What's So Good About Happiness?

(Extended version of paper discussed at Kingston Philosophy Café on 14 August 2018)

1. A few quotes

1. "That action is best, which procures the greatest happiness for the greatest numbers." Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746) – *Inquiry Concerning Moral Good and Evil* (1725)
2. "The greatest happiness of the greatest number is the foundation of morals and legislation." Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) – *The Commonplace Book* (c. 1776)
3. "The circumstance of utility, in all subjects … is constantly appealed to in all moral decisions concerning the merit and demerit of actions." David Hume (1711-76) – *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1748)
4. "By the principle of utility is meant that principle which approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever, according to the tendency which it appears to have to augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest is in question..." Jeremy Bentham – *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789)
5. "Actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness." John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) – *Utilitarianism* (1863)
6. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." – *The American Declaration of Independence* (1776)
7. "The object of government in peace and in war is not the glory of rulers or of races, but the happiness of the common man." William Beveridge (1879-1963) – *Social Insurance and Allied Services* (1942)
8. "Mankind does not strive for happiness; only the Englishman does that." Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) – *Twilight of the Idols* (1889)
9. "There is nothing which has yet been contrived by man, by which so much happiness is produced as by a good tavern or inn." Samuel Johnson (1709-84) – recorded in Boswell's *Life of Johnson* (1791)

2. From the *fact* that people generally want to be happy, no *moral* prescriptions *automatically* follow.

"What's so good about happiness?" is, on the face of it, a strange question to ask. As generally defined, happiness involves, at the very least, feeling *contented* and having a sense of *well-being*. As such, it is something we seem bound to value/pursue and therefore to consider *good*. Conversely, unhappiness involves feelings of *discontent* and is thus, by its very nature, something we seem bound to consider *bad*. The objective/psychological *fact* that people want to be happy, however, does not *automatically* prescribe a *particular normative/moral* approach. The following considerations are relevant here.

a. Human personality is highly complex and varied. What makes for happiness or unhappiness can differ from one person to another and, for any individual, can change over her/his lifetime.
b. People may regard different forms of happiness as 'higher' or 'lower' but disagree as to which is which. Given both this and the many different ways in which people can obtain happiness, how can the 'amount' of happiness experienced individually or collectively over a period of time ever be quantified?
c. In practice, we rarely feel *unreservedly* happy or unhappy. We often experience *mixed* emotions and our emotional state can change rapidly as the focus of our attention shifts between different aspects, positive or negative, of our lives. In order to identify our overall level of happiness or unhappiness, therefore, it seems we would have to estimate the balance between positive and negative feelings (which we might label *pleasures* and *pains*) experienced by us over a given period of time.
d. Pleasures and pains weigh less heavily with us the further into the future they are likely to occur. Where pleasures are more immediate than their associated pains the more likely are we to adopt a 'live now, pay later' lifestyle.[1]

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[1] Summed up well in the Clown's song in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (Act II, Sc. 3) "Present mirth hath present laughter; what's to come is still unsure".

e. Happiness is often associated with the *meeting of expectations*. These, however, are often socially determined and influenced by comparisons with others. Greater happiness might be obtained where expectations are more modest and thus more achievable and where inequalities are minimised, thereby reducing feelings of relative deprivation.

f. The complexity of our emotional systems means that we can sometimes get a perverse pleasure from being miserable and thus be considered 'happy to be unhappy' (the *Eeyore complex* – see page 18).

g. Some people get *masochistic pleasure* from the experience of pain. As they do so by choice, it appears to be what, on balance, makes them most happy.

h. Some people obtain *sadistic pleasure* by actively inflicting pain and suffering upon others or *schadenfreude* (literally 'harm-joy') by passively contemplating other people's misfortunes.

i. Our capacity for *empathy* means that the happiness or unhappiness of *others* can affect our *own* happiness or unhappiness. To seek personal happiness, therefore, need not be an entirely selfish enterprise. If only to satisfy a felt need for the approval of others, moreover, we are liable to behave towards them in ways likely to please rather than pain them.

j. The extent to which we empathise with others is limited by our *awareness* of them and how we *characterise* them. Priority is liable to be given to people who are closest to us. Our tendency to see people as belonging to distinct *groups* (often based on vague notions of 'ethnicity' or 'nationality') can also affect how much, if at all, we care about their happiness/unhappiness.

k. In terms of our concern for the happiness/unhappiness of others, the most neglected are likely to be people as yet unborn whom, at best, we can only dimly imagine. If our happiness is bought at their expense (e.g. by using up scarce resources) but we heavily *discount* future pleasures/pains (see point d), we will prioritise our present gratification over their longer-term suffering.

The above considerations highlight difficulties in: *defining* happiness; measuring its *value*, particularly where judgements differ about the *quality* of the various forms it can take; assessing whether all such forms are invariably *good*; justifying why the maximisation of happiness should be the *ultimate* end of human endeavour; identifying the *population* of present and future people whose overall happiness is our chosen target.

3. *Utilitarianism* faces the problem of deriving an '*ought*' from an '*is*'.

The moral approach known as *utilitarianism* – anticipated by philosopher Francis Hutcheson (see quote 1) and associated in particular with English philosophers Jeremy Bentham (see quotes 2 & 4) and John Stuart Mill (see quote 5) – maintains that we should always aim to achieve the greatest happiness of the greatest number of people.[2] Philosophically problematic is the step from an 'is' to an 'ought' i.e. from the *factual*, albeit contestable, premises that a) happiness is measurable and b) the pursuit of happiness for both themselves and at least some others is the *ultimate goal* of human beings, to the *normative* conclusion that we should *therefore* judge all actions by whether or not they help to maximise the sum total of human happiness. The step does not appear to be dictated by *logic* or *reason*. Scottish philosopher David Hume, whilst recognising that expected outcomes inevitably influence moral decisions (see quote 3), also argues that "it is not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger."[3] Awkward facts are a) the *selectivity* of our concern for others, limiting *whose* happiness we care about and b) our disdain for some of the ways in which other people achieve happiness, regarding them as perhaps *trivial* or even *pernicious*.

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[2] Utilitarianism is generally seen as a type of *consequentialism* i.e. the view that actions are not right or wrong in themselves but have to be judged by their *outcomes*. The English philosopher G.E. Moore (1873-1958), although himself a consequentialist, accused utilitarians of committing what he called the 'naturalistic fallacy' i.e. of equating the 'non-natural' quality 'goodness' with the 'natural' quality 'happiness'. Goodness, he argued, is a quality in its own right which we recognise, when judging outcomes, through some form of moral intuition. The nature of such goodness and the human faculty by which we detect it, however, seem far from clear.

[3] A *Treatise of Human Nature* (Book 2, Part 3, Section 3).

4. Bentham's so-called 'hedonic calculus' aims to measure happiness mathematically.

Bentham (1789) argues that people's happiness or unhappiness is measurable in terms of the *total value* of the pleasures and pains which they experience and that the value of each pleasure or pain is determined by its *intensity* and *duration*. When evaluating the *future* pleasures/pains arising from some act (e.g. legalising the sale of cannabis), account also has to be taken of their: *certainty/uncertainty* (i.e. the *probability* of their occurrence); *nearness/remoteness* (i.e. the *timing* of their occurrence); *fecundity* (i.e. the extent to which initial pleasures and pains generate further pleasures and pains); *purity* (i.e. the extent to which initial pleasures beget only further pleasures and initial pains only further pains). Separate calculations are needed for each person liable to be affected by the act. The calculated totals for their pleasures and pains can then be summed to show their *extent* i.e. their overall impact upon the community concerned. If the value of pleasures exceeds that of pains, the act can be considered good. If the reverse is the case, it can be deemed bad. For Bentham's own summary of the process, see page 19.

5. Should the maximisation of happiness be conceived in *gross* or *net* terms?

Bentham's formulation raises an immediate issue. Should we aim to maximise a) the total value of the pleasures that people experience (a *gross* measure) or b) the amount by which the value of their pleasures exceeds the value of their pains (a *net* measure). The following example illustrates the problem.

Option X	Total value of pleasures	☺☺☺☺☺☺☺☺☺☺☺☺☺☺☺☺☺☺☺☺
	Total value of pains	☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹
Option Y	Total value of pleasures	☺☺☺☺☺☺☺☺☺☺☺☺☺☺☺
	Total value of pains	☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹☹

If options X and Y represent *alternative* initiatives, which should we choose? Option X delivers a third more total pleasure than does option Y but only half the *surplus* of pleasure over pain.

6. Some pains arise from awareness of being *deprived of pleasures*, thus blurring the distinction between positive and negative utilitarianism.

An alternative aim to the maximisation of pleasure (whether gross or net) is the *minimisation of pain*, an approach sometimes characterised as *negative utilitarianism*. On this basis we would choose whatever option delivers the *least pain* (option Y in the above example), never mind how much pleasure it also produces. Short of this, we could apply a weighting factor that increases the scores for pains relative to those for pleasures. However, things are rarely simple. Bentham (1789) recognises that one kind of mental pain results from feeling *deprived of pleasures*. He states: " Pains of privation are the pains that can result from the thought of not possessing now any of the various kinds of pleasures." Mill (1863) similarly regards the absence of pleasure as a source of unhappiness and thus as a kind of pain, defining happiness as "pleasure and the absence of pain" and unhappiness as "pain and the privation of pleasure". The only way to *reduce* the 'pains of privation' might seem to be to *increase* the availability of the relevant pleasures, thus blurring the distinction between positive and negative utilitarianism. Making societies more egalitarian, however, could also reduce such pains by lowering culturally determined expectations (fuelled by inequalities in wealth/income which encourage the desire, usually frustrated, to emulate the lifestyles of the rich and famous) and thus feelings of *relative deprivation*.

