

Two Senses of Happiness in Mill's
Utilitarianism

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It has been suggested that Mill might be guilty of confusion with respect to two different characterizations of happiness. The first version, which is sketched out in Chapter II of Utilitarianism, is defined as nothing but pleasure and the absence of pain; the second version, as articulated in Chapter IV, seems to be broadened to include other things than pleasure as "parts" or "ingredients" of happiness as a "concrete whole." We shall try to determine how and why Mill lands in this apparently paradoxical position.

In Chapter II Mill says that "by happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain." In the passage in which this bald characterization occurs, Mill is trying to thread a line between two misunderstandings of the concepts of utility and pleasure. The first places utility in the "impractically dry" position of the ordinary sense of the useful, over and against the agreeable or the ornamental, which are rejected as "frivolity and mere pleasures of the moment." The second accuses utilitarians of the "practically voluptuous" alternative of "referring everything to pleasure, and that, too, in its grossest form."

The way between these extremes seems to involve a theory of utility in which the pleasant and the useful are distinguished but not entirely separated. However, Mill's identification of happiness and pleasure seems only to avoid the first extreme. He tries to avoid the second extreme by an explication of the idea of happiness that incorporates Epicurean, Stoic, and Christian elements. We shall see that Mill's elucidation of happiness in

(a) there is not really further: it's the pig philosophy;
2^d of the two above, is it? YES!

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Chapter II at least points, in contrast to his initial definition, and in anticipation of his second definition of happiness in Chapter IV, to the possibility of "constituents" of happiness that are not pleasures themselves.

Mill's analysis of happiness is couched in a response to two further objections: that utilitarianism is a "pig" philosophy, or ^{a)} that it has such a lofty criterion of pleasure that it is incapable of attainment. Mill once again takes a middle course. On the one hand, because human beings are susceptible to the "pleasures of the intellect, of the feelings and imagination, and of the moral sentiments," they can in principle regulate their conduct by reference to pleasure of a qualitatively "superior" kind, and thus get beyond the merely quantitative pleasure-calculus of the pigsty. On the other hand, the enjoyment of the higher faculties depends only on opportunity and mental cultivation, which in turn depend on human effort to eliminate poverty and disease and to reform education and social institutions.

Though Mill does not explicitly do so in Chapter II, it seems possible to regard all these activities ^{??} as ends-in-themselves or "parts" of happiness, though the latter activities need not be at all pleasant. Even when (the enjoyment of the higher faculties is denominated roughly as "interest" and the other activities roughly as "virtue,") it is not necessary that the latter merely serve the former as means to an end (the goal of the martyr is virtue as an end). However, if Mill is to maintain his initial identification of happiness and pleasure, and if he is not to confuse ends and means, he must relegate

Quite lost: don't think M. calls the enjoyment of any activity either "int." or "virt."; & enjoyment is not ~~an~~ itself an activity. ACTIVITIES WRONG WORD; VIRTUE & INTEREST MY WORDS

what we have called "virtue" to the status of mere means, as G.E. Moore has pointed out.¹ We shall see that the same problem faces Mill in Chapter IV.

We find in Chapter IV that money, power, fame, and virtue, all of which at first are means to happiness, gradually come to be regarded as ends or ingredients of happiness itself. Since money, power, or fame beyond a certain amount render their possessors "noxious" to others, while the "blessing" of virtue to others puts no apparent limit on its desirability, though it need not be pleasant to its possessors, Mill's treatment of virtue as a means-become-end is a prime candidate for our discussion. It turns out that virtue "is" good only as a means, though "psychologically" we can desire it as an end good in itself. In Mill's brief discussion of will, desire, and moral reform, virtue becomes a provisional "end" so that it can really come into play as a means. A weak-willed man does not do the right things on purpose, or willfully. The way to reform him is to make virtue appear pleasant, or desirable, to him, so that doing the right things will be pleasurable at first. (Once he begins to do the right things habitually, virtue will cease to be desired as an end, but will remain as a means to the original end (i.e., happiness).

←
PSYCH. HEDONISM FORCES MILL TO
DO THIS.
YES, PRECISELY;

th temporal order wh you give here

ref? Can't believe he says this. This reverses

Thus, we see an implicit wavering in Mill's argument for the identification of happiness and pleasure in Chapter II; and while the wavering has certainly become explicit in Chapter IV, Mill just as certainly has not abandoned his initial definition

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of happiness. The source of his deflection is the problem associated with "psychological hedonism," Mill's underlying "theory of life." Moore claims that Mill treats pleasure and pain as the sole motivating forces of human action; the difficulties arise when he discovers that some desirable objects might have little or no reference to pleasure or pain. Worse still, the motives of "pure" pleasure and "pure" pain are too simple: they give no clue as to the direction of our desires. Moore suggests what he thinks is a more plausible alternative: that desire is directed toward concrete objects (at most "associated" with pleasure) as its motives, and is "produced" in part by pleasures caused by the ideas of these objects.²

Whether the utilitarian corpus can be salvaged without the troublesome element of psychological hedonism is a vexing question; at least (we have seen that Mill can have only one definition of happiness) with such a presupposition.

N.g. YES. HAPPINESS
AS PL. IS ONLY
FORM CONSISTENT WITH
PSYCH. HEDONISM.

I'm not clear that we've seen this. Do you mean the defn of h. as pl.? I haven't seen that at all, since I think both of his defns are quite bad.

Maybe all we've seen is that he can't use inconsistent defns—but surely we knew that ahead of time.

Your crucial par. 5 slips away fr me: let's either discuss it or you write me a new par 5 & jff, & give it back w/ this version.

R.H.

NOTES

¹Moore, G.E., Principia Ethica (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1903), pp. 71-72.

²Ibid., pp. 68-71.

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Moore, G.E., Principia Ethica, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1903.