

PARMENIDEUM

III. No. 2

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Ascea (Sa) May 2011

PARMENIDEUM

at Elea

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Better to be an unhappy human than a happy machine

Habeeb Marouf

Mill could hardly have imagined that humanity would one day be on the verge of transforming itself from humans, discontented with their natural biological endowments, to beings that transcend not just mere biology but the laws of physics themselves.

The prospect of biogenetic and nanotech engineering and even an eventual transhumanism espoused by a growing number of advocates and “visionaries” brings new life to Mill’s old question. One day, some say quite likely in the next few decades, humans will wrest evolution from natural selection, artificially selecting or knocking out genes that may or may not be desirable, enhancing themselves with intelligent machine parts and perhaps, as many hope and predict, merging with and eventually becoming entirely machine based, in the extreme, becoming simply information held in computer databanks.

Obviously there will be advantages to any one of these transformations, including freedom from disease and injury, increased longevity and perhaps as the transhumanists hope, and many of us might believe we would wish, also the long sought immortality. Other benefits include hyper-intelligence and the acquisition of knowledge without effort as a result of “memory upgrades”, prosthetic and aesthetic enhancements in the form of additional organs and limbs and classical Greek beauty, as well as spectres of virtual reality worlds in which one may experience all possible thrills and delights within and outside of the bounds of those physically possible.

That this will all come to pass is by now uncontroversial, and respected scientists and philosophers speak openly without embarrassment about a brave new world in which humanity will have severed itself from its humble origins. That there will be apparent advantages is also uncontroversial, and few people will deny they are at first glance desirable.¹ However, the question is, apart from the obvious scenario of being overrun,

¹ Those people that stand rigidly against any transformation of humanity are of the opinion that being human is the best thing to be, for humans. And those unreservedly for this transformation are of the opinion that humanity has outlived the usefulness of its wetware, and, literally, it’s time for a change.

enslaved and perhaps exterminated by hyper-intelligent machines grown weary of us, what are the disadvantages to the so called singularity?

At this point it might be helpful to bring the pig and the fool into the issue, particularly the fool. Fools, and to a lesser extent pigs, have a bad reputation when it comes to the finer aspects of life, being essentially simple creatures motivated, as the saying goes, solely by pleasure and the avoidance of immediate suffering. In the case of the pig, evolution has wisely endowed it with an instinct that causes it to seek that pleasure that only serves to enhance its flourishing, though in the case of the fool pleasure seeking can actually result in his destruction. Both however, are adverse to contemplation and planning, or any kind of experience that might hold promise beyond the present moment, and both are notorious for being delighted with what others view with distaste. Towit, mud, trivia and distraction.

How then, do the fool and pig help in understanding the disadvantages of the paradisiacal bounty of the bio, nano and robo world to come?

Perhaps the aspect to being human that makes it difficult to be entirely happy with our lives is the knowledge that all humans are mortal. Indeed, it is easy to imagine that if humans were immortal they would find it easier to cope with disappointment and even pain and suffering in the knowledge that there is an eternity in which to put things right and master the art of living well. Disappointment today could be borne easier knowing that there is plenty of time to try again during uncountable tomorrows, to remake a decision any number of times until one was satisfied with the result. As it stands, a short lifetime makes it imperative that we get it right quickly, else life could turn out to be more miserable than satisfying.

Indeed, the fixed and currently irrevocable end point of death is what adds urgency to life, paradoxically making experience simultaneously both rich and futile. On the one hand humans value each moment more because they are aware there are a limited number of moments, yet on the other, this very limitation ultimately detracts from a complete happiness untrammelled by feelings of futility. Individuals aware of this paradox, though appreciative of the potential richness of any particular moment, nevertheless will certainly be dissatisfied with the final outcome, one that remains the same irrespective of any action it is possible to take. That is presumably why Socrates stated at the time of his trial and execution that the purpose of living was to learn how to die. For Socrates the awareness of

death commands all aspects of an apparently wise man's life, causing him to "examine" it so as to deal not just with its vicissitudes but also its termination.

But despite the impression given by Mill's statement, Socrates was apparently quite satisfied with his life, shown by the fact that he was perfectly at ease when facing its termination. This may have been due in part to his belief in an afterlife, but what must have added significantly and possibly critically was the richness of the life he had lived. Martin Seligman notes three aspects to happiness – the hedonistic, engagement and serving a purpose greater than oneself, all of which in the right measure contribute to Aristotle's notion of eudaemonia, a general life enhancing well being and satisfaction with life. Socrates is seen to have possessed all three. He certainly did not deprive himself of the pleasures of life, carrying on love affairs and hobnobbing with the aristocracy. He also engaged fully in the flow of life by occupying himself with questioning the citizens of Athens from a position of intellectual superiority, an occupation that would be very satisfying indeed if one took the trouble, as he did, to become intellectually superior. And finally he served a purpose greater than himself, the search for truth and knowledge. Thus he possessed all the elements that make for happiness. In addition, at the termination of this satisfying life he was surrounded by devoted friends and followers, something that would have helped greatly in that ordeal.

Mill and the Satisfied Pig: Some Reflections on the Qualitative Distinction between Types of Pleasures

Alan A. Preti (Rosemont College)

It does not take John Stuart Mill very long to cut to the proverbial chase in his classic *Utilitarianism*, the definitive statement of a distinctive moral philosophy; after some brief introductory remarks on the failings of what he calls the "intuitive" and "inductive" schools to establish anything remotely approaching certainty with regard to right and wrong, he proceeds with a clear and concise formulation of the utilitarian doctrine:

The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals "utility" or the "greatest happiness principle" holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote

happiness, wrong as they tend to promote the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain and the privation of pleasure (1863, 9-10).

As Mill recognizes, while this straightforward account requires elaboration, any supplemental explanation does not affect the fundamental view of life that grounds utilitarianism, viz. “that pleasure and freedom from pain are the only things desirable as ends; and that all desirable things ... are desirable either for pleasure inherent in themselves or as meant to the promotion of pleasure or the prevention of pain” (1863, 10).

The psychological hedonism lying at the heart of utilitarian ethics has an old pedigree in Western thought, perhaps going as far back as Democritus. Plato certainly found the view unsettling, wrestling with its implications throughout a number of his works: in the *Gorgias*, he has Socrates challenging Callicles’ defense of a lifestyle dominated by the pursuit of pleasure, while in the *Philebus*, it is Protarchus to whom Socrates points out that a life motivated by pleasure alone is not the life of a man, but rather that of an oyster. In the *Republic*, Socrates describes the city of swine as “filled with a multitude of things which are no longer necessities...,” including, among other things, “cooked dishes and unguents and perfumes, and courtesans and pastries...” (373a-b). But it is with Epicurus that most people identify a life dedicated to the pursuit of *hedone*, and while he undoubtedly endorsed the view, his was not a call for a lifestyle of excessive self-indulgence (as Mill himself points out), but rather for one emphasizing moderation and tranquillity of mind.

Although having precursors in Epicurus and Lucretius, it is the British utilitarians who formalized the connection between desire for pleasure and the avoidance of pain and their bearing on human action. As a moral theory derived from hedonism, utilitarianism, of course, was not Mill’s brainchild, but rather that of his contemporary and his father James’ friend Jeremy Bentham, who in his opening lines from *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* somewhat too readily slips from the psychological to the normative: “Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain*, and *pleasure*. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do” (1879, 1). For Bentham, the issues of social legislation and practical morality were in principle simple enough: identify the proposed courses of action, calculate the net utility resulting from each, and perform the action which produces the maximal outcome. One of course needed to

take into account various aspects of a given pleasure or pain and their bearing on overall utility, identified by Bentham as intensity, duration, certainty, remoteness, fecundity, purity and (when one is concerned with utility as it applies beyond the sphere of the individual) extent;¹ the fundamental doctrine, however, merely made explicit what seemed to Bentham to be the indisputable basis of human beings' everyday motivation and behavior.

Mill's own utilitarianism, while a development of Bentham's original insight, consisted in large part in a repudiation of those elements which he found problematic with the Benthamite vision, particularly those which led detractors to identify utilitarianism as "a doctrine worthy only of swine," one of the more common epithets directed toward the theory by its critics.² Indeed, Mill's well-known distinction between 'higher' and 'lower' pleasures was drawn specifically as a corrective to what he took to be a gross misconstrual of Epicureanism in all its varieties, including its contemporary manifestation in the nascent utilitarian philosophy. By drawing a qualitative distinction between distinctive types of pleasures, Mill took himself to be transforming a simple "pig's philosophy" to a doctrine worthy of any Victorian gentleman worth his salt.

The distinction between two types of pleasures is one of the unique features of Mill's utilitarianism, and there has been no shortage of ink spilled on the matter. Whether it is indeed the case that it is "better to be a human dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied" is a question of intrinsic merit; and yet, divorced from the greater context of Mill's vision of the ethical life, loses some of its force. Mill's point was essentially that which Socrates made to Protarchus: a life lived for the sake of pleasure alone – and here it is Mill's 'lower' pleasures which Socrates has in mind – is not a life worth living, at least not for a human being. The reason is clear enough; the human conception of

¹ See chapter IV of the *Principles*.

² Mill refers to "the herd of writers, not only in newspapers and periodicals, but in books of weight and pretension ..." (9) and unnamed "German, French, and English Assailants" (10) as chiefly responsible for the mischaracterization of utilitarianism as a philosophy advocating a life of self-indulgence. He also seems to have had in mind Thomas Carlyle's essay *Jesuitism* in the *Latter-Day Pamphlets*, in which is denounced the prevalent godless "Pig Philosophy" likening the universe to an "immeasurable pig's trough" in which Paradise is the "unlimited attainability of Pig's-wash" (1858, 266).

happiness cannot be satisfied in the absence of the exercise of those ‘higher faculties’ unique to human beings. As Mill puts it:

Human beings have faculties more elevated than the animal appetites, and once made conscious of them, do not regard anything as happiness which does not include their gratification. ... 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. (1863, 11)

One might think, given Bentham’s emphasis on the quantitative in the employment of the felicific calculus, that he was an exception to the above sentiment. After all, Bentham seems to have been quite adamant that the quantity of pleasure trumped any purported qualitative ranking of pleasures; as he puts it in *The Rationale of Reward*, “prejudice apart, the game of push-pin is of equal value with the arts and sciences of music and poetry”³ (1825, 206); all else being equal, the pleasure afforded by a simple child’s game is of no lesser (or greater) value than the pleasure afforded by a performance of Beethoven’s *Pathétique* sonata or a recitation of Wordsworth’s *Tintern Abbey*.

