

Chapter 3

In the last chapter I tried to develop what I called an "ethical yardstick"--a standard we can use to gauge the moral worth of actions. Building on the concept of human good or human happiness, that chapter's main idea is that the more something meets people's fundamental needs, treats people the way they're entitled to be treated, improves their lives and increases their sense of basic contentment and satisfaction in life, the better it is from an ethical standpoint. Conversely, to the extent that an action or policy decreases or makes such satisfaction more difficult, it is morally worse.

As you remember, I offered the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a convenient description of the fundamental needs of everyone in the human family. And I pointed out that the Declaration essentially says that in order to be fully content with life as human beings we need two things--to experience certain material conditions or actual states of affairs (food, shelter, education, the absence of fear, etc.) and to be treated in a certain way (equal to others, with fairness and the like). And this two-fold distinction echoes the two major ways we saw that people describe what they believe makes something wrong--hurting others (actual state of affairs) and violating someone's rights (treatment).

Actually, the two prongs of these accounts represent the two basic ways philosophical ethics measures how much an action makes people's lives better or worse. The approach we're going to look at in this chapter says we discover the moral character of an action (just how morally right or wrong it is) by looking at the results or consequences it produces. The other approach, which we'll see next chapter, says that we should examine instead the action itself.

My aim in this handbook is to avoid philosophical jargon as much as possible and to put things in a straightforward, common sense way. But there will be a couple of times when I think that using a technical term will help clarify the issue at hand. And this is one of them.

As I said a couple of paragraphs ago, evaluating the moral status of an action by looking at its consequences is one of the two most basic, longstanding approaches in philosophical ethics. It has come to be known as the teleological approach. "Teleological" comes from two ancient Greek words: telos and logos. The latter crops up in lots of modern words and can be taken to mean something like "the study of." "Biology" means "the study of life"; "psychology," "the study of the psyche"; "sociology," "the study of society"; "criminology," "the study of criminal behavior"; and so on. Telos appears very infrequently in English and in this context means "end." So "teleology" means "the study of ends." (To avoid confusion, remember that "end" here means "the end of an action," its "result" or "outcome." "Teleology" does not mean "the study of ends" as we see it in things like the "Hot Buns Calendar.") Any approach that says an action is justified by what it produces--even something as crude as the idea that "the ends justify the means"--is basically teleological.

In one respect, a teleological or results-oriented approach is one of the most practical and uncomplicated ways to evaluate actions. In a sense it's also scientific. To figure out how morally right or wrong an action is, we simply look at the actual results and see how they measure up against our "ethical yardstick." How much actual, real life good or happiness is produced? If there's more good than harm, the action's morally o.k.

On the face of it, such an approach makes a lot of sense. Pleasure makes life better. Pain makes it worse. In developing a standard for evaluating human behavior, it makes more sense that "pleasure" belongs with "right" and

"pain" with "wrong" than the other way around. Why would we want an ethical guideline that says people should do things that make themselves unhappy or hurt one another?

This way of thinking also seems sensible and useful. It gives us a common sense way to resolve moral dilemmas. Instead of debating whether homosexuality is "natural" or "perverse," a teleological approach says we should look to see just how much actual good or harm it produces. If it leads to more good than harm, it's morally justifiable; if more harm than good, it's unjustifiable. This is like a philosophical application of that saying in sports--"no harm, no foul." If no harm is done, why should we say something is morally wrong?

But measuring how much human good or harm is produced by actions is not as easy as it first seems. For one thing, if we want to make a decision before we do something (the situation we're usually in when we have an ethical dilemma on our hands), we have no actual results to examine. That means we have to imagine likely outcomes and speculate about the odds attached to different options. And if we're going to do a complete and accurate job, we need to know what to look for. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights might be a place to start, since it tells us that the more the things on the list are produced, the happier people will be. But the Declaration is a political, not a philosophical document, and it takes us only so far. We need something more rigorous and systematic.

Not surprisingly, some philosophers have developed such systems. In this chapter we're going to look at two of them (those of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill) and see how well they work.

Given the practical and scientific character of a teleological or results-oriented approach to ethics, it's no surprise that one of the most famous representatives of this way of thinking would be a very practical, no nonsense, empirically oriented individual. And such was Jeremy Bentham, an Englishman who lived in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (1748-1832).

