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RESEARCH ON WELL-BEING: SOME ADVICE FROM JEREMY BENTHAM

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SUMMARY

Jeremy Bentham was the most illustrious of the utilitarians. This paper shows how his ideas on the measurement of happiness are of relevance to modern research on well-being.

ABSTRACT

Jeremy Bentham provided a comprehensive list of the sources of pleasure and pain, rather in the manner of modern writers on well-being such as Nussbaum. He explicitly used the term well-being and in the course of extensive discussions he covered many of the issues of concern to modern researchers. In particular he stressed the social and other-regarding aspects of well-being and emphasised the importance of "ill-being". Bentham insisted that the measurement of well-being should be firmly based on the concerns and subjective valuations of those directly concerned. Those who wished to superimpose other judgements were dismissed as "ipsedixitists". The paper considers what, if anything, the modern researcher can learn from Bentham.

KEYWORDS

Bentham, Paternalism, Utility, Well-Being

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On the face of it Bentham is the very last person to turn to for such advice. Modern research on well-being[1] likes to look at the rich panoply of human experience rather than utility derived merely from goods and services: it also stresses agency, liberty, human rights, equality, justice and the common interest rather than narrow self-interest. Bentham, in contrast, is held to have emphasised mechanical, calculating, self-interested economic man and to have insisted upon the flawed metric of the "greatest happiness" principle. I do not propose, in this paper to mount a defence of Bentham or of utilitarianism. But I do suggest, that in devising a framework for the analysis and measurement of well-being, Bentham may even now have something useful to say. Whether or not we take his advice is, of course, up to us.

1. WELL-BEING AND ILL-BEING

Bentham defined well-being[2] as the excess of pleasure over pain. Well-being, he thought, was a more suitable term than happiness which was much too upbeat.

> "[happiness] seems not only to lay pain in all its shapes altogether out of the account, but to give it to be understood that whatsoever have been the pleasures that have been experienced, it is in a high and as it were superlative degree that they have been experience"[3]. *Deontology* 1.3.

He also insisted on distinguishing between well-being and ill-being:

> "[the] difference may, if it be on the pleasure side of the account, be termed the net amount of his well-being – or, more shortly, his clear well-being – or simply his well-being; if on the side of pain, net amount of his ill-being – or his net ill-being – or simply his ill-being". *Deontology* 1.3.

Bentham's emphasis on ill-being is very important in the context of destitution. Notice how he starts (see section 2) from the pains immediately associated with the physical body – cold, hunger, pain, disease. Indeed, the human body (often in its detailed workings, *viz.,* the alimentary canal) is central to the pleasure/pain calculus. Utility may be in the mind but Bentham knows very well that its causes are often physical. Reduce these privations and you reduce unhappiness and increase well-being.[4]

Bentham's well-being/ill-being distinction is a salutary one. First it is a reminder that ill-being is probably a characteristic of many people in poor countries: that the removal of the pains associated with ill-being is a priority in improving the "greatest happiness". Secondly it is relevant to the concept of "need". It has to be conceded that the well-being/ill-being distinction is, in a sense, not necessary since ill-being can show up as a low score in some measure of well-being. It is true that the "zero"

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[1] See, for example, Sen (1985) and Nussbaum and Sen (1993).

[2] "Well-being" was a term which Bentham himself used. He was unhappy with "utilitarianism" which he settled for, though reluctantly. "Greatest-happiness-ism" or "felicity-ism" would have been even more awkward. (*Essay on Utilitarianism: Long Version*) in Goldworth (1983).

[3] To be happy it is neither necessary nor sufficient to smile all the time.

[4] However, Bentham believed the balance would usually be positive, if only because net ill-being would induce suicide.

… "Taking the whole of mankind together, on which side of the account does the balance lie, on the well-being or ill-being side? If religion were out of the question, the answer would require scarce a moment's thought; on the side of well-being beyond dispute; of well-being existence itself is a conclusive proof. So small is the quantity of pain necessarily accompanying the termination of existence" (130-131).

score between well-being and ill-being, between pleasure and pain, has to be an arbitrary one and that needs graduate into wants and then desires. But for some components of the happiness function it is useful to think of "basic needs" levels as those such that, below them, well-being gives way to ill-being; for example nutrition or bodily warmth. This will be especially relevant if the happiness function is asymmetric in that utility falls off very rapidly below the basic needs level: Rosen (1999) suggests that "pain and the relief of it counted for far more in human happiness than the simple pursuit of pleasure".

