

## Chapter 10

Darwin and Differential Capacity for Happiness:

From Cardinal to Ordinal Utility Theory

sympathies can become more and more acute, only as fast as the amount of human misery to be sympathized with becomes less and less; and while this diminution of human misery to be sympathized with, itself must be due in part to the increase of sympathy which prompts actions to mitigate it, it must be due in the main to the decrease of the pressure of population upon the means of subsistence. While the struggle for existence among men has to be carried on with an intensity like that which now exists, the quantity of suffering to be borne by the majority must remain great. This struggle for existence must continue to be thus intense so long as the rate of multiplication continues greatly in excess of the rate of mortality. Only in proportion as the production of new individuals ceases to go on so greatly in excess of the disappearance of individuals by death, can there be a diminution of the pressure upon the means of subsistence, and a diminution of the strain and the accompanying pains that arise more or less to all, and in a greater degree to the inferior.

***Spencer Principles of Ethics***

## 10.1: Lionel Robbins Remembers

Just six years after his *Essay on the Nature and Significance of Economic Science* created a stir in economics, with its query about the scientific status of interpersonal utility comparisons (Robbins 1932, pp. 136-40), Lionel Robbins remembered how he came to be a “provisional” utilitarian:

My own attitude to problems of political action has always been one of what I might call provisional utilitarianism. ... I have always felt that, as a first approximation in handling questions relating to the lives and actions of large masses of people, the approach which counts each man as one, and, on that assumption, asks which way lies the greatest happiness, is less likely to lead one astray than any of the absolute systems. I do not believe, and I never have believed, that in fact men are necessarily equal or should always be judged as such. But I do believe that, in most cases, political calculations which do not treat them *as if* they were equal are morally revolting. (1938, p. 635)

A. C. Pigou’s utilitarian analysis, involving “the delicate balancing of gain and loss”, was attractive:<sup>1</sup>

It follows, therefore, that when I came to the study of economics, I had the strongest bias in favour of a utilitarian analysis. The delicate balancing of gain and loss through intricate repercussions of policy which I found in such works as the *Economics of Welfare*, fascinated me; and I was powerfully attracted by the proposition, urged so forcefully by Edwin Cannan and others, that recent developments of the theory of value could be invoked to demonstrate the desirability of the mitigation of inequality. When I look back on that frame of mind, I find it easy to understand the belief of Bentham and his followers that they had found the open sesame to problems of social policy (1938, pp. 635-36)

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<sup>1</sup>A. C. Pigou was Alfred Marshall’s successor at Cambridge. Pigou’s views were selected by J. M. Keynes in the *General Theory* to speak for the classical school itself. Robbins (1971) tells us that of all the London School economists only F. A. Hayek was close to Pigou and that because of their shared mountain climbing skills! Pigou was perhaps the only economist of great stature without an interest in the history of economics.

Then, doubts set in about the feasibility of such a utilitarian calculus:

But I began to feel that there were profound difficulties in a complete fusion between what Edgeworth called the economic and the hedonistic calculus. I am not clear how these doubts first suggested themselves; but I well remember how they were brought to a head by my reading somewhere—I think in the works of Sir Henry Maine—the story of how an Indian official had attempted to explain to a high-caste Brahmin the sanctions of the Benthamite system. “But that,” said the Brahmin, “cannot possibly be right. “I am ten times as capable of happiness as that untouchable over there.” I had no sympathy with the Brahmin. But I could not escape the conviction that, if I chose to regard men as equally capable of satisfaction and he to regard them as differing according to a hierarchical schedule, the difference between us was not one which could be resolved by the same methods of demonstration as were available in other fields of social judgment. (1938, p. 636)<sup>2</sup>

In this chapter, we provide the context for Robbins’ memory of the debate over the transition from cardinal to ordinal utility. In so doing, we link the debate to the transition from egalitarianism to hierarchy that has been the over arching theme of this book, and to post-Darwinian accounts of variations in the capacity for happiness. We begin by considering the egalitarian utilitarianism of J. S. Mill and Herbert Spencer in which everyone was supposed to count as one. That is their phrase. Second, we compare Spencer’s utilitarian goal with Darwin’s goal of the “general good.” Here, we suggest that Spencer’s goal was egalitarian, while that of Darwin entailed biological perfection or hierarchy. We then follow Robbins’ suggestion and consider Edgeworth’s hedonic calculus in which the notion of hierarchy enters economics. For Edgeworth, agents have

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<sup>2</sup>Robbins appreciated Smith’s egalitarianism: “Adam Smith, that discredited *laissez-faire* economist, with his insistence on the original similarity of porters and philosophers ...” Robbins (1928, p. 401). Robbins returns to this theme on occasion, e.g., Robbins (1963, pp. 74-5)

differential capacities for happiness. That is *his* phrase, and he tells us that it came to him through Darwin. Throughout, we consider normative aspects of Darwin's work, in particular Darwin's open and sustained challenge to the early utilitarianism of Mill and Spencer.<sup>3</sup>

Darwin's alternative to the greatest happiness, the "general good", distinguished the *happiness* of individuals from their *perfection*. Post-Darwin, individuals might plausibly be able to judge their happiness, but they are presumed to be less able to judge (still less to effect) their perfection.<sup>4</sup> Supposing the scientist, by contrast, *is* able to evaluate such perfection as well as how to achieve it, the "general good" provides the means to judge social states. Such a notion of "general good" makes it clear that Darwin's conception of natural selection was normative:<sup>5</sup> a social state with more perfect people would be judged

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<sup>3</sup>"Again and again the statement has been made that 'Darwin was no philosopher,' .... In fact, Darwin was keenly interested in philosophy and, as we have seen, attempted to follow in his own writings the best advice of the philosophers of science of his day. Admittedly, he never published an essay or volume explicitly devoted to an exposition of his philosophical ideas, but in his scientific works he systematically demolished one after the other of the basic philosophical concepts of his time and replaced them with revolutionary new concepts." Mayr (1991, p. 50).

<sup>4</sup>"Much in man's conceptual framework is based on the thinking of pre-science or pre-biological science. Terms like 'progress,' 'perfection,' 'equality,' 'rights of the individual,' etc. were coined and conceptually shaped when everybody still believed in *scala naturae*, in the concept of a *tabula rasa*, and in a biological (=genetic) identity of all individuals. It is sometimes a traumatic experience to try to reconcile ethical and political principles that have become dear to our hearts with the realities of scientific advances. In our Western world we judge medical and technological advances strictly on the basis of whether or not they are good for the individual. We do not ask whether they are good for the gene pool or for the species." Mayr (1969, p 201).

