

A Refutation of Utilitarianism

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Alleged refutations of utilitarianism are not uncommon, so it is unlikely that the title of the present essay will raise eye-brows. 'Another paper about utility's failure to account for our duty to be just' (thought with a yawn, as it were), is apt to be the prevailing reaction to the title's stated objective. This is understandable. For utilitarianism has been taken to task on just this score more than a score of times. And rightly so, I believe, though I shall not argue that point here.¹ Here I intend to offer a refutation of utilitarianism which turns, not on the duty of justice, but on the value of friendship, a refutation which, so far as I am aware, has never previously been advanced in the not inconsiderable body of literature critical of that theory. Put briefly, what I hope to be able to show is that utilitarians are unable to explain how the value of friendship

1 I consider some of the issues relating to the apparent clash between justice and utility in my *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1983), Chapters VI and VII.

can find a place within their general theory of obligation. Before beginning the argument proper, a number of assumptions need to be made explicit.

I shall assume that utilitarians all agree that the institution of morality, to the extent that is justified, exists for the sake of something beyond itself – has, that is, a justifying purpose or goal – and that this purpose or goal is its role in making the world a better world or, as this is sometimes expressed, in bringing about the greatest possible balance of intrinsic good over intrinsic evil. Where utilitarians differ, I assume, is how they answer two questions: (1) How best may we achieve this goal? and (2) What things are intrinsically good and intrinsically evil? The several versions of act- and rule-utilitarianism provide us with alternative answers to the former question, while the debates between, say, value hedonists (those who hold that pleasure and pleasure alone is intrinsically good) and non-hedonists illustrate two conflicting ways in which some utilitarians have answered the latter question. (I shall comment on this conflict below). For reasons that will become clearer as we proceed, the distinction between act- and rule-utilitarianism, relevant in the context of other types of challenge to utilitarian theory, proves to be irrelevant in the present case. The question about intrinsic value, however, is highly relevant, if, as I shall argue, friendship is intrinsically valuable. For if this is true, then one of the intrinsic values utilitarians must accommodate, when they set before us the goal of bringing about the greatest possible balance of intrinsic good over intrinsic evil, is the intrinsic value, friendship.

But is friendship intrinsically valuable? Let us consider the alternatives, of which there appear to be just four. First, friendship might be judged to be *only* intrinsically valuable, a view which henceforth I shall refer to as ‘the intrinsic-view’; second, friendship might be judged to be *only* instrumentally valuable, henceforth referred to as ‘the instrumental view’; third, friendship might be judged to be *both* intrinsically *and* instrumentally valuable (‘the combined-view’); or fourth, friendship might be held to have no value whatever (‘the no-value-view’). Now, this last view is preposterous. Friendship is so great a treasure in human life, ‘the one point in human affairs,’ in Cicero’s memorable words,² ‘concerning the benefit of which, all with one voice agree,’ that the no-value-view needs only to be characterized in order to be rejected. Equally implausible, it seems to me, is the instrumental-view. Certainly knowing that I have friends, being around them, being supported by them, etc., contributes causally to my life’s

2 Cicero, *De Amicitia* (‘On Friendship’)

having other kinds of value — e.g., security. But it appears to be a gross distortion of the value of friendship to suppose that the whole of its value is reducible to its role in bringing about other values. One feels, rightly I believe, that friendship itself has a kind of value that cannot be reduced without remainder into its usefulness as a means to values other than itself. I shall have more to say on this matter as we proceed. At present I merely intend to indicate that and why the instrumental-view and the no-value-view seem to fly in the face of our ordinary experience and our reflective judgments of value about this experience. We do find friendship valuable; we do not find it valuable merely as a means to other values. This, it seems to me, is the point from which all our other thinking about the value of friendship must begin and against which its credibility must be tested. For if even just this much is granted, it follows that we must accept the judgment that friendship is intrinsically valuable, a judgment that is common ground between the intrinsic and the combined-views of friendship's value, and ground that is antagonistic both to the no-value and the instrumental views. Thus, if we accept even this much, we must require that utilitarians include the intrinsic value of friendship in their catalogue of intrinsic goods and explain how this value can be accommodated by their theory of obligation.

Now, it is important to realize that neither of these requirements is shirked by this century's leading utilitarian. I mean Moore. For there are ample grounds for thinking both that (a) Moore accepts the intrinsic value of friendship and that (b) he believes that its value can be fully accommodated by his utilitarian account of obligation. It will be worth our while to see why this is so.

