

## A Christian refutes Utilitarianism

The Problem Of Right Conduct, A Text-Book Of Christian Ethics, by Peter Green argues against Utilitarianism, the notion that we should hedonistically increase the greatest pleasure of the greatest number.

Green rejects the Hedonistic Basis for morality which argues that what is right is what increases happiness and pleasure and what is wrong is what fails to do this. He states that the advantage of this theory is that it is so simple (page 65).

Conveniently, the fact that the following argument seems plausible is not dealt with: "A system of ethics is no good just as a theory and has to be easily and speedily understood to be implemented. Better even a faulty system that all the people readily or can readily adopt as one that is more convoluted and which they cannot and which makes them feel condemned a lot of the time. Ethics improve character no matter how bad they are for they make the person think they are doing right with the result that they are less likely to be malicious and will be more kindly and generous. So Hedonistic ethics may be bad on paper but good in practice and still be the only way forward."

He rejects the view that we don't always seek pleasure for it is undeniable and also that when we take it on ourselves to undergo what is unpleasant the reason we do it is because we see it as a stepping stone to better pleasures and less pain (page 66). But the problems he sees is firstly the problem of what pleasure means. He states that there are many good things we want which are not about giving us bodily pleasure. And when we all have different desires to say that ethics is about getting what we desire is to say we can make them up as we go along. He states that when we desire anything the pleasure we get from acquiring it is a bonus, a side-effect of getting what we want (page 67). He will not get any pleasure if he forgets about the thing he desires and focuses on the pleasure he hopes that he will get out of it. Green surmises that the strongest argument against seeing right and wrong solely in terms of pleasure and pain is that none of us praise a man who helps others just to advantage himself. So doing good should not be intended just to make the person who is doing the good happy. This really means that you need not take pride and joy in the good you do and do it for this pride and joy experienced. It opposes self-esteem and without self-esteem any respect you have for others is artificial. We cannot help taking some pleasure in what we do and the man who does good to please himself though it pleases others is doing all he can and should be praised. Christians slag off his goodness.

The Utilitarian Basis is that we should advance the most happiness of the most people and be willing to sacrifice our happiness if that would make others happier than we would be if we did not sacrifice.

Green says the trouble is that it is unclear on what it means by good. Some say that good consists principally of intellectual pleasures for they fear the consequences of people being told to do whatever they feel like. Bentham rejected this view for pleasure whether intellectual or carnal is just pleasure. So to say as Christians do that morality may give pleasure but is not about pleasure is totally frightening and makes us find morality repulsive. It is no wonder the majority of Christians have prejudices against their own Church and even more prejudices against members of other Churches.

Green says that the word good to a Utilitarian cannot be given a clear meaning so there is no way can work out the greatest good for us all (page 71). To say a thing like that is to admit that goodness has nothing to do with formulating and preparing a moral system which is the same thing as saying that morality is invented and hate could be a moral obligation.

Green feels that Utilitarianism fails to tell us why we should believe in it as a system of morality. He says that it has to convince us that it is best for us to believe in it. And to convince us to practice it even when we will have to sacrifice our happiness perhaps permanently for the betterment of others. He says it cannot do these. This is nonsense. Greatest happiness of greatest number is sheer commonsense. This remains true if a system cannot be made out of it. It is people who block the creation of a system not the rule.

Green, being a Christian, seeks to deny that I should only accept a morality that is ultimately concerned only with what is best for me. Utilitarianism seeks what is best for me but considers what other people need and if I have to die for them then die I must. This is the best for me under the circumstances. By criticising Utilitarianism for doing that he is saying his own morality has no basis! He says it is not always true that what is best for me will be best for everybody else too (page 70). I dispute this for the following reason. If we accept whatever blows life throws at us and recognise that to be happy we have to be willing to lose things that we like when we have to part with them that we will be content to do without it if it is necessary for the common good. His statement that Utilitarianism gives no authority for saying that the greatest happiness of the greatest number is what matters is foolish for it is obvious that Utilitarianism sees happiness as better than misery which is right so to look for proof is like looking for proof that 1 and 1 is 2. It needs no proof for it proves itself. Green accuses Utilitarianism of sometimes assuming that since A, B and C each desire their individual good that it does not mean that they are seeking the highest good for them all which is the fallacy of composition (page 71). This is not a fallacy for to

make the greatest good of the greatest number possible each person has to co-operate and enjoy having this good as an aim. They have to make the good of the whole their individual good and gain pleasure and enjoyment from it.

The Christian has to accuse Utilitarianism of having no basis because to admit that it is viable and tolerable and acceptable is to admit that the Christian way is not the only way to a moral life which contradicts Jesus' claim to be the only source of right teaching and divine grace, or the power that makes you holy and pleasing to God. The Christian then is forced to slander and do conjuring tricks with facts to smear it. (So they certainly do not believe in loving Utilitarians!) The Utilitarian would agree with adultery under some circumstances while the commandment of God forbids it totally. If most people are happiest without believing in God then Utilitarianism commands that God be dispensed with. Utilitarianism implies that Jesus did wrong by choosing such a horrible death to save the world for had he chosen a gentler one we would not have to disturb ourselves by remembering it and be guilty that he had to do that for us. Christianity says that believing in and giving the heart to God is the greatest good and not happiness and that serving God does not promise happiness in this world and you could die and find that there is no happiness in the next world either say if Christianity was mistaken about the existence of Heaven. Christians say that even when you are on your deathbed you should renounce yourself and do something painful for others or another. It denies that it is in any way an evil to deprive yourself in this way. This means that no person can really be important. What is important is the self-denial.

The next objection Green has is that when a person is very very lucky, the fact is that a lot of bad things had to happen before they brought him the luck and when we cannot sum up if he really is better off we cannot do it for society either for when we cannot do it for one person how can we do it for millions? (page 65). He thinks what is meant by the greatest good is too vague to be of any help. But that cannot be a refutation of Utilitarianism. The greatest good of the greatest number could be true even if we have problems deciding what the good is. Nobody can deny that the greatest good of the greatest number philosophy is right if we can find out what good is. The doctrine needs no basis for it speaks for itself. To deny this is to deny that there is such a thing as morality or right and wrong.

The Utilitarian John Stewart Mill is quoted as saying that he would rather go to Hell forever than go to a God in Heaven who condemns unbaptised babies to Hell for all time and eternity (page 64). But God is going to do what God is going to do so him going to Hell is going to mean one less person being happy for nothing which would be inconsistent with Utilitarianism. God sends seven year olds to Hell for at that age they can allegedly choose it. It's a terrible slander in itself to say that anybody would choose such a fate or a sin that brings with it such a fate which is just as wrong. You would need to be able to prove the faith one hundred per cent to be able to make such a serious accusation – another proof that Christianity when understood right is anti-morality. To go to the Heaven of such a God would be to betray the people he abuses which highlights how much hatred festers under the Hell doctrine. It is actually worse to be willing to do that now when we are on earth because we know very little of God for sure.

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