<sup>5</sup>Richards (1987, pp. 234-41) discusses the foundational aspects of Darwin and Mill's views without linking these differences to attacks on the classical economists' egalitarian supposition of equal capacity.

superior to one with less.<sup>6</sup>

The contrast between the early utilitarianism of Mill and Spencer and the post-Darwinian pursuit of the “general good” comes into play especially when we consider what to do with imperfect people. Should the less-than-perfect be replaced by more perfect people, or do they – as in Spencer’s account – count equally with all others? This question was central to F. Y. Edgeworth’s fusion of utilitarianism with biology. Edgeworth held that biological fitness mapped to the capacity for pleasure: as people were biologically superior, they possessed a greater capacity for pleasure. He considered the extreme case of agents with such low capacity for pleasure that they have zero or negative total happiness. Their pleasure from consuming goods is offset totally, perhaps more than offset, by their pain at producing goods. This case is central to Edgeworth’s eugenic proposals for racial betterment. If such low pleasure capacity people were replaced by people with a greater capacity for pleasure, social utility will increase. While no one at the time

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<sup>6</sup>Debate over whether Darwin’s concept of evolution progresses toward some goal has focused on the *Origin of Species*. Ospovat (1981, p. 228) writes: “If Darwin’s nineteenth-century readers generally assumed that he, like Spencer (or Chambers), was a progressionist, it is easy to understand why. He was. ... Without ceasing to be a theory of adaptation, natural selection became also a theory of development.” Richards (1992, 176-77) debates Stephen Gould and Ernst Mayr’s random walk reading of Darwin. (See also Ruse 1996.) The goal-directed aspect of evolution is clearer in Darwin’s later writings than the earlier ones. Ruse (1999, p. 332): “Of course, we have long known that ‘Social Darwinism’ played this ideological role, and I discuss it as such in my book. But historians have had a tendency – a tendency which I exemplify – to treat the socio-political system as something aside from the true evolutionary science, something a bit disreputable and down market. What we now realize is that the science itself and the ideology were never that far apart, even in the minds of the most respectable and influential of post-*Origin* evolutionists.” Ruse conjectures that popular evolution was goal-directed to explain the increasingly “progressive” *Origin* over the editions: “*Descent of Man*, published some twelve years later, is a far more popular-oriented book than the *Origin of Species*.” Ruse (1999, p. 333).

suggested that *actual* people be replaced, there *was* considerable public discussion of proposals to give people greater or less discretion over the decision to reproduce.<sup>7</sup>

Our argument has four parts. First, we suggest that Robbins' criticism of interpersonal utility comparisons was part and parcel of the earlier debate over the capacity for happiness. Second, we contrast the utilitarianism of Spencer with the "general good" of Darwin. We show, third, that Edgeworth reconciled utilitarianism with Darwinian natural selection by arguing that biological superiority mapped to greater capacity for happiness. Finally, we demonstrate that Pareto optimality blocks Edgeworth's eugenic proposals.

## 10.2: Early Utilitarianism and Capacity for Happiness

We begin with Spencer's 1851 description, in dialogue form, of the utilitarian theorist (the "plebian") in operation. Since everyone possesses an equal capacity for pleasure, Spencer concluded with the utilitarian commonplace, "everyone to count for one" and social utility is then measured in terms of the majority.<sup>8</sup> The calculus of social

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<sup>7</sup>We have considered eugenic debates over immigration – the mix of existing people – above, Chapters 4 and 5.

<sup>8</sup>Robbins' older colleague, Graham Wallas, made this point in his *Life of Francis Place*: "They [Bentham and James Mill] believed themselves to have found a common-sense philosophy, by which ordinary selfish men could be convinced that the interests of each invariably coincided with the interests, if not of all, at any rate, of the majority. ... Every man, therefore, if he were reasonably well educated in his youth, would throughout the rest of his life aim at 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number' ..." Wallas (1898, pp. 89-90). "The other great inspiration of those days came from Graham Wallas." (Robbins 1971, p. 86) We provided the context for Wallas' majoritarian reading of James Mill in Chapter 9.

welfare requires only that the utilitarian theorist *count* the number of people affected by the policy in question:

“And so you think,” says the patrician, “that the object of our rule should be ‘the greatest happiness to the greatest number.’”

“Such is our opinion,” answers the petitioning plebian.

“Well now, let us see what your principle involves. Suppose men to be, as they very commonly are, at variance in their desires on some given point; and suppose that those forming the larger party will receive a certain amount of happiness each, from the adoption of one course, whilst those forming the smaller party will receive the same amount of happiness each, from the adoption of one course, whilst those forming the smaller party will receive the same amount of happiness each, from the adoption of the opposite course: then if ‘greatest happiness’ is to be our guide, it must follow, must it not, that the larger party ought to have their way?”

“Certainly.”

“That is to say, if you—the people, are a hundred, whilst we are ninety-nine, your happiness must be preferred, should our wishes clash, and should the individual amounts of gratification at stake on the two sides be equal.”

“Exactly; our axiom involves that.”

“So then it seems to us, that as, in such a case, you decide between the two parties by numerical majority, you assume that the happiness of a member of the one party, is equally important with that of a member of the other.”

“Of course.”

“Wherefore, if reduced to its simplest form, your doctrine turns out to be the assertion, that all men have equal claims to happiness; or, applying it personally—that you should have as good a right to happiness as I have.”

“No doubt I have.” (Spencer 1851, p. 22)

Spencer’s conclusion that utilitarianism involved a simple counting of affected persons drew the later criticism of Edgeworth, who compared the rough and ready policy calculations in the *Data of Ethics* with the delicate calculations required by the utilitarian scientist. The scientist must do more than simply count to determine who was in the



majority; policy evaluation required the integration of utility functions:<sup>9</sup>

Mr. Spencer has 'tried' the Utilitarianism of Mr. Sidgwick ('Data of Ethics'), and condemned it; but had the procedure been according to the forms of quantitative science the verdict might have been different. 'Everyone to count for one' is objected to Utilitarianism, but this equation as interpreted by Mr. Spencer does not enter into Mr. Sidgwick's definition of the Utilitarian End, greatest possible product of number  $\times$  average happiness, the definition symbolized above. Equality of distinction is no *proprium* of this definition; *au contraire*. Not 'everybody to count for one,' but 'every just perceivable increment of pleasure to count for one,' or some such definition of the pleasure unit, is the utilitarian principle of distribution. (Edgeworth 1881, p. 122).

Spencer held that all count equally in the calculus of welfare. More than this, in their own calculus individuals were able to recognize (and count equally) others affected by their actions. Following Adam Smith, Spencer argued that individuals see themselves as connected by sympathy, and that sympathy is the source of moral obligation. Indeed, the fullest evolutionary discussion of sympathy begins with the work of Spencer. Relying explicitly on Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Spencer argued that sympathy is the foundation for our perception that others possess rights, and it consequently forms the basis for moral action:

Seeing, however, that this instinct of personal rights is a purely selfish instinct, leading each man to assert and defend his own liberty of action, there remains the question – Whence comes our perception of the rights of others?

