

# The Philosophy of Happiness

---

## Aristotle on Happiness

Since the earliest days of Western thought philosophers have concerned themselves with the nature of happiness. One of the earliest to ask the question ‘what is happiness?’ was Aristotle, who, in a manner typical of philosophers, before providing an answer insisted on making a distinction between two different questions. His first question was what was meant by the word ‘happiness’ – or rather, its ancient Greek equivalent *eudaimonia*. His second question was where happiness was to be found, that is to say, what is it that makes us truly happy. Reasonably enough he thought that it was futile to try to answer the second question without having given thought to the first.

The definition that he offers is that happiness is the supreme good that supplies the purpose, and measures the value, of all human activity and striving. ‘It is for the sake of happiness’ he wrote ‘that we all do everything else we do’ (Aristotle, 2002, 1102a3). This seems a very sweeping statement: surely it is implausible to suggest that every human action is explicitly aimed at some single goal. Indeed, the suggestion is inconsistent with things that Aristotle says elsewhere. He does not seem to wish to rule out the possibility of impulsive actions done for fun without any reference to one’s long-term happiness. What he means rather is that if you plan your life – and any sensible person, he thinks, ought to have a plan of life, at

least in the form of a set of priorities—your top priority, your overarching goal, will show what you take to be a worthwhile life, and thus what you mean by ‘happiness’. Indeed, in the light of what Aristotle says, we might offer ‘worthwhile life’ as the most appropriate translation of his word ‘*eudaimonia*’. But we will continue to use the traditional translation ‘happiness’, where necessary qualifying it as ‘Aristotelian happiness’.

Aristotle was well aware that human beings may have the most varied and bizarre notions of what makes them happy. But whatever they present as their ultimate ambition, it must, he thinks, as a matter of logic, pass certain tests if it is genuinely to count as happiness. For there are two features, he maintains, that are built into the very notion of happiness.

One is that it must be an end rather than a means. We may do other things for the sake of happiness, but we cannot be happy as a means to some other goal. You may find, perhaps, that being cheerful helps you to make money, and for that reason you resolutely adopt a cheerful frame of mind. But that just shows, Aristotle would say, that cheerfulness is something different from happiness, and if your ultimate aim is to make money for its own sake, what that indicates is that you believe (wrongly) that happiness is to be found in riches. Happiness, he insists, is always sought for its own sake and never for the sake of anything else.

The second built-in feature of happiness is that it must be self-sufficient: that is, it must be some good, or set of goods, that in itself makes life worth living. One’s life cannot be truly happy if there is something missing that is an essential ingredient of a worthwhile existence. Moreover, a happy life should, so far as human nature allows, be invulnerable to bad luck; otherwise, the constant fear of losing one’s happiness will diminish that happiness itself. So happiness, Aristotle concludes, must have the properties of independence and stability.

On the basis of these definitional features of the concept of happiness, Aristotle was in a position to move on to his second question: in what does happiness consist? What sort of life is actually the most worthwhile? Some things can be ruled out

from the start. There are some occurrences in life, e.g. sickness and pain, which make people want to give up life: clearly these are not what makes life worth living. There are the joys and adventures of childhood: these cannot be the most choice-worthy things in life since no one in his right mind would choose to be a child once more. In adult life there are things that we do only as means to an end; we go to war, for instance, in order to bring peace. Clearly these cannot, in themselves, be what makes life worth living (Aristotle, 1992).

If life is to be worth living it must surely be for something that is an end in itself. One such end is pleasure. The pleasures of food and drink and sex Aristotle regards as, on their own, too brutish to be a fitting end for human life. If we combine them with aesthetic and intellectual pleasures then we find a goal that has been seriously pursued by people of significance. Others prefer a life of virtuous public action – the life of a real politician, not like the false politicians, who are only after money or power. Thirdly, there is the life of scientific contemplation, as exemplified by the Athenian philosopher Anaxagoras, who when asked why one should choose to be born rather than not replied ‘In order to admire the heavens and the order of the universe’.

Having weeded out a number of other candidate lives, Aristotle settled for a short list of three: a life of pleasure, a life of politics, and a life of study. The pursuit of wealth was ruled out briskly at the start of the inquiry. Money is only as good as what it can buy. It is how someone spends his money that shows us where he really thinks happiness lies: does he spend it on luxury, for instance, or does he use it to gain political power, or give it to those less well off?

What was Aristotle’s own choice between the three types of life on his short list? There is no single answer to this question: Aristotle wrote more than one treatise on happiness, and he gave different accounts in different treatises. But in all of them, we are offered a definition of happiness as activity in accordance with virtue, that is to say, doing well what is worth doing and what we are good at. Aristotle’s definition derives from a consideration of the function or characteristic activity (*ergon*) of human beings. Man must have a function, the

Nicomachean Ethics argues, because particular types of men (e.g. sculptors) have a function, and parts and organs of human beings do likewise. What is this function? Not growth and nourishment, for this is shared by plants, nor the life of the senses, for this is shared by animals. It must be a life of reason concerned with action. So human good will be good human functioning, namely, activity of soul in the exercise of virtue (Aristotle, 2002, 1098a16).

So much is common to all of Aristotle's ethical treatises. Where they differ is in determining which are the particular virtues whose exercise constitutes happiness. For, as Aristotle explains, there are many different kinds of virtue or excellence: there are the moral virtues displayed in the active life, such as courage and temperance, and there are the intellectual excellences, such as wisdom and understanding, that are exercised in a life of scientific inquiry. In the best known of his moral treatises, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle identified happiness with the enjoyment of philosophical study. The life of the philosopher provided the best fit, he argued, to the definitional features of happiness.

On the one hand, it was the most independent and the most stable. To philosophise you need only the bare necessities of life: you do not need a vast staff or expensive equipment. Riches may be stolen, political allies may desert you, and age and sickness may take away your appetite for pleasure. But as long as you live nothing and no one can take away the enlightenment you achieve by philosophising. On the other hand, philosophy is always an end, and not a means: it cannot be pursued for the sake of some superior goal, since it is totally useless for any other purpose.

