THREE ESSAYS ON WELL-BEING

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Abstract

This dissertation consists of three essays on the topic of welfare or well-being.

The first essay, “Pluralism about Well-Being,” concerns how many kinds of event are basically good or bad for a person—good or bad for her, but not solely in virtue of being appropriately related to other events that are good or bad for her. A monistic theory of welfare says that only one kind of event is basically good for a person, and that only one kind is basically bad for a person. I argue for pluralism, the view that there is either more than one basically good kind or more than one basically bad kind.

The second essay, “Objectivism about Welfare,” concerns the relationship between a person’s attitudes and the events that are basically good or bad for her. Subjectivists claim that an event is basically good (bad) for a person only if and at least partly because she would have a certain kind of favorable attitude toward it under the right conditions. I argue for the negation of subjectivism, objectivism. (Since an objective list theory of well-being is a theory according to which both pluralism and objectivism are true, the first two essays amount to an argument that some objective list theory is true.)

The last essay is entitled “Prudence, Morality, and the New Humeans,” and it relates to well-being via its discussion of prudent actions (e.g., ones that would bring about an increase, or prevent a decrease, in the agent’s welfare). The Humean Theory of Reasons says that there is a reason for an agent to perform a particular action only if her doing so would promote the satisfaction of one of her desires. This theory has traditionally been regarded as incompatible with Moral and Prudential Rationalism, which say that if an agent is morally required to perform a given action or it would be prudent for her to perform it, then there is some reason for her to perform it. However, some Humeans have recently denied this incompatibility. I argue that the incompatibility is genuine, even if we assume that the desire satisfaction theory of well-being is true.
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Most of all, I thank my parents for bringing me into existence and for working so hard to provide me with a good life. I will soon be in the enviable position of making a decent living using book smarts alone. This would not have been possible were it not for the good habits that my parents instilled in me when I was a child. If it weren’t for their efforts, I would have been a middling student and would not have been able to go to graduate school. My parents have sacrificed a great deal of their well-being for the sake of mine. For this, I will always be grateful. I dedicate this dissertation to them.
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Introduction

Each of the three chapters of this dissertation was written as a stand-alone essay. The first two chapters, “Pluralism about Well-Being” and “Objectivism about Welfare,” form a natural pair: taken together, they amount to a defense of objective list theories of well-being. The last chapter, “Prudence, Morality, and the New Humeans,” is a bit of an outlier. It argues not for any thesis about well-being, but for the claim that, no matter which theory of well-being is true, Humean theories of reasons are incompatible with certain common sense views about reasons to act morally and prudently.

Because each essay was meant to stand alone, there is some repetition, particularly when I introduce terminology and lay out my framework for thinking about welfare. This introduction will add more repetition, but most of the remarks I will make here are things that I don’t say in the chapters, either because they concern relationships between the chapters or because they are details that would have slowed down the action. Some of this would best be read after you have read the dissertation.

Goodness-For and Well-Being

My most fundamental assumption in this dissertation is that something can be good for you and that something can be bad for you. More precisely, I assume that there are some entities—call them welfare subjects—for whom things can be good (in a certain sense) and for whom things can be bad (in the same sense), and that human beings are among these. Although humans are the welfare subjects most often discussed, most non-human animals are clearly also welfare subjects, and perhaps all animals are. Some believe that plants are also welfare subjects, but this is highly controversial.¹

I said that a welfare subject is an entity for whom things can be good or bad in a certain sense. What sense is this? The welfare sense. When we say that it would be good for you to win the lottery or that it was good for your dog that you rescued him for a kill shelter, we have a certain sense of ‘good for’ in mind. When we say that hammers are good for driving nails or that arsenic is good for poisoning people, we have a different sense of ‘good for’ in mind. Nothing can be good for the activity of driving nails in the same sense that winning the lottery would be good for you. If winning

¹ Kraut (2007).
the lottery would be good for you, then other things equal, it would make you better off—and not just financially. The activity of driving nails cannot be better or worse off. The welfare sense of ‘good for’ is the sense that we usually have in mind when we say, of some human being, that something would be good for him. It is the only sense of ‘good for’ that I use in this dissertation. Whether plants are welfare subjects is controversial because, although some things (e.g., water, sunlight) can be good for them in some sense, it is unclear whether anything can be good for them in the welfare sense.

There are two ways in which something can be good (in the welfare sense) for a subject: it can be derivatively good for her, or it can be basically good for her. It would be derivatively good for you to win the lottery, since at least some of the goodness for you of winning the lottery would be due to the goodness for you of its effects. Whether winning the lottery would have any basic goodness for you—goodness for you that it doesn’t count as having simply in virtue of being appropriately related to other things that are good for you—is unclear. If you like, you can think of things that are merely derivatively good for a person (i.e., derivatively good for her, but not basically good for her) as things that are not really good for her, but that are merely suitably related to things that are good for her. I don’t think anything turns on this.

Unsurprisingly, there are analytic connections between the concepts of basic goodness and badness for a subject (in the welfare sense) and the concept of welfare or well-being. A subject’s welfare is how well things are going for that subject—i.e., how well off the subject is. It is analytic that a subject’s welfare is determined by the facts about how basically good or bad for her things are: the more things there are that are basically good (bad) for you, and the more basically good (bad) for you they are, the higher (lower) your welfare—other things equal. Since a welfare subject is an entity for whom things can be good or bad in the welfare sense, a welfare subject is an entity who can have a level of welfare—i.e., an entity capable of well-being.

I have introduced three concepts that I rely on throughout the dissertation: goodness for a subject in the welfare sense, badness for a subject in the welfare sense, and welfare (or equivalently, well-being). I do not think that any of these concepts can be explained in terms of concepts outside this circle. What is goodness (badness) for a subject in the welfare sense? It is the kind of goodness

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2 For a nice discussions of this, see Rosati (2009).
(badness) for a subject which, when instantiated, increases (reduces) the subject’s well-being—other things equal. What is a subject’s well-being? It is the stuff that a subject has more of the more basic goodness for him (in the welfare sense) is instantiated and the less basic badness for him (in the welfare sense) is instantiated. Some philosophers have attempted to explain some of these concepts in other terms, but in my view, their analyses are either unpersuasive or circular. Almost all philosophers of well-being assume, as I will, that we understand these concepts well enough to put them to work.

In denying that these concepts can be explained in other terms, I am disagreeing with those who think, as Moore did, that what it is for something to be good for you is just for it to be possessed by you (or located in your life) and good simpliciter. However, the assumption that these theorists are mistaken is invoked only once in the dissertation, in the argument against Judgment Subjectivism that I give in the second chapter. Everything else I say is compatible with the Moorean view of goodness-for. I cannot argue against this view here, except by noting that it seems obviously conceptually possible that something might be good for a person even though it is not good simpliciter. (Think of a sadistic pleasure.) Notice, too, that many people have no trouble understanding that some things are good for people in the welfare sense but cannot fathom how something could be good simpliciter.

Of course, some people (most prominently, Moore) claim not to understand goodness-for in the welfare sense unless it is explained in terms of something else, like goodness simpliciter. I can’t do much for these people besides pointing out that talk of well-being and of goodness-for in the welfare sense is ubiquitous in ordinary life. When a friend who hasn’t seen you in a long time asks you how you have been, he is (most likely) asking about your welfare. When you say that you had a terrible day yesterday but are having a much better one today, you are (most likely) saying that you are higher in well-being today than you were yesterday. When we judge that a typical member of an affluent Western society is more fortunate than a typical citizen of a severely impoverished country in the developing world, we are making a comparative judgment about well-being. These locutions

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3 Darwall (2002), for example, says that what is good for a subject in the welfare sense is what one ought to desire for the sake of the subject. I don’t know how to understand the idea of something one ought to desire for a subject’s sake except in terms of the thing’s goodness for the subject in the welfare sense.


5 Rosati (2008) argues against the Moorean view.
can be used to talk about things other than welfare, but more often than not, they are used to talk about welfare. It is hard to believe that someone could really have no idea what well-being is.

**The Bearers of Goodness-For**

Certain things are good or bad for welfare subjects. To which ontological category do these things belong? I assume that, in the first instance, it is particular events or states of affairs that are good or bad for subjects. For example, *your feeling happy from 9am to 9:15am* might be good for you, and *your getting a root canal from 4pm to 4:30pm* might be bad for you.

I do not distinguish carefully between events and states of affairs. I like saying that states of affairs are the bearers of goodness and badness for you because this does not suggest that the bearers of these properties must be short-lived or involve changes: *your being alive* might obtain for many decades, and it is the sort of thing that might be good for you. However, some people think of states of affairs as abstract entities that exist a world even if they do not obtain there. If such a person heard me say that we can work out a person’s level of welfare by looking at how basically good or bad for him all of the states of affairs that are good or bad for him are, he might misinterpret me as claiming that we need to look not only at the states of affairs that obtain, but also at those that do not obtain. An easy way to screen off this misunderstanding is to talk about events instead of states of affairs. For if I say that we should look at all of the events at a world and determine how good or bad for a particular person they are, no one will think that we should look not only at the events that happen there but also at events that exist there even though they do not happen there.6

I said that the bearers of goodness or badness for you are, in the first instance, particular events or states of affairs. But notice that we also talk about basically good or bad kinds. Indeed, the main theories of welfare—hedonism, desire satisfactionism, and objective list theories—all claim to identify at least one kind of thing that is basically good for you and one kind that is basically bad for you. As I explain in the first chapter, I believe that when a theorist claims that a kind K is basically

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6 Some possible (but actually undefended) views claim that a state of affairs can be basically good for you at a world even if it does not obtain there. Suppose you are pleased that you won the race, when unbeknownst to you, you lost. (I am assuming here, following Feldman and Heathwood, that ‘pleased that’ is not factive.) It might be claimed that *your winning the race* is good for you (given the background condition that you feel a pleasure directed at it) even though it does not obtain. Views like this are highly esoteric, however. In general, the only states of affairs that we need to look at to determine your welfare are the ones that obtain.
good for you, she is claiming that any possible member of $K$ is basically good for you at the world at which it obtains because it is a $K$. When a theorist makes such a claim about a kind $K$, she is claiming that it is a basic good. (Notice that I reserve the term ‘basic good’ for kinds. A particular state of affairs that is basically good for you is nevertheless not a basic good.) Thus, a hedonist claims that pleasure states—states of affairs consisting of a person feeling pleasure—is a basic good: every possible pleasure state is basically good for its subject at the world at which it obtains because it is a pleasure state.

Notice that if $K$ is a basic good for you, it is a basic good for you even at a world where no tokens of $K$ obtain. For to say that $K$ is a basic good for you is just to say that every possible token of it is basically good for you at the world at which it obtains. This could be true even though, in some worlds, no tokens of $K$ obtain. (Desire satisfaction might be a basic good for you even though you never get anything you want at the actual world.) If $K$ is a basic good for you at any world, it is a basic good for you at every world. The analogous claim is not true of particular states of affairs.

Notice, too, that it makes no sense to ask how basically good for you a basic good $K$ is. A particular event or state of affairs that is basically good (bad) for you has a basic prudential value for you—i.e., a certain amount of basic goodness (badness) for you. If desire satisfaction is a basic good, then every token desire satisfaction of yours is basically good for you to a certain extent at the world at which it obtains. But desire satisfaction, the kind, is not basically good for you to any particular extent. To say that it is basically good for you is just to say that all of its possible tokens are basically good for you at the worlds where they obtain.

**Monism and Pluralism**

The foregoing remarks can help answer some questions about the first chapter. The thesis of that chapter is that pluralism about well-being is true: there is either more than one basic good or more than one basic bad. (By contrast, a monist believes that there is only one basic good and only one basic bad.) Since a basic good (bad) is a kind of basically good (bad) event or state of affairs, pluralism is a thesis about how many such kinds there are. Why does this matter? Why should you care how many kinds there are, especially since I don’t identify any of the kinds? Moreover, isn’t the classification of any theory of welfare as monistic or pluralistic arbitrary? Desire satisfactionism
sounds like a monistic theory when it’s glossed as the view that the only thing that is basically good for you is getting what you want and that the only thing that is basically bad for you is not getting what you want. Wouldn’t it be equally acceptable to describe it as a pluralistic theory on the grounds that you want (and get) many different kinds of things?

As I see it, the issue between monism and pluralism is about explanation. Everyone agrees that a very large number of token states of affairs are basically good for you. But what explains why these token states, and not others, are basically good? Is there a single explanation of this, or is there more than one explanation of it? Monists believe that there is a single explanation of why all of the particular states of affairs that are basically good for you have this property: they are members of the sole basic good. Hedonists, for example, believe that whenever a particular state of affairs is basically good for you, it is basically good for you because it is a pleasure state—a state consisting of your feeling a pleasure. Desire satisfactionists believe that whenever a particular state of affairs is basically good for you, it has this status because it is a desire satisfaction—a state of the form $p \& your\ desiring\ p$. By contrast, pluralists believe that there is more than one possible explanation of why a particular state of affairs is basically good for you. Imagine a pluralist who thinks that there are two basic goods: desire satisfaction and subjective desire satisfaction—states of affairs of the form $your\ believing\ p \& your\ desiring\ p$. Such a theorist will deny that whenever there are two token states of affairs that are basically good for you, they instantiate the property of basic goodness for you for the same reason. Instead, he will claim that there are two possible explanations of why a particular state is basically good for you: it could be a desire satisfaction, or it could be a subjective desire satisfaction.

The debate between monism and pluralism matters because it matters how many possible explanations there are for a particular state’s being basically good for you. If you like, you can think about this in terms of good-making properties: how many properties can make a given state basically good for you? Is there only one, or are there more than one? Just as it matters how many wrong-making properties there are, it matters whether monism or pluralism about well-being is true.

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7 Technically, given how I’ve defined pluralism, a pluralist might think that there is only one possible explanation in the case of basic goodness but believe that there is more than one possible explanation in the case of basic badness. But I’ll ignore this arcane possibility.
It should also be obvious by now that whether a given theory of welfare counts as monistic or pluralistic is not arbitrary. The desire satisfactionist says that there is only one possible explanation of why a particular state of affairs might be basically good for you: it is a desire satisfaction. She also says that there is only one possible explanation of why a particular state of affairs might be basically bad for you: it is a desire frustration. Each basic good or bad corresponds to such an explanation, so desire satisfactionism should be understood as a monistic theory rather than as a pluralistic one.

**Subjectivism and Objectivism**

As I explain in the second chapter, subjectivism about welfare is a view about which particular events or states of affairs can be basically good for you. It says that some event or state $x$ is basically good for you only if and at least partly because you have a favorable attitude toward it (or it consists in the right way of your having a favorable attitude toward it). Different versions of subjectivism are arrived at by specifying the favorable attitude. Most subjectivists think of the attitude in question as desire. Objectivism, the view that I defend in the second chapter, is the claim that subjectivism is false.

The distinction between subjectivism and objectivism is orthogonal to the distinction between monism and pluralism. All four of the formally possible combinations of these views are coherent.

Desire satisfactionism is an example of a monistic, subjectivist theory. It says that there is only one basic good and only one basic bad: desire satisfaction and desire frustration. The view that only desire satisfactions are basically good for you implies a certain version of subjectivism—namely, the one on which $A$ is desire. If only states of affairs of the form $p \& \text{your desiring } p$ are basically good for you, and if every state of affairs that is basically good for you has that property because it is a state of affairs of that form, then a state of affairs is basically good for you only if and at least partly because it consists in the right way of your having a favorable attitude (viz., desire) toward something (viz., the object of the desire).

There is nothing incoherent about a monistic, objectivist theory: it is coherent (though implausible) to suppose that all and only state of affairs of the form your reading a book are basically good for you. (States of affairs of this form do not consist in your having a favorable attitude toward anything, and

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8 I am eliding important details that I will explain in the second chapter.
some of them obtain even though you have no favorable attitude toward them.) Monistic, objectivist theories strike me as implausible because they imply that whatever the sole basic good $K$ is, a life sufficiently rich in $K$ would be a life high in welfare even if it contained nothing toward which you had a favorable attitude. I believe this is why such theories have so few defenders.

Pluralist subjectivist theories are also possible, though they have been almost entirely neglected. Recall the pluralistic theory that I sketched above, according to which the only two basic goods are desire satisfaction and subjective desire satisfaction. This is a pluralistic theory, because it says there are two potential explanations of why a particular state of affairs is basically good for you. But it is a subjectivist theory because it says that any state of affairs that is basically good for you has that property at least partly because it is constituted in the right way by your having a favorable attitude (viz., desire) toward something. Although the theory gives two potential explanations of a state’s being basically good for you, both explanations invoke your favorable attitudes in the right way. Almost all subjectivists have been monists, but if my argument in the first chapter is cogent, they have compelling reasons to adopt a pluralistic theory (such as the one I just sketched) even if they remain subjectivists.

Finally, I understand an objective list theory to be a theory according to which both pluralism and objectivism are true. A theory on which desire satisfaction and knowledge are both basic goods would be an objective list theory, since it would be committed to at least two basic goods and to the possibility of an event’s being basically good for you even though you do not have a favorable attitude toward it and it does not consist in the right way of your having a favorable attitude toward anything. (On this theory, your knowing the Central Limit Theorem would be basically good for you even if you had no favorable attitude toward it.)

Some philosophers have claimed that unlike desire satisfactionism, an objective list theory does not explain why anything is basically good for you: it merely enumerates the things that are basically good

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9 To put it in the terms that I use in the second chapter, such theories are implausible because they violate the Resonance Intuition.
10 I believe that Fletcher (forthcoming) defends such a theory, even though he describes it as an objective list theory.
11 Someone might wonder why the arguments against Desire Subjectivism in the second chapter are necessary, given that I have already argued against desire satisfactionism in the first chapter. The reason is that desire satisfactionism is not the only Desire Subjectivist theory: another possibility is the pluralistic subjectivist theory that I just sketched, which is left standing by the first chapter but eliminated by the second chapter.
for you. Though I do not discuss this thought in the dissertation, I believe it rests on a confusion. Every theory of well-being explains why any particular token state of affairs that is basically good for you instantiates that property: a monistic theory will say that it is a token of the only basic good, and a pluralistic theory will identify the basic good (among the several available ones) of which it is a token. So at the level of tokens, an objective list theory is just as explanatory as desire satisfactionism is. Now, an objective list theory is admittedly silent on the question of why the basic goods it lists, and only those, are basic goods. But the same could be said of desire satisfactionism: this view has no explanation of why desire satisfaction is the only basic good. So at the level of types, every theory is merely enumerative, not explanatory. Objective list theories are no less explanatory than other theories of well-being.

The conclusion of the first chapter is that pluralism is true. The conclusion of the second is that objectivism is true. Since the arguments in the two chapters are compatible, when taken together, they amount to an argument that some objective list theory is true.

Examples of Basic Goods and Bads

One feature of the dissertation will annoy some readers: I do not name any basic goods or bads. I argue that pluralism and objectivism are true, and hence that some objective list theory is true, but I do not even begin to populate such a list. In my view, this is no defect. One way to argue for objectivism would be to argue, of some particular kind of state of affairs that does not involve favorable attitudes in the right way, that it is a basic good. And one way to argue for pluralism would be to argue, of two kinds of states of affairs, that they are both basic goods. But these are obviously not the only ways to argue for these claims. The fact that I use arguments that do not name any basic goods or bads should not undermine my results.

For those readers who insist on getting examples, let me name some. I believe that pleasure is a basic good and that pain is a basic bad—or more precisely, that states of affairs consisting of your feeling pleasure are a basic good and that states consisting of your feeling pain are a basic bad. Since I remain neutral on the relationship between pleasure and favorable attitudes, I am neutral on whether

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12 Fletcher (forthcoming). The distinction between enumerative and explanatory theories of well-being is due to Crisp (2006), pp. 102-03.
pleasure’s being a basic good would imply the truth of objectivism. However, I am strongly inclined to believe that being loved is a basic good. This does imply objectivism. For although being in a loving relationship might require favorable attitudes on your part, simply being loved does not: it merely requires favorable attitudes on the part of the person who loves you. And as my argument in the second chapter will illustrate, being loved is something toward which some possible creatures do not have favorable attitudes.

I must emphasize that nothing that I say in the dissertation depends on the claims I have just made. Moreover, I don’t take myself to establish any of these claims anywhere in this work. The conclusion of the first two chapters is that some theory of the ‘objective list’ kind is true, not that any particular theory of this kind is true.

**Objective Normative Reasons**

The third chapter of the dissertation concerns the Humean theory of reasons, according to which there is a reason for an agent to perform an action $A$ only if her performing $A$ would promote the satisfaction of one of her desires. I say more about the Humean theory in that chapter, but for the time being, let me issue a clarification about the kind of reason for action that I take this theory to be about.

To begin with, the Humean theory is a theory about *normative* reasons rather than *explanatory* ones—reasons that justify rather than reasons that merely explain. But even within the category of normative reasons, we must distinguish between *objective* and *subjective* reasons. Suppose that you want to drink a gin and tonic and that you believe that the glass in front of you contains a gin and tonic. Unbeknownst to you, it contains gasoline. Assuming that the satisfaction of your desires give you reasons for action, does your desire to drink a gin and tonic give you a reason to drink what’s in the glass? There’s a sense in which it does and a sense in which it doesn’t. It does in the sense that, given what you believe, your drinking what’s in the glass would help satisfy your desire for a gin and tonic. It does not in the sense that your drinking what’s in the glass would not really help satisfy that desire.
This desire gives you a subjective normative reason to drink what’s in the glass, but it does not give you an objective normative reason to do so.\textsuperscript{13}

I understand the Humean theory of reasons to be a theory about \textit{objective normative reasons} for action. This is the case even though Humean theories are sometimes classified as subjectivist theories of reasons rather than objectivist ones (in a sense of these terms distinct from, but related to, the sense at issue in discussions of welfare). Humean theories are subjectivist theories of objective normative reasons.

\textbf{The Variant on Humeanism}

Let me end with a remark for those who have already read the chapters. In the third chapter, I point out that there is a variant on non-concurrentist Humeanism that could accommodate Prudential Rationalism—assuming that desire satisfactionism is the correct theory of well-being. Since nowhere in that chapter do I say anything against desire satisfactionism, I don’t pursue this thought further there. However, earlier in the dissertation, I give two arguments that imply the falsity of desire satisfactionism: the Hedonic Timing argument in the first chapter and the argument against Same World Desire Subjectivism in the second chapter. Since I take myself to have shown that desire satisfactionism is not the correct theory of well-being, I believe I am in a position to show that the variant on non-concurrentist Humeanism that I consider cannot accommodate Prudential Rationalism.

Remember that, as I argue in the first chapter, one way for your welfare to increase is for you to feel an attitudinal pleasure of the right kind with a false object. Even if we suppose that an attitudinal pleasure directed at \( p \) is constituted in part by a desire for \( p \), you need not get any \textit{desire satisfaction} from your desire for \( p \) when you are pleased that \( p \): after all, \( p \) might be false. So we can construct a case in which a given agent’s performing action \( A \) would increase her welfare because it would cause her to feel an attitudinal pleasure of the right kind with a false object, but her doing \( A \) would not promote her getting any desire satisfaction. It would be prudent for her to do \( A \), but since her doing \( A \) would not promote her getting any desire satisfaction, the variant on non-concurrentist

Humeanism says that there is no reason for her to do $A$. Thus, even this variant on Humeanism fails to accommodate Prudential Rationalism.
Chapter 1

Pluralism about Well-Being

Theories of welfare purport to identify the ultimate sources of well-being and ill-being—the basic goods and bads whose presence in your life ultimately determines how well you are faring. Such theories can be classified not only according to what they claim the basic goods and bads are, but also according to how many of them they claim there are. Monism is the view that there is just one basic good and one basic bad. Simple hedonism, which says that pleasure is the only basic good and pain the only basic bad, is a paradigm case of a monistic theory. Pluralism is the view that there is either more than one basic good or more than one basic bad. A theory that distinguished between pleasure and desire satisfaction and maintained that both were basic goods would be a pluralistic theory.

Pluralism is sometimes said to be the majority view among philosophers. However, although some philosophers have posited a plurality of basic goods, there are no defenses of pluralism as such. In this paper, I give an argument for pluralism that is general in the sense that it does not purport to identify any of the basic goods or bads. I claim that whether or not pleasure is a basic good and pain a basic bad, at least one basic good is basically good for you only at times when you feel pleasure, and at least one basic bad is basically bad for you only at times when you feel pain. However, because two people can differ in welfare during intervals when neither of them feels any pleasure or pain, these two basic goods and bads cannot be the only ones: either there is a basic good that can be basically good for you even when you are not feeling pleasure, or there is a basic bad that can be basically bad for you even when you are not feeling pain. Thus, even if you cannot name any of the basic goods or bads, you can know that pluralism is true.

14 “I take it that while each monistic view has its defenders, pluralism is the most popular view about well-being.” [Bradley (2009), p. 15.] “[T]his is the point in the progression of thought about welfare at which many prominent contemporary philosophers can be found: convinced that some form of the objective list theory is correct, but yet to settle on any particular list.” [Keller (2009), p. 659.]
In the course of arguing for pluralism, I also touch on other debates. Fred Feldman has recently argued that some hedonistic theories can accommodate all of the putatively anti-hedonistic intuitions elicited by Nozick’s Experience Machine. Although some people have argued that the theories he identifies are not really versions of hedonism, no one has taken issue with his claim that they are consistent with all of these intuitions. I argue that they are not consistent with them, and thus that the Experience Machine threatens hedonism even if Feldman’s theories are genuinely hedonistic. I also address the question of whether, whenever you feel a pleasure, you must like it or desire to be feeling it—a view apparently endorsed by Scanlon and Parfit, among others. I argue that this question should be answered in the negative. Most importantly, I give a new argument against desire satisfactionism, the Hedonic Coincidence argument.

1.1 Preliminaries

I follow standard practice in assuming that the things that are good or bad for us are states of affairs and that basic goods and bads should be understood as kinds of states of affairs. Thus, hedonism properly understood says that pleasure (pain) states—states of affairs consisting of someone’s experiencing a pleasure (pain) at a particular time—are the only basic good (bad), whereas desire satisfactionism accords this status to desire satisfactions (frustrations)—states consisting of someone’s having an intrinsic desire at a particular time while the object of that desire is true (false).

