Well-Being Notes

Hedonism

Hedonism claims that the balance of pleasure over pain and nothing else non-instrumentally makes a life go better for the person whose life it is.

A common objection to hedonism alleges that hedonism is the "philosophy of swine" in the sense that it treats elevated pleasures like the pleasurable study of philosophy and base pleasures like the indulgence of one's sexual appetites no differently. According to hedonism, pleasure non-instrumentally makes a life go better for the person whose life it is entirely in virtue of its pleasantness. Then, it seems, elevated pleasures and base pleasures make exactly the same sort of contribution to a person's life. If there is a difference in the contribution made by such pleasures to a person's life, it is a difference in magnitude (of pleasantness) and not a difference in kind. So the two sorts of pleasures are commensurable, but we intuitively think this is not so. This objection can be illustrated by Rawls's Haydn and the Oyster thought experiment. Haydn's life is an exceptionally well-lived but ordinarily finite one which includes a great amount of elevated and ordinary pleasures. The Oyster's life is one of perpetual, not particularly intense, sensory pleasures. Since, by hedonist lights, elevated pleasures such as those in Haydn's life and base pleasures such as those in the Oyster's life are commensurable, the hedonist seems committed to the view that a sufficiently long Oyster life is prudentially better than Haydn's. But intuitively, we think that Haydn's life goes better for Haydn than the Oyster's life goes for the Oyster, regardless of how long the Oyster's life is. We think that the elevated pleasures are incommensurably (prudentially) better than base, merely sensory pleasures, i.e. no amount of Oyster pleasures would be as prudentially good as the pleasure Haydn takes in his musical achievements. Hedonism is implausible if it cannot accommodate this intuition.

Feldman suggests that "Desert Adjusted Intrinsic Attitudinal Hedonism" concurs with our intuition that base pleasures contribute less to well-being than elevated pleasures. According to attitudinal hedonism, only attitudinal pleasure non-instrumentally makes a life go better for the person whose life it is. Attitudinal pleasure is a propositional attitude that takes propositional entities (states of affairs) as its objects. For example, an examiner may take attitudinal pleasure in the state of affairs where he is reading a well-written essay. Other propositional attitudes include hope, fear, belief, and doubt. So, for example, a student may hope that his essay is well-written. Attitudinal pleasure is intrinsic iff the person whose pleasure it is is attitudinally pleased by some state of affairs not in virtue of the fact that he is attitudinally pleased by some other state of affairs. For example, a student who is attitudinally pleased by the state of affairs where he has written an excellent essay and attitudinally pleased by the state of affairs where he will receive a good grade on the exam because he has written an excellent essay is only intrinsically attitudinally pleased by the latter state of affairs. According to Feldman's Desert Adjusted Intrinsic Attitudinal Hedonism, intrinsic attitudinal pleasure and nothing else makes a life go better for the person whose life it is, but how much better it makes a life go is desert-adjusted, i.e. an intrinsic attitudinal pleasure makes a life go a lot better if it is pleasure taken in a worthy object (state of affairs), and not much better if it is pleasure taken in an unworthy object. So it seems this hedonism can meet the "philosophy of swine" objection. Plausibly, such states of affairs as where one is reading an excellent essay are more deserving objects of attitudinal pleasure than such states of affairs as where one is indulging one's sexual appetites. The Desire Adjusted Intrinsic Attitudinal Hedonist could then claim that, on these grounds, the former sort of elevated attitudinal pleasures are incommensurably more prudentially good than the latter sort of base attitudinal pleasures. Returning to Haydn and the Oyster, the Desire Adjusted Intrinsic Attitudinal Hedonist could say that the exceptional achievements in Haydn's life make Haydn's life go so much better for him that no amount of Oyster pleasures in the Oyster life could make the Oyster's life go just as well for the Oyster. So this hedonism distinguishes between elevated and base pleasures and is not the "philosophy of swine".

Olsaretti argues that Feldman's adjusted versions of attitudinal hedonism deviate from pure hedonism since under such a theory, a pleasure's worthiness, and not only its pleasantness, determine its contribution to well-being. Feldman's motivation for so adjusting the prudential value of pleasure seems to be to make room for independent non-hedonist convictions about the good life. It seems that it is because Feldman thinks such things as veridicality and dignity are important to a good life that he is willing to so adjust the prudential value of pleasure. This motivation is not consistent with the central hedonist idea that pleasure alone is important to a good life. So Desire Adjusted Attitudinal Hedonism is an abandonment of "pure" hedonism, and is in fact some hybrid theory of well-being.

