a species of monistic objective list theory (m-OLT). It is a species of OLT because it asserts that happiness has prudential value **regardless of whether one desires it or not and it is monistic**, in particular, because it asserts that there is one and only one desire-independent thing that has prudential value: happiness.

5.2. HAPPINESS THEORY AND THREE VIEWS ABOUT HAPPINESS

Relation	Theory
happiness alone is the only thing what has prudential value	HTWB
happiness is one of a number of things that has prudential value	p-OLT
happiness is sometimes something that has prudential value, although at other times it has no prudential value (depends on your desire)	DFT
happiness has no prudential value	H?, OLT

Table 5.1: Four views on the relation of happiness to well being; **HTWB**: happiness theory of well-being; **OLT**: objective-list theory; **DFT**: desire-fulfillment theory; **H**: Hedonism

In order to get a clearer sense of HTWB, it is necessary to get a more precise understanding of the nature of happiness. In clarifying what happiness is, we will not only be in a position to evaluate the merits of HTWB but also evaluate how happiness fits into other theories of well-being that contend that happiness is relevant for determining one's well-being.

5.2.1 The pleasure theory of happiness

Consider the idea that **to be happy** is just to have or be above a certain hedonic (pleasure) level and to be unhappy is just to have or be below a certain hedonic level. The basic idea then is that once you reach a certain level of pleasure, you are happy, while if you fall below a certain level of pleasure, you are unhappy.

Using this account of happiness, we can then flesh out HTWB.

Definition. *Pleasure-happiness theory of well-being (p-HTWB)*

The happiness theory of well-being contends that

1. happiness is the only thing that has prudential value for us (it is the only thing that make our lives better or worse)
2. a person's well-being at a particular time is determined solely by their overall level of happiness at that time.
3. *pleasure theory of happiness*: to be happy is just to have or be above a certain hedonic (pleasure) level and to be unhappy is just to have or be below a certain hedonic level.

5.2. HAPPINESS THEORY AND THREE VIEWS ABOUT HAPPINESS

There are a few merits to this theory.

1. it accords with our intuitions that **pleasure** has something to do with happiness.
2. happy people tend to be **correlated** with above-average levels of pleasure and unhappy people tend to be correlated with above-average levels of pain.
3. it fits with the idea that happiness is **subjectively determined**: only we can really say whether or not we are happy. For if my being happy is determined by my hedonic level, and my hedonic level is determined by me (only an individual can really say whether they are feeling good or not), then only I can say if I am truly happy.

At first glance, p-HTWB appears to be the same as hedonism as both seem to put a strong emphasis on the role pleasure/pain plays in determining one's well being. However, this is not the case. The difference is that the **hedonist theory contends that one's well-being is completely determined by their pleasure/pain levels**. That is, Liz is better off than Tek if she has a greater hedonic level than Tek. In contrast, p-HTWB contends that happiness / unhappiness are the only things that are relevant for determining if someone is better-off or worse-off. That is, whether or not are happy determines your well-being.

Example. *Contrast between hedonism and p-HTWB*

Suppose Liz has a greater hedonic level than Tek. According to hedonism, Liz is better off than Tek. In contrast, even if Liz has a greater hedonic level than Tek, they may both fail to reach the hedonic level required to be happy, and so since neither is happy, neither would be better off than the other.

p-HTWB faces several objections.

Objection. *Lack of precision*

The account of happiness lacks precision. What threshold do you have to reach to be happy? What threshold do you have to fall below to be unhappy?

In order to further clarify the theory, we can more fully specify the distance between the various thresholds. A first attempt is to simply say:

5.2. HAPPINESS THEORY AND THREE VIEWS ABOUT HAPPINESS

1. when you reach a **high hedonic level**, you are happy,
2. when you fall below a **low hedonic level**, you are unhappy
3. when you are **between** the two levels (hedonic neutrality), you are **neither happy nor unhappy**.

This idea is intuitive since individuals sometimes won't agree to being happy or unhappy. For consider if Tek asks Liz how she is today, and she responds "I'm doing alright." This could be interpreted as her neither being happy nor unhappy.

Objection. *small changes problem*

One problem with the above account is that it makes the change between being unhappy to neither happy nor unhappy turn on a small change in overall pleasure. Imagine Tek is unhappy. Someone gives him a candy bar and this pleases him only slightly but enough for him to move from being unhappy to being neither happy nor unhappy. It seems implausible that individuals can change happiness states with only small changes in their hedonic levels.

Objection. *too wide of a gap*

Some might argue that the threshold for happiness is too high while the threshold for unhappiness is too low. According to the pleasure theory, one needs to have a high level of pleasure to be happiness, or high level of pain to be unhappy. But some might argue that this leaves too wide of a gap where people are neither happy nor unhappy.

One response to the gap objection is to **narrow the gap**. That is, on this account, there would again be three states:

1. when you are just above hedonic neutrality, you are happy,
2. when you are just below hedonic neutrality, you are unhappy
3. when you are **at** hedonic neutrality, you are neither happy nor unhappy.

Here, hedonic neutrality is more of a point and only at this point are you neither happy nor unhappy. This contrasts with the previous version where hedonic neutrality occupied a range of hedonic states.

5.2. HAPPINESS THEORY AND THREE VIEWS ABOUT HAPPINESS

Objection. *happiness level too close*

Happiness strikes many as a kind of **achievement** and to place it so close to neutrality and unhappiness strikes many as being incorrect. There seems to be a much larger distance between being happy and being sad.

Objection. *small changes problem*

Same as before. Implausible to think that a small change in pleasure would mark a significant change in one's happiness state. But, perhaps the problem is even worse. If Tek is at hedonic neutrality, Tek can go from being happy, to neutral, to unhappy, back to neutral, back to happy in a matter of minutes.

Suppose I am just below hedonic neutrality (so I am unhappy), then two good things happen to me. It is unintuitive to say that I am now happy and now my life is going well.

Objection. *Animals*

Animals have hedonic levels since they can experience pleasure and pain. Therefore, according to the theory, animals can be happy and unhappy. But, some argue that animals cannot be happy/unhappy as this is a complex state for which they lack the requisite cognitive capacity. Thus, the pleasure theory of happiness is too simplistic.

Objection. *Experience machine*

The experience machine objection would apply. If pleasure and pain determine whether I am happy or not, then there is no reason for me not to enter the experience machine.

Objection. *Evil pleasures*

The evil pleasures objection would apply. That is, the case where an individual takes pleasure in doing diabolical or things that make them worse off.

5.2. HAPPINESS THEORY AND THREE VIEWS ABOUT HAPPINESS

In short, p-HTWB seems susceptible to many of the objections leveled at hedonism but also many more involving how it uses pleasure to define happiness, which ultimately determines well-being.

5.2.2 The cognitive life-satisfaction theory of happiness

In the prior section, we examined p-HTWB. This theory is a species of objective list theory but asserts that happiness is the only relevant factor in determining one's well-being. In addition, it equated pleasure with happiness. In addition, we saw that this theory faced a number of objections. From here, we could do either of two things:

1. abandon HTWB – the objections are too devastating
2. preserve HTWB by substituting a different account of what it means to be happy.

Rather than equating happiness with pleasure, another option is to equate happiness with **life satisfaction**. That is, an individual is happy to the extent that they are satisfied with their life. That is, they are happy to the extent that they have a positive assessment of their life as a whole.

Definition. *Cognitive life-satisfaction-happiness theory of well-being (cls-HTWB)*

The happiness theory of well-being contends that

1. happiness is the only thing that has prudential value for us (it is the only thing that make our lives better or worse)
2. a person's well-being is determined by the degree to which they are happy
3. *life-satisfaction theory of happiness*: the degree to which one is happy/unhappy is determined wholly by the degree to which they **believe** they are satisfied/unsatisfied with one's life as a whole

Note that the theory (i) is a happiness theory of well-being and (ii) happiness is identical to life-satisfaction, and (iii) one's overall level of satisfaction is determined by the beliefs an individual has about how their life is going.

Perhaps the first question that the cls-HTWB needs to answer is **what does**

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it mean to be satisfied with one's life as a whole? As Fletcher (p.103) points out, it could mean any, all, or some combination of the following:

1. the degree to which you regard your life as meaningful
2. the degree to which your life as a whole fits with the plan you made for your life
3. the degree to which you enjoy the different parts of your life
4. whether, if you could change anything in your life, how much of your life would you change?

Exercise.

It is worthwhile to consider these questions ourselves. That is, put each of these criteria in question form and ask yourself them (e.g. what is the degree to which you regard your own life as meaningful?). Answering these questions is supposed to tell you the degree to which you are happy, which ultimately determines how well your life is going.

Intuitively, we cannot think that these questions are asserting the same thing and so they cannot all be identical with the indeterminate question of how satisfied with your life? That is, an individual might assert that his or her life is meaningful but might contend that it hasn't gone according to plan and that s/he does not particularly enjoy it.

The question then is which of the above questions (if any) determines the degree to which an individual is satisfied with one's life. On first approach, we might contend that **one of the above questions determines life-satisfaction.**

Objection. *Mixed answers*

It seems implausible to say that it is one of the questions without further argumentation since we can imagine an individual contending that **they are happy insofar as their life has meaning but unhappy insofar as they don't particularly enjoy what they do.** You can imagine a pediatric surgeon whose life has meaning insofar as they help children but they don't particularly enjoy their lives. In fact, the suicide rate of those in the medical profession is one of the highest of all fields (e.g. 1.87 medical doctors, 1.67 dentists, 1.54 police officers, 1.54 veterinarians,

A second approach then is to treat life-satisfaction as a **multi-dimensional state.** That is, happiness is identical to life-satisfaction and life-satisfaction

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is determined by the degree to which (i) one's life is meaningful, (ii) how well it fits one's life plan, (iii) how much an individual enjoys their life as a whole, and (iv) how much of their life they would change if they could. On this approach, one can assert that one is happy insofar as their life has meaning but unhappy insofar as they fail to enjoy it. In short, it is not an all or nothing

Objection. *no argument that these are exhaustive*

Life-satisfaction is said to be determined in different ways by the four dimensions above, but it isn't clear whether these are *all* of the dimensions that are *relevant* for evaluating life-satisfaction. Thus, the theory does not clearly give us an exhaustive account of happiness.