Aristotle's identification of happiness with the pursuit of philosophy strikes some people as engaging, and others as irritating. Few, however, have found it totally credible. Perhaps Aristotle did not do so himself, because in his lesser known but more professional treatise, the *Eudemian Ethics*, he claims that the happy life must combine the features of all three of the traditional candidates on his short list. The happy person must not be a purely contemplative philosopher, but must possess and exercise the practical virtues that are neces-

sary for the pursuit of worthwhile ambitions. Someone who is really virtuous will find virtuous actions in pursuit of noble goals a pleasure and not a burden. It is wrong to think that the only pleasures are those of the senses, but these too have a role in the happy life when enjoyed in accordance with the virtue of temperance—a virtue which is violated not only by an excess of sensual pleasure but also by a lack of sensual pleasure (Aristotle, 1992).

This kind of ideal of life, Aristotle believed, which assigns a role to philosophy, to the practical virtues, and to pleasure, could claim to combine the features of the traditional three lives, the life of the philosopher, the life of the politician, and the life of the pleasure-seeker. The happy man will value contemplation above all, but part of his happy life will be the exercise of political virtues and the enjoyment in moderation of natural human pleasures

### **Epicureans and Stoics**

In making an identification between the supreme good and the supreme pleasure, Aristotle entitles himself to be called a hedonist: but he is a hedonist of a very unusual kind, and stands at a great distance from the most famous hedonist in ancient Greece, namely Epicurus. Epicurus' treatment of pleasure is less sophisticated, but also more easily intelligible than Aristotle's. He is willing to place a value on pleasure that is independent of the value of the activity enjoyed: all pleasure is, as such, good.

For Epicurus, pleasure is the final end of life and the criterion of goodness in choice. He suggests that this is something that needs no argument: we all feel it in our bones.

We maintain that pleasure is the beginning and end of a blessed life. We recognize it as our primary and natural good. Pleasure is our starting point whenever we choose or avoid anything and it is this we make our aim, using feeling as the criterion by which we judge of every good thing (Diogenes Laertius, 1972, 128–9).

This does not mean that Epicurus makes it his policy to pursue every pleasure that offers itself. If pleasure is the greatest

good, pain is the greatest evil, and it is best to pass up a pleasure if it will lead to long-term suffering. Equally, it is worth putting up with pain if it will bring great pleasure in the long run.

These qualifications mean that Epicurus' hedonism is far from being an invitation to lead the life of a voluptuary. It is not drinking and carousing, he tells us, nor tables laden with delicacies, nor promiscuous intercourse with boys and women that produces the pleasant life, but sobriety, honour, justice and wisdom. A simple vegetarian diet and the company of a few friends in a modest garden suffice for Epicurean happiness.

What enables Epicurus to combine theoretical hedonism with practical asceticism is his understanding of pleasure as being essentially the satisfaction of desire. The strongest and most fundamental of our desires is the desire for the removal of pain. Hence, the mere absence of pain is itself a fundamental pleasure. Among our desires some are natural and some are futile, and it is the natural desires to which the most important pleasures correspond. We have natural desires for the removal of the painful states of hunger, thirst and cold, and the satisfaction of these desires is naturally pleasant. But there are two different kinds of pleasure involved, for which Epicurus framed technical terms: there is the kinetic pleasure of quenching one's thirst, and the static pleasure that supervenes when one's thirst has been quenched. Both kinds of pleasure are natural: but among the kinetic pleasures some are necessary (the pleasure in eating and drinking enough to satisfy hunger and thirst) and others are unnecessary (the pleasures of the gourmet).

Unnecessary natural pleasures are not greater than, but merely variations on, necessary natural pleasures: eating simple food when hungry is pleasanter than stuffing oneself with luxuries when satiated. Hunger, indeed, is the best sauce. But of all natural pleasures, it is the static pleasures that really count. 'The cry of the flesh is not to be hungry, not to be thirsty, not to be cold. Someone who is not in any of these states, and has good hope of remaining so, could rival even Zeus in happiness' (Long & Sedley, 1987, 21G).

Sexual desires are classed by Epicurus among unnecessary desires, on the grounds that their non-fulfilment is not accompanied by pain. This may be surprising, since unrequited love causes such anguish. But the intensity of such desire, Epicurus claimed, was due not to the nature of sex but to the romantic imagination of the lover. Epicurus was not opposed to the fulfilment of unnecessary natural desires, provided they did no harm – which of course was to be measured by their capacity for producing pain. Sexual pleasure, he said, could be taken in any way one wished, provided one respected law and convention, distressed no-one, and did no damage to one's body or one's essential resources. These qualifications added up to substantial constraint, and Epicurus thought that even when sex did no harm, it did no good either.

Epicurus is more critical of the fulfilment of desires that are futile: these are desires that are not natural and, like unnecessary natural desires, do not cause pain if not fulfilled. Examples are the desire for wealth and the desire for civic honours and acclaim. But so too are desires for the pleasures of science and philosophy: 'Hoist sail' he told a favourite pupil 'and steer clear of all culture' (Diogenes Laertius, 1972, X,5). Aristotle had made it a point in favour of philosophy that its pleasures, unlike the pleasures of the senses, were unmixed with pain: now it is made a reason for downgrading the pleasures of philosophy that there is no pain in being a non-philosopher. For Epicurus the mind does play an important part in the happy life: but its function is only to anticipate and recollect the pleasures of the senses.

In the ancient world the great opponents of Epicureans were the Stoics, a school founded in the fourth century by Zeno of Citium. The Stoics found it disgusting to believe that the virtues were merely means of securing pleasure. Zeno's successor Cleanthes told his pupils to imagine pleasure as a queen on a throne surrounded by the virtues. On the Epicurean view of ethics, he said, these were handmaids totally dedicated to her service, merely whispering warnings, from time to time, against incautiously giving offence or causing pain. In reality, according to the Stoics, happiness consisted in nothing other than virtue itself.

Like the Stoics, Aristotle had placed happiness in virtue and its exercise, and had counted fame and riches no part of the happiness of a happy person. But he thought that it was a necessary condition for happiness that one should have a sufficient endowment of external goods. Moreover, he believed that even a virtuous man could cease to be happy if disaster overtook himself and his family, as happened to King Priam as his sons, his city and finally he himself fell in Trojan War (Aristotle, 2002, 1101a8-17). By contrast, the Stoics thought that happiness, once possessed, could never really be lost; at worst it could be terminated only by something like madness.

The weakness in the Stoic position is its refusal to come to terms with the fragility of happiness, the insistence that happiness cannot be constituted by any contingent good which is capable of being lost. Given the frail, vulnerable natures of human beings as we know ourselves to be, the denial that contingent goods can constitute happiness is tantamount to the claim that only superhuman beings can be happy.

