

Student Name: Elizabeth Sithabile Nyanhete

Student Number: 2503461

Module Name: Peace from the Perspectives of Well-being

Introduction

A Russian novelist, Leo Tolstoy faced a crisis which led him to consider suicide. He characterised his former life in terms of his achievements rather than a set of valuable activities. He supposedly regarded his spouse and children as possessions that did not give him any difficulties and his estate as a cash cow that grew effortlessly. He deemed this as a definition of a happy life. His description of his estate implies that he deemed work as an unpleasant chore to be avoided. He compared his health competitively to that of a peasant, driven by a sense of command of his physical and mental capabilities. However, in his book, 'A Confession', Tolstoy described this part of his life as hollow. What is striking about his account is how he characterizes his life not as a set of valuable activities but as a collection of achievements (Gill & Thomson, 2019, Ch. 2, p. 1).

Tolstoy's crisis illuminates a problem that is deeper than his biography. It exposes a concept coined by Gill and Thomson (2019) as a thin account of value. It is a conception that locates the value of any activity, including work, exclusively in what it produces, in wages or output. A thin account treats the activity as a means to an end with a goal that must be reached by minimising the cost in pursuit of it, a concept they referred to as instrumental rationality. Gill and Thomson (2019) argue that the concept of instrumental rationality is flawed because it does not allow us to articulate what is actually valuable. Instrumental rationality is mainly concerned with the most efficient ways of achieving goals. It assumes that all efforts directed at achieving goals are instrumental. This means that goal-directed actions are means to goals, therefore if means have instrumental value then the actions also have instrumental value. If the activities have instrumental value it means that humans also have instrumental value. This defeats the purpose of anything being of value. This concept dehumanises our lives and makes us machines for achieving results (Gill & Thomson, 2019, Ch. 2, pp. 2-4). This essay will argue that this is not a conceptual error but a form of dehumanisation which treats human activities and

eventually human beings themselves, only in terms of their usefulness for producing external outcomes.

A thin account cannot explain why the materially successful Tolstoy had everything that defined a happy life but still felt hollow and on the verge of suicide. These failures show that a thin account of work is existentially damaging. The value and meaning of life can be eradicated by treating our activities as means to an end. The way we conceive the value of our activities, ourselves and our lives is at stake. Any account of well-being must have these relationships right otherwise we risk dehumanising and instrumentalizing ourselves (Gill & Thomson, 2019, pp. 1-3).

This essay assumes a different approach. It claims that work contributes to well-being not mainly through wages, status or output, but through the quality of lived experiences and dignified self-perception of the worker. The thesis is that a thin account places the value of work in its outcome, but a thick account is based on the quality of the non-instrumental value of work activities and the dignified self-perception of the worker. This claim requires a replacement of a thin instrumental account with a thick evaluative one. A thick evaluative account developed by Thomson, Gill and Goodson (2021) employs evaluative concepts in which well-being is not simply a question of happiness or having more pleasure. It is not about what a person happens to value but about what is actually of value (Thomson, Gill & Goodson, 2021, p.3). Rather, a thick evaluative account asks whether the lived experience of work is itself part of human flourishing, employing rich evaluative concepts such as dignity and appropriate self-perception. This approach shifts the question from ‘What does work do for us?’ to ‘What is it like to experience work activities and how do they shape who we become?’

The first part of the essay will explore Tolstoy’s account of his life and provide an illustration of the existential cost of instrumentalizing oneself. His story illustrates how the description of

his life embodied instrumental rationality as he was only concerned about goals and minimising the cost to achieve them. Secondly, the essay will employ Gill and Thomson`s (2019) critique of instrumental rationality. It diagnoses why a thin account fails as it dehumanizes and does not articulate the non-instrumental value of activities. The third part will build on the thick evaluative account as an alternative to a thin account. It will explore the four constituents of well-being that represent structural features of living. The fourth section will explore the concept of evaluative self-perception which will expand on how work activities shape us and build our identity through dignity consciousness. The last part will look back at Tolstoy`s life and how it would have looked like as a thick evaluative account and the implication of the argument for peace in a work setting.