Further, if life-satisfaction were defined in terms of **any** way you could evaluate your life, then this would include ways of evaluating one's life that are irrelevant to one's life-satisfaction (e.g. My life satisfaction is determined by how good I am at video games)

Objection. *integration to the global level*

An individual may be able to provide answers to the specific (local) questions concerning life's meaningfulness, life-plans, etc. but may fail to understand (i) the **weight** of each of these dimensions and (ii) how they integrate with each other to determine one's overall life-satisfaction level. That is, I may be able to say **I am happy insofar as my life has meaning** but **unhappy because I don't enjoy it very much**, but what is the **overall state of my well-being**? How do these two parameters fit together?

One response to part of this objection is to say that one's inability to determine how these life-dimensions integrate does not matter. That is, an individual may have a great deal of life-satisfaction given their answers to the four factors listed above *and therefore are happy* but not be able to recognize that they themselves are happy overall.

Objection. *cognitive non-reflection*

Recall that cls-HTWB asserts that the degree to which one is happy/unhappy is determined wholly by the degree to which they **believe** they are sat-

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isfied/unsatisfied with their life as a whole. But consider the following two problems:

1. I might not have any beliefs concerning my life-satisfaction (I don't think about that sort of thing)
2. I might have a false belief concerning my life-satisfaction (even though my life is going horribly and I feel unsatisfied with it, I might delude myself into believing my life is great)

5.2.3 The affective life-satisfaction theory of happiness

One seeming problem with cls-HTWB is that it makes one's life satisfaction **depend upon an individual's beliefs**. But, the theory seems to get the wrong result in cases where an individual has no beliefs about how satisfied they are with their lives or has false beliefs. The problem with cls-HTWB then may be that it let's life satisfaction be determined by belief.

Instead, it may more sense to make it determined by how one feels since (i) happiness seems tied to feeling and (ii) since feelings are not judgments about the world or ourselves, there isn't the opportunity for self-delusion.

Definition. *Affective life-satisfaction-happiness theory of well-being (als-HTWB)*

The happiness theory of well-being contends that

1. happiness is the only thing that has prudential value for us (it is the only thing that make our lives better or worse)
2. a person's well-being is determined by the degree to which they are happy
3. life-satisfaction theory of happiness: the degree to which one is happy/unhappy is determined wholly by the degree to which they **feel** they are satisfied/unsatisfied with one's life as a whole

There are, however, several problems with als-HTWB.

Objection. *Hedonistic dilemma*

Note that the affective life-satisfaction-happiness theory of well-being

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(als-HTWB) and the pleasure happiness theory of well-being (p-HTWB) are not identical. p-HTWB says that *any and all* pleasure increases your happiness while als-HTWB says that happiness is determined by positive (or pleasurable) feelings *about your life*. The problem for als-HTWB is how it should understand regular, old pleasures in one's life.

1. If some pleasures are not interpreted as feelings of satisfaction about one's life, then als-HTWB implies that everyday pleasure and pain do not impact one's well-being (which is implausible). For example, imagine Tek has a delicious sandwich, wins the lotto, buys a new car (all things that give him pleasure) and then crashes his car and is terribly hurt (something that gives him pain). Things went from better to worse but he didn't necessarily have a feeling about his life as a whole.
2. If all pleasures are interpreted as feelings of satisfaction about one's life, then it is no different from p-HTWB (and so is subject to the same objections).

Exercise.

In your own words, explain the above objection.

Objection. *Experience machine*

als-HTWB is susceptible to the experience machine objection since (i) well-being is determined by happiness and (ii) happiness is determined by how one feels about one's life. If Liz feels just as good about her life in the machine as outside of it, then she is just as better off in the machine as outside of it.

Objection. *Easily satisfied*

Suppose Tek has a so-so life. He feels ok about it. But now suppose Tek is drugged and while his life is the same as it was before, he feels as though his life is perfect. That is, Tek can barely contain how happy he feels about his life. According to als-HTWB, Tek's life is going great (since he feels so great about it). But this is implausible since while

5.3. CONCLUSION

Tek's life is better, it isn't necessarily great just because he feels it is great.

Exercise.

Suppose Tek has a drug for you. Taking it will make you *feel* your life is unbelievably great. Would taking the drug make your life unbelievably great? Why or why not?

5.3 Conclusion

Lecture 6

Hybrid theories of well-being

6.1 Introduction

Thus far we have examined the following theories:

1. hedonism
2. desire-fulfillment theory
3. pluralistic objective-list theories
4. perfectionism
5. the happiness theory

In presenting each of these theories, the goal was to give an account of well-being. That is, to give a general explanation of prudential value, viz., of what determines a life being better or worse off. However, our goal was not merely to describe these theories but to evaluate which theory best explains prudential value. Since our goal was evaluative, we sought to criticize each theory and determine its merits and weaknesses.

While proponents of a specific theory might contend that certain of the challenges we posed are capable of being overcome, we might pause and consider where some combination or hybrid theory is preferable to the ones that we have considered. That is, we might try to formulate a theory of well-being that draws on the advantages of multiple theories and, at the same time, overcomes the setbacks that those theories face.

6.1. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we consider hybrid theories of well-being. In particular, we consider two such hybrid theories:

1. the pleasure and desire-fulfillment hybrid theory
2. the three goods hybrid theory

Before analyzing each of these theories, it is worthwhile to show why hybrid theories are distinct from pluralistic objective list theories. For example, take the theory that combines the hedonistic theory and the desire-fulfillment theory.

Definition. *pleasure and desire-fulfillment theory (P&D)*

All and only those desire-fulfillments that we take pleasure in have prudential value

The P&D theory is distinct from a pluralistic objective list theory in that:

1. P&D says that there is a single, internally complex thing that is good for us: those things that we would take pleasure in and would fulfill our desires
2. pluralistic objective-list theory says that there are two distinct things that have prudential value: everything that gives us pleasure and everything that fulfills our desires

Thus, the number of things that P&D says has prudential value is much smaller than that of the pluralistic theory.

While some hybrid theories may be distinct from objective-list theories, it might be argued that certain hybrid theories are nothing more than a refinement of one of the above theories we have considered. For instance, a proponent of the desire-fulfillment theory might assert that P&D is nothing more than a species (or more developed version) of the desire-fulfillment theory. This development is motivated by its attempt to overcome the scope problem. This may be true but the same thing can be said by the hedonist. That is, the hedonist may contend that letting all pleasure have prudential value leads to problems. And so it is necessary to limit the pleasures that have prudential value to those tied to the fulfillment of our desires.

6.2 The pleasure and desire-fulfillment hybrid theory

In this section, the pleasure and desire-fulfillment hybrid theory is presented.

Definition. *pleasure and desire-fulfillment theory (P&D)*

All and only those desire-fulfillments that we take pleasure in have prudential value (the pleasurable fulfillment of things that we desire make us better off). The painful frustration of our desires make us worse off.

Example.

Tek desires to win the gold medal in the 800m dash.

1. if he fulfills this desire and enjoys fulfilling it, then he is better off
2. if he fulfills this desire but does not enjoy it (or even takes pain in the fulfillment), then he is neither better off nor worse off
3. if he encounters obstacles that lead to the failure of his fulfilling this desire and finds these obstacles painful, then he is worse off
4. if he encounters obstacles that lead to the failure of his fulfilling this desire and he finds these obstacles either pleasurable or non-painful, then he is neither better off nor worse off

6.2.1 Comparative advantages and disadvantages of the P&D theory

Let's consider what advantages and disadvantages P&D has over its competitors.

First, let's consider the experience machine objection and compare P&D to hedonism. At first glance, P&D appears to be preferable to hedonism. Recall that according to the hedonist, if Tek-in-the-machine and Tek have identical hedonic levels, then they are equally well off. But, this seems implausible if we believe that one's well-being is at least partly determined by things outside of one's hedonic level. According to P&D, Tek outside of the machine would be better off than Tek-in-the-machine since prudential value is determined not simply by pleasure but by desire-fulfillment combined with pleasure from that desire-fulfillment.

6.2. THE PLEASURE AND DESIRE-FULFILLMENT HYBRID THEORY

Objection. *counterintuitive result*

While we may think that the problem that the experience machine reveals is that there is more to prudential value than pleasure alone. That is, while there is some value to the pleasure in the experience machine, Tek-in-the-machine would be missing out on other goods. The problem then with P&D is that it would entail that none of the pleasurable experiences in the machine have prudential value because none of the experiences are tied to the fulfillment of desires. More exactly, only those desires to have a certain experience would have prudential value.

Second, another problem for both hedonism and desire-fulfillment theory involves taking pleasure in or desiring the fulfillment of evil things. Assuming Tek takes pleasure in torturing people, it is problematic to assert, as the hedonist does, that the pleasure derived from this act makes Tek better off. Similarly, if Tek desires to torture people, then it is problematic to assert, as the desire-fulfillment theory does, that this makes Tek better off.

At first glance then, P&D does not completely overcome this problem but does seem slightly preferable to both the hedonist theory and the desire-fulfillment theory. The reason for this is because the P&D asserts that while (i) one is better off if one fulfills the desire to torture and enjoys its fulfillment but one is not better off if (ii) one enjoys torture but does not fulfill this desire and (iii) one fulfills the desire to torture but does not enjoy it.

	FD	NFD
P	H, DFT, P&D	H
NP	DFT	

Table 6.1: Results concerning the resulting of some malicious act (e.g. torturing). P: pleasure; NP: no pleasure; FD: fulfills desire; NFD: does not fulfill desire; H: hedonism; DFT: desire-fulfillment theory; P&D: pleasure and desire-fulfillment theory

Objection. *horrifying explanation*

P&D gives a horrifying explanation for certain cases where torturing lacks prudential value. First, consider the case where Tek desires to torture, this torturing is fulfilled, but during the act itself Tek finds it to be unpleasurable. According to P&D, Tek would be better off if

6.2. THE PLEASURE AND DESIRE-FULFILLMENT HYBRID THEORY

he found this torturing pleasurable. Second, consider the case where Tek takes pleasure in torturing people but has no real desire to do it. According to P&D, Tek would be better off if he desired to torture people and fulfilled this desire.

Third, consider the scope problem. To review, the scope problem was a problem for the desire-fulfillment theory that showed the theory posits cases where an individual desires something but the fulfillment of that desire has no known impact on their well-being. The simplest example includes Tek’s desiring that a person he will never meet again has a good day. It is hard to see how having this desire fulfilled can improve Tek’s life.

In contrast to the desire-fulfillment theory, P&D seems to give us the right result. Since Tek has no knowledge concerning whether the recent acquaintance had a good day, he cannot take pleasure in the fulfillment of the desire, and so the fulfillment does not make his life better or worse. At least on this issue, P&D seems preferable to desire-fulfillment theory.