Bentham was a practical soul, more reformer than philosopher. He trained in law, but was more concerned with reforming the laws and penal code than being a barrister. Nonetheless, he was seriously interested in the British philosophers of his time who argued for the value of empiricism, the basic approach of modern science. When it comes to determining how people should behave and to evaluating laws, policies and institutions, Bentham thought the best approach was simply to look and see what did the most practical good and improved the lives of the most people. Arguing especially against aristocrats who held fast to the authority of tradition and prelates who praised self-sacrifice and the denial of pleasure and comfort, Bentham became the chief exponent of a theory called utilitarianism.

The word "utilitarianism" is obviously built on "utility" which means "usefulness." Bentham thought we should evaluate things simply on how practically useful they were in making life better for people. In fact, living by his ideas, Bentham directed that when he died his body should be dissected for the benefit of science. This was much more useful than simply discarding it. Indeed, because Bentham left all of his estate to the University of London on the condition that his remains be present at its board meetings, Bentham's body was stuffed and is on display in a glass case at the end of a long hall at University College.

But don't think Bentham would be offended by this. One time in London I was to meet a scholar from the University of London for lunch. And when I called my British colleague to find out where we should meet, she said, "Meet me at 12 in front of Jeremy Bentham." It turns out that Bentham's body is the standard meeting place at the University, a fact that would delight Bentham. A century and a half after his death, his body is still "useful."

Utilitarianism is a moral theory, however, not just a general approach to life. So its idea of "utility" is quite specific and directly related to "human happiness." And for Jeremy Bentham what makes human life happy or satisfying is pleasure.

In his Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation, Bentham writes, "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. . . . [T]he standard of right and wrong . . . [is] fastened to their throne. . . . By utility is meant that property in any object whereby it tends to produce benefit, advantage, pleasure, good, or happiness (all this in the present case comes to the same thing) or (what comes again to the same thing) to prevent the happening of mischief, pain, evil, or unhappiness to the party whose interest is considered: if that party be the community in general, then the happiness of the community: if a particular individual, then the happiness of that individual."

As far as utilitarianism is concerned, something is morally good to the extent that it produces a greater balance of pleasure over pain for the largest number of people involved, or, "the greatest good of the greatest number." Bentham thinks it's so obvious that pleasure is the ultimate stuff of human happiness, and thus the ultimate standard of human good, that it's ridiculous even to try to prove this point. In Bentham's eyes this is the ultimate, objective standard of morality--"the greatest happiness of all those whose interest is in question [is] the right and proper, and only right and proper and universally desirable, end of human action."

We could thus say that Bentham's "ethical yardstick" is marked off in units of pleasure and held only against the consequences of actions.

O.k., Bentham tells us that if we want to determine the moral character of an action, we should look to see how much pleasure it produces. Intuitively, this idea seems to make sense. It involves an open, objective and public process of measuring pleasure. It's very democratic--everybody is equal and the pleasures of the majority prevail. And pleasure is something everybody understands. There's nothing fancy or mysterious about it. So far so good.

But how do you measure pleasure? How do we weigh pleasure against pain? Systematic and practical man that he was, Jeremy Bentham gives us a way--the hedonistic calculus.

The hedonistic calculus is a system that lets us measure and compare the amounts of pleasure and pain that different actions produce. ("Hedonistic" comes from the Greek word for "pleasure.") Bentham identifies seven elements that we have to take into account: 1) the intensity of the feeling, 2) its duration, 3) its certainty or uncertainty, 4) propinquity or remoteness (how soon we'll experience it), 5) its fecundity (the likelihood that the experience will produce other pleasures in the future), 6) its purity (the chance the feeling will produce pain or unhappiness), and 7) extent (the number of people affected by it). The object of the game is to assign a numerical value to each of these categories for each of the actions or options we're measuring, tally them up and compare the final scores. Whichever has the higher total is morally better.

Let's try using Bentham's system and see how well it works.

Here's the case. Imagine that your car has just broken down and it's going to take \$500 to repair it--\$500 that you don't have. Since you desperately need your car for work and school, you try to borrow the money from family, friends and associates, but come up dry. Next you try a bank, but here too you have no luck. You have no credit history and no collateral.