7. The application of Bentham's calculus poses significant problems.

Crucial to Bentham's calculus is the feasibility of applying a *common* measure of *value* to disparate pleasures and pains and, in particular, to their *intensity*. Bentham recognises that pleasures and pains come in many different kinds, both *mental* and *physical* (see page 19), and may impact differently upon different people. Any measure of *intensity* would need to take into account the *subjectivity* of the experience of pleasure/pain and would appear to require the use of an *ordinal* scale. Individuals could be

asked to *rank* the *intensity* of their different pleasures and pains on, let us say, a scale of 0 to 10.[4] Someone's respective scores for mild amusement, sheer bliss, nagging toothache and severe anxiety might, for example, be 2, 10, 5 and 9. The other factors in Bentham's calculus pose fewer conceptual problems. *Duration* can be measured in any convenient unit of time (e.g. minutes or hours), the main problem being to identify how long in practice any particular pleasure or pain has lasted or is likely to last, particularly where its intensity *fluctuates* over the period concerned. The *certainty/uncertainty* of future pleasures/pains can be allowed for by applying a *probability* factor e.g. if it is considered that a particular pleasure or pain has only a 75% chance of occurring then its score could be multiplied by 0.75. The *nearness/remoteness* (i.e. *timing*) of future pleasures/pains can be allowed for by applying *discount factors* in order to calculate their *present values* (the further into the future they are expected to occur, the more will they be discounted).[5]

8. A Worked Example.
To put flesh on the bones of Bentham's calculus, here is an example of how it might be applied to a particular pleasure and a particular pain which, due to some act, an individual is expected to experience. The following assumptions are made: on a 10 point scale, the *intensity* (**I**) of the pleasure for the individual concerned is 10 and of the pain 5; the expected *duration* (**D**) of the pleasure is 8 hours and of the pain 50 hours; the pleasure is guaranteed whereas the probability (**P**) that the pain will occur is only 40%; the pleasure is expected to occur immediately but the pain only in 3 years' time; a discount factor (**F**) based upon an annual compound rate of 10% is used to calculate the present value of non-immediate pleasures/pains.

$$I \times D = V \qquad\qquad I \times D \times P \times F = V$$

The value (**V**) for the **pleasure** = $10 \times 8 = 80$ and for the **pain** = $5 \times 50 \times 0.4 \times 1/1.1^3 = 75$

This particular pleasure/pain pair, therefore, is estimated to provide more pleasure than pain for the individual. However, it can be seen that only slight changes in some of the assumed values could easily reverse the result.

9. Shouldn't the *quality* of pleasures also be taken into account? If so, *who* judges their quality?
A factor not *specifically* included in Bentham's calculus is the *quality* of pleasures. Mill (1863) considers that the quality of pleasures is at least as important as their quantity and that people who have experienced a range of pleasures will come to prefer the 'higher' to the 'lower' – hence his dictum: "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied".[6] An allowance for this might be made by including in the calculations *quality factors* which give greater weight to higher than to lower pleasures. But who decides which are the higher and which the lower and what should be their relative weights? Some self-appointed arbiter of taste? Bentham appears to envisage his calculus being applied *objectively* by an *impartial* analyst who simply identifies the pleasure/pain outcomes which, for whatever reason, people will *actually* experience (the key problem being how to gauge their likely intensity, duration, etc.) and who does not seek to impose her/his own value judgements regarding their 'quality'. Arguably, the quality of any pleasure *for any given individual* is already reflected in the *intensity* with which she/he experiences it and, where there is an option, *for how long*, if at all, she/he *chooses* to experience it (i.e. in its *duration*). Some people, for example, may find little

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[4] It might seem inappropriate to start the scale at zero as a pleasure/pain with *zero* intensity would a *non-existent* pleasure/pain. Including zero in the scale, however, provides a way for individuals to indicate that what might represent a kind of pleasure/pain for others would be *no* pleasure/pain for them.

[5] *Discounting* is the reverse of *compounding*. For example, £100 accumulating at a 5% annual rate over 6 years will *compound* to £100 $\times 1.05^6$ = £134. Conversely, assuming the 5% rate, £134 to be received in 6 years time will *discount* to a *present value* of £134 $\times 1/1.05^6$ = £100.

[6] Mill's dictum, we should note, raises the issue (also recognised by Bentham) of how far, when making moral decisions, we should take into account the pleasures/pains of *non-human* sentient beings – including those, such as pigs, which many of us are happy to eat.

or no pleasure in visiting public parks, museums, art galleries and libraries and spend little or no time in doing so.

10. How do *differences* in the pleasure/pain evaluations of *individuals* affect *collective* decision-making?
The example at the end of the last paragraph flags up an important question for the application of utilitarian principles to decision-making. How can the often *divergent* pleasure/pain evaluations of *individuals* with respect to some matter be reflected in *collective* choices about it? Matters subject to collective choice include: public expenditure on facilities/services which benefit people differentially and some not at all; taxation/welfare systems that redistribute income, to an extent at least, from richer to poorer people; the regulation of human conduct, *pre*scribing some behaviours (e.g. observing fire safety standards) and *pro*scribing others (e.g. fox-hunting). The *normative stance* of people on such matters will vary depending upon *whose* pleasures/pains they take into account and how they evaluate them (opponents of fox-hunting, for example, are likely to attach *zero* or even *negative* weight to the pleasures that hunt members apparently get from pursuing and killing foxes). Some differences may be reduced through *moral discourse*, the essential purpose of which is to persuade others of the correctness of one's own position. Such discourse generally concerns both *factual* and *evaluative* issues i.e. what *in fact* are the likely short and long term consequences of a particular course of action and what *value*, positive or negative, should be put upon them. In spite of such discourse, collective decisions are generally made in the context of significant differences of opinion regarding both facts and values. How such decisions reflect the different moral positions of different individuals, including any made from a utilitarian perspective, will then depend upon the nature of the choice-making system. *Direct* voting on particular issues (as with the 2016 EU referendum) accords equal weight to each person's evaluation.[7] With *representative* democracy, the evaluations of individuals regarding issues of public concern might influence collective choices *indirectly* via their selection of parties/candidates. Once elected, however, representatives are free to apply their *own* evaluations to the expected consequences of the measures upon which they vote; hence direct and representative democracy may result in different collective choices (e.g. regarding matters such as capital punishment). Dictators, whether 'benevolent' or not, would seem to have the greatest scope for imposing their own value judgements upon others.

11. The *strict* application of Bentham's calculus to decision-making appears a practical impossibility. It does, however, encompass key concerns which, in practice, we *do* take into account.
Bentham's calculus is easily dismissed as an academic curiosity that would be impossible to apply in practice. The worked example above involves a single pleasure and a single pain experienced by a single individual. How could such calculations be applied to the myriad of pleasures/pains experienced by, potentially, millions of people, how could such pleasures/pains be identified and how could the required values (e.g. for *intensity*) be established? The calculus serves, nevertheless, to identify the *type* of factors that we generally *do*, in practice, take into account when making decisions about what we individually or collectively should do, even if we can't put precise values upon them. Elements of the calculus, moreover, *are* used in a number of contexts. In deciding what treatments should be funded by the NHS, for example, account is taken of the degree (*intensity*) of improvement they will make to the well-being of individual patients, how far their lives will be extended (and thus the likely *duration* of such improvement) and the number of people affected (and thus the overall *extent* of the benefit received). Many decisions, including end-of-life decisions, moreover, focus upon the *quality of people's lives*, the assessment of which seems bound to take into account, if not to be determined by, the future pleasure/pain balance that, depending upon their level of consciousness, the individuals concerned are considered most likely to experience.

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[7] In the case of the EU referendum, of course, it is hard to imagine any voter claiming *realistically* to have performed a Bentham-type identification and evaluation of all the future pleasures/pains likely to be experienced differentially by millions of people as a result of either 'remaining' of 'leaving'. In any case, voters would differ widely in *whose* pleasures/pains they cared about and consequently took into account (many probably restricting their concern to UK citizens or to some sub-group of the UK population). In practice, 'gut feeling' is likely to have been the principal determinant of how most people voted.

12. Economics has embraced the concept of utility. The greatest happiness principle argues for income redistribution from rich to poor.

Utilitarianism has had a profound influence in the field of economics. In the 19th century the concept of utility came to be applied to the benefit/happiness that people derive from purchased goods and services. The Irish philosopher and political economist Francis Edgeworth (1845-1926) suggested this could be measured in terms of the *intensity* and *duration* of pleasure afforded (compare this with Bentham's calculus). "Any individual experiencing a unit of pleasure-intensity during a unit of time is to 'count for one'... A mass of utility ... is greater than another when it has more *intensity-time-number* units."[8] The assumption of *diminishing marginal utility* (i.e. that the more we consume of anything over a given time period the less satisfaction we get from each increment) has egalitarian implications. It implies that if we transfer income from rich to poor people, the happiness lost by the former is more than outweighed by the happiness gained by the latter. The utilitarian principle of maximising happiness thus supports the case for income redistribution. As the economist Joan Robinson argues, it "points to egalitarian principles, justifies Trade Unions, progressive taxation, and the Welfare State, if not more radical means to interfere with an economic system that allows so much of the good juice of *utility* to evaporate out of commodities by distributing them unequally."[9]

13. Happiness/unhappiness might be conceived as states of mind distinct from, albeit affected by, experiences of pleasure/pain. The direct reporting of happiness levels is, at least, *attempted*.