2. MAKE A COMPREHENSIVE LIST

Sooner or later the modern researcher turns to drawing up lists of factors which may or may not affect an individual's well-being. One thinks of Sen's notion of functionings or "beings and doings", fleshed out by Nussbaum's Aristotlean list (1993), or of Doyal and Gough's list of human needs (1991)[5]. Bentham had been there a long time before us and his own lists, agree with them or not, are interesting and possibly instructive.[6, 7]

The first list to be considered here comes from Bentham's *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (chapter 5). Happiness, it will be remembered, depends upon the balance of pleasures and pains of various sorts.

First the pleasures:

> The pleasures of sense: taste or appetites, intoxication, smelling, touching, the ear, the eye, sex, health, novelty.
> The pleasures of wealth: acquisition and possession of enjoyable articles.
> The pleasures of skill (e.g., playing a musical instrument)
> The pleasures of amity (being on good terms with others)
> The pleasures of good name (repute, esteem, honour).
> The pleasures of power (e.g., to command the services of others)
> The pleasures of piety or religion
> The pleasures of benevolence (goodwill, sympathy)
> The pleasures of malevolence
> The pleasures of memory or recollection
> The pleasures of the imagination (contemplation)
> The pleasures of expectation (belief in future pleasures)
> The pleasures of association (e.g., from games)
> The pleasures from relief of pain.

Then the pains:

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[5] For more rent reviews of the now extensive literature see Saith (2001), Alkire (2002) and Clark (2002), ch.3.

[6] I do not wish to exaggerate Bentham's originality or influence as an economist. Thus, Denis O'Brien (1975) is dismissive of the importance of utilitarianism to classical economics. He argues that the pain/pleasure psychology was common eighteenth-century property and that all the utilitarians did was to turn it into a tautology.

[7] It is of interest that his discussion was much appreciated by Alfred Marshall who contrasted the richness of Bentham's analysis of wants and desires (and that of continental writers) with their much narrower treatment by subsequent English economists. (Marshall *Principles of Economics* 8th edition, 1920)

The pains of privation (include unsatisfied desire, disappointment and regret)
The pains of the senses: hunger and thirst, disagreeable tastes, smell, touch, hearing, sight, excessive heat or cold, disease and indisposition, intense exertion of body or mind.
The pains of awkwardness
The pains of enmity
The pains of ill-repute
The pains of piety or religion
The pains of malevolence or ill-will
The pains of the memory
The pains of the imagination
The pains of expectation
The pains of association

Bentham was rather given to making lists and similar ones crop up elsewhere in his work. The most important and detailed alternative statement is to be found in his eight page *Table of the Springs of Action*. (I have suppressed the extensive thesaurus of synonyms and antonyms which Bentham indefatigably provided).

Table of the Springs of Action

Pleasures and pains of the taste – the palate – the alimentary canal – of intoxication. Hunger, need of food, want of food, desire of food, thirst, drought, inanition.
Pleasures and pains of the sexual appetite. Sexual desire.
Pleasures and pains of the senses, collectively considered. Physical want, need exigency.
Pleasures and pains derived from wealth. Possession, fruition, acquisition, affluence, opulence, privation, loss, poverty, indigence.
Pleasures and pains of power, influence, dominion, governance, command, rule, sway. Ambition, aspiringness, of promotion, preferment, advancement… of rising in the world.
Pleasures and pains of curiosity. Curiosity, inquisitiveness, love of novelty, love of experiment, desire for information.
Pleasures and pains of amity, derivable from goodwill, from free services: good opinion, good offices, help, aid, assistance, support, co-operation, vote.
Pleasures and pains of good or bad repute. Desire for goodwill. Fear of shame, disrepute, dishonour, disgrace.
Pleasures and pains of the religious sanction. Religious zeal, fervour, ardour. Fear or love of God.
Pleasures and pains of sympathy. Fellow feeling, good-will, friendship. Domestically, for the political world at large, for the world at large.
Pleasures and pains of antipathy or of ill-will. Dislike, aversion, resentment.
Pains of labour, toil, fatigue. Love of ease. Fear of toil or over exertion.
Pains of the body and of death. Self-preservation, security. Love of life. Fear of pain or death.