The Stoics in effect accepted this conclusion, in their idealisation of the man of wisdom. Happiness lies in virtue, and there are no degrees of virtue, so that a person is either perfectly virtuous or not virtuous at all. The most perfect virtue is wisdom, and the wise man has all the virtues, since the virtues are inseparable from each other. One Stoic went so far as to say that to distinguish between courage and justice was like regarding the faculty for seeing white as different from the faculty of seeing black. The wise man is totally free from passion, and is in possession of all worthwhile knowledge: his virtue is the same as that of a god:

The wise man whom we seek is the happy man who can think no human experience painful enough to cast him down nor joyful enough to raise his spirits. For what can seem important in human affairs to one who is familiar with all eternity and the vastness of the entire universe? (Long and Sedley, 1987, 61J, 63F).

The wise man is rich, and owns all things, since he alone knows how to use things well; he alone is truly handsome, since the mind's face is more beautiful than the body's; he

alone is free, even if he is in prison, since he is a slave to no appetite. It was unsurprising, after all this, that the Stoics admitted that a wise man was harder to find than a phoenix. They thus purchased the invulnerability of happiness only at the cost of making it unattainable.

### **Happiness as a Gift of God**

It will be seen that what view a philosopher takes of the nature of happiness makes a great difference to whether he thinks it easy or difficult to achieve, Aristotle, having defined happiness to his own satisfaction had gone on to ask the question: how is it acquired? He had offered a number of candidate answers, derived from the reflections of previous philosophers. Does it come about, he asked, by nature, by training, by learning, by luck, or by divine favour? (Aristotle, 1992, 1214a15). In the course of his treatise he tried to show that each of these elements has a part in the acquisition of happiness. There is no need to follow how he spells this out, because the importance of his list is that each item on it has been seized upon by one or other later thinker as crucial. Some have claimed that happiness is in our genes, others have written how-to manuals setting out regimes to be followed for its acquisition. Some have believed that there is a secret science whose mastery will bring happiness to the initiate. Others have thought that happiness is owed above all to a fortunate environment. Finally, for many centuries the dominant account was that supreme happiness was a gift of God, obtainable only through divine grace.

The foremost exponent of this last view was St Augustine. Like everyone in the ancient world, Augustine starts from the premise that everyone wants to be happy, and accepts that it is the task of philosophy to define what this supreme good is and how it is to be achieved. If you ask two people whether they want to join the army, Augustine says in the *Confessions*, one may say yes and the other no. But if you ask them whether they want to be happy, they will both say yes without any hesitation. The only reason they differ about serving in the army is

that one believes, while the other does not, that that will make him happy (Augustine, 1992, 10, 31).

In another work, Augustine tells the story of a stage player who promised to tell his audience, at his next appearance, what was in each of their minds. When they returned he told them 'Each of you wants to buy cheap and sell dear'. This was smart, Augustine says, but not really correct – and he gives a list of possible counterexamples. But if the actor had said 'Each of you wants to be happy, and none of you wants to be miserable' then he would have hit the mark perfectly (Augustine, 1963, 13,3,6).

Again like Aristotle, Augustine defines happiness as the supreme good. This is the good which provides the standard for all our actions: it is sought for its own sake, not as a means to an end, and once we attain it we lack nothing that is necessary for happiness (Augustine, 1972, VIII,8). Then Augustine goes on to take a step beyond Aristotle and all his pagan predecessors. He claims that happiness is truly possible only in an afterlife, in the vision of God.

First, he argues that anyone who wants to be happy must want to be immortal. How can we hold that a happy life is to come to an end at death? If a man is unwilling to lose his life, how can he be happy with this prospect before him? On the other hand, if his life is something he is willing to part with, how can it have been truly happy? But if immortality is necessary for happiness, it is not sufficient. Pagan philosophers who have claimed to prove that the soul is immortal have also held out the prospect of a miserable cycle of reincarnation. Only the Christian faith promises everlasting happiness for the entire human being, soul and body alike (Augustine, 1963, 13, 8, 11–9,12).

The supreme good of the City of God is eternal and perfect peace, not our mortal transit from birth to death, but in our immortal freedom from all adversity. This is the happiest life – who can deny it? – and in comparison with it our life on earth, however blessed with external prosperity or goods of soul and body, is utterly miserable. None the less, whoever accepts it and makes use of it as a means to that other life that he longs for and hopes for, may not unreasonably be called

happy even now—happy in hope rather than in reality (Augustine, 1972, 19, 20).

Virtue in the present life, Augustine says, is not equivalent to happiness: it is merely a necessary means to an end that is ultimately other-worldly. Moreover, however hard we try, we are unable to avoid vice without grace, that is to say without special divine assistance that is given only to those selected for salvation through Christ. The virtues of the great heroes of Roman history were really only splendid vices. They received their reward in Rome's imperial glory, but did not qualify for the one true happiness of heaven.

The treatment of happiness by Thomas Aquinas, like his treatment of many topics, combines elements from Aristotle and Augustine. He agrees with both of them that everyone necessarily desires happiness, and he agrees with Augustine that happiness is truly to be found only in the beatific vision of God after death. But he raises a different question with a new urgency. How can the necessary desire for happiness, he asks, be reconciled with that freedom of the will that is an essential attribute of human beings? If I cannot help but desire happiness, and if happiness is only to be found in God, how can I ever turn away from God and commit sin? He gives his answer:

There are some particular goods that have no connection with happiness because a human being can be happy without them; nothing necessitates the will to want these. There are other things which do have a necessary connection with happiness, the things that unite men to God in whom alone true happiness is to be found. But until the necessity of this link is established by a vision of God, the will is not necessitated either to want God or the things of God (Aquinas, 1993).

Aquinas' attempt to reconcile a belief in freedom with the postulate that humans cannot help but pursue happiness, though neat and clear, is not really satisfactory. On the one hand, the mere fact that a particular good is not necessarily connected with happiness is not sufficient to establish my freedom not to choose it. If I am a chain-smoker who gets through 200 cigarettes a day, am I free at any moment to stop smoking? To establish that I am, something more is needed than the obser-

vation that human beings can be happy without smoking. On the other hand, there seems to be something wrong with the fundamental premise that Aquinas shares with both Aristotle and Augustine, namely, that one cannot help but pursue whatever one regards as necessary for one's happiness. A wife may be convinced that she will never be happy unless she leaves her husband, and yet stay with him for the sake of the children.