Feldman's response to the "philosophy of swine" objection fails to be a hedonist response because it allows such things as veridicality and dignity to adjust the prudential value of pleasures so pleasantness is no longer the sole determinant of a pleasure's prudential value. This suggests an alternative strategy under which such things as veridicality and dignity adjust not the prudential value of pleasures, but their pleasantness. This is the strategy of Mill's "Qualitative Hedonism". According to

Mill's Qualitative Hedonism, base pleasures are of lower quality and thus incommensurably less pleasant than elevated pleasures. This claim could be motivated by the thought that something's being more pleasant than another must be because the qualities of the two things differ in some way, and plausibly, whether something is elevated or base is a relevant quality. Returning to Haydn and the Oyster, the qualitative hedonist would say that Haydn's exceptional achievements are incommensurably more pleasant than the Oyster's Oyster pleasures, so Haydn's life contains a greater balance of pleasure over pain than the Oyster's regardless of how long the Oyster life is, and so Haydn's life goes better for Haydn than the Oyster's life goes for the Oyster, regardless of how long the Oyster life is.

Mill's qualitative hedonism appears unmotivated since the quality of a pleasure, in Mill's sense, seems to be a function of its object's being elevated or base, but there is little apparent reason to think that the relation between an object's being elevated or base and the corresponding pleasure's being good for a person is so attenuated. In other words, on Mill's account, a pleasure's being taken in an excellent object grounds its being high quality, and its being high quality grounds its being highly pleasant, and its being highly pleasant grounds its being highly good for the person whose pleasure it is. But we could instead think that a pleasure's being taken in an excellent object directly grounds its being very good for the person whose pleasure it is. Intuitively, this sort of direct unattenuated relationship between an object's being elevated or base and the prudential value of taking pleasure in that object is compelling, and we have little apparent reason to accept the more drawn out hedonist alternative. In other words, if whether an object is elevated or base affects how pleasant that object is, why not think it also affects how prudentially valuable that object is?

This objection to Mill's qualitative hedonism begs the question against the hedonist. By hedonist lights, there is good reason to reject that whether something is elevated or base directly affects its prudential goodness, namely the central hedonist idea that pleasure alone is important to a good life.

Mill's qualitative hedonism is incompatible with the conception of pleasure as a sort of positive sensation, so it requires the conception of pleasure as an activity. It also requires some discontinuity and/or incommensurability in the pleasantness of elevated and base pleasures, neither of which are particularly intuitive (which after all, is the primary appeal of hedonism.

Another common objection to hedonism alleges that it fails to attach adequate weight to the veridicality of pleasure. This objection is illustrated by Nozick's Experience Machine thought experiment and Kagan's Happy Businessman example.

Feldman suggests that "Veridicality Adjusted Intrinsic Attitudinal Hedonism" concurs with our intuition that non-veridical pleasures contribute less to well-being than veridical ones.

If Feldman's solution is unsuccessful, it seems the hedonist's only remaining tactic is to undermine our intuition that veridical pleasures are better for us than non-veridical pleasures. The hedonist would reject that the deceived businessman's life is going all that poorly for him and attempt to explain why our intuitions about the deceived businessman misfire. Our intuition that the deceived businessman's life goes poorly for him could be explained by the fact that we would not like to be deceived, and would find it painful to be deceived. We know that the businessman is being deceived, and this is an essential element of the case we are made to consider. So it seems our intuitions are liable to misfire because we are unable to fully step out of this knowledge and into the perspective of the businessman. In other words, we bring our knowledge of his being deceived into what we imagine the businessman's life is like for him, so we do not fully appreciate the fact of the businessman's blissful ignorance. Additionally, a person motivated by non-hedonist considerations will likely find greater pleasure than a person motivated to find pleasure, all else being equal. For example, the tennis player who focuses on playing well will likely enjoy a game of tennis more than the tennis player who aims explicitly a enjoyment. Then, by hedonist lights, we have reason to be moved by such non-hedonist considerations and to silence the hedonist thought. So our intuition that such things as achievement, friendship, and autonomy in themselves contribute to well-being could be explained in terms of our being such sophisticated hedonists. So our intuition that the Happy Businessman's life goes poorly for him is the result of our failing to fully appreciate what his life is like for him and our being sophisticated hedonists. Then this intuition is inadequate ground for thinking that the Happy Businessman's life in fact goes poorly for him. So the objection that hedonism fails to attach adequate weight to the veridicality of pleasure is unsuccessful because we do not have adequate reason to think that the veridicality of pleasure deserves any weight at all.

Desire Theory

Desire theory claims that desire satisfaction and nothing else non-instrumentally makes a life go better for the person whose life it is. Actual desire theory claims that the satisfaction of a person's actual desires and nothing else non-instrumentally makes life go better for this person. The primary attraction of desire theory is that it seems to be uniquely attitude sensitive. According to desire theory, nothing can be good for me unless I desire it, which is to have certain pro-attitudes towards it. This (it seems) is not the case for hedonism or list theory.