These lists are not at all as narrow as a knowledge of only secondary sources on Bentham might have suggested[8, 9]. He, like Adam Smith before him, recognised the importance of being a member of society as well as having material goods. To function in society one must be able to enjoy the pleasures and pains of curiosity, of skill, of good name, of piety, of power, of good, of reputation and of association. Several of these capacities also feature in Nussbaum's list which is hardly surprising

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[8] Something similar is true of Bentham's proposed system of education (1817) which was, of course, utilitarian but not narrowly so. It could provide "a richly stocked and variegated garden of art and science" to nourish the mind and prevent *ennui* in later life.

[9] Indeed Bentham's lists stand up pretty well in comparison with the more modern lists reviewed, for example, in the survey by Alkire (2002).

as both she and Bentham drew ultimately on Aristotle. Sen, too, broadens "functionings"[10] well beyond the standard narrow concerns of economics:

> "(My) approach is based on a view of living as a combination of various 'doings and beings', with quality of life to be assessed in terms of the capability to achieve valuable functionings. Some functionings are very elementary, being adequately nourished, being in good health, etc., and these may be strongly valued by all, for obvious reasons. Others may be more complex, but still widely valued, such as achieving self respect or being socially integrated…" (Sen and Nussbaum 1993).

Bentham's "functionings" were those of the late eighteenth century so we would not expect them to correspond exactly with those that are emphasised today. In some respects his down-to-earth lists are both wider in scope and more relevant to the concerns of poor people than those common in the modern literature on development ethics: for example his inclusion of the pleasures and pains of labour, toil, fatigue, sex, intoxication, and dishonour.

We should also note that Bentham clearly wished his list to include other-regarding[11] as well as self-regarding pleasures and pains. These could be quite wide in scope, covering malevolence as well as benevolence, bad will as well as good. The other-regarding actions of a Benthamite might also enable a fund of goodwill (or ill-will) to be established and drawn upon in the future, rather in the manner of "social capital"[12]. To accumulate social capital might be in an individual's interest.

> "You will be producing a stock of sympathy and good reputation, laid up in the breasts of others, ready upon occasion to be brought into action for your advantage" (278).

The effects of policy might be very different in communities with high and low stocks of goodwill and it would be advisable for the policy-maker to be aware of such feelings.

Bentham held that self-regarding actions would normally dominate. However, self-interest would often be inconsistent with maximising the "greatest happiness". How could the interests of individuals and those of society be harmonised? Partly, of course, by appropriate punishments. But also by the exercise of "virtue" through other-regarding actions (along with prudence and probity)[13].

In the introduction to *Deontology* Bentham outlines his theory of how happiness and virtue may be brought into equivalence. This is by incorporating prudence and benevolence.

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[10] See Crocker 1992, 1995 for useful accounts of the Sen-Nussbaum approach. In particular Crocker (1992) reviews what he calls the commodities, the utility, the basic needs and finally the capabilities approaches for assessing well-being.

[11] So, in as far as he includes other-regarding actions, Bentham includes some aspects of Sen's notion of "agency" as something to be distinguished from well-being (Sen 1992)

[12] This would then, of course, be a matter of enlightened self-interest or what modern writers would call an informed, prudential desire.

[13] Griffin (1986) carefully examines the role of prudence in the life-plans of rational individuals. In his excellent account, desires are regarded as "primitives" which have to be modified by reason and prudence before they are acceptable as a basis for policy. "To my mind the best prospect for a utilitarian account of well-being is to hold on to the over-wide desire account and look for good reasons to rein it in" (20). Lyons (1991), by contrast, offers a "differential interpretation" whereby in politics the interests of the whole community are served whereas in private people serve their own interest (p.52). There is then, of course, no need to marry them up. I am grateful to Ian Gough for a helpful defence of this interpretation.