You're really feeling stuck. As you go to leave the bank, however, you spy this little old lady taking a wad of bills from one of the tellers and stuffing them into her purse. At first you just feel depressed about life's unfairness and your predicament. You're sure your boss is going to fire you and that you'll miss classes to boot. But as you're walking home, you realize that this little old lady is walking along the same street--the same deserted street--that you are. You look around and see no one else around and--a victim of your despair--wonder whether you should steal this woman's purse. There's the dilemma: do you steal the money or not?

Most people would be hard pressed to say that mugging a little old lady is "morally right," so Bentham's calculus should come to the same conclusion. We have to take each of the seven categories and assign a number that tells how much pleasure or pain is involved, so let's use a scale of -10 to +10. Positive numbers will stand for pleasurable feelings, negative numbers unpleasant ones. To see whether mugging Grandma will produce more pleasure than pain, let's compare the theft's effects on the little old lady versus the effects on you.

	GRANDMA	YOU
1. Intensity	-10	+2

How intense is the experience for each of you? Being mugged is a very intense experience and it's totally unpleasant. So -10 should describe your victim's feelings. Coming up with a score for you is more complicated because so many more feelings are involved. If you're normal, the experience will probably be pretty intense, but it will involve both good and bad feelings. You're apprehensive about taking the money and getting away without being seen, caught or hurting the woman. Your heart will be pounding (a sure sign of intensity) and you may feel really guilty about what you've done. So that looks like about a -8 for you. But once you think you've escaped and know that you can get your car fixed, you'll probably be very happy. For the time being, you've saved your job and you can continue in school. For the sake of argument, let's assume that your happiness will be very intense (+10). So, on balance you'll feel more intensely happy than unhappy by +2.

2. Duration	-10	-2
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How long will the pleasure or pain last? Again, it's easy to come with up a value for your victim. Being mugged isn't something you easily get over. The intensity will decrease, but the woman will feel unhappy about this for a long time (-10). Your happiness won't last as long--only until you need money again or your car breaks down (let's say +6). But you'll probably also be feeling some guilt, or at least some bad feelings about having been put in a position where stealing was your only way out. And you may also be worrying about whether you'll eventually be caught. And those feelings will probably last longer than the happy ones. Depending on how much of a conscience you have, you might be haunted by the event for the rest of your life. Let's assign a -8 for your negative feelings, which gives you a -2 on balance.

3. Certainty	-10	+7
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What's the likelihood that the pleasure or pain we think will result from the event actually will? There's no question that Grandma is going to feel bad about this--whether you get away with the theft or not (-10). What are the odds that you'll feel good? Probably a little less (+7). You've got to get away with the crime first and then you'll likely have mixed feelings.

4. Propinquity	-10	+8
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How soon? Your victim is going to start feeling badly immediately. You're

Unless you're a hopelessly selfish creep, I can't believe you'd have to think very long about this. Breaking a promise to help your best friend just to go off and have a good time is a rotten thing to do. How could an ordinary person in good conscience say that it's "morally better" to go party than to help your friend?

Let's see if Bentham's system gives us the same answer. I've given this example to all of my ethics classes over the last few years, the results have been remarkably consistent. Why not try it yourself first, before reading any farther?

	PARTY	HELP FRIEND
1. Intensity		
2. Duration		
3. Certainty		
4. Propinquity		
5. Fecundity		
6. Purity		
7. Extent		

Figure 2

A typical tally looks something like this:

	PARTY	HELP FRIEND
1. Intensity	+9	+3

Most of my students find parties much more enjoyable than helping friends study. So they figure that even with a guilty conscience they would still experience fairly intense pleasure at a good party.

2. Duration	+5	+3
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The party rates higher here. The pleasure starts with the anticipation of a good time and the party would last longer than a study session.

3. Certainty	+7	+10
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The odds of enjoying the party and feeling good about helping Marla are both pretty good, although the party's a shade more chancy. You've got to get there first, and it's possible that you won't have as great a time as you've been promised. The pleasure connected with keeping your promise is a sure thing. You'll feel good about yourself, Marla will be grateful and your friendship will be strengthened.

4. Propinquity	+8	+8
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How soon? The same in each case--tonight.

5. Fecundity	+8	+5
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The party's seen as probably leading to more pleasures in the future than tutoring will. The party--new friends, perhaps lovers, other parties; helping

Marla--self-approval, feeling good about her success on the test, pleasures that will come from the friendship continuing.

