



UNIVERSITY OF
ILLINOIS PRESS

North American Philosophical Publications

WHOLE-LIFE WELFARISM

Author(s): Ben Bramble

Source: *American Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (JANUARY 2014), pp. 63-74

Published by: University of Illinois Press on behalf of the North American Philosophical Publications

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24475371>

Accessed: 03-04-2018 23:03 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

University of Illinois Press, North American Philosophical Publications are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *American Philosophical Quarterly*

WHOLE-LIFE WELFARISM

Ben Bramble

I. INTRODUCTION

According to *welfarism about value* (hereafter simply welfarism),

something is good (or bad) only if it is good (or bad) *for* somebody—that is, makes somebody better off (or worse off) in some way.

Welfarism is a popular view among contemporary philosophers. Many find it hard to see how something that benefits nobody could be the least bit valuable or worth bringing about, or how something that harms nobody could be the least bit disvaluable or worth preventing.

What few philosophers seem to have noticed is that welfarism can be formulated in two importantly different ways, depending on whether one has in mind *momentary* well-being (i.e., how well off one is at a *particular time*) or *lifetime* well-being (i.e., the welfare value of one's life *considered as a whole*). According to what I will call *at-a-time welfarism*,

something is good (or bad) only if it makes somebody better off (or worse off) in some way *at a particular time*—that is, increases (or decreases) somebody's *momentary* well-being in some way.

By contrast, *whole-life welfarism* says

something is good (or bad) only if it makes somebody better off (or worse off) in some way in his life *considered as a whole*—that is,

increases (or decreases) somebody's *lifetime* well-being in some way.

These formulations are importantly different because, as many philosophers now believe, and as I will soon be arguing, not everything that makes a person better off (or worse off) in some way at a particular time makes him better off (or worse off) in some way in his life considered as a whole, and a person can be made better off (or worse off) in some way in his life considered as a whole without being made better off or worse off in some way at a particular time.

In this paper, I will attempt to show that we should be whole-life welfarists. By focusing on lifetime, rather than momentary, well-being, a welfarist can solve two of the most vexing puzzles in value theory, The Badness of Death and The Problem of Additive Aggregation.

2. THE BADNESS OF DEATH

Many of us believe that one reason a person's death can be a bad thing is that it can be bad *for* him (i.e., make him worse off in some way). But *at what time* can one's death possibly make one worse off? Not when one is *alive*, for then it hasn't even happened yet. Equally, however, not when one is *dead*, for then one has no level of well-being to speak of. Call this *the timing problem* for the badness of death.

Philosophers have offered two main kinds of responses to this problem. First, to try to show that one's death *can* make one worse off at some time (*temporalism*). Second, to deny that something can make one worse off only if it makes one worse off at some time (*atemporalism*).

In this section, I will argue that the two most promising versions of temporalism fail, and that atemporalism is viable, but only if whole-life welfarism is true.

2.1. Temporalism

Most temporalists are either *priorists* or *subsequentists*. According to priorism, one's death can make one worse off when one is *alive* (and only then).¹ It can do so, most priorists claim, by *frustrating one's present desires for future states of affairs*. Suppose Eric wants to write a great novel, and would do so, but for his premature death. According to priorists, Eric's death makes him worse off *now* by frustrating his desire to write this novel.

Priorism faces two very serious worries. First, most of us find it highly counterintuitive to think that the frustration or satisfaction of one's present desires for future states of affairs can affect how one is doing *now*. As David Velleman writes,

[w]e do not say . . . of a person raised in adversity, that his youth wasn't so bad, after all, simply because his youthful hopes were eventually fulfilled later in life. We might say that such a person's adulthood compensated for an unfortunate youth; but we wouldn't say that it made his youth any better.²

Nobody, after all, would think to harm his enemy by frustrating (even very strong) desires this enemy once had, but has since lost.

Second, even if it were true that the frustration of a present desire for a future state of affairs makes one worse off now, it seems impossible to account for the badness of death *wholly* in this way. Suppose Luna, had she not died last year, would have gone

on to develop a deep and abiding interest in poetry, one she would have successfully pursued for years. In this case, Luna's death seems a bad thing, in part, by depriving her of the opportunity *to become interested in and pursue poetry*, even if she'd had no desire during her lifetime that was frustrated by this deprivation.