> "When the happiness of others as well as his own is at stake upon the conduct he is about to pursue, a man's happiness it has already been observed will be the sole ultimate as well as immediate object of his solicitude; that to others, no further than in so far as his own happiness is affected in virtue of the way in which the happiness of others is affected by his conduct. But, wheresoever the happiness of others is affected by the conduct a man pursues, his own happiness it will be shewn will in some way or others be affected by the manner in which theirs is affected by it. On every such occasion, in order to know in which way the act he is about to perform may be most conducive to his own happiness it thence becomes necessary for him to consider and, as far as may be possible, to know in which ways their happiness is likely to be affected by it. *Deontology* (introduction).

It is evident that Bentham has in mind quite a complex reflective process: there should be an *empirical* evaluation of how others are affected which then has to be absorbed into a happiness function. This tension between the greatest happiness of mainly self-interested individuals and of the whole polity has been a perennial difficulty with utilitarianism and has spawned a huge literature – well beyond the scope of the present paper.

3. WHOSE HAPPINESS IS TO COUNT?

> "The community is a fictitious *body*, composed of the individual persons who are considered as it were its *members.* The interest of the community then is what? – the sum of the interests of the several members who compose it" (Bentham 1817 p. 12).

Bentham intended that his "greatest happiness" principle could be applied at various levels, individual, community, state or the whole human race: but it is crucial that the principle always applies to those "whose interest is in question" (1970 p. 12); that the boundaries are specified. Though his principle was devised as a universal one Bentham was, in practice, overwhelmingly concerned with devising legislation and institutions (schools, prisons, parliaments) at the level of the "state". As Williams recognises: "the fathers of utilitarianism thought of it principally as a system of social and political decision, as offering a criterion and basis of judgement for legislators and administrators" (Smart and Williams 1963, p.135). Bentham may therefore be said always to be "parochial" in the sense that it is always the interests of the governed that are relevant (Lyons 1991).

Within the polity, be it large or small, the test of action is whether or not it improves the total happiness of the governed. Various things follow from this.

1. Bentham saw policy-making as open and endogenous within a representative democracy with liberty as its cornerstone (Long 1977). His treatment of "liberty" is rather complex. Certainly, it features in his *Springs of Action* but the love of liberty and of justice are there cited as examples of compound rather than simple pleasures: liberty is desired not for its own sake but for the "power" and "ease"[14] it might bring. For example, Bentham sees the provision of the security which enables people to enjoy their pleasures as an aspect of liberty: the state itself is an arrangement whereby they give up some of their liberty in exchange for security, for excessive liberty ends in anarchy. So people have preferences for liberty, with implied trade-offs. In what sense, therefore, may liberty be said to be a "cornerstone"? Though Bentham did not see liberty as a "priority" (in the manner of Rawls) he did see it as a pre-

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[14] James (1973), in reviewing Long, sees Bentham's view as close to the positive definition of liberty, i.e., the ability to do what one wants to do.

condition for the greatest happiness principle to work. As a tireless campaigner for liberty of the press, he argued powerfully for the "liberty of public association"[15] and for

"the security with which malcontents may communicate their sentiments, conceal their plans, and practise every mode of opposition short of actual revolt, before the executive power can be legally justified in disturbing them" (485).

Bentham claimed that the process of policy-making itself could not work without open discussion.

"Had the debate [on government corruption] been …instituted on the footing of utility, the parties might at length have come to an agreement; or least to visible and explicit issue. – 'I say, that the mischiefs of the measure in question are to such an amount. – I say, not so, but to a less. – I say, benefits of it are only to such an amount. – I say not so, but to a greater" (*Fragment* 1823, 493).

Liberty was, indeed, the cornerstone of Bentham's system but it performed an almost entirely instrumental role. In modern development parlance, policy is best formed in an open democratic framework with minimum corruption: otherwise known as good governance[16].

2. Once the boundary has been drawn, Bentham's principle is very bold and straightforward: each is to count for one and none for more than one. In the calculus of happiness no person (particularly a monarch or an aristocrat) should be given greater importance than another. "Each to count for one" is not merely a slogan:

"The happiness of the worst man of the species forms as large a part of the happiness of the whole species as that of the best man" (278).