The way to a solution of this difficulty has been opened by Adam Smith in

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<sup>9</sup>The classical economic utilitarians counted people helped and harmed; they did not weight helps and harms (see Chapter 9). This suggests the norm employed is akin to the median well-being in which one simply counts persons equally affected by policy. Economists today use the mean for utilitarian welfare evaluation as a proxy for efficiency. How did we go from one to the other, apparently without a discussion? Edgeworth's *Mathematical Psychics* played a decisive role in the transition. For Edgeworth and the economists who followed him, all normative questions were reduced to average happiness.

his “Theory of Moral Sentiments.” It is the aim of that work to show that the proper regulation of our conduct to one another, is secured by means of a faculty whose function it is to excite in each being the emotions displayed in surrounding ones ... the faculty, in short, which we commonly call Sympathy. (1851, p. 96)

For Spencer (as for Smith), justice and beneficence are rooted in sympathy (1851, p. 98).<sup>10</sup>

Although Spencer and Mill disagreed on the content of utilitarianism as an intellectual enterprise,<sup>11</sup> they fully agreed that everyone counts as one and both insisted that rights are established through the device of sympathy. Mill fully agreed with Spencer on the importance of sympathy as the mechanism by which people are connected and thus individual rights are established. To explain justice in *Utilitarianism*, Mill appealed to an extended sense of sympathy (Mill 1861, p. 248; quoted above, Chapter 7).<sup>12</sup> As noted

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<sup>10</sup>Edgeworth (1881) discusses sympathy in connection with Spencer’s later *Data of Ethics* and focuses on the impact of sympathy on the range of contract (see Fontaine 1997), but he drops the consideration of sympathy from his analysis of social utility.

<sup>11</sup>Upon reading *Utilitarianism*, Spencer explained his views in a letter to Mill: “The note in question greatly startled me by implicitly classing me with the Anti-utilitarians. I have never regarded myself as an Anti-utilitarian. My dissent from the doctrine of Utility as commonly understood, concerns not the object to be reached by men, but the method of reaching it. While I admit that happiness is the ultimate end to be contemplated, I do not admit that it should be the proximate end. The Expendiency-Philosophy having concluded that happiness is the thing to be achieved, assumes that morality has no other business than empirically to generalize the results of conduct, and to supply for the guidance of conduct nothing more than its empirical generalizations.

“But the view for which I contend is ... good and bad results cannot be accidental, but must be necessary consequences of the constitution of things; and I conceive it to be the business of moral science to deduce, from the laws of life and the conditions of existence, what kinds of action necessarily tend to produce happiness, and what kinds to produce unhappiness.” Spencer (1904, 1:88).

This letter is quoted by Darwin (1888, p. 125) (1871 1:101-2) “Our great philosopher, Herbert Spencer, has recently explained his views on the moral sense. He says, ‘I believe that the experiences of utility organised and consolidated through all past generations of the human race, have been producing corresponding modifications ...’ Darwin seems not to have noticed Mill’s response although he quotes the 1864 printing *Utilitarianism* (Darwin, 1888, p. 99 note 5) (1871, 1:71, note 5).

<sup>12</sup>As noted above, Mill envisaged a process by which individuals come to sympathize with a widened set of people. See Mill 1861, p. 233, quoted above, Chapter 9.

above, also, sympathy forms the basis of the early utilitarian identification of the Greatest Happiness Principle with the Golden Rule of Christianity.<sup>13</sup>

In the 1863 printing of *Utilitarianism*, Mill carefully summarized Spencer's objections to having been classified as an anti-utilitarian. Mill changed the wording to clarify that the argument was about anterior principles instead of whether Spencer was a utilitarian or not:

This implication, in the first principle of the utilitarian scheme, of perfect impartiality between persons, is regarded by Mr. Herbert Spencer (in his *Social Statics* ...) as a disproof of the pretensions of utility to be a sufficient guide to right; since (he says) the principle of utility presupposes the anterior principle, that everybody has an equal right to happiness. It may be more correctly described as supposing that equal amounts of happiness are equally desirable, whether felt by the same or by different persons. This, however, is not a presupposition; nor a premise needful to support the principle of utility, but the very principle itself; ...<sup>14</sup>

Soon after this, early eugenicists systematically attacked the Classical economists' idea of sympathy as they sought to establish that sympathy, unchecked, interfered with the "salutary effects" of the law of natural selection (above, Chapter 4).

### 10.3: Spencer vs Darwin

If our case above concerning sympathy in Spencer is correct, it would seem that he

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<sup>13</sup>This identification is noted in Spencer (1893, 1:252-53). The commonality between Christianity and Utilitarianism is discussed above, Chapter 8. In Darwin's *Descent* (1888, p. 129), the Golden Rule is quoted as Part I Chapter IV ends and then Darwin considers Wallace's argument that sympathy and concern for others stops natural selection in man and the responses by Greg and Galton (above, Chapter 4).

<sup>14</sup>The textual details are provided in the Toronto edition of *Utilitarianism*, Mill (1861, pp. 257-58). Spencer seems not to have noticed Mill's response. Mill added that every utilitarian would agree with what Spencer said except the claim that utilitarianism is "necessary."

has been miscast as the founder of social Darwinism at least to the extent that Spencer is regarded as endorsing a plan for directed evolution to achieve the perfection of the species. We turn to a comparison of Spencer and Darwin to shed additional light on this reading. Edgeworth finds Mill and Spencer in common opposition to Darwin because they presuppose a homogenous human capacity for pleasure. Here is Edgeworth's judgment of the difference between Mill and Darwin on human homogeneity and what would soon be called eugenic considerations:

... should we be affected by the authority of Mill, conveying an impression of what other Benthamites have taught openly, that all men, if not equal, are at least *equipotential*, in virtue of equal educatability? Or not connect this impression with the more transitory parts of Mill's system: a theory of Real Kinds, more Noachian than Darwinian, a theory of knowledge which, by giving all to experience gives nothing to heredity, and, to come nearer the mark, a theory of population, which, as pointed out by Mr. Galton (insisting only on quantity of population) and, taking no account of *difference of quality*, would probably result in the ruin of the race? Shall we resign ourselves to the authority of pre-Darwin prejudice? Or not draw for ourselves very different consequences from the Darwinian law? Or, rather, adopt the 'laws and consequences' of Mr. Galton? (1881, p. 132).

Contrary to contemporary discussions which give Spencer "credit" for eugenic ideas,<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>West (2003, p. 12): "In the 1850s, agnostic English philosopher Herbert Spencer published *Social Statics*, asserting that man and society, in truth, followed the laws of cold science, not the will of a caring, almighty God. Spencer popularized a powerful new term: 'survival of the fittest.' He declared that man and society were evolving according to their inherited nature. Through evolution, the 'fittest' would naturally continue to a perfect society. And the 'unfit' would naturally become more impoverished, less educated and ultimately die off as they should. Indeed, Spencer saw the misery and starvation of the pauper classes as an inevitable decree of a 'far-seeing benevolence,' that is, the laws of nature. He unambiguously insisted, 'The whole effort of nature is to get rid of such, and to make room for better ... If they are not sufficiently complete to live, they die, and it is best they should die.' Spencer left no room for doubt, declaring 'all imperfections must disappear.' As such, he completely denounced charity and instead extolled the purifying elimination of the 'unfit.' The unfit, he argued, were predestined by heir nature to an existence of downwardly spiraling degradation."