The Story of Tolstoy

It is important to look at practical scenarios of an instrumentalized life in order to understand what an instrumentalized life looks like. This diagnosis provides a more detailed pathology of an instrumentalized life. In the book, *Confession*, published in 1983, Leo Tolstoy describes a crisis in his life that led him to contemplate suicide. The way he described his life was governed by instrumental rationality theorised by Gill and Thomson (2019), concerned with the most efficient ways of achieving goals. Tolstoy`s story is not just an account of an unhappy life but a case study that illustrates what happens when we treat our lives as means to an end.

A direct quote from his book provides us with autobiographical lens through which we can understand how he diagnosed his predicament. “I was afraid of life, I struggled to get rid of it, and yet I hoped for something from it. And this was happening to me at a time when, from all indications, I should have been considered a completely happy man; this was when I was not yet fifty years old. I had a good, loving, and beloved wife, fine children, and a large estate that was growing and expanding without any effort on my part. More than ever before I was

respected by friends and acquaintances, praised by strangers, and I could claim a certain renown without really deluding myself. Moreover, I was not physically and mentally unhealthy; on the contrary, I enjoyed a physical and mental vigor such as I had rarely encountered among others my age. Physically, I could keep up with the peasants working in the fields; mentally I could work eight to ten hours at a stretch without suffering any aftereffects from the strain. And in such a state of affairs I came to a point where I could not live; and even though I feared death, I had to employ ruses against myself to keep from committing suicide” (Tolstoy, 1983, p. 29).

This part of Tolstoy`s confession is quite surprising. He acknowledges that he was afraid of life and wanted to get rid of it yet he hoped that life would give him something in return. This passage can be read as suggesting an instrumental orientation toward life, in which its value appears tied to what it yields rather than to the worth of living itself. Gill and Thomson (2019) argue that an action that is instrumentally valuable is a cost that we have to pay to achieve our intended goals yet efficiency requires us to achieve goals at minimal costs. The finger-click test provides a way of judging if our activities are instrumentalized (Gill and Thomson, 2019, Ch. 2, p. 5). Clicking the finger and achieving desired results without facing the cost of achieving them is a way of instrumentalizing activities. Tolstoy could click his finger and get what he wanted from life without incurring any cost in experiencing it.

Tolstoy`s description places his wife, children, estate, reputation and health within a list of external goods, indicating that his life was being accessed through indicators of success rather than through the lived quality of relationships and activities. Praises from friends and acquaintances are mentioned proudly as if they were external validation and social status acquired without putting effort. He describes his health status competitively, comparing it to peasants and not as a condition of living a flourishing life. In this account, all the goods of his life are framed according to status, goal achievement and their instrumental value.

It is also striking that he says that from all indications he should have been considered a happy man based on his possessions. This provides a distinction between what was empirically observable and measurable versus the evaluative reality of Tolstoy's life. The "indications" he referred to were his possessions, which included his family, status and his estate. An outsider basing on their standard metrics of what a good life looks like would conclude that he was a happy man but Tolstoy knew otherwise. This is a gap identified by Thomson, Gill and Goodson (2021) between empirical indicators and evaluative realities. Empirical statements define what is, describing how the world exists. They focus on measurable and observable facts that can be investigated through scientific methodology. Evaluative claims, on the other hand, are not about describing facts but about determining what ought to be. What is important for a person's life cannot be reduced to simply what they value. Happiness is often at times defined in terms of what a person values, this risks happiness being tied to what a person values. A person can value the wrong things, which implies that well-being cannot be tied to what one values personally (Thomson, Gill and Goodson, 2021, pp. 2-3).

What is absent from this account are the four dimensions of well-being: the level of activities, the level of awareness, the relational level and the level of self-consciousness (Thomson, Gill & Goodson, 2021, pp. 16-17). These will be discussed later in more detail. This is precisely the structure of instrumental rationality as described by Gill and Thomson (2019). Features of instrumental rationality appear in Tolstoy's story. Happiness is defined by the advancement of possessions, accumulation of wealth, good health status, and recognition from friends and colleagues. The efficiency of achieving goals with minimal cost and energy spent is all that matters. He ignores the quality of his relationship with his wife and children, the intrinsic satisfaction in growing his estate and the experience of physical exercise and enjoying healthy meals to improve his health. All his activities are worthwhile based on the results, to be applauded with monetary reward.