And the principle has to hold for women[17] as well as men:

"On the grounds of the greatest happiness principle, the claim of this sex is…at least …as good as that of the other. The happiness and interest of a person of the female sex, constitutes as large a proportion of the universal happiness or interest, as does that of a person of the male sex" (*Constitutional Code* Bowring ix 108).

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[15] That liberty had some sort of priority is indicated by Bentham's view that, though religious belief could be an obstacle to utilitarian analysis, he did not want to abolish it as he favoured freedom of religious expression (Schofield 1999).

[16] Without good governance (or Bentham's institutional liberty) individual might have "well-being freedom" without having what Sen (1992) calls "agency-freedom". Some of Bentham's sources of pleasure or pain certainly imply some agency", for example,
Pleasures and pains of amity, derivable from goodwill, from free services: good opinion, good offices, help, aid, assistance, support, co-operation, vote.
Pleasures and pains of good or bad repute. Desire for goodwill. Fear of shame, disrepute, dishonour, disgrace.
Thus Bentham's system would have no difficulty in distinguishing the two cases put by Sen (1985 p.219) where A pushes B into the river and B is, or is not, drowned.
[17] Ball (1973) argues that Bentham was not a feminist as he was prepared to allow husbands to represent their wives' views. Though a philosophical radical he was, of course, a creature of his time in practice.

3. Bentham himself came to recognise that when the size of the polity is given[18] the greatest happiness of the greatest number, is equivalent simply to the greatest happiness, *provided that all those whose interests are in question are included*. The "greatest number" is then simply a red-herring[19]. This meant that questions of population size were definitely off the agenda[20] and should be left to individuals:

"With regard to increase of population by births, everything may be left to the spontaneous of individuals… Also <u>"would you encourage population, - render men happy, and trust to nature"</u>. Bentham on Population and Government (*Philosophy and Politics* 1995 p.400-401)

Neither was it desirable to regulate internal migration (from rural areas into cities) and external migration. To attempt the latter would, Bentham argued, turn the country into a prison and he was scathingly dismissive of them. On the other hand "deperition" (wasting away) of population would reduce happiness so (low cost) hospitals for the poor etc., were "agenda" rather than "non-agenda". The modern equivalents here would be community clinics and the provision of health workers in developing countries.

4. Bentham insisted that people's own preferences[21] or happiness functions should count. The only criterion was happiness so it was impossible to say that some activities were better or more important than others (notoriously "pushpin is as good as poetry"[22]). Bentham contrasted this view with that the "ipsedixitists" who wished to impose more elevated preferences based upon rights: he attacked such people (e.g., Blackstone) with sarcasm and vitriol. In particular he attacked the concepts of rights and of some sort of highest good (the *summum bonum*) based on deontological principles. Rights, supposed to have been established during some sort of historical "original contract", could only be a fiction as government does not follow naturally from a state of nature (1823).

"According to this, political society, in any sense of it, ought long ago to have been established all the world over" (Bentham, 1823, p.437)

As for the *summum bonum*, it was "consummate nonsense":

"Lie all your life long in your bed, with the rheumatism in your loins, the stone in our bladder, and the gout in both your feet, so long as you are in the habit of virtue, so long the *summum bonum*, be it what it may, is in your hands, and much good may it do you." (138).

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[18] For Bentham's purposes population (of those whose interests are in question) has to be taken as given, since the polity is a construction based upon their consent, as discussed below.

[19] The reason for the italicized condition is that it might be possible to maximize total happiness by excluding some of those "whose interest is in question". Bentham (on the principle that each should count for one) strictly insisted this should never be done. In my own view, this is the most fruitful way of interpreting the "greatest number" part of the utilitarian slogan, rather than trying to have it make a statement about population size.

[20] Which enabled Bentham to sidestep Parfitt's "repugnant conclusion" that utility could be maximized by having a large population at near subsistence level.

[21] Strictly these have to be "primitives" or crude, unlaundered, desires. But the happiness from a pleasure depended partly on its expected duration so people's desires could be informed, prudential desires. And they could be changed by education. However, when the chips were down, the primitives had to count.

[22] It is relatively easy to make an argument that poetry gives greater utility than pushpin to the enlightened utilitarian. Pub poetry combines the two, of course.