There are, of course, conceptual difficulties with the notion of distinct pleasures and pains the duration of which can be determined by identifiable start/finish times. Moreover, although Bentham and Mill seem to *equate* happiness with pleasure (or at least a *net surplus* of pleasure) and unhappiness with pain (or at least a *net surplus* of pain), it could be argued that happiness/unhappiness are better conceived as more general states of mind which represent the *summative* effect of people's pleasure/pain experiences but which are distinct from them. Sometimes, indeed, we simply feel happy or unhappy without knowing exactly why. The National Well-being Survey which started in 2011 (and which is now incorporated into the Annual Population Survey) does not ask people about their experiences of pleasure or pain but simply, on a scale of 0 to 10, "overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?"[10] Respondents are advised that 0 on the scale denotes "not at all" and 10 "completely". It cannot be assumed that people who rate their happiness at zero are *necessarily* unhappy or, if they are, it tells us nothing about the *degree* of their unhappiness (which could range from mild discontent to abject misery). Much of the time we are simply engaged in some mental or physical activity and not directly *conscious* of being either happy or unhappy. A happiness rating of zero could simply mean that people are in a fairly *neutral* state of mind, neither happy nor unhappy.[11] The survey question recognises that happiness is not an *instantaneous* phenomenon but is meaningful only as something experienced *over a period of time*. Over the previous day the happiness levels of respondents would have been liable to *fluctuate* in response to changing experiences and as different sets of thoughts, positive or negative, passed through their minds. Some of these thoughts might have related not to their current situation but to *remembered* events, some joyous, some sad, some the source of satisfaction, some of regret.[12] Respondents' scoring of their *overall* level of happiness (a seemingly *cumulative/summative* measure) might be best interpreted, therefore, as a measure of their *average* level of happiness during their waking hours on the previous day. Subject to these caveats, the survey results show a surprising similarity between local authority areas in the mean level of people's reported happiness (although averages, of course, can conceal wide variations between individuals). Results for the financial year ending April 2017, show a UK mean happiness level of 7.51, the highest level

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[8] Edgeworth, Francis (1881) *Mathematical Psychics: The application of mathematics to the moral sciences*.

[9] Robinson, Joan (1962) *Economic Philosophy*. Penguin Books.

[10] Respondents are also asked: "overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?"; "overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?" and "overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?"

[11] The mere fact of being *asked* how happy or unhappy we are may redirect our thoughts and *alter* our state of mind. Someone's response might be: "Until you asked, I wasn't feeling particularly happy or unhappy but now that I come to think about it...."

[12] Bentham (see page 19) includes *Memory* as major source of both pleasure and pain.

being 8.4 (Orkney Islands) and the lowest 7.01 (Brentwood, Essex). The mean score for Kingston upon Thames was 7.58. The survey results generally show a slight improvement in average happiness levels since 2011. It cannot be concluded from this that people are becoming happier because they are becoming 'better off'. It might reflect changes in people's *expectations*.

14. We may all seek happiness but, if there has to be such a thing, is it the *ultimate* aim of our lives?

We might agree that happiness is something that people have a *right* to pursue (see quote 6) and that governments have a *duty* to promote (see quote 7), but does this make its achievement the *ultimate* aim of our lives? According to Mill (1863), the fact that people in practice pursue happiness is evidence enough that it constitutes *an* end of human conduct. He accepts that people pursue *other* ends (e.g. virtue or wealth) but argues that these have become ends only as a result of their association with the achievement of happiness (which is thus the *ultimate* end). The German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, by contrast, *rejects* utilitarianism (in his eyes a peculiarly *English* and *deviant* moral approach – see quote 8) on the basis that it is fixated with mere happiness to the exclusion of much higher ends, which he associates broadly with the *realisation of the human spirit*. He accepts that happiness can be a *by-product* of the achievement of such ends but not that it is something to be pursued for its own sake. What might constitute the realisation of the human spirit, however, is ambiguous. The same applies to Aristotle's concept of *eudaimonia* which is generally interpreted as *human flourishing* (rather than *happiness*, in its modern sense).[13] How do we decide what it is for a human being to 'flourish'? Does it necessarily involve, for example, the *exercise of human reason* at its highest possible level?

15. The central 'offer' of world religions is the attainment of happiness/contentment in some sort of afterlife, a plausible and coherent conception of which is conspicuous by its absence.

Nietzsche regards fixation with happiness as symptomatic of a 'slave mentality' – promoted by religions such as Christianity which, by offering humans the prospect of a heavenly paradise, encourage passive acceptance of their earthly lot. Both Christians and Muslims aspire to *personal* immortality in a heaven where happiness, as they conceive it, abounds. For Hindus and Buddhists the *loss* of personal identity through eventual absorption into a cosmic 'oneness' provides escape from personal unhappiness and promotion to a blissful, albeit non-personal, mode of existence. Thus, in one way or another, the attainment of happiness/contentment is a central concern of major world religions reflecting their existence as *human constructs* expressing basic human yearnings. The happiness on offer is to be found not on earth but in an afterlife, the purpose of people's earthly lives being to prepare them to satisfy its entry requirements – which might include observance of specified rules of behaviour, acceptance of the existence of one or more hypothesised 'gods' or achievement of a state of 'enlightenment'.[14] For those who believe in it, the heavenly afterlife attained by fortunate souls is generally imagined as unreservedly happy and pain-free. Less clearly imagined are: the personal characteristics of the souls (e.g. whether they are eternally fixed as at the time of death or are subject to change); the relationship between souls (e.g. whether their social structure is egalitarian or hierarchical); whether souls ever disagree (a seemingly less than blissful occurrence) and, if so, how they resolve any conflicts; what souls actually *do* for an eternity in order to avoid the pain of unremitting boredom (escape through death no longer being an option). The thoughts of believers on these issues, in so far as they have any, are likely to reflect their earthly desires and attitudes. Not all will consider a perfectly happy society of souls to be one free from all prejudice and inequality (whether based on race, colour, creed, class, gender, sexuality, age or whatever).

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[13] In his *Nicomachean Ethics* (Book 10), Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 BC) defines human happiness/flourishing, as "activity in accordance with the highest virtue" and relates this to the exercise of the *intellect.* Recognising that it is also associated with *pleasure,* he argues that: "activity in accordance with wisdom is admittedly the most pleasant of the activities in accordance with virtue" and that "philosophy or the pursuit of wisdom contains pleasures of marvellous purity and permanence". He considers that happiness/flourishing is unique in being pursued as an end in itself rather than as a means to something else and contrasts it with *amusement* which he regards as "a form of rest" taken "as a means to further activity".

[14] To assist with the preparation, organised religions usually offer/prescribe guidance from appointed clerics/gurus who, incidentally, thereby gain permanent and potentially lucrative employment.

16. Religious belief *can* inspire social reform but lack of belief in an afterlife is *more likely* to incentivise it. The potential for *changing mind-sets* raises issues for the pursuit of happiness.

The imagined attributes of a heavenly afterlife have inspired some to seek actively to *change*, not passively accept, earthly realities. The Christian inspired aims of the Levellers, active at the time of the English Civil War, and of anti-slavery reformers such as William Wilberforce (1759-1833) provide examples of the ability of religious belief (contrary to Nietzsche's view) to promote *spirited* and potentially *revolutionary* challenge to societal norms and institutions. Arguably, however, absence of belief in a compensatory afterlife provides the strongest incentive to seek, if not an earthly paradise, then at least a society which maximises people's happiness during their brief corporeal existence. We are now back, of course, to the problem of how we define and measure happiness and how, if at all, we discriminate in terms of its quality. Particularly problematic is the potential for major social change to alter the mind-sets of both present and future generations and thus what is liable to make them happy or unhappy. Is it possible that greater happiness would result if the characteristics of people (including their attitudes, beliefs and patterns of behaviour) were very different? How feasible is it to produce a society of such people? How much unhappiness would be inflicted in the process of transition (e.g. if it involved coercing or eliminating anyone considered recalcitrant or obstructive)? Is it indeed possible to *compare* happiness levels in different societies if they relate to very different sets of beliefs and social norms? Even if we are satisfied that a particular set of social arrangements, *if achieved*, would produce the greatest overall happiness (at least for those who survived the transition process), how sure can we be that its pursuit would not, in the event, spawn a monster (i.e. that by trying to realise a utopian dream we do not end up with a dystopian nightmare)? Questions such as these are particularly acute where change is revolutionary rather than evolutionary (as with the English, American, French and Russian revolutions).

17. What's wrong with a *Brave New World* society? Is a drug-induced happiness necessarily bad?

Might a society be deemed dystopian *even if* it genuinely guarantees its members the maximum of happiness and the minimum of pain and suffering? What is wrong, for example, with Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* society (see pages 20-21) where biological/social engineering combined with the mass supply of consumer goods, entertainments and the mind-altering drug *soma* keeps everyone docile and happy? A *practical* objection to such a society is that it would prove difficult, if not impossible, to sustain. Particularly fragile is likely to be the continuing motivation of its highly intelligent controllers (the Alpha Double-Pluses) who seem bound, at some stage, to ask themselves the same sort of questions as we are now considering. Objectionable also would be the Brave New Worlders' use of the drug soma *if* it were harmful – but Huxley stresses that it does not impair their health and efficiency and that it provides them with a refreshing 'holiday' from bad moods and life's annoyances whilst also making them calmer and more caring citizens. Our own society, it is important to remember, allows the *controlled* use for *medical* purposes (e.g. to alleviate pain, anxiety and depression) of a restricted range of drugs (e.g. fentanyl, diazepam and fluoxetine) which work by modifying the chemistry of the brain and nervous system. Alcohol and nicotine, drugs which are both legal and widely used for *recreational* purposes, work in a similar way.[15] There are, of course, worries about the *side effects*, *excessive use* or *addictive potential* of some of these drugs. Particular concern attaches to drugs which radically limit/distort our cognitive processes and thus our ability to operate effectively as purposive *agents* within our physical and social environment. The physical dangers of anything that causes us to "see the world as the world's not"[16] are obvious (an extreme example being an LSD-induced belief that we can fly, bird-like, from upper-floor windows). Our 'normal' way of seeing the world is the result of an evolutionary process in which sentient beings are unlikely to

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[15] Samuel Johnson (see quote 9) extols good taverns and inns, places designed primarily for the consumption of *alcohol*, as the greatest contributors to human happiness. The artist William Hogarth, however, is persuaded that not all forms of alcohol consumption have happy results and, in a pair of prints, contrasts the prosperous and salubrious *Beer Street* with the penurious and crime-ridden *Gin Lane* (see page 22). Some religions (e.g. Islam) and some religious sub-groups (e.g. Baptists and the Salvation Army) oppose *any* consumption of alcohol.