One objection to actual desire theory is that it is committed to the claim that all actual desire satisfactions contribute to well-being, but this is intuitively not so. We think intuitively, for example, that the satisfaction of some ill-informed and/or irrational desires do not contribute to well-being. For example, suppose that I desire that I quench my thirst, and satisfy this desire by drinking from a polluted lake, which I did not know was polluted. Actual desire theory would unintuitively judge that so drinking is good for me. Or, suppose that I know that I should visit the dentist because this will be good for my health, but I desire not to do this, and in fact do not. Again, actual desire theory would unintuitively judge that being so irresponsible is good for me. More generally, it seems that we can and do desire things that are bad for us, i.e. we can and do have "defective desires", and actual desire theory goes wrong because it is too deferent to our very fallible desires.

Heathwood distinguishes between something's being ceteris paribus good (for a person) and its being all-things-considered good (for a person). Heathwood then argues that our intuitive judgements about "defective" ill-informed or irrational desire satisfaction track all-things-considered goodness, and the judgements of actual desire theory agree with our intuitive judgements on this, since actual desire theory is not committed to the claim that each desire satisfaction is all-things-considered good, only that it is ceteris paribus good. Something is all-things-considered good for some person iff the life this person were to lead if this thing obtained is better than the life this person were to lead if this thing did not obtain. Something is ceteris paribus good for some person iff, all else being equal, this person's life is better if this thing obtained than if it did not. Then, "defective" ill-informed or irrational desire satisfaction is all-things-considered bad. For example, the person who drinks from the polluted lake, we imagine, would later suffer ill health and feel disgust upon learning that the lake was polluted. This person would desire to be in good health, and to not have drank from the polluted lake. Both these desires would be frustrated. Plausibly, these desires are stronger than the earlier desire to drink from the polluted lake since we imagine that this person comes to regret having so drank. Then, according to summative actual desire theory, this person's life is all-things-considered worse if he drinks from the polluted lake. Suppose instead that, prior to drinking from the lake, this person had consumed medicine to relieve a headache that also had the side effect of rendering him immune to the effects of drinking polluted water, and he never finds out that the lake was polluted. Then, intuitively, his life goes better for him if he drinks from the lake, since his doing so quenches his thirst and has no other effect. So it seems that our intuitions about well-being track all-things-considered goodness. Summative actual desire theory claims only that each desire satisfaction is ceteris paribus good, so it is consistent with our intuitions, and not excessively deferent to desire.

We think intuitively, also, that "the objects of our strongest desires often come to us as Dead Sea apples [...] mere dust and ashes in the eating". For example, consider the Desperate Undergraduate.

Concurrent actual desire theory would concur with our intuition about "Dead Sea apples". This version of desire theory could be motivated as follows. Because persons (ordinarily understood) exist in time, what is good for a person must be good for this person at some point in time. Then, it is quite natural to think that only the satisfaction of desires that a person has at the time when they are satisfied make life go better for this person at this time. So only the concurrent satisfaction of desires contribute to well-being.

The distinction between ceteris paribus goodness and all-things-considered goodness does not seem sufficient to meet the objection from defective desires because there seem to be "intrinsically" defective desires, whose satisfactions are ceteris paribus bad (or at least no good) for the person whose desires they are. Base desires are one such category of intrinsically defective desires. This objection is illustrated by Moore's thought experiment about the perpetual bestiality indulger, Porky. Porky's strongest desires are satisfied by a perpetual indulgence in bestiality. Suppose that Porky can satisfy his desires to indulge in bestiality without frustrating his other desires. Then, actual desire theory seems committed to the view that a life of indulgence in bestiality is best for Porky, and each satisfaction of his desire to indulge in bestiality is ceteris paribus good. Intuitively, this is absurd, we think such a life and each such satisfaction would be terrible, even for Porky.

The desire theorist could respond by undermining our intuition that such desire satisfactions do not contribute to well-being. Plausibly, we find it difficult to imagine a case such as Porky's, so our intuitions are muddied by considerations that have been excluded by supposition. We think, ordinarily, that any person who indulges in bestiality would also feel tremendous shame, guilt, and loneliness, and risk contracting some barnyard disease. These, we think, would make life much worse for any such person, and actual desire theory would concur. We think also that no person could ordinarily have such desires, so the person who so indulges, we tend to imagine, would have to be in some way unwilling or coerced. Then, we think such indulgence does any such person little good, and again actual desire theory would concur. Even though these considerations have been excluded by supposition in Porky's case, because such suppositions are extremely unrealistic, we struggle to accurately represent Porky's case to ourselves, and so our intuitions misfire. Plausibly, also, we care strongly about values other than well-being. In other words, we care not only that Porky's life is good for him, but also that it is good simpliciter, that it is not a pathetic, degrading, or otherwise bad life. Ordinarily, a life that is good for the person whose life it is is also good simpliciter. Then, because these values are closely related, we struggle to disentangle our intuitions about well-being from our other value judgements such as those to do with achievement and dignity, and so our intuitions misfire. Then, that we intuitively think

Porky's bestiality indulgence ceteris paribus bad for him does little to show that Porky's bestiality indulgence is in fact so bad for him hence does little to undermine actual desire theory.