The ipsedixitist, according to Bentham, does not believe in the general happiness principle but instead pursues sentiment, "duty", "justice" or some such goal of his own. Unlike utilitarians such people have no rational basis for making policy:

"in a contest between two hot-blooded [ipsedixitists] darkness dashed with coruscations is the result. Each rummages poetry and rhetoric for *strong things.* Victory is his who has let fly the stronger" (*Springs of Action.* p.35).

The strong implication of Bentham's view is that individual preferences, like them or not, have to be taken neat. The downside of this is that we may have to accept preferences that we do not very much like. The upside is that outsiders should not impose their own preferences, whether they be NGOs, the World Bank or even distinguished academics. It hardly needs to be said that Bentham's view of rights was very much at variance with modern development ethics.

4. A WELL-BEING METRIC

For Bentham the metric for well-being was, in principle, quite straightforward. The individual feels pleasures and pains of the sort listed in section one. These arise from basic activities like eating, being warm and having sex, through health to ones esteem and position in society. Such pleasures may be selfish, unselfish or malevolent. The important thing is that they are the individual's own preferences, not those of anyone else. Famously, pleasures are greater or less according to their intensity, duration, certainty, propinquity (also fecundity and purity). Each individual's well-being may, in principle, then be expressed cardinally as a number.

To a degree, recent approaches to measuring individual happiness follow in Bentham's footsteps. It is well known that twentieth-century economics found that it had no need of a cardinal measure[23] (except in a technical sense when dealing with uncertainty). It was sufficient to *order* bundles of goods and services in terms of preference. But economists are now increasingly attempting to attach cardinal scores to happiness or unhappiness.[24] Much of this research concentrates on what Bentham would have called "ill-being" (brought about by unemployment, divorce or other major "life events"). Researchers have also devised 'quality of life' measures to assess an individual's health state or perceptions about health and some have attempted to relate these to subjective well-being (Camfield and Skevington, 2003). Often such scales involve a more or less arbitrary aggregation of the different components. They are Benthamite in spirit, however, as they are based on the subjective perceptions of individuals.

It is important to remember that, since it was based on observation, Bentham thought of his research programme as "scientific", comparing himself to Bacon.

"For success, the utilitarian depends on correctness, especially on the estimate of pleasure or pain resulting from every action… It is in his interest that correctness should be generally

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[23] On the question of measurement Bentham had noticed that where a person was indifferent between carrying out or not carrying out a transaction involving money the value of the non-monetary component could be measured by the relevant amount of money. Bentham seemed to use totals, not margins here but his method is very suggestive of Marshall's (Bentham Archive, UC xxvii).
[24] Clark and Oswald (1994) used a cardinal scale for unhappiness in the UK (including inability to sleep, poor self-worth and so on) and related it to unemployment. Winkleman (1998) used panel date from Germany to build an index of unhappiness and again to investigate the impact of unemployment. Much of this growing literature is surveyed in Frey and Stutzer (2002). For a useful survey of the whole field see Frey and Stutzer (2002).

applied to every subject and that logical operations should be reached to perfection" (1817, p. 51)[25]

Modern writers, though not aiming for "perfection", attempt to do something similar. Thus, for Sen, the exercise:

> "must take the form of valuing the functioning vectors reflecting the 'doings' and 'beings'." (Sen 1985b p. 28).[26]

Bentham did not actually do any of this, of course. He did not have a technique for doing so and in any case was much too busy with his prodigious writing and his pursuit of numerous projects. But he did make a suggestion which is interesting in view of modern multivariate analysis and the use of zero-one variables. Happiness functions will vary across individuals. However, he distinguishes, in chapter VI of *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation*, between the causes of pleasure and pain (as outlined in the lists above) and the *circumstances affecting sensibility.* Bentham, ever exhaustive, cites thirty-two such circumstances[27]. Many of them are what we would now expect to see in a list of "household characteristics": for example, religion, political attitude ("radical frame of mind"), sex, age, rank, education, lineage (social class).   Bentham, one feels, would have loved to have been able to get his hands on the data sets and computers available to modern researchers:

> "The subject is so difficult, and so new, that I think I shall have not ill succeeded, if, without pretending to exhaust it, I shall have been able to mark out the principal points of view, and to put the matter in such a method as may facilitate the researches of happier enquirers" (53).