Your well-being is fixed by the facts about the prudential values for you of all the states of affairs that are good or bad for you—that is, the facts about how good or bad for you they are. To determine how well you are faring, however, we need not consider all of the prudential value for you of the states that are good or bad for you. A state is derivatively good or bad for you if and only if some of its goodness or badness for you is due at least in part to the goodness or badness for you of other states. For example, the conjunctive state your drinking wine & your eating cheese derives at least some of its goodness for you from the goodness for you of each its conjuncts, and your having $5 derives at least some of its goodness for you from the goodness for you if its effects. A state is non-derivatively or basically good or bad for you if and only if some of its goodness or badness for you is not due even in part to the goodness or badness for you of other states. A state can be both

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16 I will sometimes speak more loosely (e.g., by saying that pleasures are basic goods according to hedonism).
derivatively and basically good (bad) for you, and we can distinguish its **basic prudential value**—the portion of its goodness or badness for you that is not due even in part to the goodness or badness for you of other states—from its derivative prudential value. Since a state’s derivative prudential value is already accounted for in the prudential values of the states from which it is derived, that value does not need to be considered in addition to the values of those other states when we attempt to determine your level of well-being. Thus, if a state is *merely* derivatively good or bad for you (i.e., derivatively but not basically good or bad for you), then it is redundant for the purposes of calculating your welfare. A **welfare atom** is a state of affairs that is basically good or bad for you. A **positive** welfare atom is basically good for you and a **negative** welfare atom is basically bad for you. Your welfare atoms are the states we cannot ignore when we tally up your level of well-being. But if one of your welfare atoms has some derivative prudential value for you, that portion of its value can be ignored, since it is already accounted for in the basic value of some other atom. The facts about your well-being supervene on, and are determined by, the **basic** prudential values for you of your welfare atoms.

A **basic good** (bad) is just a kind of positive (negative) welfare atom, so the dispute between monism and pluralism concerns how many kinds of positive and negative welfare atoms there are. What does it mean to say that K is a kind of welfare atom? Not merely that all of its members are atoms. After all, a hedonist who distinguished between sharp pains and dull pains would not therefore count as a pluralist. Not merely that some of its members are atoms either, for then pluralism would be trivial: any kind of atom would generate a plurality of more inclusive kinds of atom. At a first approximation, a kind K is a kind of welfare atom if and only if all of its members are welfare atoms because they are Ks. The simple hedonist thinks that all sharp pains are negative atoms and that all dull pains are negative atoms, but he does not think that any pain is a negative atom because it is a *sharp* pain, or because it is a *dull* pain. Instead, he thinks that every pain is a negative atom because it is a *pain*. That is why he thinks that pain is a kind of negative atom, whereas sharp pain and dull pain are not.

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17 Since a conjunctive state could have some basic value while also deriving some of its value from the basic values of its conjuncts, a welfare atom can have other atoms as parts. This does not lead to double-counting, since we would only count the basic value of such a conjunctive state.

18 This is compatible with the view, defended in Velleman (1991), that certain facts about the shape of your life (e.g., that it improved over time) help determine how good your life is: your having an *uphill* life could be one of your welfare atoms. It is even compatible with the holistic view that some of the goodness for you of your life does not derive from the goodness for you of any of its proper parts: your entire life could be one of your welfare atoms.
Pluralism should be distinguished from **objectivism** about well-being—the view, roughly, that something can be basically good for you even if you do not have a favorable attitude toward it. The distinction between monism and pluralism is orthogonal to the distinction between objectivism and subjectivism. A pluralistic theory could say that all of the basic goods and bads are subjective, and a monistic theory could say that the sole basic good and the sole basic bad are both objective. As a matter of fact, pluralists tend to be objectivists, and they tend to defend **objective list** theories—views on which both pluralism and objectivism are true. But we should not conflate the two.

It should also be noted that pluralism is a view in the normative ethics of welfare, not a metaethical view: it is a view about how many basic goods and bads there are, not a view about what it is for something to be good or bad for you. Furthermore, since pluralism is just the claim that there is more than one basic good or more than one basic bad, it is not to be identified with any particular pluralistic theory of well-being. It is appropriately contrasted not with any particular monistic theory, such as hedonism or desire satisfactionism, but with monism—the thesis that there is only one basic good and only one basic bad. Thus, one can argue for pluralism without arguing for any particular list of basic goods and bads.

### 1.2 Preview of the Argument

My argument for pluralism depends on an uncontroversial assumption: you can have a level of well-being at a particular time, and your well-being can be higher at one time than at another. Your well-being at a time is not the total amount of well-being that you have accrued throughout your life up to that time. Rather, it is how well you are doing *at that time.* (A typical octogenarian has accrued more lifetime well-being until now than a typical infant has, but he may not be better off *now* than

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20 Thus, you can be a pluralist even if you accept a non-disjunctive analysis of goodness for a person, such as the view, defended by Darwall (2002), that for something to be good for you is for it to be such that one ought to desire it insofar as one cares about you. After all, there might be two kinds of thing that one ought to desire insofar as one cares about you: your desire satisfactions and your pleasures. I should also note that my argument is neutral on the question of whether goodness for a person can be understood in terms of goodness *simpliciter,* as argued by Brewer (2009), or whether it is (to use Brewer’s terminology) “irreducibly person-relative,” as argued by Rosati (2008). For I will not accord the status of a basic good or bad to anything whose occurrence in a person’s life could not plausibly be regarded as good (or bad) *simpliciter.*
the infant is.) Your well-being at a time is determined by the basic prudential values for you of your welfare atoms at that time. Thus, the fact that you can have a level of welfare at a time entails that some token welfare atoms are basically good or bad for you at particular times. This is not controversial. It is just the denial of the incredible claim that, although some things might be basically good or bad for you, there is no time at which anything is basically good or bad for you.

Because your well-being at a time is fixed by how basically good or bad for you your welfare atoms are at that time, we can use observations about changes in a person’s welfare over time and differences in people’s welfare at a time to make inferences about the basic goods and bads. The temporal facts about well-being might warrant us in concluding that there is a basic good (bad) whose tokens can be basically good (bad) for you at certain times, or that there is a basic good (bad) whose tokens cannot be basically good (bad) for you except at certain times. And we might be entitled to draw such existential conclusions about basic goods and bads without concluding, of any particular kind of state of affairs, that it is a basic good or bad.

My argument for pluralism runs as follows. In the next section, I argue for two claims:

**The Pleasure Claim** Some kind of positive welfare atom is such that its tokens cannot be basically good for you except at times when you are feeling pleasure.

**The Pain Claim** Some kind of negative welfare atom is such that its tokens cannot be basically bad for you except at times when you are feeling pain.

In the following one, I argue for this claim:

**Conclusion** Either there is some kind of positive welfare atom whose tokens can be basically good for you even at times when you are not feeling pleasure, or there is some kind of negative welfare atom whose tokens can be basically bad for you even at times when you are not feeling pain.
The basic good or bad whose existence is implied by the Conclusion must be distinct from the basic good and basic bad whose existence is implied by the Pleasure and Pain Claims. Thus, it follows that pluralism is true.\textsuperscript{21}

\section*{1.3 The Pleasure and Pain Claims}

I use the terms ‘pleasure’ and ‘pain’ very broadly, to refer to any experiences that feel good or feel bad, respectively.\textsuperscript{22} Orgasms feel good and headaches feel bad, so they are pleasures and pains. But it also feels good when you are pleased that you managed to avoid the rain, and it feels bad when you are pained (or displeased) that your candidate lost the election, so those are pleasures and pains too.

In this section, I argue for the following two claims:

\textbf{The Pleasure Claim} \hspace{1em} Some kind of positive welfare atom is such that its tokens cannot be basically good for you except at times when you are feeling pleasure.

\textbf{The Pain Claim} \hspace{1em} Some kind of negative welfare atom is such that its tokens cannot be basically bad for you except at times when you are feeling pain.

Many people already accept these claims. As will become clear shortly, all hedonists are already committed to them (though you need not be a hedonist to accept them). Moreover, the Pleasure Claim would be accepted by anyone who thinks that engagement in virtuous activities (or contact with objective goods) is basically good for you, but only at times when you take pleasure in them.\textsuperscript{23}

The claims are not trivial, however, because they are incompatible with monistic desire satisfactionism. I will now argue that everyone should accept these claims because they follow from the best explanations of certain facts about the temporal coincidence of some pleasures (pains) with increases (decreases) in well-being. That they follow from these explanations will be obvious, but that these are the best explanations will take some work to establish.

\textsuperscript{21} Space constraints preclude me from answering the most common objections to pluralism (e.g., that pluralistic theories face special problems when it comes to comparing the basic prudential values of welfare atoms).

\textsuperscript{22} This is merely meant to be an intuitive characterization of the scope of these terms, not an analysis of pleasure and pain. I am not aligning myself with the “feels good” theory of pleasure proposed by Smuts (2011). My argument is compatible with any plausible theory of pleasure and pain, including Heathwood’s (2006, 2007) desire-based theory.

\textsuperscript{23} E.g., Kagan (2009).
The argument will get fairly complex, so an analogy might help. Suppose we are trying to figure out why the lord of the manor died last night. We might first attempt to determine whether he died of natural causes or whether he was murdered. If there is at least one plausible explanation of how he might have been murdered (e.g., the butler slipped poison in his nightcap) but no plausible explanation of how he might have died naturally, we could reasonably conclude that he was murdered—without embracing any one of the plausible explanations of how he might have been murdered or who murdered him. Having concluded that he was murdered, we might then attempt to determine who the murderer was. Given that there is at least one plausible explanation of how the butler might have murdered him, if there is no plausible explanation of how anyone else might have murdered him, we could reasonably conclude that the butler did it—without embracing any one of the plausible explanations of how he did it. At each stage, we favor one of several competing hypotheses not because we accept a particular explanation of it, but because, unlike the others, there is at least one plausible explanation of why it might be true. We can reasonably become convinced that the butler killed the lord without committing ourselves to any theory about how he killed him—even if the reason we think the butler did it is that it is at least plausible that he slipped poison in the lord’s nightcap, whereas there is no plausible story about how anyone else might have done it. The plausibility of the hypothesis that the butler slipped poison in the lord’s nightcap can be part of a conclusive case that the butler murdered the lord even if we are not warranted in accepting it because, for all we know, there are equally plausible alternative hypotheses of how the butler did it.

The argument for the Pleasure and Pain Claims will have a similar structure. I will begin with a certain datum that needs explaining, and I will arrive at an explanation of it in two stages. At each stage, I will rule out all but one hypothesis on the grounds that, whereas there is at least one plausible potential explanation of why this hypothesis is true, there is no plausible potential explanation of why any competing hypothesis is true. In doing so, however, I will not commit myself to any of the plausible potential explanations for the hypotheses that I favor. I will present the argument for the Pleasure Claim in detail and then explain how a parallel argument can be given for the Pain Claim.

Pleasures at least usually coincide temporally with increases in welfare. Imagine a baby lying in his crib, feeling pretty neutral. The clouds part, allowing a ray of sunlight to shine down on him. He
takes pleasure in the warm feeling of the sun. A minute later, the clouds block the sun again, and he goes back to feeling neutral. Some philosophers think that people do not get welfare boosts when they feel sadistic or otherwise objectionable pleasures. Even if they are right, the baby certainly undergoes an increase in well-being that coincides temporally with his perfectly unobjectionable pleasure: his welfare rises when his pleasure begins, remains at higher level while it persists, and declines when it ends. This is one of countless boost cases, in which a pleasure coincides temporally with a boost in well-being for the person experiencing it. Most ordinary, everyday pleasures are like this: when a person feels pleasure from eating a chocolate bar, watching a beautiful sunset, recalling an amusing incident, or thinking about her children’s accomplishments, she gets a welfare boost at the same time that she feels the pleasure. Indeed, it is a datum that some typically-met conditions are such that, necessarily, whenever someone feels a pleasure that meets those conditions (e.g., it is not sadistic), she gets a welfare boost. Whatever those typically-met conditions turn out to be, let us call any pleasure meeting those conditions a pleasure of the right kind. The datum can then be put as follows: most everyday pleasures are pleasures of the right kind, and necessarily, whenever someone feels such a pleasure, she gets a welfare boost that coincides temporally with it. This is a fact that any plausible theory of welfare must accommodate.

In claiming that pleasures of the right kind necessarily coincide temporally with welfare boosts, I have not implied that they are themselves basically good for the people feeling them. A pleasure of the right kind is not necessarily one that is basically good for the person feeling it. The datum that any plausible theory of welfare must accommodate is that there is some condition C such that pleasures typically meet C and necessarily, any pleasure meeting C coincides temporally with an increase in the welfare of the person feeling it—an increase whose source might not be the pleasure itself. To say that a pleasure is of the right kind is just to say that it is a pleasure meeting condition C. So another way of putting the datum is this: pleasures are typically of the right kind, and necessarily, whenever someone feels a pleasure of the right kind, he gets an increase in welfare whose source may or may not be the pleasure itself. This is compatible with the claim that necessarily, no pleasure is ever basically good for anyone who feels it. At no point in this paper do I endorse any version of the

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24 E.g., Kraut (2007), pp. 188-89.
25 Perhaps the set of conditions that a pleasure must meet to be of the right kind is empty, so that necessarily, whenever someone feels any pleasure, she gets a welfare boost. I remain neutral on whether this is true.
thought that any pleasures are basically good for you when you feel them. This cannot be overemphasized.

Furthermore, when I say that a pleasure of the right kind always coincides with a welfare boost for the person feeling it, I mean a pro tanto, not an all-things-considered, welfare boost. Sometimes, your net welfare drops just when you feel a pleasure of the right kind because an appropriately timed bad event outweighs the welfare boost coinciding with the pleasure. But since you would have been even worse off overall if the bad event had happened but you had not felt the pleasure, your pleasure still coincided with a pro tanto welfare boost.

What explains the datum that pleasures of the right kind coincide with welfare boosts for the people feeling them? There are many salient logical possibilities. It could be that whenever someone begins to feel a pleasure of the right kind, a state of affairs that was already basically bad for him becomes less basically bad for him and then reverts back to its original level of basic badness for him once he stops feeling the pleasure. Or it could be that fewer states of affairs are basically bad for people when they are feeling pleasures of the right kind than at other times: perhaps states of the form your not feeling pleasure meeting condition C are basically bad for you whenever they obtain, so you get a pro tanto increase in welfare whenever you feel a pleasure of the right kind because no such states obtain at those times. These explanations are not credible, however, because there is no kind of state of affairs that could plausibly be claimed to be a basic bad and whose being a basic bad would explain any of these hypotheses. For example, it is not plausible that your not feeling pleasure in condition C is basically bad for you rather than merely neutral. And it is totally implausible that this kind of state of affairs is the only basic bad, which is what a monist would have to claim if she claimed that it was a basic bad.

More importantly, what happens when you feel a pleasure of the right kind is that you get more basic goodness, not less basic badness. After all, it is surely possible that someone might feel a pleasure of the right kind at a time when nothing is basically bad for him. This can be the case only if what explains the welfare boost is an increase in basic goodness, not a decrease in basic badness. Now, since the welfare of a person who is feeling a pleasure of the right kind is pro tanto higher at every time at which he is feeling the pleasure, it is evident that at every time during a pleasure of the right kind, the person

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26 I assume that there is a single explanation of all boost cases.
feeling it is getting basic goodness. The simplest and most natural explanation of this is the following:

**Simple Hypothesis**  Whenever a person feels a pleasure of the right kind, there is a token positive welfare atom that is basically good for him at every time in the interval during which he is feeling that pleasure.

Note that the Simple Hypothesis is neutral on the question of whether, whenever someone feels a pleasure of the right kind, the token positive atom that is basically good for him at every time during the interval in which he is feeling the pleasure is basically good for him only at those times. It is compatible with a positive answer to this question, but it is also compatible with the view that sometimes, when someone feels a pleasure of the right kind, a state of affairs that is basically good for him before, during, and after the pleasure is even more basically good for him during the pleasure than it is before or after it.

Any alternative to the Simple Hypothesis would have to explain why a person who feels a pleasure of the right kind has higher level of welfare at every time at which he is feeling the pleasure without invoking a state of affairs that is basically good for him at every time at which he is feeling the pleasure. Such an alternative would have to say that the welfare boost coinciding with the pleasure is due to more than one state of affairs, such that (i) at every time during the pleasure, at least one of these states is basically good for the person, but (ii) none of them is basically good for the person for the entire duration of the pleasure. Besides being baroque, any such hypothesis would lack a plausible potential explanation: there are no kinds of states of affairs that could plausibly be basic goods and whose tokens behave this way.

By contrast, there *is* a plausible candidate basic good that behaves in accordance with the Simple Hypothesis. Whatever conditions in fact need to be met in order for a pleasure to be attended by a welfare boost, we can specify a kind of pleasure state that consists in a person’s feeling a pleasure while those conditions are met. In other words, whatever the right kind of pleasure is, we can construct a **right kind of pleasure state** that consists in a person’s feeling a pleasure of the right kind. It is at least plausible (even if it is ultimately false) that the right kind of pleasure state is a basic
good. And the right kind of pleasure state would behave in accordance with the Simple Hypothesis if it were a basic good. For the following principle is clearly true:

**Hedonic Timing** If a pleasure (pain) state is basically good (bad) for its subject, it is basically good (bad) for her at all and only those times when the pleasure (pain) is occurring.\(^{27}\)

I remain neutral on whether any pleasures are basically good for the people who feel them. However, *if* a pleasure is basically good for me, then it is basically good for me at every time I feel it. Moreover, it is basically good for me *only* at those times: I do not get any basic prudential value now for pleasures or pains that I will feel in the future or ones that I felt in the past but no longer feel. (It can be true of me now that I have accrued a lot of lifetime well-being thanks to my past pleasures, but that does not imply that some well-being can *accrue to me now* thanks to my past pleasures.) This is true even if what happens at other times can influence how much prudential value I get from a pleasure or pain when I experience it. If I feel a pleasure at \(t_2\) *about some state* that obtains at \(t_1\), then according to the view that all pleasures are basically good for you but that they are more basically good for you if their objects are true, what happens at \(t_1\) amplifies the prudential value for me of the pleasure I feel at \(t_2\). Nonetheless, that value accrues to me only at \(t_2\): if I died before \(t_2\), I would never benefit from that pleasure, and once the pleasure disappears after \(t_2\), I cease to benefit from it.\(^{28}\) If pleasures are basically good for me at all, then as Bradley puts it, “the time a pleasure is good for me is just the time of the pleasure.”\(^{29}\) Given that Hedonic Timing is true, pleasure states of the right kind are states that could plausibly be a basic good and that would behave in accordance with the Simple Hypothesis if they were. For Hedonic Timing trivially implies that if a pleasure state of the right kind is basically good for its subject, it is basically good for him at every time at which he is feeling the pleasure of the right kind.

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\(^{27}\) For the sake of simplicity, I individuate pleasure states in such a way that they cannot acquire or lose basic goodness, and pleasures in such a way that they cannot go from being of the wrong kind to being of the right kind (or vice versa). Thus, I would redescribe a pleasure that is of the right kind only during its middle part as a pleasure of the right kind flanked by two pleasures of the wrong kind. Dropping this convention would add complexity but change nothing of substance in my argument.

\(^{28}\) The fact that some pleasure states are not *wholly* constituted by someone’s feeling a pleasure does not cast doubt on Hedonic Timing. Suppose that the conjunctive pleasure state *your feeling pleasure of intensity \(I\) and duration \(D\) about \(p\) & \(p\)* is basically good for you. When is it basically good for you? Not whenever \(p\) is true, since \(p\) might have been true long before you existed and might even be eternally true. Not when \(p\)’s truthmaker obtained either, since it might have obtained centuries before your birth. The only credible answer is: *when you feel the pleasure.*

\(^{29}\) Bradley (2009), p. 18.
What this shows is that the Simple Hypothesis at least has the following going for it: there is a kind of state of affairs that could plausibly be claimed to be a basic good (viz., pleasure states of the right kind), such that if it were a basic good, this would entail and explain the Simple Hypothesis. The same cannot be said of any alternative to it. But either the Simple Hypothesis or some alternative is required to explain the datum that pleasures of the right kind coincide temporally with pro tanto welfare boosts. This entitles us to accept the Simple Hypothesis even if we remain agnostic, as I will, about whether pleasure states of the right kind are in fact a basic good.

So the first stage of my explanation of the datum that pleasures of the right kind coincide temporally with pro tanto welfare boosts is that the Simple Hypothesis is true. Note, however, that the Simple Hypothesis is not the Pleasure Claim. The Pleasure Claim says that at least one type of positive atom can only be basically good for you at times when you are feeling pleasure. The Simple Hypothesis is compatible with the view that there is no such type. Indeed, it is even compatible with the view that no token positive atom is basically good for anyone only at times when he is feeling pleasure. It merely says that whenever you feel a pleasure of the right kind, there is some token state of affairs that is basically good for you at every time in the interval in which you feel the pleasure—whether or not it is also basically good for you at other times.

To get the Pleasure Claim from the Simple Hypothesis, we need to ask: why is the Simple Hypothesis true? What best explains it? Two options present themselves. The first is:

**Explanation**

There is a kind of positive welfare atom such that whenever you feel a pleasure of the right kind, a token of this type is basically good for you at every time in the interval during which you are feeling that pleasure. Tokens of this type cannot be basically good for you at times when you are not feeling pleasure of the right kind.

This thesis *does* imply the Pleasure Claim, and trivially so. For it entails that there is some basic good whose tokens cannot be basically good for you except at times when you are feeling pleasure of the right kind. But whenever you feel pleasure of the right kind, you feel pleasure. Thus, it entails that
there is some basic good whose tokens cannot be basically good for you except at times when you are feeling pleasure. That is exactly what the Pleasure Claim says.

The second candidate explanation for the Simple Hypothesis is:

**Alternative**

There is a kind of positive welfare atom such that whenever you feel a pleasure of the right kind, a token of this type is basically good for you at every time in the interval during which you are feeling that pleasure.

Tokens of this type *can* be basically good for you at times when you are not feeling pleasure of the right kind.

If monism is true, then there is only one basic good, so the same basic good is doing the work every time a pleasure of the right kind coincides with a welfare boost. But if that is so, the Explanation and the Alternative are the only two possible explanations of the Simple Hypothesis. Either the basic good that is doing all the work can only be basically good for you when you are feeling pleasure of the right kind (the Explanation), or it can be basically good for you even at other times (the Alternative). Thus, for the purposes of this argument, we can assume that either the Explanation or the Alternative is true.

Let us take stock before moving to the final stage of the argument. I started with the datum that pleasures of the right kind coincide temporally with *pro tanto* welfare boosts. This, I argued, is best explained by the Simple Hypothesis: whenever someone feels such a pleasure, there is a token positive atom that is basically good for him at every time in the interval during which he feels that pleasure. Assuming monism, there are only two possible explanations for the Simple Hypothesis: the Explanation and the Alternative. The Explanation trivially implies the Pleasure Claim, which is the conclusion I am aiming to establish in this section. Thus, if I can make a case that we should accept the Explanation, I will have made a case for the Pleasure Claim.

How can we decide between the Explanation and the Alternative? By reapplying the method that warranted us in accepting the Simple Hypothesis. Suppose it turned out that some kinds of state of affairs that can plausibly be claimed to be basic goods would behave in accordance with the Explanation if they were basic goods. If it also turned out that no kind of state of affairs that can
It is easy to think of kinds of states of affairs that can be claimed with some plausibility to be basic goods and that would obey the Explanation if they were basic goods. As I argued above, if pleasure states of the right kind were a basic good, then whenever you felt a pleasure of the right kind, a token pleasure state of the right kind would be basically good for you at every time in the interval in which you felt that pleasure. Moreover, given Hedonic Timing, it is clear that no pleasure state of the right kind could be basically good for you at times when you are not feeling pleasure of the right kind. For that principle implies that if a pleasure state of the right kind is basically good for you at all, it is basically good for you only at those times when you are feeling the pleasure of the right kind. Thus, the Explanation at least has the following going for it: there is a kind of state of affairs that can plausibly be claimed to be a basic good (viz., pleasure states of the right kind), such that if it were a basic good, its being a basic good would entail and explain the Explanation. This counts in favor of the Explanation even if we remain agnostic about whether this kind of state of affairs is in fact a basic good. And it counts decisively in favor of the Explanation if there is no plausible potential explanation of the Alternative.

By contrast, it is not easy to think of a kind of state of affairs that can plausibly be claimed to obey the Alternative. This would have to be a state whose tokens can be basically good for people when they are not feeling pleasure of the right kind but that also has the following feature: whenever a person feels pleasure of the right kind, a token of it is basically good for that person at every time in the interval in which the pleasure is occurring. What kind of state of affairs could this be?

Here is one possibility. Perhaps engaging in activities that are virtuous or that involve the exercise of distinctively human capacities is basically good for you whenever you do this, but it is even more basically good for you when you are taking pleasure in these activities. If pleasures of the right kind are just pleasures that you take in such activities, then since you can engage in such activities even when you are not feeling pleasure, this would explain the Alternative. As I noted earlier, however, most ordinary pleasures are of the right kind: pleasures of the right kind are the rule, not the
exception. But most ordinary pleasures are not pleasures that we take in virtuous activities. Indeed, many paradigmatic pleasures of the right kind are not pleasures taken in such activities: when a baby takes pleasure in the warmth of the sunshine, this pleasure is of the right kind even though the baby is not engaging in any virtuous activity. Thus, it is false that pleasure of the right kind is pleasure taken in such activities. Therefore, although it could plausibly be claimed that engagement in such activities is basically good for us (and is even more basically good for us when we take pleasure in these activities), since a pleasure of the right kind is a pleasure meeting a condition that pleasures typically meet, the truth of this hypothesis would not explain the Alternative.

There is only one minimally credible potential explanation of the Alternative. Remember that a desire satisfaction is a state of the form \( p \land S \text{ intrinsically desires } p \). Perhaps the following is true:

**Desire**

Necessarily, when someone feels a pleasure of the right kind, he is the subject of a desire satisfaction that obtains at every time in the interval during which he is feeling that pleasure.

Let us follow the desire satisfactionists’ practice of using ‘desire’ to refer to any pro-attitude.\(^{30}\) Someone can be the subject of a desire satisfaction even at a time when he feels no pleasure: your intrinsic desire for fame might be satisfied before you discover that you have become famous. Thus, if Desire were true and desire satisfactions were a basic good, they would behave in accordance with the Alternative. Since it is at least plausible that desire satisfactions are a basic good, this would neutralize the advantage of the Explanation over the Alternative. For then we would have the same kind of evidence for the Alternative as we do for the Explanation: there would be at least one kind of state of affairs that could plausibly be claimed to be a basic good, such that if it were a basic good, its being a basic good would entail and explain the Alternative. Notice, however, that desire satisfactions can behave in accordance with the Alternative only if Desire is true: if Desire is false, then there is no guarantee that whenever a person is feeling pleasure of the right kind, there is a desire satisfaction of hers that is basically good for her throughout that pleasure.\(^{31}\) As I will argue,

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\(^{30}\) Heathwood (2007), p. 25; (2006), p. 559. This is also how ‘desire’ is used in, e.g., Sobel (2005).