Yet a caricature of Bentham as a “Porky the Pig” character preferring an afternoon rollicking in the mud to an afternoon of refined aesthetic enjoyment is too facile; indeed, had this been the case, we should have hardly been the beneficiaries of Bentham’s voluminous writings and important contributions to the legal and social reforms for which he is so admired. The push-pin comment, too easily marked as an unambiguous exaltation of a simpleton’s low-brow satisfactions, and all too often portrayed as Benthamism in a nutshell, was intended to emphasize pleasure in general as the hallmark of utility – not as a repudiation of all things aesthetic and intellectual.⁴ If an innocent game such as push-pin “furnish more pleasure [than music or poetry], it is more valuable than either” (1825, 206). Of course, were it the other way around, the latter would be more valuable. It may well be that simple pastimes requiring little or nothing in

³ Misquoted by Mill in his essay *On Bentham* as “quantity of pleasure being equal, push-pin is as good as poetry” (1859a, 389).

⁴ It is also important to note that the push-pin comment constitutes part of a larger rebuke of those whom Bentham saw as self-styled standard-bearers of “good taste,” singling out for especial attack the essayist Joseph Addison (see 1825, 209).

the way of mental exertion *as a matter of fact* occupy a greater part of most people's time than do the arts and sciences, and thus *as a matter of fact* produce more pleasure; this does not mitigate the potential utility of the latter, a point which did not go unnoticed by Bentham:

All the arts and sciences, without exception, inasmuch as they constitute innocent employments, at least of time, possess a species of moral utility, neither the less real or important because it is frequently unobserved. They compete with, and occupy the place of those mischievous and dangerous passions and employments, to which want of occupation and ennui give birth. They are excellent substitutes for drunkenness, slander, and the love of gaming. (1825, 207)

Is there intimation here, however unfocused, of the qualitative distinction later made explicit by Mill? Bentham's caveat "inasmuch as they constitute innocent employments" militates against this interpretation, as he seems to have in mind here something on the order of passively listening to music or enjoying a sunset, or passing the time with one's photo or stamp collection – in short, nothing which exercises the 'higher faculties,' at least not in the same way that a close study of classical Sanskrit texts would. This being the case, Bentham's point seems to be that the pleasures of "innocent employments" of whatever type are of greater utility than the debauchery which he associates with idleness and boredom, and that only because of the greater quantity of pleasure which they produce when engaged in.⁵ But then this latter point could be extended to include *any* higher pleasure, and indeed, that is what Mill seems to have in mind when he admits that "utilitarian writers in general have placed the superiority of the mental over bodily pleasures *chiefly in the greater permanency, safety, uncostliness, etc. of the former* – that is, in their circumstantial advantage rather than in their intrinsic nature" (1863, 11 [italics mine]). But as we know, the fact that the mental pleasures might be considered preferable on the basis of the amount of pleasure they produce will not suffice for Mill, as he seeks to take the higher ground, as it were.

Enough has been said to suggest that the view of Bentham as advocating a philosophy of unadulterated sensual indulgence is misplaced.

⁵ But doesn't this contravene the felicific calculus? What if I enjoy drunkenness more than a sunset? And what if I derive greater pleasure from "want of occupation and ennui" than from either of the others?

However, we can put the issue to rest by pointing out that in the list of pleasures enumerated in the *Principles*, the “pleasures of sense” are but one of fourteen, the others including pleasures of wealth, skill, amity, a good name, power, piety, benevolence, malevolence, memory, imagination, expectation, association, and relief.⁶ While clearly not a sensualist, then, Bentham was nevertheless what one might call an *experiential* hedonist, holding that the pleasures to which humans are susceptible are all tied in one way or another to some type of experience or state, usually narrowly construed. That is, most of Bentham’s illustrations suggest kinetic, as opposed to static pleasures; there is little to suggest that a life of Epicurean *ataraxia* was the ideal for Bentham.

It is interesting to note that the list of pleasures excludes anything remotely resembling what Mill would call a higher pleasure: what of the pleasures of the arts and sciences the utility of which Bentham himself recognized in the passage quoted above (whether those of ‘innocent employment’ or of a more sophisticated pedigree)? Can the pleasure of an aesthetic or intellectual experience perhaps be reduced to any of the pleasures or some combination thereof in Bentham’s list? Surely *some* such experiences will include *some* of the pleasures enumerated; any number of musical works, say, will engage the memory and imagination, satisfy or thwart our expectations, produce a sense of relief when releasing harmonic tension, and so on. But I do not see how a wholesale reduction of higher pleasures to instances of any of Bentham’s pleasures, whether singly or in combination with others, is possible.

Although we have saved Bentham from the pig caricature, then, it cannot be denied that his views on pleasure and human motivation are rather restricted in scope; it is not easy to tease out his precise sentiments on the so-called higher pleasures, and it is not clear that he had a coherent account of what it is to live well (over and above the call for maximizing utility, understood in terms of quantity of pleasure), which is, after all, what we would hope from a theory of morals. And it is this deficiency, as well as others, which led ultimately to Mill’s disillusionment with Benthamism and to his revision of the utilitarian doctrine; however indebted he was to his elder contemporary, however much he defends him in his later essays, Mill found Bentham’s views on human nature constricted by a narrowness of vision stemming from paucity of experience. For Mill, Bentham’s empiricism was “of one who has had little experience;” the man himself was

⁶ See chapter V.

“a boy to the last” in whose soul self-consciousness was never awakened, and who knew “so little of human feelings ... [and] still less of the influences by which those feelings are formed” (1859b, 354-5). And perhaps most importantly:

Man is never recognized by him as a being capable of pursuing spiritual perfection as an end; of desiring, for its own sake, the conformity of his own character to his standard of excellence, without hope of good or fear of evil from other source than his own inward consciousness. (1859b, 359)

In these and other reflections on Bentham’s weaknesses as a philosopher and moralist, Mill speaks to the realizations which accompanied the recovery from his depression of winter 1826-7, and which had a significant effect on the direction of his thought from that point forward. He tells us, in his autobiography, that while not rejecting *in toto* everything which he had come to believe about the promise of utilitarianism, he nevertheless “for the first time, gave its proper place, among the prime necessities of human well-being, to the internal culture of the individual. ...the cultivation of the feelings became one of the cardinal points in my ethical and philosophical creed” (1873, 143). Inspired by this new vision, Mill worked toward developing an important dimension of utilitarianism which makes demands on us in a way that is much more consistent with the conception of ethics as ultimately concerned with how best to live. In order to flesh out how this is so, let me turn back to Mill and take a closer look at the qualitative distinction between types of pleasures.

We have referenced the distinction several times now without having stated explicitly what is being distinguished, although I think we have a fairly good idea what the issue is. Mill himself expresses the distinction in various ways, contrasting at different points in *On Utilitarianism* between a) higher and lower pleasures, b) pleasures of the intellect, feelings and imagination, and moral sentiments, and those of mere sensation, and c) mental and bodily pleasures. What is intended here seems clear enough; it is not a classification that was unrecognized prior to Mill, who himself was acquainted from his earliest years with the Greek philosophers who emphasized philosophy and other intellectual and moral activities in their conceptions of a flourishing life. The sticking point, however, is Mill’s claim that the higher pleasures are intrinsically more valuable than the lower pleasures on account of their qualitative superiority; there is no amount (read: quantity, especially of intensity and duration) of

any lower pleasure that could make it more valuable than any higher pleasure. But why not?

Recall that Bentham's felicific calculus assesses the relative values of pleasures, with quantity as the sole criterion. As long as I adopt some unit as a standard and assign to it a specific amount of pleasure, all I need do is compute values to determine which choice or course of action maximizes utility. Just as assigning weight to physical objects with a standard unit of measurement allows us to judge that one is heavier or lighter than another, we can 'weigh' the objects of our desires in terms of the amount of pleasure they produce. If a glass of Lello's homemade *Falanghina* produces for me six units of pleasure – say, with one unit equivalent to one minute's worth of relatively intense pleasure – while a glass of Mastroberardino's *Aglianico* produces three, so much the worse for Mastroberardino. Of course, I am oversimplifying for the sake of clarity; a thorough application of the calculus would have us not only assigning values to each of the six (and the seventh, when appropriate) elements relevant to the outcome, but also balancing the overall amount of pleasure against the overall amount of pain. If the six units of pleasure produced by Lello's *Falanghina* obtain at the expense of four units of pain in the form of severe gastrointestinal disturbances, Mastroberardino gains the upper hand by one unit. In any case, the main point is that, again, all else being equal, the amount of pleasure is the strict measure.

Such an approach, as mentioned earlier, was available to Mill, but he preferred to take the higher ground with the qualitative distinction. Because of the qualitative difference between higher and lower pleasures, there is no criterion whereby pleasures of either type can be weighed against the other (nor, it would seem, can higher pleasures themselves be weighed against each other; or does quantity enter into the mix here?). Higher and lower pleasures are different in *kind*, and where there are differences in kind there exists no standard of measurement that could be applied across the board. But if this is the case, as has been pointed out by a number of critics, Mill cannot accept the distinction without significant cost – he must abandon the hedonism which he claims is the foundation of utilitarianism. If the fundamental hedonist claim is that the objects of our desire are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in themselves or for the pleasure they produce, there seems to be no ground for preferring one over the other save for the amount of pleasure produced: what other ground could there be? Quality ends up collapsing into quantity. To deny this is to accept that there is some reason other than their pleasantness which can serve as a criterion

for comparison. G.E. Moore's description of the problem is as clear a statement as any; substituting 'colour alone is good as an end' for the hedonistic principle 'pleasure alone is good as an end,' Moore says:

It is plain that if you say "Colour alone is an end," then you can give no possible reason for preferring one colour over another. Your only standard of good and bad will then be "colour"; and since red and blue both conform equally to this, the only standard, you can have no other whereby to judge whether red is better than blue. ... Just so with pleasure: If we really do mean "Pleasure alone is good as an end," then we must agree with Bentham that "Quantity of pleasure being equal, pushpin is as good as poetry."⁷ (1959, 81)

We will see whether this criticism is as devastating as it appears. In the meantime, we might ask on what basis the distinction is proffered in the first place. What makes some pleasures intrinsically more valuable than others? For Mill, the empiricist, there is "but one possible answer":

If one of the two [pleasures] is, by those who are competently acquainted with both, placed so far above the other that they prefer it, even though knowing it to be attended with a greater amount of discontent, and would not resign it for any quantity of the other pleasure which their nature is capable of, we are justified in ascribing to the preferred enjoyment a superiority in quality so far outweighing quantity as to render it, in comparison, of small account. (1863, 12)

We must defer to the consensus of competent judges, those who have experienced both types of pleasures, and who, if not unanimously, at least by a majority, have indicated a preference for a given type; and naturally, it is the higher pleasures which are preferred.

Mill takes it to be a matter of fact that one who is "qualified by knowledge" of both types will necessarily prefer the higher, simply because of their intrinsic superiority (1863, 15).