Tolstoy's account is not proof of the essay thesis but an illustration of the problem the thesis addresses. Through a lived experience it shows what is at stake if we do not make a distinction between a thin account of work and a thick evaluative one. A thin account locates value in outcome and achievements and cannot sustain a flourishing human life as it confronts the meaning of our very existence. It erodes dignity of human life by assigning value to goal achievement and results. It treats the substance and meaning of life as a cost to be minimised and in so doing, hollows everything of value.

The next section will make the argument more explicit. Having seen what an instrumentalized life looks like, it will shift the focus to Gill and Thomson (2019) critique of instrumental rationality and their argument of why it fails.

A Critique of Instrumental Rationality

Tolstoy's story exposes a structural flaw in our way of thinking about what is truly of value. That way of thinking is instrumental rationality as referred to by Gill and Thomson (2019), which is the philosophical engine of a thin account of work. This section seeks to make the philosophical argument more explicit by exploring the critique of instrumental rationality. It defines instrumental rationality, exposes its flaws and failures in determining what a good life looks like.

The common view of instrumental rationality is that activities are means to an end, assigning them instrumental value. A given goal is assigned intrinsic value, hence one must achieve their goals in the most efficient way possible. Instrumental rationality is efficient in solving specific problems but not as a conceptual framework of well-being. It has four features, namely; given goals, restricted relevance, justification and minimising costs. Instrumental rationality assumes that a set of goals is given and the most efficient means are carefully selected amongst an exhaustive set of possibilities. Gill and Thomson (2019) argue that the first feature of

instrumental rationality is only concerned about the most efficient means to an end without providing rational choices amongst the variety of means to an end. This gives value to utility, since it enables us to choose based on the value of the specific aims. This view indicates a well-known limitation of instrumental rationality, in that, problems are not neatly packaged and presented to us in a way that supports instrumental rationality. We have to know what concepts to apply to the problem and how it should be framed. Instrumental concepts such as efficiency, savings and usefulness are essentially relative to a goal. Instrumental rationality selects the most efficient way of achieving goals, eliminating our ability to choose rationally from the variety of ends (Gill & Thomson, 2019, Ch. 2, p. 2-3).

The second feature states that only the features useful in attaining the goal are relevant. This removes the intrinsic value of the activity itself, making it irrelevant. What is relevant is defined solely by the achievement of the goal. Despite each activity regarded as a lived experience to be enjoyed, instrumental rationality disregards it. The third feature suggests that, since what is instrumental has no value per se, then its use is a cost which must be proportional to the value of the goal. A long chain of means constitutes an accumulation of costs which are weighed by how value the goal is to make the cost worthwhile. This can lead to means exhaustion in which the accumulation of costs of goal achievement become so heavy that no goal is worth all the effort. Lastly, the essence of instrumental rationality is that we must be concerned solely with the most efficient means to a goal, thus we must minimise or cut costs (Gill & Thomson, 2019, Ch. 2, pp. 2-3).

When we apply this logic to work, it sounds reasonable and more realistic. We go to work to earn wages, make a living and move up the hierarchy ladder attaining a social status. If it were possible to achieve these goals by all means necessary without having to work, rationally, we would. The work itself is a cost, therefore, a rational person seeks to minimise work and cut costs. This is similar to the finger click test whose only concern is to attain goals, eliminating

the cost of activities. When we look at Tolstoy's life, it is evident that his life was governed by instrumental rationality. His main concern was achieving goals and maximising wealth through growth of his estate. Rationally it was logical for him to achieve his goals without having to put much effort in attaining them. He deemed his family as prized possessions as if there was no need for him to play his part in contributing to their flourishing as a husband and a father.

Tolstoy's story also offers an illustration of means exhaustion. He had pursued fame, success and family as means to an end. Once he achieved all those goals, he asked himself, "Very well, you will have 6000 desyatins in the Samara province, as well as 300 horses; what then?" "Very well, you will be more famous than Gogol, Pushkin, Shakespeare, Moliere, more famous than all the writers in the world- so what?" He had no answer to any of these questions (Tolstoy, 1983, p. 27). It would seem that after all, the accumulation of wealth meant nothing because he had instrumentalized his life so much that it lost substance and meaning and no goal was worth the cost of attaining it as it left him with an empty heart.