\(^{31}\) For the purposes of this argument, I assume that a desire satisfaction is basically good for its subject at every time in the interval when it obtains. If this is false, then from the fact that someone was the subject of a desire satisfaction at every time in the interval during which he was feeling a pleasure, it would not follow that his desire satisfaction was basically good for him at every time in this interval. Thus, rejecting this assumption would make it highly implausible.
because Desire is false, desire satisfactions could not play the role demanded by the Alternative. Since no other kind of state of affairs could plausibly play this role either, we should prefer the Explanation over the Alternative.

Why think that Desire is true? The fact that people usually intrinsically desire to be feeling the pleasures that they are feeling would not confirm the necessary connection that it posits. On reflection, there are only three prima facie plausible views that would support Desire. I will now argue, however, that all three of these views are false.

The first view whose truth would imply Desire is this:

**First View**

It is impossible for you to feel a pleasure without intrinsically desiring to be feeling it at every time in the interval during which you feel it.

A number of philosophers, including Scanlon and Parfit, appear to endorse this view.\(^{32}\) If it is right, then Desire is true, since whenever you feel a pleasure, at least one of your intrinsic desires is satisfied at every time in the interval in which you feel the pleasure: namely, your desire to be feeling that very pleasure. This view is prima facie plausible when it is restricted to sensory pleasures—pleasant sensations, such as the feeling of a backrub or a hot shower. For there is some credibility to Heathwood’s claim that a sensory pleasure is, roughly, a sensation such that, while you are feeling it, you intrinsically desire of it that you be feeling it.\(^{33}\)

Even if sensory pleasures must be intrinsically desired when felt, however, the First View founders when we consider attitudinal pleasures—pleasures in the apparent fact that \(p\), such as the ones you feel when you are pleased that the Celtics won, or pleased that you are meditating in peace and

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\(^{32}\) Scanlon says that “it is plausible to suppose that an experience is pleasant, or enjoyable, only if, among other things, the subject desires it while it is occurring” [(2002), p. 339]. David Sobel interprets him as saying that “a phenomenological state counts as pleasure only if the agent experiencing the state desires that phenomenological state while she is experiencing it” [(2005), p. 449.] Parfit claims that the pleasant sensations are the ones that you hedonically like, and though he takes pains to distinguish hedonic liking from a particular sense of desire, his hedonic likings are desires in the broad sense in which I am using the term [(2011), pp. 52-56]. I am assuming that Parfit and Scanlon have intrinsic desires in mind, and that they intend these claims to apply to all pleasures, including attitudinal ones.

\(^{33}\) Heathwood (2007), p. 32.
tranquility. The most thoughtful desire-based analysis of attitudinal pleasures, Heathwood’s, says that such pleasures are **subjective desire satisfactions**: to be pleased that \( p \) is to intrinsically desire that \( p \) while believing that \( p \). This analysis leaves it open that *you might feel an attitudinal pleasure at a given time without desiring to be feeling it at that time*. This is intuitively correct, whether or not the analysis as a whole is right. Suppose you are at a sporting event where the winner of the raffle will be displayed on the jumbotron. Live footage of one of the audience members is shown on the screen, and you form the belief that this fellow has won the raffle. At first you do not have a pro-attitude toward his having won, but when you realize that he is your best friend, you acquire a desire that he has won: you like it, give it a mental “thumbs up,” and so on. Intuitively, this description of the scenario implies that you are now pleased that he has won. Without knowing whether you also have a desire to be feeling this very episode of attitudinal pleasure, we can know that you are pleased that he won. Whatever your attitudinal pleasure is—whether it is your simultaneously intrinsically desiring and believing \( p \), your believing \( p \) (given the background condition that you intrinsically desire \( p \)), or whatever—you need not have a pro-attitude toward it. Thus, even if you must desire whatever proposition you are taking pleasure in during any episode of attitudinal pleasure, you do not need to have an *additional* desire (intrinsic or not) for the thing, whatever it is, that is your attitudinal pleasure.

This is supported by a comparison of sensory pleasure with attitudinal pleasure. Even if Heathwood is right to think that whenever you feel a sensory pleasure you must feel a sensation that you intrinsically desire, it is not plausible that in order to be feeling a sensory pleasure, you must desire that very state—viz., your feeling this sensation while intrinsically desiring it. Such a desire would be superfluous. The view that sensory pleasures must be intrinsically desired when felt is minimally plausible only if we identify such pleasures with the sensations themselves, not the complex states involving the sensations and the subject’s attitudes toward them. But when it comes to attitudinal pleasure, what plays the role that Heathwood assigns to the sensation in sensory pleasure is the *object* of the attitudinal pleasure—a certain proposition or state of affairs. It may be plausible that, in order to take pleasure in \( p \), you must intrinsically desire \( p \). But it is no more plausible in the attitudinal case

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34 I will use ‘is pleased that \( p' \) as shorthand for ‘is pleased about the apparent fact that \( p' \) or ‘is taking pleasure in the proposition that \( p' \). Thus, as I use it, ‘is pleased that \( p' \) is not factive. Heathwood and Feldman also intend it to be non-factive. If the phrase is factive in English, then you can take us to be talking about the mental state component of being pleased that \( p \). See Heathwood (2006), pp. 556-57 for a discussion of this.

than it is in the sensory case that, in order to feel a pleasure, you need to have a desire about your present attitudes. The First View says that it is impossible to feel any pleasure without intrinsically desiring it. This is not true of attitudinal pleasures, so even if it is true of sensory pleasures, the First View is false.

It might be objected that whenever someone feels an attitudinal pleasure, he also feels a sensory pleasure. If this is correct, then assuming that all pleasures are either attitudinal or sensory, the first view is underwritten by Heathwood’s analysis of sensory pleasure after all. The premise of this objection is false, however. As Feldman has argued, you can feel an attitudinal pleasure at a time when you do not feel any sensory pleasures: an injured motorcyclist who has been given an anesthetic that prevents him from feeling any sensations might be pleased that he was not killed in the accident. And as the motorcyclist’s attitudinal pleasure shows, an attitudinal pleasure can be of the right kind even if the person feeling it feels no sensory pleasure at the same time. Sensory and attitudinal pleasure are not connected in a way that would enable Heathwood’s analysis of the former to underwrite the First View.

The second view whose truth would imply Desire is the following:

**Second View**

A pleasure of the right kind is, among other things, a pleasure that you intrinsically desire to be feeling at every time in the interval during which you feel it. That is, only pleasures that are intrinsically desired when they are felt necessarily coincide temporally with welfare boosts.

The Second View says that even if you can feel some pleasures without desiring to feel them, the sort of pleasure that always comes with a welfare boost is—in addition perhaps to being non-sadistic—pleasure that you intrinsically desire to be feeling while you are feeling it. However, given that some attitudinal pleasures are felt without being desired and that some of these are pleasures of the right kind, it is clear that the second view is false. When you take pleasure in the thought that you won the race without simultaneously desiring to be feeling that pleasure, this attitudinal pleasure is surely of the right kind: whatever conditions need to be met for you to receive a welfare boost that coincides with this pleasure, those conditions are met. Likewise, when you take pleasure in the

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thought that your summer vacation is only a week away, you get a welfare boost whether or not you desire this pleasure. Since at least some pleasures are of the right kind even though they are not intrinsically desired when felt, the Second View is false.

My discussion of the first two views suggests a third and final possible view that would explain the truth of Desire:

**Third View**

Every pleasure is either a sensory pleasure or an attitudinal pleasure. It is impossible to feel a sensory pleasure without intrinsically desiring to feel it at every time in the interval in which you feel it. It is impossible to feel an attitudinal pleasure without intrinsically desiring its object at every time in the interval in which you feel it. An attitudinal pleasure is of the right kind only if its propositional object is true.

This is the view that you would get if you agreed with Heathwood’s analyses of sensory and attitudinal pleasures, believed that sensory and attitudinal pleasure are the only kinds of pleasure, and maintained that the only attitudinal pleasures that necessarily coincide temporally with welfare boosts are pleasures whose objects are true. Because it agrees with Heathwood about sensory pleasures, this view implies that whenever you feel a sensory pleasure, you are the subject of a desire satisfaction that obtains at every time at which you feel the pleasure. It also implies that whenever you feel an attitudinal pleasure of the right kind, you are the subject of such a desire satisfaction: for it says that an attitudinal pleasure of yours is of the right kind only if its object is true, and it agrees with Heathwood that every attitudinal pleasure involves an intrinsic desire for its object. If, at every time that you are pleased that \( p \), you intrinsically desire \( p \) and \( p \) is true, then your desire for \( p \) is satisfied at every time that you are pleased that \( p \). Since this view says that sensory and attitudinal pleasures are the only kinds of pleasure, it implies Desire: whenever you feel a pleasure of the right kind, you are the subject of a desire satisfaction that obtains at every time at which you feel that pleasure.

The Third View is false, however, because an attitudinal pleasure can be of the right kind even if its object is false. Suppose that you are pleased that you will be having dinner tonight at your favorite restaurant. Unbeknownst to you, however, this restaurant will be closed tonight. Surely you get a pro
tanto boost in welfare during this attitudinal pleasure, even though its object is false. To take another example, suppose that you read a tabloid story claiming that a certain celebrity recently purchased a million dollars’ worth of “designer” hand soap in a single afternoon. Because celebrity eccentricity amuses you to no end, you take great pleasure in the apparent fact that he did this. Surely you get a pro tanto boost in welfare during this attitudinal pleasure, even if the story is false. If you are reading this story on your deathbed, then surely your life will contain at least somewhat more total welfare if you take intense attitudinal pleasure in the story than it would if you read the story but felt neutral. Thus, even if sensory and attitudinal pleasure are the only kinds of pleasure, and even if Heathwood is right about both kinds of pleasure, the Third View is false.

I have just argued against three prima facie plausible views that would imply Desire if they were true. Besides these views, there are no plausible motivations for Desire. Thus, we do not have good reasons to think that it is true. But if Desire is false, then desire satisfactions would not behave in accordance with the Alternative even if they were a kind of positive welfare atom. For it would not be true that, whenever someone is feeling a pleasure of the right kind, some desire of his is satisfied at every time in the interval in which he is feeling the pleasure. This is because a person might be feeling an attitudinal pleasure of the right kind that he does not intrinsically desire to be feeling and whose object is false. Since desire satisfactions are the only kind of state that have a decent chance of supporting the Alternative, we can conclude that no state that could plausibly be a basic good would make the Alternative true if it were a basic good. That is, unlike the Explanation, the Alternative is true only if there is a basic good that could not plausibly be a basic good. Thus, we should accept the Explanation.

37 This is not to say that your total lifetime well-being will be higher on account of this boost: perhaps you feel terrible whenever you discover that you have taken pleasure in false propositions, so when you discover that the restaurant is closed, your welfare will undergo a pro tanto decrease that outweighs any boost you got from the pleasure. Nor is it to deny that your welfare would be even higher during this pleasure if its object were true.

38 It might be thought that another kind of state that could plausibly support the Alternative can be extracted from Peter Railton’s view that what is good for you is what your ideal advisor (i.e., the person you would be if you had full information and full instrumental irrationality) would want your actual self to have [Railton (2003a), pp. 10-13; (2003b), p. 54]. However, there is no guarantee that whenever you feel a pleasure of the right kind, the closest world at which you are fully informed and fully instrumentally rational is one where you want your actual self to be feeling that pleasure: perhaps that world is one where you do not believe attitudinal pleasures with false objects to be good for your actual self and where you desire for your actual self only what you believe to be good for him. In light of the many problems facing idealized desire satisfaction views—see, e.g., Velleman (1988), Sobel (1994), Rosati (1995), and Hubin (1996)—the version of desire satisfactionism that I consider in the text strikes me as the most plausible one. For arguments that desire satisfactionists need not idealize, see Murphy (1999) and Heathwood (2005).
As I explained earlier, however, the Explanation trivially implies the Pleasure Claim. The Explanation implies that some basic good can be basically good for you only when you are feeling pleasure of the right kind. But you cannot feel pleasure of the right kind without feeling pleasure. Thus, the Explanation implies that some basic good can be basically good for you only when you are feeling pleasure. That is just what the Pleasure Claim says.

This shows that, whether or not desire satisfactions are a basic good, they are not the only basic good: for a desire satisfaction of yours can be basically good for you even when you are feeling no pleasure, and the Pleasure Claim says that there is at least one basic good whose tokens can be basically good for you only when you are feeling pleasure. If desire satisfactions were the only basic good, then some attitudinal pleasures that in fact coincide temporally with welfare boosts for the people feeling them would not so coincide. Thus, they are not the only basic good. My argument for the Pleasure Claim therefore doubles as an argument against monistic desire satisfactionism. To my knowledge, this Hedonic Coincidence Argument has not previously been discussed. Although little attention has explicitly been paid to the datum that most ordinary pleasures necessarily temporally coincide with pro tanto welfare boosts for the people feeling them, all theorists (including desire satisfactionists) surely agree that their theory of welfare must accommodate this datum. It is natural to assume that desire satisfactionists can do this by analyzing pleasure in terms of desire, as Heathwood does. The Hedonic Coincidence Argument shows that, surprisingly, even if pleasure is analyzed in terms of desire, desire satisfactionism cannot accommodate the datum. Thus, even if we remain open to the possibility that desire satisfactions are a basic good, we should reject monistic desire satisfactionism.

I have argued for the Pleasure Claim via inference to the best explanation from the datum that pleasures of the right kind coincide temporally with welfare boosts. It should be emphasized that although the argument relied twice on the claim that it is plausible that pleasure states of the right kind are a basic good, at no point did it rely on the claim that they in fact are a basic good. The argument was not that since pleasure states of the right kind are a basic good, the Pleasure Claim is

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39 Desire satisfactionists may have argued against the claim that pleasures are themselves basically good for you whenever you feel them, but that is not our datum. Recent interest in desire-based analyses of pleasure appears to be motivated in part by desire satisfactionists’ hope that such analyses will enable them to accommodate the datum that pleasures of the right kind coincide with welfare boosts even though they deny that pleasures are basically good. What I have argued is that this hope is misplaced.
true. The argument was: (i) that the Simple Hypothesis or some alternative to it is required to explain our datum, (ii) that the Simple Hypothesis is true because, although there is a plausible potential explanation of it, there is no plausible potential explanation for any alternative to it; (iii) that the truth of the Simple Hypothesis means that either the Explanation or the Alternative is true; (iv) that the Explanation is true because, although there is a plausible potential explanation of it, there is no plausible potential explanation for the Alternative; and (v) that the Pleasure Claim is true because it trivially follows from the Explanation.

A parallel argument could be made for the Pain Claim. It is a datum that there are some typically-met conditions such that, whenever those conditions are met and someone feels a pain, his pain coincides temporally with a pro tanto decrease in his welfare. (It is tempting to think that any possible pain meets these conditions, though nothing I argue depends on this.) This datum is best explained by

**Simple Hypothesis** Whenever a person feels a pain of the right kind, there is a token negative welfare atom that is basically bad for him at every time in the interval during which he is feeling the pain.

It can then be shown using the same kind of reasoning that, in spite of the desire satisfactionist’s attempts to motivate an Alternative*, what best explains the Simple Hypothesis* is the

**Explanation** There is a kind of negative welfare atom such that whenever you feel a pain of the right kind, a token of this type is basically bad for you at every time in the interval during which you are feeling that pain. Tokens of this type cannot be basically bad for you at times when you are not feeling pain of the right kind.\(^{40}\)

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\(^{40}\) Just as you can be pleased that \(p\) at a time when you feel no sensory pleasures, you can be pained or displeased that \(p\) at a time when you feel no sensory pains. And even if you must be averse to \(p\) whenever you are displeased that \(p\), you need not be averse to your own attitudinal displeasure that \(p\), whatever it is, in order for it to be a pain of the right kind. Moreover, some attitudinal pains with false objects can be of the right kind: if you take pain in the apparent fact that your mother died, you will get a pro tanto drop in welfare that coincides temporally with this pain even if, unbeknownst to you, she is still alive.
From the Explanation*, it straightforwardly follows that the Pain Claim is true: some basic bad can be basically bad for you only at times when you are feeling pain.

You need not accept the arguments I have given in this section to believe the Pleasure and Pain Claims. As long as you accept these claims, you should accept pluralism if you are persuaded by the argument that I give next.

1.4 Pluralism Established

The Pleasure and Pain Claims say that there is some basic good whose tokens can be basically good for you only when you are feeling pleasure and some basic bad whose tokens can be basically bad for you only when you are feeling pain. If this is right, then provided that there is at least one other basic good or bad, pluralism is true. I will now argue that there is at least one other basic good or bad.

I should alert the reader to a difference between the argument I am about to give and the one I gave for the Pleasure and Pain Claims. Each of these two Claims is incompatible with monistic desire satisfactionism. In arguing for these Claims, however, I did not rely on any intuitions that monistic desire satisfactionists already reject. Indeed, the starting point for my argument was a datum that they accept and hope to accommodate. Thus, monistic desire satisfactionists should find the argument that I gave surprising, and since they do not already deny any of the intuitions on which it relies, they should be open to changing their views in response to it. By contrast, the argument I am about to give, whose conclusion is incompatible with monistic hedonism, does rely on an intuition that most monistic hedonists already reject. Thus, it is not likely to get many monistic hedonists to change their minds.

This does not vitiate the argument, however. To begin with, although most monistic hedonists already reject the intuition, it is not the case that most monists reject it. Indeed, many (and perhaps even most) monists accept it. Furthermore, even hedonists who reject the intuition should be surprised by the use to which I put it: no one else has used this intuition to argue for the claim that there is a basic good or bad besides the two whose existence is implied by the Pleasure and Pain Claims. Finally, even if most hedonists would not regard the argument below as an effective piece of
“coercive philosophy,” they would (I hope) regard it as a good “philosophical explanation”—one that shows you how to get the last premise for an argument for pluralism from a widely-held intuition that has not previously been discussed in connection with monism and pluralism.

The argument starts with a variant on Nozick’s Experience Machine. Two lives, A and B, are indistinguishable with respect to the intensities, durations, and temporal distribution of their pleasures and pains. Indeed, they are experientially indistinguishable: no one could tell them apart “from the inside.” However, whereas A is a normal, relatively good life lived in the real world, the subject of B spends his entire life plugged into an experience machine. Thus, there are certain states involving A’s subject (call him Adam) that do not correspond to any state involving B’s subject (call him Bill). For example, Adam’s having friends obtains but Bill’s having friends does not.

Never mind which person you would rather be. As many writers have pointed out, the fact that you would prefer to be Adam does not show that A is higher in welfare than B. Perhaps A is preferable to B merely because A is a more dignified life or a life better befitting a human being. Go directly to your intuitions about welfare. Do Adam and Bill have the same total lifetime well-being? Here is the intuition that most hedonists reject, but that I and a large plurality of philosophers (including many monists) accept: Adam’s entire life is better for Adam than Bill’s entire life is for Bill.

Some hedonists give the following debunking explanation of this intuition: when we try to put ourselves in Bill’s shoes, we cannot ignore our knowledge that he is hooked up to the machine, so we assess his level of welfare as if he were aware of his predicament and unhappy about it. I am not persuaded, however, since we need not attempt to assess Bill’s welfare from his vantage point. We can try to assess Adam and Bill’s welfare “from the outside,” taking into account what their lives are like for them but also looking out for welfare-affecting factors they might be unable to detect. When I try to assess their welfare third-personally, my intuition that Adam’s life is better persists.

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41 This terminology is from Nozick (1981).
44 Arguably, a majority of philosophers have this intuition. Though he rejects the intuition, Crisp (2006, p. 99) writes that “Nozick dealt [hedonism] a near-fatal blow with his famous example of the experience machine. The result has been that these days hedonism receives little philosophical attention, and students are warned off it early in their studies, often with a reference to Nozick.” He adds that the claim that Adam and Bill are identical in lifetime well-being is one “from which most of us will recoil” (p. 118).
I will not attempt to prove that this intuition is correct. The disagreement between those who accept it and those who reject it is well-entrenched, and it is not clear that either side can persuade the other that it is mistaken.\footnote{For more arguments against the intuition, see Silverstein (2000) and Crisp (2006).} I will simply assume that it is correct. As I noted earlier, this does not beg any questions against monism, since a monist could share this intuition: for example, a monistic desire satisfactionist could say that Adam is better off than Bill because both of them have desires concerning the external world but more of these are satisfied in Adam’s case. Indeed, as I will explain shortly, although most monistic hedonists reject this intuition, it may not even beg any questions against them.

The intuition that Adam is higher in lifetime well-being than Bill does not imply that there is a basic good or a basic bad distinct from the two whose existence is implied by the Pleasure and Pain Claims. However, it shows the existence of such a basic good or bad \textit{indirectly}. That is because, as I will now argue, anyone who accepts this intuition should also accept a more fine-grained intuition about the difference in welfare between Adam and Bill—an intuition that \textit{does} imply that there is such a basic good or bad. This has not yet been noticed in the literature.

Intuitively, if Adam’s whole life is better than Bill’s, Adam’s welfare advantage is \textit{temporally pervasive}: for pretty much any interval during his life, Adam is better off during that interval than Bill is during the corresponding interval in his life. More specifically, it is not the case that Adam is higher in well-being than Bill only at times when they are experiencing pleasures and pains. Adam has higher welfare than Bill does during many pleasureless and painless periods in their lives.

To see this, imagine that Adam and Bill are both academics who spend several hours per day doing research (or in Bill’s case, seeming to do it). Although they sometimes enjoy their research, on any given day, there are several intervals of time during which they are working without feeling any pleasures or pains, whether sensory or attitudinal. Consider one such interval of time. Intuitively, whatever differences between their lives account for the fact that Adam’s lifetime well-being is higher than Bill’s, most (if not all) of these differences remain in place during this interval. Adam has a wife who loves him and colleagues who respect him, whereas Bill does not. Bill is radically deceived about his place in the world, whereas Adam is not. Adam has many satisfied desires about
the external world, whereas the corresponding desires of Bill's are frustrated. Intuitively, it is because of temporally pervasive differences like these that Bill's life is worse than Adam's. But surely, if Bill's lifetime well-being is lower than Adam's because of differences like these, then given that these differences exist during this pleasureless and painless interval of time, Bill's well-being during this interval of time is also lower than Adam's. It would be bizarre if the entirety of their difference in lifetime well-being were solely the result of differences in well-being temporally circumscribed by their pleasures and pains. The differences between their lives that ground their difference in lifetime well-being remain in place even when they are not feeling pleasure or pain, so surely they differ in well-being during many pleasureless and painless intervals too.

I am not claiming that the intuition that Adam is higher in lifetime well-being than Bill entails the claim Adam is higher in well-being than Bill during some pleasureless and painless intervals. I am merely claiming that it is highly implausible that this claim is false even though the intuition is true. We do not need to accept any particular explanation of Adam and Bill's difference in lifetime well-being to see that it is explained by some temporally pervasive differences that remain in place even during pleasureless and painless intervals. And the best explanation of how such differences ground a difference in lifetime well-being is that they ground differences in well-being during the intervals when they obtain, which include intervals when neither person is feeling pleasure or pain. Suppose that Adam's personal relationships are part of the explanation of his higher lifetime well-being. Surely, they contribute to his advantage in lifetime well-being by giving him an advantage in well-being throughout the intervals when these relationships exist, which include intervals when neither he nor Bill is feeling any pleasure or pain. Surely they do not contribute to his advantage in lifetime well-being merely by giving him an advantage in well-being over Bill during intervals when they are feeling pleasure or pain. I claim that whatever the explanation is for Adam’s advantage in lifetime well-being, it will involve differences between the two lives that persist even during intervals when neither person is

47 This is not to say that some such temporally pervasive feature is a basic good or bad. It is just to say that some such feature enters into the explanation of why Adam’s life is better than Bill’s. Maybe such a feature enters into the explanation even though it is merely derivatively good or bad because, although it has no basic prudential value of its own, it increases or decreases the basic prudential values of some of the welfare atoms in the two lives. Just as I did not need to assume that pleasure is itself a basic good or that pain is itself a basic bad to obtain the first two premises of my argument (viz., the Pleasure and Pain Claims), I do not need to assume that desire satisfaction, radical deception, or some other thing is a basic good or bad to obtain the third and final premise of the argument.

48 We can ignore the arcane possibility that although they differ in lifetime well-being, they do not differ in well-being during any sub-interval of their lives. Even if the state of affairs corresponding to a person's entire life can have some basic goodness or badness for him, it is simply not credible that none of the difference in lifetime well-being between Adam and Bill is attributable to differences in how well they fare during sub-intervals of their lives.
feeling pleasure or pain. Moreover, the best explanation of how these temporally pervasive differences give Adam an advantage in lifetime well-being is that they give him an advantage in well-being whenever they obtain—including at times when neither he nor Bill feels any pleasure or pain. This is why anyone who accepts the intuition that Adam is higher in lifetime well-being should also accept the claim that he is higher in welfare than Bill during some pleasureless and painless intervals, even though the intuition does not entail the claim.

If this claim is true, however, then the following thesis trivially follows:

**Possible Difference**  
There can be two people, X and Y, such that for some interval of time I during which neither feels any pleasures or pains, X’s well-being during I differs from Y’s well-being during I.