Let us move on, then, to subsequentism. Subsequentism says that one's death can make one worse off when one is *dead* (and only then). According to the leading subsequentist, Ben Bradley, a person's death makes her worse off at those times at which she "would have been living well, or living a life worth living, had she not died when she did."³ This is because, Bradley says, when one is dead, one has, at each moment, not *no* level of well-being, but a well-being level of *zero*.

How can a person have a level of well-being of zero at a time at which he does not exist? Bradley responds by noting that one way a *living* person can have a zero level of well-being at a certain time is just for there to be nothing that is intrinsically good or bad for him at that time—that is, just for him to *lack* certain properties.⁴ Now, says Bradley, "[i]f there's one thing non-existent objects are good at, it's lacking properties."⁵

But is Bradley right that a *living* person for whom nothing is intrinsically good or bad at a certain time has a zero level of well-being at this time? I doubt it. Consider Rip, who, let us suppose, was extremely well off in both his childhood and his adulthood, but who had a very long period of unconsciousness in between, during which there was nothing that was either intrinsically good or bad for him at any time.⁶ If this period were made long enough, then, on Bradley's view, Rip's *average* level of well-being throughout his life would have to be *extremely* low. But this is counterintuitive, given Rip's extremely high level of well-being in both his childhood and his adulthood. Most of us feel as though Rip's average well-being level was

very high. If we are right, then, in calculating it, we must regard him as having had, during his unconscious years, not a zero well-being level, but no level at all.

One's level of well-being, I would suggest, is better understood using an analogy with the volume level of a sound. If you are listening to a sound on the radio, and then you turn the volume dial down to zero, you are left, not with a sound of zero volume, but with no sound at all. Similarly, if you take away everything that is intrinsically good or bad for a person at some time, this person is left, not with a well-being level of zero, but with no level of well-being at all. In both instances, there is nothing that remains for the relevant measure to be a measure of.

The dead, then, cannot, as Bradley claims, have a zero level of well-being, just because *nobody* can. Subsequentism, then, cannot get off the ground.

2.2. Atemporalism

According to atemporalism, something can make one worse off without making one worse off at any time. How is this possible? Simply by reducing one's *lifetime* well-being (i.e., making one worse off in some way in one's life *considered as a whole*) without reducing one's momentary well-being. To determine whether a person's death was bad for him compared with some alternative possible death, one need only compare his actual lifetime well-being with the lifetime well-being he would have enjoyed on this alternative, and see which is higher.

Atemporalism is available on each of the leading theories of lifetime well-being. Consider, first, *desire-based* theories, on which lifetime well-being is equivalent to the extent to which one gets what one wants. There are two main desire-based theories, *idealized life preferentism* and *desire satisfactionism*.⁷ According to idealized life preferentism, one life is better for a person than another just in case this person, having experienced each

life from the inside, would prefer it (rather than the other) to have been his actual life.⁸ Desire satisfactionism, by contrast, says that one life is better for a person than another just in case it contains a greater balance of desire satisfaction over frustration than the other.⁹ On both these theories, death can reduce lifetime well-being without reducing momentary well-being. On idealized life preferentism, it can do so by resulting in a whole-life one would prefer less than the relevant alternative. On desire satisfactionism, it can do so by resulting in a whole-life that contains less desire satisfaction or more desire frustration than the relevant alternative.

Consider, next, *achievementism*, on which it is the fulfillment of one's central goals or aims (rather than one's desires) that determines one's lifetime well-being.¹⁰ On achievementism, death can reduce one's lifetime well-being without reducing one's momentary well-being because it can result in a whole-life involving less fulfillment of one's central goals or aims.

Consider, third, *perfectionism*, on which it is the fulfillment of one's nature as the kind of creature (and perhaps also the individual) one is that determines one's lifetime well-being.¹¹ On perfectionism, death can reduce lifetime well-being without reducing momentary well-being by resulting in a whole-life in which one does not as effectively fulfill one's nature.

Finally, consider *hedonism*, on which lifetime well-being is equivalent to the pleasurable-ness of one's life minus its painfulness. On hedonism, death can reduce lifetime well-being without reducing momentary well-being by resulting in a whole-life that is less pleasurable or more painful in some way.¹²

Atemporalism is an elegant and intuitive solution to the timing problem. However, as Bradley points out, it faces a serious worry: it makes the reason for which death can be bad for its subject different in kind to the reason for which the vast majority of harms—harms

such as sicknesses and injuries—are bad for their subjects. Sicknesses and injuries are bad for us because they make us worse off *at particular times*. Death should not be different.