Gill and Thomson argue that instrumental rationality is flawed because it does not allow us to articulate what is actually valuable. The view that all actions directed towards achieving goals are instrumental, commits us to a disastrous view and turns us into machines for achieving results. This contradicts the view that actions have intrinsic value. This claim in turn implies that humans are instrumentally valuable, because goal-oriented activities constitute oneself. Thus to regard activities as instrumentally valuable is to instrumentalize and dehumanise oneself. This claim would defeat the idea of anything being valuable if everyone has no intrinsic value. If anything does not have intrinsic value then humans do and if humans do not have intrinsic value then nothing is of value (Gill & Thomson, 2019, Ch. 2, pp. 3-4). This is the philosophical core of the essay. A thin account of work which treats work as a mere means to external ends rests on a conception of value that is unsustainable. It instrumentalizes and dehumanizes our lives making value practically impossible.

This section has explored the concept of instrumental rationality and its flaws as argued by Gill and Thomson (2019). This critique opens up the possibility of an alternative. It would seem that the error in instrumental rationality lies in conflating the distinction between means and ends and instrumental value and intrinsic value. An action can be a means to an end and yet possess intrinsic value. This frees us to reject instrumental rationality's assumption that all means have instrumental value and ends have intrinsic value (Gill and Thomson, 2019, Ch. 2, p. 6). Work can therefore be directed towards goals, wages and output yet the activity of work itself has intrinsic value. This is the philosophical move that makes an alternative thick evaluative account possible.

A Thick Evaluative Alternative

The previous section concluded that instrumental rationality fails because it conflates two distinctions that should be kept separate, that is means versus ends and instrumental value versus intrinsic value. This makes it impossible to recognise that an action can be instrumental in nature but have intrinsic value. It drives this section to explore an alternative, the thick evaluative account of work. It explains the philosophical move that makes a thick evaluative account of work possible and explores what it means for work to be intrinsically valuable as an activity. It will also explore the features of work that make it a constituent of well-being rather than means to it.

Instrumental rationality is a commonly accepted notion that leads to absurd consequences. It does not allow us to articulate the notion of valuable activities necessary in describing well-being. Gill and Thomson (2019) claim that actions have intrinsic value as means to ends. Separating the two distinctions, instrumental and intrinsic value, and means and ends, rejects the assumption that means only have instrumental value and that ends only have intrinsic value. The first distinction, instrumental versus non-instrumental value shows that something has

instrumental value in what it causes not for what it is, while something of non-instrumental value has value in itself. In some cases, something can have both instrumental and non-instrumental value for example health. The second distinction is means versus ends. Typically, our actions lead to ends which are goals, as such they are means and means are causally relevant in achieving goals. Instrumental rationality conjoins these distinctions leading to the error that, means have instrumental value and ends have intrinsic value (Gill & Thomson, 2019, Ch. 2, p. 6).

This view is relevant to well-being in that it transforms the way we understand goals and their relationship to activities such as work. The idea that the value of what we do is in the goal is flawed and this is seen in recognising that instrumental rationality does not recognise this. The distinction suggests that human beings are the primary bearers of intrinsic value. Furthermore, it is important in understanding the composition of well-being. Instrumentalization is one form of ill-being and as such, one may treat things that have intrinsic value as though they have instrumental value or they may treat things of instrumental value as though they have non-instrumental value (Gill & Thomson, 2019, Ch. 2, p. 7). This distinction does not mean that goals are not important, rather it transforms how we understand their relationship to our activities. In light of this, one may instrumentalize themselves at work by treating themselves or the work they do means to an end, this is a form of ill-being.

A thick evaluative account does not dismiss our goals but assigns them their proper roles. Gill and Thomson (2019) argue that goals are instrumentally valuable in three ways. First, they improve the quality of activities by giving them structure and direction, for example, having a deadline sharpens writing skills. Second, they enable more intrinsically valuable activities, for example, winning a race enables one to compete in more races. Third, the products of our work have intrinsic value for other people, for example, completing a building provides shelter for other people (Gill & Thomson, 2019, Ch. 2, pp. 9-10).