Now, as I explained earlier, for any interval of time, a person’s well-being during that interval is fixed by the basic prudential values for him during that interval of all of his welfare atoms. How well-off I am today is wholly fixed by how basically good or bad for me my welfare atoms are today: what the basic prudential values for me of my atoms will be tomorrow, or a week from now, is irrelevant. Once we have fixed the basic prudential values for me of my welfare atoms during a certain interval, we have fixed how well off I am during that interval.49

If this is right, then two people cannot differ in well-being during a given interval unless at least one token welfare atom is basically good or bad for one of them during that interval. For if nothing at all was basically good or bad for either of them during that interval, then they would have the same level of well-being during this interval—plausibly, zero. Thus, Possible Difference implies

49 Bruckner (2013) and Dorsey (2013) argue that if you currently have a desire whose object obtains in the future, the object of your desire can be basically good for you now. My claim is compatible with this controversial view. I do not claim that your welfare during an interval is fixed by those among your welfare atoms that obtain during that interval. I claim that your welfare during an interval is fixed by how basically good or bad for you during that interval all of your welfare atoms—past, present, and future—are. I do not assume that a welfare atom can be basically good for you only during the times when it obtains. If Bruckner and Dorsey are right, then some of the atoms that will obtain in the future are basically good for you now. This is compatible with the thesis that your present welfare supervenes on how basically good or bad for you all of your welfare atoms are now.
**Conclusion**

Either there is some kind of positive welfare atom whose tokens can be basically good for you even at times when you are not feeling pleasure, or there is some kind of negative welfare atom whose tokens can be basically bad for you even at times when you are not feeling pain.\(^{50}\)

We now have all we need to show that pluralism is true. The Pleasure Claim says that there is a basic good that can be basically good for you only when you are feeling pleasure. The Pain Claim says that there is a basic bad that can be basically bad for you only when you are feeling pain. The Conclusion implies that either there is a basic good distinct from the one described by the Pleasure Claim, or there is a basic bad distinct from the one described by the Pain Claim. Thus, either there is more than one basic good or more than one basic bad. Pluralism is true.\(^{51}\)

1.5 Feldman and the Experience Machine

My argument for pluralism shows something about the Experience Machine that is worth noting. People who have the intuition that Adam is higher in lifetime well-being than Bill usually take it to show that pleasure and pain states are not the only kinds of welfare atom, and hence that no monistic version of hedonism is true. It is a mistake to jump to this conclusion, however. Feldman has developed a number of “adjusted” hedonistic theories according to which the only welfare atoms are pleasure and pain states but the basic prudential values of these states are determined in part by things other than the intensities and durations of the pleasures and pains or the temporal distribution of the states. According to truth-adjusted hedonism, for example, the basic prudential

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\(^{50}\) If my argument is sound, it shows that a natural development of an idea of Roger Crisp’s is a mistake. Crisp (2006, pp. 122-23) claims that an anhedonic life—one totally devoid of pleasure—cannot have a positive level of welfare. It would be natural for him to endorse the corresponding claim about lives totally devoid of pain and to generalize these claims to sub-intervals of lives. Thus, a natural extension of his claim about the anhedonic life is that if a sub-interval of a life contains no pleasure or pain, it must have zero welfare. But if I am right, the case of Adam and Bill shows that a person can have positive or negative welfare during a pleasureless and painless interval. During some such intervals, Adam is higher in welfare than Bill, so they cannot both have zero welfare then.

\(^{51}\) As I explained earlier, the subjectivism/objectivism distinction is orthogonal to the monism/pluralism distinction. My argument for pluralism is compatible with subjectivism, at least when it is understood as saying that nothing is basically good for you unless you desire it or it consists in your desiring something. A subjectivist could claim that there are two basic goods (bads): desire satisfactions (frustrations) and subjective desire satisfactions (frustrations). Your desire satisfactions (frustrations) can be basically good (bad) for you at times when you are not feeling pleasure or pain, so this view would confirm Possible Difference and the Conclusion. It would also confirm the Pleasure and Pain Claims, provided that Heathwood is right to think that your subjective desire satisfactions (frustrations) can be basically good (bad) for you only at times when you are feeling pleasure (pain). This would be a pluralistic, subjective theory of welfare—a Subjective List Theory.
value of a pleasure state is fixed by the intensity of the pleasure, its duration, and whether its object is true: pleasures taken in states of affairs that obtain are more prudentially valuable than pleasures taken in states of affairs that do not. This view predicts that Adam has more total lifetime well-being than Bill because Adam and Bill’s pleasures often have corresponding objects that are true in Adam’s case but false in Bill’s. For example, when Adam takes pleasure in the proposition that he has bench pressed 250lbs (which is true), Bill takes pleasure in the proposition that he has bench pressed 250lbs (which is false). Truth-adjusted hedonism says that since pleasures with true objects have more basic value, Adam has higher lifetime well-being than Bill even though pleasure and pain states are the only welfare atoms.

Feldman claims that since these ‘adjusted’ hedonistic theories are versions of hedonism, and since the Experience Machine gives us no reason to reject these theories, the Experience Machine gives us no reason to reject hedonism. Some people have alleged that these ‘adjusted’ theories are not really versions of hedonism, and Feldman has tried to rebut this charge. However, no one has disputed Feldman’s claim that the Experience Machine gives us no reason to reject these theories (whether they are versions of hedonism or not).

My argument for pluralism shows that Feldman is wrong about this. Both he and his opponents have been unduly focused on the intuition that Adam is higher in lifetime well-being than Bill. They have ignored the more fine-grained but equally compelling intuition that during many intervals of time when neither of them feels any pleasure or pain, Adam is higher in well-being than Bill. No monistic hedonistic theory can accommodate this claim, since all such theories say that pleasure and pain states are the only kinds of welfare atom, and (as Hedonic Timing says) such states can only be basically good or bad for someone at times when she is feeling pleasure or pain. Since two people cannot differ in welfare during an interval where nothing is basically good or bad for either of them, all monistic hedonistic theories, ‘adjusted’ or not, are incompatible with the intuition that Adam and Bill differ in well-being during many pleasureless and painless periods of time. Thus, pace Feldman, they should all be rejected.

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1.6 Conclusion

It might seem unsurprising that if pleasure is a basic good and pain a basic bad, then if a life spent plugged into the experience machine contains less total welfare than an experientially identical life spent in the real world, pluralism must be true. My argument for pluralism is not a version of this unsurprising thought, however.

To begin with, this thought is thrown into doubt by Feldman’s claim that the basic prudential value of a pleasure might be determined in part by features other than its intensity or duration. I have explained why there is some truth in it despite what he says: if Adam and Bill differ in lifetime welfare, they also differ in welfare during some pleasureless and painless intervals, and this is what implies that pleasure states and pain states are not the only basic goods or bads.

Furthermore, whereas the unsurprising thought is merely a conditional, I have argued not just that pluralism is true if certain other things are true, but that pluralism is true. Someone who agreed that Adam has more lifetime well-being than Bill could accept the unsurprising thought but reject its antecedent on the grounds that desire satisfactions and desire frustrations are the only basic good and bad, respectively. She could claim that the truth of monistic desire satisfactionism is what explains the difference in their well-being. I have shown why this position is untenable: to plausibly explain the fact that pleasures (pains) of the right kind necessarily coincide temporally with pro tanto welfare boosts (drops), we must postulate a basic good (bad) that can be basically good (bad) for you only at times when you are feeling pleasure (pain). This Hedonic Coincidence Argument shows that monistic desire satisfactionism is false.

To yield pluralism, the unsurprising thought would have to be supplemented with the premise that pleasure is a basic good and pain a basic bad. My case for pluralism goes through with weaker premises: it does not assume that pleasure is ever basically good for you or that pain is ever basically bad for you. Moreover, the status of pleasure and pain states as basic goods and bads has not been carefully argued for, even by hedonists. Feldman’s book consists entirely of defenses of hedonism against objections that have been thought to refute it: nowhere does he argue for the positive claim
that pleasure (pain) states are basically good (bad) for their subjects.\textsuperscript{54} Likewise, the only support Bradley gives for this positive claim is an argument that all of the main alternatives to hedonism have worse problems than it does.\textsuperscript{55} Thus, an argument for pluralism that relied on the premise that pleasure is a basic good and pain a basic bad would be open to the objection that it is far from clear that this is true. Not so with my argument.

Notice, too, that part of my argument could be marshaled in favor of the view that pleasure \textit{is} a basic good and pain a basic bad. For although I do not do this, one could argue that ultimately, what best explains the temporal coincidence of welfare boosts (drops) with pleasures (pains) of the right kind is the fact that pleasure (pain) states of the right kind are \textit{themselves} basically good (bad) for us. Thus, there is something in this paper even for hedonists.

My argument for pluralism does agree at one point with a widely held intuition about a familiar thought experiment. It should be clear, however, that the \textit{argument} is not a familiar one, and that it does not reach its conclusion via a simple appeal to intuition.

My main objective in this paper was:

1. To show that pluralism is true, and thus that the two most prominent monistic theories, hedonism and desire satisfactionism, are false.

On the way to this objective, I tried to achieve four other goals:

2. To show that pluralism can be established using an argument that is \textit{general} in the sense that it does not purport to identify even a single basic good or bad.
3. To give a new argument against desire satisfactionism: the Hedonic Coincidence argument.
4. To show that, contrary to what Scanlon, Parfit, and others appear to believe, it is possible to feel a pleasure without liking it or desiring to be feeling it.

\textsuperscript{54} Feldman (2004), pp. 5-6.
\textsuperscript{55} Bradley (2009), p. 4.
5. To advance the discussion of the Experience Machine by showing that, contrary to what Feldman has recently argued, adjusted hedonistic theories cannot absorb all of the intuitions about the case that lead some people to reject hedonism.

One lesson of this paper is that we should always ask when a putative basic good or bad could be basically good or bad for us. Hedonism is not viable because some basic good or bad can be basically good or bad for us when we are not feeling pleasure or pain. Desire satisfactionism is not viable because it cannot account for the fact that pleasures (pains) of the right kind coincide temporally with pro tanto welfare boosts (drops). Only a pluralistic theory can plausibly accommodate all of the temporal facts about our well-being.
Chapter 2

Objectivism about Welfare

Some people’s lives go better for them than others’. Some periods in the same person’s life go better for her than other periods. A theory of welfare or well-being attempts to explain differences like these by identifying the things that are intrinsically or basically good or bad for a person—good or bad for her, but not solely in virtue of being suitably related to other things that are good or bad for her. A person’s welfare at a time is determined by how basically good or bad for her at that time all of the things that are good or bad for her are. Thus, a theory that told us how basically good or bad for a person things are at a given time would enable us to work out her welfare at that time.

Subjectivism about welfare is the view that if something is basically good for you, it is basically good for you at least partly because you have a certain favorable attitude, $A$, toward it under certain conditions, $C$. Determinate versions of subjectivism are arrived at by specifying $A$ and $C$. For example, one version of the view says that something is basically good for you only if and at least partly because you would desire it if you were fully informed and perfectly rational.

Even a determinate version of subjectivism is not a full theory of welfare. It tells us why certain things are not basically good for you, and it gives us part of the explanation of why anything that is basically good for you has that property, but since it leaves it open that something might fail to be basically good for you even though you would have $A$ toward it in $C$, it does not tell us exactly which things are basically good you at a time. Nor does it tell us how basically good or bad for you everything is at a time. Thus, it does not give us enough information to work out how well off you are at a time. Nonetheless, many full theories of well-being have some version of subjectivism as a component: all desire satisfaction theories, for example, embrace some version of subjectivism on which $A$ is desire. Furthermore, whether subjectivism is true has generated a great deal of discussion in its own right.

Many philosophers find subjectivism appealing because it respects the intuition that you have a certain kind of authority over whether you are well off. Intuitively, you are well off only if your life
(or enough of it) appeals to you or resonates with you under the right conditions. As Peter Railton puts it, “it would be an intolerably alienated conception of someone’s good to imagine that it might fail in any such way to engage him.”\(^{56}\) Moreover, it seems that when a person is well off, part of what makes this true is that enough of her life resonates with her under the right conditions. Subjectivism accommodates these intuitions by making resonance in the right circumstances a necessary condition (and an indispensable part of the explanation) of anything’s being basically good for you.

**Objectivism** about welfare is the claim that subjectivism is false. Although many philosophers are objectivists, no one has come close to making a comprehensive case for objectivism. Extant attempts to refute subjectivism tend to focus one or two particular formulations of it, leaving it open that many other versions (including ones that have been defended in print) may be viable.\(^ {57}\) Indeed, all existing discussions of subjectivism assume an interpretation of attitude \(A\) that excludes a type of subjectivist view that has recently been proposed.\(^ {58}\) No objectivist has given arguments that rule out nearly every subjectivist view with contemporary defenders.\(^ {59}\) This is what I aim to do. I begin by arguing that the main motivation for subjectivism is not compelling. Next, I give a taxonomy of subjectivist views by distinguishing two specifications of attitude \(A\) and two specifications of conditions \(C\). Then, I argue that all four of the resulting views are false. Since practically every subjectivist view that has been defended is one of these four views or a combination thereof, this amounts to a strong presumptive case for objectivism.

I give different arguments against the various subjectivist views, but they share a common theme: views about welfare should always be tested for what they imply about the well-being of newborn infants.\(^ {60}\) Even if a view is intended to apply only to adults, we may have sufficient reasons to reject

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\(^{56}\) Railton (2003b), p. 47.

\(^{57}\) Sarch (2011) is a rebuttal of the view defended by Rosati (1996), and Ferkany (2012) restricts himself to arguing against the view proposed by Sumner (1996) as well as the pro-subjectivist argument found in Sumner (1995). (Ferkany targets other views as well, but as I understand them, they are not really subjectivist views.)

\(^{58}\) Namely, the one defended in Dorsey (2010) and (2012).

\(^{59}\) It should also be noted that although Fletcher (forthcoming) might initially appear to include a defense of objectivism, it does not. Fletcher defends an objective list theory, but he proposes a new understanding of such theories according to which they do not imply a commitment to objectivism. Indeed, the theory he defends is arguably subjectivist.

\(^{60}\) Kraut (2007) endorses this principle, but he does not explicitly discuss subjectivism or objectivism. As I will explain later, however, he does give what amounts to an argument against a particular version of subjectivism. Rosati (2009) also notes that some theories of welfare do not work when applied to infants.
it because its truth would imply an implausible divergence between the facts about the welfare of adults and the facts about the welfare of infants.

2.1 Preliminaries

As I understand them, subjectivism and objectivism are views in the normative ethics of welfare, not metaethical views. They are views about which things have the property of being basically good for you and why they have this property. They are not views about what this property is. Thus, they are neutral on the question of whether this property is irreducibly normative or reducible to a non-normative property, as well as on the question of whether it is a natural property or a non-natural one. Two non-naturalists could disagree about whether whenever something has the non-natural property of basic goodness for you, it has it at least partly because you have a favorable attitude toward it under the right conditions.

When I speak in this paper about things that are basically good for you, I mean particular events or states of affairs (e.g., your feeling a particular pleasure at time t) rather than kinds (e.g., pleasure—or more precisely, states of affairs consisting of your feeling pleasure). Thus, subjectivism and objectivism are views about which particular events can be basically good for you. I will not say anything about basically good or bad kinds, and I will leave it open whether we should accept monism (the view that only one kind is basically good for you and only one kind is basically bad for you) or pluralism.

Subjectivism purports to state a necessary condition and an indispensable part of the explanation of anything’s being basically good for you. It does not say anything about things that are merely derivatively good for you. A subjectivist could say that a particular pile of money is derivatively good for you even though your anti-materialistic ideology prevents you from having the right favorable attitude toward it: for that money buys you experiences toward which you do have the right attitude.

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61 The standard practice in the literature is to say that the things that are basically good or bad for you are states of affairs (and kinds thereof) but to often speak more loosely (e.g., of the basic goodness of friendship rather than of your having friends). I will follow this practice.

62 Although subjectivism says that a particular event is basically good for you only if you have A toward it in C, a particular event can often satisfy this condition by belonging to a type toward which you have A in C. You might have a desire for admiration that implicitly commits you to desiring, of any arbitrary person, that he admires you.

63 I understand an objective list theory to be one on which both objectivism and pluralism are true. I argue for pluralism while remaining neutral between subjectivism and objectivism in Chapter 1.
under the right conditions. Some writers reserve the label ‘subjectivism’ for the stronger thesis that something is basically good for you if and only if and because you have favorable attitude \( A \) toward it under conditions \( C \).\(^{64}\) If subjectivism as I understand it is false, then so is subjectivism in this stronger sense.

Furthermore, although I elided this earlier and will usually do so, subjectivism is really the conjunction of the aforementioned claim about basic goodness and the corresponding claim about basic badness: if something is basically bad for you, it is basically bad for you at least partly because you have a certain unfavorable attitude, \( A^* \), toward it under conditions \( C \)—where \( A^* \) is the opposite of \( A \) (e.g., aversion, if \( A \) is desire). It would be bizarre to accept the claim about goodness without accepting the claim about badness. Since objectivism is the negation of subjectivism, it would be true if either of these two claims were false. But since these two claims surely stand or fall together, any objectivist would deny both claims.

There is a problem concerning the formulation of subjectivism that should also be noted before we proceed. The view that something is basically good for you only if\(^{65}\) you would desire it if you were fully informed is a subjectivist view—namely, the one on which \( A \) is desire and \( C \) is the closest world in which you have full information. What about the view that something is basically good for you only if it is a state of affairs of the form \( p \ & \ you \ would \ desire \ p \ if \ you \ were \ fully \ informed \)? This is just a variant on the first view that incorporates what that view regarded as background conditions into the characterization of the alleged basic good. Whereas the first view says that something is basically good for you only if it is the object of the right favorable attitude of yours under the right conditions, the second view says that something is basically good for you only if it is the combination of the object and your having the right attitude toward it under the right conditions. Surely, given that the ‘object’ view is subjectivist, the ‘combo’ view is as well. However, the ‘combo’ view does not satisfy the formulation of subjectivism that I gave above. After all, the ‘combo’ view does not say that in order for a state of affairs of the form \( p \ & \ you \ would \ desire \ p \ if \ you \ were \ fully \ informed \) to be basically good for you, you have to have a favorable attitude toward this compound state of affairs under the right conditions. This means that the formulation of subjectivism that I gave should be modified to

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\(^{65}\) For brevity sake, I will usually leave the ‘and at least partly because’ implicit.
accommodate ‘combo’ subjectivist views. As Ben Bradley has noted, however, it is difficult to formulate a modification that gets the intuitively right results. This strikes me as a technical problem that will be solved in time. I will stick with my initial formulation, but the possibility of a ‘combo’ subjectivist view corresponding to each ‘object’ view should be kept in mind.

Is hedonism a subjectivist view or an objectivist one? As other philosophers have said, that depends on the relation between pleasure and favorable attitudes. Suppose that every pleasure is either a sensation you have a favorable attitude toward or a combination of a belief and a favorable attitude directed toward the same propositional object. Then since hedonism says that only pleasures are basically good for you, it would be a subjective theory. On the other hand, suppose that pleasures are not constituted by favorable attitudes and that it is possible to feel a pleasure without having a favorable attitude toward it. Then since hedonism says that all pleasures are basically good for you, it would be an objective theory. Since I remain neutral on the metaphysics of pleasure, I will remain neutral on how to classify hedonism.

2.2 The Main Motivation for Subjectivism Is Not Compelling

We make judgments not only about how well a person’s life is going for her, but about whether she has a good life and whether she is well off. When we judge that someone is well off or that she has a good life, we do not merely mean that her welfare is above zero: we mean that she is sufficiently high in welfare. As I said earlier, the main reason so many philosophers find subjectivism appealing is that it explains the following intuition:

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66 The subjectivist could not just say that something is basically good for you only if either you have A toward it in C or it partly consists in your having A toward something in C: even if A is desire and C are your actual circumstances, the conjunctive fact that 2 + 2 = 4 and that you actually desire to be a millionaire satisfies the second disjunct, but intuitively does not pass the subjectivist test for basic goodness for you. See Bradley (forthcoming).
67 E.g., Bradley (forthcoming) and Heathwood (forthcoming).
68 Heathwood (2006) and (2007) defends a version of this view on which the favorable attitude is desire. Feldman (2004) defends a similar view on which the attitude is being pleased.
69 Notice that this depends on the point that there can be ‘combo’ subjectivist views.
70 I believe that Smuts (2011) holds this view. Crisp (2006) denies that favorable attitudes are what make something a pleasure, but it is not clear that he thinks there is no necessary connection between such attitudes and pleasures.
71 Ferkany (2012, p. 475) claims that two theses deserve the name ‘subjectivism’: subjectivism in my sense and psychologicalism, the view that only “psychological states of experiencing subjects, such as perceptual states, feelings, and attitudes” are basically good for them. Hedonism is a psychologistic view no matter what connections there are between pleasure and favorable attitudes, but I believe it is misleading to apply the label ‘subjectivism’ to psychologism. The view that only red experiences are basically good for you (whatever your attitudes toward them) is psychologistic, but not subjective in anything like the sense that has concerned philosophers of well-being.
Resonance Intuition  A person is not well off unless sufficiently many of the things in her life resonate with her (in the sense that she has a favorable attitude toward them) under the right conditions. If a person is well off, part of what makes this true is that enough of the things in her life resonate with her under the right conditions.

Subjectivism straightforwardly explains the Resonance Intuition. If nothing can be basically good for you unless it resonates with you under the right conditions, then since your welfare will not be high enough for you to count as well off unless enough things are basically good for you, you will not be well off unless enough things resonate with you under the right conditions. Moreover, since part of what makes it true that you are well off (if you are) is that things are as basically good for you as they are, if the basic goodness for you of a thing is always at least partly explained by the fact that it resonates with you under the right conditions, your being well off will be at least partly explained by the fact that enough of the things in your life meet the resonance condition.

By contrast, objectivism appears to be incompatible with the Resonance Intuition. Objectivism says that something can be basically good for you even if it does not resonate with you under the right conditions. But this seems to imply that, if you had enough things that are basically good for you even though they do not resonate with you under the right conditions, you would be sufficiently high in welfare to count as well off. Thus, you could be well off (and have a good life) even if there was nothing in your life that resonates with you under the right conditions.

The incompatibility between objectivism and the Resonance Intuition is merely apparent, however. An objectivist could say that when something that does not resonate with you under the right conditions is basically good for you, its basic prudential value for you (i.e., how basically good it is for you) depends in part on whether enough of the things in your life resonate with you under the right conditions. If insufficiently many of the things in your life meet the resonance condition, she could claim, then each additional thing that is basically good for you but that does not meet that condition

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72 Technically, an objectivist could agree with the subjectivist’s necessary condition on basic goodness while denying that this condition is even partly explanatory. But there is no plausible motivation for this view, and I will assume that no objectivist would accept it.
increases your welfare, but in a way that approaches a limit lower than what is necessary for you to count as well off. Thus, if you are well off, this is partly due to the fact that enough of the things in your life resonate with you in the right conditions. This view is available to the objectivist because nothing in the concept of basic goodness implies that the basic prudential value for you of a thing is fixed by its intrinsic features. The basic goodness for you of a thing cannot derive from the goodness for you of anything else (in the way, for example, that money derives its goodness for you from the goodness of what you buy with it), but it is conceptually possible that its magnitude be affected by the properties of some other thing. The subjectivist’s explanation of the Resonance Intuition is admittedly simpler than the objectivist’s, but if the arguments that I give below are cogent, this is massively outweighed by the advantages of objectivism.

It might be objected that although objectivism is compatible with the Resonance Intuition, this is not the main intuition that supports subjectivism. The main intuition is not a threshold intuition about whether you count as well off or as having a good life, but a marginal intuition: nothing can in itself increase your welfare unless it resonates with you under the right conditions. And this intuition, it might be observed, is not compatible with objectivism. True, but this is not an intuition that supports subjectivism. It is subjectivism—or rather, as I will explain later, a thesis even stronger than subjectivism. Thus, to appeal to this intuition is just to say that subjectivism is intuitive. Once you distinguish subjectivism from the Resonance Intuition, however, it looks like most of the former’s intuitive appeal comes from the fact that it is easily confused with the latter. (Is it really so obvious that in no possible circumstances can anything have any amount of basic goodness for you, however small, unless you have a favorable attitude toward it under the right conditions?) The arguments that I give below will show subjectivism to be hardly intuitive at all.

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73 Arneson (1999, pp. 139-41) makes a similar proposal. Sarch (forthcoming) considers a theory on which you need sufficient quantities of enjoyment and achievement to be high enough in welfare to count as well off.
74 Using the term ‘intrinsic goodness for you’, as many philosophers do, misleadingly suggests otherwise.
75 Bradley (forthcoming) agrees with me about appealing to the marginal intuition: “If this is supposed to be an argument against objective theories, it is fair to ask why it should be convincing…. [The] argument amounts to little more than pointing to the fact that objective theories are not subjective theories…” However, either he does not distinguish the marginal intuition from the threshold one or he does not recognize that an objectivist can accommodate the latter. For he adds: “subjectivism does have intuitive appeal. When we think of someone living a life doing things she is not interested in and does not care about, it is hard to think of her life as being good for her.” This is the threshold intuition (i.e., the Resonance Intuition). Since an objectivist can accommodate this intuition, one must not confuse its intuitive appeal with that of subjectivism.
It might also be argued that an objectivist who tries to accommodate the Resonance Intuition is an objectivist in name only, since she admits that your level of welfare is affected by how many things in your life would resonate with you. But this would involve a misunderstanding of objectivism. Objectivism is just the denial of subjectivism, and to deny subjectivism is not to deny that whether sufficiently many of the things in your life would resonate with you is crucially important for your overall level of welfare. The spirit of objectivism is simply that subjectivism is wrong. Rejecting the Resonance Intuition is no part of the spirit of the view.

2.3 A Taxonomy of Subjectivist Views

I will now distinguish four subjectivist views by giving two specifications of attitude $A$ and two specifications of conditions $C$. To my knowledge, nearly every subjectivist view that has actually been proposed is essentially one of these four views or a combination thereof. If all four of these views turned out to be false, this would be a strong presumptive case against subjectivism.

A theory of welfare cannot merely tell us what is basically good for you in the actual world: it must also tell us what is basically good for you at other possible worlds. Suppose that you were feeling happy an hour ago but were not feeling happy five minutes ago. A theory of well-being cannot merely tell us whether it was basically good for you to feel happy an hour ago: it must also tell us whether it would have been basically good for you to feel happy five minutes ago—i.e., whether at the closest world to the actual world where you felt happy five minutes ago, this was basically good for you. For any possible world, a theory of well-being should tell us which things (if any) are basically good for you at that world. (Plausibly, if you do not exist at a given world, then nothing is basically good for you at that world.)

Suppose we want to know whether something $x$ is basically good for you at $W$. The subjectivist claims that it is basically good for you at $W$ only if you have $A$ toward it in $C$. There are two salient candidates for $C$: it could be the same world at which the basic goodness for you of $x$ is in question (viz., $W$), or it could be what we might call the ideal world—the closest world at which you are idealized in certain ways (e.g., in possession of full information and full instrumental rationality). Thus, there are two salient kinds of subjectivist view that differ on the question of what the right conditions are:
Same World Subjectivism: Something $x$ is basically good for you at $W$ only if and at least partly because at $W$, you have favorable attitude $A$ toward $x$.

Ideal World Subjectivism: Something $x$ is basically good for you at $W$ only if and at least partly because at the ideal world, $I$, you have favorable attitude $A$ toward $x$—where $I$ is the closest world where you are suitably idealized.