[16] The quote is from A.E. Houseman's poem *A Shropshire Lad* (see page 21) and refers to the effects of drinking beer – or at least too much of it!

survive for long unless their sensory/cognitive systems *accurately* interpret salient features of their given environment – an evolutionary novelty now being the existence of a species (i.e. *homo sapiens*) capable of *consciously* altering its environment and manipulating its own biological destiny.

18. Does it matter if happiness is based on *false* belief?

Taking drugs which radically alter our perceptual experience has been justified by some not only for the pleasure it affords (although 'bad trips' are possible) but also for the access it supposedly gives to a hidden reality. In his book *The Doors of Perception*[17] (1953), Huxley describes his mind-altering experiences of taking the cactus-derived drug mescaline (he later experimented with LSD and compared its effects). If the happiness obtained from mind-altering drugs depends, at least in part, upon their users' belief that the experiences involved, *as they interpret them*, represent something *true* about the world, and if this belief is *unjustified*, does it therefore constitute *false* happiness? And, if so, does this *matter*? This issue goes much wider than drug-taking. Many people find comfort in some type of religious belief, religion being described by German philosopher Karl Marx (1818-83) as "the opium of the people"[18]. Even if what is believed (e.g. personal survival in an afterlife or eventual absorption into cosmic oneness) is untrue, might it be considered a *convenient untruth* which helps believers (who will not exist post-death to discover their error) lead happier and better lives?[19]

19. The nature of *social/institutional reality* is bound to impact on human happiness.

Religion is just one feature (along with, for example, property, money, government and nationhood) of the *social/institutional world* which, as argued by American philosopher John Searle,[20] is created and sustained through human *collective intentionality*. Being *observer-dependent* (unlike the *brute world* of particles in fields of force which exists *independently* of how, if at all, humans represent it), it is inherently *fragile* and subject to on-going *change* as the *diverse* perspectives/visions of different people compete for predominance (collective intentionality, it is important to emphasise, does not mean *consensus*). How individuals conceive their social world, and where they place themselves within it, is bound to affect their happiness. Social/institutional reality incorporates a wide range of *distinctions/categorisations* (relating, for example, to age, gender, class, ethnicity and nationality) which directly impact on how people regard and treat each other and thereby on their physical and mental well-being. The evolutionary *survival value* of different manifestations of social/institutional reality (e.g. of democratic as opposed to autocratic systems of government) remains to be seen. The dystopian nightmare suggested by Huxley (see page 20) is a totalitarian world where an all-powerful elite controls a population of *de facto* slaves who do not have to be coerced because they have been brainwashed into loving their servitude.

20. Our individual happiness is affected by what we imagine other people think of us.

Whilst our social/institutional world is what it is by virtue of enough people believing it to be so (making it observer-*dependent*), the *holding* of a belief, whether true or false, by an individual is an observer-*independent* fact about her/him i.e. about the *content of her/his mind*. But how can we *know* what is going on in someone else's mind? At best, we can only *imagine* what other people are thinking by interpreting relevant signs, primarily what they say and do. Without such imagining, however, there is no basis for social interaction and what we imagine other people are thinking about *us* can significantly affect our happiness or unhappiness. Bentham includes the knowledge that we *are* or *are not* liked by others or held

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[17] The title comes from a line in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793) by William Blake (1757-1827): "If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is: Infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern." The US band *The Doors* (formed in 1965) took their name from Huxley's title.

[18] The quote comes from Marx's *Introduction* (published separately in 1844) to *A Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (published after Marx's death). A fuller quote is: "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people."

[19] The untruth might be less than convenient for *other* people if it takes the form of *religious fanaticism* expressed by intolerance towards rival beliefs or towards non-believers.

[20] See: *The Construction of Social Reality* (1995); *Mind, Language and Society* (1999); *Making the Social World* (2010).

in good esteem by society/God as a source of *pleasure* or *pain* (see page 19). In practice, our knowledge of what other people are thinking is speculative and there is always scope for the deliberate putting out of false signs, the putting out of signs that represent only temporary states of mind (e.g. short-term annoyance with someone held in long-term affection) and for the *misinterpretation* of signs. Disappointing for some who imagine that others are thinking either good or ill of them, is to discover that they are not being thought about *at all*.[21] The scope for being rendered happy or unhappy by the presumed attitudes of others towards us has been vastly increased by the advent of social-media, although why we should care about the expressed 'likes' or 'dislikes' of people about whom we know next to nothing and who know next to nothing about us, is unclear. More relevant to our happiness or unhappiness would appear to be the approval or disapproval of people who know us well and whose judgement we have, through experience, come to respect.

21. Is happiness to be found in being 'true to ourselves'?

If we were always able "to see ourselves as others see us"[22], not only might we find it *confusing*, as the perspectives of others can *differ*, but we would also face a constant challenge to our *self-images* and estimations of *self-worth*. In practice, the feedback we get from other people is limited and we are not, in any case, bound to agree with it. We are largely free to cultivate our self-images and make judgements about ourselves as we wish.[23] These may vary depending upon, for example, our social situation or mood and may be either positive or negative, the two extremes of self-estimation being self-adoration and self-loathing. This variability and the fact that our personalities *evolve*, makes it impossible to identify an 'authentic self' to which we should always be true. Even if such a self *were* identifiable, to assume that its thoughts and deeds must of necessity be *good* or *conducive to happiness* is to commit the 'genitive fallacy' of judging things by their *provenance* rather than their *substance*. People's beliefs and behaviours might 'authentically' reflect something about their personas but this does not thereby make those beliefs and behaviours *right* or *good* (think of a Hitler or a Savile). This can be judged only by their *content* and *consequences*.

22. Does *truth* trump happiness?

The happiness which people might enjoy by virtue of entertaining unjustifiably high opinions of themselves is generally fairly harmless and not worth spoiling, it being more important to encourage those who *under-*estimate their own value. There are *limits*, however, to the harmlessness of entertaining false ideas, whether they be about ourselves, other people or our physical and social worlds. It is hard to escape the conviction that *truth matters*, even if it is an *unhappy* truth. Ignorance is *not* bliss (see page 23) if it blinds us to realities which we *can* and *should* do something about. Even with things we are powerless to avoid (e.g. our own deaths), an ability to recognise and cope with the realities involved is a mark of maturity. Although the observer-*dependent* nature of our social world makes it permanently *alterable*, this does not mean that 'anything goes' i.e. that one set of beliefs is as valid as any other regardless of its relationship to observer-*independent* facts. The problem, of course, is to agree the *criteria* for establishing such facts, some people (e.g. religious fanatics) regarding the strength of their own convictions as sufficient evidence for their truth. A downside of the human capacity for *imagination* is the ability to imagine and *believe* all

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[21] As a character in Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) says, "there is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about."

[22] In his poem *To a Louse, On Seeing One on a Lady's Bonnet at Church* (1786), Robert Burns (1759-96) suggests that having the gift "to see ourselves as others see us" would free us from "many a blunder ... and foolish notion" and lead us to abandon "airs in dress and gait ... and even Devotion".

[23] "At one extreme are the completely dedicated and single-minded fanatics, at the other are those adolescents who do not yet know 'who they are or where they are going'. The more integrated the self-image, the more consistent a person's behaviour will be: one effect of the self-image on behaviour is the suppression of behaviour that is out of line. This 'consistency' may take various forms, depending on whether the self-image is based on the attributes of some person, or on a set of ethical or ideological rules of conduct, or on an occupational or social-class role".
Michael Argyle. *The Psychology of Interpersonal Behaviour*. Penguin, 4th Edition, 1988

sorts of things, however fantastical they might be, which are *untrue*.[24] Particularly pernicious is the tendency to believe that all members of a socially-defined group (based, for example, on ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, class, caste or religion) think the same way and share the same attributes, desires and intentions – in other words, to fail to recognise and treat each as an *individual*. This has been the prime cause of *human-inflicted* pain and suffering throughout history – a particularly heinous example being the mass-murder resulting from the Nazi-propagated myth of a world-wide 'Jewish conspiracy'.

23. Some human imperfections add interest to life but others are clearly prejudicial to our happiness.

A worrisome thought is that without human frailties, foibles, airs and pretensions, the world would be an exceedingly *dull* place – as would a heaven full of 'perfect' souls.[25] Such imperfections add spice to life, can be a source of amusement and provide material for imaginative exploration in, for example, novels, plays and films. The problem is to distinguish relatively harmless imperfections from those which lead people to inflict pain and suffering upon each other and even to obtain pleasure in the process. The degree of harm arising from our ability to believe things which "just ain't so" will depend upon *what* is believed and about *whom* or *what* it is believed. As suggested above, a major cause of unhappiness in the world is the *negative* and *false* stereotyping of people on the basis of their membership of putative 'groups'. This has the effect of denying their individuality and legitimising, potentially, their persecution as 'the enemy'. Harm is done not only by falsely characterising whole *groups* of people but also by falsely crediting selected *individuals* with semi-mystical qualities (due, perhaps, to personal charisma, blood-line or claimed ability to mediate with a putative 'god'), resulting in their elevation to positions of power and privilege. Many other animals, of course, identify and follow 'leaders' but humans, by virtue of their higher cognitive functions, have both more *choice* in the matter and more *bases*, rational or otherwise, for doing so. A depressing fact is that humans, whilst generally acting rationally, can also be susceptible to putting their faith in charlatans, mountebanks and other 'chancers' whose main, if not sole, talent is for self-promotion.