Another sort of apparently ceteris paribus bad desire satisfaction threatens actual desire theory. Consider, for example, Rawls's Grass Counter, whose strongest desires are satisfied by counting the blades of grass in the lawns of Harvard. Actual desire theory is committed to the claim that such grass counting is ceteris paribus good for him. But intuitively, such grass counting does no good for the Grass Counter because it is entirely pointless. If pointless desire satisfaction is not ceteris paribus good, the above account of actual desire theory cannot be true.

It is not entirely clear what is meant in describing a desire as pointless. If it is meant that the desire is instrumentally pointless, then its contributing nothing to well-being can be accounted for by the fact that it is instrumental, and actual desire theory can concur with intuition. An intrinsic actual desire theory claims that only intrinsic desire satisfaction makes a life go better for the person whose life it is. A desire satisfaction is intrinsic iff the object of this desire is desired for its own sake, and not for the sake of some further thing that it will lead to or otherwise realise. For example, if I desire to quench my thirst and I also desire to have a drink because this will quench my thirst, then the satisfaction of the former is an intrinsic desire satisfaction but the satisfaction of the latter is not. That only intrinsic desire satisfactions have prudential value could be motivated by the thought that it is our intrinsic desires that we ultimately care about, i.e. we care about our instrumental desires only because we care about the things that they are instrumental to, so if what makes our life go better for us has to do with the things that we care about, what ultimately makes our life go better has to do with what we care about non-instrumentally. Then, according to intrinsic actual desire theory, instrumentally pointless desires that are inadequate means to their ends, for example, the desire to perform a rain dance to summon rain, contribute nothing to well-being when satisfied, because these desire satisfactions are merely instrumental and not intrinsic. So intrinsic actual desire theory yields the intuitive judgement about instrumentally pointless desire satisfactions, and the objection from pointless desires cannot be an objection from instrumentally pointless desires.

If it is meant that the desire is morally pointless, then its contributing nothing to well-being cannot be accounted by the fact that it is so pointless, since we think intuitively that there are such pointless desires whose satisfaction contributes to well-being. For example, piano playing, stamp collecting, and rock climbing, are morally pointless in the sense of being morally neither good nor bad, but we think intuitively that such things can and do contribute to well-being. So it is not moral pointlessness that makes a desire defective.

The most plausible understanding of pointlessness is as lacking excellence. The thought then is that such things as grass counting do not involve any engagement with excellence, and so make the grass counter's life go no better for him. This understanding of pointlessness seems to capture the intuition behind the Grass Counter thought experiment and similar defective pointless desires.

The desire theorist could respond by undermining our intuition that such desire satisfactions do not contribute to well-being. The desire theorist will argue that we have failed to disentangle our intuitive judgements about well-being from our intuitive judgements about excellence in a life. Our intuitions about well-being are difficult to disentangle from our intuitions about the excellence of a life because we care strongly both about how well a life goes for the person whose life it is and about how well a life goes by some standard of excellence, so regarding a person whose life goes moderately well by the former standard but terribly poorly by the latter, we are inclined to say simply "that life went poorly". Further, ordinarily, a life that goes well by prudential lights is also one that goes well by aretaic lights, so we have little need to disentangle the two judgements, and struggle to do so in such extraordinary cases as the Grass Counter's. So our intuitions about the prudential value of pointless desire satisfactions are not entirely credible, i.e. do not constitute adequate reason to think that pointless desire satisfactions are in fact of no prudential value. Then our intuitions that pointless (in the sense of lacking excellence) desire satisfactions are of no prudential value, do not undermine intrinsic actual desire theory.

The desire theorist need not undermine our intuitions about defective desires, and could instead defend an ideal desire theory. According to some ideal desire theory, the satisfaction of a person's ideal desires, i.e. the desires this person would have under some suitably ideal circumstance, and nothing else makes this person's life go better for him. Ideal desire theory could be motivated by the thought that what makes our lives go better for us is not simply getting what we want, but getting the things that we should want. Ideal desire theory appears to have the resources to reject that the satisfaction of ill-informed and/or irrational desires contributes to well-being, both all-things-considered and ceteris paribus. Plausibly, an ideal standpoint for the evaluation of well-being would be fully informed and fully rational since we think that imperfect information and imperfect rationality are among the factors that ordinarily impede our judgements of well-being.