Why, you may be wondering, is this a problem? Death is, after all, in *many* ways unlike anything else. It is a problem because it makes it hard to see how we can have a *unified axiology*—that is, an account of the goodness (and badness) of things on which good (and bad) things are good (and bad) *for the same kind of reason*—something that we need if we are to avoid difficult problems of commensurability. If sicknesses and injuries are bad things just because they make their subjects worse off *at some time*, and death is a bad thing just because it makes its subject worse off in his life *considered as a whole* (without making him worse off at any time), then it may be impossible to determine which is worse, a given injury or a given death.

This is, indeed, a serious worry. A unified axiology is important to have. Fortunately, I believe, atemporalists *can* deliver one. They can do so by accepting what I have called whole-life welfarism. According to whole-life welfarism, something is bad only if it makes somebody worse off in some way in his life considered as a whole. Sicknesses and injuries, *on any plausible theory of lifetime well-being*, will often reduce their subject's lifetime well-being. On desire-based theories, they will do so when they result in a whole-life one would prefer less, or a whole-life containing less desire satisfaction or more desire frustration. On achievementism, they will do so when they result in a whole-life involving less fulfillment of one's central goals or aims. On perfectionism, they will do so when they result in a whole-life in which one does not as effectively fulfill one's nature. On hedonism, they will do so when they result in a whole-life that is less pleasurable or more painful in some way.

If whole-life welfarism is true, then sicknesses and injuries, while they certainly do

make us worse off at particular times, are not bad things *for this reason*. They are bad things just when, and because, they reduce their subject's (or somebody else's) lifetime well-being.¹³

Whole-life welfarism, then, removes the principal obstacle to accepting what is the most elegant and intuitive solution to the timing problem for the badness of death, atemporalism.

3. THE PROBLEM OF ADDITIVE AGGREGATION

The second major puzzle in value theory that whole-life welfarism allows us to solve is what Larry Temkin calls *the problem of additive aggregation*. This puzzle is that some good things seem *so* good that even a small amount of them is better than *any* amount of certain other good things, and some bad things seem *so* bad that even a small amount of them is worse than *any* amount of certain other bad things. For example, it seems better that a single person is saved from a premature death than that *any* number of people enjoy a pleasurable lick from a lollipop. Similarly, it seems worse that an innocent person die prematurely than that *any* number of people suffer a short, mild headache.¹⁴

Philosophers have offered two main kinds of responses to this puzzle.¹⁵ First, to argue that there *is* some number of lollipop licks that would be better than the prevention of the death (as well as some number of short, mild headaches that would be worse than the death), and our intuitions about these cases are mistaken. Second, to try to explain how it could be the case that some good (or bad) things are *so* good (or bad) that even a small amount of them is better (or worse) than any amount of some other good (or bad) things.

In this section, I will explain why neither of these responses is satisfactory. I will then defend a response made possible by whole-life welfarism: to deny that each lollipop lick

is good (and each short, mild headache bad) *at all*.

3.1. *The First Response*

According to John Broome, there is some number of short, mild headaches that would be worse than the premature death of an innocent. While many of us find this counterintuitive, Broome argues that intuitions about very large numbers are unreliable.¹⁶ He writes:

Even the best philosophers cannot get an intuitive grasp of, say, tens of billions of people. . . . [These] philosophers ought not to think their intuition can tell them the truths about such large numbers of people. For very large numbers, we have to rely on theory, not intuition.¹⁷

He cites two kinds of cases where the involvement of very large numbers can mislead. First, in modern engineering, where “the cables that support suspension bridges are unintuitively slender.” Second, in evolutionary theory, where

many people’s intuition tells them that the process of natural selection, however many billions of years it continued for, could not lead from primordial slime to creatures with intelligence and consciousness. Four billion years will do it.¹⁸

Broome is right that, where large numbers are involved, intuitions can go wrong, and, moreover, that this is true not only in cases concerning what is physically possible (such as his engineering and evolution cases), but also in cases concerning the value of things. It seems likely, for example, that many of us do not fully appreciate how bad the Indonesian Boxing Day Tsunami of 2004 was—it killed 280,000 people—owing to the sheer numbers involved.

But whether we should think that our intuitions are mistaken in a given case concerning the value of things must depend, first, on *how widely and firmly felt the intuition is*, and, second, on *the prospect of coming up with an acceptable theory that vindicates the intuition*. For example, the intuition that torturing

babies is wrong is so widely and firmly felt that we would be unjustified in believing any theory on which it is mistaken, if acceptable alternatives exist.