The grounds for interpreting Moore as endorsing both (a) and (b) are as follows. In the final chapter of *Principia*, 'The Ideal,' Moore, having given his arguments for the indefinability of goodness, having described the method of isolation to be used for judging what is intrinsically valuable, and having set forth his views concerning the connection between what is right and what is good, at last reveals to his readers what things he himself judges to be intrinsically valuable. He writes as follows:³

(O)nce the meaning of the question (What things are intrinsically good?) is clearly understood the answer to it, in its main outlines, appears to be so obvious, that it runs the risk of seeming to be a platitude. By far the most valuable things, which we know or can imagine, are certain states of consciousness,

3 G.E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1903). Page references to this work are included in the body of the present essay.

which may be roughly described as the pleasures of human intercourse and the enjoyment of beautiful objects. No one, probably, who has asked himself the question, has ever doubted that personal affection and the appreciation of what is beautiful in Art and Nature, are good in themselves; nor, if we consider strictly what things are worth having *purely for their own sakes*, does it appear probable that anyone will think that anything else has *nearly so great a value* as the things which are included under these two heads. (188-9)

I have explored Moore's conception of beauty elsewhere.⁴ Here my concern is with, in his words, that other great 'unmixed good' which he identifies as 'personal affection.' The story is told that Moore was in love when he wrote *Principia*. I do not know. I do not believe, however, that he intends to restrict 'personal affection' to romantic involvement. This is not a natural reading of 'personal affection' (e.g., one might have personal affection for one's children or parents independently of romantic attachment); Moore's mention of 'the things included under those two heads' is consistent with interpreting him to mean that he includes more than romantic love under 'personal affection'; and, finally, given Moore's renowned insistence on saying what one means, especially if this departs from the ordinary meaning of an expression, one would expect him to say that, by 'personal affection' he means *only* 'romantic attachment,' *if* that were what he means: he does not say this. It is not unreasonable, therefore, and in fact seems amply supported by the text of *Principia*, to interpret Moore to include within the class of 'personal affection' those instances of friendship which are independent of romantic attachment or involvement, which is the sense of 'friendship' I have had, and shall continue to have, in mind in the present essay. Thus, on my reading of Moore, one of the two great unmixed intrinsic goods is that state of mind which attends or is constituent of personal affection, including friendship. Since referring to this good as 'the state of mind attendant upon or etc.' is cumbersome, I propose, for brevity's sake, to refer to it merely as 'friendship.' I do not believe that any distortion in Moore's meaning results.

Friendship, then, on Moore's view, is an intrinsic good, and in this respect if in no other Moore clearly seems to be correct. As noted earlier, the value we place upon or claim to find in friendship is not merely instrumental, though friends may certainly be and often are of assistance to us in accomplishing our ends. Indeed, *if* the relationship that exists between two persons is merely that each performs mutually advantageous service for the other, there is no friendship, though there

4 'Moore's Conception of Beauty,' unpublished M.A. Thesis (University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA. 1962)

may be, as Aristotle notes,⁵ goodwill or a 'friendly sort of relation.' Friendship requires more; it requires that we be disposed to act so as to promote the well being or happiness of another for his/her own sake, not for the sake of what we stand to gain in return. As Aristotle writes,⁶ 'he who wishes someone to prosper because he hopes for enrichment through him seems to have goodwill not to him but rather to himself, just as a man is not a friend to another if he cherishes him for the sake of some use to be made of him.' So friendship, properly understood, would seem to point to the following two truths, the one psychological, the other a matter of value. First, it requires, as a matter of psychology, that we be able to act for the sake of another's well being or happiness independently of our being motivated by thoughts of personal gain or advantage. Thus, friendship is not possible, as a matter of fact, if psychological egoism is true, and this latter view is not true, if people are able to act as friendship requires. But, second, friendship is valuable in itself and not just because of the mutually beneficial consequences or pleasures to which it leads. Thus, value hedonism cannot be true, if friendship is an intrinsic good. For what is valuable for its own sake, in the case of friendship, is not merely the pleasure friendship brings, which, if this were true, would imply that friendship had instrumental value only; what is valued for its own sake is the *affectionate relationship* from which these pleasures arise. Thus, if the relationship one has with another is valued instrumentally only, then there is no friendship, though there may be, in Aristotle's words, 'a friendly sort of relation.'

Much has been written on the possibility of friendship – on whether, that is, human beings are psychologically 'wired' in such a way as to allow for the possibility of genuine friendship. That is a question well beyond the scope of the present essay. Our interest lies in its value, which, in the preceding, has been stated to be intrinsic. Indeed, as Moore saw, to say that friendship is intrinsically good or, what is more accurate, that it is a great intrinsic good, runs the risk of being a platitude. But what is not platitudinous, according to Moore, are the far reaching and, one might say, unsuspected consequences recognition of this great good has for morality generally and obligation in particular, especially if both are viewed against the backdrop of the principle of utility. In an oft-neglected passage in *Principia*, Moore writes the following:

5 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book IX, Chapter 5

6 *Ibid.*

This simple truth (that the enjoyment of beautiful objects and personal affection are great intrinsic goods) may, indeed, be said to be universally recognized. What has *not* been recognized is that this is the ultimate and fundamental truth of Moral Philosophy. That it is only for the sake of these things – in order that as much of them as possible may at some time exist – that any one can be justified in performing any public or private duty; that they are the *raison d'être* of virtue; that it is they – these complex wholes *themselves*, and not any constituent or characteristic of them – that form the rational ultimate end of human action and the sole criterion of social progress: these appear to be truths which have been generally overlooked. (189)