24. Pending further evolutionary change, we can only make best use of the physiology we now have.

Humans are the product of an evolutionary process traceable back, ultimately, to primordial slime. Stages of this process are evidenced in the structure of the human brain, its component parts ranging from the basic (e.g. the *brain stem* or 'reptilian brain' governing vital functions) to the most advanced, namely the *cerebral cortex* associated with thinking and reasoning and described by a neuroscientist as "the crowning achievement of brain evolution, both literally and figuratively".[26] The make-up of our sensory/cognitive systems clearly affects our capacity to experience pleasure/pain as well as the nature of that experience. Crucial to how we behave, including our capacity for making *moral* choices, is the degree of *interconnection* between the cerebral cortex and other parts of the brain including the *hypothalamus* (responsible for hormone release), the *amygdala* (generating emotional responses) and the *hippocampus* (associated with memory). Further evolutionary change via the selective survival of genetic mutations cannot be ruled out. What form this might take is unknown but it could include substantial alterations to the structure, chemistry and functioning of the brain and nervous system and thus to both the experience of pleasure/pain and the triggering of choices and actions.[27] Meanwhile, discounting the possibility of the

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[24] Mark Twain (1835-1910) is widely but, it seems, falsely credited with originating the aphorism: "It ain't what you don't know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure that just ain't so." It is quoted at the start of Adam McKay's film *The Big Short* (2015) about the build-up to the 2008 financial crash.

[25] Hence the aphorism, used but not originated by Mark Twain: "Go to Heaven for the climate, Hell for the company".

[26] Barry J. Gibb (2012) *The Rough Guide to the Brain.*

[27] It has been suggested by some that, given the looming crisis of over-population relative to resource-availability, a change in human physiology which reduces the pleasures associated with sexual activity would aid the long-term survival of the human species. A compensatory change would be one which reduces the pains of childbirth, unlikely by itself to significantly encourage procreation. The greatest reduction in physical pain/suffering would result from genetic changes which lessen human susceptibility to illnesses/diseases. *However*, anything which increases human longevity can only add to the problems of over-population unless accompanied by changes which cause humans to seek/find happiness in ways involving minimal use of non-renewable resources.

human species' *re-engineering* its own genetic/biological make-up in the near future, we are stuck with our current physiology and have no alternative but to try to make best use of it.

25. We are combatants in a *moral war* where *ideas* are our weapons.

What might constitute the *best* use of our mental and physical capacities is clearly a *moral* issue. At its heart is the problem, already mentioned, of how to derive an 'ought' from an 'is' i.e. how to proceed from *factual* premises (e.g. that people naturally prefer to be happy rather than unhappy) to *normative* conclusions about how we *should* or *shouldn't* behave. Reason *alone* seems unable to bridge the gap. It can *inform* choices by exploring possibilities, identifying likely outcomes and making comparisons with a view to establishing *consistent* rules of behaviour. Putting a *value* upon alternative possibilities, however, appears to require *emotive* factors which ultimately settle the direction of choice and provide *triggers* for action. Moral choice might thus been seen as the outcome of the interplay between reason and emotion,[28] realised through the interaction of the cerebral cortex with other parts of the human brain. This is not to say that such choice is *dictated* by the physical processes involved. The fact that we differ widely in our beliefs and behaviours in spite of having more or less identically structured *brains* indicates that 'nurture' is more important than 'nature' in determining the content of the *cognitive systems* comprising our *minds*. The scope for changing this content with a view to promoting happier human lives/relationships would appear to be immense. Such change is realisable not through physically altering the brain but through the impact of *ideas* – comparable, in the field of psychiatry, to the use of cognitive behavioural, rather than drug, therapy. *However*, the diversity of viewpoints and the absence of common agreement not only about facts but about the basis for establishing them (e.g. whether the *strength* of a belief has any bearing at all upon its *truth*) means that a *moral war* is involved in which the participants strive to persuade others of the correctness of their own positions.[29] The process is essentially a *dialectical* one, its outcome depending upon the strength of the ideas and arguments deployed and their ability to generate in people's minds sufficiently robust and tenacious thoughts and feelings. Much remains to be fought for, as evidenced by the continuing existence in the world of beliefs and behaviours which: cause great pain and suffering; display a combination of ignorance, superstition, prejudice, partiality and greed; stem from a fundamental failure adequately to *imagine* the thoughts and feelings of other people.[30]

26. Without the exercise of imagination we cannot begin to *empathise* with other people. To be of value, however, such empathising must *morally discriminate*.

As generally defined, to *empathise* with another person is to *understand* and *share* her/his thoughts and feelings by *imagining* oneself *as* that person, taking into account her/his personal characteristics and situation in the world. Any attempt to imagine the physical/mental experiences of another person, however, raises significant issues, including the following.

a. Our imaginative capacity is affected by the nature and extent of our *own* personal experience. How far is it possible, for example, to imagine what it is like to have a particular illness/disability if one has not experienced it oneself or for a man to imagine what it is like to give birth to a baby? In some cases we can acquire at least *some* relevant experience e.g. fast for a week to get a glimmering of what it is like to be starving, or sleep out in the open on successive winter nights to get a feel for what it is like to be homeless and living on the streets. Those who insist water-boarding does not constitute torture can have themselves subjected to it to see if the experience changes their minds. In many cases, of course, such self-experimentation is simply not possible e.g. we will never, unless we are extremely unlucky,

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[28] David Hume recognises this interplay but arguably attributes too subordinate a role to reason when he says: ""Reason, is, and ought only to be, the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them". [A *Treatise of Human Nature* - Book 2, Part 3, Section 3]

[29] Some people (e.g. religious and political fanatics) are so convinced of they own rightness that they feel justified in trying to *force* their views on anyone who fails to agree with them. They thereby turn the *moral* battlefield into a *physical* one and must be prepared, if they lose, to reap the consequences.

[30] This assertion, of course, *itself* represents a particular dialectical standpoint, as does the general line of argument followed within this paper.

find out for ourselves what it is like to be poisoned with chlorine gas or a nerve agent or to lose one or more limbs in a bomb attack on one's home, school, etc.

b. In trying to imagine what it would be like to be another person we are liable, in practice, to do it from the perspective of our *own* personality. We may be able to imagine how *we* would feel in a given set of circumstances but this could be very different from how *someone else* would feel given that people can vary widely in how they react to different stimuli, in their likes and dislikes and in what makes them happy or unhappy.

c. We often have little, if any, knowledge of the people whose mental experience we are trying to imagine. Sometimes, indeed, we are simply imagining the thoughts and feelings of *hypothetical* people living in *possible* situations (including people as yet unborn). Even where our focus is on a *specific* person whom we think we know intimately, such as a partner, we cannot be *sure* about how their mind works or what is going on in it – which sometimes might be just as well!

d. Even where we *can*, through an act of imagination, experience vicariously, albeit imperfectly, someone else's thoughts and feelings, we are not bound to 'share' them in the sense of *sympathising* or *agreeing* with them. We might succeed, for example, in getting a better understanding of the mentality of a psychopath, fascist or religious fanatic by imagining what it would be like to *be* one but, at the same time, find that mentality wholly *repulsive*. This indicates that, to be of value, empathy must be tempered with *moral discrimination* and that, in so far as *approval* is required, we may find it possible to empathise with *some* aspects of another person's mental/emotional experience but not all. At times, indeed, we might even find it difficult to empathise with some aspects of our *own* personas!

e. Our personalities are highly complex, only *semi*-integrated and liable to display varying levels of consistency/inconsistency. We can all recognise within ourselves aspects of our personalities, including an assortment of prejudices, which pull us in different directions and which, together with our passing moods, are liable to affect how we react in given situations. To varying degrees, we are all suggestible and open to persuasion by others i.e. not only able to *understand* their point of view but also prone to *adopt* it.[31] The greater our ability to imagine the contents of other people's minds the greater the scope for our being converted to their way of thinking, perhaps by activating and reinforcing existing aspects of our own personalities. The impact of this will depend upon whether the appeal is to the 'better angels' or the worse demons of our nature.[32] If we can readily imagine the thoughts and feelings of a kind and caring person we need not worry. If we can all too easily imagine ourselves into the mind of a psychopath or sadist we have good reason to be concerned.

27. Awareness of the plight of other people impacts upon our *own* happiness. To be useful, however, our feelings of empathy must be directed to identifying ways in which we can *help* those people.
Subject to the qualifications outlined above, the ability to empathise with other people is fundamental to the application of any moral approach which targets human happiness. Inevitably it involves imagining not only what gives people pleasure but also what causes them pain and suffering. However, to dwell too long in our minds on the latter can seriously impact upon our *own* levels of happiness (i.e. by generating Bentham's 'pains of benevolence' – see page 19). If we spent all our time vividly imagining all the *bad* things which happen to people in the world we would spend it in abject misery, if not in floods of tears. To achieve happiness for ourselves and perhaps even to preserve our sanity, the imagination has to be directed much of the time to the *good* things which happen to people (thus generating Bentham's 'pleasures of benevolence'). An ability to *re-direct* our thoughts provides a vital self-preservation and

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[31] David Hume recognises this tendency when he says: "No quality of human nature is more remarkable, both in itself and in its consequences, than that propensity we have to sympathise with others and to receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary to, our own." [*A Treatise of Human Nature* Book 2, Part 1, Section 11]

[32] The reference to 'better angels' comes from the closing lines of Abraham Lincoln's First Inaugural Address in 1861: "We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature."

coping mechanism and, at least as importantly, enables us to act as *effective agents* in the world and thus potentially to *help* other people. Imagining their suffering is helpful only if we are then able to concentrate our minds upon identifying what we can and should *do*, directly or indirectly, to eliminate or at least reduce it. Just *contemplating* the suffering of others achieves nothing by itself and runs the danger of becoming a form of *schadenfreude* where portrayal of their plight, rather than spurring us to action, is treated simply as 'misery pornography' (e.g. avidly viewing a TV programme about starving people whilst happily tucking into a jumbo-sized burger or pizza).