Edgeworth traces the line of descent from Darwin through Galton.

On what basis does Edgeworth link Galton and Darwin? As noted above (Chapter 4), Darwin cites both co-founders of eugenics, Francis Galton and W. R. Greg, and he quotes Greg at some length in *Descent of Man*. And, as we have noted above, Darwin proposes to replace the greatest happiness criterion with a focus on the perfection of the race.

The critical issue of importance was how such perfection would occur. Evolution directed by science and scientific authority is central to social Darwinism, as we can see by noting how the word “fitness” changed from a description to a normative usage.<sup>16</sup> The key question to resolve is where Spencer and Darwin fall on this issue of directed evolution.

### *Spencer*

Since there is no account that compares Spencer and Darwin directly, we examine Spencer’s 1852 “Population” in juxtaposition to Darwin. The question we wish to answer is how evolution was supposed to occur. Was there, for Spencer, a need for direction of the evolutionary process, or was evolution envisaged as a process by which progress, however conceived, is achieved by sympathetic, self-regulating individuals?

For Spencer, life is costly: giving life imposes a cost on those who presently enjoy

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<sup>16</sup>Leonard Darwin explained that for positive purposes “fittest” means that what survives but “when we come to discuss eugenic reforms, we are apt to attach a somewhat different meaning to the word ‘fittest.’ The aim of eugenicists is to alter human surroundings in such a way as to increase the chance of ‘survival’ of those types which are held to be most desirable ... (1926, p. 114)

life. And when life-giving agents understand this, the course of evolution changes.

Spencer's evolution is, then, directed by evolving and sympathetic agents. Since Spencer sees himself as one of these agents, he looks at evolution from the inside the process.

Spencer introduces the "law of maintenance of all races" (1852, 476) which has the property that the preservation of life varies inversely with propagation:

Now the forces preservative of race are two – ability in each member of the race to preserve itself, and ability to produce other members – power to maintain individual life, and power to propagate the species. These must vary inversely. When, from lowness of organization; the ability to contend with external dangers is small, there must be a great fertility to compensate for the consequent mortality; otherwise the race must die out. When, on the contrary, high endowments give much capacity of self-preservation, there needs a correspondently low degree of fertility. (1852, p. 476)

Spencer regards this as axiomatic and he offers illustrative examples that include yeast fungus, algae, termites, sharks, rodents, elephants and man. (1852, pp. 476-8). He uses this relationship to conceptualize what economists would refer to, today, as the opportunity cost of giving life:

Hence the maintenance of the individual and the propagation of the race, being respectively aggregative and separative, *necessarily* vary inversely. Every generative product is a deduction from parental life; and, as already pointed out, to diminish life is to diminish the ability of preserve life. The portion thrown off is organised matter; vital force has been expended in the organisation of it, and in the assimilation of its component elements; which vital force, had no such portion been made and thrown off, *would have been available for the preservation of the parent*. (1852, pp. 478-79)

Thus, individual maintenance and development take place at the cost of reproduction (1852, p. 479).

Next, Spencer proposes an inverse relationship between the degree of fertility and the development of the nervous system (1852, p. 493). He observes that the “human race is in a state of transition” (1852, p. 496) toward a state of lower fertility and higher development, and he casts about for an explanation. After ruling out additional strength and agility (1852, p. 496), Spencer speculates that much might come from additional intelligence (1852, p. 497). He settles finally on the explanation of improved “morality”, including “greater power of self-regulation” related to the acquisition of increased sympathetic tendencies:

Will it be in morality, that is, in greater power of self-regulation? Largely also; perhaps most largely. Normal conduct, or in other words, conduct conducive to the maintenance of perfect and long-continued life, is usually come short of more from defect of will than of knowledge. ... A further endowment of those feelings which civilization is developing in us—sentiments responding to the requirements of the social state—emotive faculties that find their gratifications in the duties devolving on us—must be acquired before the crimes, excesses, diseases, improvidences, dishonesties, and cruelties, that now so greatly diminish the duration of life, can cease (1852, p. 497).

Then he claims that excessive population growth will be sufficient to reduce fertility rates (and improve the development of the nervous system):

... it may be shown why a greater development of the nervous system *must* take place, and why consequently, there *must* be a diminution of the present excess of fertility; and further, it may be shown that the sole agency needed to work out this change is – *the excess of fertility itself*. (1852, p. 498)

This is because excessive population growth induces improved intelligence including improved “foresight” and prudential restraint:

Every improvement is at once the product of a higher form of humanity, and

demands that higher form of humanity to carry it into practice. The application of science to the arts is simply bringing to bear greater intelligence for satisfying our wants; and implies continued increase of that intelligence. To get more produce from the acre, the farmer must study chemistry ... Difficulty in getting a living is alike the incentive to a higher education of children, and to a more intense and long-continued application in adults. In the mother it induces foresight, economy, and skilful house-keeping; in the father, laborious days and constant self-denial. Nothing but necessity could make men submit to this discipline, and nothing but this discipline could produce a continued progression. (1852, pp. 498-99)

Then Spencer sketches the survival principle applied to humans and quotes events in Ireland as an instance. It is to be noted that Spencer's social Darwinism is a description of events, and not an endorsement or a policy prescription; although Spencer would later renounce teleology, here description and prescription blur:

All mankind in turn subject themselves more or less to the discipline described; they either may or may not advance under it; but, in the nature of things, only those who *do* advance under it eventually survive. For, necessarily, families and races whom this increasing difficulty of getting a living which excess of fertility entails, does not stimulate to improvements in production—that is, to greater mental activity—are on the high road to extinction; and must ultimately be supplanted by those whom the pressure does so stimulate. This truth we have recently seen exemplified in Ireland. And here, indeed, without further illustration, it will be seen that premature death, under all its forms, and from all its causes, cannot fail to work in the same direction. For as those prematurely carried off must, in the average of those cases, be those in whom the power of self-preservation is the least, it unavoidably follows, that those left behind to continue the race are those in whom the power of self-preservation is the greatest—are the select of their generation. So that, whether the dangers to existence be of the kind produced by excess of fertility, or of any other kind, it is clear, that by the ceaseless exercise of the faculties needed to contend with them, and by the death of all men who fail to contend with them successfully, there is ensured a constant progress towards a higher degree of skill, intelligence, and self-regulation—a better co-ordination of actions—a more complete life (1852, pp. 499-500).