Now, this account similarly raises a host of well-known problems, not the least of which concerns the charge of elitism – who exactly are these

⁷ Note that Moore quotes Mill's own misquote of Bentham; see n.3 above. Other classic critiques making essentially the same point include those found in Bradley 1927 (116-20) and Sidgwick 1907 (94-5).

competent judges? Victorian gentlemen like Mill himself who mastered Greek and Latin while still a child, and had a thorough knowledge of the classics by age twelve? But perhaps the charge is unfair; after all, we do seek out experts whenever our own experience in a given area is wanting. We prefer the counsel of someone well-versed in her area of expertise, be it tort law, pest extermination, interior decoration, or what have you, just *because* of her expertise. If someone competently acquainted with the pleasures of both Plato's dialogues and blended whiskeys is in a position to tell me which is the more desirable, I should like to know.

There are additional problems. What does it mean to be competently acquainted with a given pleasure? To have experienced it more than once? How many times? Won't this vary, depending on the sort of pleasure? I suppose some cases are fairly straightforward. I am competently acquainted with the pleasures of, say, sitting round a fire, exercising, stroking cats, and other simple activities which do not require much in the way of developing competency. Other cases, however, are not so simple. I hear a piece of music for the first time. It gives me pleasure. I develop a liking for the piece, and begin listening to it on a regular basis. It is not wildly implausible to think that at some point, I have become competently acquainted with the pleasure afforded by the piece.

But now consider: in time, my listening deepens and I discover patterns, nuances, sounds of which I was unaware in my initial hearings. I gain pleasure from these discoveries, but it is a different sort of pleasure than before. The previous pleasure was of a passive nature; I was taken by the seeming simplicity of the melody, the rhythmic pulse, the bombastic ending, without reflecting on any of these aspects – they just made me *feel* good. The later pleasure(s) resulted from a more focused and active listening, revealing that the melody was not as simple as I had initially thought, expanding sinuously through various permutations which deviated in sometimes predictable and sometimes not-so-predictable ways from the original statement, before finally returning to its earlier simplicity. The rhythm was also much more complex than I thought, with a variety of shifts in emphasis throughout the work; in fact, attending solely to the rhythm of the piece has opened up a whole new world of pleasure. Am I becoming more competently acquainted with the piece?

Before long, I discern an overall pattern to the work which had completely eluded me previously; I now conceive of the piece as having a unified structure, made all the more coherent on account of the variety of the melodic, harmonic, rhythmic, and dynamic elements and the manner in

which the composer has integrated them. I have discovered a critical aspect of music appreciation – form. The pleasure that I feel in connection with these new experiences and insights is in some sense deeper than the pleasure associated with my earlier hearings; it is a pleasure of understanding, mingled with a new kind of sensibility (I would call it an aesthetic sensibility, I suppose, if I had the word). It is, indeed, a pleasure of a quite different ... *quality*. I also find it (in a way which I cannot make clear to myself) more valuable, more meaningful than the simple pleasure of just “feeling good,” which is what I recall about my earlier experience.

Intrigued, I embark upon a study of anything and everything related to music: the physics of sound, the historical development of music in different cultures, theory of harmony, composition, musical aesthetics. I also begin studying various instruments, with a view to learning the piece that set me on this course, and many others. The process, though lengthy and often frustrating, is peppered with more profound moments of clarity and insight into this phenomenon we call music, as well as its relation to any number of dimensions of human experience. It is also a journey with no end, at least none that I can imagine attaining; there is simply too much to learn, too much to accomplish. Competent acquaintance, it would seem, is somewhat more complicated a concept than originally thought. Not only that, but in the attempt to determine what constitutes competence, we seem to have discovered something of great value.

There is much at stake here. Can I ever go back to that innocent state, to that naïveté of the earlier pleasure? Of course; in fact, one might argue that such an outlet is necessary if one is to maintain a healthy mental balance. Indeed, Mill suggests that it was the very absence of such an outlet that figured strongly in his bout of depression. So I might find myself interrupting my self-imposed regimen of higher-faculty exercise with moments given to the unabashed pleasures of immediate, non-reflective passive experience: sipping a single-malt Scotch while letting the sweet sounds of a Bach sarabande sweep over me, or, for that matter, knocking back a few pints while singing along with the Rolling Stones’ (*I Can’t Get No*) *Satisfaction* at full tilt (and wondering whether a teenage Mick Jagger’s lyrics bespoke a prescience of the limitations of a life given to the lower pleasures). There may be a question as to whether I can truly appreciate such pleasures in precisely the same fashion as I did before – they are no longer the pleasures of a naïve mind, after all, but of a mind having temporarily peeled back layers of encrusted reflection and analysis. And it is

not clear to me such a case would be completely free of at least some sedimentation which would serve to differentiate between the experiences.

The more important question, however, is not whether one could or would willingly put their intellectual pursuits and activities briefly on hold in order to make room for a handful (or even more) of bodily pleasures (we can, and we do), but rather, whether one would choose to live a life dedicated solely to the pursuit of the lower pleasures, once having experienced what a life motivated in large part by intellectual, aesthetic, and moral pursuits has to offer. Mill, as we know, thought not, although allowing that there are bound to be unfortunate exceptions:

Few human creatures would consent to be changed into any of the lower animals for a promise of a full allowance of a beast's pleasures; no intelligent human 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 their lot than they are with theirs. ... A being of higher faculties ... can never really wish to sink into what he feels to be a lower grade of existence. (1863, 12-13)

We have, it would seem, returned to the central theme, whether it is better to be a human dissatisfied than a pig satisfied. And why, may we ask, would the competent judge be unwilling to make such a trade-off?

We may give what explanation we please of this unwillingness...but its most appropriate appellation is a sense of dignity, which all human beings possess in one form or other, and in some, though by no means in exact, proportion to their higher faculties, and which is so essential a part of the happiness of those in whom it is strong that nothing which conflicts with it could be otherwise than momentarily an object of desire to them. (1863, 13)

In this passage, we find a suggestion as to how Mill's position, despite the inconsistencies noted in the criticisms noted earlier, can be vindicated. I suggested earlier that Mill's reevaluation and reform of Bentham's utilitarianism added a dimension that had been lacking in the latter's views, one much more consistent with the conception of ethics as ultimately concerned with how best to live. That this is so is no great revelation; we are well aware of the extent to which Mill's work was motivated by his disillusionment with Benthamism. It is also helpful to keep in mind that

Bentham was far more concerned with organizing the chaotic mess that passed for British jurisprudence during his lifetime than he was with ethics in the broad sense. For Mill, ethics could never be severed from its classical roots, as intimated earlier. In this connection, what I think gets lost among the better-known critiques such as those advanced by Moore and others, is the connection between the qualitative distinction and Mill's call for self-actualization and moral development. While never deviating from his commitment to utilitarianism's prescription for promoting the greater good, it is easy to overlook the fact that Mill's conception of happiness is one that includes a requirement for a steadfast resolve for self-improvement, one which cannot obtain without the proper exercise of the higher faculties. To miss this point is to misunderstand Mill.

We must keep in mind that Mill, ever the self-conscious moralist, in *On Utilitarianism* is providing us with a manual for how to live; in so doing, he challenges us to develop the higher faculties with a view to forming a noble and moral character, as it is precisely nobility of character that allows us to live an authentic human existence. Adherence to the principle of utility, if limited merely to taking stock of the consequences of actions through an impersonal cost-benefit analysis, overlooks the important relation between actions and the mind of the agent, and how this relation bears on her entire moral being. It is not a sequence of individual pleasures (even in the ideal combination of intellectual pursuits and sensual indulgence) tallied up over the course of one's life that constitutes a happy and meaningful existence, but rather the spirit of the moral agent and how it is conducted throughout a lifetime. We make ourselves through our choices; we become human through the exercise of those very faculties that allow us to become so. If they are left to stagnate, we do not make good on the potential for the authorship of our own being, and indeed, of the entire community.

Mill's sensitivity to the dignity of the human being and its importance to human progress (both individual and collective) is echoed throughout several of his most important works. In *On Liberty*, his view of freedom extends beyond a narrow conception of the limits of state power toward a broader vision of human liberty centred round the concept of the developing person: his is not merely a theory of liberty, but a theory of human personality and its potentiality for growth, richness, and self-realization. Mill has it that "it really is of importance, not only what men do, but also that manner of men they are that do it" (1859b, 106). And commensurate with the duty of effecting such a transformation – for Mill

does indeed view moral self-cultivation as a duty – is the individuality without which moral responsibility would be an empty concept.

Mill's discussion of the freedom of the will ("Of Liberty and Necessity") in *A System of Logic* likewise speaks to cultivation of character, in this context with reference to the important role played by habit. The creature of moral habit is no longer motivated by the expectation of pleasure or pain; either will continue to obtain as the consequences of actions, but the moral agent acts independently of these expectations. The thrill of victory and the agony of defeat, shall we say, have been rendered irrelevant. In the end, "it is only when our purposes [i.e. our habits of willing] have become independent of the feelings of pain or pleasure from which they originally took their rise, that we are said to have a confirmed character" (1959, 552).

Ultimately, it may be that Mill would have been better served by simply doing away with the qualitative distinction, and by speaking instead of the value of exercising the higher faculties in connection with a perfectionist conception of happiness. It does appear that Mill, while not a virtue ethicist, was aiming to balance the requirements of the principle of utility with those of the virtues. Certainly, there is a strong case to be made that Mill's departure from Bentham's strict hedonism puts him, while most definitely not completely within, then at least round the perimeter of Aristotle's camp. Working on sketches and writing parts of *On Liberty* during a Mediterranean sojourn in 1855 with stops in Sorrento, Naples, Palermo, Messina, and Corfu before continuing on to Athens and Delphi, and heading back to Florence, Milan, and Lugano, it is fitting to find him acknowledging in that work Plato and Aristotle as '*i maestri di color che sanno*.'⁸ Mill notes that it was the 'lofty inspiration' of the former and the 'judicious utilitarianism' of the latter that were the "headsprings of ethical and all other philosophy" (1859b, 46). And while it may be a stretch to call Aristotle a judicious utilitarian, we can see why Mill was motivated to make room for the virtues in his conception of the good life; he simply could not rest satisfied without acknowledging the debt owed to the rational ethical traditions with which he was familiar from his earliest years. Plato and Aristotle may have been the headsprings, but Mill stands squarely downstream.

These observations suggest to me that in the end, it is not so much whether the alleged inconsistencies in Mill's qualitative distinction are insurmountable without sacrificing his hedonism, or whether Mill is

⁸ Paraphrasing Dante from Canto IV of *La Divina Commedia* (Inferno).

consistent in his definitions of pleasure and happiness, or whether he falls back on intuitionism when he claims that ultimate ends cannot be proven to be so, and so on. These are, of course, important philosophical issues. But I fear it is myopic to lay all bets on any one or more of these, as if Mill's insights stand or fall on them. This may seem a curious claim; but we are treating of philosophy here, where one man's clear and absolute refutation is another's incoherent mass of confusion. As philosophers, we are, of course, concerned with truth, and in this case, the truth of Mill's views. But I would submit that such truth lies not in the probing analysis of the man's words (however pleasurable an experience that is in itself), but rather in the life inspired to live by them as much as is humanly possible.