However, for many purposes it is not necessary, as Bentham had thought, to aggregate all the aspects of an individual's well-being into a single number or to aggregate across all individuals. Various partial orderings may be acceptable instead[28].

How does the relief of poverty or the reduction of inequality affect well-being? Bentham's definition of poverty is not helpful here as he classified the population (for this purpose) only into those who were destitute, those who lived by their labour and those who did not need to work. All of those who had to live by their labour were defined as being in poverty. Bentham had no difficulty with the notion that one should provide help for the destitute (provided it was done economically). Their pain could be reduced with little, or even no, loss of aggregate pleasure. On the other hand he was strongly against poverty reduction (on his definition): *a fortiori* he would be against reductions in inequality. This might be thought to sit oddly with diminishing marginal utility which Bentham understood, albeit in a non-technical fashion. He recognised that in principle, aggregate utility could be increased by transferring income from rich to poor.

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[25] As far as I know Bentham made no attempt to carry out any such measurements. He was much too busy proselytizing across the whole field of legislation!

[26] In commenting on the difficulty of getting all the information that the utilitarian needs Sen allows that "other moral approaches are constrained by the availability of information" (Sen 1985, p. 174).

[27] The complete list of such circumstances is:
Health, strength, hardiness, bodily imperfection, quantity and quality of knowledge, strength of intellectual powers, firmness of mind, steadiness of mind, bent of inclination, moral sensibility, moral biases, religious sensibility, religious biases, sympathetic sensibility, sympathetic biases, antipathetic sensibility, antipathetic biases, insanity, habitual occupations, pecuniary circumstances, connexions in the way of sympathy, connections in the way of antipathy, radical frame of body, radical frame of mind, sex, age, rank, education, climate, lineage, government, religious profession.

[28] A substantial literature has developed around the partial ordering of functionings and/or capabilities (see, for example, Saith 2001).

"Particles of wealth at the disposition of the legislator, say 10,000; - happiness of the most wealthy to that of the least wealthy, say….as 2 to 1; by giving to each one of 10,000 a particle of wealth, the legislator will produce 5,000 times the happiness he would produce giving the 10,000 particles to one person" (Goldworth 1979 pp.8-9)

However, the qualification "at the disposition of the legislator" here is an important one for Bentham believed that if positive redistribution was attempted there would be strong second order effects on labour supply (the "extinction" of labour), more than offsetting any gain in happiness due to inequality reduction. The stances taken by Bentham and by "modern" writers on inequality strikingly capture a fundamental difference in outlook. In Bentham's system a reduction in inequality would only increase happiness if a substantial number of the non-poor had strong other-regarding sympathies[29]. If people had little or no aversion to inequality, *perceived* inequality would in effect be near zero (Sen 1973). Bentham would have argued that to impose a policy of redistribution in such a society would be the act of an ipsedixitist.

5. BENTHAM'S UTILITARIANISM AND WELL-BEING

For the purposes of this section I take Sen (1985b, 1987) as a source for modern criticisms of the utilitarian interpretation of well-being[30]. We may then see how far these criticisms apply to Bentham[31]

One criticism is that of '*welfarism',* "requiring that the goodness of a state of affairs be a function only of the utility information regarding that state" (Sen 1987 p. 39). This is a fair statement of Bentham's position. Two comments should be made, however. The first is that the criticism becomes less damming the more that is included in the well-being function[32]. Bentham casts his net pretty widely and certainly includes "other-regarding" pleasures, social esteem and various "beings and doings". Nevertheless, it is true that these wider factors have to be processed through the well-being function. The second comment is that *as a starting point* welfarism could be quite useful to a researcher in deciding what to include in well-being. It is relevant to know what people's real concerns are: these may or may not coincide with what the researcher believes they are or ought to be (Clark 2002).

A second criticism is that of *'sum ranking'*: "requiring that utility information regarding any state be assessed by looking only at the sum-total of all the utilities in that state" (*ibid*). Quite right, says Bentham. To take anything else into account is to be an "ipsedixitist"[33]. But it should not be lost sight of that Bentham gave some sort of priority to liberty on instrumental grounds, in that it was a necessary condition for the greatest happiness apparatus to be able to work.