Same World Subjectivism is often glossed as the view that the favorable attitudes that matter to whether something is basically good for you are your actual attitudes. But this is misleading. Suppose we want to know whether it would be basically good for you to have some experience $E^*$ that you do not actually have—that is, whether at $W^*$ (the closest world to the actual world where you are having $E^*$), $E^*$ is basically good for you. Same World Subjectivism does not say that what matters is whether you have attitude $A$ toward $E^*$ at the actual world$^{76}$: it says that what matters is whether you have $A$ toward $E^*$ at $W^*$. What’s true is that, on Same World Subjectivism, whether $E^*$ is basically good for you at $W^*$ depends on the attitudes that you actually have at $W^*$ (rather than those you have at the ideal world). But the attitudes you actually have at $W^*$ are not necessarily the ones you have at the actual world.

My formulation of Ideal World Subjectivism leaves a crucial question unanswered: relative to which world is the ideal world, $I$, the closest world where you are suitably idealized? The obvious possibility is $W$, but proponents of Ideal World views are not completely clear on this. I will put off discussing this question until Section 2.6, where I argue against Ideal World Subjectivism. I will also delay discussing what suitable idealization consists in until then.

As far as attitude $A$ goes, there are two obvious options: it could be a belief or judgment that the thing is good for you (or some other favorable cognitive attitude), or it could be a desire.

$^{76}$ We can imagine a view, Actual World Subjectivism, that does say this. This view is implausible. Everyone would agree that $E$ might be basically good for you at other possible worlds even though, at the actual world, you have no favorable attitude toward $E$ or anything like it. Perhaps it would be good for you to experience the taste of marmite even though, as things stand, you have never heard of marmite.
Judgment Subjectivism

Something $x$ is basically good for you at $W$ only if and at least partly because under the right conditions, $C$, you believe that $x$ is good for you at $W$.

Desire Subjectivism

Something $x$ is basically good for you at $W$ only if and at least partly because under the right conditions, $C$, you desire $x$.

Desire Subjectivism sometimes goes by the name ‘Internalism’. It is the favored view of the vast majority of subjectivists. Judgment Subjectivism is a new arrival on the scene, introduced by Dale Dorsey. As I will explain later, Wayne Sumner’s view is essentially a disjunction of Judgment and Desire Subjectivism.

The foregoing specifications of $A$ and $C$ generate four subjectivist views. I will first argue individually against the Judgment and Desire varieties of Same World Subjectivism. Then, I will give a general objection to Ideal World Views and extend my arguments against the Same World views to their Ideal World counterparts.

It should be kept in mind that each subjectivist view purports to state a necessary condition of anything’s being basically good for you at any possible world. Thus, we can look for counterexamples to these views at non-actual possible worlds. This will be important in what follows.

2.4 Same World Judgment Subjectivism

I will now argue against the two versions of Same World Subjectivism, starting with

Same World Judgment Subjectivism

Something $x$ is basically good for you at $W$ only if and at least partly because at $W$, you believe that $x$ is good for you.

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77 On Railton’s formulation of Ideal World Desire Subjectivism, the object of the desire is not $x$, but your desiring or pursuing $x$. It would be tedious but straightforward to complicate the formulation of Desire Subjectivism to reflect this.

78 Rosati (1996, p. 298) explains that “internalist accounts of a person’s good hold that something can be intrinsically, nonmorally good for an individual person $A$ only if she herself would desire it…, at least under suitably ideal conditions.”
Let us call something an **evaluative belief** just in case it is a belief to the effect that something is good for you, bad for you, not good for you, not bad for you, good or bad for you to a certain extent, or better or worse for you than something else.\(^{79}\) Same World Judgment Subjectivism says that something is basically good for you at a given world only if it is good for you *according to* the evaluative beliefs you have at that world.\(^{80}\) Although no one has advocated this view in print, it is worth discussing because it is a natural option for a Judgment Subjectivist and because my argument against it can be extended to rule out the view that Dorsey advocates, Ideal World Judgment Subjectivism.

Same World Judgment Subjectivism implies that if, at \(W\), you do not have any evaluative beliefs, then nothing is basically good for you at \(W\).\(^{81}\) Clearly, however, there are entities for whom certain things are basically good at possible worlds where they lack evaluative beliefs. Newborn babies are like this. They are clearly capable of well-being. If you stick pins into a newborn baby, it will be worse off than it otherwise would have been. If you feed it when it is hungry or you cuddle it, it will be better off. Indeed, it is clear that a newborn baby can have a positive level of welfare, and this implies that some things can be basically good for them. Newborn babies do not have evaluative beliefs, however. Although recent advances in developmental psychology have shown that babies are surprisingly sophisticated, there is no evidence that newborn babies have evaluative beliefs. They like some things and are averse to others, and perhaps they have beliefs. But it is overwhelmingly plausible that they do not have beliefs to the effect that \(X\) is good for them. Moreover, even if we cannot be certain that this is true in the actual world, we can be certain that there are many possible worlds in which this is true, and that many of these will be worlds where some things are basically good for newborn babies. Thus, the following claim is true:

\(^{79}\) Notice that this is an unusually narrow sense of the phrase ‘evaluative belief’: the belief that something is good *simpliciter* does not count as an evaluative belief in my sense.

\(^{80}\) Dorsey (2012, pp. 415-16) worries that your evaluative beliefs at \(W\) might be incoherent in a way that implies that \(X\) both does and does not pass the subjectivist test for basic goodness for you at \(W\). He therefore suggests that we look not at your evaluative beliefs at \(W\), but at your evaluative beliefs at the closest world to \(W\) where they have been purged of incoherence in accordance with the principle of “minimal mutilation.” But since it is not possible for you to both believe and fail to believe at \(W\) that \(X\) is good for you, I do not see the force of Dorsey’s worry. My argument against the view as I have formulated it would apply equally to Dorsey’s reformulation.

\(^{81}\) Dorsey’s reformulation has the same implication, since if you lack any evaluative beliefs at \(W\), then the closest world to \(W\) where you do not have incoherent evaluative beliefs is \(W\). Attempting to render an empty set of evaluative beliefs coherent in accordance with the principle of minimal mutilation cannot yield a non-empty set of such beliefs.
Babies

There are possible worlds at which something, $x$, is basically good for a newborn baby, $S$, even though $S$ does not have any evaluative beliefs at that world. (It is overwhelmingly plausible that the actual world is such a world.)

This implies that Same World Judgment Subjectivism is false—at least of newborn babies. For that view implies that there are no such worlds.

I have been assuming that, according to the Same World Judgment Subjectivist, the time at which you have to believe at $W$ that $x$ is good for you is the time at which $x$ is good for you at $W$. What if we interpret these views as allowing your future evaluative beliefs at a world to account for a thing’s presently being basically good for you at that world? My argument would still go through, even though newborn babies typically will have evaluative beliefs once they reach a certain age. After all, something can be basically good for a newborn baby who does not survive long enough to acquire any evaluative beliefs. These newborns make Babies true even when its last clause is read without an implicit restriction to the time at which $x$ is basically good for $S$. And since nothing that is basically good for these tragically short-lived newborns is basically good for them partly because they will believe them to be good for them in the future, the same is surely true of newborns who will survive long enough to have evaluative beliefs. It would be bizarre to think that whether $x$’s basic goodness at $t$ for a newborn $S$ at $W$ is due in part to some fact about $S$’s evaluative beliefs at times later than $t$ depends on whether $S$ is one of the tragically short-lived newborns or one of the fortunate ones. Thus, since Same World Judgment Subjectivism is false of those newborn babies who die before they acquire any evaluative beliefs, it is false even of those newborns who will acquire such beliefs in the future.

Now, Same World Judgment Subjectivism might be presented as a view about the welfare of human adults and not as a thesis about all welfare subjects. Even if this is so, we should reject it. For if it is true of adults even though it is false of newborn babies, then the facts about the welfare of adults diverge from the facts about the welfare of newborns in a way that cannot plausibly be explained.

If Same World Judgment Subjectivism is true of adults, then whenever something is basically good for an adult, part of what makes this true is the fact that she believes it to be good for her. But as we
have seen, this is not how things work with newborn babies. Go to a world where there is an adult who did not have evaluative beliefs when she was a newborn. Why would some fact about this adult’s evaluative beliefs be an indispensable part of the explanation of anything’s being basically good for her now, even though no such fact entered into the explanation of why anything was basically good for her when she was a newborn? Why would a test that everything that was basically good for her previously failed to pass be something that anything that is basically good for her must now pass?

Given that Same World Judgment Subjectivism is false of newborn babies, the following principle creates a presumption that it is also false of adults:

**Difference**

If X is not an essential part of the explanation of why everything that is basically good for creatures of kind A is basically good for them, then it is not an essential part of the explanation of why everything that is basically good for creatures of kind B is basically good for them—unless there is some difference between As and Bs that explains why they would differ in this way with respect to X.

To defeat this presumption, one must identify a difference between adults and newborn babies that explains why Same World Judgment Subjectivism could be true of the former even though it is false of the latter. I do not see a plausible way to do this.

It might be argued that when a human being acquires the capacity to have evaluative beliefs, she becomes an importantly different kind of creature: one capable of having a conception of her own good. Although she remains a member of the same species, her nature now differs dramatically, and this difference explains why Same World Judgment Subjectivism is true of her now even though it was formerly false of her. But this argument is not persuasive. Although the capacity to have a conception of one’s own good is a major difference between adults and newborn babies, the mere fact that an adult has this capacity cannot plausibly explain why this capacity would generate a restriction on the things that can be basically good for her that was not in place when she was a newborn. Nor could this fact plausibly explain why it is now true that whenever anything is basically
good for her, part of what makes it basically good for her is her belief that it is good for her—even though this was false when she was a newborn baby.

Consider a possible world in which a given human being never acquires any evaluative beliefs even though she acquires the capacity to have such beliefs at the normal stage in her development. This is not farfetched. G. E. Moore claimed not to have any evaluative beliefs in our sense, since he claimed not to understand how something could be good for someone, as opposed to being good simpliciter and appropriately related to that person.82 Even a person who acquires the concept of goodness for someone might never acquire evaluative beliefs because exposure to conflicting theories of welfare has led her to suspend judgment on these matters. As I have already argued, Same World Judgment Subjectivism is false of such a person when she is a newborn baby: lots of things are basically good for her then even though she does not believe them to be good for her. If acquiring the capacity for evaluative beliefs makes Same World Judgment Subjectivism true of her, then from the time at which she acquires this capacity, nothing is basically good for her. This is incredible. If she hasn’t so much as acquired a single evaluative belief, and if things were basically good for her when she was a newborn baby in spite of her not having any such beliefs, then why would the mere fact that she is now capable of having such beliefs make it true nothing is basically good for her?

The Same World Judgment Subjectivist might respond by claiming instead that his view is true, not of all creatures who are capable of having a conception of their good, but only of those who have such a conception. But this would be to concede that his view is not even true of normal human adults. For even if every normal adult actually has a conception of his own good, for every such adult, there are possible worlds at which he never acquired any evaluative beliefs even after he acquired the capacity to have such beliefs. As I just argued, some of these worlds are surely ones where some things are basically good for him when he is an adult. These worlds are therefore counterexamples to Same World Judgment Subjectivism even when it is read as a view only about the welfare of human adults. For whatever kind of creature this view is meant to apply to, the view purports to a state an indispensable part of the explanation of anything’s being basically good for such a creature at any possible world.

82 Moore (1988), pp. 98-99 (section 59). “In what sense can a thing be good for me? … [W]hen I talk of a thing as ‘my own good’ all that I can mean is that something which will be exclusively mine… is also good absolutely, or rather that my possession of it is good absolutely. The good of it can in no possible sense be ‘private’ or belong to me; any more than a thing can exist privately or for one person only.”
Suppose, finally, that the Same World Judgment Subjectivist abandons the ambition of giving a view that applies to all possible worlds. He might retreat to the following view:

**Weak SWJS**

For any world $W$ at which you believe at least one thing to be good for you, something $x$ is basically good for you at $W$ only if and at least partly because at $W$, you believe that $x$ is good for you.

By weakening his view in this way, he could claim that it applies not only to human adults, but to newborn babies too: for there are possible worlds where newborn babies believe certain things to be good for them (let us suppose), and perhaps the new view tells the right story about their welfare at those worlds. This view does not do what a subjectivist view is supposed to, though: it does not tell us, for some favorable attitude $A$ and some condition $C$, that nothing can be basically good for you unless you have $A$ toward it in $C$. For all that this view says, if you lacked evaluative beliefs, anything whatsoever could be basically good for you. Furthermore, it has the absurd implication that if you are extremely high in welfare at a world but lack evaluative beliefs at that world, simply acquiring the belief that $x$ is good for you (for some $x$ that you do not have and would not have if you acquired this belief) would bring it about that nothing is basically good for you and would therefore reduce your welfare to zero (or lower). Even this view of last resort should be rejected.

To summarize: Same World Judgment Subjectivism is not true of newborn babies because some things are basically good for them even though they cannot have evaluative beliefs. Given that this is so, it is not true of adults either. For if it were true of adults even though it is false of newborns, there would be an implausible and inexplicable divergence between the facts about the welfare of adults and the facts about the welfare of newborns.

Notice that an argument like this one could be run against any Same World Subjectivist view according to which the relevant favorable attitude $A$ is too sophisticated for newborn babies to have. It is not crucial that the attitude in question be cognitive. Thus, if someone proposed Same World *Higher-Order* Desire Subjectivism—the view that something is basically good for you at $W$ only if and at least partly because, at $W$, you desire to desire it—I would reply with the same argument. For it is extremely plausible that newborn babies do not have any higher-order desires,
and even if we remain agnostic about whether this is true in the actual world, this is obviously true at some possible worlds where some things are basically good for them.

2.5 Same World Desire Subjectivism

Now consider the desiderative version of Same World Subjectivism:

**Same World Desire Subjectivism**

Something $x$ is basically good (bad) for you at $W$ only if and at least partly because at $W$, you desire (are averse to) $x$.

One prominent contemporary advocate of this view is Chris Heathwood, who prefers a ‘combo’ statement of the view to an ‘object’ statement. Heathwood thinks that something is basically good for you at $W$ if and only if and because it is a subjective desire satisfaction of yours obtaining at $W$—a state of affairs consisting of your simultaneously desiring and believing some proposition $p$.

If we recast this view as an ‘object’ view, it says that something is basically good for you at $W$ if and only if and because it is a proposition that you simultaneously desire and believe at $W$. This implies that something is basically good for you at $W$ only if and at least partly because you desire it at $W$.

Same World Desire Subjectivism is also a commitment of any desire satisfactionist who thinks that the desire satisfactions that are relevant to your welfare at $W$ are the ones that obtain at $W$. Mark Murphy and Heathwood have independently argued that this is the best form of desire satisfactionism.

The kind of argument I just gave cannot be used against Same World Desire Subjectivism. Newborn babies certainly have desires. They like certain things and dislike other things. They are motivated to obtain certain things and to avoid other things. These all count as desires in the thin sense that is standardly used in discussions of welfare. And it is not obvious that some things are basically good for newborn babies even at worlds where they do not have desires. So we cannot rule out Same World Desire Subjectivism on the grounds that newborn babies obviously lack the psychological machinery

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84 The bizarreness of thinking that a proposition that may not even be true at a world can be basically good for you there shows that some views, such as Heathwood’s, are better understood as ‘combo’ views than as ‘object’ views.
85 Murphy (1999), Heathwood (2005).
that it regards as necessary for well-being. However, thinking about newborns yields a different argument against this view.

A preview of the argument will help. One strategy for arguing against a subjectivist view is to point out that it incorrectly implies that nothing can be basically good for certain entities for whom some things can, in fact, be basically good. This strategy, which I used against Same World Judgment Subjectivism, has the advantage of not requiring any discussion of how basically good or bad things are for the entities in question: we simply note that some things can be basically good for them, and we rule out the subjectivist view on the grounds that it is incompatible with this. A different strategy is to start with the observation that two individuals differ in welfare during a certain interval of time, and to argue that the best explanation of this observation implies the falsity of the subjectivist view in question. My argument against Same World Desire Subjectivism will employ this strategy. I will begin by arguing that two particular individuals differ in welfare during a given interval of time—namely, the period during which they are newborn babies. Then, I will argue that although Same World Desire Subjectivism does not strictly speaking imply that they cannot differ in welfare during this interval, we can give a much more plausible explanation of this difference if we reject this view than if we accept it. Thus, an inference to the best explanation will license us in rejecting Same World Desire Subjectivism.

Consider a possible world \( W \) in which newborn babies only have desires concerning the felt quality of their experiences: they desire experiences that feel certain ways, they are averse to experiences that feel certain other ways, and those are the only kinds of desire they have.\(^{86}\) There are two human beings at \( W \) who are perfect duplicates of each other as far as their beliefs and desires are concerned and who have experientially indistinguishable lives. The crucial difference between them is that whereas one of them (call him Adam) lives in the real world of \( W \), the other one (call him Bill) spends his entire life plugged into an experience machine.\(^{87}\) Adam has the sort of normal, relatively good life available to a well-to-do citizen of a Western country. During his infancy, he is raised by two affectionate and loving parents, he begins to explore the world around him, and he learns to control and move his body in the normal ways that infants do. Bill has none of these things, but he

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\(^{86}\) Perhaps the actual world is such a world. I am less confident about this than I am that newborn babies actually lack evaluative beliefs. But as before, what the actual world is like is not crucial.

is fed a simulation of them via the experience machine. (Just as he emerges from the womb, robots kill his parents and plug him into the machine.) Ask yourself: is Adam’s total welfare during the neonatal period higher than Bill’s total welfare during that period?

It is important to distinguish this question from the corresponding one about lifetime well-being. Most philosophers (including most Same World Desire Subjectivists) would say that Adam’s total lifetime well-being is higher than Bill’s. This claim fits perfectly well with Same World Desire Subjectivism. After all, when Adam and Bill reach a certain stage of development, they acquire desires that do not merely concern the quality of their experiences. In so doing, they come to have a profile of desires that is better satisfied in Adam’s life than in Bill’s. For example, they surely both come to desire to have friends and to be loved by their family members, and while these desires are satisfied in Adam’s case, they are frustrated in Bill’s (since he has no friends or family members). As long as some of the things that both men desire but that are gotten only by Adam meet whatever other conditions are necessary for being basically good for a person, more things are basically good for Adam during his lifetime than are basically good for Bill during his. Thus, other things equal, Adam is higher in lifetime well-being than Bill.

The relevant question for our purposes is whether, during their neonatal period, Adam’s welfare is higher than Bill’s. Though this is controversial, I claim that it is. While Adam’s loving parents are playing with him, cuddling him, and taking care of him, Bill is being kept in total isolation and being fed a mere simulation of these events. No one loves Bill or cares about him, and at no point during this time does he interact with another human being. Nor does he begin to develop his physical capacities or interact in any way with the real world around him. I claim that even if Bill’s total welfare during the neonatal period is nearly as high as Adam’s, it is at least a little bit lower than Adam’s. That is:

**Neonatal Period**  
Adam’s total well-being during the neonatal period is at least somewhat greater than Bill’s total well-being during that period.

I admit that it is not as clear that Neonatal Period is true than it is that Adam’s total lifetime well-being is higher than Bill’s. (Even the latter claim is controversial, though most subjectivists accept it.) But this may be because the neonatal period is so short that the difference in welfare between Adam
and Bill during this period is barely noticeable, whereas in the lifetime case, there is enough time for a much larger difference to accrue. To get clearer on whether Neonatal Period is true, consider a tragic variant on the case, in which both Adam and Bill die just before the end of the neonatal period. It seems even more obvious to me in the tragic variant that Adam’s total welfare during the neonatal period is greater than Bill’s: more welfare accrues to Adam during his tragically short life than does to Bill. Suppose you were entrusted with the task of ensuring that a fetus who will be born in a few days and who will not survive beyond the neonatal period will have the best possible life. If you were ignoring any considerations except those relevant to its welfare, and you had to choose between giving it Adam’s short life and giving it Bill’s, would you be totally indifferent between the two options?

If Neonatal Period is true, then we have an argument against Same World Desire Subjectivism. We have stipulated that at the world where Adam and Bill are located, newborn babies only have desires concerning the quality of their experiences. Thus, if Adam is higher in welfare during the neonatal period than Bill is, this cannot be because the profile of desires that Adam and Bill share during this period is better satisfied in Adam’s case: their lives are experientially identical, so the desires that they have during this period are equally well satisfied. Nor could it be because the desires about the past that Adam and Bill will have later in life (e.g., a desire to have been raised by loving parents) are better satisfied during this period in Adam’s case. For in the tragic variant of the case, in which Adam and Bill both die when they are still newborns, the neonatal difference in welfare persists. Since there are no future desires that could potentially explain this difference in the tragic variant, it is surely not explained by future desires in the original case either. Thus, unlike the claim that Adam’s total lifetime well-being is higher than Bill’s, Neonatal Period cannot be explained by a difference in how well-satisfied Adam’s and Bill’s desires are. How, then, could Adam be higher in total welfare during the neonatal period than Bill is?

If Same World Desire Subjectivism is false, then a simple and natural explanation is available:

**First Explanation**

During the neonatal period, either something is basically good for Adam even though he does not desire it or something is basically bad for Bill even though he is not averse to it.
For example, perhaps it is basically good for Adam that he is being loved or that he is developing his physical capacities. Since Bill is not being loved or developing his capacities, this would explain how Adam could be higher in welfare than Bill during that period.

On the other hand, suppose that Same World Desire Subjectivism is true. Since Adam and Bill only have desires concerning their experiences during the neonatal period, this view implies that nothing except those experiences that they desire (are averse to) are basically good (bad) for them. This leaves only two possible explanations of Neonatal Period, and I will argue that each of these is worse than the First Explanation.

First, it could be that some of the experiences had by Bill do not meet a necessary condition on basic goodness, or that some of the experiences had by Adam do not meet a necessary condition on basic badness. (This can only be so if the condition that Same World Desire Subjectivism represents as necessary is not also sufficient.) That is:

**Second Explanation** During the neonatal period, there is *not* a one-to-one correspondence between the things that are basically good (bad) for Adam and those that are basically good (bad) for Bill because *either* (i) some experience is basically good for Adam but the corresponding experience is not basically good for Bill, or (ii) some experience is basically bad for Bill but the corresponding experience is not basically bad for Adam.

This explanation is not credible, however. Remember, the only things that are basically good for Adam and Bill during this period are experiences that they desire, and the only things that are basically bad for them are experiences to which they are averse. But there is no plausible necessary condition on an experience’s being basically good for you that is not met by some of Bill’s experiences even though it is met by the corresponding experiences in Adam’s life. Surely the illusoriness of an experience, or the fact that it is produced by an experience machine, cannot altogether disqualify it from being basically good for you: your welfare can go up if you have a nice dream or use virtual reality goggles. Likewise, there is no plausible necessary condition on an experience’s being basically bad for you that is not met by some of Adam’s experiences even though it is met by the corresponding experiences in Bill’s life. (If some experience that Bill is averse to is
basically bad for him, could the fact that the corresponding experience in Adam’s life is not illusory really prevent it from being basically bad for him—even though he is just as averse to it?) We should reject the Second Explanation because there is no plausible potential explanation of it.

Now suppose that Same World Desire Subjectivism is true but that the Second Explanation is false. Then the experiences that Adam and Bill have and desire (and those that they have and are averse to) during the neonatal period all meet whatever other necessary conditions there are, besides Same World Desire Subjectivism, on something’s being basically good (bad) for you. (If there are no other necessary conditions, then this is trivially true.) If so, then every experience that Adam desires is basically good for him, every experience that he is averse to is basically bad for him, and nothing else is basically good or bad for him. Moreover, the same is true of Bill. Since Adam and Bill are identical with respect to their desires, aversions, and experiences, there is a one-to-one correspondence between the things that are basically good (bad) for Adam during the neonatal period and those that are basically good (bad) for Bill during that period. In this case, the only way that Adam could nonetheless be higher in welfare during this period than Bill is the following:

**Third Explanation**

During the neonatal period, although there is a one-to-one correspondence between the things that are basically good (bad) for Adam and those that are basically good (bad) for Bill, there is at least one pair of corresponding and indistinguishable experiences $x$ and $y$ (where $x$ is had by Adam and $y$ is had by Bill) such that $x$ is higher in basic prudential value for Adam than $y$ is for Bill—even though Adam desires (is averse to) $x$ exactly as much as Bill desires (is averse to) $y$.

For example, suppose that Adam and Bill are both having the same cuddly, parental experience, and that they are both liking it equally intensely. It could be that because Adam’s experience is caused by the real world whereas Bill’s is caused by the experience machine, Adam’s experience is more basically good for Adam than Bill’s is for him. Or suppose that they are both having a cold, shivery experience toward which they are equally averse. It could be that because Bill’s experience is illusory,

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88 Remember, a thing’s basic prudential value for you is how basically good or bad for you it is. (I count something that is basically bad for you as having negative basic prudential value for you.)
it is more basically bad for him than Adam’s is for him. Such differences in basic prudential value between corresponding experiences could explain Adam’s advantage in welfare even though there is an exact correspondence between the things that are basically good (bad) for Adam and those that are basically good (bad) for Bill.

The Third Explanation is more complex than the First Explanation. Adam is higher in welfare than Bill is during the neonatal period because of some non-experiential difference between their lives during this period (e.g., that Adam is loved but Bill is not). The First Explanation says that this difference corresponds either to the presence of something basically good in Adam’s life that is absent from Bill’s or the absence of something basically bad from Adam’s life that is present in Bill’s. The Third Explanation denies this and says that this difference merely boosts the basic prudential value for Adam of something in his life (or dampens the basic prudential value for Bill of something in his life). The First Explanation is preferable insofar as it is simpler. However, simplicity is not decisive, as we saw when we compared the objectivist’s explanation of the Resonance Intuition with the simpler explanation available to the subjectivist.

What really dooms the Third Explanation is the fact that it goes against the spirit of subjectivism. What is the basic subjectivist thought? It is not the Resonance Intuition, which I have shown to be compatible with objectivism. Instead, it is what I called the ‘marginal’ intuition earlier: nothing can make a difference (positive or negative) to your level of welfare unless it resonates with you under the right conditions. I believe that subjectivists would agree. For example, Heathwood describes the case of Henry, who reads an entomology book even though he lacks any favorable attitude toward this event or anything it leads to. Might Henry nonetheless have benefited from reading the book? Heathwood assumes that an objectivist might answer ‘yes’ but that a subjectivist would answer ‘no’.89 This assumption is warranted (as I think it is) only if the marginal intuition is the basic idea behind subjectivism. For if reading the book increased Henry’s welfare, then it benefited him—even if it was not itself basically good for him but merely amplified the basic goodness for him of some other event. Thus, if every subjectivist would deny that Henry benefited, subjectivism is implicitly committed not merely to the impossibility of non-resonating events that are basically good for you, but to the impossibility of non-resonating events that boost the values of other events that are

89 Heathwood (forthcoming).
basically good for you. The Third Explanation says that there are non-resonating events of the latter kind, so a Same World Desire Subjectivist who accepted it would be a subjectivist in name only.\(^\text{90}\)

Moreover, any Same World Desire Subjectivist who accepted the Third Explanation would be saddled with a combination of views that is *ad hoc* and unstable. If there can be desire- and aversion-independent boosters or dampeners of basic prudential value, why can’t there be desire- and aversion-independent *sources* of basic prudential value—things that are basically good (bad) for you even though you do not desire them (are not averse to them)? What could motivate this combination of views, besides a desire to save the letter of Same World Desire Subjectivism from refutation? Subjectivists cannot credibly appeal to the Third Explanation.