Mill brings to a close his *System of Logic* with a statement which I find to be one of his most eloquent (there are so many) on the matter, and it serves just as well to bring to an end the reflections in this paper:

The character itself should be, to the individual, a paramount end, simply because the existence of this ideal nobleness of character ... would go further than all things else toward making human life happy; both in the comparatively humble sense, of pleasure and freedom from pain, and in the higher meaning, of rendering life, not what it now is almost universally, puerile and insignificant – but such as human beings with highly developed faculties can care to have. (1959, 621-22)

In fine, yes, it is indeed better to be a human dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied.

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Pleasure and Qualitative Worth: Mill Can't Have It Both Ways

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Mill's view that it was better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a pig satisfied, turning on its head Bentham's provocative dictum and returning to Aristotle's wisdom, was supported by Mill's distinction between lower and higher pleasures. At the same time Mill insisted he was remaining faithful to Bentham's hedonic utilitarianism that recognises only one intrinsic good: pleasure. Defenders of Mill (e.g. Crisp) say he can make these consistent by recognising qualitative distinctions within the sole good of pleasure. After all, even gustatory taste allows for qualitative distinction (fine chocolate and a good pizza are qualitative distinct), so why not between very different kinds of pleasure (food, sex, Shakespeare, Schubert, etc.)?

The possibility of qualitative distinction should be uncontroversial; it is their subsequent ranking ("lower", "higher") that is problematic. Mill suggests this ranking in various ways that raise questions both about their consistency with each other and with hedonic utilitarianism. On the one hand there is an intrinsic intuitive ranking that holds intellectual pleasures superior to bodily ones. On this view competence in judging means having the appropriate intuitions. On the other hand the suggestion that competent judges prefer one to the other can be read in terms of preference satisfaction: a de facto recognition of preference, and a normative accommodation of this preference.

Neither of these strategies is successful. The intrinsic ranking is plausible and no doubt congenial to Aristotelian inclinations. But its plausibility derives from the existence of other values. One can say intellectual pleasures are superior to bodily ones because they reflect, say, the higher dignity of rational beings. But then the dignity of rationality is a good or value distinct from pleasure. One can distinguish between the two pleasures qualitatively without recourse to an independent value, but then one cannot assign to them an intrinsic ranking. The notion of *qualitative distinction* is ambiguous between the chocolate/pizza distinction denoting

unranked but distinct “qualities”, and the colloquial use of “quality” as a term of ranking, such as in “this is a quality product”. Some Mill interpreters fallaciously trade on the ambiguity, thinking they can pass from having made the first kind of distinction (unranked) to the second.

The second strategy of treating the preference of competent judges as a brute psychological fact has problems of its own. First, it is implausible that most who show some preference for intellectual over physical pleasures will never sacrifice any amount of the “higher” for the “lower” pleasure. Mill is pushed to make that implausible suggestion in order to make the distinction appear more than a mere *de facto* preference. That is, it is not merely that one is *preferred* over the other, but one is *esteemed* over the other. That is just a way of attempting to bring the intrinsic ranking in through the back door of *de facto* judgement, but if the philosopher is not committing himself to an endorsement of the judgment, hardly any normative implications follow; the hedonic utilitarian must still maximise aggregate pleasure irrespective of evaluations. A person may derive more pleasure (however guiltily) from a pleasure she evaluates less than another.

Even if one grants the implausible suggestion that competent judges prefer any amount of the higher over the lower pleasure, the desired normative implications of practically favouring the higher pleasures still do not follow. For if you could either make one Socrates intellectually stimulated but unsatisfied, or ten pigs happy, the fact that competent human judges prefer being Socrates does not show that aggregate pleasure maximisation can be achieved by favouring the intellectual stimulation of Socrates. On the other hand, if one reverts to a utilitarianism of preference satisfaction one could give weight to the alleged preferences of those “competent judges” for their higher pleasures, but no more weight than the preference of incompetent people and normal pigs (and other animals) for their “lower” pleasures. All these would have to enter the calculus on an even footing. Mill fails, then, to make the ranked distinction consistent with hedonic utilitarianism, and as for a preference-satisfying utilitarianism, the distinction fails to capture the intuition that one sort of pleasure is intrinsically higher and thus ought normatively to be favoured.

Beyond Happiness: A ‘Complete’ Life

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John Stuart Mill draws a quite interesting and controversial conclusion. He claims that "it is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied."¹ Although Mill's claim seems to be just a direct criticism of hedonism, which could be simply outlined as an ethical perspective that holds "pleasure is the highest good", it actually harbours questions about values that make life worth living. What kind of life is a good life? Is happiness the ultimate end or are there values we cannot forgo even for the sake of happiness? Would it be possible for a human being to desire a life without having the liberty of leading a 'complete' life which comprises happiness as well as sorrow, longing, regret, and many other human states? Once the problem is seen in such a perspective, it is clear that the dilemma Mill proposed can be situated at the centre of value theory and could be recapitulated by the question of what kind of life is worth living.

Although it would be quite bold to claim that everyone would prefer the life of the unhappy Socrates, a significant number of people would probably be unwilling to trade their lives, which have a great likelihood of containing sadness and pain, with a life that will guarantee a carefree life in which they will be unable to question whether or not they are happy. But, what is it that keeps people from making such a choice? What annoys about the characters, say, in Huxley's *Brave New World* who continue their carefree lives by taking a certain dose of 'soma' every day? Interestingly, there is something making people discontent with scenarios in which happiness is guaranteed at the cost of forgoing freedom and the opportunity of a 'complete' life. Perhaps this is due to the fact that human beings do not prefer sheer happiness to the exclusion of other intrinsic values that make our lives worth living. I shall here argue that there are intrinsic values other than happiness and that beyond happiness we value in life that make our lives "complete" such as desire for freedom, reality, and living our own unique existence among many other indispensable human values. I shall then draw attention to the fact that these intrinsic values

¹ *Utilitarianism* (1861) Ch.II.

harbour an array of feelings other than or even contradictory to happiness and joy. Hence, since our desire for a complete life surpasses our desire for happiness, we cannot easily forgo our humanity even though being human invites burden and weight.

Before attempting to argue for the indispensability of these intrinsic values for a good life and to shed light on why we choose to possess such values that could sometimes contradict pleasure and happiness, I need to address what I mean by ‘happiness’ and ‘intrinsic value’ in this context. While happiness could be defined in many different ways, for present purposes, I take it as a “feeling the lightness of living without reflection.” Given this definition, someone who uses hallucinogenic drugs to relieve pain is considered happy, so is a pig or a mentally handicapped person. This might seem an oversimplified view of happiness; yet, my main focus will be on this conception of happiness and it will help me in answering the question that boggles my mind: could anyone wish that he/she were a carefree pig in this world rather than living the life of a human being with all its ups and downs?

Simply put, intrinsic values are defined as values that are desired for themselves regardless of whether they are also useful as a means to promote some other ends. In that way, intrinsic values are distinguished from extrinsic or instrumental values. To illustrate, whereas money (to buy beautiful dresses) or a radio (to listen to good music) are instrumentally \square hence extrinsically \square valuable; beauty, happiness, joy, and health have intrinsic value. Living a complete life requires intrinsic values other than happiness. Yet, some intrinsic values that are indispensable for a good life inherently contain pain, difficulty, or suffering. We want love in our lives, we want passion, we want to be healthy, we want wisdom; yet, love is never devoid of some pain, passion brings with it jealousy, effort is required to keep up health, and it is not without some sort of pain and difficulty that people become wise. Then, knowing that they harbour pain and difficulty, could love, passion, health, and wisdom still be desirable? We are confronted with a dilemma here, because while we chase after such values, at the same time we destine ourselves to the possibility of suffering. Hence, since the values similar to these are indispensable for a good and complete life, it could be claimed that a good life will never be completely devoid of some pain.

Central to a good life, freedom of choice is an intrinsic value, among others, we want to possess even though it brings with it responsibility and possible regrets in the course of our lives. No one in their

right mind would be willing to trade his/her freedom of choice for the sake of pleasure. Freedom of choice is so essential to a good life that when a person is to be punished, the most commonly used method is imprisonment which means taking away one's freedom of choice. Human beings get frustrated when they are deprived of freedom of choice or when they are forced to live under another's will. On the other hand, living without freedom of choice, an animal has no burden on its shoulders. It is freedom of choice that brings with it responsibility, the need for constant reflection, and possible regrets. Given this picture, the carefreeness of an animal seems tempting; yet, giving up on our freedom of choice would not be easy. On the one hand, there is a prospect of a *happy* (reflection-free), yet severely incomplete life devoid of freedom of choice, and on the other hand, there is a life with freedom of choice that allows for tears or laughs. For some, it might be difficult to choose one over the other, but I don't think we would want to sacrifice freedom of choice for the sake of happiness.

In addition to freedom of choice, human beings immensely value "reality"; in fact, happiness and pleasure are worthy as long as they are connected with reality. For instance, no matter how intense the pleasure we feel during our dreams, we do not take our pleasant dreams into account when someone asks us if we are happy. It is because we think that the happiness we feel in our dreams does not contribute to our well-being in life. Yet, it is exactly "us" who experience this happiness whether in a dream or in reality; and happiness in a dream, unlike eating a banana in the dream, is only a feeling and has no physical complement. A banana I have eaten in my dream cannot satisfy my hunger physically, but happiness has a different nature. It is a feeling, and I should feel satisfied whether I am dreaming or not. In other words, happiness I feel in my dream and happiness I feel in real life should not differ in terms of "wholeness". But, our concern for reality is so ingrained that happiness that is not accompanied by reality is ignored by us as if it never existed and has never been experienced.

In support of my thesis, Robert Nozick invites us to a thought experiment that allows us to test ourselves in a relevant scenario in his article "The Experience Machine"². He wants us to imagine a machine that could give us whatever desirable or pleasurable experiences we could want. He says that "superduper neuropsychologists" have figured out a way to stimulate a person's brain to induce pleasurable experiences that the subject could not distinguish from those she'd have apart from the machine. He then

² *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, New York: Basic Books, 1974, pp. 42-45.

asks, given the choice, whether or not we would prefer to live plugged into the machine rather than choosing the real life? In order to make the experience flawless, he also adds that we would not know that it is the machine that produces the pleasure and we will get the feeling of being in love or writing a bestseller or giving a wonderful concert. Yet, how many of us would be willing to get hooked up to this experience machine and give up our freedom and our contact with reality? According to Nozick, our choice would be against plugging in and he concludes, “Perhaps what we desire is to live ... ourselves, in contact with reality” (p. 45). I think his reasoning is pretty accurate; because our desire for freedom as well as our desire for reality and curiosity regarding our own lives would stand in front of us as a staunch barrier and leave us indecisive. Despite the undeniable love of pleasure and happiness, this is probably the reason why people approach this seemingly brilliant alternative with hesitation.