28. Dealing with *challenge* appears vital to the achievement of human happiness.

Identifying and attempting to achieve societal changes which will make people happier provides us with a big challenge. Paradoxically, if we are *too* successful in meeting this challenge we will *lose* it and thereby an activity which contributes to our happiness by giving meaning and purpose to our lives – a dilemma for anyone promoting a *utopian* agenda. As Bentham recognises, a major source of pleasure is the enjoyment obtained from achieving things which require the application of physical/mental skill and effort. Given the current state of the world, of course, we are in no danger of running out of ways in which we can improve it. Moreover, whilst there appears to be something enduring in the human psyche which requires a challenge (reflecting our evolution as *problem-solving* creatures), we are highly ingenious at inventing our *own* physical and mental challenges in the form, for example, of puzzles, games and sports. Amazing but undoubtedly real, for example, is the endless pleasure which some people can get from as supremely trivial an activity as trying to minimise the number of times they have to hit a small ball in order to get it into a succession of eighteen holes in the ground (players with religious beliefs, perhaps, imagining heaven as 'the great golf course in the sky'). For many children and adults today, computer games provide a major source of pleasure by challenging their cognitive/reactive skills. Concerning, however, are games (e.g. *Grand Theft Auto*) where players become participants in simulated acts of criminality and violence. Opinion is divided about the impact of such games e.g. whether they merely allow the harmless working out of players' aggressive instincts in the safe context of a simulated world or whether they strengthen those instincts, desensitise players to the infliction of pain and suffering and tempt them to perpetrate similar violent/murderous acts in the real world. A Bentham-style analysis would require the weighing up of the immediate pleasure derived from the playing of such games with the possible longer-term pain inflicted upon society if they have a significant corrupting effect upon their players.

29. Whilst there is a case for banning material which causes extreme harm, adults must not be shielded from the realities of life if they are to exercise *moral agency*.

Concern about their potentially corrupting effects apply as much to passive forms of entertainment (e.g. literature, plays and films) as to those, such as computer games, which involve the active participation of users. From a utilitarian perspective, restrictions upon them would be justified if the harm they do clearly outweighs any pleasure they might give some people. The problem is how to judge this. Some material (e.g. child pornography) is so obviously harmful and corrupting that its criminalisation is accepted as uncontentious. Generally less clear, however, is the approach to be taken towards other material which might be highly distasteful or disturbing to some people but which nevertheless satisfies the prurient, morbid or ghoulish instincts of others. Of particular concern is bound to be the portrayal of acts of extreme violence, including sexual violence. A compromise approach widely adopted is to try to restrict the consumption of such material to adults (as defined by society), although the access which most children now have to the internet makes this hard to achieve. Education, both parental and formal, has a crucial role to play in inculcating from an early age disdain for finding *pleasure* in observing the pain, suffering or exploitation of other people. Any examples used in this process, of course, have to be carefully selected to be *age-appropriate*. By adulthood, however, it is important that people should be *aware* of all the bad things which can happen in the world so that they can guard/strive against them. Ignorance is *not* bliss (see page 23) if it involves shielding people from realities about which they need to know if they are to make informed moral judgements and be properly equipped to fight for a better/happier society.

30. The purpose of education is to foster intellectual and emotional *capacity*, not to indoctrinate.

Aristotle (see footnote 13) associates human happiness/flourishing with *virtuous conduct* but accepts that virtue might be neither a natural endowment nor something capable of being taught through theoretical argument. Instead, he argues, "the soil must have been previously tilled if it is to foster the seed, the mind of the pupil having been prepared by the cultivation of habits, so as to like and dislike aright".[33] Obvious questions arise regarding the sort of habits to be cultivated and how far the whole process might amount to 'infant conditioning' (identified by Huxley as a potential tool of social/political control – see page 20). If we value freedom of thought, whether for utilitarian or other reasons, we should oppose anything which constitutes child *indoctrination*, a major example being the parental imposition of religious beliefs/dogmas. Rather, the focus of a child's education should be upon the development and exercise of intellectual and emotional *capacity*. Any *rules* should be confined primarily to what is necessary for the immediate safety/welfare of the child/others, the *reasons* for them being explained at the earliest opportunity. Crucial to developing the capacity of children for empathy is to encourage in them the habit of imagining how *they* would feel if on the receiving end of their intended/actual behaviour towards others. "Do as you would be done by" provides a basic rule, if one is needed, to encapsulate this approach.[34]

31. Imaginatively exploring our physical world provides a twofold contribution to human happiness.

The development and exercise of our capacity for *imagination* is fundamental to our ability to explore, interpret and engage with our physical environment (of which we are ourselves a part). Whilst some of these imaginings (e.g. those relating to particle physics, quantum mechanics, relativity theory and astrophysics) are far removed from our everyday experience and may seem to border on the fantastical, they remain 'grounded' by being always open to refutation in the light of relevant evidence. Their contribution to human happiness is twofold. From a practical point of view they can lead to the development of technologies (e.g. in the field of communications, medicine and sustainable energy) which, if used wisely, clearly contribute to human well-being. At least as importantly they arise from the human need not just for *challenge* (see paragraph 28) but for *discovery* – which requires that there always be something *beyond* to be explored and understood and which explains why a state of 'absolute knowledge', whether on earth or in a putative heaven, would constitute a living death.

32. Human imagination is employed in *constructing*, as well as understanding, social reality.

Our imaginative faculties are employed not just in exploring and understanding our social/institutional world but in *constructing* it (see paragraph 19). *What* is constructed (i.e. social, political and economic structures, organisations and practices) will have a profound impact upon human happiness and, in particular, its *distribution* between individuals. Utilitarianism should be as much concerned with the *spread* of happiness as with its total or average value. This will vary between different economic/political systems depending upon whether they are, for example, feudal, capitalist, communist, autocratic or democratic. The extent to which human imaginings are directed along *rational* and *evidence-based* lines will determine what type of social/institutional world is constructed and the levels of happiness/unhappiness experienced by its different members. Imaginings allied to the false belief, for example, that the ancestry or physical/mental characteristics of people determine their social worth will produce a society where the life chances, and thus the potential for happiness, of different groups of people are grossly unequal.

33. Fiction, the creation of the imagination, is a major source of pleasure. Imagination unconstrained by *reason*, however, can be detrimental to human happiness.

Related to its role in the construction of social reality, is the ability of the imagination to create *fictions* – the stuff of storytelling, novels, plays, films, TV drama/soaps, etc. These provide a major source of pleasure

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[33] *Nicomachean Ethics* (translation by Harris Rackham).

[34] An equivalent prescription "Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them" (Matthew 7:12 and similarly Luke 6:31) exists in the Bible, although the moral stance it expresses must have long pre-dated it. A negative version, expressed by the Chinese philosopher Confucius (551-479 BC), is: "Do not do to others what you would not wish they should do to you".

for many people and a means of escape from the concerns of everyday life. Importantly, they can also provide vehicles for the exploration and *critique* of different aspects of society – hence authoritarian regimes/institutions attempt to censor/suppress them if they are deemed subversive. The dividing line between fiction and reality is often blurred. Many people find fictional characters so real that they share vicariously in their portrayed joys, sorrows, pleasures and pains, thereby experiencing an emotional catharsis.[35] Fiction might thus been seen as having a therapeutic value, particularly for the socially isolated. It also helps to stimulate the developing imaginations of young children, although this often involves persuading them, at least temporarily, of the real existence of fictitious beings (Santa Claus is an obvious example) about which they later have to be disabused – instilling in them, perhaps, a healthy distrust of anything adults might tell them in the future. Throughout their lives, many people maintain a belief in beings (e.g. witches, ghosts, angels, devils, demons and one or more gods)[36] for whose existence they can supply no evidence worthy of the name. Depending upon its prevalence, such belief can become a significant component of social/institutional reality with potential consequences for human happiness. Its influence may be benign but, if manifested in the form of fanaticism, may result in the brute reality of violent death for anyone deemed a non-believer, heretic, blasphemer, etc. Imagination is thus a double-edged sword. If tempered with realism and rationality, it can be a force for good. Dangers arise when fluid imaginings are unconstrained by reason and allowed to crystallise in the form of irrational beliefs.

34. Moral approaches which posit *objectively* existing rules of behaviour are practically and conceptually flawed. Any utilitarian approach is bound to be *subjective* and *conflictual*.
For believers in the existence of a god, to behave morally is to observe her/his/its wishes. Only if god is a utilitarian will this necessarily mean trying to maximise happiness. Apart from the practical problem of knowing what god's wishes are, there is the conceptual problem of justifying the step from the *fact* of such wishes to the *prescription* that they should be observed.[37] The conceivability of *disagreeing* with god, moreover, suggests that there is more to morality than blind observance of god's wishes. Alternative approaches to morality which claim that how we should behave is determined by objectively existing *virtues*, such as those posited by Aristotle, or *duties*, such as the 'categorical imperatives' posited by German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), run into similar problems. Utilitarianism also appears to take the unwarranted step from the *fact* that people naturally prefer to be happy to the *prescription* that our ultimate goal should be the maximisation of their happiness. A related problem is that, individually, we can *disapprove* of many of the ways in which people obtain happiness. To say that we should maximise only happiness which is obtained in *good* ways begs the question of what determines the goodness of anything other than its contribution to happiness. The same problem arises if we aim to maximise the fulfilment of people's *preferences* rather than their happiness, an approach known as *preference utilitarianism*. The key issue is that we may disapprove of behaviour *even if* the happiness or preference satisfaction enjoyed by its perpetrators outweighs the unhappiness or preference denial inflicted upon others – a situation which could arise, for example, where a majority of people find happiness in, or have a preference for, persecuting a minority, perhaps due to their ethnicity or sexuality. This suggests that disapproval of some behaviours might express a *direct* emotive/aesthetic reaction to them rather than the result of appraising their happiness outcomes. It might be the case, however, that the emotive reactions of individuals reflect values inculcated during their formative years and that these, depending upon the

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[35] Charles Dickens was particularly adept at tugging at the heart strings of his readers, habitually crossing the line between sentiment and sentimentality. Provocatively, Oscar Wilde wrote of the death scene in Charles Dickens' *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841) that "One must have a heart of stone to read the death of little Nell without laughing."