This example brings out the fundamental weakness of the eudaimonism that is common to the ethical systems of all the thinkers we have considered: namely, that they place morality on a basis that is ultimately self-centred. Compared with this feature common to both the pagan and the Christian forms of eudaimonism, it is less important whether the ultimate satisfaction that is held out is envisaged as being realised in this world or in the next. To be sure, Aristotle admitted that a happy man would need friends, and that even a philosopher could philosophise better in company. Again, Augustine and Aquinas taught that we must love our neighbour, as we are commanded to do by the God whose vision we seek. But in each case the concern for the welfare of others is presented as a means to an ultimate goal of self-fulfilment.

### **Fulfilment and Altruism**

The first philosopher in the Christian tradition to break with this eudaimonism was the fourteenth century Oxford Franciscan, John Duns Scotus. While Augustine and Aquinas had followed Aristotle in placing happiness at the apex of their ethical systems, they accepted, as Aristotle did not, the idea that human beings must obey a natural law laid down by a creator God. Aquinas concurred that such things as murder, abortion, and usury were all violations of the natural law of God. But he structured his ethical system not around the concept of law, but around the idea that virtue was the route to self-fulfilment in happiness. It was Duns Scotus who gave the theory of divine law the central place that it was to occupy in the thought of Christian moralists henceforth. Simultaneously, Scotus removed happiness from its position of solitary dominance in ethical theory.

Scotus agreed with Aquinas that human beings have a natural tendency to pursue happiness; but in addition, he postulated a natural tendency to pursue justice. This natural appetite for justice is a tendency to obey the moral law no matter what the consequences may be for our own welfare. Human freedom, for Scotus, consists in the power to weigh in the balance the conflicting demands of morality and happiness.

In denying that humans seek happiness in all their choices, Scotus was turning his back not only on Aquinas but on a long tradition of eudaimonistic ethics. He was surely right to do so. Unless a philosopher seeks to make it true by definition, it is surely wrong to maintain that one's own happiness is the only possible aim in life. A person may map out his life in the service of someone else's happiness, or for the furtherance of some political cause which may perhaps be unlikely to triumph during his lifetime. A daughter may forego the prospect of marriage and congenial company and a creative career in order to nurse a bedridden parent. No doubt such people are doing what they want to do, in the sense that their actions are voluntary and not coerced. But 'doing what you want to do' in that sense is not the same as seeking one's own happiness or doing what would give one most pleasure.

In the eudaimonistic tradition freedom was conceived as the ability to choose between different possible means to happiness; and wrongdoing was represented as the outcome of a failure to apprehend the appropriate means. For Scotus, freedom extended not just to the choice of means to a predetermined end, but to a choice between independent and possibly competing ultimate goals (A. Kenny, 2005, 272–4).

### **The Greatest Happiness of the Greatest Number**

The disagreement between Aquinas and Scotus was replayed, in a different key, at the end of the eighteenth century. It was re-enacted as a difference of opinion between the philosophers Bentham and Kant. Bentham, like Aquinas, made happiness the central concept of morality. Kant, like Scotus, thought that morality needed a different basis: he called it the sense of duty.

Where Scotus had placed the appetite for justice on equal terms with the pursuit of happiness, Kant regarded duty as the supreme motive which must triumph over every other.

Bentham's fundamental moral principle, on his own account, was owed to David Hume. When he read the *Treatise of Human Nature*, he tells us, scales fell from his eyes and he came to believe that utility was the test and measure of all virtue and the sole origin of justice. The principle of utility was interpreted by Bentham as meaning that the happiness of the majority of the citizens was the criterion by which the affairs of a state should be judged. More generally, the real standard of morality and the true goal of legislation was the greatest happiness of the greatest number.

Bentham, like Aristotle, is eudaimonistic in making happiness the key notion of morality. But there are two important differences. First, for Bentham what should guide choices is not the individual's own happiness, but the general happiness. Second, Bentham equated happiness with pleasure, while Aristotle made a sharp distinction between the two. Indeed, Aristotle denied that there was any such thing as pleasure, *tout court*: there were pleasurable experiences and pleasurable activities, and the moral evaluation of a pleasure depended simply on the evaluation of the activity or experience enjoyed. For Bentham on the other hand, pleasure was a single indefinable feeling – produced, no doubt, in many different ways – and this feeling was the one thing that was good in itself and was the point of doing anything whatever. 'In this matter we want no refinement, no metaphysics. It is not necessary to consult Plato, nor Aristotle. Pain and pleasure are what everybody feels to be such.'

It is pleasure that is the supreme spring of action. Bentham's *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* famously begins:

Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand, the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we

think: every effort we can make to throw off our subjection, will serve but to demonstrate and confirm it (Bentham, 1982).

To maximise happiness, therefore, is the same thing as to maximise pleasure, and pleasure itself is simply a straightforward sensation.

It was, Bentham was careful to point out, a sensation that could be caused not only by eating and drinking and sex, but also by a multitude of other things, as varied as the acquisition of wealth, kindness to animals, or belief in the favour of a Supreme Being. So critics who regarded Bentham's hedonism as a simple call to sensuality were quite mistaken. However, whereas for a thinker like Aristotle pleasure was to be identified with the activity enjoyed, for Bentham the relation between an activity and its pleasure was one of cause and effect. Moreover, whereas for Aristotle the value of a pleasure was the same as the value of the activity enjoyed, for Bentham the value of each and every pleasure was the same, no matter how it was caused. 'Quantity of pleasure being equal' he wrote 'push-pin is as good as poetry'. What went for pleasure went for pain, too: the quantity of pain, and not its cause, is the measure of its disvalue.

What is of prime importance for a utilitarian, therefore, is the quantification of pleasure and pain. In deciding on an action or a policy we need to estimate the amount of pleasure and the amount of pain likely to ensue. Bentham was aware that such quantification was no trivial task, and he offered recipes for the measurement of pleasures and pains. Pleasure A counts more than pleasure B if it is more intense, or if it lasts longer, or if it is more certain, or if it is more immediate. In the 'felicific calculus' these different factors must be taken into account and weighed against each other. In judging pleasure-producing actions we must also consider fecundity and purity: a pleasurable action is fecund if it is likely to produce a subsequent series of pleasures, and it is pure if it is unlikely to produce a subsequent series of pains. All these factors are to be taken into account when we are considering our own affairs, If we are operating the calculus for purposes of public policy, we must further consider another factor, which Bentham calls

'extension' – that is, how widely the pains and pleasures will be spread across the population.