The pleasures we feel during the simulation do not satisfy us as the real pleasures. It might be more intense or long-lasting than the pleasures we could have in real life, but we feel like there is something missing. And that is our contact with reality. Of course, the machine could provide us with a feeling that “it is the only reality”, yet when choosing this option of getting hooked up to this machine, I will know that I am forgoing reality and that is the exact reason that would stop many, if not all, people from accepting this seemingly fabulous offer.

Another value that makes life complete for human beings is living one’s own unique existence. We have a strong tie to our own existence and we are inherently curious about our own life story. I especially want to dwell on this “passion of the soul”³, curiosity, which is essential to a good life. Being lured by the attraction of the lightness of living without reflection, and preferring the “life of a pig”, one also loses out on the possibility of living his/her own unique life; because it is our choices, mistakes, successes, and weaknesses that makes us unique beings. Inherently, we immensely value being ourselves at a deeper level □ if we are not in a depressed mood. This could be inferred from our hesitation to choose the pleasure machine over real life. We do not know what is waiting for us in real life; yet, anyone who has lived a little bit can easily guess that it will contain some pain besides happiness. Nonetheless, we still tend to prefer living our real lives rather than a simulated joyfulness because we

³ According to Descartes, curiosity, which is defined as a desire for understanding, is among the passions of the soul, cf.. *Passions of the Soul* (1650).

want to see what will happen in “our” lives. We would not want to lose out on our own life story and a great sense of curiosity makes us want to experience our less-than-perfect lives. Despite the probable turbulences and mishaps, we have a connection to our lives and we would never want to let go of this bizarre tie. Analogically, it is like the feeling we have towards our own children, we love them unconditionally and we would not give up on them even if they had major impairments. We would never think of exchanging our children with more intelligent or more handsome ones. Likewise, we do not want to forgo our own lives despite the difficulties we face and the pains we suffer. In that respect, the feeling of possession and attachment to our lives also seems to play a role in forcing us to make this choice.⁴ We are attracted to living a unique life of our own that we can put our signature to. Hence, some perfectly designed, custom-made life which is tailored to make me happy □ yet fails to be my own □ does not suffice to be satisfying.

In light of the abovementioned remarks and Nozick’s thought experiment, it could be concluded that to “live” a complete life with all its ups and downs, and in a sense to “discover” our own lives possess a value that is deeper than leading a perfectly pleasurable life. Freedom, reality, and experiencing one’s own unique existence are among the values that make our lives meaningful and worth living, and they can even surpass the value we find in happiness. Experiencing life with every bit through possessing freedom of will, being connected with reality, and living our own existence are more attractive to us compared to a life in which we are deprived of reflection and in which there is a safety net against pain and suffering. It is because we inherently feel that life is incomplete without dreams and hopes, longings and suffering, regret and agonies.

When one wishes to be transformed into a “pig” by the touch of a magic wand, is it not true that this person also sacrifices his/her opportunity to live a complete life? Mysterious as ‘a complete life’ might sound, what I mean by this phrase just corresponds to a life experience that includes the capability of reflection as well as deeper feelings and more intense experiences whether or not they are positive or negative. Lacking the capacity to think and feel or at least having a thinking, questioning and feeling capability even at a quite minimal level compared to that of Socrates

⁴ This idea will not be further explained here as it pertains more to the field of psychology. For present purposes I just want to draw attention to the essentiality of curiosity for the meaning of our lives.

would not be appealing to human beings. We can imagine that the grief of a mentally retarded person would not be as intense as that of Socrates; yet, we are afraid that this person's happiness would also not be as intense as his. In our lives, the feelings that touch the places never touched before are valuable, and even if such feeling is grief, we might prefer living that experience rather than being *unable* to live it. Therefore, when we question ourselves, we may be willing to live a fuller and a more complete life despite its ups and downs.

Perhaps this longing for a complete life makes us think in such a way: Would it not be losing out on our existence if we only experience pleasure while it is possible to feel an array of various feelings? Even though existing as a human being might result in feelings of suffering, regret, and worry, would it not be detracting value from our lives if we altogether exclude such experiences? That is the exact reason why "living a complete life" attracts us with its irresistible lure and forces us to make our choice in a direction including the possibility of pain and suffering.

It might be objected that some people would gladly choose to be plugged into the machine that will guarantee their happiness forever. In fact, it appears that half the world opts for taking hallucinogenic drugs over reality, drunkenness over sobriety, and the like escapisms over and above a real life. What could be said in the face of such empirical data? I think there is a quite big difference between choosing to sedate ourselves for a short time and forgoing the capability to feel sadness and pain once and for all. In the case of taking drugs, we are still in charge and it is *us* who *freely choose* to live this experience. Yet, giving up on being a full-fledged person and giving up on the opportunity to live a complete life is much more terrifying. It is important to note that some people might genuinely be willing to get plugged into the machine if they are currently leading a severely painful life or if they plan to commit suicide, since in such case the experience machine is a better choice than death because we do not know what is waiting for us after death. And the machine promises to give us nothing but pleasure. Hence, under such circumstances, the machine could be a likely preference. But, a regular person leading an average life would not be willing to hook up to the machine. The offer could seem tempting at a distance, but when it is time to abandon some of the intrinsic values that are essential for making our lives worth living, it will be a tough choice. And when it is time to forgo human capacities and be transformed into a pig, no matter what we initially think about Mill's idea, the promise of feeling the lightness of living without reflection will fall short of being convincing. To support this claim, let me

alter the machine a little bit and give it the ability only to take away our ability to reflect so that we will not be able to feel sadness, and instead laugh even at the sight of the worst scene. We should opt for this alternative, shouldn't we? Yet, it is not likely that we would be willing to give up our intellect in order to be happier. It is, indeed, evident from our reaction to mentally retarded people: we do not envy them, we feel sorry for them. They might be happy, but we do not want *that* kind of happiness.

Indeed, we are confronted with a utopia paradox here. Happiness seems to be one of the final ends we want to attain in our lives. We even sometimes consider it to be our ultimate desire; but, a pleasurable life that is incomplete, a life devoid of freedom to choose, a life that is not real, or a life that does not let us experience our own lives will never be choice-worthy. A complete life contains some intrinsic goods that come together with pain, difficulty, and suffering. Accordingly, while seeking after a fulfilling life, we also invite pain and suffering into our world. This clearly shows that there are values we desire in life other than happiness and *beyond happiness*. That's the reason why the promise of happiness cannot be convincing in trading our lives with a cosy and carefree life of an animal; or it scares us to deprive ourselves of reality and hook onto a machine that guarantees indescribable pleasures. It is because we prefer to live a 'complete' life, even if it might contain some disappointments, regrets, and pain. Life loses its glamour and falls short of being satisfying when it shows itself as absolute pleasure. One cannot help but wonder why it is that even though my favourite colour is blue, I don't want all my possessions to be blue till the end of my days. Didn't I just say that blue was my favourite colour? Perhaps it is because I need other colours to like and enjoy blue even more.

With reference to our desire for a complete life, it could be said that we want the *satisfaction bar* raised, we want the *challenge*. We want to possess the *capacity* to be happy as well as sad; only then is happiness worthy for us. We long for a freely chosen, real, and complete life of our own. Given that we are happy insofar as we are satisfied with our lives, it is quite easy to be happy as a pig but almost impossible to be entirely happy as a human being; yet, we still seem to prefer the challenge. For the pig, to be happy means to have a cosy place to rest and plenty of food to eat, and as long as the pig has them, it is happy. Of course, we may not want to call this state "happiness" but if we will talk about a pig's happiness, we cannot add other things such as a huge savings account or a limousine with a chauffeur. On the other hand, our checklist for happiness is never as slim as that of a pig; we look for meaning, purpose, respect, love, good living standards, as

well as challenges. Yet, the pig's happiness would probably be more secure than ours because it can think neither about the past nor the future, and it has no regrets or worries at the present; the pig's life is totally free from concern and anguish. However, being human brings about responsibility, pain, and regret on the one hand; and on the other hand it grants fulfilment, higher pleasures, human happiness, and a unique life experience.

In conclusion, I should maintain that when we reflect on the question of what a good life is, it is obvious that happiness cannot be the ultimate or the sole end. There are values other than happiness and beyond happiness we value all that make our lives "complete". However, they often invite into our lives feelings other than or even contrary to happiness. Freedom of choice could be painful, reality hurts at times, and life is not always a bed of roses; yet, life would not be complete if we take away such values that are indispensable for a good life.

In light of the above portrayal of a good human life, the question I had in mind at the beginning seems to be resolved. The prospect of the life of a satisfied pig or any promise of reflection-free life cannot be satisfying for a human being. Even though people at times envy the carefreeness of animals and choose to experiment with piggishness temporarily, I do not think that they would be willing to forgo the human capacity to be able to experience feelings other than happiness. In other words, we are willing to disregard the tempting promise of a continuous state of carefreeness, compared to the prospect of a *complete* life.

J.S. Mill's Thought and Contemporary Ethics: Some consequences

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"Is it actually better to be an unhappy human than a happy pig?" This question refers to the famous text by J.S. Mill, in chapter 2 of his *On Utilitarianism* (1871), in which the author argues for a difference in quality among the various pleasures that humans and other living beings can experience. Since Mill's argument has met no consensus until now, this paper aims at getting (or, at least, favoring) an *indirect* answer to our question, by highlighting its crucial importance on the ethical ground.

Contemporary animal ethics and an egalitarian first step.

Classical utilitarianism, particularly J. Bentham, contributed to the emergence in the second part of the 20th century of a new kind of ethical reflection dealing with the old question of men's duties toward animals. By doing so, Bentham opposed a strong occidental anthropocentric tradition for which, in a Kantian way of thinking, man only can be the object of moral considerations, insofar as he, alone, possesses rational, moral faculties or autonomy; wrong treatment of animals is prohibited here inasmuch as they can be seen as a kind of invitation to acts of cruelty toward men¹. We shall call these “theories of our duties toward animals for indirect considerations”².

By contrast, Peter Singer defends an extension of *direct* moral considerations beyond the narrow circle of humanity:

It is an implication of this principle of equality that our concern for others ought not to depend on what they are like, or what abilities they possess—although precisely what this concern requires us to do may vary according to the characteristics of those affected by what we do. It is on this basis that the case against racism and the case against sexism must both ultimately rest; and it is in accordance with this principle that speciesism is also to be condemned. If possessing a higher degree of intelligence does not entitle one human to use another for his own ends, how can it entitle humans to exploit nonhumans?