Ideal desire theory also appears to have the resources to reject that the satisfaction of base or pointless desires contributes to well-being. Plausibly, an ideal standpoint for the evaluation of well-being is one occupied by a person who does not merely have the relevant true beliefs, but appreciates the relevant details about his possible life paths in as vivid a way as possible.

That a standpoint be "fully informed" is a demanding requirement. We think that a standpoint is "fully informed" if it is sufficiently informed such that it escapes the difficulties we ordinarily face, and hope to overcome through this idealisation, in evaluating apparently incommensurable life paths. Then, a "fully informed" standpoint is one in which the relevant details about each life path are known and appreciated in as vivid a way as possible. For example, it is insufficient for some standpoint's being "fully informed" that from this standpoint, it is merely known that if I were to choose the life of an athlete, I would represent my nation in the Olympics. It is necessary that from this standpoint, what it feels like to represent my nation in the Olympics, what that would mean to the hypothetical athlete me must be entirely apparent.

But a person's so idealised desires seem so distant from the real person whose welfare we are concerned with that it is not clear the ideal person's judgements would be normatively forceful for the real person. For example, the Grass Counter, if credibly informed that "the ideal version of yourself would do something far more meaningful than this", we imagine, would respond "well good for him, but why should I care what he does?" The ability to appreciate information is a function of a person's personality. For example, an unempathetic person would not be able to fully appreciate the fact that his words and actions hurt others. When told as much, this person would respond "I can see that, but it's nothing to do with me that they feel that way". Such a person is informed only in a minimal sense of the hurtfulness of his words and actions. So in order for a person to be "fully informed" of different facts, in the sense which requires a full appreciation of these facts, the person that he is must change, potentially quite dramatically. So the "person" that occupies the "fully-informed" standpoint sought by idealised desire theories would be different from the person whose well-being is evaluated in the following ways. The idealised "person" would have far greater capacities of reason, memory, and imagination, he would be able to keep all the necessary experiences clearly before his mind, and he would have lost any and all parts of himself that prevented the maximally vivid appreciation of the relevant information. But this idealised "person" could hardly be described as the same person as the real person about whom we are concerned. Then, we could doubt whether the judgements of such an "idealised" person are authoritative, i.e. whether the real person whose well-being we are concerned with would be moved by such judgements. There seems to be no consideration that guarantees that such judgements would be authoritative. But if some account of ideal desire theory is correct, then under that account, such judgements are necessarily authoritative. In order to establish this necessity then, an account of ideal desire theory must include a substantive account of the ideal person that makes clear what reason one has to treat judgements issued by the ideal version of one as authoritative.

List Theory

List theory claims that each item on some objective list of goods and nothing else non-instrumentally make a life go better for the person whose life it is.

A common objection to list theory alleges that list theories are objectionably elitist. This objection seems to be the complaint that such theories license an "elite" to think of themselves and/or others in certain objectionable ways. For example, according to some account of list theory which claims that things such as knowledge, aesthetic appreciation, and achievement are on the list, the lives of the British monarchy go better for them than the lives of the hoi polloi. It is quite natural then, to worry that this fact licenses the former to take an objectionably elitist, dim view of the latter.

A similar objection to list theory alleges that list theories are objectionably autonomy-violating, or that they invite objectionable paternalism. This seems to be the complaint that list theory invites objectionable interference in the lives of those who, according to the theory, are mistaken about their own good.

The allegation of elitism is unsuccessful for two reasons. First, a plausible list theory could include "the esteem of others" on the list of goods that contribute to well-being. Then, being held in contempt by an "elite" would make life worse for each member of the hoi polloi. So, insofar as the "elite" are concerned with the well-being of the hoi polloi, they have reason not to be so elitist. Second, how persons ought to treat each other, including what sorts of attitudes persons ought to have towards each other, is a matter of interpersonal morality, and is thus, to some extent, well-being agnostic. A plausible moral theory will demand that we treat each other with respect. So even if the lives of the "elite" go better for them than the lives of the hoi polloi go for them, the "elite" would not be licensed to hold the hoi polloi in contempt.

A similar response is available against the objection from autonomy violation. A plausible list theory could include "autonomy" on the list of goods, and a plausible moral theory would demand respect for the rights of others which guarantee them some degree of freedom from paternalistic interference.