Moore, then, if 'personal affection' is understood to include friendship, clearly regards friendship as being of fundamental importance to morality and, by implication, moral theory. So, in reply to my arguing, as I have, that friendship is an intrinsic good and that utilitarians must find a place within their theory of obligation for this great good, it cannot be objected that I am foisting upon utilitarians a project which they themselves have failed to recognize and for which they are certain not to have enthusiasm. On the contrary, as the presiding makes clear, this century's leading utilitarian thinker recognizes the crucial importance friendship has for 'Moral Philosophy' in general and utilitarianism in particular. For if, as seems incontrovertible, friendship is intrinsically good; and given that the principle of utility directs us, as a matter of obligation, to bring about the greatest possible balance of intrinsic good over intrinsic evil; then that principle must direct us, as a matter of obligation, to bring about the maximum amount of the particular intrinsic good that friendship is – 'as much of (it) as possible,' in Moore's words – at least to the extent that doing so is harmonious with the overarching obligation to maximize the balance of (all) intrinsic goods over (all) intrinsic evils. That is, it may be that, in endeavoring to fulfil the obligation the utilitarian principle places before us, we will have to weigh, somehow – (and *how* is far from clear; but that is *another* problem) – the intrinsic good of friendship against other intrinsic goods (e.g., the enjoyment of beautiful objects). So it would be inaccurate to say that we have an obligation (or duty⁷) to maximize the greatest amount of friendship simpliciter; rather, we must say that we have the obligation to bring about the greatest possible balance of intrinsic good, including the intrinsic good of friendship, over intrinsic evil. Since, once again, referring repeatedly to our alleged 'obligation to bring about the greatest possible balance of intrinsic good over intrinsic evil, including the intrinsic good of friendship, etc.' is more than a mouthful, I propose to refer to the idea thereby expressed simply as 'the duty (obligation) involving friendship.'

7 I use the terms 'duty' and 'obligation' interchangeably.

But now there is a problem. For even if we have a duty involving friendship, there are alternative ways in which this duty might be understood. On one interpretation this duty is understood in terms of our having a *duty-to-someone*, one's self or others. A second interpretation holds that the duty involving friendship is a *duty-to-friendship-itself*. Now, the last quote given from Moore suggests that he is inclined toward this latter alternative. It is, he says, 'only for the sake of these things,' 'these complex wholes *themselves*,' that we 'can be justified in performing any public or private duty.' This is a somewhat odd position, viewed at first blush, since it is unclear what it can mean to say that we have a duty 'to friendship itself' as distinct from, say, duties to our friends. Indeed, the suggestion is less credible if we bear in mind that, when Moore speaks of the intrinsic value of friendship, he is referring to states of mind, states of consciousness, and it is unclear how sense can be made of the claim that we have a duty to this or that state of consciousness. I shall return below to a discussion of this second alternative, (the view that the duty involving friendship is to be analysed in terms of a duty to friendship itself). For the present I want to explore the former alternative, where this duty is analysed in terms of our having a *duty-to-someone*. What I want to explain is why this pattern of analysis, applied to the duty involving friendship, is deficient, and why, therefore, utilitarians ought to avoid it. Once this much is seen, we may better understand why utilitarians must attempt to interpret the duty involving friendship along the lines of the second alternative, the one which Moore, for example, evidently accepts. Whether utilitarians can provide a credible account of the relationship between the duty to maximize the balance of intrinsic good over intrinsic evil, on the one hand, and, on the other, the intrinsic good that friendship is, will thus be seen to turn on the possibility of the utilitarian's interpreting the duty involving friendship as a duty we have to friendship itself. I shall argue that the utilitarian cannot succeed in this undertaking. First, though, the attempt to interpret the duty involving friendship as a *duty-to-someone* needs to be nullified.

What might it mean to view this duty as a *duty-to-someone*? One possibility is that the duty involving friendship is a duty we have to our friends (what I shall call 'the narrow interpretation'). A second possibility ('the broad interpretation') is that we have a duty to make friends, or at least a duty to try to make them. The two interpretations certainly are different. For example, my having duties to my friends (e.g., a duty to help them in times of their personal distress) is not the same as, and does not presuppose or entail, my having a duty to try to make friends in the first place, just as, analogously, my having a duty to keep a promise once made is distinct from, and does not presuppose or entail, my having a duty to go about making promises. We need to ask, then, whether

the duty involving friendship should be understood along the lines of the broad or the narrow interpretation, assuming, as we are for now, that this duty should be understood as a duty-to-someone, and emphasizing again that our interest lies in determining whether the duty involving friendship can be made to fit the general utilitarian prescription that we have a duty to act so as to maximize the balance of intrinsic good over intrinsic evil.