6. Purity

-6

-1

The party lost on this score. My students think that it's pretty likely that in some ways they're going to feel worse after partying. About the only unhappiness that helping Marla would produce is feeling badly about missing out on a great time. However, the negative aftereffects of partying are considerable, ranging from feeling guilty about treating a friend that way to what we might call "post-party discomfort" (being hungover, the confusion that accompanies coming to in Arizona three days later and not remembering how you got there, the trouble involved in asking your parents to wire money to you so you can get a plane back to New Jersey, and so on).

The total to this point is 31 for the party and 28 for staying. Breaking your promise is slightly ahead. What does it look like when we add the seventh category (extent) and take account of the effects on other people? Well, your friend is surely going to be pretty unhappy if you go. But if you get around at the party and make sure at least a few people have a really good time, their positive (pleasurable) scores could really offset Marla's negative one. And that would make the "party" score clearly higher than "help friend" score. At the very least, however, it looks like a real horse race.

So according to Jeremy Bentham's "hedonistic calculus" it's probably "morally better" to turn your back on Marla just to go off and have a really good time for yourself. But that's ridiculous. Keeping your promise to help your best friend versus blowing her off for a party? How could it even be close? But as I said above, these results are amazingly consistent. Even though 100% of the people in my classes say before using Bentham's system that the right thing to do is to stay and help Marla, 80 to 90% of them come up with scores like those above. Most of my students believe that the consequences of breaking the promise would produce more pleasure than keeping it would. And in a teleological or results-oriented approach, it's the amount of pleasure produced that counts in determining right and wrong.

I hope you're thinking to yourself that the problem here is with Bentham's system and not your original judgment that the better thing to do from an ethical standpoint is to help your friend. But remember I said at the beginning of this chapter that measuring the consequences of actions is more difficult than it first appears. So what's wrong with the calculus?

Let's take one more example and see if that will identify the trouble. Imagine that NBC wants to come up with a sure fire way to compete against Monday Night Football. They try the following. They premiere a new two hour show called "Monday Night at the Coliseum," originating from Los Angeles. Every week the names of two men will be drawn from postcards people have previously sent in volunteering (with full knowledge of the rules) to be part of a "contest." Their motivation? The winner will receive \$2 million, the loser \$1 million. The rules of the game? A few days before the broadcast, an NBC SWAT team will abduct these men, terrorize them and beat them up. In the intervening days, they'll be subjected to all sorts of physical hardship, trials and beatings. Of course, this is all being captured on video tape, and the highlights are shown during the first part of the show. Then the contestants are brought together before a packed audience at the Los Angeles Coliseum where they engage in hand to hand, no-holds-barred combat on live, nationwide TV. The winner is the man who beats the other unconscious. Then the loser is revived and tortured for the final fifteen minutes of the show. The torture is designed to cause him lots of pain, but no permanent physical damage. (The similarity with certain Roman practices shows you why NBC puts it on at the L. A. Coliseum.)

Let's imagine that the show does really well in the ratings and 40 million Americans are riveted to their screens every Monday night, delighting in the suffering and travails of these two men. And this is not all that implausible. Violence has a big following in this country. Some people go to boxing matches or hockey games looking for it. Others find it in movies or television programs. Still others follow it on television newscasts or in the newspapers. So it's possible that millions of people would really enjoy this program.

But what about the ethical side of this? Would it really be morally acceptable to put something like this on the air? Would it be morally better to leave the program on the air or cancel it? I hope you feel at least somewhat uneasy about saying that there's nothing wrong with showing graphic violence and torture on national television no matter how good the ratings. But let's turn to Bentham's ideas again and see what they tell us.

Well, if Bentham's utilitarianism adopts as its basic standard "the greatest happiness of the greatest number," it's hard to see what could be wrong with "Monday Night at the Coliseum." What balance of pleasure over pain does the program produce? Millions of people get a great deal of pleasure at the expense of pain experienced by only two men. Even if 2 million people get outraged over the program and feel some kind of pain or unhappiness, it's still not close to the amount of pleasure the program produces. Besides, no one is dying, the contestants have volunteered and they're generously rewarded. They can experience a lot of pleasure with the money they've gotten for their pains. Maybe both men end up experiencing more pleasure than pain. Could cancelling the show produce more pleasure than the tremendous amount continuing it does? How could we object?