Given the three problems that we have considered, it appears that while P&D is preferable to DFT, it does not have any significant advantages of hedonism (see Table 6.2).

	H or P&D?	DFT or P&D?
experience machine	H	DFT
evil pleasures/desires	maybe P&D	P&D
scope problem	H	P&D

Table 6.2: Comparison of hedonism (H) and desire-fulfillment theory (DFT) to the pleasure desire-fulfillment hybrid theory (P&D) with respect to three problems

6.2.2 Arguments against the P&D hybrid theory

While P&D theory might fair well against other theories along the lines of the three problems we previously considered, to some degree it should as hybrid theories are often motivated by their ability to solve the problems of the original theories. That is, the initial motivation behind hybrid theories is that by combining two theories together, the combination will yield a theory with more virtues and fewer vices than non-hybrid theories. However, one

6.2. THE PLEASURE AND DESIRE-FULFILLMENT HYBRID THEORY

potential problem with creating a hybrid theory is that they can create entirely new problems. In this section, some arguments against P&D are raised.

First, Fletcher (p.120-122) raises the argument for the claim that desire-fulfillment is not necessary for prudential value. He argues that there are cases where we want to say an individual is better off even though they did not have a desire fulfilled. The argument is raised by considering two different scenarios:

1. Tek wishes Jon to have a good day and where (i) it is fulfilled and (ii) he believes it to be fulfilled (and therefore gets pleasure from it)
2. Tek wishes Jon to have a good day and where (i) it is not fulfilled and (ii) he believes it to be fulfilled (and therefore gets pleasure from it)

According to Fletcher, it is reasonable to think that Tek is better off in scenario (2) even though P&D would say that Tek is not since his desire is not fulfilled.

Exercise.

Consider scenarios (1) and (2). While we might all agree that Tek is better off in (1), do you agree with Fletcher that Tek would be better off in (2)? If so, why?

Second, while the first argument contends that *desire-fulfillment* is not necessary for prudential value, a second argument contends that *pleasure* is not necessary for prudential value. First, if you cannot experience pleasure or pain, then according to P&D, nothing can make your life better or worse (which seems implausible). Second, take a case where you desire to eat your vegetables but you take no pleasure in it. It seems correct to say that eating your vegetables (fulfilling this desire) makes you better off even though you don't also enjoy fulfilling this desire. Thus, P&D is problematic because it makes pleasure a necessary ingredient for prudential value but there seem to be cases where doing something makes us better off even though we take no pleasure in it.

At the beginning of this section, it was mentioned that while P&D did well in relation to the three earlier problems (e.g. experience, evil pleasures/desires, scope problem), the theory itself might raise new problems. In this section, we considered two such problems. Where does P&D stand

6.3. THE THREE GOODS HYBRID THEORY

now? See Table 6.3.

	H or P&D?	DFT or P&D?
experience machine	H	DFT
evil pleasures/desires	maybe P&D	P&D
scope problem	H	P&D
value without desire	H	x
value without pleasure	x	DFT

Table 6.3: Comparison of hedonism (H) and desire-fulfillment theory (DFT) to the pleasure desire-fulfillment hybrid theory (P&D) with respect to the earlier three problems and the two new problems raised in this section

Thus, while hedonism and DFT both suffer from one of the two problems raised in this section, P&D fares worse than both theories in that it suffers from both.

6.3 The three goods hybrid theory

At least upon our analysis, the P&D doesn't fair well in comparison to earlier theories. But perhaps combining hedonism with desire-fulfillment theory is the wrong hybridization for remember that P&D is just one of the many number of possible hybrid theories. Perhaps a more fruitful theory would involve combining a pluralistic objective list theory with desire-fulfillment theory. For recall that one of the problems with objective list theory is that it can be alienating. That is, something may be good for an individual but that individual has no desire for that thing.

Fletcher (p.124-125) considers a specific form of this hybrid theory that he calls the three goods hybrid theory (TGHT) which is the combination of a three goods objective list theory and desire-fulfillment theory.

Definition. *three goods hybrid theory (TGHT)*

There are three and only three things that make an individual better off. These are: (i) pleasure that is desired, (ii) friendship that is desired, and (iii) achievement that is desired.

6.3.1 The three goods hybrid theory vs. the P&D theory

The way that TGHT is analyzed is first by comparing it to P&D. Fletcher (p.125-127) runs through the various scenarios that pose challenges to the theories thus far considered. TGHT fares similar to P&D along a number of these scenarios. Where it differs (and has a relative advantage over P&D) is with respect to situations where we have a desire-fulfilling achievement but take no pleasure in it. For example, a scenario where Tek desires to eat vegetables everyday for a month but does so unhappily. According to P&D, fulfilling this desire has no prudential value since Tek takes no pleasure in it, whereas TGHT seemingly gives us the right result since Tek's achievement is desired and there is prudential value in it regardless of whether or not he enjoys it.

6.3.2 The three goods hybrid theory vs. non-hybrid theories

The question for this section is whether the TGHT offers any significant advantage over non-hybrid alternatives. Fletcher (p.128-129) argues that TGHT actually fares worse than the non-hybrid three goods alternative (the pluralistic objective list theory that asserts that pleasure, friendship, and achievement are the only three prudential goods). That is, while the non-hybrid alternative suffers from many of the same issues as TGHT, hybridizing the three goods theory with a desire-fulfillment theory actually makes things worse overall.

The main problem in particular concerns cases where pleasure, friendship, and/or achievement are good for an individual even if that individual does not desire those things. These sorts of problems are a direct result of adding the desire-fulfillment theory to the three goods theory. For example, Tek may benefit from a pleasurable and extended vacation even if he desires to work overtime instead. Or, Tek may be great friends with Liz, and this friendship benefits him in ways he cannot yet appreciate and yet he has no desire to be friends with her.

6.4 Conclusion

Overall, the view we have presented thus far paints a pretty negative picture about the prospects of hybridizing. While the hybrid theories may be intuitively attractive, on closer inspection they don't fair much better than their non-hybrid counterparts. And, even worse, they seem to be susceptible to additional objections. Nevertheless, our evaluation of these hybrid theories is relatively limited since (see Fletcher p.129):

1. we have only considered two hybrid theories
2. the class of objections that we have considered has been relatively limited
3. it isn't the case that all of the objections that we have raised are good objections

6.4. CONCLUSION

Lecture 7

Well-being and economic equality

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we consider Harry G. Frankfurt's *On Inequality*. When people think about well-being they often think about *wealth / money*. While money may not make your life good, it does seem to play an important role in achieving a good life. If you have no wealth, you may not have the resources to acquire what you desire (DFT) or fulfill your capacities (human perfectionism) or experience pleasure (hedonism).

Related to the point that some people have more money than others. That is, we are not all equal in terms of our wealth. Some individuals have vast sums of wealth while others are living in crippling poverty. There thus is a question about whether this inequality is morally acceptable and (related to our discussion) whether inequality stands in the way of achieving a good life.

7.2 Economic equality as a moral ideal

Some people treat economic equality as a **moral ideal**. That is, they treat it as something that is intrinsically good (good in itself), something we ought

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to remove in society for its own sake, and treat the inequality in society as a moral problem. The view that it is desirable that everyone should have the same amounts of money or wealth is a view that Frankfurt calls “economic egalitarianism” (p.6)

Definition. *economic egalitarianism (EE)*

Economic egalitarianism is the view that everyone having the same amount of money is either a prudential or moral good.

If economic egalitarianism is true, then everyone having the same amount of money is something we ought to desire. We ought to pursue it because we are better off in a society when everyone has the same amount of money or because it is the morally right way for a society to be.

Frankfurt argues for the following four theses:¹

1. Thesis 1: EE is not an intrinsic moral good (not something we should desire for its own sake)
2. Thesis 2: EE is morally objectionable
3. Thesis 3: Economic *inequality* is not, in itself, morally objectionable
4. Thesis 4: the doctrine of sufficiency is true (or at least preferable to economic egalitarianism)

Let’s briefly review each of these.

First, in saying that EE is not an intrinsic moral good, Frankfurt is contending that while it may have instrumental value, it is wrong to contend that we ought to pursue economic equality for its own sake. Thus, while it may be helpful to demand that everyone have the same amount of wealth in order to achieve some other good, it is wrong to contend that we ought to pursue economic equality as something good in itself.

Second, Frankfurt contends that EE is morally objectionable. He will argue that there are serious ethical problems with pursuing EE as though it were a moral ideal. And so, not only does Frankfurt contend that **EE is not a good**, he also contends that **EE is morally wrong** (it is not something we should pursue as an end in itself. To put this frankly, Frankfurt is arguing

¹I’m actually not sure if he explicitly aims to argue for all four of these theses or even holds them. This is my interpretation of what he is trying to do.

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that you are doing something morally wrong if you make economic equality your moral goal.

Third, Frankfurt contends that there is nothing inherently wrong with some individuals having more money/wealth than others. While individuals with more wealth than others may use their money for evil, e.g. undermine a democratic state, it is not the case that simply having more wealth than another is morally wrong. Thus, the mere fact that Tek has X amount of wealth and Liz has Y amount of wealth, the fact that X is greater than Y is not morally wrong.

Fourth, Frankfurt contends that the doctrine of sufficiency is true or at least a better moral goal than EE.

Definition. *doctrine of sufficiency (DS)*

The doctrine of sufficiency states that what is morally important with respect to money is that everyone should have enough (Frankfurt, p.7)

The idea here is that what is important is not how much wealth Jon has in comparison to Liz but whether they both have enough money.

Exercise.

Consider each of the four theses one by one in a group. Which of these (if any) do you agree with and why?

7.2.1 Arguments against EE

Frankfurt raises several arguments against economic egalitarianism (some more central than others). In this section, we consider several of these initial arguments.

Restriction of freedom argument

First, let's put forward what we will call the **restriction of freedom argument**. Frankfurt (p.6) argues that EE on its face is absurd since there are cases where we would want to pay some people more for services that

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are in high demand. He contends that we ought to allow businesses to do this but I think the point can be made even stronger and more specific.

Example. *no incentives*

Suppose Tek is a doctor that specializes in the treatment of a rare, deadly, yet treatable disease. However, in 2020, this disease saw a high increase. Whereas before the disease only affected a few hundred of people, it now impacts close to a million. Before the rise in the disease, Tek took on a normal workload of 40-50 hours a week, but now there are hundreds of thousands of people who desperately need his help. Tek agrees to work an extra ten hours a week for free, but the demand for his labor is still high.

