

M.A. ON PEACE AND WELL-BEING

Provisional lecture notes for session one

Warning: These lecture notes are not a verbatim transcript of the lecture that will be given on February the 2nd 2026. They are only an aid to the lecture itself. They are also a supplement to the power point presentation.

1. Our main aim over the course of this whole term is to understand well-being as a multidimensional value and to understand its relation to peace.
2. This understanding requires us to separate three kinds of propositions which are not often distinguished. The distinction is important because it helps us to know what we're dealing with and what kind of evidence or support a claim will need or might lack.
 - a) Empirical or factual claims are those which are made true or false by the way the world is. Such claims can be confirmed or disconfirmed by observation or experiment. For example, 'water boils at 100°C at sea level' and 'GDP per capita in Burundi is \$486 as of 2025 according to the IMF'. Typically, empirical claims are contingent. This means they don't have to be true (or false).
 - b) Conceptual claims are those which are made true or false by the semantic meaning of the words involved in the claim. Such claims are not confirmed or disconfirmed by observation alone. They need to be supported by analysis and argumentation. Sometimes these assertions are called analytic or a priori claims. Typically, they define a word or a concept. For instance, a chair is a piece of furniture designed to be sat on or a definition of gross domestic product would count as conceptual claims. Typically such claims are not contingent. They are necessary. If they are false, they are contradictions.
 - c) Evaluative claims provide or articulate reasons for action or choice. For example, 'this is my duty' expresses a moral reason. 'It is good to go to the doctor's regularly' expresses a prudential reason. These are evaluative claims, as are those which say that something is good or better or bad and those which affirm that one ought to do something.

Our main concern is with evaluative claims. Note that the empirical assertion that somebody values something is not an evaluative claim. Clearly, the concept of well-being is in part evaluative.

3. We need to know the criteria that render evaluative claims true or false. The search for such criteria is axiology. Philosophical or conceptual theories of well-being are fundamentally theories of axiology about well-being: what makes well-being good and what makes ill being bad.

Such theories need to specify the relevant fundamental or non-derivative values (or what is valuable non derivatively). This is why a theory of well-being should be primarily a theory of the relevant kinds of non-instrumental value. Well-being must be a non-instrumentally valuable state or condition. The three current main theories concerning well-being are at bottom different axiological views. For example, the desire theory holds that what makes something non-instrumentally valuable is the satisfaction of desire and the pleasure theory affirms that it is pleasure and the absence of pain that is non instrumentally valuable. We will examine these views in more detail later.

The idea that theories of well-being have to specify the relevant kinds of non instrumental value helps us to understand the relationship to peacefulness. If, for the moment, we define negative peace as the absence of violence then we can see that negative peace is only instrumentally valuable. (That doesn't mean it's less valuable; rather it indicates the kind of value it has). In contrast, positive peace should be non-instrumentally valuable and this suggests that positive peace should be conceived as various aspects of well-being.

I'm now going to go through five errors that are often committed in relationship to well-being.

4. First, the key is to understand the difference between instrumentally valuable and non instrumentally valuable. These two are fundamentally different from each other, a bit like the difference between a dog and the shadow of a dog. Insofar as something is instrumentally valuable, it has value for what it facilitates or causes. It does not have value in itself. Think of money. Insofar as something is merely instrumentally valuable, its value is entirely derivative. In sharp contrast, something is non-instrumentally valuable insofar as it has value for what it is itself and not because of what it causes or facilitates. Think of happiness. So 'non instrumentally valuable' is not derivative.

These two ways of being valuable are fundamentally different. When something is non instrumentally valuable, we appreciate its valuable aspects for their own sake, and we may promote the thing in question. In contrast, insofar as something is instrumentally valuable, it is rational to treat its use as a cost that should be minimized, according to the principles of instrumental rationality and simple economics. Insofar as something is instrumentally valuable, it is disposable and replaceable.