But surely we'd have to object. A theory that says it's o.k. to let a few people suffer as long as it produces enough pleasure for the majority must have something wrong with it. Otherwise, we could justify anything from racial and sexual discrimination to forced labor to caste systems and slavery. As long as there's a greater balance of pleasure over pain in the end, nothing's wrong.

So what's the problem? Take a look back at the last two examples and compare the different pleasures involved. The one pits the pleasures you and others experience at a good party versus the pleasures of friendship. The other case weighs the pleasures of seeing someone else suffer against whatever pleasure would come from taking this off the air. But the kind of pleasure doesn't matter in the calculation, only the amount. Bentham's system gives us the results it does because it doesn't distinguish between the pleasures involved. It doesn't matter what type of experiences produce the competing pleasures. All that matters is what produces the biggest amount.

In Bentham's mind, all pleasures are equal. As he puts it, "pushpin is as good as poetry." "Pushpin" was a simpleminded game played in Bentham's day. Bentham thought that pleasure was pleasure; it didn't matter where it came from. Contemporary versions of his phrase would be something like "having sex is as good as helping someone" or "partying is as good as promise keeping."

And that's precisely the problem, because all pleasures aren't equal. You may experience more pleasure going to the party, but is it really as good as the kind of pleasure you'll feel from helping your friend? And do you think that the pleasure people get from watching two men inflict pain on each other is as good as other kinds of pleasure? Don't you think that the pleasure you experience from helping someone is somehow better than the enjoyment you get from drinking yourself blind at a party or watching a fight at a hockey game?

But how do we distinguish among types of pleasures and still keep our approach strictly results-oriented?

The problem with Bentham's version of utilitarianism and his hedonistic calculus did not escape the notice of one of his younger contemporaries, John Stuart Mill (1806-1873). Actually, Mill wasn't just a "younger contemporary" of Bentham. Bentham was a close friend of James Mill, John Stuart's father, and was the young man's godfather. James Mill was so strongly influenced by Bentham's ideas that he put his son through a rigorous and remarkable program of education aimed at producing the ideal defender of utilitarianism. Mill bought most of this, but after something akin to the modern day "nervous breakdown" he began making important revisions in utilitarianism. Like his father and Bentham, John Stuart Mill was more interested in social reform than abstract theory.

The most important change Mill made in utilitarianism was in the issue we've been addressing--the quality of pleasures. Mill accepted the idea that the standard for evaluating actions is the amount of pleasure or happiness that is produced. He writes in his work entitled Utilitarianism, "The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals 'utility' or the 'greatest happiness principle' holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain and the privation of pleasure." However, Mill rejected Bentham's belief that all pleasures are equal. Mill insisted that we distinguish between a whole range of pleasures--some lower and some higher. He explains, "It is quite compatible with the principle of utility to recognize the fact that some kinds of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others. It would be absurd that, while in estimating all other things quality is considered as well as quantity, the estimation of pleasure should be supposed to depend on quantity alone." And once pleasures are separated into high and low quality, it makes sense in Mill's mind to claim that the better pleasures are so much better that a small amount of high quality pleasure outweighs a much larger amount of low quality pleasure.

Thus, Mill's "ethical yardstick" is similar to Bentham's in measuring only the pleasure that results from an action. But it's different in being able to identify and measure better versus worse kinds of pleasure. It measures quality as well as quantity.

Well, we've seen that measuring the quantity of pleasure produced isn't too complicated. You analyze the end results of each option for everyone affected and tally up the total. But how do you determine the quality of a pleasure? It's not so obvious.

Maybe we should start with something easier than pleasure. How do you determine the quality of a record or tape? You listen to it, right? But you'll be able to judge only if you know what to listen for--clarity, depth of sound, range of frequencies, and the like. Only if you've heard both low and high quality reproductions will you know the difference. Or what about judging the quality of clothing? Again, you have to know what to look for. Is the fabric free of flaws and runs? Is the lining good quality fabric and does it hang properly? Are the seams sewn so they won't unravel? If the cloth has a pattern to it, does the design match up properly on abutting pieces? Are the buttons sewn on securely? Or how about distinguishing between better and worse quality wine? You study the wine's body, bouquet, taste and aftertaste. But you can make an accurate appraisal only if you have an "educated" or trained palate.