[36] According to a 2016 YouGov survey, about 30% of UK adults definitely believe in ghosts and about 25% in a Creator. Interestingly, only about 40% of those who self-identify as Christians definitely believe in a Creator, suggesting that for many of them Christianity has more of a cultural than a religious significance.
See: https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2016/03/26/o-we-of-little-faith

[37] This is sometimes referred to as the *Euthyphro* problem. In the dialogue of the same name, the Greek philosopher Socrates (469-399 BC), according to his pupil Plato (427-347 BC), questions whether it is the fact of something being loved by the gods that makes it good or whether it is the fact of its being good that makes it loved by the gods.

parental/societal influences involved, connect ultimately to experience of the happiness outcomes of different behaviours. This still leaves open the question of how such outcomes are to be evaluated. Whilst their implications for happiness seem bound to be *considered*, other considerations (e.g. concern for living *truthfully* - see paragraphs 18 and 22) may take precedence. At the very least, any evaluation is liable to *discriminate* between different experiences of happiness on the basis of their *type* and *incidence*. Depending upon who is doing the evaluating, the happiness obtained by a poor person from being decently if modestly housed, for example, may be rated much higher than that obtained by a rich person from living in a mansion. The *subjectivity* of happiness (see paragraph 7) means that people will *differ* in their evaluations, the collective choices they want made (see paragraph 10) and the type of society they think will foster people who seek/find happiness in the 'right' sort of ways (see paragraph 16). What, in the event, happens will be determined by the dialectics of a moral, if not a physical, war (see paragraph 25).

Roger Jennings
August 2018   Revised/extended December 2018

Some relevant KPC papers

The relationship between happiness and morality is considered in the following two papers presented at previous sessions of the Kingston Philosophy Café:
Moral Certainty or Moral Relativism? (April 2010)
Money, Metaphysics and Morality (October 2012) – especially Section 4

The questionable link which is often made between goodness and personal 'authenticity' is considered in the following paper, prompted by a KPC discussion on the subject.
Thoughts on Authenticity (March 2015)

The relationship between happiness on earth and in a hypothesised heaven is considered in the following background paper for KPC's *Big Death Debate* which was presented by Filiz Peach, Kieran Quill and Roger Jennings at the *Philosophy Now* Festival of Ideas on 21 November 2015.
Thoughts on Death (November 2015) - see, in particular, paragraphs 24-30

All four papers can be accessed on the KPC website via the following link:
https://e-voice.org.uk/kingstonphilosophycafe/files/index?folder_id=16243163

Possible questions for discussion:

Questions we might consider in our discussion include the following:
- Which is more important, to maximise happiness or minimise unhappiness?
- We might not be able to perform a 'happiness calculation' for every choice we make but can we identify *rules of conduct* which we can be confident will generally produce the happiest results?
- If we could be made blissfully happy (without impairing our health or physical/mental functioning) by regularly taking some drug would we be 'happy' to do so?
- Is it more important to live truthfully and honestly than to be happy?
- If the consequences of actions are not judged on the basis of their impact on human happiness, on what other basis might they be judged?
- Are some things just right or wrong in themselves, never mind their consequences for human happiness or for anything else?
- Is the happiness we get from the drinks we buy tonight likely to be greater or less than the happiness that would result if we donated the money instead to Oxfam or some other good cause?

The 'Eeyore complex' – enjoying being miserable!

"Eeyore, the old grey Donkey, stood by the side of the stream, and looked at himself in the water.
"Pathetic," he said. "That's what it is. Pathetic."
He turned and walked slowly down the stream for twenty yards, splashed across it, and walked slowly back on the other side. Then he looked at himself in the water again.
"As I thought," he said. "No better from *this* side. But nobody minds. Nobody cares. Pathetic, that's what it is."
There was a crackling noise in the bracken behind him, and out came Pooh.
"Good morning, Eeyore," said Pooh.
"Good morning, Pooh Bear," said Eeyore gloomily. "If it *is* a good morning," he said. "Which I doubt," said he.
"Why, what's the matter?"
"Nothing, Pooh Bear, nothing. We can't all, and some of us don't. That's all there is to it."
"Can't all *what*?" said Pooh, rubbing his nose.
"Gaiety. Song-and-dance. Here we go round the mulberry bush. ...I'm not complaining, but There It Is."

A. A. Milne *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926)

According to a map in Milne's book, Eeyore lives at the south-east corner of the Hundred Acre Wood in an area labelled "Eeyore's Gloomy Place: Rather Boggy and Sad".

Jeremy Bentham's *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789)
Extract from Chapter 4: Measuring Pleasure and Pain

"Thus, to take an exact account of an act's general tendency to affect the interests of a community, proceed as follows. Of those whose interests seem to be most immediately affected by the act, take one, and take an account,
(1) of the value of each pleasure that appears to be produced by it in the first instance;
(2) of the value of each pain that appears to be produced by it in the first instance;
(3) of the value of each pleasure that appears to be produced by it after the first, this being the fecundity of the first pleasure and the impurity of the first pain;
(4) of the value of each pain that appears to be produced by it after the first, this being the fecundity of the first pain and the impurity of the first pleasure. Then
(5) Sum up the values of all the pleasures on one side and of all the pains on the other. If the balance is on the side of pleasure, that is the over-all good tendency of the act with respect to the interests of that person; if on the side of pain, its over-all bad tendency.
(6) Repeat the above process with respect to each person whose interests appear to be concerned; and then sum the results. If this balance is on the side of pleasure, that is the over-all good tendency of the act with respect to the interests of the community; if on the side of pain, its over-all bad tendency."

An edited text of Bentham's book can be freely accessed at:
https://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/bentham1780.pdf

Bentham's classification of simple pleasures and pains.

Source: *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (1789) Chapter 5

Bentham identifies 14 kinds of pleasure and 12 kinds of pain, as summarised in the table below. Most represent 'opposite sides of the same coin' and can be paired together. Bentham associates the pleasure derived from the application of skill/effort with the *achievement of its intended outcome(s)*, not the application process *itself* which might indeed be *painful* (as recognised by the 'no pain, no gain' dictum). Arguably, however, applying skill/effort can be enjoyable *regardless* of its success. In many areas including competitive sport, 'losers' greatly outnumber 'winners' but simply *trying* can be pleasurable and, indeed, considered an achievement in itself. Not *specifically* included amongst Bentham's pleasures are the experiences of *mental stimulation* provided by, for example, novels, poetry, plays, films, music and other entertainments as well as by our fascination with, and exploration of, the world around us. Without such stimulation we are liable to experience the pain of *boredom* (covered, arguably, by Bentham's 'Deprivation'). A particular source of mental stimulation worth singling out is that of *humour*, which can provide a partial antidote to suffering and generally help to make life more bearable.

Pleasures	Pains
The senses: *Pleasant* visual, tactile, aural, olfactory and gustatory experiences, sexual pleasure, the satisfaction of hunger/thirst , intoxication, good health.	The senses: *Unpleasant* visual, tactile, aural, olfactory and gustatory experiences, hunger/thirst , excessive heat/cold, ill-health/disease, physical/mental exhaustion.
Skill: Enjoyment from achieving things that require the application of skill and effort.	Awkwardness: Frustration from not achieving, or finding unduly difficult, things needing skill and effort.
Friendship: Knowing one is *liked* by particular individuals.	Enmity: Knowing one is *disliked* by particular individuals.
Good reputation: Knowing one is held in *good* repute in society.	Bad reputation: Knowing one is held in *bad* repute in society.
Piety: Believing that one is held in God's *good* esteem.	Piety: Believing that one is held in God's *bad* esteem.
Benevolence: Viewing the *pleasures* of those one *likes*.	Benevolence: Viewing the *pains* of those one *likes*.
Malevolence: Viewing the *pains* of those one *dislikes*.	Malevolence: Viewing the *pleasures* of those one *dislikes*.
Memory: Remembering *pleasant* things.	Memory: Remembering *painful* things.
Imagination: Imagining *pleasant* things.	Imagination: Imagining *painful* things.
Expectation: Expecting *pleasant* things.	Expectation: Expecting *painful* things.
Association: Pleasure provided by objects/incidents only because they are *associated* with things in themselves *pleasant*.	Association: Pain provided by objects/incidents only because they are *associated* with things in themselves *painful*.
Power: Knowing that others are obligated to provide one with services/ benefits.	
Wealth: Gaining/possessing things which provide enjoyment/security.	
Relief: Experienced when a pain of some type stops or lessens.	
	Privation: Awareness of being *deprived* of one or more pleasures, resulting in unsatisfied desire, disappointment or regret.

**Huxley's *Brave New World*. Is a drug-induced happiness as good as any other kind?**

In his novel *Brave New World* (1932), Aldous Huxley (1894-1963) envisages a World State, the inhabitants of which are biologically engineered into types (Alphas, Betas, Gammas, Deltas and Epsilons) differentiated by intellect and physique and allocated to distinct tasks. Overall control is exercised by an Alpha elite (the Alpha Double-Pluses). A technologically advanced command economy ensures the mass supply of consumer goods which, together with the promotion of entertainments, sports and use of the drug *soma*, keeps the population docile and happy. In a foreword added to his novel in 1946, Huxley predicts a growth in totalitarianism, arguing that "only a large-scale popular movement towards decentralisation and self-help can arrest the present tendency towards statism". He speculates that state guarantees of material prosperity/security might prove insufficient to secure the compliance of citizens and that new tools of control might be sought including: "a greatly improved technique of suggestion through infant conditioning and, later, with the aid of drugs such as scopolamine; a fully developed science of human differences, enabling government managers to assign any given individual to his or her proper place in the social and economic hierarchy; a substitute for alcohol and other narcotics, something at once less harmful and more pleasure-giving than gin or heroin; a foolproof system of eugenics, designed to standardise the human product and so to facilitate the task of the managers." Huxley presents us with an ethical challenge. What's wrong with a *Brave New World* if its people are genuinely guaranteed happiness and freedom from conflict? Is a happiness dependent upon the restriction/distortion of human awareness/cognition essentially *false* happiness? Or will any old happiness do?

