# Later versions of Utilitarianism

PHIL 230, Fall 2014

**The “experience machine” (Nozick)**:

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-- Would you plug in for life? Whether you could stop after a few years and reprogram, and go back in, etc., over and over or whether you just programmed once and went in for the rest of your life—either one.

-- Why or why not?

Answers from class on the wiki:

- go to the course webpage <http://blogs.ubc.ca/phil230>

- click on “wiki” on the top menu

- click on “notes from in class discussions

Direct link: http://wiki.ubc.ca/Course:PHIL230-CH/discussions

**Nozick on experience machine**

Many would not plug in because:

1. They want to actually *do* certain things, not just have an internal experience of doing them

2. They want to actually *be* a certain way, not just have an internal experience of being that way

3. The machine can only give us contact with a reality limited by what we can think of/understand, not “true reality,” which may go beyond this

How this relates to consequentialism and utilitarianism

• consequentialism: we should judge the moral value of actions based on the production of good consequences

-- but how do we judge what counts as “good consequences”?

• hedonistic utilitarianism (Mill): judge consequences based on their production of happiness (pleasure, reduction or absence of pain) because that is the only intrinsically good thing

-- happiness is the ultimate end goal of all our actions; everything else we pursue is for the sake of happiness (everything else has instrumental value)

• the “experience machine” questions whether internal, subjective experiences like pleasure and pain are indeed the only intrinsically good things, that all other things are good just b/c they bring us pleasure or lead to other things that bring us pleasure

-- even if we could have all the internal experiences we want, would there still be something missing that we want to call “good”?

-- so maybe something else should be part of (or the whole of) our judgment of what’s morally right/wrong

**Some other options for utilitarianism** that can deal with this and other objections

**1. Desire-fulfillment utilitarianism (also called preference utilitarianism)**: what is intrinsically good (how we should judge whether consequences are good, and therefore whether acts are morally right) is fulfillment of desires or preferences rather than pleasure

• “An action A is *right* if and only if A would result in at least as much general desire fulfillment as any alternative action that the agent could perform instead” (Timmons 143)

*-- How does this respond to the “experience machine” objection to hedonistic utilitarianism?*

*-- What problems might this view have itself?*

**2. Objective theories of value, rather than subjective**

a. hedonistic and desire-fulfillment theories of value are subjective, in that they say that the only things of intrinsic value relevant to ethics are psychological states or things that are dependent on psychological states

-- e.g., pleasure and reduction of pain, or the fulfillment of desires

b. objective theories of value: what is of intrinsic value relevant for ethics is independent of psychological states

-- e.g., David Brink’s pluralistic theory of value (Timmons 144-146): the following are objectively good:

• pursuing and achieving reasonable personal projects

• having social and personal relationships like family, friends, other social connections

c. This view responds to the following objection:

-- Some say that it makes more sense to say certain things are objectively intrinsically valuable, and that is why we often find them pleasurable or they fulfill certain desires

*-*- I.e., the value of pleasure and desire-fulfillment are dependent upon the objective value of other things

-- Subjective theories of value argue the other way around: other things have value dependent upon whether they are desired, or provide pleasure, which have intrinsic value.

**3. Rule utilitarianism (RU)** (Brandt’s view is one version of this; the following is a more general statement of RU)

a. Act utilitarianism: judge the moral value of an action on the utility of the consequences of that act itself

b. Rule utilitarianism: “An action A is *right* if and only if A is mentioned in a moral rule whose associated utility is at least as great as the utility associated with any alternative moral rule applying to the situation” (Timmons 139)

c. One way to think of the difference:

-- in AU, a principle of utility like Mill’s would be used to judge individual actions

-- in RU, such a principle of utility would be used to judge which rules should be accepted, and then the moral judgment of actions depends on their conforming to a rule that should be accepted

Act utilitarianism Rule utilitarianism

Princ of Utility (e.g., Mill’s GHP)

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Rules about morality of actions

Moral judgment of individual actions

Moral judgment of individual actions

c. The version of RU Timmons considers:

-- The moral value of an act depends on its being mentioned in a rule judged to be good according to its “acceptance utility”

-- acceptance utility: “the utility that would result were individuals generally to accept the rule,” were they to “conform their behavior to the rule in question as a result of internalizing it” (Timmons 139)

-- Brandt has a similar, but more complex version of “acceptance utility” (next set of notes)