In each case, the story's the same. In distinguishing differences in quality you rely on your judgment, a judgment that's been trained and developed through a fair amount of experience with the thing under consideration. Someone without your experience with clothing, say, probably wouldn't see the differences that are so apparent to you. Your judgment may appear to be no more than your personal opinion to someone untutored in the area, but even though it's subjective, it isn't arbitrary. (He or she would

probably recognize the factors that influenced your decision if you pointed them out.) Your judgment is based on real life experience, and other people with the same knowledge and experience as you will more likely agree than disagree with your evaluation.

But notice that the process is getting less obvious. More intangibles are coming in. When you make a judgment about the quality of something, it might just be pretty intuitive. You may look for specific things, but your judgment might also involve something you can't put your finger on. How do you describe what goes into your judgment that one car has a better "feel" than another? Nonetheless, to repeat what I just said, the fact that a judgment is subjective doesn't make it arbitrary.

Let's return, then, to the problem of judging between different kinds of pleasure. Mill approaches the problem like this:

If I am asked what I mean by difference of quality in pleasures, or what makes one pleasure more valuable than another, . . . there is but one possible answer. Of two pleasures, if there be one to which all or almost all who have experience of both give a decided preference, . . . that is the more desirable pleasure.

So to separate low and high quality pleasures, we ask people who have the greatest amount of experience with both.

And what will they tell us? Mill continues,

Now it is an unquestionable fact that those who are equally acquainted with and equally capable of appreciating and enjoying both do give a most marked preference to the manner of existence which employs their higher faculties. Few human creatures would consent to be changed into any of the lower animals for a promise of the fullest allowance of a beast's pleasures; no intelligent human being would consent to be a fool, no instructed person would be an ignoramus, no person of feeling and conscience would be selfish and base, even though they should be persuaded that the fool, the dunce, or the rascal is better satisfied with his lot than they are with theirs. . . . Whoever supposes that this preference takes place at a sacrifice of happiness--that the superior being, in anything like equal circumstances, is not happier than the inferior--confounds the two very different ideas of happiness and content. It is indisputable that the being whose capacities of enjoyment are low has the greatest chance of having them fully satisfied; and a highly endowed being will always feel that any happiness which he can look for, as the world is constituted, is imperfect. But he can learn to bear its imperfections, if they are at all bearable; and they will not make him envy the being who is indeed unconscious of the imperfections, but only because he feels not at all the good which those imperfections qualify. It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied. And if the fool, or the pig, are of a different opinion, it is because they only know their own side of the question. The other party to the comparison knows both sides.

Mill doesn't give us a system of differentiating between pleasures as much as he gives examples of higher and lower pleasures. The "higher" includes: intelligence, mental pleasures, education, sensitivity to others, sense of morality and health. Among the "lower" we find: stupidity, ignorance, selfishness, indolence and physical pleasures, especially sensual indulgence. Mill suggests that the former are more characteristically human; the latter we share with other animals. (He would see the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a list of what would produce "higher" pleasures.) And he finds the distinctly "human" or "higher" satisfactions so much more enjoyable that they far outweigh whatever greater amount of "lower" pleasures we give up to get them.

A stupid person may feel perfectly content with life because of what his stupidity conceals from him about the world. But Mill believes that that

individual would be better off if he became more aware of life, more intelligent, even though it will lead to some discontent. The pleasure associated with stupidity is low quality; that connected to intelligence is high quality. In the same way, somebody without a shred of sympathy, decency or understanding for other people may get real pleasure from acting that way. However, Mill thinks that on balance she'll be happier if she acquires sensitivity and a conscience. Even though she'll experience a smaller amount of pleasure, it'll be higher quality and thus more satisfying.

It's important to see that the higher moral, emotional and intellectual pleasures are supposed to be better than the lower ones because they ultimately produce better results. And the word "ultimately" here is crucial because it points up that when you analyze the consequences of an action, you have to take the long view. We have to ask ourselves, "What produces the greatest good over the long, not the short term?"