Some extracts from *Brave New World*:

"And if ever, by some unlucky chance, anything unpleasant should somehow happen, why, there's always soma to give you a holiday from the facts. And there's always soma to calm your anger, to reconcile you to your enemies, to make you patient and long-suffering. In the past you could only accomplish these things by making a great effort and after years of hard moral training. Now, you swallow two or three half-gramme tablets, and there you are. Anybody can be virtuous now. You can carry at least half your morality about in a bottle. Christianity without tears – that's what soma is."

"I don't understand anything," she said with decision, determined to preserve her incomprehension intact. "Nothing. Least of all," she continued in another tone "why you don't take soma when you have these dreadful ideas of yours. You'd forget all about them. And instead of feeling miserable, you'd be jolly. *So* jolly."

""Don't you want to be free and men? Don't you even understand what manhood and freedom are?" Rage was making him fluent; the words came easily, in a rush. "Don't you?" he repeated, but got no answer to his question. "Very well then," he went on grimly. "I'll teach you; I'll make you be free whether you want to or not." And pushing open a window that looked on to the inner court of the Hospital, he began to throw the little pill-boxes of soma tablets in handfuls out into the area."
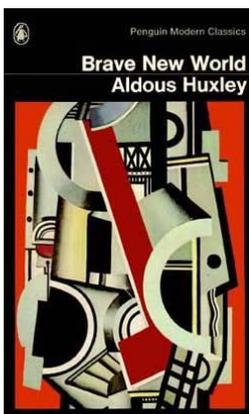
"A really efficient totalitarian state would be one in which the all-powerful executive of political bosses and their army of managers control a population of slaves who do not have to be coerced, because they love their servitude."
Foreword to *Brave New World*

Aldous Huxley (1894-1963)

The title of Huxley's novel is taken from Miranda's speech in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (Act V, Scene 1):
"O wonder! How many goodly creatures are there here! How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world, That has such people in't."

Extract from Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World Revisited* (1958) explaining the role of *soma*.

The full text of *Brave New World Revisited* can be accessed at: https://www.huxley.net/bnw-revisited/

"In the Brave New World of my fable there was no whisky, no tobacco, no illicit heroin, no bootlegged cocaine. People neither smoked, nor drank, nor sniffed, nor gave themselves injections. Whenever anyone felt depressed or below par, he would swallow a tablet or two of a chemical compound called soma. The original soma, from which I took the name of this hypothetical drug, was an unknown plant (possibly *Asclepias aeida*) used by the ancient Aryan invaders of India in one of the most solemn of their religious rites. The intoxicating juice expressed from the stems of this plant was drunk by the priests and nobles in the course of an elaborate ceremony. In the Vedic hymns we are told that the drinkers of soma were blessed in many ways. Their bodies were strengthened, their hearts were filled with courage, joy and enthusiasm, their minds were enlightened and in an immediate experience of eternal life they received the assurance of their immortality. But the sacred juice had its drawbacks. Soma was a dangerous drug – so dangerous that even the great sky-god, Indra, was sometimes made ill by drinking it. Ordinary mortals might even die of an overdose. But the experience was so transcendently blissful and enlightening that soma drinking was regarded as a high privilege. For this privilege no price was too great.

The soma of *Brave New World* had none of the drawbacks of its Indian original. In small doses it brought a sense of bliss, in larger doses it made you see visions and, if you took three tablets, you would sink in a few minutes into refreshing sleep. And all at no physiological or mental cost. The Brave New Worlders could take holidays from their black moods, or from the familiar annoyances of everyday life, without sacrificing their health or permanently reducing their efficiency.

In the Brave New World the soma habit was not a private vice; it was a political institution, it was the very essence of the Life, Liberty and Pursuit of Happiness guaranteed by the Bill of Rights. But this most precious of the subjects' inalienable privileges was at the same time one of the most powerful instruments of rule in the dictator's armoury. The systematic drugging of individuals for the benefit of the State (and incidentally, of course, for their own delight) was a main plank in the policy of the World Controllers. The daily soma ration was an insurance against personal maladjustment, social unrest and the spread of subversive ideas. Religion, Karl Marx declared, is the opium of the people. In the Brave New World this situation was reversed. Opium, or rather soma, was the people's religion. Like religion, the drug had power to console and compensate, it called up visions of another, better world, it offered hope, strengthened faith and promoted charity. Beer, a poet has written, 'does more than Milton can To justify God's ways to man.'† And let us remember that, compared with soma, beer is a drug of the crudest and most unreliable kind. In this matter of justifying God's ways to man, soma is to alcohol as alcohol is to the theological arguments of Milton."

†A.E. Houseman (1859-1936) *A Shropshire Lad* (LXII), (1896)

"Say, for what were hop-yards meant,   Ale, man, ale's the stuff to drink
Or why was Burton built on Trent?   For fellows whom it hurts to think.
Oh many a peer of England brews   Look in the pewter pot
Livelier liquor than the Muse,   To see the world as the world's not.
And malt does more than Milton can   And faith, 'tis pleasant till 'tis past:
To justify God's ways to man.   The mischief is that 'twill not last."

Beer Street and *Gin Lane* by William Hogarth (1697-1764)

The prints *Beer Street* and *Gin Lane* were produced in 1751 by William Hogarth in support of a Gin Act aimed at restricting the popular consumption of gin which had come to be seen as a major social menace. The inhabitants of Beer Street are healthy and industrious. Only the pawnbroker has no business. In Gin Lane, by contrast, the pawnbroker thrives whilst all around are squalor and destitution. In the foreground a drunken and pox-ridden mother allows her baby to fall to its death. Behind are scenes of madness, murder and mayhem. Moralising verses (by Rev. James Townley) were attached to the first versions of the prints. The moral argument presented by the prints is clearly *utilitarian* in character, illustrating as they do the supposedly opposite consequences for human happiness of beer-drinking and gin-drinking. The Gin Act 1751 achieved a big reduction in gin-drinking which, nevertheless, remained a perceived social menace well into the 19th century. Charles Dickens (in *Sketches by Boz*, 1836), recognised (as did Hogarth) that the habit itself might be seen as much a *consequence* as a cause of poverty and deprivation: "Gin-drinking is a great vice in England, but wretchedness and dirt are a greater; and until you improve the homes of the poor, or persuade a half-famished wretch not to seek relief in the temporary oblivion of his own misery, with the pittance that, divided among his family, would furnish a morsel of bread for each, gin-shops will increase in number and splendour."

Beer Street

Gin Lane

Beer, happy produce of our Isle
Can sinewy Strength impart,
And wearied with fatigue and toil
Can cheer each manly heart.

Labour and Art upheld by Thee
Successfully advance,
We quaff Thy balmy Juice with Glee
And water leave to France.

Genius of Health, thy grateful Taste,
Rivals the cup of Jove,
And warms each English generous Breast
With Liberty and Love!

Gin, cursed Fiend, with Fury fraught,
Makes human Race a Prey.
It enters by a deadly Draught
And steals our Life away.

Virtue and Truth, driven to Despair
Its Rage compels to fly,
But cherishes with hellish Care
Theft, Murder, Perjury.

Damned Cup! that on the Vitals preys
That liquid Fire contains,
Which Madness to the heart conveys,
And rolls it thro' the Veins.

Should happiness be bought at the price of ignorance?

In his poem *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College* (1742), Thomas Gray (1716-77) imagines pupils at his alma mater playing happily whilst blissfully unaware of the misfortunes that will befall them in later life. He concludes that "happiness too swiftly flies" and "where ignorance is bliss, 'Tis folly to be wise". But can ignorance ever *be* bliss? Is a happiness dependent upon ignorance and self-deception *false* happiness? Do we become fully-formed human beings only when we acquire the ability to face up to realities, whether pleasant or unpleasant, and make moral choices in the fullest knowledge of their factual context and likely consequences? The utilitarian case for such awareness, even if it takes the edge off 'present mirth', is that it helps us, because 'forewarned is forearmed', to avert much future misery. Gaining awareness of the darker, as well as of the lighter, sides of life is a crucial part of the growing-up process, the main issue being the appropriate age at which it is best acquired. An important role of education, arguably, is to foster character traits and habits of mind which strengthen our ability to cope with adversity. A broadly *stoical* approach to life seems likely to help, the main problem being to distinguish the *unalterable*, against which it is pointless to strive, from the *intractable* which, albeit with much difficulty, *might* be changed. Achieving such change requires the will to tackle and resolve, as far as possible, both practical and moral issues. A *constructive* and *realistic* mental attitude seems most likely to achieve the happiest outcomes. Generally helpful also is a *sense of humour*. We may not always find it possible to laugh in the face of adversity, but humour often provides the means to diffuse awkward situations, put things (including ourselves) in perspective and divert the mind to happier thoughts. Thomas Gray, it has to be said, is not the cheeriest of poets! In reality, most of his "little victims" probably enjoyed quite happy lives, the big 'downer' which none could escape being the ultimate one – death.

"Alas, regardless of their Doom,
The little Victims play!
No Sense have they of Ills to come,
Nor Care beyond today:

These shall the fury Passions tear,
The vultures of the mind,
Disdainful Anger, pallid Fear,
And Shame that skulks behind;
Or pining Love shall waste their youth
Or Jealousy with rankling tooth,
That inly gnaws the secret heart,
And Envy wan, and faded Care,
Grim-visaged comfortless Despair,
And Sorrow's piercing dart.

Ambition this shall tempt to rise,
Then whirl the wretch from high,
To bitter Scorn a sacrifice,
And grinning Infamy.
The stings of Falsehood those shall try,
And hard Unkindness' altered eye,
That mocks the tear it forced to flow;
And keen Remorse with blood defiled,
And moody Madness laughing wild
Amid severest woe.

To each his sufferings: all are men,
Condemned alike to groan,
The tender for another's pain;
The unfeeling for his own.
Yet ah! why should they know their fate?
Since sorrow never comes too late,
And happiness too swiftly flies.
Thought would destroy their paradise.
No more; where ignorance is bliss,
'Tis folly to be wise."