For this reason, I think it is too soon to conclude with Broome that our intuitions are mistaken in the lollipops/headaches cases due to the involvement there of very large numbers. The intuition that there is no number of short, mild headaches that can be worse than the premature death of an innocent is extremely widely and firmly felt, and, as I will argue in section 3.3, there exists an acceptable theory that can vindicate this intuition.

3.2. *The Second Response*

I want now to consider two attempts to explain how it could be that some good (or bad) things are so good (or bad) that even a small amount of them is better (or worse) than any amount of some other good (or bad) things. The best known such attempt is Derek Parfit’s, outlined in his paper “Overpopulation and the Quality of Life.”¹⁹ Here, Parfit appeals to what he calls “the best things in life.” These things, which include “the best kinds of creative activity and aesthetic experience, the best relationships between different people, and the other things which do most to make life worth living,” have “more value . . . [or do] more to make the outcome better . . . than any amount of what is nearly as good.” Why is it better that an innocent person is saved from a premature death than that any number of people enjoy a pleasurable lick from a lollipop? It is because this person’s death might come at the cost of some of these best things, whereas the lollipop option would produce none of these things.

There are a number of problems with Parfit’s proposal. I will mention just two. Consider, first, that, if it were right, some things would *just* miss out on being among “the best things in life.” Suppose Mozart’s music qualifies as one of them, but Haydn’s music narrowly misses out. It is implausible

that even a small amount of Mozart is better than *any* amount of Haydn. As Parfit himself acknowledges, “it may be hard to defend the view that what is best has more value—or does more to make the outcome better—than any amount of what is nearly as good.” For this reason, he says, his view sometimes strikes even himself as “crazy.”²⁰

The second problem for Parfit’s response is that, even if it weren’t crazy, it wouldn’t *explain* very much. It says nothing, after all, about *how* it could be the case that the best things in life are so very valuable that even a small amount of them is better than any amount of any other good thing. To solve the puzzle, it would need to do so.

The most sophisticated version of the second response is Dale Dorsey’s, made in his wonderful piece “Headaches, Lives, and Value.”²¹ Dorsey appeals, not to “the best things in life,” but to the notion of lifetime well-being, in order to explain how it could be the case that each lollipop lick is good, but no number of them better than the prevention of the premature death. According to Dorsey, while every “momentary hedonic good” (i.e., every pleasure considered independently of its consequences) increases its subject’s lifetime well-being, there is no number of such pleasures that can contribute as much to lifetime well-being (either of a single subject or to lifetime well-being across lives) as anything that contributes even slightly to the fulfillment of a person’s *global plans* (i.e., the plans she would “endorse as valuable were she of sound mind and fully aware of all relevant information, including information about the consequences of her adopting [them]”).

How can a premature death be worse than *any* number of short, mild headaches, even though each of the latter is bad? It is because the death can *interfere with somebody’s global plans*, and so result in a greater reduction in lifetime well-being than the headaches (which, Dorsey says, we must assume do not interfere with anyone’s global plans). The

death is, in this way, more harmful to people, and so worse.²²

I believe Dorsey is on the right track in appealing to the notion of lifetime well-being in order to solve the puzzle. But his particular use of it will not do the job. This is because it merely relocates the puzzle from the area of value theory to that of lifetime well-being. Where the original puzzle was to explain how it could be the case that each short, mild headache is somewhat bad, but no amount of such headaches worse than a premature death, Dorsey leaves us wondering how it could be the case that each short, mild headache somewhat reduces a person’s lifetime well-being, but no amount of such headaches reduces people’s lifetime well-being more than something that interferes even slightly with somebody’s global plans. If every instance of a certain thing truly somewhat reduces a person’s lifetime well-being, then surely *enough* of that thing has got to reduce people’s lifetime well-being more than a finite amount of anything else that reduces somebody’s lifetime well-being. If not, why not? To solve the puzzle, Dorsey would need to answer this question.

3.3. My Response

While Dorsey’s response fails, it comes close to what I believe is the correct response to the puzzle. This is to hold:

- (a) A thing is good (or bad) only if it increases (or decreases) a person’s *lifetime* well-being in some way (whole-life welfarism).
- (b) Each extra lollipop lick (and short, mild headache) (at least, as we are imagining it in these thought experiments) makes no difference to its subject’s *lifetime* well-being.

Therefore,

- (c) Each extra lollipop lick is not a good thing (and each extra short, mild headache not a bad thing) *at all*.

