

# AXIOLOGY

## A. What is axiology?

1. Axiology is the study of *value*, i.e., what makes good things good and bad things bad
2. Recall that the main point is to determine what things are *intrinsically good*, or good for their own sake
3. So far we have seen one very popular axiological theory, namely hedonism

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## B. Arguments Against Hedonism

1. One objection comes from Robert Nozick



**Robert Nozick  
(1938-2002)**

2. Nozick asks:

Q: What would the ideal life be like if hedonism were true?

A: One in which we always experienced pleasure, and never experienced pain.

3. Perhaps this is close to being possible, especially with new advances in virtual reality.
4. Consider an “experience machine” that could give us any experience we desire ... or what it’s really called ...

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## B. Arguments Against Hedonism

# THE ORGASMATRON 5000

**YES, THAT'S RIGHT, THE NEW AND IMPROVED ORGASMATRON 5000 CAN GIVE YOU ANY EXPERIENCE YOU WANT AT ANY TIME! WHILE YOU ARE IN IT, YOU WON'T KNOW YOU ARE IN IT. YOU CAN BE ANYONE. YOU CAN DO ANYTHING. IT WILL SCAN YOUR BRAIN TO MAKE SURE YOU ARE HAPPY. IF YOU START BECOMING UNHAPPY FOR MORE THAN 5 SECONDS, IT WILL CORRECT ITSELF TO BRING YOU PLEASURE ONCE AGAIN. NEVER HAVE A BAD DAY AGAIN -- JUST PLUG IN TO THE ORGASMATRON 5000 TODAY!**

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B. Arguments Against Hedonism

5. Nozick's argument against hedonism

(P1) If hedonism is true, then life plugged in to the Orgasmatron 5000 is better than life not plugged in.

(P2) Life plugged in to the Orgasmatron 5000 is not better than life not plugged in.

(C) Therefore, hedonism is not true.

6. The argument is valid. Is it sound?

a) Perhaps the sort of "pleasure" or "happiness" found in the orgasmatron is not *genuine* pleasure or happiness, or not of the same quality.

b) Perhaps life in the orgasmatron really is better after all.

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B. Arguments Against Hedonism

7. Another argument against Hedonism:

**Ming the Merciless.** The evil space tyrant Ming loves destroying lesser planets and torturing lesser beings.

(P1) If hedonism is true, then the pleasure Ming takes in torturing and killing is intrinsically good.

(P2) The pleasure Ming takes in torturing and killing is not intrinsically good.

(C) Therefore, hedonism is not true.

8. Possible responses:

- Perhaps Ming's pleasure is of a lower quality
- Admit that it is good, but outweighed by all the pain he causes.

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B. Arguments Against Hedonism

9. Other things that might be intrinsically good:

• **knowledge:** consider a happy-go-lucky village fool who does not realize that everyone else is constantly making fun of him; would you switch lives with him?

• **friendship and love:** people seem to deeply value these even if they are not always a source of happiness.

• **life:** consider two possible worlds: one rich in plant life, the other barren: which is better?

• **beauty or artistic experience:** artists these days rarely try to create pleasure in their audience, but instead aim to create a different kind of experience, yet they still think this sort of art is a good thing.

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C. Desire Satisfactionism

1. *Desire satisfactionism* is another widely held view.

**(DS)** An event or state of affairs X is intrinsically good if and only if X satisfies or fulfills an intrinsic desire that some person has.

2. Intrinsic desire: something I desire for its own sake, not as a means towards another end.

a) My desire for a powerpoint projector is NOT intrinsic.

b) Perhaps my desire for the welfare of my unborn daughter is an intrinsic desire.

3. Connection between our desires, values and wants and what is good seems to be a close one.

(Recall Mill's argument for hedonism).

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C. Desire Satisfactionism

4. Lesson of experience machine?

a) While having our desires fulfilled usually brings us pleasure, it's not the pleasure that seems most important to us.

b) We want to *do certain things* and *be a certain way*, not just "feel like" we do things or are certain ways.

c) We want to *actually* accomplish our goals.

d) If my lifelong goal is to become an philosophy professor, it is a good thing if I become one.

- *Having the experience or feeling of being a philosophy professor* doesn't cut it.

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C. Desire Satisfactionism

5. An argument for desire satisfactionism:

**(P1)** For something to be good is the same as for it to be valuable.

**(P2)** If for something to be good is the same as for it to be valuable, then for something to be good is the same as for it to be valued, desired or wanted.

**(P3)** If for something to be good is the same as for it to be valued, desired or wanted, then desire satisfactionism is true.

**(C)** Therefore, desire satisfactionism is true.

The argument is valid. Is it sound?