The idea of instrumentalizing is important for understanding the relationship between peace and well-being. We instrumentalize something when we treat and regard something that has non-instrumental value as if it merely had instrumental value. The prime example of this is when we treat people as objects or tools to be used. When we do this, we are confusing the two types of value. In this sense, dehumanization, objectification, commodification, exploitation and marginalization are all forms of instrumentalization or of confusing the two types of values: treating a person as a thing. Note that this is something that we can do to ourselves.

5. The second kind of error that we tend to find in the social sciences about well-being is the failure to distinguish adequately between evaluative and empirical claims. When we say the

person's life has well-being or that a policy is conducive to well-being, these claims employ an evaluative concept, namely well-being. These are evaluative because well-being has to be something good.

In most traditions, the social sciences have to be value-neutral in order to be based on empirical claims that can be verified or falsified. In many traditions, this means that the social sciences should try to avoid using evaluative concepts or else should reduce them to empirical ones. For instance in neoclassical economics, the concept of utility is analyzed in terms of people's preferences. Many books on well-being apply a similar approach. It is supposed that the evaluative element of well-being should be reduced to some single empirical concept such as desire or pleasure. For example, in some accounts, it is suggested that people have well-being if they rate some aspects of their lives positively.

The main problem with this kind of theory is that it fails to distinguish between evaluative and empirical claims in a sufficiently clear way. Well-being has to be good! The way people rate different aspects of their lives doesn't have to be good or rather doesn't have to reflect what's good. In short, we cannot reduce what's valuable to what people value or how they rate. It's clearly possible for people to value what's not valuable and likewise it's clearly possible for people to not value what's valuable.

One might think the what people value is on the whole likely to reflect what's valuable without it being the case that we can define what's valuable in terms of how people value.

5. A third kind of error that people often make in the study of well-being is the failure to distinguish between what causes well-being and what well-being actually is or consists in (cause versus constituent). One can see this in comparison with the notion of good health. It is relatively easy for the most part to identify some of the things that are good for our health. Nevertheless, the question 'what is good health?' looks relatively difficult and complicated to answer. However, a little bit of thought shows us that we can't really reply to the first question (what causes good health?) without a presupposed answer to the second question (what is good health?). Likewise with well-being.

Our primary interest is to define well-being or rather to understand well what it actually is (what it consists in). After that, we can begin to ask what causes it or what kinds of psychological and social conditions facilitate it. The latter is an empirical inquiry; the former is conceptual and axiological.

6. A fourth kind of error is the failure to distinguish between measurement and what is measured. As they say, the map is not the terrain. Often for the purposes of the empirical social sciences, we want quantitative data. This means that we need to measure social phenomenon and tendencies, such as family violence and depression. Once measured, we can look for significant correlations that may amount to causal relationships. The basis of these scientific hopes is quantitative data. But social phenomena are not essentially quantitative. They are intentional and qualitative in content. This means that, to measure them, we have to first know

what the social phenomena is that we're trying to measure. Indeed, social phenomena are usually subject to lots of contextual factors, as well as having content or being intentional. What counts as violence in the family relationship may vary from culture to culture, for example. This means that we have to look for ways to operationalize a concept, such as violence between spouses so that the phenomena can be measured. Here's the point: one can't think about how to measure a phenomena without defining the phenomena that one is trying to measure. In short, the phenomena and its measurement are distinct. So are the processes of defining the phenomenon and measuring them.

This may look obvious. However the attempt to give operational definitions for difficult concepts is relatively rife in the social sciences, and this strategy overlooks the fundamental distinction between the measurement and the thing measured. Here's a simple example. It's quite difficult to define intelligence. In the positivist tradition, we can avoid the difficult task of defining intelligence by simply specifying how we are going to measure it. We can then turn this specification into a definition: "intelligence is whatever we measure through our IQ tests."