Bentham offered a mnemonic rhyme to aid in operating the calculus:

Intense, long, certain, speedy, fruitful, pure –  
 Such marks in pleasures and in pains endure.  
 Such pleasures seek if private be thy end;  
 If it be public, wide let them extend.  
 Such pains avoid, whichever be thy view  
 If pains must come, let them extend to few.

(Bentham, 1982,4,2)

In using the felicific calculus for purposes of determining public policy, extension is the crucial factor.

'The greatest happiness of the greatest number' is an impressive slogan: but when probed it turns out to be riddled with ambiguity. The first question to be raised is 'greatest number of *what?*' Should we add 'voters' or 'citizens' or 'males' or 'human beings' or 'sentient beings'? It makes a huge difference which answer we give. Throughout the two centuries of utilitarianism's history most of its devotees would probably give the answer 'human beings', and this is most likely the answer that Bentham would have given. In principle he thought that in the pursuit of the greatest happiness 'the claim of [the female] sex is, if not still better, at least altogether as good as that of the other'. Only tactical considerations prevented him from advocating female suffrage.

In recent years many utilitarians have extended the happiness principle beyond humankind to other sentient beings, claiming that animals have equal claims with human beings. Though a great lover of animals (especially cats) Bentham himself did not go as far as this, and he would have rejected the idea that animals have rights, because he did not believe in natural rights of any kind. But by making the supreme moral criterion a matter of sensation he made it appropriate to consider animals as belonging to the same moral community as ourselves. Animals do not share Aristotelian rationality with humans, but it is beyond doubt that many animals as well as humans feel pleasure and pain. The classical and Christian moral tradition had placed supreme moral value in activities

not of the sense but of the reason, and regarded non-rational animals as standing outside the moral community. Bentham's moral theory represented a break with this tradition, and that has turned out, in the long term, to be one of its most significant legacies.

A second question about the principle of utility is this: should individuals, or politicians, in following the greatest happiness principle attempt to exercise control over the number of candidates for happiness (however these are defined)? Does the extension of happiness to a greater number mean that we should try to bring more people (or animals) into existence? What answer we give to this is linked to a third, even more difficult question: when we are measuring the happiness of a population, do we consider only total happiness, or should we also consider average happiness – should we take account of the distribution of happiness as well as of its quantity? If so, then we have to strike a difficult balance between quantity of happiness and quantity of people.

In introducing his Greatest Happiness principle, Bentham was less concerned to provide a criterion for individual moral choices than to offer guidance to rulers and legislators on the management of communities. But it is precisely in this area, when we have to consider not just the total quantity of happiness in a community but also its distribution, that the greatest happiness principle, on its own, fails to provide a credible decision procedure.

Suppose that, by whatever means, we have succeeded in establishing a scale for the measurement of happiness: a scale from 0 to 10 on which 0 represents maximum misery, 10 represents maximum happiness, and 5 a state of indifference. Imagine that we are devising political and legal institutions for a society of 100 people, and that we have a choice between implementing two models. The result of adopting model A will be that 60 people will score 6, and 40 will score 4. The result of adopting model B will be that 60 people will score 10 and 40 will score 0. Faced with such a choice, anyone with a care either for equality or humanity will surely wish to implement model A rather than model B. Yet if we operate Bentham's felicific calculus in the obvious manner, model A

scores only 520 points ( $60 \times 6 + 40 \times 4$ ), while model B achieves a total of 600 ( $60 \times 10$ ).

The principle that we should seek the greatest happiness of the greatest number clearly leads to different results depending on whether we opt to maximise happiness or to maximise the number of happy people. The principle needs, at the very least, to be supplemented by some limits on the amount of inequality between the best off and the worst off, and limits on the degree of misery of the worst off, if it is not to permit outcomes which are gross violations of distributive justice.

But even if we restrict our consideration to matters of individual morality, there remains a problem raised by the initial passage of the *Introduction* quoted above. The hedonism there proclaimed is twofold: there is a psychological hedonism (pleasure determines all our actions) and an ethical hedonism (pleasure is the standard of right and wrong). But the pleasure cited in psychological hedonism is the pleasure of the individual person; the pleasure invoked in ethical hedonism is the pleasure (however quantified) of the total moral community. If I am, in fact, predetermined in every action to aim at maximising my own pleasure, what point is there in telling me that I am obliged to maximise the common good? This was a problem which was to exercise some of Bentham's successors in the Utilitarian tradition.

The best known, and the most talented of these successors was John Stuart Mill. Mill was, like Bentham, a consequentialist, that is to say he thought that the morality of an action depended on its foreseen consequences. But in other ways he toned down aspects of Bentham's teaching that had been found most offensive. In his treatise *Utilitarianism*, written in his late fifties, he acknowledges that many people have thought that the idea that life has no higher end than pleasure was a doctrine worthy only of swine. He replies that it is foolish to deny that humans have faculties that are higher than the ones they share with animals. This allows us to make distinctions between different pleasures not only in quantity but also in quality. 'It is quite compatible with the principle of utility to recognise the fact that some *kinds* of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others' (Mill, 1962, 258).

How then do we grade the different kinds of pleasure? 'Of two pleasures' Mill tells us 'if there be one to which all or almost all who have experience of both give a decided preference, irrespective of any feeling of moral obligation to prefer it, that is the more desirable pleasure'. Armed with this distinction a utilitarian can put a distance between himself and the swine. Few humans would wish to be changed into a lower animal even if promised a cornucopia of bestial pleasures. 'It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied.' Again, no intelligent, educated person would wish, at any price, to become a foolish ignoramus. It is 'better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied' (Mill, 1962, 260).

Happiness, according to Mill, involves not just contentment, but also a sense of dignity; any amount of the lower pleasures, without this, would not amount to happiness. Accordingly, the greatest happiness principle needs to be restated.

The ultimate end, with reference to and for the sake of which all other things are desirable (whether we are considering our own good or that of other people), is an existence exempt as far as possible from pain, and as rich as possible in enjoyments, both in point of quantity and quality; the test of quality, and the rule for measuring it against quantity, being the preference felt by those who in their opportunities of experience, to which must be added their habits of self-consciousness and self-observation, are best furnished with the means of comparison (Mill, 1962, 262).

Let us suppose, then, that a critic grants to Mill that utilitarianism need not be swinish. Still, he may insist, it does not appeal to the best in human nature. Virtue is more important than happiness, and acts of renunciation and self-sacrifice are the most splendid of human deeds. Mill agrees that it is noble to be capable of resigning one's own happiness for the sake of others – but would the hero or martyr's sacrifice be made if he did not believe that it would increase the amount of happiness in the world? A person who denies himself the enjoyment of life for any other purpose 'is no more deserving of admiration than the ascetic mounted on his pillar.'