The role of goals shows that a thick evaluative account of work does not reject productivity and achievement. It rejects the claim that goals exhaust the value of work. A well organised work place with clearly defined roles and wages is worthwhile because it enables work activities that they themselves are worthwhile.

To give full context to a thick evaluative account, it is helpful to draw on Thomson, Gill and Goodson`s (2021) framework of what constitutes well-being. They argue that well-being constitutes of four inescapable intertwined dimensions that represent the structural features of living. These dimensions are; the level of activities, the level of awareness, the relational level and the level of self-consciousness. The level of activities are concerned primarily with what someone does and what they go through which includes activities, experiences and processes. The level of awareness is the consciousness of experience and activities. It is the appropriate appreciation of what one is doing and the quality of attention they pay to the world around them. Relational level is concerned with one`s interaction with the world and other people, based on personal actions having an effect on the next person. The level of self-consciousness is about being aware of oneself within their experiences and activities, that is, their intrapersonal relationships (Thomson, Gill & Goodson, 2021, pp. 16-17).

Applying this framework to work raises different questions. A thin account of work asks, “What does work produce and how efficient is it in achieving goals?” Alternatively, a thick evaluative account of work asks, “What is it like to do this work, how does it affect the next person, does the activity contribute to the worker`s flourishing, is the worker appropriately connected to the value of what they do?” These questions are crucial for evaluating whether or not the activities of work are fulfilling the constituents of well-being.

This section has argued that making the distinction between intrinsic and instrumental value and means and ends is crucial in correcting the philosophical error of instrumental rationality.

It is therefore possible to claim that work, though driven by goals, can be intrinsically valuable as an activity. A thick evaluative account grounded in this claim asks if the lived experiences of work are contributing to flourishing by attending to the quality of the activities and how they fit into what constitutes well-being. The next section turns to evaluative self-perception and how work activities shape our identity through dignity consciousness.

Work, Self-perception and Dignity

The previous section demonstrated that work can constitute well-being through the intrinsic value of the lived experience of work. We must understand the relationship between goals and activities to avoid instrumentalizing activities and assigning non-instrumental value to goals. A thick evaluative framework of work allows us to attend to what workers do and who they become in so doing.

Work is diverse, not limited to paid employment but also includes unpaid activities such as gardening. Work can express who we are, serve the betterment of others and give us a sense of being human for example, in the role of a nurse, where caring for others expresses our shared humanity.

A flourishing life requires appropriate kinds of evaluative self-perception. Gill and Thomson (2019) argue that how we perceive ourselves and value ourselves is not only a cause of well-being but it is partly constitutive of well-being itself. This means that self-perception is not merely an external cause of well-being; it is partly constitutive of well-being, because how one inhabits one's own life shapes the quality of that life. One's sense of self is an unavoidable constant companion with an influence on one's life. Reflexive self-consciousness permeates our lives daily in the smallest and tiniest ways in that, we can be aware of our activities, our awareness of them and our awareness of that awareness, building layers that are constantly joined even when self-consciousness is absent. One tends to appreciate what is good about the

activity but if they are preoccupied for example with worrying about their appearance while they walk on the beach, they may fail to appreciate the activity itself. Local self-awareness can either enhance the activity or destroy it. Through awareness of activities and surroundings, a person constructs a phenomenal world they inhabit, built from a complex sense of self gathered from moment to moment. The quality of the local self-perceptions define the quality of one's inhabited phenomenal world (Gill & Thomson, 2019, Ch. 6, pp. 1-2).

Relating this to work, as a worker becomes appropriately aware of their work activities, their environment and their awareness of that awareness, they build a kind of phenomenal world that shapes how they show up for work. If work activities and the work environment do not contribute to their well-being, they construct a diminished phenomenal world impacts the quality of their work experience. If a worker is not appropriately aware of their work activities, they may not appreciate what is good about their activities. The emotional state of the worker can impact their level of appropriate self-awareness, for example, anxiety narrows attention to what makes them anxious, and blocking their experience of what is good about the activity.