However, a little bit of thought shows us that this strategy is bankrupt. One cannot define intelligence by how one measures it without a blatant circularity: "Intelligence is the ability to answer an IQ test and an IQ test is a measurement of intelligence." That is a circular statement. The idea that we could measure intelligence in a better way requires the separation of the measurement from the thing measured.

This distinction is very important for well-being studies, which often tends to ignore the idea that we have to understand well what we are trying to measure before we measure it. The question how should we define and understand well-being? is distinct from the question of how we should measure it. In this course, we're primarily interested in the first.

7. There is a fifth kind of error prevalent in well-being studies. As strange as it may sound, the there is inadequate attention to the subjectivity of experience. Such an idea may seem counterintuitive because a lot of the literature focuses on so-called subjective accounts of well-being. Such accounts try to measure well-being in terms of people's responses to questions about whether they subjectively think their lives are satisfactory with respect to some element. They are asked to rate aspects of their lives and this approach is often called subjective. In other words, they try to answer questionnaire questions such as "In general are you happy with the friendships that you have in your life?" You should be able to see that this approach threatens to fail to distinguish the nature of well-being from a way to measure it. However, that's not the point at hand.

The current issue is that even such so-called 'subjective theories' don't take into account what it feels like from the inside to have the kind of experiences one has, and how the phenomenology or felt quality of such experiences is constitutive of well-being. We need to be able to understand well-being from the inner perspective of the person whose well-being it is. Typically, social scientific studies do not do this. For example, they might be interested in correlations between unemployment and depression, but they are not likely to examine the phenomenology what it is

like to be unemployed or depressed under different conditions and examine what is bad about it. Roughly, such a study is called 'phenomenology'. Later we will look at this aspect of well-being and ill being.

8. What do the five errors amount to? In broad terms, their significance as errors amounts to the following: currently, much research tries to mold the complex phenomenon of well-being and ill-being to the methodological demands of the social sciences rather than trying to understand the phenomenon on its own terms. This demand pushes us to simplify the concept of well-being, and thereby deprive it of its radical evaluative force. After all, we cannot employ a conception of well-being that has been shaped to fit the requirements of the social sciences to criticize radically the society we live in.

9. This idea is perhaps best illustrated by the tendency to assimilate concepts such as well-being into the framework of neoclassical economics. What does this mean? Such economics is fundamentally about the most efficient allocation of scarce resources to sets of ends. This traditional definition of economics already shows how this social science is inadequate to understand well-being itself. For example, it assumes that the allocation of resources should be directed towards our goals, whatever those happen to be rather than towards what is non instrumentally valuable. This already embodies the reductive tendencies that we discussed earlier: what is non-instrumentally valuable cannot be reduced to what ends or goals or preferences we have. It also limits all questions about what is valuable and disvaluable in the living of our lives to the efficiency of instrumental means. it's dangerous to think about well-being in purely economic terms mainly because economics is purely about what's instrumentally valuable.

10. With these five preliminary errors in mind, let us quickly review the three standard theories of well-being. Please remember that these theories should provide us with an axiology, an account of what is non-derivatively or fundamentally valuable and why. They should tell us what is non instrumentally valuable in the relevant ways for well-being.

a) **Pleasure theory.** According to the pleasure theory, our lives are have well-being insofar as we experience pleasure and the absence of pain.

Typically, according to such theories, pleasure and the absence of pain are viewed as the only non instrumentally valuable states. Such theories are hedonistic. Pleasure and pain are conceived as simple sensations.

There is a lot to say about why such theories are mistaken and misleading, and some of these are discussed in chapter 4 of the book and in later sessions of this class. For the moment, you should be able to see that such theories are erroneous because they instrumentalize our actions and our lives. Suppose such a hedonistic theory were true. If this were the case, visiting your mother would only be instrumentally valuable relative to the pleasure caused to you and your mother. Given this, a more efficient way to gain such pleasure might be to take a special pill that gives you the feeling of pleasure that you would have had if you had visited your mother. In other

words, you don't need to go through the costs and inconvenience of actually visiting your mum, instead you can simply take the pill. It is more efficient instrumental means to the pleasure. Likewise your mother could take the pill which would give her the sensation and pleasure of having just seen her son or daughter. This taking of the pills would maximize pleasure. It would save all the trouble of actually going to see your mother.