A third criticism is that of '*consequentialism'*: "requiring that every choice… be ultimately determined by the goodness of the consequent state of affairs" (*ibid*). This is a criticism that Bentham would have been delighted to accept. Yes, indeed, he would argue. Policies and laws should be judged entirely by their consequences and not at all by their intentions. Sen (2000) has more recently moderated this

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[29] There would then be the possibility of Pareto-optimal redistribution (Collard 1978, ch. 11).
[30] Broome (1991) is critical of what he takes to be Sen's conflation (for utilitarians) of utility with "the good" rather than restricting it to preferences. Bentham, of course, also conflated the two but preferred to use the language of happiness or well-being.
[31] There is no mention of Bentham in Nussbaum and Sen (1993) and the references in Sen (1982,1985b) are perfunctory. However, there is a useful brief discussion of Bentham on rights in Sen (1987 p. 48).
[32] This also modifies the related criticism that utility does not capture the whole of well-being.
[33] The same would apply to Sen's related point that well-being is not the only thing that is valuable.

particular criticism. He objects to consequentialism but not to "consequential evaluation" which should, of course, be done.

Finally it has been a longstanding criticism of utilitarianism that people who are less efficient utility-generating machines (e.g., those with disabilities) will, in effect, be discriminated against (Sen 1982 p.357). It is not clear that this would be so in Bentham's system as "below-needs" levels of provision would generate high ill-being. Thus to redistribute income to people with special needs could well increase Bentham's over-all index of well-being[34].

6. CONCLUSIONS

Bentham's advice to the modern researcher on well-being may be divided into the useful (or salutary) and the not-so-useful (or downright wrong). Let us start with the not-so-useful, i.e., technical aggregation. Although Bentham had interesting things to say about this, modern researchers know (following Arrow 1951) that it is impossible to construct a social ordering from individual orderings without violating at least one important and desirable condition. Any aggregation metric has to some degree to be arbitrary[35].

The more positive ways in which Bentham's advice (much of it outlined above) might be useful in thinking about modern research on well-being may be summarised as:

1. Define the boundaries of the polity, the people whose interest is in question: the village, the country, etc.

2. Count "each for one and none for more than one": this means everyone, including people with disabilities, youngest daughters or whatever.

3. Include all the elements of well-being that people themselves think to be important, not forgetting ill-being: this to be established by observation and by "bottom-up" information[36].

4. Measure, on a cardinal scale, how their subjective well-being is related to these elements: this has to some degree to be arbitrary as in composite measures of "satisfaction" or "unhappiness".

5. Show statistically how these subjective scales are affected by the "causes" or elements of pleasure and by individual or household characteristics.

6. Judge policies by their predicted effect on the chosen measure of well-being.

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[34] Bentham explicitly discusses "bodily imperfection" as a factor affecting sensibility. "By bodily imperfection may be understood that condition which a person is in, who either stands distinguished by any remarkable deformity, or wants any parts or faculties, which the ordinary run of persons of the same sex and age are furnished with: who, for instance, has a hare lip, is deaf, or has lost a hand. This circumstance, like that of ill-health, tends in general to diminish more or less the effect of any pleasurable circumstance, *and to increase that of any afflictive one*" *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation,* p.55 (my italics). Sen also allows for this possibility but stresses that it cannot be relied upon.

[35] Thus a typical version of the Human Development Indicator (HDI) takes the log of mean income per head, life expectancy and adult literacy, all with arbitrarily equal weights. My own view is that Bentham would have found "arbitrary" weighting acceptable if it led to a useable well-being metric.

[36] Clark (2003) found that people in his South African survey put a strong emphasis on practical survival, on mental functioning and on recreation.

7. Argue and debate policies and measurements in an open society in the context of "good governance"[37].

8. Beware of the ipsedixitists: don't allow a few people (even important people) to dictate what is to be included or excluded.

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[37] Where there is bad governance the government cannot be expected to be maximizing the "greatest happiness": but when outsiders supply aid directly (say, through NGOs) it is important that they try to increase the "well-being" of those affected rather than acting as what Bentham would call ipsedixitists.

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