On the one hand, it would seem wrong to force Tek to work longer hours. On the other hand, according to EE, since he ought to have the same wealth as everyone else and so could not provide economic incentives for Tek to work longer hours.

This argument is developed somewhat on p.9-10 where Frankfurt contends that EE is false because it creates a “dangerous conflict between equality and liberty”. The general idea is that when individuals are free, there is a natural tendency for inequalities to develop, and so the only way to achieve economic equality is through the restriction of that liberty. We can thus summarize the restriction of freedom argument as follows:

Definition. *restriction of freedom argument*

- P1: Any theory that entails a morally problematic restriction on freedom is false.
- P2: If EE is true, then everyone ought to have the same amount of wealth
- P3: Ensuring that everyone has the same amount of wealth involves a morally problematic restriction of freedom
- C: Therefore, EE is false.

Exercise.

Consider the restriction of freedom argument.

1. Is the argument persuasive? If not, which part of it is problem-

atic?

2. P3 contends that ensuring that everyone has the same amount of wealth would involve an ethically problematic restriction of freedom. I gave you an example that helps to support it. Come up with your own example.

Argument from alienation

Second, Frankfurt contends that while the the restriction of freedom argument may be a good argument, there is a more fundamental argument. Let's call this argument the "argument from alienation". According to this argument, the belief that EE is a moral good actually is harmful to individuals in that **it guides you to pursue something that is not something in your best interests**. As Frankfurt puts it "exaggerating the moral importance of economic equality is harmful, in other words, because it is *alienating*."

Why is pursuing economic equality alienating? The claim is that EE causes you to pursue a moral goal that has nothing to do with what you truly want. That is, instead of figuring out what you truly need or desire or want or what is in your best interests, the focus instead is **on whether or not everyone has the same amount of wealth**. But the amount of money someone has does not really seem relevant to whether you have what you need. And so, the claim is that EE is morally objectionable because it obstructs your pursuit of living a genuine, authentic life.

Definition. *argument from alienation*

- P1: Any theory that is alienating is false.
- P2: If EE is true, then everyone ought to have the same amount of wealth and should aim to pursue the goal that everyone has the same wealth
- P3: Requiring that people should have a desire or goal to ensure one has the same amount of wealth is alienating.
- C: Therefore, EE is false.

Exercise.

P3 says that EE requires you to have the goal of producing economic

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equality but that this is alienating. Frankfurt contends that this is alienating because it ignores something more fundamental: whether you have what you need. Can you give an example of an individual who is alienated but economic equality is achieved?

Argument from obstruction of inquiry

A similar argument to the argument from alienation is that treating EE as though it were a moral ideal directs inquiry into obtaining equality when it ought to investigate **sufficiency**. This sort of argument sort of assumes that the **doctrine of sufficiency** is true (or the more promising of the positions), but essentially the argument is as follows:

Definition. *argument from obstruction of inquiry*

- P1: Assume DS is true and EE is false.
- P2: If DS is true, then we ought to investigate its key concepts, e.g. the notion of *having enough*.
- P3: Belief in EE has the effect of pushing researchers into an analysis of *equality* and obtaining the conditions of equality rather than *sufficiency* or *having enough*.
- C: Therefore, belief in EE produces negative consequences (and so is morally objectionable).

What is the point of this argument? Well, if Frankfurt can show DS is true and EE is not a moral ideal, this sort of argument would be a step toward showing the stronger thesis that **EE is not merely not a moral ideal but is also morally objectionable**.

Exercise.

In a group,

1. restate the doctrine of sufficiency
2. Let's suppose the doctrine of sufficiency is true and that a focus on EE directs people away from giving a clearer understanding of its key concepts. If this is the case, then decide whether you think that EE is would be morally objectionable.

7.2.2 Arguments for EE

Frankfurt has given some preliminary arguments against EE but why might someone accept EE. On p.16, Frankfurt turns towards arguments for EE. He provides three arguments (one of which he focuses on in particular).

Argument from social interaction and social improvement

First, he proposes the argument that EE is true because economic equality would create better relationships between people. In other words, it would create better social interactions if everyone had the same amount of money. The second argument is that economic equality would help to diminish other, non-economic problems, e.g. it would limit an individual's capacity to exploit the political situation or make society more meritorious rather than partially determined by entitlements. Putting both arguments succinctly:

- P1: We ought to accept a theory if it produces a net benefit in terms of consequences (more positive consequences than negative consequences).
- P2: Adopting EE would produce beneficial consequences both in terms of improving social relationships between people and in terms of fixing other non-economic problems.
- C: Therefore, EE is true.

Frankfurt contends that both arguments are subject to the same objection.

Objection. *economic equality treated as an instrumental rather than intrinsic good*

The moral value of economic equality is treated as an instrumental rather than an intrinsic moral good. It is not something morally valuable in itself and so does not establish the truth of EE.

Argument from diminishing marginal utility

Third, Frankfurt considers a family of arguments all related to the idea of diminishing marginal utility. This family of arguments occupies a consider

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chunk of the book (pp.17-47). Let's call these arguments **arguments from diminishing marginal utility**.

Definition. *utility*

A thing's utility is the satisfaction you receive from using that thing or consuming a product.

Example.

- A dollar's utility is how much benefit you derive from using it.
- A vacation's utility is how much benefit you derive from taking one (or selling it or gifting it)
- A toy car's utility is how much benefit you derive from playing with it (or selling it or gifting it)

Definition. *marginal utility*

The marginal utility of a thing is the *change* in the utility that results from an increase in consuming or using that thing.

Example.

- A dollar's marginal utility is how much *additional* benefit you derive from receiving an additional dollar.
- A vacation's marginal utility is how much *additional* benefit you derive from having an extra vacation
- A toy car's marginal utility is how much *additional* benefit you derive from having another toy car

Definition. *diminishing marginal utility*

The law of diminishing marginal utility is that the marginal utility of each unit decreases as the supply of those units increases.

Example. *chocolate*

According to the law of diminishing marginal utility, for each piece of chocolate you eat, the marginal utility of the next piece of chocolate you will eat **decreases** (let's assume you eat one right after another). That is, for each chocolate you eat, the satisfaction, benefit, or utility you derive from eating that chocolate decreases.

Example. *dollars*

According to the law of diminishing marginal utility, for each dollar you receive, the marginal utility of an additional dollar decreases. That is, for each dollar you receive, the satisfaction, benefit, or utility you derive from that dollar decreases.

Now let's state the argument for EE from diminishing marginal utility.

- P1: For each person, the utility becomes less effective the wealthier they get
- P2: The utility of money functions the same way for people
- IC1: Therefore, the marginal dollar always brings less utility to a rich person than it does to a poor person.
- IC2: Therefore, an equal distribution of money **maximizes aggregate utility** (viz., an equal distribution of wealth maximizes the total amount of satisfaction of all people).
- P3: We ought to maximize aggregate utility.
- C: Therefore EE is true.

The general idea here is that if the utility of wealth decreases as you acquire more wealth, then the best way to maximize overall societal utility (e.g. the overall amount of happiness in a society) is to redistribute wealth from the rich (their wealth has minimal utility for them) and give to the poor (a few dollars goes a long way for the poor).

Objection. *inflation: invalid argument*

Frankfurt (p.19-20) argues that this does not account for **inflation**. The claim here is that if you take away some money from the rich and give it to the poor, it will cause the price of goods to increase (inflation). And so, if a loaf of bread costs two dollars, redistributing the wealth

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will cause it cost five dollars.

Increasing the cost of goods does not hurt the rich because they can still maintain a good lifestyle, but increasing the cost of goods hurts the middle class as they can no longer maintain their previous levels of consumption. Thus, while giving money to the poor may help the poor, it does not increase aggregate utility as the middle class are harmed.

Note.

Part of this argument is outside of my ability to evaluate (namely whether inflation will occur if we take money from the rich and give it to the poor). However, that is puzzling (to me at least) is why the redistribution of wealth would still leave rich people in the first place. It seems that the more straightforward argument is simply to say that at some point giving money to the poor won't improve their situation because inflation the marginal utility will be negligible due to inflation.

Objection. *P2 is false*

First, Frankfurt (p.20-21) asks us to consider individuals who are so miserable or suffer from mental, physical, or emotional issues that prevent them from obtaining the same level of satisfaction as other from money. Second, Frankfurt asks us to consider individuals who simply "enjoy things more heartily than other people do". Both considerations would show P2 is false.

Exercise.

This objection is sort of interesting. Frankfurt contends that the argument for EE assumes that everyone is the same, viz., if Jane and Tek both have 10,000 dollars then giving Tek and Jane an extra ten dollars to buy a dinner will have the same effect. Frankfurt contends that this is false since Tek may enjoy the ten dollars more than Jane. Is this true?

The premise that Frankfurt is most interested in is P1. This premise basically states the principal (or law) of marginal utility: the utility of a good becomes less effective the wealthier one gets.

Objection. *P1 is not universally true*

P1 is not a truth of reason but a generalization from experiences. It may be true for various activities like eating chocolate or the health benefits of running miles, but there are other items for which the law of marginal utility is false.

1. **Money:** Unlike chocolate which may have a relatively homogeneous effect, money which is a tool that you can use to do a wide variety of different things. Thus, money is different than chocolate and so the principal of marginal utility may not be true since there are so many different experiences you can attain with it.
2. **Synergistic Effects:** Frankfurt (p.30-31) points to examples where an individual will prefer A over B, but would greatly prefer A and C over B alone. His example involves popcorn. Tek may prefer popcorn slightly over no popcorn but may prefer *battered popcorn* greatly over popcorn. The idea here is that the sum of the utilities of the items is greater than the utilities of the items alone. In other words, the utility of goods does not diminish with additional acquisition but can multiply due to their synergistic effects. Another way of thinking about it is that suppose you have one toy train and this gives you 5 units of utility. According to the principal of marginal utility, receiving another train would not yield as much utility as the first. But, perhaps having two trains would bring even more joy than the first *because you can make them interact or now you can play with a friend.*
3. **Things with utility thresholds:** Frankfurt (pp.24-34) considers a host of examples that rely upon utility thresholds. In sum, he points out that while the utility of an item will decrease at the margin, sometimes the marginal utility of an item **spikes** due to its crossing a threshold. The existence of such examples aims to show that one of the principles that guide the principal of marginal utility (viz., P1: for each person, the utility becomes less effective the wealthier they get) is false. Below we consider several of these examples.

