

The Experience Machine and Personal Good

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Rawls: Utilitarianism takes the principle governing the decisions of a single person and extends it to society.

Principle: Maximize overall good!

Good = pleasure/happiness/desire-satisfaction/self-interest.

Q: Which one?

I. Nozick, 'The Experience Machine'

Nozick takes pleasure/good-experiences as his foil.

- Would you accept the offer? *Should* you accept? Why (not)?
- Too blob-like? Transformation machine. Too inactive? Result machine. Too easy? *Harder* experience machine.
- Should we trust our judgments?
 - Reverse experience machine (matrix).
 - Hard to imagine result machine. (What if I called it a "robotic body"?)
- If you would NOT accept it: What is it you value? Now imagine that *without* pleasure. Still good?
- If you WOULD accept it: Devil offers (1) kids miserable, you think they're happy vs. (2) kids happy, you think they're miserable. Choice?

That's not what you want? Why not? (Are your desires arbitrary, or are there reasons they're sensitive to?)

Leads us to question what our personal good consists in.

II. Parfit, 'What makes Someone's Life Go Best'

- 1) Hedonism ("Feel from the inside.")
- 2) Desire-satisfaction/Success theory (desires *about your life*).
- 3) Objective List (knowledge, virtue, intellect, cultivation of abilities)

Objection to (1)? Experience machine! Long life of a TV rat vs. short life of a tortured intellectual (e.g. Alan Turing).

Objection to (2), for (3)? Addict. Grass-counter [misinformed: Mozart, before heard piano].

Idealize? *How much* information and rationality? Collapse to (3).

Objection to (3), for (2)/(1)? Choose between miserable Nobel-Prize winner, or happy farmer. (A Beautiful Mind?)

Parfit: a mix! **Personal good is composite.** The right sorts of things *plus* desires/pleasure associated with them.

[If time:] Suppose we accept Parfit. Could that solve problematic Utilitarian tradeoffs?