When we contemplate this kind of hypothetical example, we can see that hedonistic theories are inadequate. (A similar kind of counterexample is discussed by Robert Nozick in his experiential machine analogy). The hedonistic theory turns *any* of our activities into something merely instrumentally valuable, that is into a disposable cost that should be minimized in the name of efficiency and rationality. In other words, given such a theory, we cannot think that our activities as such are non instrumentally valuable. Worse, such a theory actually instrumentalizes all of our activities and hence our outer lives, at what we will later call level 1 of well-being. Life doesn't reduce to the pleasure we feel. It matters *non derivatively* what we actually do. In short, well-being cannot be reduced to pleasure.

Later in the course of this term, which will argue that the whole idea of pleasure as a simple and separate sensation is radically mistaken. Pleasure is not a mental thing referred to by a noun. Rather it's more like an adverb that describes the way perform our actions when they are non-instrumentally valuable (i.e. appreciatively).

b) The Desire or preference theory. According to such an account of well-being, person has greater well-being insofar as she has more of her highly ranked preferences or desires satisfied. In short, something is non-instrumentally valuable only insofar as it is more desired or preferred.

You should be able to see that this kind of theory is reductive because it reduces what's valuable about well-being to a single criterion. Normally, desire theorists try to analyze well-being in terms of desires or preferences that are informed (Griffin, *Well being* 1986). However such refinements don't touch or resolve the fundamental problem with desire theory, which is that the axiology is mistaken. Some of life's processes, activities, actions and experiences are non instrumentally valuable. A life that is composed of such activities etc. will be one of more well-being. A desire theory states that this value consists in the activities etc. being desired. But we can see that this is an erroneous axiological approach through two considerations.

A) First, an activity could be non instrumentally valuable for a person even if he or she did not want it. For example, suppose that I could go out for early morning walks with my young son on most days but I don't because I don't want to. Nevertheless we can suppose that if I were to do it would be a wonderful and enjoyable experience. if such cases are possible then the desire theory has the axiology the wrong way round: we desire certain things because we recognize that they are desirable or valuable for us and not the opposite (namely, they are desirable or valuable because we desire them).

B) A second consideration is that we can desire things that are not non-instrumentally valuable for us. For example, we can get addicted to activities that are hardly enjoyable at all (quite apart from the fact that they might also be instrumentally bad for us).

In summary, life is *in part* constituted by processes (such as studying), activities (such as seeing a friend) and experiences (such as going to the beach). A life of well-being or a flourishing life will consist in part of activities that are non instrumentally valuable. We need to understand what comprises this non-instrumentally valuable (or if you like, what its basis or criteria might be). So far, we have reached the preliminary conclusion that pleasure and desire theories give an erroneous understanding of this point.

c) **Aristotelian theories.** In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle provides some of the seeds for a rather different account of flourishing or well-being. Such accounts are typically called objective list theories and sometimes 'perfectionist theories'. Put simply, such theories provide a list of non instrumentally valuable goods, which form the basis of human well-being (these are sometimes conceived of as virtues). You can see this approach at work in the capabilities theory of human development outlined by Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen. The good thing about such theories is that they typically recognize the inadequacies of preference and hedonistic based accounts of well-being.

One serious problem is that such theories typically do not give us empirical criteria that determine what is to count as a non-instrumentally valuable activity or experience. In other words, where does the list come from? Writers such as Philippa Foot appeal to the concept of natural goods: some things are just good for us because of our human nature.

Hopefully, we will have the opportunity to see later in the course that vague appeals to human nature are misplaced. Nevertheless, Foot is right in that the relevant criteria have to be relational to the kind of beings we are (but not relational through the concepts of pleasure and what we desire). We can see this by imagining what a life of flourishing is for a horse or a cat.