Underlying the allegation that list theory is objectionably autonomy-violating seems to be the worry that list theories are inadequately sensitive to the attitudes of persons. The naive version of this objection claims that a person's having certain pro-attitudes towards something is necessary for this thing's being good for this person. It seems list theory is uniquely guilty of being so insensitive. According to hedonism, it is pleasure and nothing else that makes a person's life go better for him. But to take pleasure in some object seems to be to have a certain attitude toward that object, so it seems a person's life is made

better by things that he has certain pro-attitudes towards. Similarly, according to some actual desire theory, it is the satisfaction of a person's actual desires and nothing else that is good for this person. So the person's pro-attitude to the things that make his life go better for him is the attitude of desire. But according to list theory, the things on the list are good for a person, regardless of that person's attitude toward those things. For example, if knowledge is a good, then my having knowledge is good for me even if I could not care less about knowledge, it brought me no pleasure, and I did not desire it.

It is simply not true that list theory is uniquely insensitive to a person's attitudes in this sense. Hedonism is not attitude-dependent in this sense. According to hedonism, pleasure is good for a person regardless of this person's attitude toward pleasure. For example, consider "an ascetic who seeks to avoid feeling pleasure for fear of corrupting his soul or angering his deity". According to hedonism, if this ascetic experienced pleasure, then this pleasure is good for him, regardless of his attitude toward this pleasure. Similarly, actual desire theory is not attitude-dependent in this sense. According to desire theory, desire satisfaction is good for a person regardless of this person's attitude toward desire satisfaction. For example, suppose that our ascetic has a first-order desire to enjoy a luxurious meal, but a second-order desire not to have the first-order desire fulfilled, because the first-order desire is inconsistent with his spiritual convictions. Then, if this ascetic were to enjoy a luxurious meal, his first-order desire would be satisfied, and by actual desire theoretic lights, this is good for him, even though he strongly desires not to have this first-order desire satisfaction.

A more sophisticated version of the objection that list theory is inadequately sensitive to the attitudes of persons gets to the heart of the matter. The worry seems to be "how could something be good for me if I do not care at all about it, if it is not something I desire, and/or it brings me no pleasure?" For example, consider an account of list theory which claims that the study of philosophy non-instrumentally makes a life go better for the person whose life it is. Suppose that I have no interest in the study of philosophy, I do not desire to study philosophy, and the study of philosophy brings me no pleasure. In other words, the study of philosophy means nothing to me. If I were to study philosophy, the relation between me and the study of philosophy is merely formal, in the sense that it is something I do but nothing more. But such a "bloodless", "cold", and "minimal" relationship between me and the study of philosophy seems insufficient to ground its being good for me. For something to be good for a person, plausibly, it must have a more substantive relationship to this person.

The list theorist could respond by noting that intuitively plausible goods such as achievement, friendship, and virtue have certain attitudes as a necessary component. For example, achievement necessarily involves thinking the things that one achieves are worthwhile. So, for example, a student's graduating counts as an achievement, and thus contributes to his well-being only if he thinks graduating worthwhile. In other words, his graduating is good for him only if he has reason to care about his graduating, which is only if there is some substantive relationship between him and his graduating. The same is true of friendship. A person enjoys the good of friendship when he is in the company of and well-loved by "friends" only if these "friends" are persons who he cares about and has affection for, hence persons whose company and love mean something to him, which is only if there is some substantive relationship between him and his being in their company and being so loved.

This response does not seem adequate. It seems still true that according to list theory, such goods as achievement, friendship, and whatnot contribute to a person's well-being quite independently of whether this person cares about these goods. The argument above establishes that an instance of achievement, or friendship, or whatnot, contributes to a person's well-being only if the person is relevantly attached to that instance of that good. But, it seems, according to list theory, such goods so contribute even if, while the instance of achievement or friendship or whatnot is meaningfully his, achievement as such or friendship as such or whatnot mean nothing to him. For example, it seems a person could, according to list theory, be made better off by an evening spent with his friends (who are well and truly his friends in that he cares about them and loves them), even if friendship itself meant nothing to this person.

The list theorist's response is more powerful than its opponents recognise. Instances of achievement, or friendship, or whatnot cannot meaningfully belong to a person if this person did not also care about achievement as such, or friendship as such, or whatnot. For example, achievement necessarily involves thinking the things that one achieves are worthwhile. The relevant sense of "worthwhile" here is "worthy as an object of achievement". Then, to achieve something necessarily involves recognising some things as worthy objects of achievement, hence recognising the broader ideal of achievement. So, an instance of achievement contributes to a person's well-being only if this person recognises the thing achieved as worthwhile and recognises the broader ideal of achievement. An instance of achievement contributes to a person's well-being only if this instance of achievement is meaningful to this person, and the broader ideal of achievement is meaningful to this person. Similarly, being in the company of friends necessarily involves having friends, and having friends necessarily involves recognising the broader ideal of friendship. If, for example, a person rejects the broader ideal of friendship, he is never moved by friend-considerations such as "my friend needs help", and is instead moved by other considerations such as "helping him makes me happy". Such a person could have no friends. So enjoying the company of "friends" contributes to a person's well-being only if these "friends" are truly friends and this person recognises the broader ideal of friendship. The "goods of friendship" are good for a person only if these goods mean something to him (because, for example the good is the company

of his friends) and the broader ideal of friendship is meaningful to him. So an account of list theory where only achievement, friendship, and whatnot are on the list is thoroughly sensitive to a person's attitudes.