Dignity in the work environment is crucial in shaping who we are. Donna Hicks (2018) explored dignity's depth and breadth. In a lecture, one of her students, Davie Floyd, described dignity as something that transcends personal value, given to us as a sacred trust. Our dignity is vulnerable therefore it is our job to protect it in ourselves, in others and in the world around us. Dignity is summed up in the 3Cs: connection to our own dignity (dignity consciousness), connection to the dignity of others and connection to something greater than us, which can include a purpose that gives meaning to our lives (Hicks, 2018, pp. 39-40).

A small organisation fighting for immigrant rights, faced conflict amongst its staff members. The young female recruits complained about inconsistencies in wages and distribution of workload based on gender discrimination. The elements of dignity that were being violated

were identity (treatment based on gender), acknowledgement (many suffered in silence and could not speak out), fairness (workload and salary inconsistencies), safety (some did not feel safe to speak out when their dignity was violated) and inclusion (some felt left out on high profile cases). What was striking was that the organisation worked tirelessly to protect these very elements of dignity for the immigrants they served, while simultaneously violating the dignity of employees within their organisation. The staff had connection to something greater than themselves which was their mission but had lost connection with their own dignity and that of their colleagues (Hicks, 2018, pp. 42-43).

Hicks (2018) introduced the Mandela consciousness: that dignity is in our hands alone and no one can take it from us, we are the guardians of our own dignity. This realisation helps us to locate where we have failed to protect our dignity and that of others. Repairing dignity requires what Hicks called “mirroring” so that the disconnection becomes visible, followed by acknowledging violations, apologizing and committing to behavioural change (Hicks, 2018, pp. 44-45).

This case study supports the essay’s core claim. A thick evaluative account asks whether work promotes dignity consciousness. Does it encourage workers to recognise their inherent value, does it cultivate respect and foster inclusivity and do people feel safe to speak out when their dignity is violated? If dignity is fundamentally about connection, then peace is eroded when those connections are severed. As the case study shows, the erosion of the connection with other people’s dignity, undermined the organisation’s mission while upholding it for the external people. Peace, in this case, is not about managing the severance but about reintegration through the ongoing process of honouring the three connections.

This section has argued that work constitutes well-being not only through the quality of lived work experiences but through self-perception and dignity consciousness. The next section will

draw all the threads together. It will return to the story of Tolstoy and re-imagine what his non-instrumentalized life would look like and the implications of the argument for peace in workplaces.

Conclusion

This essay began with Tolstoy asking the why and what next. His inability to answer, despite possessing everything a thin account would deem worthwhile, exposed the inadequacy of instrumental rationality. The argument has shown that work contributes to well-being not only through outputs but through the non-instrumental value of work activities and the dignified self-perception of the worker. The first requires separating means from instrumental value, recognising that work, although directed by goals has intrinsic value (Gill & Thomson, 2019, Ch. 2, p. 6). The second requires what Hicks (2018) called “dignity consciousness”, the understanding of our inherent worth and our duty to protect it for ourselves and others. A thick account of peace requires the ongoing process of honouring the 3Cs of dignity: connection to one’s dignity, the dignity of others and connection to something greater (Hicks, 2018, pp. 40-41).

Tolstoy’s life is an illustration of instrumentalizing one’s life. If Tolstoy’s life were described through a thick evaluative lens, the question would not be about what he achieved, but whether he understood his inherent worth, whether his lived experiences contributed to his well-being and whether he appreciated what was good about his activities. A thick account of peace in the workplace requires nothing less. It requires the ongoing process of alignment with the connection to our own dignity, the dignity of others and something greater than oneself. Peace is not the management of the disconnection but a daily practice of restoration and honouring these connections. This is the paradigm shift from instrumental rationality to dignity consciousness. It is a turn from asking what work produces to asking how work shapes us.

References

1. Gill, S. and Thomson, G. (2019) *Understanding Well-Being: A Conceptual Framework*.
2. Hick, D. (2018) *Leading with Dignity: How to Create a Culture That Brings Out the Best In People*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
3. Thomson, G., Gill, S. and Goodson, G. (2021). *Happiness, Flourishing and the Good Life: A Transformative Vision for Human Well-Being*. London: Routledge.
4. Tolstoy, L. (1983) *A Confession*. Translated by D. Patterson. New York: WW. Norton.