This is a typically “impartialist” discourse, which suggests searching for objective criteria, with no consideration for the group the individual belongs to, in order to legitimize any difference in treatment. Along this line, Singer asserts a duty to take into consideration the interests of all sentient beings, that is to say, beings who have the faculty to experience pain and pleasure, including a great deal of non-human animals. Now, denying the relevance of their interests, he says, is to prove guilty of *speciesism* (racism toward other species).

We should point out first that such a position, which is at the core of the Anglo-Saxon animal ethics, is based on a crucial criticism of the notion of “human dignity”. This criticism is explicit in Singer’s work:

¹ See Kant, *Lectures on Ethics*.

² «obligations relatives aux animaux pour des raisons indirectes.» J.-Y. Goffi, *Le Philosophe et ses Animaux ; du statut éthique de l’animal*, Nîmes, J. Chambon, 1994, p. 51.

[] when one thinks only of humans, it can be very liberal, very progressive, to talk of the dignity of all human beings. [] It is only when we think of humans as no more than a small sub-group of all the beings that inhabit our planet that we may realize that in elevating our own species we are at the same time lowering the relative status of all other species.³

I shall add that this criticism, again, is best understood in the context of the 19th and 20th centuries and the increased influence of natural sciences, especially the work of Charles Darwin. Indeed, as Roderick Nash reminds us, “the broader significance of Darwin’s work, the American philosopher Edward Evans said in 1894, was to take the « conceit out of man. »”⁴

Admittedly, authors in the wake of Singer, like Tom Regan⁵, Gary Francione or Martha Nussbaum, have usually been *both* “followers” and strong critics, paying tribute to Singer’s seminal work but also discussing, in particular, aspects or totality of his basic utilitarian commitment. Yet these methodological considerations are not important for our present question. The crucial point is that a significant part of this literature can be roughly identified, in the end, with an egalitarian “first step” in favor of sentient animals, favored by a new conception of the natural world and the place of man inside it.

Animal ethics and Mill’s argument. Since the frontiers of moral community have been extended to new objects, a set of various moral issues has been raised in the meantime. Among them, the evil of death and prohibition of murder – and, consequently, the value of life – can be considered having a crucial place. For Bentham, there is nothing wrong in killing animals as long as death is given painlessly, for animals have no sense of future. Mill’s assertion that pleasures differ in quality can be interpreted in the same way, as the recognition of degrees of value among living beings.

Indeed, in this famous text, Mill defends (opposing Bentham) the thesis that pleasures come in types, intellectual and bodily pleasures, which are

³ P. Singer, “All Animals are Equal”, T. Regan, P. Singer (eds.), *Animal Rights and Human Obligations*, New Jersey, Prentice-Hall, 1989, (last two quotes).

⁴ R. Nash “Do Rocks Have Rights?”, *The Center Magazine*, vol. 10, 1977, pp. 2-12. This influence of our “world-views” on moral beliefs is best shown in J. Rachels *Created from Animals: the moral implications of Darwinism*, Oxford University Press, 1990.

⁵ T. Regan *The Case for Animal Rights*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1983.

non-homogeneous. This is to hold, correlatively, the non-commensurability of these pleasures and non-commensurability of the *lives* which are experiencing these. Briefly, it means that, as soon as a sufficient degree of satisfaction of the bodily needs and pleasures has been reached, no addition of bodily pleasure can compete with the smallest addition of intellectual pleasures. Experiencing intellectual pleasures, Socrates is necessarily *happier* than the pig which only experiences *satisfaction* of its bodily needs. But this is not only a matter of pleasure: it is a matter of value as well. According to this interpretation⁶ of Mill's argument, bodily pleasures experienced by pigs remain *comparable* to bodily pleasures experienced by man; as for intellectual pleasures, pigs experience none, and that's why their life has *lesser* value. Hence this is to be understood as a discontinuity. The "appropriate appellation" of this repugnance we show for "lower grades of existence", Mill concludes, is a "sense of dignity" in some proportion to our higher faculties.

Back to animal ethics, does it mean that Singer rejected such an idea of ordering the value of different lives? Actually, it is explicit that he didn't. Indeed, he refers to this famous comparison test from Mill – comparison of the lives of Socrates, the "fool" and the pig – in chapter 4 of his *Practical Ethics*: he notices the weaknesses of Mill's argument in the context of classical utilitarianism; but he assumes in the meantime that if a comparison were acceptable, "some forms of life would be seen as preferable to others"⁷; finally, the possibility that similar conclusions would fall within the scope of preference utilitarianism is left open.

In brief, this means, as we can see in the following chapters of his book, that there are some criteria which in Singer's view explain and legitimize differences in treatment: mere things (plants, rocks) cannot benefit from any moral considerations; "merely sentient" beings should not be inflicted suffering, but they can be killed, if painlessly; only *persons*, beings who are complex enough to have *preferences*, can see their lives valued and protected. We shall see now why this is so.

Contrary to Mill, this means, in Singer's view, that some sophisticated non-human animals like great apes should be considered as persons too, and attributed some of the very same fundamental rights which human beings

⁶ Jean-Yves Goffi *Qu'est-ce que l'animalité ?*, Paris, Vrin, p. 117.

⁷ P. Singer *Practical Ethics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993 (2nd ed.), p. 107.

benefit from⁸. Nonetheless, I shall argue that Singer's thought on these crucial points can be seen, in agreement with Mill, as the recognition of a scale of *objective* values among living beings⁹.

This thesis is close to some powerful objections formulated by Gary Francione at the turn of the 21st century. In a series of books, the author favors a strong commitment toward the protection of each sentient animal, *including the protection of their lives*. In addition to the analysis of the American biologist Donald Griffin¹⁰, one of his most interesting arguments rests on evolutionary considerations:

“Any being that is sentient is necessarily self-aware. Any being that is sentient necessarily has an interest in life because sentience is a means to the end of continued existence.”

Hence sentience, understood as such, is the fundamental criterion, and the only one, to be admitted in the community of equals as a real person¹¹.

This position is paralleled by a strong criticism of Singer and Bentham's ideas, by which Francione gives us a fresh look on the “orthodoxy” of animal ethics. In his view, Bentham tried to refute the traditional correlation between mental faculties and moral standing and nevertheless he *re-introduced it* insofar as he considers that animals are “never the worse for being dead”:

“Therefore, because Bentham believed that cognitive differences between humans and nonhumans meant that the latter did not have an interest in their lives, he did not challenge our use of animals, but only our treatment of them.”

Paying attention to the *treatment* of animals with respect to their welfare (a “welfarist position”) is not challenging our *use* of them, that is to say, in Francione's view, our taking and using them as mere property – which means that it is still legitimate to kill them (at least painlessly). In other

⁸ See P. Singer and P. Cavalieri (eds) *The Great Ape Project: Equality Beyond Humanity*, 1993.

⁹ M. Nussbaum's interpretation, for example, is opposite. She considers instead: “It is not that some creatures are more wonderful or admirable *per se*, from some detached point of view in the universe. [] Instead, the level of complexity of a creature affects what can be a harm for it.” M. Nussbaum *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, Harvard University Press, 2007, p. 359.

¹⁰ Donald Griffin *Animal Minds – Beyond Cognition to Consciousness*, 2001.

¹¹ See G. Francione *Animals as Persons: Essays on the Abolition of Animal Exploitation*, Columbia University Press, 2008. Quotations above and below are taken from p. 144 and p. 6, respectively.

words, this is acknowledgment of a kind of constant moral priority of man (and some other sophisticated animals at best) over the major part of the non-human animals on Earth, *due to cognitive differences*.

Now, it seems to me that this objection he addresses to Bentham closely matches what I suggested above – that Singer’s position, in relation to Mill’s argument, may be seen as closely related to our sense of the dignity and of the higher value of mentally complex living beings. For, in an utilitarian way of thinking, such a superiority in value is established by appraisal of a variety of positive experiences, which themselves are related to the possession of eminent mental faculties (hence such minds are seen as qualitatively different from other minds): in the end, and quite in agreement with Mill’s thought, more complex animals are given greater value and dignity on the assumption that they have a richer life, with a greater diversity of bodily and intellectual experiences, forming projects, forming relationships and so on, which makes them have a *preference* to live.

So it may be that Mill’s original argument was flawed as Singer suggested, but he reached the very same conclusion by his own means. To conclude, we can say that the question of life and death brings forward and reveals a “second step” in the animal ethics movement: the introduction of a hierarchical ordering in the value of life, which seems to go against the egalitarian first step¹². Assuming that one can consider that self-consciousness comes in degrees, this can be identified as a set of “theories valuing self-consciousness”¹³.

In *The Rights of Animals and Unborn Generations*¹⁴, Joel Feinberg supports this line of thought by devoting a careful conceptual analysis to it. In this brilliant article, he makes it plain too that moral consideration can

¹² It is easy to see this paradox in Tom Regan’s work, due to his strong commitment to equality among all “subject-of-a-life” individuals in the first place. See the numerous objections raised to his treatment of the “lifeboat case”, for example Lori Gruen’s article “Animals” in Singer’s *Companion to Ethics* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1991).

¹³ “Self-consciousness” here is understood with a large range of meanings, from Francione valuing mere sentience as a state of minimal self-awareness which many animals share, to Regan restraining inherent value and attribution of rights to “subjects-of-a-life”, which he describes as “individuals who have desires and preferences, memory, beliefs about their own future, a psychological identity over time, who acts purposively...”

¹⁴ J. Feinberg *Rights, Justice, and the Bounds of Liberty*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1980.

have no intelligibility when interests are lacking; but such interests, again, are closely related to the range of *experiences* the organism is capable of. Hence we can see that this way of thinking tends to distinguish at least three main categories: mere things have no interests since they present no “conative life”; mere *living* things (like trees or “lesser” animals), despite a conative life, have no interests¹⁵ since they lack “cognitive equipment”, and so they cannot benefit from moral consideration; finally, only beings having some consciousness of their self can meaningfully be predicated rights.

This way of thinking is largely accepted among philosophers; as Edward Johnson¹⁶ remarks, both speciesist and anti-speciesist authors find it attractive. But this is not surprising. The latter are strongly inclined to hold such thesis as soon as they engage in considerations regarding animal rights. Indeed, a familiar objection is to point out that vegetables have a life which might deserve a kind of moral consideration too – yet vegetarians need to eat vegetables. This is a kind of argument *ad absurdum*, designed to prove that meat eating cannot be a real moral problem. Stressing the crucial importance of suffering in moral issues, however, is an efficient way to prevent this argument.

But at the same time, because suffering is a kind of self-awareness already¹⁷, it paves the way for considering a set of new criteria relative to higher degrees of *consciousness*. The emphasis on suffering suggests taking the matter further and, in particular, establishing a fundamental distinction between the biological life (of vegetables) and the biographical life (of persons). Such distinctions will prove useful for preventing a few more upsetting consequences, such as equating the life of a normal human with the life of a non-human animal, with which most modern readers would be quite uncomfortable¹⁸. So, we can understand at last why Singer makes a difference between “merely sentient beings” and “persons”.