The narrow interpretation of the duty involving friendship is demonstrably too narrow, when viewed against this general utilitarian prescription, since this prescription lays it down that we have a duty to act so as to bring about the greatest possible balance of good over evil; *ceteris paribus*, therefore, we have a duty to act so as to bring about the greatest amount of that particular good that is friendship, a duty which a person who happens *not* to have any friends cannot fulfil just by acting so as to fulfil those duties he has to his already existing friends, since, *ex hypothesi*, he *has* no 'already existing friends.' Thus, if (1) those who happen not to have friends have an obligation to act so as to bring about the greatest possible balance of intrinsic good over intrinsic evil; and if, furthermore, (2) friendship is intrinsically good; and if, finally, (3) *ceteris paribus*, those who happen not to have friends cannot fulfil *their* obligation involving friendship by fulfilling *their* duties to *their* friends; *then* it follows that *they* can fulfil their obligation involving friendship only by making, or by trying to make, friends. Now, (1) and (2) are propositions Moore, for example, would readily grant; indeed, they are propositions upon which he insists. Proposition (3), moreover, is demonstrably true, for the reasons given. It follows, therefore, (treating the duty involving friendship as a duty-to-someone), that anyone who would accept *both* Moore's view about the value of friendship *and* the principle of utility must accept the broader interpretation of the duty involving friendship, the interpretation which holds, once again, that we have a duty to make friends, or at least to try to do so. How reasonable it is to maintain that we have such an obligation is a question to which we will direct our attention momentarily. Before doing so, however, it is important to emphasize that, given the preceding, this obligation should not be construed as one that is peculiar to those who happen not to have any friends. Given the preceding, *everyone* must be thought to have the obligation in question. It is just that those who already have friends, if they can claim responsibility for the friendship or for trying to make friends at least, can be credited with having already fulfilled the obligation involving friendship, to a greater or lesser extent, whereas those who happen not to have any friends at all and who happen not to have made any effort to make them must be given the lowest possible moral grade, as it were, at least when it comes to discharging the duty involving friendship.

We turn now to consider how reasonable it can be to allege that we have a duty to make, or at least to try to make, friends. The obvious question to ask is, *to whom* do we have this obligation, if we have it? I am not here claiming that all obligations necessarily are obligations-to-someone, and, as already explained, I will consider other options below. What I am trying to do now is clarify and critically assess the possible view that the duty involving friendship is a duty we have to someone. What I want to know is to whom we owe this duty, assuming that we owe it to someone. For example, in the case of our duty to keep a promise, this question is clearly relevant and has a clear answer: we have the obligation to keep our promises to those individuals, if any, to whom we have made them. So, to whom do I have a duty involving friendship, assuming I have a duty involving friendship, and assuming this duty is a duty-to-someone?

In the nature of the case, only two possibilities are evident: *Either* I might be thought to have this obligation to myself, or I might be thought to have it to some other (or others). As regards the first alternative, it is unclear to begin with whether sense can be made of the idea that we have obligations to ourselves. If the correct understanding of strict obligations is one in which all strict obligations have correlative rights, then it does not appear to make sense to speak of '(strict) obligations to oneself' since the idea that we can have rights against ourselves seems altogether unintelligible. And if the duty involving friendship is not a strict duty, how could friendship have the great importance Moore, for one, attributes to it? However, even assuming that sense can be made of the idea of self-regarding duties, it remains to be asked what these duties might be and whether, in particular, the duty to make or try to make friends is one of them.

Moore, for one, has very little to say on the topic of duties to oneself, remarking in passing only that 'the disagreeable effects on other people of [omitting] the "self-regarding duties," prudence and temperance, are not so marked as those on the future of the agent himself' (p. 168). Moore makes no effort to show that we have these duties (prudence and temperance) to ourselves, and the fact that he places quotes around the expression 'self-regarding duties' makes it even less clear what his own considered views are on this matter. But let us by-pass these difficulties and assume, for argument's sake, that we do have the self-regarding duties Moore mentions. Then we can ask how, if at all, a duty concerning friendship might be built upon either of these.

Temperance will not do. Temperate people do not do too much or too little of whatever it is that they do; but the duty to be temperate itself, assuming we have this duty to ourselves, does not lay down specifically what we ought to do – for example, take up the saxophone, raise Welsh corgis or invest in the stock market. Thus,

temperance is not an adequate idea on which to base a self-regarding duty to make, or to try to make, friends, (though presumably it would direct us, if we undertake this project, to endeavor not to make too few or too many).

Prudence, too, fails as a basis for a self-regarding duty involving friendship, if prudence is understood in terms of enlightened self-interest. For though it certainly frequently *is* in our self-interest to have friends, the relationship that exists between friends, as noted earlier, cannot be founded just on mutual self-interest. Relationships founded on mutual self-interest are of the sort *I-will-do-this-for-you-if-you-will-do-that-for-me*; both parties to the bargain stand to benefit from the transaction *and* enter into the transaction for that reason, as when I pay the plumber to fix my pipes. Personal affection is unnecessary and may in fact be a hindrance to the pursuit of a person's enlightened self-interest. Friendships differ, first, because they necessarily involve affection – (I cannot be John's friend if I do not feel affection for him) – and, second, because friendship involves a willingness to do something for one's friend without requiring that he/she do something (roughly equivalent) in return. Friendship is not an *I-will-do-this-for-you-if-you-will-do-that-for-me* relationship; it consists in the willingness to *do-this-for-you-whether-you-do-anything-for-me-or-not*, a willingness to make sacrifices which, viewed from the vantagepoint of enlightened self-interest, it might not be prudent to make.