Example. *I'm going to Disneyland!*

Suppose Tek and Liz are saving to go to Disneyland. They take each

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new dollar they earn and put it in the bank. The benefit they could derive from each is somewhat small and the benefit they could derive from spending the sum at any given point also continues to decrease at the margin. But, once they are a dollar short of the money needed to go to Disneyland, the marginal utility of the next dollar is huge. It means they can go to Disneyland, a dream for both Tek and Liz.

Example. *collections*

Tek collects stamp. He has a large blue book where he collects stamps of a certain sort. For each new stamp he collects, the benefit he derives from it decreases. But, once he collects the final stamp in his collection, he derives a huge wave of satisfaction since his collection is complete. In short, the marginal utility of each stamp may diminish until he is one short of his collection.

The above objections then aim to show that argument that economic equality maximizes utility is mistaken. But Frankfurt takes his criticism of EE further by arguing that economic equality can minimize aggregate utility.

7.2.3 Economic equality minimizes utility

The preceding analysis has pointed out problems with EE. It is part of the general effort to show that EE is not an intrinsic good. However, recall that Frankfurt has another thesis in mind: that EE is actually morally problematic. One way that Frankfurt tries to establish this conclusion is by showing that economic equality could actually make things worse.

Frankfurt argues for the thesis that economic equality can actually **minimize** aggregate utility by way of an example.

Exercise.

Divide into a group of five. If you cannot form a group of five, team up with someone so that the number of players in the game equal five.

1. there are 15 units of a resource that are necessary for survival
2. each person at least five units of the resource to survive

Now consider the following questions:

1. What is the most number of individuals that can survive?
2. Suppose that EE is true, what would the result be of dividing the resources equally? That is, how many people would survive?
3. Suppose there were 16 instead of 15 units of a resource, what would be the most rational distribution of resources?

Frankfurt's first point of this example is that in situations involving scarcity, EE would minimize aggregate utility. He writes "[u]nder conditions of exigent scarcity, when there is not enough to meet everyone's minimal requirements, the desirability of an egalitarian distribution may be quite out of the question" (p.36).

His second point is that supposing that the resources were distributed so as to maximize survival of the individuals, if there were an unallocated resource, it is just as rational to allocate that to someone who already will survive. The argument for this is that the one additional unit of the resource will not improve the condition of the person who needs more to survive. That is, if Tek needs three units to survive, but only one is available, that extra unit might as well be thrown away, given to someone with enough, or held in reserve. The general point then is that "it is [a] mistake to claim that were

some people have less than enough, no one should have more than enough” (p.37).

7.2.4 The argument for EE from moral intuition

Another argument for EE is a bit more nebulous. It goes something like this:

- P1: Economic inequality just seems wrong (we have an intuition that it is wrong)
- P2: We ought to follow our moral intuitions.
- C: Therefore, economic inequality is wrong.

Objection. *P1 is false*

We don't have a moral intuition that economic inequality is wrong, our moral intuition is that there are people with too little. We are responding not to the inequality but to the hardships of poverty. To suppose this, note that we don't feel that there is something wrong concerning the inequality between super rich people. “The fact that some people have much less than others is not at all morally disturbing when it is clear that the worse off have plenty” (p.43).

Frankfurt points out that the argument from moral intuition actually supports his view concerning the doctrine of sufficiency. What bothers us about economic inequality is not the inequality itself but our attention to the fact that some people do not have enough.

Exercise.

Before moving onto a support of the doctrine of sufficiency, it is worthwhile to stop and try to summarize Frankfurt's position *against EE*. Take a moment to state his position by listing out some key points. After you have done that, Frankfurt's own summary of his position and try to make sense of what he saying: He writes: “The fundamental error or economic egalitarianism lies in supposing that it is morally important whether one person has less than another, regardless of how much either of them has and regardless also of how much utility each derives from what he has. This error is due in part to the mistaken assumption

that someone who has a smaller income has more important unsatisfied needs than someone who is better off. Whether one person has a larger income than another is, however, an entirely extrinsic matter. [...] It is independent [...] of the amounts of satisfaction they are able to derive from them [their incomes]. The comparison implies nothing at all concerning whether either of the people being compared has *any* important unsatisfied needs.” (p.46-47).

7.2.5 The doctrine of sufficiency

At this point, Frankfurt has primarily argued for the first three theses:

1. Thesis 1: EE is not an intrinsic moral good (not something we should desire for its own sake)
2. Thesis 2: EE is morally objectionable
3. Thesis 3: Economic *inequality* is not, in itself, morally objectionable
4. Thesis 4: the doctrine of sufficiency is true (or at least preferable to economic egalitarianism)

In this section, he takes a closer look at thesis 4, which concerns the doctrine of sufficiency. To some degree, however, he has already argued for it in that he has argued that our moral intuitions about inequality actually support the doctrine of sufficiency (DS) over EE.

First, Frankfurt tries to clarify what it means to “have enough”.

Definition. *having enough, version 1*

To have enough is to reach a limit such that to go beyond that limit is not desirable.

This notion of having enough is often prevalent if we eat too much food or do too much of something. This is not the notion of “having enough” that he wishes to tie to the doctrine of sufficiency.

Definition. *having enough, version 2*

To have enough is to reach a certain standard, requirement, and/or state.

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Frankfurt aims to make this idea clear and so he says a variety of things about it that I will summarize here:

- to have enough money means that it is reasonable for a person to be content with the money they have
- for a person to be content means that cannot reasonably take what is distressing in their life to be about not having enough money
- for a person to be content means that having more money would not enable them to be less unhappy than they are
- having enough does not mean that (i) they have barely enough, (ii) they enough to get by, or (iii) they are living on the brink

It is helpful to draw out two illustrations of an individual that has enough.

Example. *someone who is happy*

If Tek is happy, then Tek has enough.

Example. *unhappy person without money problems*

Tek is unhappy but their unhappiness would not be significantly improved by having more money. It would instead be improved by things that money cannot buy, e.g. love, true friendship, a meaningful life, etc.

Another key point of clarification is that while an individual may have enough, this doesn't mean that they wouldn't welcome or benefit from having more money. When an individual has enough, acquiring more money would not significantly diminish any unhappiness in their lives even though having more money might bring them added satisfaction.

Example. *Tek and Liz in Vegas*

Suppose Tek and Liz rent a fancy room in Vegas. It is great, luxurious, and they are extremely happy with it. They can be said to have enough or be content even though an even more extravagant one might bring them slightly more joy. That is, having a more extravagant room wouldn't make them less unhappy because they are not unhappy.

The key idea here is to say that a person who has enough does not take having more money to be a key component in being satisfied with their

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lives. That is, while having more would bring more pleasure, it isn't taken to be essential to being satisfied with one's life. In short, having enough isn't the same as having as much as possible.

Finally, let's consider some objections that Frankfurt raises and then provides responses.

Objection. *no reason to be satisfied*

There is no good reason for accepting less satisfaction when one could potentially have more. Such behavior is irrational. Suppose Tek is happy with his lot (he has a nice car, nice house, and he would not be made less unhappy with more wealth). Nevertheless, there is no good reason to accept this lot when he potentially could have more: a better car, a better house, etc.

Frankfurt's (p.56-57) responds by saying that there is a good reason for accepting less satisfaction over more satisfaction. The reason is that since one has no great need, desire, interest in changing things, then one has a good reason for not changing things. That is, if one is content with how things are, then the individual has no desire to change things. And, if the individual has no desire to change things, then it is not irrational to accept what one has rather than accepting more.

Objection. *should not be satisfied*

It is improper or wrong to be satisfied. One ought never to settle for less satisfaction when one could have more. For example, suppose Liz meets Tek. She could marry him and knows they would be happy together. However, she thinks she could do better and be happier. She loves him but perhaps she could love someone more. Presumably, she ought to find someone other than Tek and we would be wrong to criticize her for leaving him for someone else.

I'm not entirely sure what Frankfurt's (p.58-59) response to this objection is. It looks like he is saying that the objection is good but only when we are faced with a comparison involving real options. Namely, if Tek is choosing between A and B, and A will bring more satisfaction than B, then he should pick A (all other things being equal), but this does not mean if he were not given a choice between A and B that he wouldn't be satisfied with B.

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I think his more general response extends to pages 59-61 in that when we evaluate our lives, it is not necessary for us to do this comparatively. That is, suppose Tek is trying to determine if he *has enough*, to do this, he only needs to evaluate whether *he is content with his lot* (whether he has reached a certain standard, requirement, and/or state) by evaluating his life. He does not need to evaluate whether he has met this state by comparing what he has to all of the things he possibly could attain.

Objection. *an individual needs more*

Suppose Tek is frustrated with his life. He is discouraged by things and has just decided to settle. He might be said to be satisfied even though he should want more.

Frankfurt contends that this is not really an objection against DS. He agrees that this individual's life is not genuinely fulfilling and should want more even though they don't complain about it. However, he also adds that just because someone doesn't complain, this doesn't mean that the source of their problems is due to Tek not having enough (perhaps it is the case that he has enough but the source of Tek's problems would not be alleviated by money).

Exercise.

Frankfurt has argued that EE is false and DS is true. First, try to summarize both positions. Second, do you think Frankfurt is right? Is DS preferable to EE? Is DS preferable to all other conceivable options?

7.3 Equality and respect

The main goal of this section is to detail Frankfurt's stance on the differences between treating **equality as a moral ideal** versus treating **respect as a moral ideal**.

Frankfurt's position is that equality has instrumental value but no intrinsic moral value. He thinks it is contingently useful for acquiring other social, moral, political ends but has no worth in itself. Quite controversially, he contends that this applies not only to economic equality but **other forms of equality**, e.g. equal rights, equal opportunity, equal concern, and so on. Frankfurt instead contends that our treatment of individuals should not be guided by trying to meet the moral ideal of equality but instead should be guided by *respecting* others.

7.3.1 The Argument against respect from inferiority

It is important to note that respecting someone means taking into account their individual differences and so may involve treating people differently. In short, a moral of respect can potentially entail inequality.

Someone who thinks that we ought to be equal may argue that we cannot substitute a moral ideal of respect for one of equality because (i) the moral of respect leads to inequality and (ii) inequality is evil. The argument goes something like this:

- P1: If conditions are unequal then some individuals have things better than others.
- P2: If some individuals have things better than others, then some people have it worse than others (and for some it is radically inferior).
- P3: If one has it radically inferior to others, then this is evil.
- C: Therefore, conditions that involve radical inequality are evil.