Mill was especially sensitive to the problem of long term consequences and he illustrates it with an interesting example--lying. Let's say you're really in a bind and lying can get you out of it. You'd feel pleasure at the relief of being out of trouble, and you'd feel any pain? It isn't like stealing money from the little old lady--nobody's losing anything. Who's being hurt by a mere misstatement of fact? How could a results-oriented approach say that any practical harm could come from a lie? Definitely taking the long view, Mill says that truth-telling is one of the most useful and necessary things for bringing about human happiness. Consequently, "any, even unintentional, deviation from truth does that much toward weakening the trustworthiness of human assertion, which is not only the principal support of all present social well-being, but the insufficiency of which does more than any one thing that can be named to keep back civilization, virtue, everything on which human happiness on the largest scale depends." Except in an extreme case (where lying will save someone's life, for example), Mill sees lying as more harmful than beneficial over the long run.

Some of you may think that Mill's imagination is working overtime here, but take a moment to think about it. What are the practical, negative consequences of lying? How would you react to a friend who lies to you? For one thing, you'd probably think of him or her as less of a friend. You'd be more cautious, less trusting, more protective of your own interests. You might suspect he's trying to manipulate you at times, and you'd be less generous than you otherwise would be. You might ultimately break off all contact with her. Or what are the consequences of you yourself lying? You'd probably distrust what others say to you (there's no reason to think they won't lie as well). If your lies work, you'd likely do it fairly often--which means you're sewing the seeds of distrust in others. You'd certainly develop an abusive, self-interested attitude towards others. Your behavior would probably encourage some people to do the same. Whichever way you look at it, the overall crop is cynicism, distrust, defensiveness and selfishness. Now multiply that over an entire nation and throw in a couple hundred years for good measure. What do you get? A pretty grim place to live. No good will. People unwilling to believe or trust each other. Agreements enforced only by the threat of punishment. Everyone looking out only for themselves. "Just one lie" won't produce all of this. But the widespread and growing practice of lying certainly could. And every lie produces consequences that make such a state of affairs more likely.

So John Stuart Mill gives us two important factors to take into account when we try to figure out the positive and negative consequences of actions--the quality of the pleasure produced and the long term effects.

In light of Mill's contributions, let's go back to the examples we used above and see if Mill in fact straightens out Bentham's system. Does he correct the problems of making decisions solely in terms of the quantity of

pleasure produced?

The first case was the dilemma of whether or not to steal the money from the old woman. We saw that making a judgment simply on the amount of pleasure versus pain gave us an acceptable result, but these other factors can add something to the analysis. How does quality fit in? Surely Mill would see the pleasure you got from mugging Grandma to be low quality and far inferior to the pleasures associated with honesty. The long term results? Your sense of respect for other people and their property would be weakened. You might not stop at one theft and next time you might be willing to hurt someone. You might now tolerate or participate in a certain amount of what you take to be "innocent theft" where you work. Certainly none of these is a useful result.

Next we looked at the case of keeping your word to help a friend or going to a party. Bentham's "hedonistic calculus" didn't work great here. Does the notion of "quality of pleasure" help? This seems to be the crux of the matter to this example. The pleasures of going to the party may be longer, more intense, and may lead to more enjoyable times in the future than helping your friend will. But the satisfactions produced in both you and your friend by keeping your word, not letting her down, helping her out and continuing the friendship have got to be worth more than the satisfactions you get from a drunken bash. This is definitely a case of a smaller amount of high quality pleasure outweighing a larger amount of low quality pleasure. (The other side of this is that your friend would probably be so deeply hurt by your going that her pain would surely outweigh any amount of enjoyment you'd be having. A large amount of low quality pleasure can't offset a small amount of high quality pain.) And the long term consequences? You'd probably lose your friendship with Marla, and other friends would know you couldn't be trusted. You'd probably make Marla more distrustful of people in general. The long term effects here would be much like the long range consequences of lying. So when you take all of this into account, keeping your promise produces the most pleasure.