For these reasons, then, we shall fail if we undertake to show that our putative obligation to make, or to try to make friends is grounded on the principle of pursuing one's self-interest or, as remarked earlier, on the supposed self-regarding duty of temperance. Whether there are other 'duties we have to our self,' I do not know. I do not believe, however, that these other duties, if we have them, will succeed anymore than do prudence and temperance in supplying a rational basis on which to found a self-regarding duty involving friendship. For any (merely) self-regarding duty, assuming that we have such duties, will necessarily focus primary, if not exclusive, attention on what the effects of acting, or failing to act, in certain ways will have on the agent himself/herself, whereas friendship, if it exists, necessarily requires that we think of the effects in a less self-centered way. Moreover, even if we have self-regarding duties, the logic of our moral appraisals of certain individuals seems clearly to reflect that a duty to make, or to try to make, friends is not one of them. Of someone who goes through life friendless, even one who makes no effort to make friends, we might well say that he has missed a great source of joy, comfort and satisfaction, that his life would have been much the better if only he had had friends; but we would not say that, on that account, he has failed to carry out or discharge a duty he had to himself. For these reasons, then, the duty we have involving

friendship, even assuming that we have this duty, is not a duty we have to ourselves.

Now, in view of this finding, the 'somebody' to whom we have the duty in question, *if* this is to be a duty-to-somebody, must be someone other than the agent himself/herself. To explore this possibility fully, we need to consider two alternatives: First, that I owe it to other people to become (or to try to become) their friend or, second, that I owe it to other people to act in such a way that they can make friends, with me or some other(s). Both possibilities lack credibility. My neighbor might justifiably complain that I have failed in my duties to him if, without his consent, I have taken the liberty to devour the contents of his refrigerator or sold his car, but with what possible justification might he complain that I have come up short in carrying out my duties to him if I have not worked at being his friend or given over my time or energy to helping him make friends with others? A neighbor who 'minds his own business' perhaps isn't the best one to invite to the neighborhood cook-out, but that only means that he isn't likely to be much fun, not that he is therefore in arrears in paying others their moral due.

It is important to realize that the issues presently under examination do not turn on Good Samaritan-type cases where someone is in distress and another fails to render assistance. The obligation we have to aid those in distress, assuming that we have it, does not bind us to become, or to try to become, the *friend* of the person to whom aid is given. Thus, whereas one can imagine how a utilitarian might endeavor to justify encouraging people to discharge their duties in 'a friendly spirit' and how, in fact, the utilitarian might even give a utilitarian justification of the view that we have a duty to fulfil our duties in this way (on the grounds that the consequences are better, all considered, if people fulfil their duties in a friendly spirit than if they merely fulfil their duties); imagining and, indeed, granting all this, it still does not follow that we have a duty to be, or to try to become, friends or that, in giving the justification just described, the utilitarian has thereby given a justification of such a duty.

A second point worth emphasizing is this. One can contest the view that we have a duty to make, or to try to make, friends without denying that we have any positive (as distinct from negative) duties. It *may* be true that we have only negative duties – e.g., not to harm one another. That is an open question, one that need not be examined in detail here. The point is, even granting that we do have some positive duties (e.g., the positive duty to render assistance to strangers), it does not follow that we have the particular duty to make, or to try to make, friends.

It was Schopenhauer who speculated that the more finely developed one's intellect and taste, the less possible is friendship: 'Great minds are

like eagles, and build their nest in lofty solitude.⁸ Possibly this is true. In any event, let us consider the case of solitary individuals to see what relevance, if any, it has to the issues at hand. For it might be argued that such persons, because they withdraw from society, fail on that account to fulfil certain positive duties they have to others – for example, the duties to render needed assistance or to be generous. And it would seem that a utilitarian would have the makings of an argument to support subjecting the recluse to moral criticism, on the grounds that such withdrawal makes no positive contribution to the good of society. Now, it is not clear that this is true, but we need not consider the matter in detail here since, even if it is, it does not follow that those who withdraw from society thereby fail to fulfil the *particular* duty to have, or to try to become, friends, or to help others do so. And not only does this not follow; there also are independent reasons for thinking that these solitary individuals do not have this duty to begin with. For if those of us who have not made our nests in lofty solitude do not have a duty involving friendship, neither do those who make their nests for one inhabitant only.

If, then, we attempt to understand how we might have a duty involving friendship along the lines of our having a duty-to-someone, either to ourselves or to others, there appear to be ample grounds for denying that we have such a duty, even if it is true that we do have certain positive, and not just negative, duties, either to ourselves, to others, or to both. That is the conclusion the argument up to this point has sought to establish. But it is possible that someone might object to this argument by saying that the wrong question has been asked throughout. For the question, according to this objection, is not, To *whom* do we have a duty involving friendship? Rather, it is, To *what* do we have this duty? And the answer to this question, this objection continues, is that the obligation we have involving friendship is an obligation we have to friendship itself; we owe it to this great intrinsic good *itself*, not to any body in particular.

Whether any utilitarian should regard matters in this way, Moore at least seems to. Recall that he writes '[t]hat it is only for the sake of these things [personal affection and the enjoyment of beauty] – in order that as much of them as possible may at some time exist – that anyone can be justified in performing any public or private duty.' It is not 'for the sake of anybody, Moore seems to be saying, that we ought to bring friendships into being; instead, it is for the sake of friendship itself, and other intrinsic goods themselves, that we ought to bring these goods into being. Indeed, to speak of what is intrinsically good, according to

8 Arthur Schopenhauer, *Essays of Arthur Schopenhauer*, trans. T. Bailey Saunders (New York: A.L. Burt n.d.), 142

Moore, is to speak of *what ought to exist for its own sake* (*Principia*, p. viii). That being so, it might be claimed that one fails to mount a serious objection to utilitarianism if one relies on an analysis of duty where duties always are duties-to-someone, oneself or others.