I began by arguing that Neonatal Period is true. Then I asked what could explain its truth, given that Adam and Bill’s desires are equally well-satisfied during their neonatal period. Assuming that Same World Desire Subjectivism is false, we can avail ourselves of the First Explanation. If Same World Desire Subjectivism is true, we must appeal either to the Second or the Third Explanation. I have argued that the First Explanation is far superior to the other two. Therefore, an inference to the best explanation from the truth of Neonatal Period entitles us to infer that Same World Desire Subjectivism is false.

What if it were claimed that this view is merely intended to apply to adults? I would reply as I did in the case of Same World Judgment Subjectivism: as Difference implies, Same World Desire Subjectivism cannot be false of newborn babies but true of adults unless there is some difference between newborns and adults that could explain why this is so. It is even clearer in this case than it was in the case of Judgment Subjectivism that there is no such difference. For newborn babies are capable of desire, just as adults are. So it could not even be claimed that because newborns lack a relevant capacity possessed by adults, a requirement corresponding to this capacity applies to adults even though it does not apply to newborns. If Same World Desire Subjectivism is false of newborn babies, then it is also false of adults.

\(^{90}\) Remember that the analogous charge cannot be made against the objectivist who accommodates the Resonance Intuition. For the Resonance Intuition is compatible with the falsity of subjectivism, and the main objectivist idea is just that subjectivism is false.
The argument in this section relied on a more controversial premise than the one I gave against Same World Judgment Subjectivism: nearly everyone agrees that something can be basically good for a newborn baby who lacks evaluative beliefs, but many philosophers will fail to share my conviction that Adam is better off than Bill during the neonatal period. I cannot pretend to have proved that this difference in welfare exists. Thus, my argument against Same World Desire Subjectivism is less decisive than my argument against Same World Judgment Subjectivism. I consider this a noteworthy result. Dorsey has argued that Judgment Subjectivism is superior to Desire Subjectivism. My arguments suggest that the opposite is true, at least of the Same World versions of these views.

I believe my argument against Same World Desire Subjectivism is more forceful than existing arguments against this view. Richard Kraut has argued that the desire satisfaction theory of welfare is false on the grounds that having a normal profile of desires and learning a language are basically good for babies even though they are not desired by them. Since this is an argument against the claim that desiring something is a necessary condition on its being basically good for you, it amounts to an argument against Same World Desire Subjectivism. This argument is unpersuasive, however, because it is not at all clear that the states of affairs that Kraut mentions are basically good for babies as opposed to merely derivatively good for them. More recently, Christopher Rice has argued against Desire Subjectivism on the grounds that we possess considered judgments about welfare that directly imply its falsity (e.g., the judgment that knowledge is basically good for us, and not because we desire it under any conditions). These judgments strike me as too controversial to be dialectically effective. I believe that the judgment that Adam is higher in welfare than Bill is considerably less controversial than the judgments about basic goodness that Rice invokes.

2.6 Ideal World Subjectivism

Ideal World Subjectivism is defended by many philosophers, including Richard Brandt, Peter Railton, Connie Rosati, Valerie Tiberius, and Dale Dorsey. It says that a particular event is basically

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91 Dorsey (2012).
93 Rice (2013), pp. 201-03, 207-09.
94 Rice briefly gives a more promising argument: he asks us to consider some people at a time when they are conscious but do not have any pro-attitudes, and he argues that it is plausible that they could nonetheless differ in well-being (p. 208). I like this argument, but I prefer mine because it is easier to imagine babies who only have pro-attitudes toward their experiences than it is to imagine people who do not have any pro-attitudes whatsoever.
95 Brandt (1979); Railton (2003a), (2003b); Rosati (1996); Tiberius (2007); Dorsey (2010).
good for you at world \( W \) only if and at least partly because you have \( A \) toward it at the ideal world, \( I \)—the closest world where you are suitably idealized. This leaves us with two questions. What does suitable idealization consist in? Relative to which world is \( I \) the closest world where you are suitably idealized?

The first question is easier to answer: it is generally agreed that the idealization consists largely or entirely in the possession of full non-evaluative information (including acquaintance with all possible experiences) and full instrumental rationality.\(^96\) (The stipulation that the information be non-evaluative is needed to avoid circularity.) In a slogan: the ideal world is the closest world where you are fully informed and fully rational.

The second question is more difficult. A natural choice is \( W \), but the writings of Ideal World Subjectivists suggest otherwise. Consider the sort of case that Railton uses to illustrate his view. Lonnie is not having experience \( E \) at \( W1 \), but he could be having it. Would it be basically good for him to be having it right now? That is, is his having \( E \) basically good for him at \( W2 \), the closest world where he is having \( E \) right now? Railton says that this depends on whether \( W1 \)-Lonnie+, the result of taking Lonnie as he is at \( W1 \) and suitably idealizing him, has \( A \) toward \( E \). He does not say that this depends on whether \( W2 \)-Lonnie+, the result of taking Lonnie as he is at \( W2 \) and idealizing him, has \( A \) toward \( E \). So it seems that the ideal world, \( I \), is the closest world to \( W1 \) where Lonnie is suitably idealized, not the closest world to \( W2 \) where this is the case—even though what we are interested in is whether \( E \) is basically good for Lonnie at \( W2 \).\(^97\)

David Sobel also understands Ideal World Subjectivists as denying that, when \( x \)'s basic goodness for you at \( W \) is in question, the ideal world is the closest world to \( W \) where you are suitably idealized. He claims that the main reason a Desire Subjectivist should idealize is that it does not follow from the fact that you do not actually desire an experience, \( E \), that it would not be basically good for you if you had it: for perhaps you actually lack any desire for \( E \) only because you do not know what it is like. This motivates an Ideal World view because if you were given full information, including

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\(^96\) See, e.g., Railton (2003a), p. 11; Sobel (2009), p. 337. The main dissenter is Rosati (1996), whose view raises additional complications that I cannot discuss here.

\(^97\) Railton (2003a), p. 11. I have changed certain details in the example. Railton wonders whether it would be good for Lonnie to drink 7-Up, but presumably, this could not be basically good for him.
experiential acquaintance with $E$, you would want to have $E$.

However, at $W$, you desire to be having experience $E$ while you are having it: for at $W$, you know what it is like. Thus, Sobel is surely not thinking that we should take you as you are at $W$ and then give you full information and full rationality. At $W$, you already have a desire for $E$. The only person that it makes sense to idealize in this case is your actual self.

These considerations incline me to think that for the purposes of the present analysis, the ideal world is the closest world to the actual world where you are suitably idealized. My arguments will not depend on this, however: they will go through on any plausible understanding of the ideal world, including the one on which it is the closest world to $W$ where you are suitably idealized.

Much could be said about Ideal World Subjectivism. I will limit myself to making one general point and to showing that the arguments I gave against the Same World versions of Judgment and Desire Subjectivism can be extended to the Ideal World versions of these views.

The general point is that because Same World Subjectivism is simpler than Ideal World Subjectivism and can accommodate the main motivation for it, subjectivists should prefer Same World views. I agree with Sobel that what primarily motivates Ideal World views is the observation that, even if subjectivism is true, the fact that you do not actually have attitude $A$ toward something $x$ does not imply that $x$ would not be basically good for you if you got it. Ideal World views accommodate this because, from the fact that you do not actually have $A$ toward $x$, it does not follow that you would not have $A$ toward $x$ if you were suitably idealized. But Same World views also accommodate this: from the fact that you do not actually have $A$ toward $x$, it does not follow that you would not have $A$ toward $x$ if you had $x$. Same World views give us a simple recipe for determining whether $x$ passes

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99 This interpretation has its own problems, but I cannot discuss them here.
100 See the criticisms given in Velleman (1988), Sobel (1994), and Rosati (1995). Hubin (1996) argues against views that explain your reasons for action in terms of the motivations you have at the ideal world. Many of his points apply to Ideal World Subjectivism. More recently, Rosati (2009, pp. 208-09) has argued that Ideal World Subjectivism faces a special problem when the welfare subject is a baby: because there are many ways the baby could grow up, there is no single idealized version of the baby, and hence no fact of the matter about what the idealized baby’s attitudes would be. I remain neutral on whether she is correct, but obviously, her argument could only help me.
101 I believe that this is also the main motivation for Ideal World Subjectivism articulated in Railton (2003a) and (2003b). Because the view that Railton sketches in those works is a complete package of which subjectivism qua necessary condition is only one component, he gives other considerations in favor of his view. But these are not relevant to subjectivism as I understand it.
the subjectivist test for being basically good for you at an arbitrary world \( W \): go to \( W \) and see whether you have \( A \) toward \( x \) there. Ideal World views tell us to do something more complicated: go to the closest world where you have full information (including information about what it is like to have any possible experience) and see whether you have \( A \) toward \( x \) there. Since Same World views do what Ideal World views are meant to do, their simplicity should lead subjectivists to favor them over Ideal World views.

Indeed, I believe that something stronger is true: once you compare Same World and Ideal World views, it looks like only Same World views have a chance of being true. Consider a case in which it would be basically good for you to get \( x \) even though you do not actually have \( A \) toward \( x \). What could explain this fact, consistently with subjectivism? The Same World explanation is that you would have \( A \) toward \( x \) if you were to get \( x \). The Ideal World explanation is that you would have \( A \) toward \( x \) if you had full information and full rationality. The former explanation is much more plausible. If it is correct, then the favorable attitudes of your suitably idealized self are playing a merely tracking role, not an explanatory one: although it might be true that \( x \) is basically good for you at \( W \) only if you have \( A \) toward \( x \) at the ideal world, it is not true that whenever \( x \) is basically good for you at \( W \), it has this status at least partly because you have \( A \) toward \( x \) at the ideal world. So Ideal World Subjectivism is false because its explanatory claim is false.

Even if we set these considerations aside, we have an independent reason to reject Ideal World Subjectivism: the arguments that I have given against the Same World versions of Judgment and Desire Subjectivism can be extended to rule out the Ideal World versions of these views.

Remember that the problem with Same World Judgment Subjectivism was that there are possible worlds (including, in all likelihood, the actual world) at which things are basically good for newborn babies who do not have any evaluative beliefs. A Judgment Subjectivist might respond to this problem by switching to the Ideal World version of the view:

| Ideal World Judgment Subjectivism | Something \( x \) is basically good for you at \( W \) only if and at least partly because at the ideal world, \( I \), you believe that \( x \) is good for you. |
This is the version of Judgment Subjectivism that Dorsey actually accepts.

Switching to the Ideal World version of the view would allow the Judgment Subjectivist to evade my argument only if there were a guarantee that even if a newborn baby lacks evaluative beliefs at \( W' \), at \( I \), he believes of at least one thing at \( W' \) that it is good for him. But there is no such guarantee.

Consider a newborn baby who does not have any evaluative beliefs. It could be that, even at the closest world at which he has full information and full instrumental rationality, he does not believe anything to be good for him. For at this world, he might be relevantly similar to G. E. Moore, who understands what it is for something to be good *simpliciter* but cannot fathom how something could be good *for someone*. Since it is possible that a newborn baby for whom some things are basically good would be like this if it were suitably idealized, Ideal World Judgment Subjectivism fails: it implies that certain newborns for whom things are basically good are such that nothing is basically good for them.

It would not help to insist, as Dorsey does, that the ideal world be one where, as a result of having full information and full rationality, you have a complete set of evaluative beliefs—one that yields “a complete ordering of all possible welfare goods,” or as complete an ordering as possible if there are cases of incommensurability.\(^{102}\) You can have a complete set of evaluative beliefs without believing that anything is good for you: you could believe that everything is not good for you (and perhaps not bad for you either). Since it is possible that a newborn baby for whom some things are basically good has this complete set of evaluative beliefs at the ideal world, Ideal World Judgment Subjectivism still implies that some possible newborns for whom certain things are basically good are such that nothing is basically good for them.

Notice that nothing in this argument depends on the thought that a newborn’s being suitably idealized might *brutely* cause him not to have any evaluative beliefs (or not to have any beliefs to the effect that something is good for him). One objection that has been leveled against Ideal World Subjectivism is that there might be certain facts such that, if you appreciated them (as you would if you were fully informed), this would brutally cause bizarre changes in your profile of favorable attitudes. For example, your appreciation of some mathematical theorem might cause you to lose the favorable attitudes you actually have toward eating. Even if this is true, however, it should not

\(^{102}\) Dorsey (2010), pp. 548-549.
follow that the dinner that you are currently enjoying is not basically good for you. Ideal World Subjectivists might respond by stipulating that, by a suitably idealized subject, they mean (among other things) one whose full information does not brutely cause any changes in his profile of favorable attitudes. I remain neutral on whether this response succeeds. My point is that even if it does, my argument against Ideal World Judgment Subjectivism goes through. The possibility that our newborn baby might not believe anything to be good for him even if he were suitably idealized does not depend on the possibility that his having full information would brutely cause anything in him. There is no guarantee that he believes anything to be good for him even at the closest world where he is suitably idealized, has a complete set of evaluative beliefs, and his being idealized does not have any brute effects on his psychology.

Now, recall my argument against Same World Desire Subjectivism. I argued for Neonatal Period, the claim that Adam’s welfare during the neonatal period is higher than Bill’s, and I argued that the best explanation of this requires us to reject Same World Desire Subjectivism. Would this argument carry over to the Ideal World version of Desire Subjectivism?

**Ideal World Desire Subjectivism**

Something $x$ is basically good (bad) for you at $W$ only if and at least partly because at the ideal world, $I$, you desire (are averse to) $x$.

What prevented Same World Desire Subjectivism from giving a satisfying explanation of Neonatal Period was that Adam and Bill only have desires about the felt quality of their experiences. It might be thought that if Adam and Bill were suitably idealized, they would have a profile of desires similar to those had by normal adults, including desires for love, contact with other human beings, and the like. If this is true, then the profile of desires that Adam has at his ideal world is much better satisfied during the neonatal period than the one that Bill has at his. This would nicely explain the truth of Neonatal Period, consistently with Ideal World Subjectivism.

However, there is no guarantee that if Adam and Bill were suitably idealized, they would have a profile of desires that is better satisfied during the neonatal period in Adam’s case than in Bill’s. It could be that if Adam and Bill were suitably idealized, they would be hedonists whose desires match

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their ideology: they would have desires only for pleasures and aversions only toward pains.\textsuperscript{104} (Perhaps they share a deep disposition toward hedonism that manifests itself when they reach a certain level of cognitive sophistication.) If they have a purely hedonistic profile of desires when suitably idealized, Ideal World Desire Subjectivism will be no better able to explain the truth of Neonatal Period than Same World Desire Subjectivism was: the best explanation of Adam’s welfare advantage during the neonatal period will require rejecting Ideal World Desire Subjectivism. Whether Adam’s welfare advantage during the neonatal period admits of a plausible explanation should not be hostage in this way to empirical fortune.

To put the point another way, let us stipulate that Adam and Bill would have a purely hedonistic profile of desires if they were suitably idealized. Neonatal Period remains true: Adam’s total welfare during the neonatal period is at least somewhat higher than Bill’s. Because of the stipulation, Ideal World Desire Subjectivism can no better explain the truth of Neonatal Period than Same World Desire Subjectivism: its only options are the Second and Third Explanations. To avail ourselves of the far superior First Explanation, we must reject Ideal World Desire Subjectivism.

2.7 Conclusion

I have distinguished four subjectivist views and argued that all four are false. These do not exhaust all possible subjectivist views, but practically every such view that has actually been defended is essentially one of these four views or a hybrid thereof. Even views that do not fit neatly into any of my four categories are vulnerable to my arguments.

Consider Wayne Sumner’s view. In a slogan, it says that you are well off at a world to the extent that you are happy there, provided that your happiness is authentic. Happiness “has both an affective component (experiencing the conditions of your life as fulfilling or rewarding) and a cognitive component (judging that your life is going well for you, by your standards for it).”\textsuperscript{105} Your happiness is authentic just if it does not depend on your being ignorant or misinformed about your life or on your having been brainwashed or manipulated in some other autonomy-undermining way. On this

\textsuperscript{104} This is true even if we conceive of suitable idealization as requiring that one’s possession of full information not brutely cause any changes in one’s attitudes.

\textsuperscript{105} Sumner (1996), p. 172.
view, Sumner tells us, “some condition of a subject’s life is (directly or intrinsically) beneficial for him just in case he authentically endorses it, or experiences it as satisfying, for its own sake. The intrinsic sources of welfare will be whatever conditions of subjects’ lives elicit this response.” You cannot experience something as satisfying unless you desire it in the thin sense of desire at issue in discussions of welfare. Furthermore, I take it that endorsement, as it occurs in the last quotation from Sumner, is the cognitive component of happiness that he describes, and that to endorse a particular component of your life (rather than your life as a whole) is to judge that it is good for you. Thus, I interpret Sumner as accepting the following view:

**Sumnerian Subjectivism**

Something \( x \) is basically good (bad) for you at \( W \) only if and at least partly because at \( W \), either you believe that \( x \) is good (bad) for you or you desire it (are averse to it).

This is just the disjunction of the Judgment and Desire varieties of Same World Subjectivism. If both of those views are false, as I have argued, then so is Sumnerian Subjectivism.

I believe that most initially plausible subjectivist views would also be vulnerable to one of my arguments. I cannot claim to have ruled out every possible subjectivist view. However, because I have argued that the main motivation for subjectivism is not compelling and that most extant subjectivist views are false, I believe I have made a strong presumptive case for the truth of objectivism about welfare.

Some philosophers will undoubtedly think that my arguments against Judgment Subjectivism are more persuasive than my arguments against Desire Subjectivism. After all, it is much more obvious that some things are basically good for newborn babies (even if they do not have evaluative beliefs) than that Adam is higher in welfare during the neonatal period than Bill is. I agree: although I am sufficiently confident about Adam’s welfare advantage to reject Desire Subjectivism on the grounds

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107 Do not be misled into thinking that Sumner is an Ideal World Subjectivist by the counterfactual language in his explanation of authenticity. His view is not that how well off you are at \( W \) depends solely on whether you are happy at some other world: it is that it depends on whether you are happy at \( W \) and also happy at nearby worlds where you have more information.  
108 In particular, the view defended in Rosati (1996) does not appear to be vulnerable to my arguments or to obvious extensions thereof. I believe that reflection on the welfare of newborn infants would raise different problems for her view, but I cannot discuss this here.
that it is incompatible with the best explanation of it, I am much more confident that Judgment
Subjectivism is false. I take myself to have shown that Desire Subjectivism is much more plausible
than Judgment Subjectivism. Those subjectivists whom I have not managed to convert to
objectivism should embrace Desire Subjectivism.

My arguments have relied on claims about the welfare of newborn infants. Many views about well-
being that appear plausible when you consider only what they imply about human adults seem
implausible when you consider what they imply about the welfare of newborn infants, non-human
animals, and other welfare subjects. Same World Judgment Subjectivism has some plausibility when
the welfare subject is a normal human adult because normal adults believe certain things to be good
for them. However, it is obviously false when applied to newborn babies and other creatures that do
not have any such beliefs. Likewise, Same World Desire Subjectivism remains plausible even in the
face of the intuition that a relatively good life spent in the real world contains more lifetime well-
being than an experientially identical life spent inside the experience machine. However, if you have
the corresponding intuition about newborn babies who only have desires and aversions concerning
the felt quality of their experiences, the view appears implausible.

I have argued that intuitions about the welfare of newborn infants can count against subjectivist
views even when these views are interpreted as making claims only about human adults. This is not because we
are entitled to assume a priori that there can be no differences between what is true about the welfare
of adults and what is true about the welfare of newborn infants. All we need to assume is that no
such differences are inexplicable. I claim that one could not plausibly explain why any of the four
subjectivist views I have considered would be true of adults even though it is false of newborn
babies.

The general lesson is that when you are theorizing about well-being, it is a mistake to focus only on a
small subset of the entities that are capable of well-being. If you do this, you run the risk of
endorsing claims that are implausible because they imply that the facts about the welfare of these
entities diverge from the facts about the welfare of other entities in ways that cannot plausibly be
explained.
Chapter 3

Prudence, Morality, and the New Humeans

Hume controversially proclaimed that it is “not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger.” He added that it is “not contrary to reason for me to chuse my total ruin, to prevent the least uncasiness of… [a] person wholly unknown to me” or to “prefer even my own acknowledg’d lesser good to my greater.“ Humeans about normative reasons for action, who claim that there is a reason for you to perform an action if and only if your doing so would promote the satisfaction of one of your desires, have traditionally accepted Hume’s revisionary claims. They have argued that, since what there are reasons for you to do depends on what you desire, there might turn out to be no reason for you to prevent the destruction of the world—something that is arguably morally required—or to act prudently. Williams, for example, embraced the conclusion that, depending on what he desires, an abusive husband might have no reason to treat his wife better—even if he is “inconsiderate, hard, sexist, nasty, selfish, [and] brutal.” Harman argued that because Humeanism is true and because a moral requirement cannot apply to someone who does not have a reason to comply with it, there are no moral requirements that apply to all possible agents. Railton disagreed with Harman about whether a moral requirement can apply only to someone who has a reason to obey it, but his acceptance of the Humean theory led him to agree that there is no moral requirement that every possible agent has a reason to obey. According to these traditional Humeans, those agents who always have reasons to act morally are a proper subset of all possible agents—namely, those with desires whose satisfaction would be promoted by their doing so. And although these theorists were less explicit about

110 I am treating Hume’s claims as being about reasons for action, rather than about rationality or the faculty of reason. I will not consider whether this interpretation is historically accurate.
111 Williams (1995), pp. 39-40. I will not distinguish an agent’s having a reason to do something from there being a reason for him to do it, and I will always mean the latter even when I speak of someone’s having a reason.
113 Railton (2003a).
prudential reasons than they were about moral ones, they would arguably have said that, depending on what you desire, there could sometimes turn out to be no reason for you to act prudently.\textsuperscript{114}

The New Humeans are unwilling to follow Hume on these points, however. They claim that their theory of reasons does not have to bite the bullets that Humeans have traditionally bitten. In their view, you can be a Humean without abandoning the commonsensical view that there is always a reason for any possible agent to do what morality requires. Thus, Mark Schroeder claims that you can accept Humeanism while insisting that moral requirements are \textit{objectively prescriptive} in the sense that every possible agent has a reason to comply with them.\textsuperscript{115} Like the traditional Humeans, the New Humeans say less about prudential reasons than they do about moral ones. They would surely also claim, however, that their view preserves the intuitive connection between an agent's welfare and her reasons for action: if it would be prudent for any possible agent to perform a particular action, then there is at least \textit{some} reason for her to do so.

Humeanism is a highly appealing view because it suggests an analysis of reasons in non-normative terms: a reason for you to do something is a consideration that helps explain why your doing it would promote the satisfaction of one of your desires.\textsuperscript{116} If, as many philosophers believe, all normative claims can be analyzed in terms of reasons, the Humean theory promises to explain and demystify all of normativity. One of the main reasons that Humeanism is widely resisted in spite of its obvious theoretical advantages is that it appears unable to accommodate the commonsensical views about morality and prudence that I described above. If the New Humeans turned out to be right, however, then this objection would have no force and the Humean theory would be even more formidable than it initially appears to be.\textsuperscript{117}

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\textsuperscript{114} I assume that prudence is to be understood in terms of well-being: for example, an action that brings about a large increase (or prevents a large decrease) in the agent’s well-being is prudent. Thus, as I understand it, prudence is linked to desire satisfaction only if the latter is linked to welfare. Some traditional Humeans might have accepted a desire satisfaction theory of welfare and thought that you therefore cannot fail to have a reason to act prudently. This would explain why they said less about prudential reasons than about moral ones. If this conjecture is right, then my arguments will show that they were mistaken.


\textsuperscript{117} That is not to say that there would no longer be any serious objections to the view on commonsensical grounds: it could still be objected that Humeanism cannot accommodate the datum that if any possible agent is morally required to do \textit{A}, then there is a very \textit{weighty} reason for him to do \textit{A}. I will not discuss the weight of reasons in this paper.
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In this paper, I argue that the New Humeans are mistaken. Any Humean theory of reasons will imply that, in some cases, there is no reason for you to perform an action even though it would be prudent for you to perform it. Moreover, any such theory will imply that, in some cases, there is no reason for you to do what you are morally required to do. The distinctive ambition of the New Humeans is to ground all reasons for action in agents’ desires while avoiding the revisionary views about morality and prudence that traditional Humeans embraced. This ambition cannot be achieved. The New Humeans must bite the same bullets that the traditional Humeans did.

An interesting possibility will emerge in my discussion of prudence. I will argue that because Humeans claim that there is a reason for you to perform an action only if it would promote the satisfaction of one of your desires, their view cannot accommodate the claim that there is always some reason for any possible agent to do what it would be prudent for her to do—even if desire satisfactionism is the correct theory of well-being. However, I will show that if desire satisfactionism is true, it is plausible that this claim about prudence could be accommodated by one version of an as yet unnoticed variant on Humeanism. Thus, although extant Humean theories must bite the same bullet in the prudential case as in the moral case, Humeans may be able to avoid the prudential bullet if they switch to this variant on their theory.

I begin by explaining why the New Humeans think they can avoid the revisionism of traditional Humeanism. Then, I give a case that shows that if the New Humeans accept a concurrentist version of Humeanism, according to which any reason for an agent to do something at a given time must be explained by a desire that the agent has at that time, they must be revisionists in just the ways that their traditional counterparts were. Next, I extend my argument to non-concurrentist versions of the Humean theory. (It is here that the aforementioned variant on Humeanism emerges.) Finally, I answer some objections.

118 For the sake of simplicity, I assume that common sense is right about what acts are morally required and (contra Harman) that it is conceptually possible for you to be morally required to do something that there is no reason for you to do, so that we can sensibly ask, of some agent and some act that morality requires him to perform, whether there is a reason for him to perform it. These assumptions could be dropped: my point is that the New Humeans must claim that some possible agents have no reason not to perform acts (e.g., murder, torture, rape) that are ordinarily regarded as morally wrong.