¹⁵ “We can never have any grounds for attributing a desire or a want to a creature known to be incapable even of rudimentary beliefs; and if desires or wants are the materials interests are made of, mindless creatures have no interests of their own.” *Idem*, p. 168.

¹⁶ See E. Johnson “Life, Death and Animals” (in Miller H. B., Williams W. H. (eds.), *Ethics and Animals*, Clifton, Humana Press, 1983) for a careful analysis of what valuing mental complexity can mean.

¹⁷ As Francione has noticed. By this he remains, obviously, a thinker valuing self-consciousness.

¹⁸ This point is also related to the issue of euthanasia. See Rachels *The End of Life. Euthanasia and Morality*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1986.

Consequences for man. Until now, our discussion of Mill's argument has shown a strong opposition between the value of human life on the one hand, the value of animal lives on the other. This may prove misleading. Whether we assume its arguments are correct or not, it is worth considering that this line of thought in the vein of Bentham and Singer were not developed for non-human moral considerability specifically. Quite the contrary: the animal rights question is only a part of an overall concern for questions about equality – racism, sexism, inequality of wealth... – as well as questions about death and the value of life – abortion, euthanasia – directly related to the welfare of man. So it may be that Mill's thought is attached to some of these various ethical points too. I shall consider below some of the most significant ones.

First, as Singer reminds us, Mill's whole argument typically suggests that the life of mentally disabled humans is less valuable than the life of “normal” humans:

“Mill's argument for preferring the life of a human being to that of an animal (with which most modern readers would be quite comfortable) is exactly paralleled by his argument for preferring the life of an intelligent human being to that of fool. [] it seems likely that by this he means what would now refer to as a person with an intellectual disability.”¹⁹

As he suggests, some authors like Singer are comfortable with the notion of comparing the life of mentally disabled persons with the life of animals, others are not; these difficulties are particular to such “marginal cases” on which speciesists and anti-speciesists are clearly opposed²⁰. I will not develop this point here, for what interests in the issue is principally the relative value of the life of mentally disabled humans (as well as animals) in comparison with the “normal” human²¹. My point is to insist that there is a

¹⁹ P. Singer *Practical Ethics*, p. 108.

²⁰ For this reason, authors like Élisabeth de Fontenay who firmly condemns the way we treat animals nowadays are *also* highly critical of the anti-speciesist' point of view. See E. de Fontenay *Sans offenser le genre humain. Réflexions sur la cause animale*, 2008.

²¹ It's true that this issue is raised by adopting an impartialist stance in the first place. There is no point in considering it if we argue for the priority of mentally disabled humans over animals, for example, appealing to the idea of humanity understood as a community. There is something in this: we could decide to give priority to our own kind in a situation of *forced choice*. But this is deeply different from a defense of the greater value of their lives *simpliciter*. Indeed, this latter position would be exactly

risk in considering a mentally disabled individual as a “lesser man” with lesser value, *even when he has a healthy (and happy?) life and experiences no great suffering* – such a conclusion being clearly related to Mill’s argument, that not everyone is prepared to accept. We will see further what alternative solution can be developed.

But this is a particularly difficult, controversial ground, and we might better focus on other considerations. As a second point, we can notice that “self-consciousness valuing theories” can account for a popular way of thinking about death:

“For the retired nonagenarian, death may not exactly be ardently desired, but still it will be a non-tragedy. Those who mourn his death will not think of themselves as mourning *for him*, but rather for his dependants and loved ones, if any, or simply in virtue of the capacity of any *memento mori* to evoke sadness. In contrast, when a young vigorous person dies, we think of him as chief among those who suffered *loss*.”²²

A young man or woman is assumed to have more prospects, more projects, joys, future experiences of all kinds than an old man. Consequently, if the former dies in an accident, the loss he suffers is said to be greater, which means in a way that his life was also attributed greater value. No doubt, this is an indirect result due to our valuing the biographical lives of *persons*.²³

To explain this popular view of death is most of the time taken as a good point. But is it really? From the onset, we should be defiant of this kind of popular intuitions which necessarily differ from one culture to another. We could show some sympathy to the cultures where the eldest are granted with high experience and high value, even (sometimes) wisdom. So it is not evident for me that the life of a young man has greater value than the life of an older one, particularly if the latter is in good health and still has

opposite to the impartialist point of view by which we were (correctly, I guess) conduced to consider animals as deserving moral considerations in their own right in the same way as racism and sexism were exposed before. (For a defense of the importance of species membership, see for example R. Nozick “About Mammals and People”, *New York Times Book Review*, 27 November 1983.)

²² J. Feinberg, *op cit.*, p. 61.

²³ “Death is an evil for the person who dies because it forecloses possibilities for his or her life; because it eliminates the chance for developing abilities and talents; because it frustrates desires, hopes, and aspirations; and because it leaves parts of lives pointless and whole lives incomplete.” J. Rachels, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

ambitions to achieve and projects carry out. This kind of argument, I guess, is only valid in extreme cases, concerning agonizing individuals or people who are far too old to have any prospect or expectation. But, assuredly, this is the burden of life coming to an end, not of old age.

Unfortunately, I am not so sure that we can expect a more philosophical background to give us further insight on this point. For we can see that, on a more fundamental ground, the whole “self-consciousness valuing position” gets support from a technical conception of “interests” concerning life and death which is neither trivial nor neutral: a non-hedonistic position whose implications are difficult to admit in some situations, including death itself²⁴. The difficulty, as Epicurus suggested, is that as soon as we are dead, we can experience no more regrets – for we experience nothing at all; so why should the deprivation of prospects and future experiences be considered as an evil, exactly?²⁵

This is a really difficult question, which would deserve an entirely new paper. But we should keep convinced, at the present time, that it is not evident why death, philosophically speaking, is a bad thing; so, the mere presumption that the death of normal human beings would be worse than the death of lesser beings (whoever or whatever they may be) is not as strong as we could think or hope. We can hardly use this kind of argument to defend the lesser value of organisms of lower complexity; it would be more convenient, to my mind, to take this as a mere expression of the position of “self-consciousness valuing” authors rather than a real argument.

A “*conativist*” position. As a consequence of all this, one can find useful to look for some alternative solution both to the position we have seen until now and the speciesist position.

Some authors, in a line of thought which is different from animal ethics, take inspiration in ecology; they consider that “life”, generally speaking, is a tendency toward self-protection, growth and flourishing²⁶. Using Feinberg’s

²⁴ This criticism of subjective hedonism is explicit in Rachels’ work. See particularly J. Rachels *The End of Life*.

²⁵ Here is Feinberg’s solution: “One way [] is to think of all harm as done to interests themselves, and interpret talk of harm done to men and women as convenient elliptical references to, and identification of, the interest that was thwarted or set back.” J. Feinberg, *loc. cit*.

²⁶ “Each [individual organism] is seen to be a teleological (goal-oriented) center of life, pursuing its own good in its own unique way. [] a living thing is conceived as a unified system of organized activity, the constant tendency of which is to preserve its existence by protecting and promoting its well-being.” P. Taylor *Respect for Nature*.

words, we could say that *conation without cognition* is sufficient to have interests²⁷, as long as agents are able to identify these interests and take them into consideration. Following this idea, any organic being possesses the fundamental attributes to benefit from moral considerations.

Of course, it could be convenient to reject such a strange, maybe subversive, idea as a foolish one. But what we have learnt, in the meantime, is that any position on the “animal life” issue would bear some consequences for man. So it may prove useful to see which solutions could be developed in this “conativist” line of thought.

In accordance with this new position, a typical solution to solve the problems raised above is to reject the idea that the value of life is related to an (allegedly objective) external criterion; it can be considered instead that such a value is only commensurate with the *subjective* frame of mind of individuals. Typically, as long as elderly people are healthy and feel up to carrying out a few more personal projects, we cannot assert anymore the lesser value of their lives, for *their valuing their lives is all that matters*.

In the same way, the life of “fools”, assuming they do not suffer from their condition, cannot be considered as inferior to “normal lives” anymore. Johnson’s position, on this point, is totally opposed to Singer’s ideas:

“I incline to the view that each mind can be valuable to itself. There need be nothing *intrinsically* wrong with the mentalities of those who are "mad," "retarded," or "childish." That they are not what I want for myself does nothing to show that they are not valuable to *those beings*.”²⁸

Furthermore, Johnson is perfectly aware that what he says here works very well when it comes to the minds of many non-human animals. So there is no more reason to consider now that a pig or a mouse would be less

A Theory of Environmental Ethics, Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986, p. 44. – See also Goodpaster “On Being Morally Considerable”, *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 75, No. 6 (Jun., 1978), pp. 308-325.

²⁷ There is a sense in which we could say that plants are “conscious”, since change in their physical environment is followed by adjustment of their physical and chemical properties towards flourishing (sometimes in a quick and impressive animal-like way). This can be extended to understand the development and decay of a whole ecosystem. But in Francione’s view, such a state of mere “consciousness” has to be distinguished from the state of *self-consciousness* which is conferred by sentience to higher animals. For both Singer and Francione, only sentient animals can have interests.

²⁸ E. Johnson, *op. cit.*, p. 131. Compare with Singer in *Practical Ethics*, p. 105-109.

satisfied with their life than the “fool”, or even Socrates; even if abilities and experiences can differ, the experiences and “pleasures of a mouse’s life are all that the mouse has, and so can be presumed to mean as much to the mouse as the pleasures of a person’s life mean to the person”²⁹.

The price to pay for defending this idea that “each life is of equal value” is now that an additional argument is needed to defend (if necessary) the moral priority of man over animals such as pigs; here we are running the big risk of a strict vegetarian diet.

But, taking one small step further, it seems easy now to suggest, in the very same way, that the state of minimal consciousness, or lack of consciousness, of “inferior animals”, mindless plants or even ecosystems, is not an argument *against* the moral consideration of their “lives” anymore. Here lies the possibility of some kind of holism pertaining to biocentrism³⁰ or ecocentrism³¹, which conceives man, non-human animals and plants as parts of a whole biosystem or ecosystem, each part of which can benefit from a kind of moral consideration. This is very different from animal ethics. It means, above all, that suffering is no longer the fundamental criterion for moral consideration. And because valuing of self-consciousness is no longer conceived as a primary necessity, it seems that to hold an egalitarian position *or* some kind of moral priority linked to mental complexity becomes on this ground a more open question than before.