Frankfurt's response is familiar.

Objection.

Just because one's life is radically inferior to another doesn't mean that

life isn't good. For example, being the poorest rich person is still being rich. And so, just because your life is inferior to another doesn't make the conditions that brought it about evil, especially if you are satisfied with your life. In short, inferiority doesn't entail a bad life, and so inequality doesn't entail evil.

One of the points to take away from all of this is that when we are evaluating how well our life is going, it seems that this is a highly **personal** evaluation. While it may be instructive to see how well we are doing in relation to other individuals, the criteria that we use to evaluate our lives don't seem to involve how well others are doing. That is, Frankfurt contends that we ought to make "a realistic estimate" of how closely our lives suit our individual capacities" and meet our "particular needs" and how well we fulfill our potential and to what degree our lives provide use with what we care about (pp.73-74).

7.3.2 The Argument against respect from equal rights

People often invoke the idea of equal rights. If one individual is granted a certain right (e.g. right to free speech, right to privacy, right to life) then this right ought to be extended to everyone. But, the doctrine of respect seems as though it would involve some circumstances where we don't treat people equally. In short, it seems to involve **a doing away with equal rights**. And so we ought not to substitute equal rights for the moral of respect for the latter is consistent with the idea that people shouldn't have equal rights.

- P1: If it is true that an individual ought to certain rights, then everyone ought to have those rights (equal rights).
- P2: If it is true that everyone ought to have equal rights, then equal rights are an intrinsic moral good.
- P3: It is true that individual ought to have certain rights
- P4: In contrast, the doctrine of respect is consistent with individuals not having equal rights.
- IC: Therefore, equality must be taken to be an intrinsic moral good and respect should not be taken as an intrinsic moral good.

Frankfurt's response here is interesting. Essentially, he contends that **P2** is false because the justification of equal rights does not depend "on whether

or not other people are entitled to them as well” (p.75). In other words, he says that **it is true that an individual to have rights that apply to all humans (equal rights) but it is false that equality (or equal rights) should be taken as an intrinsic moral good.**

Objection. *P2 is false*

While it is true that we ought to have equal rights, the justification of equal rights does not depend upon treating equality as an intrinsic moral ideal. It instead depends upon the fact that **everyone should be accorded certain rights, respect, and consideration in virtue of what they are and/or what they have done.** The rights we have are the same *because* we share a lot of the same characteristics, e.g. being human, having reason, etc.

In other words, the idea that we have equal rights is consistent with the doctrine of respect. If Jon and Liz are both human beings, they deserve certain rights in virtue of the fact that they are both human. Tek does not deserve those rights because Liz has them (or vice versa). They deserve those rights in virtue of the fact that we respect something they both have in common, e.g. being human, having reason, etc.

7.3.3 The Argument against respect from unequal distribution

Suppose three people: Tek, Liz, and Jon. Tek has six units of resources and we decide to distribute four to Liz and two to Jon. Jon is happy with two resources but when he finds out that Liz received four, he is upset for not being treated equally. He thinks it is objectionable to not be treated the same because he has been disrespected by Tek.

- P1: If we treat people unequally, then we are failing to respect them.
- P2: We ought to respect people.
- C: Therefore, we ought to treat people equally.

Frankfurt (p.77) contends that this argument fails to appreciate the relation between equality and respect.

Objection. *P1 is false*

When we treat people **equally**, the goal is to ensure the same outcome for everyone. We are treating individuals *impersonally* in a way that anything specific about them does not matter. But just because we don't treat people exactly the same doesn't mean we are not respecting them.

When we treat people with **respect**, there is no antecedent goal that the outcomes should be the same. Instead, when we treat people with respect we treat them **impartially and non-arbitrarily but personally**. Namely, insofar as we treat them differently, this differential treatment *takes into account some features about them that make them different from other people*. Rather, when we treat people with respect, we treating them in a **personal manner** by taking into consideration their specific characteristics and conditions.

Thus, unequal treatment does not entail a failure to respect them.

This objection can be difficult to understand and so let's look at an example.

Example. *Ice cream and cake*

Suppose there is cake and ice cream. Jon wants a little cake and a lot of ice cream, while Tek wants a lot of cake and a little ice cream. If we were to treat them equally, we might simply give them the same amount of cake and ice cream (and then let them trade if they so desire). But, if we are to treat them with respect, we might take into consideration their respective desires and give them the amount of each they prefer.

Thus, we would give Jon a little cake and a lot of ice cream **and** we would give Tek a lot of cake and a little ice cream.

But what about the case involving Tek, Jon, and Liz, and the distribution of resources? According to Frankfurt, respect involves treating individuals in a way that **takes into consideration their relevant differences**. In the case of Jon and Liz, assuming Tek doesn't know anything about either and so his information about each is identical, it would follow he is being disrespectful. But it isn't disrespectful simply because he is treating them unequally. It is disrespectful because he is behaving in a completely arbitrary way.

But why is this arbitrariness problematic? Why does Tek need to treat Liz and Jon equally if he doesn't know their relevant differences?

It looks like Frankfurt's answer to this is that by **treating them differently without knowing there is a relevant difference**, Tek is denying some aspect of Jon. He is treating him as though he was different than Liz and so, according to Frankfurt, denying some important part about him. Frankfurt writes, "People who resent disrespectful treatment do so because, by its very nature, it convey a refusal to acknowledge the truth about them" (p.85). The sort of arbitrary treatment of Jon involves a kind of denial of his reality or some aspect of who he is (e.g. that he is a human or that he has the capacity to reason).

In short, if Tek knows nothing about Jon and Liz and has six units of a resource, he ought to distribute them equally.

Exercise.

You now have Frankfurt's full case against the intrinsic moral value of equality (both economic equality and other forms of equality, e.g. equal rights). In a group, take five minutes to try to summarize the entire book. What is Frankfurt's principal claims? What is his constructive alternative? How can we still have equality even though equality has no intrinsic moral value?

Lecture 8

The Reasons of Love

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we consider Frankfurt's *The Reasons of Love*. He begins the book by pointing out two different types of problems.

1. logical puzzles
2. puzzles that arise from features of the world

In both types of puzzles, the interest in solving the puzzles is **purely theoretical**. That is, the goal was to simply overcome one's own ignorance. The puzzles were thought to be interesting and to evoke wonder.

In contrast, Frankfurt wants to consider a third type of problem, a **practical problem** that concerns **how we ought to live**.

Also in contrast to the earlier puzzle, where awe/wonder might evoke a desire to solve theoretical puzzles, the puzzle Frankfurt wants to consider is spurred on by **distress**, anxiety, or unease.

8.2 Non-moral norms

The question of how one should live falls within the field of **practical reasoning**. A theory that explains what one ought to do with one's life is thus

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a **theory of practical reasoning**.

Definition. *practical reasoning*

Reasoning about what one should do.

The goal of a theory of practical reasoning is to tell us **how we ought to live**.

Definition. *The goal of a theory of practical reasoning*

The goal of a theory of practical reasoning is to tell us how we ought to live.

One form of practical reasoning is **moral and ethical reasoning**. We do not need precise definitions of either moral or ethical reasoning here. We can instead think about both in terms of various rules or principles that we ought to adhere to regardless of their prudential or legal status. Ethical rules (e.g. the Golden Rule, the categorical imperative, various utilitarian maxims) are examples but also other forms of reasoning, e.g. complex perspective taking, a consideration of one's obligations given one's role, etc.

According to Frankfurt, moral answers for how we ought to live are:

1. not the only kind of answers
2. not the most significant in terms of directing our lives
3. not necessarily the ones that should take precedence

This third point is interesting. Frankfurt is asserting that when thinking about how one ought to live, sometimes we should **ignore the ethical or moral answers**.

At first glance, this seems wrong since if one is giving a different answer, the only other answer seems that one is pursuing one's **personal interest**. That is, rather than being ethical, one is being selfish.

- P1: If one does not make the moral answer primary, then when one asks how one ought to live, the only possible answer is to promote one's personal (or narrow) self-interest.
- P2: Frankfurt asserts that the moral answer to how one ought to live shouldn't always take precedence.

- C: Therefore, Frankfurt wrongly asserts that we sometimes should pursue our own self-interest even if it violates ethical rules.

Frankfurt's responds by asserting that P1 is false.

Objection. *P1 is false. False dichotomy*

The choice isn't simply between *being ethical* or *being selfish*. Frankfurt contends that sometimes there are somethings in life that have a greater claim on us than either of those two.

Frankfurt contends that sometimes we have certain ideals that are more important than ethical ideals or goals, e.g. aesthetic, cultural, or religious.

He does not provide a concrete example so let's try to come up with one.

Example.

Suppose Tek believes in God. One night, he is awoken by a vision of God who directs him to quit his job and help the poor. Tek does this because he is a believe and thinks the vision is genuine.

In answering *how ought one to live*, Tek has an answer that is independent (even if in line with) ethical norms or rules. If God had commanded him to do something evil, he would have followed the command. Nevertheless, this is a case where the answer of how one ought to live is dictated not by a selfish desire nor by any ethical rules or appeal, but instead by something else that has a greater claim on Tek.

Exercise.

We have the question of *how one ought to live*? Frankfurt contends that in answering this question we need not answer it using strictly ethical rules / commands (e.g. maximize happiness, tell the truth, be good) nor need we simply pursue our own self-interest (e.g. do what's best for me). Instead, he contends that we can give other kinds of answer.

In your own life, can you think of something that is important that you think is worth doing and worth doing independent of any ethical

8.3. WHAT CARE IS NOT

or selfish reasons?

None of this is to say that you cannot live an ethical life or that someone who lives a moral life is living incorrectly. Instead, Frankfurt's claim is that there are other, just as intelligible, yet non-moral forms of practical reasoning.