Importantly for our reading, Spencer holds that “self-regulation” of numbers will



bring about progress. When Spencer came to combine his ethical volumes into the 1893 *Principles of Ethics*, he reported a missing chapter (1893, 1:317).<sup>17</sup> Here he continues the theme of human development through expanded sympathy but he worries about impediments to the continued expansion of sympathy, in particular, observed “misery”:

Doubtless the moral modification of human nature which has thus to take place hereafter, analogous to that which has taken place heretofore, will be retarded by other causes than this primary cause. Not only is the growth of sympathy held in check by the performance of unsympathetic actions, such as are necessitated by militant activities, but it is held in check by the constant presence of pains and unhappiness, and by the consciousness that these exist even when they are not visible. Those in whom the sympathies have become keen, are of necessity proportionately pained on witnessing sufferings borne by others, not [only] in those case where they are the causes of sufferings, but where the sufferings are caused in any other way. To those whose fellow feelings were too keenly alive to the miseries of the great mass of their kind –alive not only to such miseries as they saw but to such miseries as they heard of or read of, and to such miseries as they knew must be existing all around, far and near, life would be made intolerable: the sympathetic pains would submerge not only the sympathetic pleasures but the egoistic pleasures. (1893, 1:328-29)

The human response to such overwhelming misery is to deaden sympathy:

And therefore life is made tolerable, even to the higher among us at the present time, by a certain perpetual searing of the sympathies, which keeps them down at such level of sensitiveness as that there remains a balance of pleasure in life. (1893, 1:329)

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<sup>17</sup>Spencer discusses how this came to be in his *Autobiography*. He changed his compositional practices so that he adopted the “practice of devoting a ‘copy-book’ to each chapter, and putting it aside with the intention of using it as a basis for the final dictation. I name this fact because of a certain accidental sequence worth mentioning. One of the ‘copy-books’ was mislaid; and when I came to the chapter sketched out in it, I had to re-dictated this without reference to what I had before said. Some time after the book was published, I found this missing rough draft. A perusal showed that, beside a different presentation of the argument, it contained some illustrations which the chapter in its finished form did not contain ... When preparing the second edition, I therefore decided to append this rough-draft chapter just as it stood ...” Spencer (1904, 2:316).

The policy consequence is that a reduction of the birthrate will stop the “human misery” that accompanies the “struggle for existence”:

Whence it follows that the sympathies can become more and more acute, only as fast as the amount of human misery to be sympathized with becomes less and less; and while this diminution of human misery to be sympathized with, itself must be due in part to the increase of sympathy which prompts actions to mitigate it, it must be due in the main to the decrease of the pressure of population upon the means of subsistence. While the struggle for existence among men has to be carried on with an intensity like that which now exists, the quantity of suffering to be borne by the majority must remain great. This struggle for existence must continue to be thus intense so long as the rate of multiplication continues greatly in excess of the rate of mortality. Only in proportion as the production of new individuals ceases to go on so greatly in excess of the disappearance of individuals by death, can there be a diminution of the pressure upon the means of subsistence, and a diminution of the strain and the accompanying pains that arise more or less to all, and in a greater degree to the inferior. (1893, 1:329)

In this statement Spencer explicitly rejects social Darwinism entailing racial development through misery induced by competition for resources, and argues to the contrary that individuals who have developed sympathetic tendencies towards one another will come to reduce misery by reducing births.

*Darwin:*

After this lengthy discussion of an unfamiliar text, we remind the reader of the words from the 1859 *Origin of Species* in which Darwin deduces the struggle for existence from the perpetual excess of population. Note first that Darwin *explicitly* denied that human foresight – Malthus’s prudential restraint or Spencer’s self-regulation – can successfully counteract the struggle for existence:

A struggle for existence inevitably follows from the high rate at which all

organic beings tend to increase. Every being, which during its natural lifetime produces several eggs or seeds, must suffer destruction during some period of its life, and during some season or occasional year, otherwise, on the principle of geometrical increase, its numbers would quickly become so inordinately great that no country could support the product. Hence, as more individuals are produced than can possibly survive, there must in every case be a struggle for existence, either one individual with another of the same species, or with the individuals of distinct species, or with the physical conditions of life. It is the doctrine of Malthus applied with manifold force to the whole animal and vegetable kingdoms; for in this case there can be no artificial increase of food, and no prudential restraint from marriage. (1859, p. 63).

Darwin's conception of racial perfection becomes evident in the section of *Descent of Man* entitled *Natural Selection as affecting Civilised* which we quoted in 7.4 above. As we have also quoted he now employs his proposal, made earlier in the text, to replace "happiness" with "general good" in the conception of social progress, and to look at humans as breeding to achieve that general good (Darwin 1871, p. 125))<sup>18</sup> As the chapter continues, Darwin cites the arguments of the co-founders of eugenics, Greg and Galton, against the Malthusian recommendation to increase human happiness by delaying marriage, because the "poor and reckless" would be unable to refrain from marriage (above, Chapter 7).

Darwin returns to this contention when the book concludes. He insists, in addition, that there is a tradeoff between the struggle for survival that results from over-population. We reproduce this passage which we quoted above (Chapter 7.4):

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<sup>18</sup>This passage is linked to the "welfare of the community" in *Origin* by Gayon (1998, p. 78). Gayon (1998, p. 78), however, omits Darwin's first and third sentences so it is not obvious to the reader that Darwin proposes something that would be applicable to animals but which might encounter ethical constraints when applied to people.

The advancement of the welfare of mankind is a most intricate problem: all ought to refrain from marriage who cannot avoid abject poverty for their children; for poverty is not only a great evil, but tends to its own increase by leading to recklessness in marriage. On the other hand, as Mr. Galton has remarked, if the prudent avoid marriage, whilst the reckless marry, the inferior members tend to supplant the better members of society. Man, like every other animal, has no doubt advanced to his present high condition through a struggle for existence consequent on his rapid multiplication; and if he is to advance still higher, it is to be feared that he must remain subject to a severe struggle. Otherwise he would sink into indolence, and the more gifted men would not be more successful in the battle of life than the less gifted. Hence our natural rate of increase, though leading to many and obvious evils, must not be greatly diminished by any means. ... ((1871, p. 643)

This paragraph featured prominently in a trial in which the contending parties were seen by the *Times* as Darwin and Mill, the Bradlaugh-Besant trial of 1877. The passage to which Darwin directed Charles Bradlaugh's attention summarizes his disagreement with the greatest happiness principle of utilitarianism.<sup>19</sup> For Darwin, the scientific goal of making better humans may mean there is a need to sacrifice the well-being of existing humans. Certainly self-direction and selection are not to be trusted. For Spencer, individuals who realize that population growth was excessive, would come to acquire foresight and reduce family size. We turn to the Bradlaugh-Besant case next.