Why is there no number of short, mild headaches that is worse than the premature

death of an innocent? It is because each extra headache (at least, as we are imagining such headaches in this thought experiment), while it reduces its subject's momentary well-being at the time of experience (i.e., makes him worse off *then* than he would otherwise have been), does not reduce his lifetime well-being at all, and so is not a bad thing at all. The premature death, by contrast, does reduce its subject's lifetime well-being, and so is a bad thing.²³

We have seen above (in section 2) why a premature death can reduce a person's lifetime well-being. The crucial question is: Why doesn't each extra short, mild headache reduce its subject's lifetime well-being? I do not wish here to commit myself to a particular theory of lifetime well-being. Instead, I will suggest that on *whichever* of the leading theories of lifetime well-being one is inclined to accept, there is a case to be made that each extra headache does not reduce its subject's lifetime well-being.

Consider, first, idealized life preferentism. This theory, recall, says that one life is better for a person than another just in case this person, having experienced each life from the inside, would prefer it (rather than the other) to have been his actual life. It seems likely that, having experienced two lives from the inside that were identical but for the existence in one of an extra short, mild headache, most of us would have no preference between the two. In support of this claim, consider the well-known phenomenon that most of us are indifferent to past pains of ours that we have entirely recovered from (and that affect nothing else in our lives).²⁴

Of course, most of us are not indifferent to having had *many* such headaches (especially if these have affected other things in our lives). But my proposed solution to the problem of additive aggregation is consistent with a *large number of short, mild headaches* reducing a person's lifetime well-being, and so being a bad thing. How many short, mild

headaches in a single life does it take to reduce a person's lifetime well-being, and so count as a bad thing? If idealized life preferentism is true, then it will depend just on the preferences of the individual in question.

Consider, next, desire satisfactionism, on which one life is better for a person than another just in case it contains a greater balance of desire satisfaction over frustration than the other. If paired with a *desire-based theory of pain*, on which a painful experience is just a species of desire frustration (namely, frustration of an intrinsic desire for the experience not to be occurring²⁵), desire satisfactionism *would* entail that an extra short, mild headache necessarily reduces its subject's lifetime well-being. However, if paired instead with a *phenomenological theory of pain*, on which an experience is painful just in case it involves a certain kind of phenomenology (or has a certain "feel" to it),²⁶ desire satisfactionism would not have this consequence. While desire-based theories of pleasure have been favored by philosophers for years, their popularity is fading. This is partly because they cannot account for unpleasant experiences *whose subject is entirely unaware of them at the time of experience*. One can hardly intrinsically want an experience of one's not to be occurring, if one has no idea *that* it is occurring.²⁷ Daniel Haybron offers the best examples of such experiences:

Everyone knows that we often adapt to things over time: what was once pleasing now leaves no impression or seems tiresome, and what used to be highly irritating is now just another feature of the landscape. Could it also be that some things are lastingly pleasant or unpleasant, while our awareness of them fades? I would suggest that it can. Perhaps you have lived with a refrigerator that often whined due to a bad bearing. If so, you might have found that, with time, you entirely ceased to notice the racket. But occasionally, when the compressor stopped, you did notice the sudden, glorious silence. You might also have noted, first, a

painful headache, and second, that you'd had no idea how obnoxious the noise was—or that it was occurring at all—until it ceased. But obnoxious it was, and all the while it had been, unbeknownst to you, fouling your experience as you went about your business. In short, you'd been having an unpleasant experience without knowing it. Moreover, you might well have remained unaware of the noise even when reflecting on whether you were enjoying yourself: the problem here is ignorance—call it reflective blindness—and not, as some have suggested, the familiar sort of inattentiveness we find when only peripherally aware of something. In such cases we can bring our attention to the experience easily and at will. Here the failure of attention is much deeper: we are so lacking in awareness that we can't attend to the experience, at least not without prompting (as occurs when the noise suddenly changes).²⁸

If Haybron is right, then desire-based theories of pain have got to be mistaken, and so desire satisfactionism can allow that an extra short, mild headache does not reduce its subject's lifetime well-being.

Still, you may object, even if painful experiences are not *constituted* by desire frustration, most of us are averse to pains of ours while they are taking place. Therefore, most short, mild headaches *would*, on desire satisfactionism, reduce their subject's lifetime well-being.