The whole position does not mean, of course, that sensibility or higher mental faculties do not matter at all in forming moral judgments: they do. Indeed, there are many actions that result in prejudice to man which would not result in prejudice to plants if applied to plants (e.g. hitting someone) or to non-human animals (e.g. depriving someone of his right to vote). A tree is a good as such has no relation to eating ice creams or writing good philosophy. On the other hand, such authors insist, a tree shows a tendency toward growth and flourishing that can be hindered, even if it has no sense

²⁹ P. Singer, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

³⁰ “From the perspective of the biocentric outlook, one sees one’s membership in the Earth’s Community of Life as providing a common bond with all the different species of animals and plants that have evolved over the ages. One becomes aware that, like all other living things on our planet, one’s very existence depends on the fundamental soundness and integrity of the biological system of nature. When one looks at this domain of life in its totality, one sees it to be a complex and unified web of interdependent parts.” P. Taylor, *loc. cit.*

³¹ See typically J.B. Callicott *In Defense of the Land Ethic*, New-York, State University of New York Press, 1989.

of it. That's why the importance of mental faculties is only *relative*, commensurate with the standard of living pertaining to higher animals and man. This is deeply different from admitting criteria according to which we should draw lines giving birth to a scale of objective values.

Conclusion. So, is it "actually better to be an unhappy human than a happy pig"? At the end of this paper we do not know yet. What we do know now is that the answer to this question has some significant moral consequences we should analyze more deeply before going further.

Of course, the various positions I have sketched cover a wild variety of thoughts and authors; it cannot acknowledge how subtle and sophisticated these philosophers' writings may be. My main message could be understood like this: there is a strong tendency in animal ethics to (re)create new frontiers, new discriminations. It was born from the (apparent) necessity of acknowledging an "insuperable line"³² separating beings with interests from beings with no interests at all. It is remarkable, however, that this tendency works in *opposition* to the impartialist stance which is the very basis of the animal rights movement.

In this light, I suggest that a more coherent approach should prompt us in the search of new solutions. One option is to dismiss this belief in an "insuperable line" as another subjective bias inherited from our human way of perceiving life³³ and of thinking about the world as a hierarchically ordered universe. If we are to get more definitive answers about Mill's conclusion, it is this global background inheritance that we should question now.

Cilento Felix

Else Mogensen (Elea)

Qualcuno dice che
la felicità è una sfera
contenendo tutto
in una grande armonia.

³² A famous word from Bentham from the *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*.

³³ By which I mean our inclination to consider that *biographical* life alone has some value.

Però vorremmo felicità
nella nostra vita giacché
è la sola meta che per se
è pregiata per l'essere umano.

È felicità desideri saziati
una vita d'edonismo
o riempita con atti buoni
una vita eudemonistica?

È felicità una vita
di rettitudine con niente
in abbondanza e capire
il proprio posto nel mondo?

Beh, felicità deve essere
una meta distintiva
e per l'essere umano
la parola chiave è l'intelletto.

Si dice che ognuno cerca
la felicità, ma certamente
non la felicità finta o
illusoria senza l'intelletto.

Perché si deve aderire alla logica:
Lo scopo per tutti è felicità
L'intelletto provvede gli scopi
ergo, l'intelletto causa la felicità.

Se tu puoi contemplare
e prepararti per l'incalzare
dell'argomento nella mente
senti, questa è la vera felicità.

Conosco un posto dove una tale
contemplazione è fattibile
il nome del posto è Cilento
dovrebbe essere Cilento Felix.

Epistola CXCVII¹

Ludvig Holberg

Dear brother,

I sense in your latest communication that you still persevere in your old impatience and dissatisfaction, which I so often have endeavored to challenge. You complain about your fate and kind of galls about your fellow citizens' wealth and about several splendors and good things that they have acquired and over which they daily enjoy themselves. I have often told you that most splendors only are in imagination. He who has a joyous mind possesses all the splendors he appears to be wanting. One, on the contrary, who naturally inclines toward dissatisfaction has want of all those splendors, which he appears to possess. Imagine yourself happy, then you also are so: Imagine that you belong to the first or second class in the order of rank and precedence, then you are just as pleased as the one who really has such a position therein; yes even more; since most people having barely attained one level of honor anxiously and desirously seek a higher one: Fancy yourself that all who tip their hats in the street do so in order to show you respect, then you enjoy in some ways the same solemnity as the great chancellor. Fancy yourself that no one is as beautiful as your wife, then you are as happy as your neighbor, who got that face for which he ferreted about for so long, but which now appears to him an everyday face; since experience shows that when the first glow passes in a marriage, the beautiful face no longer emit forceful beams in the eyes of the husband. Fancy yourself that the city's public paths and parks are laid-out for your sake, since they are always available to you, it is then the same as if they belong to you. Fancy finally yourself that when you hunt flies, you are on perforce hunt. I have tried both kinds of exercises and find that by a little help from the *imagination* it comes to one and the same,² especially when the hunt

¹ Published in 1748, in F.J. Billeskov Jansen, (edition, København 1954) titled "Imagined Happiness is real Happiness", here translated from the Danish by LarsAagaard-Mogensen.

² Holberg argued (*Epistola* No. 107 and 506b) that imagined diseases are real diseases; however, in *Moralske Fabler* No. 170 he added: one – although of low rank

follows the plan I have devised and which I shall explain on some other occasion.³ You will undoubtedly regard all this as foolery and hold my entire catechisation for jest: I do not at all proffer it as serious, but still contend that it can offer some occasion for philosophical considerations.

I remain etc.

Is it better to be an unhappy man than a happy pig?

Z.G. Mimica (Vienna/Zagreb)

Why should pigs be considered happy? My intuition is that it is because they tend to sleep much longer than humans. How we compare us with pigs; pigs don't eat us as we eat them; they are in our custody and still we feel that they are much happier than we. They probably do not know that violent death is coming to them sooner or later, as we humans do know and that makes us tragic beings. Animals live according to Epicurus' rule that there is no death, because as long as we are alive, there is no death, and when death comes, we are not alive any more.

Therefore my answer would be: it would be better to be a happy pig, but it is not possible. Something similar could be said for Hobbes and Rousseau; a state of nature would be possible to achieve, but nobody wants it. Happiness is relative as long as it does not interfere with the egoistic interests of others. And pigs are symbols of happiness, and that is especially seen on New Year's Eve when everybody incline to pretend or aspire to be happy. Why am I trying to claim that it is better to be an unhappy man than a happy pig? Happiness is something that can't be forced by someone. It just happens – like love. We can neither force ourselves, nor others to be happy. One is happy or not, that's all. No one is alone but not everyone is happy. Most people seem to be unhappy indeed, especially in the Western world.

Well, bringing animals into philosophical investigations was for years considered (morally) wrong. But today we witness a change of the pattern. What is different today is that we can't pose questions, e.g., about God. If I ask is it better to be an unhappy God than a happy pig or human, it

– can fancy oneself to be in a high position, but a hungry man cannot fancy himself satisfied.

³ Which Holberg did in *Epistola CCV*, (ed.).

seems that I am posing a wrong question, because I can put myself in neither a pig's nor a God's skin. There is a proverb that no one can go out of his or her skin.

We could only take for granted that animals live in an eternal "now" and have no idea of future (though they have of course past experiences, for instance dogs don't forget traumas they experienced as puppies). What about pigs? They seem to have a lot of intelligence, but I will stick to Wittgenstein that it is better to remain silent than to say something which is not true. If, acc. to his pleading to articulate the truth in a few words, one might say that animals are silent because they seem to be happy and they are silent as long as they are happy. But they can be euphoric, too. And then we have a problem and do not know what to say.

Disquisition on Happiness¹

Ramón Pérez de Ayala

"I was born to be a social reformer. It is evident that society is badly organized and must change. Men have a right to happiness, all men, and they have the right to it here on earth. The most vehement and constant stimulant, the most powerful and active incentive that God created in uniting the human body and soul is the pursuit of happiness. Therefore, since it is by divine plan that the pursuit of happiness is the foremost human desire, man's right to happiness is clear. All important conscious activities (and there is no need even to mention the unconscious and automatic ones) spring from that fatal and inevitable incentive, the wish for happiness – thus, religion, morality, law, art, science ... From their beginnings, all these activities have conspired to perfect society for the ultimate purpose of providing the greatest happiness for the greatest number. But because of human failings, to date these experiments in social organization have been founded on a narrow concept of happiness which emphasizes only one of man's conscious activities to the detriment and omission of all the others. The Church was born as an attempt to organize society for happiness' sake. Saint Paul's Epistles unequivocally state that the apostle believed himself immortal and

¹ *Belarmino and Apolonio* (1921), translated from the Spanish by M. Baumgarten and G. Berns, London 1990.

was convinced that all who professed faith in Christ would also become immortal. According to him, the Saviour would return to establish the kingdom of happiness on earth for the faithful, what he called *Parousia*. All Saint Paul's followers believed what he preached; but when some of his converts in Thessalonica died, the Thessalonian Christians rose in revolt and branded him a deceiver. The same thing happened with the Ephesians. Finally, the apostle realized that he and all Christians had to die; but since he could not renounce happiness completely, he decided that only the body died, and the spirit, which was immortal, entered into the kingdom of Christ, into paradise. Thus, the early Church was a gentle and uncultured anarchy, an effort to organize society in order to secure happiness after death. In this attempt at social organization for happiness' sake, all kinds of conscious actions besides religious ones – scientific, artistic, political and even ethical acts – were dismissed and looked upon with contempt. Our current social organization, what people call capitalist society, is another attempt at organizing in order to achieve happiness by emphasizing two types of activity, the political and scientific, to the exclusion of all other pursuits. It is a state of cruel and productive anarchy just as the primitive Church constituted a state of gentle and uncultured anarchy. Socialism, the heir apparent to capitalism, is a social experiment that bases itself solely on scientific activity. Up to now all experiments to institute happiness have been failures. Although they are all different, they all have as a common trait this underlying anarchy which is disguised, shamefaced, and inhibited. Although it may seem paradoxical, couldn't it perhaps be that anarchy is the only possible social organization leading to happiness? On the day when all kinds of conscious activity, including politics and the administration of justice (by which I don't mean the art of governing but the art of communal living without bothering or harming one's fellow man), attain complete maturity and total autonomy, existing in harmony among themselves without denigrating or causing harm to each other, won't the result be a spontaneous organization of perfect anarchy, of absolute liberty, and of unsurpassable happiness?"

Next **Parmenideum**, autumn 2011.

Provisional title: "Ancient rationalism and modern mysticism: the former as antidote to the latter".

The conference will address the question of why the philosophy of Parmenides is important in a modern context. Specifically this question addresses two aspects of Parmenides. The first considers Nestor Cordero's (University of Rennes) contention that Parmenides was as much a scientist as a philosopher, in that his poem is a thesis on rational inquiry as opposed to opinion. The second aspect is that rational inquiry provides a powerful countercheck on superstition and the dangers that lie in superstitious belief. What can be viewed as particularly powerful about Parmenides' thesis, it might be argued, is that his answer to the origins of Being avoids a creator or god. One interesting corollary is the possibility that Parmenides was an atheist; or at least, despite apparently being a mystic, the possibility that he did not take the gods of his day too seriously.