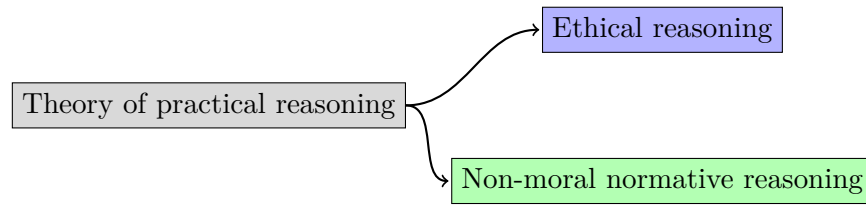


Figure 8.1: Theories of practical reasoning

One way of thinking about Frankfurt's question is to consider that there are many number of different ways that you could live. In terms of professions, you could become a doctor, a lawyer, a construction worker, or take no profession at all. In terms of your behavior, you could be a nice person, a mean person, a person who is concerned about the less fortunate, a personal driven by personal success, and so on. In terms of your relations, you could be a father or mother, a caregiver, a devoted grandchild, etc. In terms of your interests and free time, you could collect stamps, walk in nature, become heavily into yoga, write a novel, and countless other things.

But you cannot do everything. Some of the activities are mutually exclusive. Some of them you simply do not have time for. Some of them don't compel you at all.

So, how should you pick? How ought you to choose? How ought you to live?

8.3 What care is not

One way to decide *how we ought to live* is to simply analyze **what we want** or **what we desire**. Frankfurt asserts that these concepts, although used a lot, are murky, overused, and sort of useless. Therefore, he suggests we try to bring the concepts we need to determine *how we ought to live* into clearer focus.

Instead of relying on *what we want* or *what we desire*, Frankfurt suggests we

get clearer about:

1. what we care about
2. what is important to us
3. what we love

8.3.1 Problems with the notion of care

At first glance, there are a number of problems with using the idea of **care** as a substitute for **desire**.

Objection.

What we care about is just a kind of *desire* and so we don't need a new notion of caring. We can just use the old notion of desire.

While it may be true that care is a type of desire, but it is also true that they are not the same since **just because you desire something doesn't mean you care about that thing**.

Example.

Liz may desire Tek but this does not mean she cares about him.

Exercise.

Can you think of something you desire but don't care about?

Objection.

What we care about is our highest desires. That is, we can define cares simply in terms of our utmost desires.

Frankfurt responds to this objection by contending that just because you desire one thing more than another doesn't mean you care about the thing you desire more.

8.3. WHAT CARE IS NOT

Example.

Tek has to choose between eating broccoli and celery. He desires broccoli over celery but he cares for neither.

Objection.

What we care about is what we take to be intrinsically valuable. That is, caring for X is nothing more than taking X to be intrinsically valuable.

Frankfurt's response is that just because you take something to be intrinsically valuable does not mean you care about that thing.

Example.

Suppose Tek regards living a monastic, meditative life as intrinsically valuable. It is something worth doing for its own sake. Nevertheless, Tek does not care about that life nor does he care if anyone at all lives such a life.

Example.

Suppose Tek desires to eat a juicy burger. He desires to do this for the pleasure it brings him. The pleasure has intrinsic value. Nevertheless, if Tek is told that he cannot have the burger, he goes on his merry way. It is not a big deal if he doesn't get the burger even if he may desire it.

Exercise.

Can you think of something (or a life) that has **intrinsic value** but it nevertheless is not something you care about? Or, that you care if anyone at all cares about?

Exercise.

Frankfurt says that we have a number of different tasks in life. Some of these include:

1. making up our minds about what we want
2. making up our minds about things we want more than others

3. making up our minds about what we think is intrinsically valuable
4. making up our minds about what we care about

Quickly thinking through these, which (if any) have you made your mind up about?

8.4 Defining care

In trying to define care, Frankfurt begins indirectly by first discussing what it means to **not care** about something.

8.4.1 Not caring

In defining what it means to **not care** about something, Frankfurt uses an example (I'll provide a variation on his).

Example.

Suppose Tek has plans to something. Liz, his friend, however, needs a favor from Tek. In order to help Liz, Tek would have to abandon his plans. Tek tells Liz that he does not care about the plans and he is happy to help her.

The question then is what exactly might Tek mean when he says he *does not care about his plans*?

Exercise.

Take a look at the first two paragraphs on page 15. There Frankfurt provides two different attitudes we might have when we say *we do not care*. In a group, reconstruct what each attitude says, then go to the board, create a diagram that helps to explain these two different attitudes, and finally identify which attitude Frankfurt thinks corresponds to *not caring*.

8.4. DEFINING CARE

8.4.2 Caring

Caring is not merely a persistent desire

Frankfurt notes that *care* should not be defined in terms of a desire we would continue even if we had to postpone the satisfaction of the desire. That is, if *not caring* is defined in terms of a desire we could abandon interest in or stop desiring at whim or without any loss, *care* is not to be defined as type of desire that we would continue to hold even if we couldn't achieve it.

For Frankfurt, there are some desires that will persist even if we can postpone their satisfaction. But the persistence of these desires is not due to the fact that we care about the object of that desire. Instead, it may be a desire that is particularly intense or a desire we have that we don't particularly wish to have. In short, the desire for X persists not because Tek cares for X but because the desire is one he cannot remove.

Example.

Suppose Tek is a drug addict. He desires drugs. He wishes he did not desire drugs, but nevertheless he desires it. For Tek, the desire for drugs is a persistent desire. But none of this indicates that Tek cares for drugs.

Two components: willing commitment and desire for persistence

Frankfurt contends that caring involves at least two components:

First, not merely a persistent desire that one aims to resist nor a persistent desire that one is apathetic about, Frankfurt asserts that **caring involves a willing commitment to a desire**. It involves an endorsement of a desire. It involves a desire that the desire move him or her to act.

Second, it also involves **a desire that the desire be sustained or for it to persist**. In other words, if one cares for something, one has a desire that s/he wishes to continue on or survive.

Example.

Suppose Tek cares for Liz. If this is the case, he not only desires her to

be happy, but he does so willing. It is not a desire that he wishes he did not have, but one he endorses. In addition, it is not a temporary wish of his that she is happy but one he continues to want to have.

Definition. *care*

Caring is a type of desire that we willing endorse (we desire to desire it) and wish to sustain (we desire that is persist)

8.4.3 Caring and our lives

Frankfurt mentions that there is more to say about caring but if his account is correct, then there is an important implication. Namely, he contends that “the fact that we do actually care about various things is of fundamental significance to the character of human life” (p.16).

There are two points to be made about the significance of caring to human life.

The first is that for a specific individual, the fact that that individual cares for something rather than another is important for them.

Example.

Suppose that Tek cares for the preservation of certain war memorials rather than the preservation of forest preserves. The replacement of a war memorial with a forest preserve will impact him differently than the reverse.

The second is this: the fact that we care about anything is significant for understanding the structure of our lives. If we did not care about anything, our lives at any given moment would be determined by whichever desires that would occur at any given moment. If this is the case, then any sort of coherence or unity to our lives would not be the result of our own doing. It would just be the result of happenstance. We would play no purposeful or active role in the design, persistence, or coherence of our own lives. Caring is thus significant to our lives in that it is a way in which **we** play an active role in giving stability, thematic coherence, and or direction in our lives.

Exercise.

This second point is worth reflecting on.

1. Quickly look over pages 16-17, read the above notes, and try to summarize what Frankfurt is saying the best you can.
2. What is the importance of caring about things for an individual's life? Supposing someone cares very little (or not at all) about things. What does this mean when talking about the structure of their lives?

8.4.4 Caring and being human

Caring involves a certain amount of psychic complexity. In order to care, not only does one need to be able to think, desire, and have attitudes about things (let's call these first-order desires) but they also need to be able to have thoughts, desires, and attitudes about thoughts, desires, and attitudes (let's call these second-order desires). In other words, one needs to have the power of **reflexivity**.¹

For Frankfurt, this power of reflexivity is a property of humans and not found in many animals. He writes

Animals of various lesser species also have desires and attitudes. Perhaps some have thoughts as well. But animals of those species—at least, so it appears—are not self-critical. They are moved into action by impulse or by inclination, simply as it comes, without mediation of any reflective consideration or criticism of their own motives (p.17-18).

In other words, many animals cannot take a stance toward their thoughts, desires, attitudes. They cannot step back and wish they desired differently or accept the desires they have. In other words, animals cannot take a volitional role in the shaping of their own lives. They simply are what they are, they have the desires that they have, and while these desires may differ

¹For recall that we define “caring” as a type of desire that we willing endorse (we desire to desire it) and wish to sustain (we desire that is persist).

from animal to animal, or may be shaped or order by experiences, animals take no active part in the development of who they are.

For Frankfurt, this capacity of reflexivity also means that human beings can objectify themselves. You can view yourself as an object. In being able to view yourself as an object, you are engaging in a kind inner separation. This separation allows you to analyze and evaluate the motivations that push you to act in one way rather than another. In short, you can view yourself as an object that has thoughts, desires, and attitudes and can take a stance on yourself as an object with these thoughts, desires, and attitudes.

Exercise.

Frankfurt contrasts animals (maybe not all) with humans in that the latter have a reflexive power. This reflexive power allows us to take a stance on ourselves as objects (assuming we make use of it). This critical stance gives us the possibility of playing an active role in shaping our own lives. So it seems like a power to be celebrated. Are there any other benefits or downsides to this capacity?

8.5 What is important

Recall that Frankfurt has asserted that a theory of practical reasoning requires that it is necessary to make use of additional non-moral concepts beyond desire. These were

1. what we care about
2. what is important to us
3. what we love

We have already examined the notion of **caring** and so now we turn to its relation to the notion of **importance**.

8.5.1 Importance to us

While there may be things that we care about because they are important, there are also things that are important to us (or things that have a heightened amount of importance) simply because we care about them.

8.5. WHAT IS IMPORTANT

Example. *Friends and family*

Suppose Tek cares about Liz. If Tek did not care about Liz, she would not be important to him. Or, she would have less importance to him than she would if he cared for her (which he does).

Example. *Liverpool football*

Consider David. He cares about Liverpool football club. If David did not care about Liverpool football club, the team would have no importance to him.

Not only are there (i) things we care about because they are important, (ii) things that are importance to us because we care about them, but there are also (iii) things that have importance to us even though we do not care about them.

Exercise.

Frankfurt's example on p.21-22 involves exposure to background radiation (e.g. radon). He contends that a number of people have never even heard of background radiation and so they do not care about it. Nevertheless, he contends that exposure to background radiation is important to them because it could potentially kill them.

What are some things that are important to people even though they have never heard of them and therefore do not care about them?

While something can be important to us without our caring for that thing, something cannot be important to us without some relevant connection to something we care about. That is, the idea of **something being important to us** depends upon the fact that we **care about something**.

Example.

