

Why Attitude to Good People Is Not Always Positive: Explanation Based on Decision Theory

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1. Formulation of the Problem

- There are very good people in this world.
- They empathize with others, they actively help others.
- One would expect that other people would appreciate them, cherish them.
- In other words, that, our attitude towards these good people would be positive.
- However, in real life, the attitude is often neutral or even negative.
- Why? Is there a rational explanation for this?

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2. Towards Explanation

- Each person's happiness is determined
 - not only by this person's satisfaction with life,
 - but also by other people's happiness.
- It is difficult to enjoy good life if many people around you suffer.
- Let us denote the Person i 's satisfaction with life by s_i , and this person's level of happiness by h_i .
- Then, h_i depends on s_i and on h_j for all other j .
- In the first approximation, we can assume that this dependence is linear: $h_i = s_i + \sum_{j \neq i} a_{ij} \cdot h_j$.
- A very good person v is very happy when others are happy and suffers when others suffer: $a_{vj} \approx 1$ for all j .

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3. Towards Explanation (cont-d)

- Let us consider a simplified model in which:
 - everyone's satisfaction is the same $s_i = s > 0$,
 - everyone's attitude to v is the same: $a_{jv} = a$, and
 - we ignore attitude towards everyone else.
- Then, $h_v = s + n \cdot h_j$, where n is the number of people except for v , and $h_j = s + a \cdot h_v$.
- Substituting the above expression for h_v into this formula, we get $h_j = s + a \cdot s + a \cdot n \cdot h_j$; so:

$$h_j = \frac{a + a \cdot s}{1 - a \cdot n}.$$

- If a is reasonably positive, i.e., if $a > 1/n$, then $h_j < 0$ – i.e., everyone will be unhappy.
- Thus, the desire to be happy implies that $a < 1/n$.

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4. Towards Explanation (cont-d)

- Reminder: the desire to be happy implies that $a < 1/n$.
- With n in billions, this explains why on average, the attitude should be either neutral or negative.

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5. Commonsense Explanation

- From the common sense viewpoint, the above mathematics makes perfect sense.
- A very good person is unhappy if other people are unhappy.
- If we empathize with this person, we become unhappy too.
- Since people do not want to be unhappy, they prefer
 - to ignore others' unhappiness (at best),
 - or even blame them for their own unhappiness.

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