This defense of utilitarianism assumes that we can 'owe it to intrinsic goods themselves,' whatever these intrinsic goods are supposed to be, to bring them into existence. Few will find this an intelligible notion, in part because duties (at least strict or 'perfect' ones) have correlative rights. If I owe it to you to keep my promise, for example, then we find it natural to think that you have a correlative right to see that I keep my word. This leaves open, of course, how this right is to be analyzed – e.g., as a valid claim, an entitlement, or a reasonable expectation. But the thought that you have a correlative right, if I have a duty to you, at least is *intelligible*. What is *not* intelligible is the thought that 'intrinsic goods themselves' have, or can have, rights. Only *individuals* can have rights. Intrinsic goods, whether of the type Moore instances, or of the type a hedonistic utilitarian commends, since they are not individuals, cannot. If strict or perfect duties always have correlative rights, we have no such duties to intrinsic goods themselves.

Suppose we do not accept the correlativity of rights with duties. What then can be said of the view, which Moore for one seems to accept, that we owe it to intrinsic goods themselves, as distinct from having duties to individuals, to act as utility prescribes? Reflecting first on hedonistic utilitarianism will reveal that there isn't much that can be said in favor of thinking of our duties in this way. For consider: What is there about *pleasure itself* that could possibly ground, or create in us, the obligation to act on its behalf? Why not say that we have a duty to redness itself to act so as to bring about an optimal balance of red things over purple ones? Isn't 'redness itself' (whatever exactly that is) just as inappropriate and, indeed, just as unintelligible an object of our duties as 'pleasure itself' (whatever exactly that is)? If it is replied, as predictably it will be, that people and sentient creatures generally prefer pleasure in a way that makes it significantly different than their preference for red things, the point is well taken. But as soon as we begin to allude to the preferences individuals have, as a means of accounting for the alleged duty to optimize the balance of pleasure over pain, we are moving away from interpreting this duty as a 'duty to pleasure itself' to interpreting it as a duty we have to individuals. The duty to optimize the balance of intrinsic good over intrinsic evil is being treated as a *duty-to-individuals* after all – the duty, namely, to bring about an optimal balance of what they prefer (pleasure) over what they prefer to be without (pain).⁹

9 Peter Singer has recently developed a version of utilitarianism which he refers to

An analogous argument can be given against non-hedonistic versions of utilitarianism, including the one offered by Moore, when, as Moore seems to believe, we are supposed to have duties to intrinsic values themselves. As in the case of 'pleasure itself,' so also in the case of 'friendship itself,' there is no clear reason to suppose that 'friendship itself' grounds, or creates in us, an obligation to act on its behalf. That our friendships are very great goods is not being denied. What is being questioned is how our friendships being a very great good can serve as an adequate basis for the claim that we have an obligation to it to bring it into existence. Moore's position would seem to be the platonic one that there is, as it were, out there, distinct from any particular friendship, this very great universal good, Friendship itself, and that what we must do is act so as to bring as much of this great good into existence as we can, not because we owe it to any person to do so, but because we owe it to this very great good itself to move it from the realm of the might-exist-in-the-ordinary-world to the does-exist-in-the-ordinary-world. After all, since, for Moore, friendship is intrinsically valuable, *it ought to exist for its own sake*. Though the issues certainly are complicated and not easily settled, there do not appear to be compelling reasons for thinking that there is such a thing as a universal 'Friendship itself' out there waiting to infuse individual friendships or that we understand what it could mean to say that there is; and if this is so, then there is no good reason to believe that there is a 'Friendship itself' to which we have any duty whatsoever. If, in reply, we are told that people value friendship, that they have a marked preference for it over loneliness, then what is said is true enough but not to the point. As soon as we begin to introduce considerations about what people prefer, we begin to move away from elucidating the view that we have a duty to Friendship itself and move toward the view that our (putative) duty involving friendship is a duty-to-someone – namely, a duty to act so that others may secure what they prefer. Whatever we may think of this latter account of our duties, it is decidedly inadequate as an elucidation of the view that our duty involving friendship is *not* a duty we have to someone, ourself or others, but *is* instead a duty we have to Friendship itself.

It is important to emphasize what is not being argued. I am not arguing that people never act, or never say that they act, for the sake of certain ideals. I readily concede this point, but, for reasons now to be ex-

as 'preference-utilitarianism.' I believe what I say here, about the analysis of duty, is harmonious with what Singer believes. But I also think that preference-utilitarianism, like the other varieties of utilitarianism, is refuted by the dilemma I pose in the present essay. See Peter Singer, *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1979).