And what about "Monday Night at the Coliseum"? Bentham's version of utilitarianism was pretty defective here. It looked like it could easily conclude that the program produced more pleasure than pain. Here too, the concept of quality will help because we can see that the pleasure people get from watching someone else's pain would definitely rate as a really base type of enjoyment. Reveling in suffering is surely not one of the most noble or advanced human traits. And what about the long range result of having such a program broadcast weekly on nationwide television? Undoubtedly pretty depressing. The program would only decrease the human sensitivity of its viewers. Pain and suffering--the real thing, not just representations of it--would become acceptable sources of entertainment. It's hard to see how this would do anything but contribute to a brutalizing of millions of people in this country. It would encourage people to think that as long as something makes money, it's o.k., no matter what the human cost. When we look at the program in this light, it should be obvious that a greater amount of high quality human good would result from taking it off the air. At least a tremendous amount of extremely low quality pleasure dependent on very high quality human pain would be stopped.

Bentham and Mill give us a number of good ideas to keep in mind. First, utilitarianism or a results-oriented approach works from the common sense idea that is intuitively obvious to most people that if we all treat one another with decency and consideration, life will be better for everyone. There will be more pleasure in our lives. More importantly, however, Bentham and Mill give us a fairly useful way of identifying just how much good is produced by different actions. They tell us how to systematically study the results or consequences of different options we might be considering in trying to determine which one is morally better, that is, which one produces more human good or happiness.

Bentham explains how to arrive at a quantifiable measurement of pleasure

and identifies the different factors we have to take account of. Mill adds especially the concept of quality and illustrates how a complete analysis of consequences takes into account not just you and everyone else immediately affected, but the people who are affected over the long haul both directly and indirectly as well. If you have the patience and imagination to produce such a thorough analysis, you'd have a solid body of data to base a moral decision on.

I want to emphasize, however, that imagination and judgment are important components in a results or consequence oriented approach to ethical analysis. The trouble with Bentham was that he left out judgment--rating different kinds of pleasures. And it's important to see that you need to use your imagination to figure out all of the possible consequences of an action. If you have a variety of options to choose from, you have to speculate about what pleasures and pains will follow from each action. And you certainly need your imagination to do a good job of figuring out the long term consequences of the different options.

So even when we try to come up with a system that's as empirical and quantifiable as possible, we can't avoid dealing with a lot of intangible things--judgments about gradations of pleasure, possible outcomes, future consequences, and the like. You just can't avoid abstract thought and judgment in an ethical decision.

1. Think about ways in your everyday life that you make decisions about whether to do something or not because of the consequences. Do you make some or all of your ethical decisions this way?

2. Mill writes, "It's better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied." Do you agree? What if you could take a pill that would make you simpleminded, but content. You'd aspire to very little in your life, but you'd be happy with whatever you got. You'd no longer feel the anxiety that a normal, aware adult feels. In essence, you're getting the offer of a kind of child-like contentment. Would you take the pill? Why or why not?

3. Think about the example in this chapter about helping your friend versus going to a party. How would you decide what to do? Would the question of what was right come to mind? If so, how would you solve it? What would you do if you were put in this position? Explain your reasons.

4. Analyze the following cases trying to decide what will produce "the greatest happiness." Use Bentham's seven categories (intensity, duration, certainty, propinquity, fecundity, purity, extent) and Mill's additional category of quality. Be sure your analysis looks at the long term.

a. The people you hang out with are all pretty active sexually, but you aren't. You were taught by your parents that sex before marriage is wrong, and up until now you never really questioned what your parents have told you about right and wrong. However, your friends are basically decent people and sex doesn't seem to be doing them any harm, so you're feeling confused about whether there's really anything wrong with "doing it." You're also beginning to feel some peer pressure because your friends tease you about being a virgin, and you're feeling increasingly uncomfortable with being different from the rest of them. There is a member of the group you like who you know would really like to sleep with you. What are your options? What are the

results of choosing each?

b. You run a small engineering company of 10 people. How well the business does depends a lot on how well you all work together. At this point everyone at the company is white and male. You need to hire someone new and your decision comes down to two people: the son of one of your engineers and a Black woman who answered an ad you ran. You think that the woman is technically better (better education, more experience), but you're sure the guys aren't going to like it. You know them pretty well and you think they'd have a really hard time adjusting to the woman--which means that everyone's work will be affected. The current atmosphere in the company is "macho" and a lot of ethnic jokes get told. What are the consequences of hiring the man? What are the consequences of hiring the woman?

5. What are the consequences (short term and long term) of:

a. smoking cigarettes?

b. drinking alcohol?

c. smoking marijuana?

d. doing more serious drugs?

How does your reading of the consequences make you think about the legality of each?