119 Schroeder claims that Humeanism is compatible even with the view that if an act is morally required, then there is at least one agent-neutral reason to do it—a single consideration that is a reason for any possible agent to do it (2007, pp. 8-9, ch. 6). If Humeanism is incompatible with the weaker claim that whenever an agent is morally required to do something, there is some reason for him to do it, it is also incompatible with this view.
3.1 The New Humeans’ Gambit

I will call the commonsensical views about morality and prudence that the Humean theory was traditionally thought to contradict Moral and Prudential Rationalism:

**Moral Rationalism** For any possible agent $S$ and action $A$, if $S$ is morally required to do $A$, then there is a reason for $S$ to do $A$.

**Prudential Rationalism** For any possible agent $S$ and action $A$, if it would be prudent for $S$ to do $A$, then there is a reason for $S$ to do $A$.\(^{120}\)

Humeanism was thought to be incompatible with these claims because, from the premise that there is a reason for an agent to perform a given action if and only if his doing so would promote the satisfaction of at least one of his desires, it seems to follow that there is a possible agent who sometimes has no reason to act morally (or prudently). However, this inference depends on the assumption that there is a possible agent $S$ and an action $A$ such that $S$ is morally required to do $A$ (or it would be prudent for $S$ to do $A$) but $S$’s doing $A$ would not promote the satisfaction of any of $A$’s desires. Traditional Humeans regarded the truth of this assumption as so obvious that they often did not even make it explicit. However, the New Humeans claim that this assumption is false. If they are right, then the Humean theory is compatible with Moral and Prudential Rationalism.

Assuming Humeanism, Moral and Prudential Rationalism are true if and only if the following claims are true:

**Moral** For any possible agent $S$ and action $A$, if $S$ is morally required to do $A$, then $S$’s doing $A$ would promote the satisfaction of at least one of $S$’s desires.

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\(^{120}\) I use the term ‘rationalism’ only because no decent-sounding ‘ism’ can be constructed using the word ‘reason’. I am not committing myself to any views about rationality or its relation to reasons, morality, or prudence.
Prudent For any possible agent $S$ and action $A$, if it would be prudent for $S$ to do $A$, then $S$’s doing $A$ would promote the satisfaction of at least one of $S$’s desires.\textsuperscript{121}

The traditional Humeans thought that Moral and Prudent are obviously false. Why, then, do the New Humeans think that they are true?

To begin with, on the most natural understanding of the promotion relation, $S$’s doing $A$ promotes $p$ just if $S$’s doing $A$ is an effective means to $p$. Moral and Prudent may seem obviously false on this natural conception of promotion, since it may seem obvious that for some possible agents, acting morally or prudently is not always an effective means to the satisfaction of one of their desires. However, the New Humeans have a maximally weak conception of the promotion relation, which I accept for the purposes of this paper: $S$’s doing $A$ promotes $p$ just if the probability of $p$ conditional on $S$’s doing $A$ is higher than the probability of $p$ conditional on $S$’s doing nothing.\textsuperscript{122} The weaker the promotion relation is, the easier it will be for an arbitrary action to promote the satisfaction of one of your desires. Thus, on the New Humeans’ conception of promotion, it is more reasonable to think that Moral and Prudent might be true.

Moreover, the New Humeans have proposed two hypotheses that would explain the truth of Moral and Prudent. Suppose that, as David Velleman appears to have argued, there is a desire possession of which is necessary for agency.\textsuperscript{123} Then, if it turns out that any agent’s performing any prudent or morally required action\textsuperscript{124} would promote the satisfaction of this very desire, Moral and Prudent will be true. Loosening Velleman’s idea a bit, we get the first hypothesis whose truth would explain Moral or Prudent:

\textsuperscript{121} On the assumption that every morally required action is a prudent one, Prudent entails Moral. I will not take a stand on this controversial assumption, however. I will argue directly against both Prudent and Moral.
\textsuperscript{122} Schroeder (2007), p. 113. For a different gloss on the promotion relation, see McPherson (2012). For doubts about the coherence of this relation, as well as a different argument from mine that Schroeder cannot get Moral Rationalism, see Evers (2009). In accepting the New Humeans’ conception of promotion, I am not making things easier for myself: the weaker the promotion relation, the more likely it is that the New Humeans will be able to accommodate Moral and Prudential Rationalism.
\textsuperscript{124} When I speak of an agent’s performing a prudent or morally required action, I mean an agent’s performing an action that it would be prudent for him to perform or that he is morally required to perform. Thus, even if no one besides me is morally required to pay you twenty dollars (because no one else owes you money), I would be performing a morally required action if I paid you twenty dollars.
**Common Desires** There is some finite set of desires that every possible agent has, such that for any possible agent $S$ and any action $A$ that it would be prudent for $S$ to perform (or that $S$ is morally required to perform), $S$’s doing $A$ would promote the satisfaction of one of the members of that set.

The second hypothesis is due to Schroeder: it might turn out that acting prudently or morally always promotes the satisfaction of *any* desire whatsoever. That is:

**Overdetermination** For any possible agent $S$ and any action $A$ that it would be prudent for $S$ to perform (or that $S$ is morally required to perform), $S$’s doing $A$ would promote the satisfaction of *every* desire had by $S$ (as well as every desire that could be had by $S$).\(^{125}\)

Assuming that nothing that altogether lacks desires counts as an agent and that Humeanism is true, this would imply Moral and Prudential Rationalism.

Why think that Overdetermination might be true? Schroeder claims that, outside the domain of prudent or morally required actions, there is an example of an action whose performance would promote the satisfaction of every possible desire: believing an arbitrary proposition only if it is true. No matter what your desires are, Schroeder says, performing this action will at least slightly increase the probability, of each of your desires, that it will be satisfied. Thus, since every possible agent has some desire or other, Humeanism implies that every agent has a reason to perform this action. It is Schroeder’s hope that Prudent and Moral are true because all prudent and morally required actions are relevantly similar to this action.\(^{126}\)

The New Humeans have not given arguments for Common Desires or Overdetermination. They have merely expressed optimism that one of these claims will turn out to be true, and they have pointed out that the truth of either of them would guarantee the truth of Prudent and Moral.

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\(^{125}\) Schroeder (2007), pp. 108-09. Schroeder is silent about prudential reasons, so he proposes Overdetermination only as it relates to morally required actions.

way to show that the New Humeans cannot avoid the revisionism of rejecting Moral and Prudential Rationalism is not to argue that they have inadequately supported Common Desires and Overdetermination, however. After all, it is logically possible for Prudent and Moral to be true even though Common Desires and Overdetermination are false. The way to proceed is simply to give a counterexample to Prudent and Moral—a task to which the traditional Humeans (and anti-Humeans) did not carefully apply themselves, since they thought it was so obvious that it could be accomplished. This would suffice to show that the New Humeans must reject Moral and Prudential Rationalism, and that Common Desires and Overdetermination are false.

### 3.2 Concurrentist Humeanism Is Revisionary

Let us begin by seeing whether such a counterexample can be produced on the assumption that the Humean theory of reasons requires temporal concurrence between every reason for action and the desires that explain it—so that there is a reason for $S$ to do $A$ at time $t$ if and only if $S$’s doing $A$ would promote the satisfaction of a desire that $S$ has not merely at some time, but at $t$. This is how Schroeder understands Humeanism, and it is also the version of the view that Parfit has recently attacked under the name of ‘subjectivism’ about reasons. If the Humean theory is concurrentist, then Moral and Prudent can do what the New Humeans want them to only if they are given a concurrentist reading too: they must be read as saying that for any possible agent $S$, action $A$, and time $t$, if $S$ is morally required to do $A$ at $t$ (or it would be prudent for $S$ to do $A$ at $t$), then $S$ has at least one desire at $t$ whose satisfaction $S$’s doing $A$ at $t$ would promote. So understood, Moral and Prudent admit of the following counterexample.

Sarah, a concert pianist, has voluntarily subjected herself to an alien experiment in which most of her desires have been eliminated (not merely masked) because their physiological bases have been removed from her brain. She is locked in a room in which there are four items. The first is a coffee machine. The second is a piano. The third is a pill (containing alien nanotechnology) which, as she knows, would quickly

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128 Whichever version of Humeanism is at issue, we should interpret Common Desires as postulating a finite set of desires that any possible agent has at every time at which it is an agent, and we should read Overdetermination as saying that for any agent $S$, action $A$, and time $t$, if $S$ is morally required to do $A$ at $t$ (or it would be prudent for $S$ to do $A$ at $t$), then $S$’s doing $A$ at $t$ would promote the satisfaction of every desire that $S$ has (or could have) at any time.
restore her normal profile of desires if she took it. The fourth is a television screen attached to a button that she knows will trigger a massive explosion in a Midwestern field whenever it is pressed. (A live video feed of the field is shown on the screen.)

Sarah retains her general capacities, including her capacities for deliberation, means-end reasoning, and intentional action: just a minute ago, she wanted a cup of coffee, deliberated for a few seconds about whether to bother trying to figure out how to operate the coffee machine, decided to go ahead with this, and proceeded to experiment with the levers on the machine until she managed to make some coffee. She is also cognitively unimpaired: she would have a perfectly intelligent conversation with you if she felt like it or believed that this would help her get something she wants. The experiment has merely left her with a very sparse profile of desires. Her capacity to acquire new desires in the normal way that people do is unaffected: it’s just that she actually has very few desires. Having just satisfied and extinguished her desire for coffee, the only intrinsic desires she currently has are desires for or against certain sensory experiences. She wants to scratch her leg because she wants it not to itch. She wants the car alarm that is going off outside to shut itself off because she wants to avoid hearing it. She wants to press the button because she wants to see an explosion on the screen. Beyond this, she does not desire anything. She does not want to play the piano. She does not want to have the desires that she used to have. Nor does she desire that her welfare increase, or even that it not decrease. She also lacks any desire to avoid harming others or to avoid doing things that she could not justify to others.

Now, the following two claims are stipulated to be true. (1) If she were to take the pill now, then within an hour, her normal profile of desires would be restored and she would have a dramatically higher level of welfare than she now has—in part because she would be playing the piano and enjoying this tremendously. (2) A group of schoolchildren happens to be playing on the field, so if she were to press the button now, they would get blown up.
It would be morally wrong for Sarah to press the button right now. Nevertheless, Sarah currently has no desire whose satisfaction would be promoted by her refraining from pressing the button now. After all, refraining from pressing the button would have no effect on whether, or when, the car alarm will stop sounding: there is nothing that she can do from her room that will affect the alarm one way or another. Nor would refraining from pressing the button help satisfy her itch-related desires, since (we may suppose) she is just as likely to scratch her leg with one of her hands if she presses the button with the other as she is likely to scratch her leg if she doesn’t press it. Finally, refraining from pressing the button would do the opposite of promoting the satisfaction of her desire to see an explosion on the screen. But these, we have stipulated, are the only desires Sarah currently has. So even though Sarah is morally required to refrain from pressing the button, she would not promote the satisfaction of any current desire of hers if she did this now. Thus, Moral is false—at least when given a concurrentist interpretation. It follows that concurrentist Humeanism is revisionary about reasons to do what is morally required: although common sense accepts Moral Rationalism, concurrentist Humeanism implies that, in this situation, there is no reason for Sarah to do what she is morally required to do.

It would be prudent for Sarah to take the pill now, since this would result in a dramatic increase in her well-being at almost no cost to her. Nevertheless, she currently has no desire that would be promoted by her taking the pill now. Taking the pill now would not promote her desire to scratch her leg or to be relieved of her itch. Nor would it have any effect on the car alarm. Nor would it promote her desire to see an explosion on the screen. Thus, even though it would be prudent for Sarah to take the pill now, she would not promote any current desire of hers if she did this now. Thus, the concurrentist version of Prudent is false. It follows that concurrentist Humeanism is revisionary about reasons to do what is prudent: although common sense accepts Prudential Rationalism, concurrentist Humeanism implies that, in this situation, there is no reason for Sarah to do what is prudent.

Did I cheat when I stipulated that Sarah’s well-being would increase dramatically if she were to take the pill? No. Taking the pill would lead her to engage in more distinctively human activities (viz.,

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129 If you think that the objects of moral prohibitions are not actions, but choices (or actions issuing from certain choices), you surely think that it would be morally wrong for Sarah to choose to press the button (or to press it as a result of having chosen to press it).
playing the piano), thus increasing her well-being if perfectionism is true. It would lead her to experience more enjoyment and could result in a better balance of pleasure over pain, thus increasing her welfare if hedonism is true. It would lead her to re-acquire a very strong desire (viz., the desire to play the piano) and to satisfy that desire, which might result in a better balance of desire satisfaction over desire frustration and thus an increase in her welfare if desire satisfactionism is true. Similar remarks could be made about any other minimally plausible theory of welfare. On any such theory, it is clearly possible that Sarah’s taking the pill would bring about a large increase in her welfare. Thus, it is legitimate for me to stipulate that we are considering a version of the case in which taking the pill would in fact bring this about.

It is worth emphasizing that, even if we assume that desire satisfactionism is the correct theory of welfare, the stipulation that Sarah’s welfare would increase if she took the pill is compatible with the fact that she would not promote the satisfaction of any of her current desires if she took the pill. That is because any plausible version of desire satisfactionism will say that, if you acquire a new desire in the future and this desire is satisfied while you have it, that will be good for you even though it does not involve the satisfaction of any desires that you currently have. This is what would happen if Sarah took the pill: she would acquire a desire to play the piano and this desire would be satisfied. If the satisfaction of this new desire would make it the case that she has a better balance of desire satisfactions over desire frustrations than she currently has (as we are supposing it would), then desire satisfactionism says that her taking the pill would increase her welfare even though it would not promote the satisfaction of any of her current desires.

If the case I have described is possible, then concurrentist Humeanism is revisionary, no matter what the New Humeans say. It could not be argued that, notwithstanding the possibility of this case, the fact that Common Desires or Overdetermination could still turn out to be true shows that the New Humeans might still manage to avoid revisionism. For if the case is possible, then Common Desires and Overdetermination could not turn out to be true. If the case is possible, then Prudent and Moral

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130 But wouldn’t restoring her former profile of desires lead her to re-acquire a very strong desire that is frustrated—viz., the desire not to have been experimented upon by aliens? No. Remember, she volunteered.

131 Heathwood (2011, p. 102) argues for the stronger claim that, according to desire satisfactionism, your doing A at t can increase your welfare only if it promotes the satisfaction of a desire that you have at a time later than t.

132 Shafer-Landau (2012) claims that a case like the one I have given is possible, but he does not produce one. Nor does he explain (as I will in the next section) how one could show that non-concurrentist Humeanism is revisionary.
are false—and so are Common Desires and Overdetermination, since they imply Prudent and Moral.

This point is crucial, so let me spell it out. Assume that the case is possible. Then there is a possible agent, an action that she is morally required to perform, and an action that it would be prudent for her to perform such that none of her desires would be promoted by her performing either action. Thus, it is false that every possible agent is such that, were she to perform any prudent or morally required action, she would promote the satisfaction of one of her desires, as Prudent and Moral say. 

A fortiori, it is false that every action that it would be prudent (or morally required) for some agent to perform would promote the satisfaction of some member of a finite set of desires shared by every possible agent, as Common Desires says. And a fortiori, it is false that every such action would promote every possible desire, as Overdetermination says.

The only hope that the New Humeans have of showing that concurrentist Humeanism can accommodate Moral and Prudential Rationalism is to show that my case is not possible. This is where Common Desires and Overdetermination might be relevant. Since the possibility of my case implies the falsity of these claims, any reasons they have for thinking that either claim is true is an equally compelling reason for thinking that my case is impossible. However, as I will now argue, there are no compelling reasons for thinking that my case is impossible.

The New Humean who likes Common Desires might argue that my case is impossible because, since Sarah does not have any desire whose satisfaction would be promoted by her taking the pill or refraining from pressing the button, she fails to possess the entirety of the finite set of desires that all possible agents share. Thus, Sarah is not an agent, and I have not described a case in which there is a possible agent none of whose desires would be promoted by her performing an action that is prudent or morally required. This objection fails, however, because Sarah clearly is an agent. An agent just is an entity capable of performing actions—and, perhaps, one for which there are reasons for action. Sarah is capable of deliberation, means-end reasoning, and intentional action. She could even carry on a perfectly intelligent conversation with you if she felt like it. Moreover, as the Humean would concede, there are reasons for her to perform certain actions (e.g., to scratch her leg, because she wants to be relieved of the itch). Thus, Sarah is an agent. The fact that Common
Desires implies that she is not an agent is a *reductio* of Common Desires, not a strike against the possibility of my case.

The proponent of Common Desires might concede that Sarah is an agent but insist that she must therefore have more desires than the ones I attributed to her. From the fact that Sarah is an agent, he might claim, it follows that she has the desire that Velleman has argued is constitutive of agency, and *this* desire would be promoted by her taking the pill (as well as by her refraining from pressing the button). This reply is implausible, however. Velleman has given different accounts of what the crucial desire is. In one paper, he claims that it is the desire to be in conscious control of one’s behavior. In another, he claims that it is the desire to act in accordance with reasons. Whichever desire it is, however, the fact that Sarah is an agent does not force us to attribute it to her. We can suppose that she intentionally made herself coffee (and that there was a reason for her to do this) without supposing that she had either of these desires. We need not suppose that she believed that there was a reason for her to make coffee and desired to do what there is reason for her to do. Nor do we need to suppose that she desired to be in conscious control of her behavior and believed that she could do so by making coffee or by performing the coffee-making actions in a particular way. The only desires we need to postulate are a desire to have coffee and a resulting instrumental desire to make coffee. It is not credible that Sarah’s status as an agent implies that she has any of the Velleman desires.

It appears that even Velleman would agree with me on this point. It turns out that the sense of ‘agency’ that interests him is not the one that is relevant to us. What interests him is not the distinction between events that are not actions and events that are, but the distinction between actions that are “full-blooded” (i.e., actions *par excellence*) and actions “from which the distinctively human feature is missing.” He does not claim that there is a single desire that any entity must possess in order to be capable of acting; he merely claims that there is a single desire that any entity must possess in order to perform a full-blooded action. Since “not all actions are full-blooded,” someone might be an agent without being capable of full-blooded action and thus without

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133 Velleman (2000b).
134 Velleman (2000a).
135 I am not claiming that these desires could be the only psychological states in the etiology of her action. I am merely claiming that these could be the only desires in that etiology.
possessing the desire that he claims is constitutive of full-blooded agency.\textsuperscript{138} If Sarah’s making the coffee had been caused in part by a desire to act in accordance with reasons or to be in conscious control of her behavior, it would have more fully displayed what is distinctive about human agency. Thus, her action was not an action \textit{par excellence}, and Velleman would agree that the fact that Sarah is capable of performing actions like this one does not imply that she has any of the desires that he has identified. Moral and Prudential Rationalism do not merely apply to \textit{elite} agents who are capable of action \textit{par excellence}; they apply to \textit{all} entities that are capable of acting and for which there are reasons for action. Thus, nothing that Velleman says undermines the conclusion that because there is no current desire of Sarah’s whose satisfaction would be promoted by her taking the pill or refraining from pressing the button, concurrentist Humeanism contradicts Moral and Prudential Rationalism.\textsuperscript{139, 140}

It is even more obvious that Overdetermination cannot credibly undermine the possibility of my example. Overdetermination implies that \textit{every} one of Sarah’s current desires would be promoted by her refraining from pressing the button. But as I have shown, \textit{none} of her current desires would be promoted by her doing this. Overdetermination also implies that \textit{every} one of Sarah’s current desires would be promoted by her taking the pill. I have shown that \textit{none} of them would be promoted by her doing this. Thus, my case is a clear counterexample to Overdetermination.

Indeed, even if we forget about Sarah, a moment’s reflection shows that Overdetermination could not be true. How could an agent who desires never to do what is morally required promote the satisfaction of this very desire by doing something that she is morally required to do? How could an agent who desires never to do what is prudent promote the satisfaction of this very desire by doing

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{138} Velleman (2000a), p. 127.
\item\textsuperscript{139} If Velleman insists that only those capable of action \textit{par excellence} deserve to be called agents, we can give him the word and concede that Sarah is not an agent, but merely a ‘schmagent’. But then common sense would clearly be committed to the view that there is a reason for any possible schmagent to always schmact prudently and morally. Nothing turns on the label ‘agent’. See Enoch (2006).
\item\textsuperscript{140} Notice that, even if we granted that Sarah must have the desire to act in accordance with reasons, it would be question-begging for the New Humean to argue on these grounds that this desire would be promoted either by her taking the pill or by her refraining from pressing the button. After all, whether Humeanism says that there is a reason for her to perform either of these actions is precisely what is at issue.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
something prudent? Overdetermination is a non-starter, so it cannot be used to argue that my case is not possible.

I claim that Sarah is a possible agent such that, although there is an action $A$ that it would be prudent for her to perform at $t$ and an action $B$ that she is morally required to perform at $t$, there is no desire that she has at $t$ whose satisfaction would be promoted by her performing either $A$ or $B$ at $t$. It follows that the concurrentist versions of Prudent and Moral are false—and, a fortiori, that Common Desires and Overdetermination are false. Thus, notwithstanding what the New Humeans say, concurrentist Humeanism is revisionary: it must reject Moral and Prudential Rationalism.

### 3.3 All Versions of the Humean Theory Are Revisionary

David Sobel claims that Humeans should not require temporal concurrence between reasons for action and the desires that explain them. I will now argue that lifting the concurrence requirement does not help the Humean theory accommodate Moral and Prudential Rationalism. However, as I will explain, it is plausible that the non-concurrentist version of an as yet unnoticed variant on Humeanism would accommodate Prudential Rationalism.

As Sobel argues, the only plausible non-concurrentist version of the Humean theory says that what actions there are reasons for you to perform at $t$ depends on what desires you have at $t$ or at times later than $t$. For suppose that, as a child, you wanted to devote some of your adulthood to a career in espionage, but that you no longer have this desire and will never reacquire it no matter what you do. Surely, your merely past desire does not currently give you any reason to do things that would promote your becoming a spy. Thus, non-concurrentist Humeanism explains your reasons to perform a given action in terms of the satisfaction of your present or future desires.

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141 Even Schroeder’s example of an action that promotes every possible desire fails: an agent who desires to have many false beliefs could not promote the satisfaction of this desire by believing things only if they are true.

142 Shafer-Landau (2012) also argues that Overdetermination is false.

143 Sobel (2011). Heathwood (2011) argues that many of the arguments commonly given for Humeanism only support concurrentist versions of the view. It is beyond the scope of this paper to address the relative merits of concurrentist and non-concurrentist Humeanism.

144 Sobel (2011), pp. 74-75. In Section 3.4.3, I briefly address the possibility of a Humean theory that includes past desires.

145 There are cases in which whether you do $A$ at $t$ affects what desires you have at times later than $t$. These cases raise complications concerning the formulation of non-concurrentist Humeanism that have not been discussed in the literature. For example, if I will desire $p$ if and only if I do $A$ at $t$, and my doing $A$ at $t$ would promote $p$, does non-
On the non-concurrentist Humean view sketched by Sobel, there is a reason for you to do $A$ at $t$ if and only if either (i) your doing $A$ at $t$ would promote the satisfaction of some desire you have at $t$ or (ii) for some time $t^*$ later than $t$, your doing $A$ at $t$ would promote your doing something at $t^*$ that there is a reason for you to do at $t^*$. The second disjunct is a “Reasons Transfer Principle” that allows your future desires to affect what you currently have reason to do via their influence on what you will have reasons to do in the future.\footnote{Sobel (2011). I am simplifying: Sobel appeals instead to the desires that you would have with full information and after ideal procedural deliberation.} Alternatively, one could formulate non-concurrentist Humeanism in such a way that your future desires \emph{directly} affect what you currently have reason to do: there is a reason for you to do $A$ at $t$ if and only if your doing $A$ at $t$ would promote the satisfaction of some desire that you have at $t$ or at some time $t^*$ later than $t$.

Whichever formulation of non-concurrentist Humeanism we go for, if the concurrence requirement is lifted, then Moral and Prudent can do what the New Humeans want only if they are also given a non-concurrentist interpretation: they must be read as saying that for any possible agent $S$, action $A$, and time $t$, if $S$ is morally required to do $A$ at $t$ or it would be prudent for $S$ to do $A$ at $t$, then $S$ has at least one desire at $t$ or at a time $t^*$ later than $t$ whose satisfaction would be promoted by $S$'s doing $A$ at $t$.

It is easy to extend the case of Sarah to show that Moral is false even when given a non-concurrentist reading. Suppose that Sarah will die tomorrow, and that whether or not she presses the button, the only intrinsic desires that she will acquire between now and then will be ones like the desires she now has—desires for or against certain sensory experiences.\footnote{Thus, we are supposing that whether or not she presses the button, Sarah will not in fact take the pill.} Clearly, this case could be fleshed out in such a way that her refraining from pressing the button would not promote any of her future desires. For example, suppose that whether or not she presses the button, an hour from now, she will acquire a desire to feel warmer. Whether she will be able to adjust the temperature is not affected by whether she presses the button now, so refraining from pressing it would not promote the satisfaction of this future desire. (We can assume that the authorities will never know that she

\textsuperscript{146} Sobel (2011). I am simplifying: Sobel appeals instead to the desires that you would have with full information and after ideal procedural deliberation.

\textsuperscript{147} Thus, we are supposing that whether or not she presses the button, Sarah will not in fact take the pill.
triggered the explosion.) Thus, Moral is false even when given a non-concurrentist reading: non-concurrentist Humeanism contradicts Moral Rationalism.

We cannot flesh out the case of Sarah to show that Prudent is false even on a non-concurrentist reading of it, however. I stipulated that if Sarah were to take the pill, she would reacquire her normal profile of desires (including a desire to play the piano) and would play the piano. The point of this was to make it completely obvious that, even if desire satisfactionism is the correct theory of welfare, her taking the pill could lead to an increase in her well-being. Thus, in the case as I have described it, her taking the pill would promote the satisfaction of a future desire—namely, a desire to play the piano. It therefore cannot be a counterexample to the non-concurrentist version of Prudent.

These considerations seem to reveal a general problem for any attempt to give a counterexample to this version of Prudent. Suppose that desire satisfactionism is the correct theory of well-being. Then it seems that, although S’s doing A at t can lead to an increase in S’s well-being without promoting the satisfaction of any of the desires that S has at t, it cannot lead to such an increase without promoting the satisfaction of some desire that S has at a time later than t. If this is correct, then there cannot be a counterexample to the non-concurrentist version of Prudent if desire satisfactionism is true.