Mill strives to explain how various notions connected with justice—desert, impartiality, equality—are to be reconciled with the utilitarian principle of expediency. With regard to equality, he cites a maxim of Bentham’s ‘everybody to count for one, nobody for more than one’—each person’s happiness is counted for exactly as much as another’s. But he does not really address the problem inherent in the Greatest Happiness Principle, that it leaves room for the misery of an individual to be discounted in order to increase the he overall total of happiness in the community.

### **Happiness vs Duty**

At the opposite extreme from utilitarianism, in modern times, stands the moral theory of Kant. Kant’s starting point is that the only thing that is good without qualification is a good will. Talents, character, and fortune can be used to bad ends and even happiness can be corrupting. It is not what a good will achieves that matters; good will, even if frustrated in its efforts, is good in itself alone. What makes a will good is that it is motivated by duty: to act from duty is to exhibit good will in the face of difficulty. Some people may enjoy doing good, or profit from doing good, but worth of character is shown only when someone does good not from inclination, but for duty’s sake.

Happiness, Kant argues in his *Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals*, cannot be the ultimate purpose of morality.

Suppose now that for a being possessed of reason and will the real purpose of nature were his preservation, his welfare, or in a word his happiness. In that case nature would have hit on a very bad arrangement by choosing reason in the creature to carry out this purpose. For all the actions he has to perform with this end in view, and the whole rule of his behaviour, would have been mapped out for him far more accurately by instinct; and the end in question could have been maintained far more surely by instinct than it ever can be by reason (Kant, 1991, 395).

The overarching concept in Kantian morality is not happiness, but duty. The function of reason in ethics is not to inform the will how best to choose means to some further end: it is to

produce a will that is good in itself; and a will is good only if it is motivated by duty. Good will, as has been said, is for Kant the only thing that is good without qualification. It is not what it achieves that constitutes the goodness of a good will; good will is good in itself alone.

Even if, by some special disfavour of destiny, or by the niggardly endowment of stepmotherly nature, this will is entirely lacking in power to carry out its intentions, if by its utmost effort it still accomplishes nothing, and only good will is left... even then it would still shine like a jewel for its own sake as something which has its full value in itself (Kant, 1991, 394).

Good will is the highest good and the condition of all other goods, and good will is within our power, while happiness is not. Happiness is an impossible goal to pursue, because no finite being, however powerful and insightful, can say definitely and consistently what he really wants. Riches may bring with them anxiety, long life may turn out to be nothing but long misery. Only an omniscient being could determine with certainty what would make him truly happy.

### **No Consensus among Philosophers**

Our survey of philosophers from Aristotle to Kant shows a great variety of understandings of the concept of happiness and of the relationship between happiness and morality. Hardly any two thinkers give the same set of answers to the following questions. Is happiness something subjective or objective? Is it a sensation detectable at a single moment, or is it a quality of an entire life? Is it a motive for endeavour, or is it a state of satisfaction? Does everyone pursue happiness? *Should* everyone pursue happiness? Is it something achievable at will, or something that depends on factors outside oneself? However it is brought about, is it something to be hoped for in this life or only in some afterlife? Is happiness the key concept that determines the structure of morality? If so, is it the happiness of the individual or is it the general happiness that stands at the apex of the moral system?

For Bentham happiness is clearly a subjective phenomenon: a warm sensation that each of us can recognise when we feel it. Pleasure and pain are opposites, and it is as natural to take someone's word for it that she feels pleasure as it is to take her word for it that she is in pain. According to Aristotle and his followers, however, most people are ignorant of the true nature of happiness and therefore do not really know whether they are happy or not. If the *Nicomachean Ethics* is right that ultimate satisfaction is to be found only in the intellectual delights of the philosopher, then the nature of happiness is a secret known only to very few. Without going so far as this in the glorification of their own discipline, other philosophers have taken the Aristotelian view that happiness is an objective, not a subjective condition, and that it takes inquiry, not just introspection, to ascertain what it is and whether one possesses it.

Feelings of pleasure are fleeting and variable, and if happiness is to be equated with pleasure then it is possible to be happy at one moment and unhappy the next—though of course in operating Bentham's felicific calculus one will attach more weight to the more durable pleasures. For Aristotle on the other hand stability is a conceptual requirement for happiness, and whether someone is happy or not can be judged only over a long period. Indeed there was an ancient tradition that only a whole lifetime would permit such a judgement: 'call no man happy' the sage Solon had famously said 'until he is dead'. Aristotle did not go so far as that. Though happiness must be an enduring condition, none the less, given the contingencies of human life, it is something that can be lost. King Priam of Troy came to an unhappy end, as every reader of Homer knew; but that did not mean that he was not genuinely happy at a time when he was a wise and popular monarch with a large and gifted family. Happiness, Aristotle had to agree, might turn into tragedy; but he insisted that anyone who was truly happy must have within himself the ability to cope in a dignified manner with whatever adversity might present itself.

All the thinkers we have considered regard happiness both as a motive in advance of action, and as a benefit resulting

from action. But different philosophers link the two features of happiness in different directions. Bentham and his followers start from utility as a satisfactory goal, and seek the means to achieve it. Aristotelians start from our desire to have a good life, and ask what kind of end state will possess the features that are built into our desire. Again, while everyone agrees that happiness can motivate action, there are some who think that happiness is a necessary goal (every action is consciously or unconsciously aimed at happiness) others think of it only as a possible motive, and not necessarily an ultimate goal.

How far is happiness achievable? Among the philosophers discussed in this chapter there are very variable degrees of optimism. Everyone agrees that some factors necessary for happiness—the essentials for life and health—may be lacking through no fault of our own. Aristotle and his Christian followers see virtue (whether moral or intellectual) as the road to happiness, and they regard the virtues as excellences that, given basic luck, we can and should acquire. For Augustine and Aquinas, happiness demanded, in addition to moral virtues like courage and temperance and intellectual excellences such as knowledge and understanding, the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love, and these were gifts of God that might be freely given or denied. The happiness that was the reward of these virtues could be fully enjoyed only in the next life; on the other hand the imperfect happiness that attached to a life of virtue in this world was compatible with an almost complete lack of worldly goods. By comparison with the Aristotelians, the utilitarians were much more optimistic about the possibility of achieving true happiness in the present life (which, for most of them, was the only life). This contrast is unsurprising, given the differences between the underlying conceptions of happiness. The more exalted one's notion of happiness is, the less one is likely to think it achievable, and the best that the optimist can hope for, the human condition being what it is, will be something rather down-to-earth.