It is undeniable that most of us are averse to pains of ours while they are taking place. However, the most plausible version of desire satisfactionism, I believe, does not take as authoritative a person's *actual* desires, but only those he would have *were he suitably idealized* (say, fully informed and vividly imagining). Now, it seems plausible that, when suitably idealized, most of us would *not* be averse to pains of ours that we know will be fleeting and not affect our lives in any other way.

Consider T. E. Lawrence in the film *Lawrence of Arabia*. At one stage, Lawrence puts out a lit match with his bare fingers without

flinching. Astonished, his comrade tries it for himself. "It damn well hurts," he cries. "Certainly it hurts," Lawrence replies. "Well, what's the trick, then?" "The trick, William Potter, is not *minding* that it hurts." Lawrence, it seems, through his scholarship, his wide experience of the world, and his profound acquaintance with human suffering—in short, just the sorts of things a desire satisfactionist should include as part of the idealization process—has achieved indifference to pains like these. It seems plausible (or, at the very least, a possibility worth taking seriously) that most of us (even William Potter), if given the education, life experiences, and profound sensitivities of someone like Lawrence, would feel similarly toward our own short, mild pains. If this is true, then the most plausible version of desire satisfactionism would entail that an extra-short, mild headache does not reduce its subject's lifetime well-being.

Even if, however, it is not true, the best form of desire satisfactionism may take as authoritative only one's *central* (idealized) desires for how one's life is to go. If this is the case, then desire satisfactionism would entail that an extra short, mild headache does not reduce its subject's lifetime well-being because such headaches, plausibly, would not interfere with the satisfaction of any such central desires.

Consider, next, achievementism, on which it is the fulfillment of one's central goals or aims (rather than one's desires) that determines one's lifetime well-being. If this theory is true, then an extra short, mild headache does not reduce its subject's lifetime well-being because such headaches do not interfere with the fulfillment of any of his central goals or aims.

Consider, next, perfectionism, on which it is the fulfillment of one's nature as the kind of creature (and individual) one is that determines one's lifetime well-being. Once again, on this theory, it is plausible that an extra short, mild headache does not reduce its subject's lifetime well-being because

such headaches would make no difference to whether he fulfills his nature.

Finally, consider hedonism, on which lifetime well-being is equivalent to the pleasurable-ness of one's life minus its painfulness. Prominent hedonists such as Bradley, Feldman, and Crisp hold that how pleasurable one's life was considered as a whole is equivalent to the *sum* of pleasure contained within it, and so that every instance of pleasure necessarily increases its pleasurable-ness considered as a whole (and, in turn, one's lifetime well-being). But a hedonist needn't hold this view. Indeed, it strikes me as more plausible to say that the addition of further instances of a given kind of pleasure to one's life—providing these are truly phenomenologically identical (i.e., that there is nothing qualitatively new in them when it comes to pleasurable-ness)—may add *nothing* (in itself) to the pleasurable-ness of one's life considered as a whole.

Consider the following analogy with colors. When we ask how colorful a given thing is—say, a painting—most of us are wanting to know *how many different colors it contains, and how bright these are*. A very small painting consisting of many different bright colors (say, a miniature of Jackson Pollock's *Blue Poles*) may be far more colorful than a very large painting consisting of only one or two drab colors (say, Rothko's *Black on Maroon*). However much you extend the latter, if it remains just the one or two drab colors, it will not become *any* more colorful. The same idea applies, I believe, to the overall pleasurable-ness of a life. What matters is just the *variety* of pleasure within it—that is, the number of first instances of different kinds of pleasures—and *the pleasurable-ness of these first instances*.²⁹

If this is correct, then, even on hedonism, an extra pleasurable lollipop lick adds nothing to its subject's lifetime well-being. Similarly, an extra short, mild headache (because it does not add to the unpleasurable-ness of its

subject's life considered as a whole) does not reduce its subject's lifetime well-being.

It may be objected: You rejected Broome's response on account of its counterintuitiveness and the existence of an acceptable alternative. But the alternative you have sketched—that is, that each extra lollipop lick is not good, and each extra short, mild headache not bad, *at all*—is surely equally counterintuitive. If there is one thing that most philosophers agree on, it's that pleasure is intrinsically good, and pain, intrinsically bad.

While it is true that most philosophers agree on this, most philosophers have been wrong before, and it is hardly the dominant view in wider society. Many consider it a mark of maturity to come to regard certain minor pains (for example, pains due to cuts or scrapes), or the inconveniences associated with brushing one's teeth at night, doing the dishes, etc., as not mattering *at all*. Equally, many of us are taught that certain fleeting pleasures, such as the enjoyment of soda or candy (providing, perhaps, one has already had *some* such pleasures), are really entirely worthless, and so to attach no importance to them whatever.