plained, there is nothing implied by this concession that can help the utilitarian. Just the opposite, in fact. The appeal to ideals can take two forms, either an appeal to principles of virtuous conduct or to the ideal state of things, the best state of affairs. Ideals in the former sense (let us call these 'virtue-ideals') can find no room within utilitarian theory. Persons who accept truth-telling or integrity as virtue-ideals, for example, regard these ideals as requiring that they behave in certain ways *independently of considerations about the consequences for others*. One who accepts truth-telling as a virtue-ideal is not saying that we ought to tell the truth because doing so will lead to the best consequences for all affected, nor is it being claimed that the amount of truth in the world will proliferate if only everyone would but fulfil their other duties. What one is saying, when the ideal of truth is set out as a virtue-ideal, is that we must tell the truth *because it is the truth, or because we will be less of a person if we don't*. But, now, if virtue-ideals impose duties independent of considerations about consequences for all affected by the outcome, utilitarians are barred by their theory from accommodating them, since, according to utilitarians, our duties are determined by considerations about such consequences. Moore may well be called an 'ideal utilitarian',¹⁰ and there is nothing wrong with referring to his views in this way, provided that this means only that he is not a hedonist when it comes to intrinsic value. If it means more – in particular, if it means that he presents us with a version of utilitarianism in which virtue-ideals are nicely accommodated – then there *is* something wrong with speaking in this way, since not even Moore could explain how, on a utilitarian basis, we can have duties that are independent of considerations about consequences. Thus, even conceding the possibility that people can have duties to certain virtue-ideals, and, therefore, that not all duties are duties-to-someone, the difficulties the intrinsic value of friendship poses for utilitarianism is not avoided. *Even if it is possible* – (and it is not clear that it is, because it is not clear what it could mean to say this) – that persons could have duties to the virtue-ideal of friendship, the utilitarian is no better off. Acting out of respect for that ideal, like acting out of respect for any other, is to act for reasons that are decidedly not utilitarian in character.

As mentioned earlier, there is a second way in which we may appeal to ideals – namely, when we speak of the best possible state of affairs. Interpreted in this way, to speak of 'the ideal of friendship' would seem to be to convey a vision of friendship's blossoming in abundance, a vision of the maximum number of people having the maximum amount

10 See, e.g., William Frankena, *Ethics* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall 1963), 14.

of friendship. That would be the ideal state of affairs, so far as friendship is concerned. Now, this way of thinking about the ideal of friendship (let us call this 'the ideal-state sense') certainly differs from the virtue-ideal sense, most particularly because the ideal-state sense interprets the ideal of friendship as a state of affairs to be achieved or striven for, whereas virtue-ideals are not future-oriented. Thus, we cannot contest the utilitarian's ability to accommodate ideals, in the ideal-state sense, in the same way as we just contested his ability to accommodate ideals, in the virtue-ideal sense. Moreover, because ideals, in the ideal-state sense, and the principle of utility are both forward-looking (they both direct us to bring something into existence in the future) it may look as if the ideal of friendship, when this is interpreted in the ideal-state sense, may be easily accommodated by utilitarianism. But appearances are deceiving in this case. For the question is, What is the *relationship* between the ideal state of affairs regarding friendship (as many people as possible having as much friendship as possible) and our having a duty involving friendship? Two possibilities are at hand. The first is that we have this duty to someone, ourselves or others, to bring this ideal state of affairs to maximum fruition. This option lacks credibility, for reasons offered in the foregoing: We simply have no duty, either a self-regarding or an other-regarding duty, to become, or to try to become, friends with others. The second possibility is that we have a duty involving friendship to the ideal-state of affairs itself. This option also lacks credibility. States of affairs, even ideal states of affairs, are not intelligible possessors of rights, so that if strict duties have correlative rights, we cannot have a strict duty to the ideal state of affairs regarding friendship. And if not a strict duty, then what sort of duty could this be? This latter question, and the larger question about the supposed connection between the ideal-state of friendship and our duties, is not a question to be answered by having expedient recourse to a definition which papers over the difficulties. Moore is guilty of this when, in *Principia*, he defines 'duty' as 'that action, which will cause more good to exist in the Universe than any other possible alternative' (p. 148). This is unsatisfactory, not only because it changes the *normative* utilitarian position regarding duty into a putative non-normative, analytic definition of 'duty',¹¹ but also because it leaves unexplained how we come to have a duty involving friendship in the first place or in what this duty consists. To suppose that these troubled waters can be calmed, and that utilitarian theory can have smooth sailing, by *defining* 'duty' in the way Moore does is to avoid

11 I explore this matter at greater length in 'Moore's Accounts of "Right",' *Dialogue*, 11 (1972).

the problems rather than to address them. If we are just supposed 'to see' that we have a duty involving friendship, one that is to be cashed in terms of our having a duty to the ideal-state of friendship, because the definition of 'duty' tells us so, then that must surely count as a point against, rather than a point in favor of, that definition. Similarly deficient is the observation that, whatever the theoretical problems might be, it is at least clear that utilitarians believe that (a) we have a duty to perform that act 'which will cause more good to exist in the Universe than any other possible action' and that, given the admitted intrinsic value of friendship, they also believe that (b) *ceteris paribus*, we have a duty to act to bring about the ideal-state of friendship. What one wants is not declarations of what utilitarians believe on this matter; what one wants is an explanation of how what they believe fits together. As things stand, neither Moore nor any other utilitarian has succeeded in giving an adequate explanation of to whom, or to what, we have a duty involving friendship, an explanation which, given their normative position and the acknowledged value of friendship, they should be required to offer.