The foregoing line of reasoning is not correct, though. Your level of welfare at a time is fixed by the facts about how basically good or bad for you at that time all of the things that are good or bad for you are. One way for your welfare to increase is for there to come to be even more things that are basically good for you. If desire satisfactionism is correct, then this can happen only if you come to have more satisfied desires. However, another way for your welfare to increase is for the things that are already basically good for you to become even more basically good for you. According to desire satisfactionism, the only way this can happen is if some of your already-satisfied desires

\[148\] Something’s basic goodness for you is that part of its goodness for you that does not derive from the goodness for you of some other thing. In calculating your welfare at a time, we should count only how basically good or bad things are for you at that time: if we also counted how derivatively good or bad for you they are at that time, we would be double-counting. Many philosophers refer to basic goodness as ‘intrinsic’ goodness, but this creates the misleading implication that it is a conceptual truth that how basically good something is for you supervenes on its intrinsic features.

\[149\] This is not the controversial view that your welfare at a time is fixed by how basically good and bad for you all of the states of affairs that obtain at that time are. It is the analytic claim that your welfare at a time is fixed by how basically good for you at that time all of the states of affairs that obtain at any time are. Thus, it is compatible with the view, endorsed by Bruckner (2013) and Dorsey (2013), that a future state of affairs can be basically good for you now because you desire it now.
become more intense while still remaining satisfied.\(^{150}\) For desire satisfactionism says that the satisfaction (frustration) of one of your desires is basically good (bad) for you in proportion to how intense the desire is. Furthermore, there are two other ways for your welfare to increase: there could come to be fewer things that are basically bad for you, or those things that are already basically bad for you can become less basically bad for you. If desire satisfactionism is true, these possibilities are realized when you cease to have certain frustrated desires or when your frustrated desires become less intense, respectively.\(^{151}\) What this shows is that, even if desire satisfactionism is correct, from the fact that \(S’s\) doing \(A\) at \(t_1\) would result in \(S’s\) having higher welfare at \(t_2\) than at \(t_1\), it does not follow that \(S’s\) doing \(A\) at \(t_1\) would promote the satisfaction of some desire that \(S\) either has at \(t_1\) or will have at \(t_2\).

This means that there can be a counterexample to the non-concurrentist version of Prudent even if desire satisfactionism is true. We need only imagine a case in which the only effect a given action would have on an agent’s desires is to either increase the intensity of one of his already-satisfied desires, to decrease the intensity of one of his already-frustrated desires, or to altogether extinguish one of his already-frustrated desires.

Let us revisit Sarah but modify what we stipulate about her in the following crucial respects:

As before, most of Sarah’s desires have been eliminated. She does not have any desires about her desires or any desires about her welfare. Thus, she does not want her welfare to increase. Nor does she want her satisfied desires to become more intense. Moreover, she does not have a desire to experience greater quantities or intensities of pleasure than she is actually experiencing. This time, however, she retains her desire to play the piano. (She doesn’t desire to play it extraordinarily well. She merely desires to play it well enough.) She is playing the piano at her usual level of excellence and mildly enjoying this. If she were to force a smile, this would increase the intensity of her already-satisfied desire to be playing the piano, increase

\(^{150}\) The satisfaction of a desire does not imply its extinction. You can retain a desire even after it is satisfied, as when you continue to desire to be playing tennis after you have begun to play it.

\(^{151}\) According to desire satisfactionism, when a frustrated desire of yours becomes satisfied, there is both a decrease in the number of things that are basically bad for you and an increase in the number of things that are basically good for you.
her enjoyment, increase the skillfulness of her playing, and make her happier. However, it would not give her any new desires: she would have just the same desires in the future as she will have if she doesn’t do this. Sarah is going to die a few minutes from now, and whether or not she forces a smile now, she will not have any desires between now and then whose satisfaction would be promoted by her forcing a smile.

On any minimally plausible theory of welfare, this is a case in which an agent $S$’s performing an action $A$ at time $t$ would result in an increase in $S$’s welfare. According to hedonism, for example, Sarah would increase her welfare if she forced a smile because this would increase her enjoyment. According to perfectionism, this action would increase her welfare because it would increase the skillfulness of her playing and thus the extent to which she is exercising distinctively human capacities or exhibiting distinctively human virtues. According to the view that happiness is the only basic good, her welfare would increase because she would be happier. And importantly for our purposes, according to desire satisfactionism, her welfare would increase because one of her already-satisfied desires would become more intense (and would thus become even better for her than it is now).\textsuperscript{152}

Furthermore, this is a case in which $S$’s doing $A$ at $t$ would not promote the satisfaction of any desire that $S$ has at $t$ or will have at a time later than $t$. At no time does Sarah have desires about her welfare or her desires, so neither the intensification of her desire to play the piano nor her increase in welfare satisfies any of her desires. Any desire of hers that would be satisfied if she forced a smile is already satisfied now: if we imagine that she would want to be feeling enjoyment after she forced a smile, we can equally imagine that she already has this desire now—a desire that is already satisfied, given that she is already enjoying herself. Thus, forcing a smile would not promote the satisfaction of any of her desires: it would not make the satisfaction of any of the desires that she has now or in the future more probable.

\textsuperscript{152} This assumes proportionalism about the basic goodness of desire satisfactions: if a desire satisfaction is basically good for you, it is basically good for you in proportion to how intense the desire is. Given that Schroeder rejects proportionalism about the weight of reasons (i.e., the view that the strength of a reason is proportional to the intensity of the desire that grounds it), he might be tempted to reject proportionalism about the basic goodness of desire satisfactions as well. But no one has ever developed a non-proportionalist version of desire satisfactionism. I leave it open whether this can plausibly be done.
Thus, this is a case in which S’s doing A at t would not promote the satisfaction of any desire that S has at t or at a time later than t—even though S’s doing A at t would increase her welfare, and would therefore be prudent. So this is a counterexample to the non-concurrentist version of Prudent: non-concurrentist Humeanism contradicts Prudential Rationalism.

Notice that although Sarah’s forcing a smile would not promote the satisfaction of any of her desires, there is some quantity of desire satisfaction that her forcing a smile would promote her getting—where desire satisfaction is the stuff that your satisfied desires give you in quantities proportional to their intensities. Consider a variant on Humeanism that is formulated in terms of getting desire satisfaction (whether from a desire that is already satisfied or not) rather than in terms of satisfying one of your desires. My case would not show that the non-concurrentist version of this variant cannot accommodate Prudential Rationalism, since the view would say that there is a reason for Sarah to force a smile. Indeed, it is plausible that one could formulate the non-concurrentist version of this variant in such a way that it accommodates Prudential Rationalism if desire satisfactionism is the correct theory of welfare.\(^{153}\)

It is not clear whether this variant is consistent with the spirit of the Humean theory. On the one hand, it seems closer in spirit to extant Humean theories than it is to objective theories of reasons (e.g., those that explain your reason to perform an action by appealing to the goodness of the outcome that your action would promote). On the other hand, if the basic idea behind Humean theories is that there is a reason for you to do something just in case it would help you get something you want (or will want), then the variant seems not to qualify. As Sarah shows, an action can help you get a particular quantity of desire satisfaction without helping you get anything you want, simply by making you want something you already have even more than you want it now. The variant says that, even though Sarah has no desire for more desire satisfaction and will not have any such desire, there is a reason for her to force a smile because there is some quantity of desire satisfaction that this would promote. I can imagine someone endorsing the variant for objectivist reasons (e.g., that the getting of desire satisfaction is good and that there is a reason for you to do what would promote good outcomes).

\(^{153}\) Since one way to increase your welfare if desire satisfactionism is true is to cause yourself to lose a currently frustrated desire, the variant must be formulated not merely in terms of promoting the getting of desire satisfaction but also in terms of opposing (i.e., making less likely) the getting of desire frustration.
I will not take a stand on how large a departure the variant represents from Humeanism or on whether Humeans should be willing to adopt it. I will also leave it open how precisely the variant should be formulated. Suffice it to say that if non-concurrentist Humeans switched to this variant, and if desire satisfactionism is the correct theory of welfare, then it is plausible that they could accommodate Prudential Rationalism.\footnote{154}

It must be emphasized that the non-concurrentist version of this variant cannot accommodate Moral Rationalism. The extension of the case of Sarah that I gave to show the incompatibility of non-concurrentist Humeanism with Moral Rationalism could be amended with the stipulation that Sarah’s refraining from pressing the button would not intensify any of her present or future desires. Since her doing this would not promote the satisfaction of any of her present or future desires either, this would ensure that there is no quantity of desire satisfaction that her doing this would promote her getting. The fact that we could add the same stipulation to the original case of Sarah shows that the concurrentist version of the variant cannot accommodate either Moral or Prudential Rationalism.\footnote{155, 156}

I have argued that non-concurrentist Humeanism contradicts Moral and Prudential Rationalism (though a variant on it may accommodate Prudential Rationalism). But non-concurrentist Humeanism is the broadest version of the Humean theory of reasons.\footnote{157} Thus, notwithstanding the claims of the New Humeans, Humeanism is revisionary about moral and prudential reasons.

\footnote{154} I am treating the variant as a view that is similar to, but distinct from, Humeanism. One reason I am individuating the views in this way is that no Humean has considered putting his view in terms of the getting of desire satisfaction instead of the satisfaction of one’s desires. (Remember Schroeder’s account of what a reason is: “For $R$ to be a reason for $X$ to do $A$ is for there to be some $p$ such that $X$ has a desire whose object is $p$, and the truth of $R$ is part of what explains $X$’s doing $A$ promotes $p$” (2007, p. 59).) Another reason is that it makes the main thesis of my paper easier to state. If you think that the variant is consistent with the spirit of Humeanism, you should think of my paper as arguing that non-concurrentist Humeanism cannot accommodate Moral Rationalism but (plausibly) can accommodate Prudential Rationalism if desire satisfactionism is the correct theory of welfare.

\footnote{155} As I explained in a previous footnote, the variant would also say that there is a reason for $S$ to do $A$ if there is some quantity of desire frustration that $S$’s doing $A$ would oppose $S$’s getting. We could fill in the details of each of the cases to ensure that there is no quantity of desire frustration that either the morally required or the prudent action would oppose Sarah’s getting.

\footnote{156} If it is possible for an agent to bring about a large increase in her welfare by doing $A$ even though there is no quantity of desire satisfaction (frustration) that her doing $A$ would promote (oppose) her getting, then even the non-concurrentist version of the variant cannot accommodate Prudential Rationalism. As I explain in the Introduction, one of the arguments I give in Chapter 1 can be extended to show that this is possible.

\footnote{157} I follow Finlay and Schroeder (2012) in classifying theories as Humean only if they explain your reasons to perform a given action in terms of the desires that you actually have or will have if you perform the action, rather than (say) in terms
We do not need to consider whether any compelling reasons to believe Common Desires or Overdetermination might threaten to undermine this result. For although the initial example of Sarah did not show that the non-concurrentist versions of Prudent and Moral are false, it did show that Common Desires and Overdetermination are false. Common Desires and Overdetermination both imply that for any agent $S$, if $S$ is morally required to do $A$ at $t$ or it would be prudent for $S$ to do $A$ at $t$, then $S$’s doing $A$ at $t$ would promote the satisfaction of some desire that $S$ has at $t$. And the original case of Sarah is a counterexample to this claim.

3.4 Objections and Replies

3.4.1 Lurking Desires

You might worry that I have misdescribed an agent most of whose desires are merely masked (or otherwise lurking in the background) as an agent who altogether lacks these desires. This worry would be misplaced, however. I have not tried to argue that any actual agents lack certain desires on the grounds that they lack the typical behavioral manifestations of these desires. That would be a bad argument, since it would ignore the possibility that the desires are present but masked. Instead, I have stipulated that the agent I describe altogether lacks those desires because she lacks whatever the physiological bases of those desires are. (The view that desires are dispositions is neither here nor there: if they are dispositions of a certain kind, then the agent I describe has very few dispositions of that kind because she has the physiological bases for very few of them.)

3.4.2 Too Few Desires

The sheer paucity of Sarah’s desiderative profile might worry you. At times, she has so few desires that she outwardly resembles a catatonic person at a mental institution: if you asked her how her day was going, she would not even acknowledge you. Could she really be an agent?

of the desires that you would have if you were idealized in certain ways. Perhaps ideal desire views equally deserve the label ‘Humean’, but they raise separate issues that I cannot consider here.
This resemblance is merely superficial, however. If catatonic people are not agents, this is because they cannot act intentionally, not because there are simply very few things that they want to do. As I have emphasized, Sarah can act intentionally: she fiddled with the coffee machine until it made her coffee, and she did this in order to get coffee. It’s just that there are very few things she wants to do. She would not answer you merely because she does not want anything that would make her want to do this. If you convinced her that if she had a conversation with you, you would shut off the car alarm that she wants shut off, she would say, “Fine. How long do I have to keep this up?” The mere fact that she has only a handful of desires does not undermine her status as an agent.

I gave Sarah very few desires so that I could give a detailed explanation, for each of her desires, of why neither the prudent nor the morally required action would promote the satisfaction of that desire. I could have carefully given her more desires and repeated this procedure, but that would have been tedious. If the fact that Sarah has so few desires still worries you, I invite you to add more desires using the recipe that I have provided.

3.4.3 Past Desires

What if someone claimed that there is a reason for $S$ to do $A$ at $t$ if and only if $S$’s doing $A$ at $t$ would promote the satisfaction of some desire that $S$ has at any time—whether before $t$, at $t$, or after $t$? I agreed with Sobel that this view is implausible, but let me sketch what I would say to a New Humean who held it. The examples I have presented would not show that this temporally unrestricted Humean theory is incompatible with Moral and Prudential Rationalism, since I have supposed that Sarah had a normal profile of desires before the experiment (including a desire to act morally and a desire to act prudently). However, each example could be modified so that Sarah was just brought into existence with whatever profile of desires I describe her as having. Although I cannot give a full defense of this claim, I believe that all of the important features of my examples (including the fact that Sarah is an agent) would survive these modifications.

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158 I am not aware of anyone who endorses this view, but McDaniel and Bradley (2008, p. 291) give one reason to think that it less crazy than it seems.
Sharon Street has argued that ideally coherent eccentrics—possible agents with very unusual but ideally coherent desires or values—are more like alien visitors than like human beings, and that we should not fully trust our intuitions about what they have reason to do. Have I run afoul of her injunction? No, because my argument does not rely on any intuitions about any agents’ reasons for action. At no point do I appeal to the intuition that there is a reason for Sarah to refrain from pressing the button or to take the pill. Nowhere in this essay do I endorse common sense. I merely argue that the Humean theory of reasons is incompatible with it. For all that I have said, I am a traditional Humean who embraces the revisionary implications of the Humean theory. My arguments merely rely on claims about whether any of a given agent’s desires would be promoted by her performing a given action. The eccentricity of Sarah’s profile of desires does not make it more difficult to tell which, if any, of her desires would be promoted by her performing a given action.

Both children and some kinds of cognitively sophisticated animals look like counterexamples to this thesis. Both seem to be able to have and act for certain kinds of reasons, but because they are not in a position to be able to recognize or appreciate the force of moral reasons, there are grounds to doubt that moral reasons apply to them…. So this makes me suspect that the datum that moral reasons are reasons for anyone, no matter what they desire, is mis-described if interpreted as

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159 Street (2009).
160 In claiming that it would be morally wrong for Sarah to press the button, haven’t I committed myself to the thesis that there is a reason for her not to press it? No. Remember, I am assuming for the sake of simplicity that common sense is right about what is morally required and that it is conceptually possible for someone to be morally required to do something that there is no reason for him to do. My argument that Humeanism is revisionary about morality really only needs the claim that, according to common sense, it would be wrong for Sarah to press the button. No claims about Sarah’s reasons for action play any role in this argument.
entailing that they are reasons for anyone with reasons at all…. [T]he right aspiration for an account of moral reasons, at least, is not to explain reasons that are shared by anyone with reasons at all…, but to explain reasons that are shared by any moral agent…\(^{161}\)

On Schroeder’s new view, common sense is merely committed to the claim that for any possible moral agent \(S\) and action \(A\), if \(S\) is morally required to do \(A\), then there is a reason for \(S\) to do \(A\). Since the class of moral agents is a proper subset of the class of agents, the falsity of Moral does not show that Humeanism contradicts this claim. Schroeder is hopeful that Humeanism is compatible with this claim because he cautiously endorses a variant on Common Desires that is restricted to moral agents. That is, he is inclined to think that every possible moral agent has a certain set of desires, such that whenever he is morally required to perform an action, his performing it would promote the satisfaction of at least one of those desires. These desires are “essentially social” desires such as “a desire for esteem, love, approval, or even just a desire not to be despised.” Living up to other people’s legitimate expectations promotes the satisfaction of such desires, and one fails to live up to these expectations whenever one does something morally wrong. Therefore, any moral agent will be such that, if she is morally required to do \(A\), her doing \(A\) would promote the satisfaction of one of her essentially social desires. According to Schroeder, this is how the Humean can avoid revisionism about reasons to do what is morally required.\(^{162}\)

Schroeder evidently assumes that even an agent who is not a moral agent can be morally required to do something: otherwise, the weaker view that he now attributes to common sense would not differ from Moral Rationalism. He claims that a moral agent is one who is “able to recognize and appreciate the force of moral reasons,” but the only clue he gives us about what this ability amounts to is that young children and animals lack it, whereas normal adults possess it. Clearly, however, he thinks that common sense is merely committed to the view that any possible agent who is able to do this (i.e., any moral agent) always has a reason to act morally. And he claims that Humeanism is compatible with this view because anyone who is able to do this has essentially social desires, and acting morally always promotes the satisfaction of at least one such desire.

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\(^{161}\) Schroeder (2012), p. 469.

\(^{162}\) Schroeder (2012), pp. 469-70.
We would need more details to determine whether Humeanism is compatible with the weaker claim that Schroeder now attributes to common sense: that there is always a reason for any moral agent to do what is morally required. Some philosophers claim that young children and animals are not morally responsible because they are not “moral agents,” where moral agents are those who are “appropriately responsive to moral demands” and who possess an “understanding and appreciation of moral reasons.” However, the abilities that they claim to be constitutive of moral agency do not require the possession of certain desires. Schroeder must tell us how he is conceiving of the ability to recognize and appreciate the force of moral reasons, and he must explain why this ability, unlike those invoked using very similar terminology in discussions of moral responsibility, can only be possessed by agents with essentially social desires. Moreover, he must make it credible that, whenever a moral agent is morally required to do something, his doing it would promote the satisfaction of some such desire. On the face of it, this is false, since a moral agent might be morally required to do something that no one else will know him to have done, or something that his community regards as morally wrong and expects him not to do.

However, even if Schroeder’s proposal can show Humeanism to be compatible with this alleged commitment of common sense, it cannot show that the Humean theory is not revisionary about moral reasons. At best, the proposal shows that according to Humeanism, those agents for whom there are reasons to act morally comprise a proper subset of all agents, membership in which requires the possession of desires with certain contents. But as I said at the beginning, this is what the traditional Humeans thought. As I will now argue, the commonsensical view about morality that the New Humeans really need to accommodate is, roughly, that any agent (or perhaps any moral agent) has a reason to do what is morally required—no matter what he desires. What Schroeder is now saying is that Humeanism can yield the view that if you are a moral agent, then there is a reason for you to act morally because your status as a moral agent implies that you care about things such as other people’s esteem or approval. This is a view on which, if you did not care about such things, there would sometimes be no reasons for you to be moral. But that is not even an approximation of

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163 Fischer and Ravizza (1999), p. 76.
164 For example, weak reactivity to reasons, the motivational capacity that Fischer and Ravizza claim to be necessary for moral responsibility for a given action, is not something that you can lack simply by lacking certain desires: it is rather a “general capacity” of the mechanism that produces the action—a capacity that you count as possessing just in case there is some nomologically possible world (perhaps one in which you have desires you actually lack) in which that mechanism issues in motivation and action in accordance with the reasons that you recognize (1999, pp. 69-76). The other capacities that Fischer and Ravizza deem necessary for moral responsibility are similar in not requiring the possession of any particular desires.
the commonsensical view. Rather, it is just the kind of revisionary view that the traditional Humeans embraced and that the New Humeans wanted to avoid. For even if common sense admits that only a proper subset of all agents always have reasons to act morally, it denies that membership in the relevant subset is contingent on the possession of certain desires. Although there might be some implicit restriction on the scope of ‘anyone’ as it occurs in this slogan, the commonsensical view that the New Humeans want to accommodate is, as Schroeder himself puts it, that “moral reasons are reasons for anyone, no matter what they desire.” So Schroeder appears to have given up the game: he has become a sort of traditional Humean.

To see that common sense denies that whether an agent always has reasons to act morally is contingent on whether he has desires with certain contents, notice that, even if it is unclear whether Sarah is a moral agent and whether common sense concedes that only moral agents always have reasons to act morally, it is clear that common sense says that anything that Sarah is morally required to do is something that there is a reason for her to do. After all, her only abnormality is a reversible dearth of desires. Although she does not care about other people’s welfare or about doing the right thing, she is not constitutionally incapable of caring about such things: she can come to care about them in the normal way that young children come to care about them as they develop. Since her moral understanding and all of her basic mental machinery has been left intact, Sarah is not relevantly different from a cognitively normal criminal who no longer cares about other people’s interests (though he could) and who, additionally, no longer cares what other people think about him or how they feel about him. Common sense would say that there is always a reason even for such a criminal to do what he is morally required to do: it would say, for example, that the fact that pressing the button would kill many innocent people is a reason for him not to press it. It would therefore also say that there is always a reason for Sarah to do what she is morally required to do. However, Sarah surely does not possess any desires in virtue of which there is always a reason for her to act morally. Her only desires are desires to be relieved of an itch, to see an explosion on the screen, and the like, and these are surely not desires without which an agent does not always have a reason to act morally. This

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165 There is some evidence that common sense does not admit this and really is committed to Moral Rationalism. For example, even though young children are paradigmatically not moral agents, it seems that common sense would say that there is always a reason for any young child to refrain from killing all of her classmates. This is not merely evidence that common sense thinks that it would be bad for any young child to kill all of her classmates, for there is no similar temptation to claim that common sense would say that there is always a reason for any volcano not to erupt when there are children around it. However, I will not rely on these considerations in what follows.
166 Schroeder (2012), p. 469.
167 Whether common sense regards Sarah as blameworthy for her morally wrong acts is another matter.
shows that even if common sense concedes that only some agents are such that there are always reasons for them to act morally, it denies that those agents must have desires with certain contents.

Thus, there is no way that Schroeder’s proposal could show that the Humean theory is non-revisionary when it comes to moral reasons. Even if it works as it is supposed to, it will imply that only a proper subset of all agents have reasons to be moral and that membership in this subset is contingent on the possession of desires with certain contents. As the case of Sarah shows, whether or not the first of these two implications is revisionary, their conjunction certainly is.168

3.5 Conclusion

The Humean theory of reasons has traditionally been thought to be incompatible with Moral and Prudential Rationalism, the view that for any possible agent S and action A, if S is morally required to do A or it would be prudent for S to do A, then there is a reason for S to do A. The distinctive ambition of the New Humeans is to argue that this supposed incompatibility is illusory. They endorse Moral and Prudent, which say that for possible agent S and action A, if S is morally required to do A or it would be prudent for S to do A, then S’s doing A would promote the satisfaction of one of S’s desires. They also give us two explanations of why Moral and Prudent might be true: perhaps all possible agents share certain desires and any prudent or morally required action would promote the satisfaction of at least one of them (Common Desires), or perhaps any such action would promote the satisfaction of any desire (Overdetermination). If Moral and Prudent are true, then the New Humeans are right: the Humean theory of reasons is compatible with Moral and Prudential Rationalism. But if either Moral or Prudent is false, then the New Humeans are wrong.

I have argued that Moral and Prudent are both false, and that Humeanism is therefore revisionary: it must deny Moral and Prudential Rationalism.169 In arguing that Moral and Prudent are false, I have also shown that Common Desires and Overdetermination are false. I have not claimed that the

168 If Schroeder made a similar proposal in the prudential case, my response would parallel the one I have given in this section.
169 To be sure, because the New Humeans endorse such a weak conception of promotion, their view is less revisionary than one might have expected: some agents will turn out always to have reason to act morally or prudently even though so acting is not always an effective means to the satisfaction of their desires.
Humean theory’s revisionism warrants rejecting the theory, however: I have not endorsed Moral or Prudential Rationalism and I have remained neutral on the truth of Humeanism.

I have also argued that, plausibly, the non-concurrentist version of a variant on Humeanism that is formulated in terms the getting of desire satisfaction rather than the satisfaction of one’s desires could accommodate Prudential Rationalism. However, I have remained neutral on whether this variant is consistent with the spirit of the Humean theory. I have also explained that the concurrentist version of this variant cannot accommodate Prudential Rationalism and that no version of it (concurrentist or not) can accommodate Moral Rationalism.

Isn’t the falsity of Moral and Prudent and the incompatibility of Humeanism with Moral and Prudential Rationalism old news? It used to be. Any of the traditional Humeans (or anti-Humeans) would have told you that the Humean theory implies that there is sometimes no reason for some possible agents to act prudently or morally. In showing that Moral and Prudent are false, I haven’t shown anything that they didn’t already believe. But the falsity of Moral and Prudent is something that they did not carefully argue for, partly because they regarded it as obvious and partly because they did not imagine that the promotion relation might be as weak as the New Humeans say it is. Moreover, since Common Desires and Overdetermination are such recent proposals, the traditional Humeans could not have explained why these hypotheses cannot show that Humeanism is not revisionary. And unfortunately, thanks to the efforts of the New Humeans, the falsity of Moral and Prudent isn’t old news anymore. Many philosophers now believe that we can enjoy the advantages of accepting Humeanism without paying some of the costs that were traditionally associated with the view. More specifically, they think that because Common Desires or Overdetermination (and thus Moral and Prudent) might turn out to be true, there is a chance that we can be Humeans without rejecting Moral or Prudential Rationalism. I have shown that they are mistaken. The traditional Humeans were right about the implications of their view: you cannot accept it without biting the Humean bullets.

Although he has other objections to Schroeder’s version of Humeanism, Alex Gregory has been persuaded that Moral is true because Overdetermination is true. He says that Schroeder’s view “implies that any arbitrary desire… can generate a reason not to murder people” and that “[s]ince everyone has some such arbitrary desire, everyone has a reason not to murder anyone: the reason not to murder is agent-neutral” (2009, p. 255).
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