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C. Desire Satisfactionism

6. Leads to something similar to Plato's Euthyphro problem:

*Are things good because we desire them, or do we desire them because they are good?*

- On **strong** desire satisfactionism, what *makes* something good is that we desire, want or value it. (Hamlet: "There is nothing good nor bad but thinking makes it so.")
- On **weak** desire satisfactionism, things are good or bad for independent reasons from our desires; we desire things because we recognize that they are good.
- Strong desire satisfactionism is more common.

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D. Arguments Against Desire Satisfactionism

1. Problem: does desire satisfactionism makes even the satisfaction of irrational desires good?

2. Consider the case of **jealous Janeane**. Janeane's twin sister Janet is a very good gymnast, and even makes it to the Olympics. Janeane is insanely jealous of her sister, and wants Janet to trip and make a fool of herself at the Olympics. This is exactly what happens.

**(P1)** If desire satisfactionism is true, then Janet's tripping at the Olympics is good.

**(P2)** Janet's tripping at the Olympics is not good.

**(C)** Desire satisfactionism is not true.

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D. Arguments Against Desire Satisfactionism

3. Possible responses:

a) Perhaps Janeane's desire is not an intrinsic desire.

b) Perhaps the good that comes from Janeane's desires is far outweighed by the badness that comes from Janet's (and others) desires not being fulfilled.

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D. Arguments Against Desire Satisfactionism

4. Another potential problem: Is the satisfaction of desires good even when it *doesn't* make anyone happy?

5. One such argument comes from Derek Parfit:



**Derek Parfit**  
(b. 1942)

6. Suppose I inject you with a highly addictive drug and you immediately become addicted. Every morning you wake up desperately desiring more of it. I have plenty and I give you enough for every day of your life. The drug has no additional benefits, harms or side-effects.

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D. Arguments Against Desire Satisfactionism

Parfit's argument:

**(P1)** If desire satisfactionism is true, then by making you have desires for this drug and making it possible for you to fulfill them, I have created a lot of additional good in the world.

**(P2)** It is not the case that by making you have desires for this drug and making it possible for you to fulfill them, I have created a lot of additional good in the world.

**(C)** Therefore, desire satisfactionism is not true.

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D. Arguments Against Desire Satisfactionism

6. One possible response:

- You probably have desires such as not to have been injected, and to be free of any addiction

- These must be taken into account.

7. Other cases of satisfied desires that don't bring happiness:

- desires fulfilled after someone dies

- desires we no longer have once fulfilled

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E. Moore's Non-naturalism

1. Another theory comes from G. E. Moore



G. E. Moore  
(1873-1958)

2. Thought *good* cannot be defined, specified or characterized in terms of any natural phenomena such as desire, pleasure or anything similar

3. Being good is a simple, unanalyzable property that some situations, events or things have but others don't

4. *Usually* pleasure, desire-satisfaction, beauty, friendship, knowledge and life are good, but not always.  
- In any case, *being good* is not the same as *being pleasurable*, even if many things are both.

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E. Moore's Non-naturalism

5. Moore's argument for non-naturalism:

**(P1)** When we know that "X is N", where N is some natural property, it is always still an open question as to whether "X is good" is true.

**(P2)** If when we know that "X is N", where N is some natural property, it is always still an open question as to whether "X is good" is true, then goodness is not a natural property.

**(C)** Therefore, goodness is not a natural property.

6. What Moore means is that it doesn't follow from the *meaning* of "N" that if "X is N" then "X is good".

(Compare "X is a bachelor" and "X is unmarried".)

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E. Moore's Non-naturalism

7. Responses to Moore:

a) Perhaps it is *not* always an open question:

- perhaps if we found the *right* natural property, it would follow from "X is N" that it must be that "X is good".

b) Second premise raises questions from the philosophy of language.

- Perhaps "good" is not synonymous with any word used in the natural and social sciences, BUT

- perhaps nevertheless the property it represents can be a natural one.

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E. Moore's Non-naturalism

**8. An objection against Moorean non-naturalism:**

- a) Non-naturalism has no way of explaining why we should care about good things
- b) Their being good has no direction connection with our feelings or desires.
- c) Why should we seek good things rather than bad things?

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F. Hybrid Axiological Views

- 1. One possibility: consider a view that combines elements from the other views.
- 2. Parfit suggests that something is Good if it has more than one of the following features:
  - (a) it is enjoyable or makes us happy,
  - (b) we desire it for its own sake,
  - (c) it is on an "objective list" of things that we consider to be good, regardless of whether they are enjoyable or make us happy.
- 3. Doesn't give a worked out theory: but think about it more for yourself.

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