One final attempt to explain what needs explaining deserves our consideration. This consists in accepting part of what I have been arguing – namely, both (a) we have no duty involving friendship and (b) friendship is a great intrinsic good. What we are obligated to do, given this last attempt at explanation, is not to bring about friendships, since we have no duty involving friendship; our duty is to do those things that *make friendship possible* – to act, in other words, in those ways which bring about the necessary conditions of the ideal state of affairs regarding friendship. Thus, we have a (public) duty to keep our promises and a (private) duty to keep ourselves in good health only if or as our doing so lays the groundwork for the full-flourishing of friendship. Our duty is to do what makes friendship possible; it is not a duty to Friendship itself, or to others, or even to the ideal-state of friendship.

This is an unpromising line of defense, certainly, and I consider it only because someone might think they find this view expressed by Moore in the neglected passage from *Principia* quoted earlier. For Moore does say that it is for the sake of friendship and the enjoyment of beauty – 'in order that as much of them as possible may at some time exist' – that we can be 'justified in performing any public or private duty' (p. 189, emphasis added). And, read independently of other textual evidence, it would be possible, though not, I think, natural to interpret him as believing that our duty is to bring about the *possibility* of an optimum amount of intrinsic good over intrinsic evil. But this interpretation does not square with the great bulk of what Moore says about the relationship between duty and intrinsic good. When, for example, he writes that '(o)ur duty ... can only be defined as that action, which will cause more good to exist in the Universe than any other possible alternative'

(p. 148), to interpret him as believing that our duty lies in doing what will bring about what makes an optimal balance of intrinsic good over intrinsic evil *possible* would clearly be to distort the position he advances. And on this point, at least, Moore clearly is correct, *if* his position is to constitute a recognizable version of utilitarianism. Given any recognizable version of that position, we are obligated, not merely to act so as to bring about the *possibility* that the results of our actions will bring about the necessary conditions of bringing about the optimal balance of intrinsic good over intrinsic evil, however intrinsic good and evil are understood; rather, our obligation lies in bringing about the greatest possible balance of those things which are themselves intrinsically good over those things which are themselves intrinsically evil. Thus, neither Moore nor any other recognizable utilitarian could be presumed to subscribe to the view here advanced in utilitarianism's defense.

Now, if the analysis of the preceding pages is accurate and the argument sound, we have shown that we have no duty to ourselves, or to other people, to be their friend, or to try to be their friend, or to help (or to try to help) them become friends with others. Moreover, we have also shown *both* that we do not have duties to the ideal of Friendship itself or to the ideal-state of friendship *and* that though we may have duties to the ideal of friendship, when understood as a virtue-ideal, these are duties which cannot be accommodated by utilitarianism. And, most recently, we have reminded ourselves that no utilitarian can maintain that our duties consist merely in doing what will make the optimal balance of intrinsic good over intrinsic evil *possible*. This is the cumulative conclusion of the argument that has gone before. For convenience's sake, let us refer to it as 'the negative-thesis.' The point I now wish to bring home is that is that the negative-thesis has absolutely fatal implications for utilitarianism, assuming that friendship is intrinsically valuable. For inasmuch as that theory holds that it is obligatory to maximize the balance of intrinsic goods over intrinsic evils, and given that friendship is intrinsically good, then utilitarianism *must* imply that, other things being equal, we are obligated to maximize friendship. If, however, the negative-thesis is true, then it is false that we have a duty involving friendship, either to ourselves, to others, to Friendship itself, or to the ideal of friendship, when this ideal is interpreted in the ideal-state sense. (Whether we can have duties to the ideal of friendship, in the virtue-ideal sense, is a moot point, since, if we can, utilitarianism cannot account for them). But, now, if this is false – if, that is, it is false that we have a duty to maximize friendship, *ceteris paribus* – then utilitarianism cannot be correct. It *cannot* be true that we are *obligated* to bring about the greatest possible balance of intrinsic good, including friendship, over intrinsic evil, and this for the quite simple reason that

there are some intrinsic goods – friendship, in particular – regarding which we have no obligation, or no obligation utilitarianism can accommodate in any event, to bring them about in the first place. And if, in order to avoid this horn of the dilemma, utilitarians were to deny that friendship is intrinsically valuable, then the theory would be impaled on the other horn, since, if anything has claim to being intrinsically valuable, friendship most certainly does. Thus, *either* utilitarians must deny that friendship is an intrinsic good, which would make their account of what things are intrinsically valuable flawed, *or* they must allow that it is intrinsically valuable, in which case they must abandon the principle of utility, since, at least in the case of the intrinsic good, friendship, we have no obligation, or no obligation utilitarianism could account for, to maximize it. In either case, a fatal defect of utilitarianism is exposed and the theory is refuted.¹² It is one of the nice ironies of the always lively history of this position that this century's leading utilitarian thinker – Moore – should have openly endorsed both horns of this dilemma *and* gotten away with it. Up to now, that is.¹³

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- 12 Not only utilitarians are impaled by one or the other horn of this dilemma. Any consequentialist or partial consequentialist account of obligation must encounter the same problem. Thus, for example, Ross' theory is subject to the same criticism.
- 13 I have benefitted from criticisms raised against an earlier draft of this essay by the members of the Philosophy Department of the University of Georgia and by my colleague, W.R. Carter.