Moreover, in denying that pleasure is intrinsically good, and pain, intrinsically bad, I am not denying the considerable importance of pleasure, and absence of pain, for a life that is good for its subject. On the contrary, on each of the theories of lifetime well-being I have sketched, it is unlikely that a given person could have a life that is especially good for him if he does not experience a significant amount of pleasure and relatively little pain. On desire-based theories, this is because, for most of us, while idealization may remove our desire for an extra fleeting pleasure, or our aversion to an extra fleeting pain, it will make no difference to our wanting a life that is, considered as a whole, pleasurable and relatively painless. (My example of an idealized agent, Lawrence, is not indifferent to the affective quality of his life considered

more generally.) On achievementism, it is because most of us have it as a goal to lead a life that is pleasurable and relatively painless. On perfectionism, it is because the capacity for pleasure is part of any adequate account of human nature. Finally, on hedonism, it is obvious why it is so. Moreover, it is clear that without *some* pleasures (including, perhaps, quite a large number of fairly trivial ones), or with *too much* pain, it would be virtually impossible for most of us to adequately function in our lives, and so achieve *anything*. Pleasure, and pain avoidance, that is, have considerable *instrumental* value for us.

I conclude that whole-life welfarism allows us to solve the puzzle.

4. CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have argued for a new theory of value, whole-life welfarism, according to which something is good (or bad) only if it increases (or decreases) a person's *lifetime* well-being in some way. This theory allows us to explain not only why death can be a bad thing in virtue of harming its subject (despite its not making him worse off at any time), but also why there is no amount of short, mild headaches (despite their making us worse off at particular times) that can be worse than a premature death.

University of Sydney

NOTES

I would like to thank two anonymous referees for this journal for their very helpful comments.

1. See Pitcher (1984); Feinberg (1993); and Luper (2004).
2. Velleman (1991), p. 57. See also Bradley: "[If] yesterday I desired that it not snow today, but it is snowing today, things were not going badly for me *yesterday*. If anything, they are going badly *today*" (2009), p. 87. For a contrary view, see Bruckner (2013); and Dorsey (2013).
3. Bradley (2009), p. 74. See also Feit (2002).
4. The other way, Bradley says, is for the things that are intrinsically good for him at that time to perfectly balance the things that are intrinsically bad for him at that time.
5. Bradley (2009), p. 107.
6. Ignore problems of how Rip could be extremely well off at times after he has awoken, given his separation from friends and loved ones. Suppose he is fascinated, rather than upset, by what has happened to him, and soon makes wonderful new friends (while cherishing the memory of his old ones).
7. These are Chris Heathwood's terms. For an excellent discussion of these views, see Heathwood (2011).
8. This sort of view was first proposed by Henry Sidgwick in *The Methods of Ethics* (1907), pp. 111–112, and later advocated by John Rawls in *A Theory of Justice* (1971), pp. 92–93, 417.
9. Heathwood (2011) himself is the leading advocate of this view.
10. See Scanlon (1998); and Keller (2009).
11. See Hurka (1993); and Kraut (2007).
12. For the best recent defenses of hedonism, see Crisp (2006); Bradley (2009); and Feldman (2004).
13. Note that it isn't necessary, on whole-life welfarism, for something to be bad that it reduce a person's lifetime well-being *more* than the relevant alternative. All that is necessary is that it make a person in *some* way worse off in his life considered as a whole. So, for example, if my getting the flu prevents me from boarding a plane that ends up crashing, it may still be the case (depending on the correct theory

of lifetime well-being) that my getting the flu (owing, say, to its extreme unpleasantness) reduced my lifetime well-being *in one way*, and so was a bad thing *in one way*.

14. The lollipop example is from Temkin (2012), p. 33. The headache example is found in many works in the literature.

15. For other responses, and why they fail, see Dorsey (2009).

16. See Broome (2004). See also Hare (1976).

17. Broome (2004), p. 57.

18. Ibid., p. 58.

19. Parfit (2004), p. 18.

20. It strikes many others as crazy too. Stuart Rachels, for example, writes: "Perfectionism entails that a brief taste of the best pleasure is better than a *very* long duration of pleasure *very* slightly less intense." This, he says, is "wildly implausible." Rachels (2001), p. 220.