In the case of background radiation, we don't know that background radiation exists and therefore do not care about it. Nevertheless, it is important to us. But, it is only important to us in relation to something we do care about, namely our health. If Tek did not care about his

health at all (or the health of others), then background radiation might be of no importance to him, regardless of whether he knows about it.

At the extreme then if someone cared about nothing, then nothing is important to that individual. Such a person would be entirely indifferent even if they are moved by various desires. Since they would have no concern to preserve any of their desires, they would be

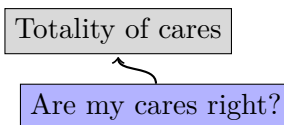
1. unconcerned about what happened to him / her,
2. unconcerned about what happened to others,
3. unconcerned about how they felt
4. unconcerned about whether any of their desires or motives for action were preserved

Example.

From time to time, you hear people say that they do not care about anything or that nothing matters. If that is the case, and Frankfurt's account is true, then this implies that nothing is important to them. Is that person being hyperbolic or is such a state possible?

8.6 Reasons for caring

Suppose an individual asks whether they should care about the things they care about. For example, suppose Tek cares about Penn State but asks himself whether he should care about Penn State. In doing this, he is looking for **reasons** why he should care about the things he cares about.



If what we care about or what is important to us guide our lives, what Tek is asking about is whether he is justified in living the way he does. In other words, Tek is asking himself how should he live?

Frankfurt contends that this sort of question is likely to make us dizzy, lead us in an endless circle, and no attempt to answer this question can

8.6. REASONS FOR CARING

ever succeed (see p.24). Frankfurt argues **that we can never give a full rational justification for why we care about certain things.**

Note.

I don't really follow Frankfurt's argument on pp.24-25. I'm not even going to try to explain it. Essentially, he thinks that any kind of inquiry into the reasons that would decide how one should live would require already knowing how one should live. Thus, it is impossible to determine what reasons would justify what someone should care about until we know what individuals should care about.

One question then is what justifies the confidence we have that certain things are important? In the case of science, our **rational nature** commands us to accept that the world is spherical. We are given evidence and arguments, and our capacity to **reason** guides us to accept this to be true.

But what about the case of what we take to be important for our lives? Frankfurt's response is that **our confidence in what we take to be important (what we care about) is not grounded in reasons (or our rational nature) at all.** We cannot actually give reasons for what we take to be important.

Example. *Survival*

Suppose we ask Tek if he thinks his survival is important. Without hesitation, he confidently tells us that his survival is important to him. We then ask him why this is the case and he looks at us in a puzzled way. His answer is not based on any reasons nor does he think you could give any reasons. Nevertheless, he remains confident that his life is important.

Example. *Children*

Suppose we ask Liz if she cares for her children. Are they important to her? Without hesitation, she confidently tells us that she does care and they are important. We then ask her why this is the case. We demand reasons to justify her confident and unhesitating answer that they do matter to her. Again, she looks at us in a puzzled way. Her answer is

not based on any reasons nor does she think you could give any reasons. Nevertheless, she remains confident that their lives are important.

In the case of things I care about, as Frankfurt notes, I don't have reasons but I still remain **confident that I care about these things**. So, what explains the basis of this confidence?

For Frankfurt, the basis of our confident responses to scientific questions is our rational nature. But, in the case of our confident responses to questions of what we regard as important, the basis is in a particular mode of caring. Namely, we are confident that certain things are important to us because of a particular type of caring called **love**.

Definition. *love (provisional definition)*

Love is a particular mode of caring^a whose activity is not governed by reasons.

^aCaring is a desire that we willingly endorse (we desire to desire it) and wish to sustain (we desire that it persist).

So, for Frankfurt, we are confident that survival is important or that our children are important because we *love living* and we *love our children*. This confidence or surety stems not from reasons (or our rational nature) but from a particular way of caring about things.

Exercise.

Frankfurt contends that we cannot rationally justify what we take to be important. Let's test this.

1. Make a list of things you think are important to you (things you care about).
2. How confident are you that these things are important to you? On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the most confident)? Are you more confident in those things than various claims made by science?
3. Do you have a rational justification for all of these things or would you be inclined to agree with Frankfurt that the reason you are so sure is because you love them?

8.6.1 Conflicts with love

Frankfurt has argued that there is no ultimate rational justification for the things that we care about.

Objection.

If there is no rational justification for the things we care about, the things we take to be important, and the things we love, does this not show that we should give these things up? Especially considering the fact that what you love and care about is different from what I love and care about? And, it may be the case that what you care about is something I despise (or vice versa). Should it not be the case that (i) our lack of reasons and (ii) differences between what people care about undermine the confidence we have in the things we care about?

Frankfurt's response is to consider two different cases:

1. parents who continue to love and protect their children even after society hates them (and even when they cannot prove that society is wrong)
2. the person who insists on defending their life even when s/he cannot show that the people who think s/he should die are wrong

In both cases, Frankfurt contends that we don't fault the parents or the person who defends their lives. We don't think they are irrational. We don't think their love or concern is unwarranted.

So, Frankfurt argues against the objection as follows:

- P1: Assume that a lack of reasons coupled with a recognition that others hate things that we love should undermine our confidence in the things we care about.
- P2: But there are a number of cases (see above) where we don't find it unreasonable for an individual's confidence about something they care about to be undermined even when they don't have reasons.
- P3: If we don't think that reasons are required in these cases, then there is no reason why would our confidence should be shaken in other cases. We are not behaving irrational.

- C: Therefore, the original assumption is mistaken. A lack of reasons coupled with a recognition that others hate things that we love should **not** undermine our confidence in the things we care about.

Exercise.

Perhaps the moral of the argument is that even if we don't have a rational justification for the things or people we love, this isn't really a reason to not love them. And, even further, it is not a reason to moderate our love or care for them. Frankfurt writes "[w]hy should we not be happy to fight for what we wholeheartedly love, even when there are no good arguments to show that it is correct for us to love it rather than to love other things instead?" (p.31).

1. Suppose Liz loves Tek, but Liz's parents do not care for Tek. They question her by saying "well why do you love him?" What are Liz's parents asking her and how might she respond? What might be a better way for Liz's parents to address their concerns about Tek to Liz?
2. Suppose Jon loves philosophy. He just took a course in the philosophy of well-being and now he wants to be a philosopher. Jon's father is concerned and asks Jon why he loves it? What is Jon's father asking him? How should Jon respond? What might be a better way for Jon's father to address his concerns about the subject Jon wishes to study?

8.7 Love

In the second part of the book, Frankfurt turns to the topic of love.

Note.

We won't have time to finish what he says through the rest of the book.

8.7.1 Love as a source of reasons

There is a general question about whether we should live our lives according to universal moral rules or if we can be preferential. The general question is

8.7. LOVE

what justification is there for treating some better better (or more favorably) than others?

Example.

Suppose Tek sees two people drowning in a lake. One is Liz, his wife. The other is a total stranger. Suppose further that Tek can only save one person. We think that Tek should save his wife but *what is his justification for favoring her over the stranger?* What sort of principle can he use to justify his action? Why not flip a coin or save the stranger?

On one account, Tek is justified simply because the woman is his wife. He does not need any further justification. He does not need some moral rule like *it is always morally permissible to save one's wife over a stranger*. No, all that is required as a justification is that the woman is his wife.

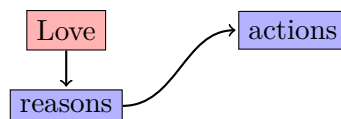
According to Frankfurt, this account is problematic for several reasons:

1. suppose Tek hates his wife and his wife hates Tek
2. suppose Tek has just discovered that his wife is planning on killing him later in the day
3. suppose Tek's marriage is an arranged marriage and he has not seen her in years

In other words, Frankfurt contends that the mere fact that the woman is his wife is not sufficient.

The better answer for why he is justified in saving his wife over the strange is not that she is his wife but that *he loves her*. Since he loves her and she is in need, her distress gives him a stronger reason to save her rather than the stranger.

For Frankfurt then, love can be a source of reasons for action. That is, if we love a person then we take that person's interests and desires as reasons for acting in a way that aids those interests.

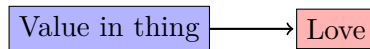


Example.

Suppose Liz loves Tek. She knows that Tek cares about stamp collecting. He has a collection that he would like to finish but is missing a stamp. While at work, Liz meets a coworker who has the missing stamp and is willing to sell it to Liz. Liz had planned to donate a large sum of money to charity. While the money would do a great deal of good, since she loves Tek, she takes his interests (his cares) as reasons for acting in a way that aids those interests.

8.7.2 Love and value

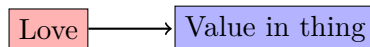
One common way of understanding love is that it is a response to something or something. On this understanding of love, an individual recognizes the inherent value in a thing or person, then loves them because of that value. Here an individual sees something that has value and then is moved to love that thing. Tek might see Liz and be struck by her beauty or grace. The preservation of Tek's love is found in the fact that he continues to recognize the beauty that is found in Liz.



Frankfurt thinks that this is perhaps one way that people love things or people but that there is another. His understanding of love is **not a response to the value in the beloved**. On this approach, it is not necessary for a person to be aware of the value of the thing that is loved before s/he loves that thing. In other words, the value of the thing plays no formative or generative or causal role in getting a person to love that thing.

This is not to say that the lover does not value the beloved but only that s/he is not moved to love the beloved as a response to the value s/he sees in him or her.

On Frankfurt's understanding of love, a thing acquires value for us because we love it.



8.7. LOVE

Example. *Love of parents*

Parents often will say they love their children. Sometimes they will even say they love them before they were born. We do not doubt that they love their children but it is not likely due to a recognition that there is something valuable in their children. It is not the case that they see their children and say “this child has such exceptional talents or qualities that my only response is to love this child.”

While their children may have some inherent value that value is not likely so great that it would compel parents to treat them as though they are the most valuable things in the world.

According to Frankfurt, the reason that something is so valuable to someone is simply because they love that thing / person so much.

Frankfurt contends that this point **generalizes** (it does not simply apply to the love parents have for their children).

Example. *Life is valuable because we love living*

Frankfurt uses the example of life. He contends that we do not recognize the value of our own lives or see that there is something so valuable that we are doing that we in turn love our lives (or love survival). Rather, we assign value to our lives and our survival because we love living.

Exercise.

Frankfurt contends that his point generalizes. To test this, take something you love. If his point is true, it is not the case that you value this thing (or person) because they have some value that you recognize and in turn love. Instead, you love that thing and because you love that thing, you value it. Does his point generalize?