Aristotle and Bentham agree that happiness is the single overarching concept of ethics, in contrast to Scotus, who thinks that the concept of happiness rests on an equal level with the concept of justice, and Kant, who thinks that it ranks below the

concept of duty. But in addition to their differences about the nature of happiness, Aristotle and Bentham disagree about the extension of the happiness that is to be the goal of action. For Aristotle the virtuous individual's ultimate aim is his or her own well-being; for Bentham it is the greatest happiness of the greatest number. Though Scotus and Kant do not give such a dominant position to happiness of any kind, on the issue of general vs individual good they in effect take sides on this issue with Bentham against Aristotle. For Scotus the interests of others than oneself are what determine the independent principles of justice; for Kant, the nature of duty is to be determined by a procedure of universalisation that treats other rational beings as on an equal footing with oneself.

Because of the overwhelming influence of Kant, many moral philosophers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries lost interest in the study of happiness. The utilitarians, of course, continued to pay homage to the concept, but their interests began to diverge in two different directions. The philosophers among them were mainly interested in the relationship between utilitarianism and other moral intuitions, while the economists sought to explore what methods were available to measure utility.

The most influential utilitarian philosopher of the nineteenth century, Mill's disciple Henry Sidgwick, came to hold that there was an inconsistency between two great principles of Mill's system. One could not simultaneously maintain psychological hedonism (the doctrine that everyone seeks their own happiness) and ethical hedonism (the doctrine that everyone should seek the general happiness). One of the main tasks Sidgwick set himself was to resolve this problem, which he called 'the dualism of practical reason'.

In the course of his thinking Sidgwick abandoned the principle of psychological hedonism and replaced it with an ethical principle of rational egoism, that each person has an obligation to seek his own good. This principle, he believed, was intuitively obvious. Ethical hedonism, too, he decided, could only be based on fundamental moral intuitions. Thus, his system combined utilitarianism with intuitionism, which he regarded as the common-sense approach to morality. However, the

typical intuitions of common sense were, he believed, too narrow and specific: the intuitions that were the foundation of utilitarian morality were more abstract. One such was that future good is as important as present good, and another is that, from the point of view of the Universe, any single person's good is of no more importance than any other person's.

The remaining difficulty was to reconcile the intuitions of utilitarianism with those of rational egoism. Sidgwick came to the conclusion that no complete solution of the conflict between my happiness and the general happiness was possible on the basis of calculations related to the present life alone (Sidgwick, 1907). For most people, he accepted, the connection between the individual's interest and his duty is made through belief in God and personal immortality. As he himself was unwilling to invoke God in this context, he concluded sadly that 'the prolonged effort of the human intellect to frame a perfect ideal of rational conduct is seen to have been foredoomed to inevitable failure.' He consoled himself by seeking, through the work of the Society for Psychical Research founded in 1882, empirical evidence for the survival of the individual after death.

### **From Philosophy to Economics**

The first utilitarians thought of happiness as something that it was possible to quantify and measure: otherwise the notion of the 'felicific calculus' would have no content. Moreover, since utility was the goal of economics, the success of an economic venture or policy must depend upon the amount of utility produced. Throughout the nineteenth century many economists believed that the most efficient method of producing utility is the free operation of the market. Whether or not this belief is correct – and the disastrous history of command economies in the latter part of the twentieth century gave it formidable support – it clearly supposes that the operation of the market and the production of utility are two separate entities that can be described and measured independently. Otherwise talk of 'efficiency' would have no meaning.

Economists such as Pigou and Marshall clearly thought of utility in this way as an independent variable. They regarded it as a quantity comparable to temperature, to which one could assign a cardinal value. (Layard, 2005, 133) But since, in line with the empiricist tradition, they conceived of mental states and events as private entities accessible only to introspection, there was a problem in seeing how utilities could be subject to any comparative measurement. In the first part of the twentieth century many philosophers and psychologists became sceptical about not just the measurement but the independent existence of mental states such as contentment.

Behaviourists such as Watson and Skinner accepted the prevailing notion that feelings were incommunicable mental events; rightly rejecting the notion of irreducibly private events, they wrongly concluded that there were no such things as feelings. Accepting an over-simplified view of the relation between a name and what it names, they thought that since words like 'anxiety' and 'contentment' were not names of private sensations, they must be names of publicly observable reactions.

Watson, the founder of behaviourism, concluded, as a result of his investigations on children, that there were three main types of unconditioned stimuli producing emotional reactions in infancy. Loud sounds and sudden loss of support produced checking of the breath, crying, a start of the whole body, and marked visceral responses. Holding or restraint produced crying with open mouth, prolonged holding of breath, and reddening of the face. Stroking the skin, and especially the genitals, produced smiling, cessation of crying, changes in respiration, cooing, gurgling and erection. These three behaviour patterns, he maintained, are the starting points from which are built up the complicated conditioned habit patterns that we call the emotions of fear, rage, and love. The complication of adult emotional life is achieved by an increase in the number of stimuli, due to conditioning and transfers, and additions and modifications to the responses (A. Kenny, 1963, 29).

The behaviourist account of emotions and feelings was a crude oversimplification that did not long remain popular with philosophers and psychologists. It lasted long enough,

however, to infect the thought of economists who wished to offer an operational definition of utility. They sought for measurable behaviour that would constitute happiness in the way that, for Watson, crying, cooing, and gurgling constituted more basic emotions. Surely, in economic terms, the behaviour most indicative of satisfaction is the set of actual choices that a person makes in his market transactions. So economists such as Robbins and Samuelson developed the theory that utility was nothing other than the revealed preferences of the those who purchased goods or services. Only an ordinal, not a cardinal, magnitude could be assigned to utility, so conceived. Moreover, critics suspected that there lurked in the system a certain circularity that made it impossible to undertake a genuinely empirical evaluation of the efficiency of an economic practice or institution.

Towards the end of the twentieth century economic fashion once again followed a change in fashion in psychology. Psychiatrists studying depression found it unsatisfactory to treat it merely as a behavioural pattern, and social psychologists began to explore ways to investigate happiness by means of population surveys. Some of these were open-ended inquiries about what people wanted out of life, which required detailed volunteered answers. Others, vaguer but more easily comparable across countries and across cultures, asked questions such as 'How satisfied are you with your life as a whole: very, somewhat, so-so, not very or not at all?' Such self-ascribed happiness was once again a quantity measurable on a cardinal scale, even if only a scale that ranged from one to five. It therefore offered economists a measure of utility independent of market activity.