21. Dorsey (2009). For similar approaches, see Crisp (1992); Griffin (1977); and Portmore (1999).

22. Dorsey's solution appeals, in effect, to what I am calling whole-life welfarism. However, he neither distinguishes between welfarism in its whole-life and momentary forms, nor explicitly endorses the former.

23. The difference between Dorsey and myself is just that he holds, whereas I deny, that each short, mild headache reduces its subject's lifetime well-being.

24. See, for example, Parfit's famous hospital case in Parfit (1984), p. 173. See also Charles Darwin in his *Selected Letters*: "Many of my excursions on horseback through wild countries, or in the boats, some of which lasted several weeks, were deeply interesting; their discomfort and some degree of danger were at that time hardly a drawback, and none at all afterwards." Darwin (1958), p. 30. (I am grateful to Brad Weslake for the Darwin reference.) Note also that it is important for this argument to go through that, according to idealized life preferentism, the preferences that are authoritative are not *prospective*—that we are choosing, not which life we are *going* to live, but which life was to *have been* ours.

25. See Heathwood (2007).

26. See Bramble (2013).

27. Ibid.

28. Haybron (2008).

29. I defend this version of hedonism at length in a separate paper.

REFERENCES

- Bradley, Ben. 2009. *Well-Being and Death* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Bramble, Ben. 2013. "The Distinctive Feeling Theory of Pleasure," *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 162, no. 2, pp. 201–217.
- Broome, John. 2004. *Weighing Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Bruckner, Donald W. 2013. "Present Desire Satisfaction and Past Well-Being," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 91, no. 1, pp. 15–29.
- Crisp, Roger. 1992. "Utilitarianism and the Life of Virtue," *Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 42, no. 167, pp. 139–160.

- . 2006. "Hedonism Reconsidered," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, vol. 73, no. 3, pp. 619–645.
- Darwin, Charles. 1958. *Selected Letters on Evolution and Origin of Species* (New York: Dover).
- Dorsey, Dale. 2009. "Headaches, Lives, and Value," *Utilitas*, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 36–56.
- . 2013. "Desire-Satisfaction and Welfare as Temporal," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, vol. 16, no. 1, pp. 151–171.
- Feinberg, Joel. 1993. "Harm to Others," in *The Metaphysics of Death*, ed. John Martin Fischer (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press), pp. 171–190.
- Feit, Neil. 2002. "The Time of Death's Misfortune," *Noûs*, vol. 36, no. 3, pp. 359–383.
- Feldman, Fred. 2004. *Pleasure and the Good Life* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Griffin, James. 1977. "Are There Incommensurable Values?," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 39–59.
- Hare, R. M. 1976. "Ethical Theory and Utilitarianism," in *Contemporary British Philosophy*, ed. H. D. Lewis (London: Allen & Unwin), pp. 122–125.
- Haybron, Daniel M. 2008. *The Pursuit of Unhappiness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Heathwood, Christopher. 2007. "The Reduction of Sensory Pleasure to Desire," *Philosophical Studies*, vol. 133, no. 1, pp. 23–44.
- . 2011. "Preferentism and Self-Sacrifice," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 92, pp. 18–38.
- Hurka, Thomas. 1993. *Perfectionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Keller, Simon. 2009. "Welfare as Success," *Noûs*, vol. 43, no. 4, pp. 656–683.
- Kraut, Richard. 2007. *What Is Good and Why* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Luper, Steven. 2004. "Posthumous Harm," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 41, no. 1, pp. 63–72.
- Parfit, Derek. 1984. *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- . 2004. "Overpopulation and the Quality of Life," in *The Repugnant Conclusion*, ed. Jesper Ryberg and Torbjörn Tännsjö (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers), pp. 7–22.
- Pitcher, George. 1984. "The Misfortunes of the Dead," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 183–188.
- Portmore, Douglas W. 1999. "Does the Total Principle Have Any Repugnant Implications?," *Ratio*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 80–98.
- Rachels, Stuart. 2001. "A Set of Solutions to Parfit's Problems," *Noûs*, vol. 35, no. 2, pp. 214–238.
- Rawls, John. 1971. *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press).
- Scanlon, T. M. 1998. *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press).
- Sidgwick, Henry. 1907. *The Methods of Ethics* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett).
- Temkin, Larry S. 2012. *Rethinking the Good* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Velleman, J. David. 1991. "Well-Being and Time," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly*, vol. 72, pp. 48–77.