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<sup>19</sup>Charles Bradlaugh is one of the most colorful figures in British history. It is hard to do justice to this imposing man, who described himself as an atheist, a republican and a Malthusian. In one pamphlet, he proposed that Malthus replace Christ in the Trinity. Scholars understandably tend to focus on one aspect, e.g., the "Bradlaugh case," his unwillingness to take an oath to enter Parliament, and the difficulty which Parliament had in physically expelling him (Arnstein 1965), or the trial (Marvell 1976). His regular debates with bishops would have made the life of an ordinary politician (Holden and Levy 1993).

Annie Besant's life, from an association with Bradlaugh's Secular Society to become the great advocate of theosophism, was also remarkable. She lost custody of her child because of her neo-Malthusian views. The importance of her presentation of the preventative check of Malthus and the positive check of Darwin as the alternatives to consider in social issues has perhaps received insufficient attention. This juxtaposition is noted only in passing in Levy 1978.

## 10.4: Bradlaugh-Besant and Racial Betterment

Bradlaugh-Besant was the turning point in the British neo-Malthusian (birth control) movement in which the public dissemination of contraceptive information was consequently decriminalized. At the trial, Annie Besant discussed a letter from Darwin to Bradlaugh. Although he was aware of the hardships associated with a large family, Darwin wrote disapprovingly of voluntary restrictions on child-bearing because they attenuated the working of “natural selection” in the development of the race:

Mr. Darwin thinks rightly, with reference to the lower animals, that the application of “natural” checks upon the natural rate of increase is really for the welfare and progress of various classes of brutes; and Mr Darwin thinks this “natural” check good for the human species, and in this he is supported to a certain extent by Mr. Herbert Spencer. I will venture to lay before you what I consider to be his strongest statement of that argument, and therefore of any possible objection. Mr. Darwin, writing to us a few days since, pointed our attention to the following extract from his “Descent of Man,” p. 618:—“The enhancement of the welfare of mankind is a most intricate problem; ... That is Mr. Darwin’s position, and putting aside for a moment the awful amount of human misery which it accepts as the necessary condition of progress, let us see if the position be defensible. (*Queen v Bradlaugh-Besant* 1877, p. 96)<sup>20</sup>

The report of the case of “The Queen v Bradlaugh and Another,” as the *Times* so delicately hid the woman’s name, recounted the story as a conflict between J. S. Mill and Charles Darwin.<sup>21</sup> In his *Autobiography*, Mill attributed his election defeat to his support of

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<sup>20</sup>The words omitted from this quotation are from the *Descent of Man*, quoted above, Ch 7.4.

<sup>21</sup>*Punch* (June 23, 1877, p. 286) under the heading “More Pernicious Literature” remarks: “A sacerdotal manual of auricular confession, privately printed and circulating among an association of Anglican Clergyman ... entitled *The Priest in Absolution*. An obvious analogy to another treatise, at present under prosecution, suggests a better title for it—*Fruits of Theology*.” The Anglo-Catholic menace rates a cartoon on June 30, 1877 whereas Bradlaugh-Besant on July 7, 1877 get this note (p. 206): “First

Bradlaugh's election campaign. But there is more than this. The *Times* focused on the question of what is more important: undirected sympathetic connections among individuals, vs. assisting the law of Natural Selection to "develop" the race.

The *Times* quoted Annie Besant describing Malthusian prescriptions:

They suggested the substitution of prudential and scientific checks for these "natural" or positive checks. In other words, they desired to substitute the birth-restraining check for the death-producing check. The only argument against it worthy of a moment's consideration has been suggested by Mr. Darwin:— ... (*Times* 20 June 1877, p. 11).<sup>22</sup>

Two paragraphs later, Besant is said to have appealed to Mill, whose idea of the relation of human development and animal existence differs from Darwin's:

The idea that the preventive check should be applied after marriage and not before might appear new to most men; but the principle was to be found in Mill's *Political Economy*, in which young men were examined at the Universities. For he wrote, "Poverty, like most social evils, exists because men follow their own brute instincts without consideration. But society is possible because man is not necessarily a brute. Civilization in every one of its aspects is struggle against animal existence. If it has not brought population under some restraint it is because it has never been tried." ...

Mr. Mill having strongly urged the necessity for 'continence,' went to observe that from the way in which people commonly talked of offspring as a sort of necessity it might almost be supposed that they allowed themselves to suppose their own volition had nothing to do with it. (*Times* 20 June 1877, p. 11).

The public discussion of the Bradlaugh case recognized Mill as the great voice against an imposed hierarchy, either the old hierarchy following from the "natural" link between marriage and children or the coming hierarchy of racial remaking. This

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'Fruits of Philosophy.'—Two hundred pounds' fine and six months' imprisonment."

<sup>22</sup>She continues, quoting the passage we have quoted from Darwin's *Descent*, above p. xxx.

recognition may have been responsible for one of the most remarkable caricatures which we have encountered in the Cope's images



reproduced above. In the background of the John Wallace *Diva* is a figure which we bring to the foreground here. Although it is not so described by Thomson, the figure bears a striking resemblance to John Stuart Mill. Anti-everything, personified.

### 10.5: Edgeworth Reconciles Darwin and Utilitarianism

Evolutionary theory played into debates about social utility in two major ways. First, as we have seen, birth control became tangled up in discussions of racial betterment. Second, the conception of biological “progress” greatly influenced utilitarian thought concerning the specification of social welfare. At issue here was the early utilitarian claim that all should count as one. Edgeworth disagreed with Mill as to whether the claim was, as Mill put it, involved “in the very meaning of utilitarianism” or a conclusion derived from the presupposition of equality (Edgeworth 1877, p. 55). Impartiality, for Edgeworth, was the logical result of an equality assumption, in which case as evolutionary theory

showed the assumption was incorrect, the early utilitarian conclusion must be mistaken.<sup>23</sup>

More than this, Edgeworth supposed that evolutionary fitness mapped directly to the capacity for pleasure:

( $\gamma$ ) The *third postulate* simplifying the third inquiry is that capacity for pleasure and capacity for work generally speaking go together; that they both rise with evolution. The *quality of population should be the highest possible evolution*—provided ... For it is probable that the highest in the order of evolution are most *capable of education* and improvement. In the general advance the most advanced should advance most. (1881, p. 68)

The attainment of Darwin's "general good" runs into the problem of people of lesser capacity:

The *fifth postulate* appropriate to this case is that to substitute in one generation for any number of parents an equal number each superior in capacity (evolution) is beneficial for the next generation. This being granted, either analytically with the aid of Mr. Todhunter's 'Researches' [See Appendix 1, p. 93] or by unaided reason, it is deduced that the average issue shall be as large as possible for all sections above a determinate degree of capacity, but zero for all sections below that degree. (1881, p. 70).