List theory's explanation of the grounds of the goodness of each item on the list appears inadequate. By list theoretic lights, the reason for thinking that such things as achievement, friendship, and virtue contribute to well-being seems to be simply that such things are on the list. Without an explanation of what the items on the list have in common other than that they are intrinsic prudential goods, and an explanation of what makes these items intrinsic prudential goods, list theory seems objectionably ad hoc.

Perfectionism appears to supply list theory with an explanation of what makes such things good for a person. According to perfectionism, such things are good for a person because they perfect human nature (and things that perfect human nature are so good).

The perfectionist response is unsatisfying. When we ask the perfectionist for an explanation of why something contributes to well-being, we are not seeking merely a statement of perfectionist necessary and sufficient conditions (that something is good for a person iff it perfects human nature) and an explanation of why this thing satisfies these conditions. We are instead seeking an explanation of why something's meeting the perfectionist criteria is reason for thinking it contributes to well-being. In other words, we are asking the perfectionist to explain why the perfectionist conditions are the right ones.

Hedonism and desire theory seem to fare no better on this count. According to hedonism, pleasure is good for a person because it is pleasant to him. This explanation is inadequate because it stops short of explaining why something's being pleasant to a person makes it good for a person. According to desire theory, a desire satisfaction is good for a person because it satisfies his desire. This explanation is inadequate because it stops short of explaining why something's satisfying a person's desires makes it good for a person. Framed this way, it seems no theory could offer an adequate explanation. Suppose that the hedonist goes on to say that something's being pleasant makes it good for a person because something's being pleasant makes that thing X and something's being X makes it good for a person. It seems this explanation is inadequate still because it fails to explain why something's being X makes it good for a person. But "ultimate ends do not admit of proof" and "all explanation stops somewhere". If no theory could be in this sense explanatorily adequate, then our conception of explanatory adequacy must be misguided.

That "ultimate ends do not admit of proof" does not seem to de-fang the objection that perfectionism fails to explain why something's developing characteristically human capacities makes it good. Even if it were not possible to explain this, what the objector seems to be after is some reason to think that perfectionism is an account of well-being, or some link between the ideas of well-being and the development of human nature. The last step in such an explanation need not be "and all X things contribute to well-being". No such explanation would be adequate since it fails to explain why something's being X implies it contributes to well-being. An adequate explanation is one that establishes a suitable conceptual link between something's satisfying some set of conditions, for example, something's perfecting human nature, and it's contributing to well-being. In other words, we worry that perfectionist, hedonist, and desire theoretic goods are just those, but not prudential goods.

Brink's Normative Perfectionism appears to offer such a link. Human beings are rational agents, and it is as rational agents that we act in the world. So it is our capacity for rational agency that determines how we act in the world. In determining how we act in the world, our rational agency also determines the sorts of things we pursue. Brink's critical move is to defend a normative conception of rational agency. According to Brink, our rational agency would not determine us to undermine itself, and would determine us to cultivate itself. Our rational agency is authoritative because it is what determines how we act in the world and the sorts of things we pursue. Then, we have authoritative reason to cultivate our rational agency. The authority of reasons to pursue such perfectionist goods as achievement and knowledge flow from the authority of reasons to cultivate rational agency. Achievement involves the exercise of rational agency in two ways, first in selecting worthwhile goals and second in acting to realise those goals. So the pursuit of achievement involves the exercise of rational agency, which plausibly, develops rational agency. The capacity of rational agency involves being appropriately sensitive to reasons, including epistemic ones, so it involves the capacity for knowledge. So the development of rational agency involves the development of knowledge. Then we have authoritative reason to pursue such perfectionist goods. We think that our reasons to pursue prudential goods are also authoritative, i.e. that we should care about what is good for us. So perfectionist goods are in a sense "fit for purpose", and this constitutes reason to think that the perfectionist goods are indeed prudential goods.

Attempts to establish a conceptual link between perfectionism and well-being include Aristotle's Function Argument and Brink's Normative Perfectionism. Discussion of these arguments exceeds the scope of this essay but it seems neither argument is conclusive. Hedonists and desire theorists, it seems, have neglected to offer a similar conceptual link between, on one hand, pleasure and desire satisfaction, and on the other, well-being. Such a conceptual link is difficult to establish, and on this count, perfectionist versions of list theory fare no worse than hedonism and list theory.