In summary, we have given a very quick overview of the three main theories of well-being and flourishing. In the literature, there are lots of different versions of each of these three kinds of theories and also various hybrid theories. I hope that you have enough grasp of the problems with these three theories to see that we need a new or fresh approach, one which (unlike the hedonistic and preference theories) isn't imprisoned by the five errors we discussed earlier (or some of them).

11. In opposition to the traditional theories, we will begin from a different starting place. We will assume that well-being or flourishing are not a single phenomenon but rather a complex structure of different aspects of living. One can see this by considering the following. When we perform an activity, there are four different dimensions to this activity: first, the nature of the activity itself; second, one's awareness of that; third, the various relational features of the activity; and fourth, the consciousness of oneself in performing of the activity. The same four dimensions or aspects apply to living itself:

- **Activities:** What we do and experience (gardening, studying, aging).
- **Awareness:** How we pay attention; being "appropriately appreciative" of life.
- **Relations:** Our interactions with other people and the various aspects of the world.
- **Self-Consciousness:** Our relationship with ourselves.

I propose that there are different kinds of goodness (or ways of being non instrumentally valuable) along each one of these four dimensions or aspects. It is a mistake to expect that the criteria for what counts as non-instrumentally valuable self-consciousness would be the same as the criteria for what counts as a non-instrumentally valuable friendship. Thus, we are not tied to seeking one criterion; rather we are committed to searching for distinct criteria for each of the four aspects or dimensions or levels.

12. Roughly, the text book is organised as follows: there are a couple of introductory chapters and after that, there are four chapters, one each for the four levels of well-being starting with the outer level of activities and finishing with the fourth level of self consciousness. At the end there is a chapter which tries to bring everything together (Chapter 7) and also the final one in which we show that our account of well-being makes the concept adequate for radical social critique, including structural critique. We will be examining peace as a structural concept at the end of the course. However, for this course, we won't start with the level of activities; we will do it the other way around. We will begin with the level of self consciousness and work down to the level of activities.

13. One reason for this is the need to relate well-being and flourishing to peacefulness. To see the relevance well, one needs three ideas.

The first is the distinction between negative peace and positive peace. As we said earlier, negative peace consists in the absence of various types of violence. As such, negative peace is only instrumentally valuable. This means it's valuable for what it brings or causes, such as the absence of harm and the possibility of well-being in all its dimensions. In this way, negative peace is valuable mostly because it facilitates well-being, where well-being is non-instrumentally valuable. This indicates that, in contrast, positive peace itself should not be merely an absence and not merely instrumentally valuable. The best way to characterize positive peace as something non instrumentally valuable is through its relation to well-being, namely as aspects of well-being. That's the first idea we need.

The second is that of instrumentalization. As we saw earlier, we instrumentalize when we treat something that is non-instrumentally valuable as if it were merely instrumentally valuable. For instance, we instrumentalize when we treat people as if they were things or objects, for instance, when we dehumanize and exploit. We treat persons as if they were only valuable as instrumental means to ends, that is as disposable or replaceable, and as if they were costs to be used with maximum efficiency. These ideas assume that persons are valuable non-instrumentally and we shall argue for and explain this thesis in the next class. For now, the main point is that instrumentalization of this kind is a necessary aspect of violent acts and attitudes. It is essential

to violence that it consists in part in instrumentalizing someone. In this way, it is more than causing material, physical and financial harm. Violence usually includes such harms, but it is essential that it consists in someone treating one as less than a person or as an object. (That someone could be oneself!)

The third idea that we need is that not instrumentalizing is a necessary feature of well-being in all four levels and that this is what positive peace consists in. Positive peace is non-instrumentally valuable because it is an aspect of well-being along all the four dimensions of well-being. In each case, it consists of non-instrumentalization and in each of the four dimension what this means and what the relevant criteria are will be different.

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