

Phil 2, January 25, 2010

Review:

Last time, we formulated three plausible ideas:

Hedonism: What is good for us as an end is pleasure, and what is bad for us as an end is pain.

Aggregation: The outcome is better if the sum of what is good for each person minus what is bad for each person is greater.

Consequentialism: We are morally required to do what would produce the best outcome.

When we put these ideas together, we get:

Pure Utilitarianism: We are morally required to do what would produce the greatest sum of pleasure minus pain.

Today, we'll examine the first idea, Hedonism.

Is pleasure the only thing that is good as an end? Some initial doubts:

- *Thought experiment*: Professor Kolodny becomes a slug.
- *Thought experiment*: Hooking yourself up to a pleasure machine.
- Would you make this choice? Would that be a good life?
- Does this suggest that things besides pleasure might be good as ends?

How might Bentham reply?

First possible reply: Some pleasures count for more than others simply because of what one takes pleasure in. Pleasures that result from friendships count more than pleasures that result from drugs. (We'll return to this suggestion later.)

Would Bentham agree with this reply?

- "Prejudice apart, the game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry."
- Chapter IV tells us exactly how the "Value of a Lot of Pleasure or Pain" is "to be Measured." All that matters is the pleasure's
 - (i) intensity (i.e., strength),
 - (ii) duration (i.e., how long it lasts),
 - (iii) certainty or uncertainty (i.e., how likely it is to occur),
 - (iv) propinquity or remoteness (i.e. how soon it will occur),
 - (v) fecundity (i.e., whether it produces other pleasures), and
 - (vi) purity (i.e., whether it is not followed by pain).

Second reply: The pleasures that are caused by friendships usually are *more intense* than the pleasures that are caused by drugs.

Some new thought experiments:

Thought experiment: Your life as an episode of MTV's "Punk'd!"

- In the Punk'd version of your life, you would have the exactly the same sensations of pleasure that your actual achievements and relationships bring you in your actual life.

- Why? Because your sensations of pleasure arise from your *beliefs* about your achievements and relationships, and you would have the same *beliefs* in the Punk'd version. The only difference is that your beliefs would be *false*.
- Don't you hope that your life *isn't* an episode of Punk'd?

Possible alternative to Hedonism, part 1: What is good for us, what makes our lives go well, is not *only* pleasure. It also depends on:

- our achieving worthwhile things,
- having meaningful relationships,
- leading a life that we freely choose,
- anything else you can think of?

Do all pleasures of the same intensity, duration, etc. matter, or matter equally?

Compare pleasures from:

- torturing kittens v. helping people
- playing "Chopsticks" over and over v. masterful concertos
- playing push-pin v. writing and appreciating poetry.

How might Bentham reply? We have to take into account how the behavior affects *other people* (or other animals that can experience pain and pleasure).

Is this reply satisfactory?

- Should the sadist's pleasure count for *anything* in *our decisions about what to do*?
- Are such pleasures even good *for him*?

Possible alternative to Hedonism, part 2: Whether pleasures are good for us, and/or whether pleasures should count in our decisions about what to do, depends on *what* we take pleasure *in*.

Why is hedonism, at least at first, plausible and attractive?

- (i) Pleasure and pain clearly matter, in some way, to whether our lives go well for us. A life in agony is, other things equal, a worse life for the person who suffers.
- (ii) When we believe that we have achieved things, or that we have good relationships, this typically *produces* feelings of pleasure. This may make it seem as if these things are good *only* as means to pleasure. But they might *also* be good as ends.
- (iii) Pleasures and pains seem *quantifiable*. This makes possible a determinate decision procedure, a method for resolving conflicts.
- (iv) *Avoids controversies* and seeming *snobbery* about which achievements and relationships are objectively worthwhile. Every person is, in effect, his or her own judge.

Preview: Is *aggregation* correct? Should we simply add up what is good and bad for people?