Despite some obvious methodological problems, which will be discussed in a later chapter, such surveys have developed into a respectable branch of social science, the discipline of 'happiness studies' that straddles psychology and economics. Later in this book a number of the results of such studies will be presented and evaluated for their possible implications for public policy. In this introductory chapter two examples will be mentioned by way of illustration.

Aristotle, it will be remembered, inquired whether happiness came by nature, by luck, or by training. Twentieth century psychologists, likewise, have sought to discover how much of a person's subjective happiness is determined by heredity, how much by environment, and how much is a result of individual endeavour. A number of studies have suggested that good or bad luck, that is to say external events outside one's control, has much less effect on self-ascribed happiness than might be expected. Some psychologists claim that each individual has a determined 'set-point' of subjective well-being – a level of contentment with life that is set by one's genes and one's personality. Key events in one's life, such as marriage or divorce, acquiring or losing a job, even serious injury, appear to make a dramatic increase or decrease in one's level of satisfaction only for a comparatively brief period. Their longer term effects are muted. In time – so this theory suggests – everyone adjusts to the new condition and returns to the set-point. Whatever the merits of this theory, the evidence collected in its favour suggests that human adaptability – even among paraplegics – is much greater than might have been anticipated.

Another well-confirmed result that is surprising – at least to economists – is that above a certain minimum level the amount of money a person has bears very little relation to how subjectively happy she is. In the period since happiness studies began the average incomes in the most developed countries have more than doubled. Yet people's answers to pollsters during the same period suggests that they are very little, if at all, happier.

Later parts of this book will refine and analyse this brief statement of an economic paradox, and discuss its relationship to philosophical discussions of happiness across the centuries.

### **The Elements of Well-being**

If we reflect upon the different accounts of happiness given in philosophical, psychological, and economic tradition, we may conclude that there are three distinct elements to be identified in human well-being. We may call them contentment, welfare,

and dignity. Contentment is what is expressed by self-ascriptions of happiness. It is not so much a feeling or a sensation as an attitude or state of mind; but of the elements of well-being it is the one that is closest to the utilitarian idea of happiness. If it is to amount to a constituent of well-being, however, it must be an enduring and stable state, and not mere temporary euphoria or passing glow of satisfaction.

Welfare, in the most obvious sense of material welfare, consists in the satisfaction of one's animal needs, for food, drink, shelter and the other things that conduce to bodily flourishing. Self-ascription does not have the same central role in the measurement of welfare as it does in the case of contentment; we may be mistaken about the state of our bodily health and other people are often better placed to make a judgement in this area. But welfare is the least controversial element in well-being. As we shall see in a later chapter, almost all philosophers who have considered the topic have considered it either a constituent or a necessary condition of happiness.

In addition to material welfare there is psychological welfare, which is less easy to quantify. Clearly there are negative conditions necessary for well-being: freedom from mental illness or defect, and freedom from tragedies occurring within one's family or immediate social circle. But there are also positive abilities of a mental as well as a physical kind, which may well be regarded as basic constituents of a good life. Literacy is a good whose possessors prize in themselves and wish to confer on others. But perhaps it is not so much an element in welfare as in the third element of well-being, which in this book we label 'dignity'.

Dignity is a much more complicated notion to define. We may say initially that it involves the control of one's own destiny and the ability to live a life of one's choice. But in addition, it seems to be necessary for total well-being that one's chosen way of life should have worth in itself, and should enjoy the respect of others. Because dignity concerns, among other things, one's position in relationship to others, measurements of dignity cannot be as absolute and objective as those of welfare. Dignity is the element of well-being most emphasized in the Aristotelian concept of happiness.

These three elements of well-being are independent of each other and may vary independently. Though they are, as a matter of empirical fact, correlated with each other in various ways, each may exist without the others, and more importantly, pairs of the triad may occur without the third.

It is possible for someone to have welfare and contentment without dignity. A well-housed and well-fed slave who looks for nothing better than his servile lot and has no complaints about the way he is treated may be thought of as being in a certain sense quite happy: but he lacks the dignity that only liberty could confer.

Contentment and dignity may be present without welfare. A devout and ascetic hermit, revered by all who come in contact with him, may regard himself as blessed even though he may be undernourished and unhealthy. Such is the 'man on the pillar' despised by John Stuart Mill. If we look for a secular example, we may think of hunger strikers, admired by a throng of supporters, suffering resolutely to further a cause they believe to be paramount. Both religious and secular martyrs have died proclaiming their own happiness.

Finally, it is all too easy for welfare and elements of dignity to be present without contentment, as in the case of a pampered member of a rich and dominant elite, active perhaps in charitable causes and feted as a celebrity in popular newspapers, but bored and irritable and finding little satisfaction in her life. Lack of contentment in the presence of welfare and dignity need not betray a defect of character: it may even be the result of something admirable, for instance the decision to stay loyal to a spouse who has become intolerable, in order to ensure a stable home for the children of the marriage.

Many of the problems and paradoxes that have perplexed those who have sought to understand the nature of happiness are removed if we resolve it into these separate elements and consider them in turn.

Our purpose in breaking down the notion of well-being is not to show that no one can be happy who does not score highly in each of these dimensions. Throughout history, few have been fortunate enough to be in possession of all the desirable characteristics we have identified. The purpose of the

analysis is to show that when we pursue happiness for ourselves or for others, the goal is not a simple but a complex one, and if we are trying to measure well-being, a single metric will not suffice. Policies for the maximisation of happiness may involve trade-offs between dignity and contentment, between welfare and dignity, and between contentment and welfare.

The three items that we have identified correspond to the unalienable human rights whose existence the American Declaration of Independence regarded as a self-evident truth: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. 'Life', broadly interpreted, includes the necessities that we have entitled 'welfare'. 'Liberty' is the foundation of a career of dignity. And the 'happiness' that was to be pursued was conceived of by the founding fathers as a state of contentment, such as was soon to be given the name of 'utility'.

In the remainder of this book we shall consider the constituent elements of well being in the order suggested by the words of the Declaration. Section Two will consider welfare, Section Three dignity, and Section Four contentment. In a final section we will discuss what conclusions with regard to moral behaviour as well as to national and international policy should be drawn from the study we have undertaken.