One objection to perfectionism alleges that perfectionism counterintuitively undervalues pleasure and preferences. Consider, for example, the Would-Be Retiree who has enjoyed a fulfilling career and is approaching the age where he had planned to retire. This retiree looks forward to retiring, and spending his days in leisure thereafter. Perfectionism seems committed to the view that this retiree's life goes better for him if he remains in his job, and continues to sharpen his rational and empathic capacities through effortful engagement in theoretical, practical, and interpersonal matters. But we think intuitively that such a thoroughly restless life would not be very good for anyone. Perfectionism seems to go wrong in neglecting what would make a person happy and what a person wants in determining what is good for this person.

The perfectionist can respond to the two problems separately. One response to the apparent failure of perfectionism to attach adequate weight to a person's pleasure notes that humans have the capacity to experience pleasure. Then, under some conception of perfectionism which understands the development of human nature to include the development of the capacity to experience pleasure, the development of this capacity contributes to well-being. Plausibly, one way the capacity to experience pleasure is developed is by the appropriate exercise of this capacity. So if the Would-Be Retiree retires, and takes pleasure in suitable activities of leisure, his doing so contributes to his well-being. This contribution could very well be greater than the contribution to his well-being of his remaining in his job since, after a long and fulfilling career, we imagine, there is not much room left for development of his rational and empathic capacities.

This perfectionist response is unsuccessful because no plausible conception of perfectionism understands the development of human nature to include the development of the capacity to experience pleasure. Because of the close relationship between pleasure and pain, it seems that the capacity to experience pain is just as much, and in the same way, a part of human nature as the capacity to experience pleasure. So if development of the latter capacity is involved in the development of human nature, development of the former capacity is too. Then, the development of the capacity to experience pain contributes to well-being. Plausibly, one way the capacity to experience pain is developed is by the exercise of this capacity, i.e. by experiencing pain. On such a conception of perfectionism, experiencing pain contributes to well-being. This is absurd, so such a conception of perfectionism is implausible.

A more successful response to the apparent failure of perfectionism to attach adequate weight to a person's pleasure notes that it is part of human nature to pursue pleasure and avoid pain. Then, under a conception of perfectionism which understands the development of human nature to include the development of this capacity, the development of this capacity contribute to well-being. Plausibly, this capacity is developed by its exercise. So pursuing pleasure and avoiding pain contribute to well-being. So if the Would-Be Retiree, in retiring and engaging in activities of leisure, is pursuing pleasure, his doing so makes his life go better for him.

The perfectionist could respond to the objection that perfectionism fails to attach adequate weight to a person's desires by arguing that humans are rational agents by nature, and rational agency is the ability to act in the world governed by reasons, including the reasons supplied by one's desires. On a conception of hedonism which understands the development of human nature to include the development of rational agency, the development of rational agency, which includes the exercise of rational agency, contributes to well-being. So a person's being appropriately moved by reasons supplied by his desires exercises and develops his rational agency, and this makes his life go well for him. To ignore his desires would be to fail to exercise his rational agency and to undermine this capacity, and this makes his life go poorly for him.

Another objection to perfectionism concerns the apparent air of unfalsifiability that surrounds perfectionism. Suppose, for example, that we come to believe some account of human nature which entails that, by perfectionist lights, development of the capacity to make fires is good for us. It seems that the perfectionist would sooner revise this account of human nature than accept the counterintuitive claim that making fires contributes to well-being. In fact, it seems that the perfectionist would feel no pressure at all to accept that making fires contributes to well-being. But if the central perfectionist claim that well-being consists in the development of human nature is independently plausible, the perfectionist must feel at least some minimal pressure to accept this counterintuitive judgement. So, it seems the central perfectionist claim is not independently plausible.

This objection misunderstands the perfectionist's response to such accounts of human nature. Supposing that we come to believe some account of human nature which entails that, by perfectionist lights, development of the capacity to make fires is good for us, the perfectionist would feel pressure to search for a plausible conception of perfectionism that avoids the counterintuitive result. The central perfectionist claim is that well-being consists in the development of human capacities. Each conception of perfectionism supplies the details required to yield a substantive account. In other words, each conception of perfectionism answers such questions as "which human capacities are good for us to develop?" and "what does it mean to develop these capacities?" For example, according to one conception of perfectionism, the development of uniquely human capacities is good for us, and according to some other conception, the development of essentially human capacities is good for us. Then, supposing that we come to believe such an account of human nature, to remain consistent with the central perfectionist claim, the perfectionist should feel pressure to either search for a more plausible conception of perfectionism or accept the counterintuitive claim. The perfectionist feels no pressure to accept the counterintuitive claim because it is far less

costly to search for a more plausible conception of perfectionism. The perfectionist feels no pressure to accept the counterintuitive claim not because the central perfectionist claim is not independently plausible, but because there is a far less costly strategy that is consistent with the central perfectionist claim.