For that possibility, Galton had offered solutions, celibacy or emigration:

What approach is useful in such cases is to be determined by Mr. Todhunter's principle. [Researches; below p. 93] Again, mitigations might be provided for the classes not selected. [Cf. Galton, 'The weak could find a welcome and a refuge in celibate monasteries,' &c.' also Sully, *Pessimism*, p. 392.] ... Again, *emigration* might

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<sup>23</sup> "Where, however, there exists a society within a society, who, by an exclusive intercourse *inter se*, are capable (in virtue of a higher nature) of deriving a more exquisite pleasure, than by association with an inferior class, there begins to arise a genuine case of privilege; as in the relation of men to apes, and perhaps of the civilized to the savage." "With regard to the theory of distribution, there is no indication that, at any rate between classes so nearly in the same order of evolution as the modern Aryan races, a law of distribution other than equality is to be wished. The more highly evolved class is to be privileged when there is a great interval, as there is between man and ape, as there may have been between the ranks and races of the ancient world." (Edgeworth 1877, pp. 65, 78).



supplement total selection; emigration from Utopia to some unprogressive country where the prospect of happiness might be comparatively zero. (1881, pp. 71-2).<sup>24</sup>

Edgeworth then asks: “*What is the fortune of the least favoured class in the Utilitarian community?*” (1881, p. 72). He starts with an admittedly unrealistic case where the fruits of nature are free, and immediately concludes from the assumption that consumption goods produce happiness that “*the condition of the least favoured class is positive happiness.*”

He then considers realistic cases where means are not free gifts of nature and so the utility of goods must be balanced by the disutility of effort. Then, he concludes, “the condition of the least favoured class is positive, zero, or negative happiness.”<sup>25</sup> The case becomes important when “we consider the case of *selection* for the benefit of the next generation.” (1881, pp. 73-4).

Then Edgeworth drops finite limits of integration, noting (1881, p. 74): “where  $\infty$  is a convenient designation for the utmost extent of *variation*—variation in the Darwinian sense.” The conclusion is that “it is no means clear that the condition of the least favoured in the second generation is above zero.” This leads him to suggest that

In fact, the happiness of some of the lower classes may be sacrificed to that

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<sup>24</sup>“Accordingly in the ‘koomposh’ of an unlimited pauper population, the most favourable disposition might seem to be (abstracted from practical considerations, and *if* the delineation of Wundt be verified within and beyond the region of sensation), might seem perhaps to be, that adhering *ex hypothesi* to the letter of the first problem, we should be guided by the spirit of the second problem, should wish to cut off the redundant numbers with an illusory portion, so as to transfer substantial (equal) portions to a few. There might be, as it were, a mulcting of many brothers to make a few eldest sons.” (Edgeworth 1877, p. 61).

<sup>25</sup>“ ... the zero-point of happiness (a concept facilitated by, though not quite identical with, the economical, ‘natural minimum of wages’).” Edgeworth (1881, p. 64).

of the higher classes. And again, the happiness of part of the second generation maybe sacrificed to that of the succeeding generations.” (1881, p. 74)

Edgeworth considers the happiness of the least favoured from three vantage points:

politics, political economy and hedonics. Even if it were “abstractly desirable” from a

hedonic point of view to have negative happiness, there may be political constraints:

It may be admitted, however, that a limit below the zero of happiness, even if abstractly desirable, would not be humanly attainable; whether because discomfort in the lower classes produces political instability (Aristotle, &c.), or because only through the comfort of the lower classes be checked from sinking to the starving-point (Mill, &c.) Let politics and political economy fix some limit above zero. If now Hedonics indicate some limit still superior (in point of comfort)—well. But if abstract Hedonics point to a limit *below* that hard and fast line which the consideration of human infirmity impose, what occurs? Simply that population shall press up against that line without pressing it back. (1881, p. 75)

The difference in capacity for happiness is critical:

Yet in the minds of many good men among the moderns and the wisest of the ancients, there appears a deeper sentiment in favour of aristocratical privilege—the privilege of man above brute, of civilised above savage, of birth, of talent, and of the male sex. This sentiment of right has a ground of utilitarianism in supposed differences of *capacity*. Capacity for pleasure is a property of evolution, an essential attribute of civilisation ( $\alpha$ ) (1881, p. 77)

As noted above (Chapter 8), Edgeworth concludes that Mill’s doctrine of moral equality must be deeply questioned:

Pending a scientific hedonimetry, the principle ‘Every man, and every woman, to count for one,’ should be very cautiously applied. (1881, p. 81)<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Mill “take[s] for granted that there is *no material* difference (no difference of kind, as Mill says in his “Logic”) between human creatures. If, however, utilitarians were really convinced that there existed either now, or (what is more conceivable) in a past stage of the world’s evolution, a broad distinction ... , presumably the establishment of a privileged class would commend itself to utilitarian sense...” (Edgeworth 1877, p. 55).

And when Edgeworth confronts Spencer's *Data of Ethics* (the missing chapter was quoted above, pp. xxx), he links Spencer to Mill on the equal capacity doctrine:<sup>27</sup>

The possibility of differences of capacity in the final state of equilibrium does not seem to be entertained by the author. But can we receive this? Can we suppose that the Examination-list of the Future will consist of an all-comprehensive bracket? If capacities for work differ, possibly also capacities for pleasure. If either or both species continue to differ, Utilitarianism, it is submitted, will continue to have a function not contemplated by the Data, unequal distribution. (1881, p. 123)

## 10.6 From Edgeworth to Pareto

Economists once believed that the Pareto principle, as value-free, escaped Robbins' strictures against Edgeworth's cardinalism.<sup>28</sup> The Pareto principle requires only ranking

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<sup>27</sup>He was correct in doing so. When Spencer put together his *Principles of Ethics*, he was explicit about the specification of equal capacity: "But chiefly the imperfection of ethical systems appropriate to societies characterized by organized inequality, is that sympathy and all those emotions into which sympathy enters, and all that happiness of which sympathy is the root, remain incomplete. Alien natures cannot sympathize in full measure—can sympathize only in respect of those feelings which they have in common. Hence the unlikeness presupposed between permanently ruling classes and permanently subject classes, negative that highest happiness which a rational ethics takes for its end. Throughout this work, therefore, the tacit assumption will be that the beings spoken of have that substantial unity of nature which characterizes the same variety of man; and the work will not, save incidently or by contrast, take account of mixed societies, such as as that we have established in India, and still less of slave societies." (1893, pp. 27-8).

<sup>28</sup>Thus, we have Bator's account of the move to value-free analysis in the body of his text. Here is "classical economics": "The foundations of modern welfare theory are well embedded in the soil of classical economics, and the structure, too, bears the imprint of the line of thought represented by Smith, Ricardo, Mill, and Marshall. But in classical writing prescription and analysis are inseparably intertwined, the underlying philosophy is unabashedly utilitarian, and the central normative concern is with the efficacy of market institutions. In contrast, the development of modern welfare economics can best be understood as an attempt to sort out ethics from science, and allocative efficiency from particular modes of social organization." (Bator 1957, p. 57); "... in the late 1930's, Nicholas Kaldor and J. R. Hicks took up Lionel Robbins' challenge to economists not to mix ethics and science and suggested a series of tests for choosing some input-output configurations over others independently of value. Tibor Scitovsky pointed out an important asymmetry in the Kaldor-Hicks test and Samuelson in the end demonstrated that a 'welfare function' denoting an ethic was needed after all. I. M. D. Little tried, but I think failed, to

and so it seems we can dispense with Edgeworth's cardinal values altogether. A variation of this theme is that the Pareto principle is weak and as long as we abstract from complicating issues such as envy (unlike Robbins 1981), it is "as-if" value free. Either contention provided a strong rationale for the development of ordinal utility theory. We show finally that Pareto analysis blocks Edgeworth's cardinality conclusions, so that it is a stronger and more egalitarian norm than is generally presumed.

A compelling justification for the use of the Pareto principle as a policy norm is the claim that it is consistent with many other norms. More than that, the case is made that if one social state is Pareto preferred to another social state, any other plausible social norm will also rank the former above the latter. The norm of interest here is cardinal utilitarianism.

Consider a society with two possible states of affairs: State  $N$  – one in which there are  $N$  people – and State  $N$  Minus 1 – in which one of the people has been relocated to some other society. We have seen that, for Edgeworth, "some other society" might entail banishment to some unprogressive country; a darker interpretation is one of non-existence.

Edgeworth's cardinal utilitarianism sums over the utility of people in  $N$  and  $N$

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shake this conclusion. The Pareto conditions are necessary, but never sufficient." (Bator 1957, pp. 57-8). In footnote 12 Bator points out, however: "Pareto-efficiency is not even a necessary condition for a maximum of just any conceivable  $W$ -function. The form of our type function reflects a number of ethically loaded restrictions, e.g., that individuals' preference functions are to 'count,' and count positively." (1957, p. 29). These "ethically loaded restrictions" are, in fact, the Pareto Principle.

*Minus 1* to determine which entails greater happiness. Consider first Edgeworth's situation in which there exists a person whose net happiness is zero. By hypothesis, Edgeworth holds that happiness depends on an individual's activity so people are not sympathetic with each other. So a society that has 100 people who obtain positive happiness and one such person with zero happiness will be characterized by the same aggregate amount of happiness as a society with the 100 people who obtain positive happiness. Edgeworth's cardinal utilitarianism thus gives state  $N$  and  $N$  *Minus 1* equal marks.

Now, consider the Pareto Principle. Here, we need to ask how the zero utility individual views the matter. Again by assumption the other people are indifferent to his fate so we only need to consider that person. If he prefers living in the society to not living there – something about which Edgeworth does not inquire – then  $N$  is Pareto Preferred to  $N$  *Minus 1*.

Using the Edgeworth example, it is clear that the Pareto and the cardinal rankings are not identical: the fact that  $N$  is Pareto preferred to  $N$  *Minus 1* does not guarantee that  $N$  is cardinally valued as higher than  $N$  *Minus 1*. We have seen that in fact the cardinal ranking of  $N$  *Minus 1* is the same as  $N$ .<sup>29</sup>

Thus, cardinal utilitarianism does not simply ratify what the Pareto principle

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<sup>29</sup>Perhaps the reader thinks that we can solve the problem by replacing the strong inequality of  $CU$  with a weak inequality. To see that this is not so, consider another of Edgeworth's examples, in which person  $N$  has negative happiness in Society  $A$  but still prefers  $A$  to  $B$ . Here we have  $N$  Pareto preferred to  $N$  *Minus 1* while the cardinal measure assigns a lower weight to  $N$  than  $N$  *Minus 1*.

reveals. In particular, the Pareto principle can block eugenic proposals resulting from the claim that there are people without the capacity for happiness. This simple example suggests that there is a significant difference between allowing people to decide whether to invite someone to become a member of the society and having that decision made by a policy maker or a scientist.<sup>30</sup> Ordinary people make such decisions on the basis of family happiness.<sup>31</sup> We have seen above that early utilitarian economists participated in the policy debate over birth control. Robbins' views on this matter were also clear (Robbins 1972, pp. 21-2). And, when Robbins discussed the genesis of the birth-control movement from the utilitarian Jeremy Bentham to James Mill and Francis Place, he came down on the side of Spencer as opposed to Darwin:

It is said, though complete confirmation is lacking, that the young John Stuart Mill spent a night in a police station, having been caught distributing information of this nature. The movement for deliberate control of population pressure, in our day the best hope of saving humanity from the worst effects of the population explosion, thus takes its rise in the heart of the classical system.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Robbins' words on immigration (Robbins 1929, p. 78) might be read against those of the eugenic theorists for whom immigration control was the *sin a qua non* of eugenic policy (Chapters 4 and 5 above).

<sup>31</sup>Robbins (1981, p. 5): "Of course I do not deny that, in every day life, we do make comparisons between the satisfactions of different people. When the head of a family carves up a turkey, he may take account of his estimate of the satisfaction afforded to different members by different portions; ..."

<sup>32</sup>Robbins (1968, p. 33). D. H. Robertson, Robbins' debating partner on theoretical issues of interpersonal comparisons and ordinality had similar neo-Malthusian views: "I find that I wrote eleven years ago: 'There can be no permanent limitation of armaments till there is an international agreement for the limitation of the birth-rate'. About the later silence of economists on this issue, Robertson wrote: 'It would have been more impressive if we had spoken out, from the World of the Unborn, before the decisive turning-point of the birth-rate in the 'seventies. (Perhaps we did our best; perhaps it was we who whispered into the ear of Mill those too long neglected passages in his *Principles*.)' Robertson (1923, p. 207). Robertson's views from 1912 read like those of C. K. Ogden (Holden and Levy 2001).

We have considered the historical details of the conflict between eugenics, in the days before it had that name, and private family planning above. It is not clear than Robbins knew all these details, but we suspect that none of them would have surprised him.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup>We doubt, for instance, that much of the work in this book would have surprised Robbins: “Why study what the ignorant and the pompous have thought the most dismal of sciences?” Robbins (1930, p. 24). “But we are really not obliged to take seriously the social and economic thought of one who could denounce Adam Smith as ‘the half-bred and half-witted Scotchman who taught the ‘deliberate blasphemy’—‘thou shalt hate the Lord thy God, damn His laws and covet thy neighbour’s goods.’ This is the voice, not of candid reason and persuasion, but of self-induced hysteria. Nor need we pay any more attention to the eulogist of Frederick the Great, the author of the *Nigger Question*, who stood opposite the Rothschild house at Hyde Park Corner gloating on the torturing of the Jews in the Middle Ages. We know the type too well.” (Robbins 1968, p. 172). We disagree with Lord Robbins on the need to take such doctrines with all due seriousness, and outline our reasons in Peart-Levy 2004.