

Chapter 20

Does Fairness Require a Multidimensional Approach?

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Abstract

What is in itself good for you, according to the argument of this chapter, is getting or achieving things that are objectively worthwhile, these being items on an objective list. Although it would be desirable to have a unified explanation of what belongs on the list, for now we rely on intuition. The chapter surveys and finds inadequate a number of alternative accounts of well-being, mainly on the ground that they conflict with the common-sense claims that enjoyment (feeling good) is a significant component of well-being—an entry on the objective list—and that there are additional intrinsic goods besides enjoyment. Since there are plural goods, we are stuck with multidimensional assessment, and with the difficulties of aggregation that involves.

Keywords

objective list views, desire satisfactionism, hedonism, perfectionism, hybrid views, well-being. Many theories of social justice hold that we have special obligations to improve the lot of those among us who are worse off. Any such theory needs a standard for determining who qualifies as worse off. Controversy swirls around the issue of how to specify the standard. Given a characterization of well-being, many issues arise concerning how best to measure it, but this chapter focuses on the characterization issue.

This problem of setting a standard interacts with another. Some possible standards provide administrable guidelines that enable us, with exactitude in theory and to some degree in practice, to detect who is actually better off, who worse off. For example, if the appropriate measure of a person's condition for distributive justice purposes is the degree to which she is

contented or satisfied with how her life as a whole is going, social science should be able to develop reliable instruments for measuring the individual's condition so understood (Lucas, chapter [14](#), this Handbook). If the appropriate measure of a person's condition is rather how good she feels, moment by moment, as she lives her life, then again figuring out how to apply this measure and assess each individual's condition looks to be a tractable social science project (Kahneman 1999; but see Feldman 2010). If the appropriate measure is instead the extent to which one's actual preferences regarding her life are satisfied, perhaps magnitudes of actual preference satisfaction can be detected and different persons' scores meaningfully compared (Bykvist, chapter [11](#), this Handbook).

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But many of us doubt the plausibility of these readily empirically measurable standards. A person might be subjectively satisfied with how her life is going, but just mistaken to be so satisfied. Having pleasant experiences or liking the experiences that one has looks to be a component of good, but not the entirety of it: things matter to us other than quality of experience. A person can be unfortunate in the preferences she develops, and it is counterintuitive to regard even the fullest satisfaction of these unfortunate preferences as a good life (good for the one who is living it).

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We should not rest content with a standard for assessing individual well-being just on the ground that it is readily and reliably measureable. This would be like assessing a manager's performance by the number of handshakes she makes per day, merely because this trivial aspect of performance can be precisely and objectively counted. We want instead to focus on what really matters, and then as a follow-up look for good proxy measures for what really matters, if it turns out that what matters is hard to assess.

This chapter surveys the major conceptions of the nature of well-being. An argument is advanced for the plausibility of a pluralistic objective list account, often dismissed as a nonstarter (Bradley 2009; Scanlon 1998). For reasons to be described shortly, I call this the bare objective list account (BOL). However, since we lack an index that would allow us to say, even roughly, given an individual's attainments along the plural dimensions of well-being, what amount of well-being overall she has, we seem to be stuck for practical purposes with an account with limited advice-giving power, either for public policy or for judgments about what kind of life it would be prudent for an individual to pursue. We have methods for aggregating scores of attainment of disparate types of goods into an overall classification of individuals as more or less advantaged depending on their aggregate score (Decancq and Lugo 2013; Chakravarty and Lugo, chapter 9, this Handbook). But we will end up with plural measures so long as there is no canonical unique assignment of weights in this aggregation exercise, and these may vary depending on further technical choices in the construction of the measure that involve normative issues. Moreover, a further source of disagreement arises from selecting what items go on the list of goods. We may be justified in believing that your well-being depends on your attainment of the things that are objectively worthwhile without yet knowing what exactly those things are.

Some might defend a proposed conception of well-being but not as a proposal about what ultimately matters. The idea is that when forging public policy we should be guided by social justice, and what we owe one another as a matter of social justice does not turn on deep and personal assessments of individual well-being (Rawls 1982, 1996, and 1999; Raz 1986, [chs. 5–6](#); Dworkin 2000, [ch. 1](#)). The question is how it is fair to treat one another. Answers might be conceived as alternatives to well-being, but could just as well be conceived as standards for assessing how individuals are faring for purposes of public policy choice. We might in this spirit

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propose a measure of resources, opportunities, and liberties. We might view preference or desire satisfaction in this same spirit, or a measure of the degree to which individuals are feeling good or bad. Let us say such proposals are suggesting standards of *fair well-being*, not ultimate well-being.

This chapter defends the appropriateness of seeking an ultimate well-being standard and not resting content with fair well-being. Any such defense will be tentative and provisional. The resolution of the issue, what standard for assessing people's condition is appropriate for purposes of a theory of social justice, depends not only on what is the best account of individual well-being, but also on further fundamental issues in the theory of what's morally right and just. Without claiming to resolve this large issue, I suggest reasons to think our best account of real well-being will always be the best account of fair well-being.

Here's a summary of the discussion to come: Section 1 describes and clarifies three accounts of well-being: desire satisfactionism, hedonism, and objective list. The section also describes what we seek in a theory of well-being. Section [20.2](#) introduces perfectionism, the type of objective theory of well-being that is by far the most developed and most popular on offer. Section [20.3](#) defends the bare objective list account by suggesting that judgments about what things are worthwhile in life that are strongly intuitive rule out its rivals. One's attitudes and opinions about what to seek in life do not determine what is worth seeking. There are several disparate goods that are worth seeking. The BOL advocate should acknowledge that her proposed account does not amount to a theory of well-being (but may be acceptable despite this lack). Section [20.3](#) also criticizes a partial theory, the organic unity proposal, that is somewhat akin to perfectionism. Section [20.4](#) introduces the idea of a hybrid account of well-being, which combines together elements of hedonism, desire satisfactionism, and the objective views. An

important hybrid view holds that to enhance an individual's life, a putative good must be both objectively valuable and subjectively affirmed in some way by that individual—desired or liked or judged valuable. A criticism of hybrid accounts is advanced.

Section [20.5](#) continues this discussion, by considering and rejecting the idea that nothing could be basically good for a person unless she would be motivated to seek it at least in ideal circumstances. Section [20.6](#) considers some sophisticated versions of desire satisfactionism and rehearses some objections against them. Section [20.7](#) explores the question, what difference would it make for appropriate public policy choice, if BOL is correct. Section [20.8](#) flags an alternative view, that for public policy purposes, the question, what in itself really makes a person's life go better or worse for that person is not relevant. Section [20.9](#) is a brief conclusion.

[20.1. Three Accounts of Well-Being](#)

What would make a person's life go, for that person, as well as possible? This is the idea of *welfare* or *well-being* or *self-interest*. The qualifier "for that person" marks the distinction between a life that goes well by being morally admirable or altruistically virtuous, and a life that goes well for the individual living it. The latter is the notion that we are trying to characterize. Another initial qualification is that we seek to identify what would, in itself, make a person's life go better. Some things are instrumentally useful to living well. Other things constitute living well. Again, the latter is our target. We are trying to characterize the idea of what, in itself, makes a person's life go better for that very person. Another distinction to keep in mind is between what is intrinsically and nonintrinsically good. What is intrinsically good is good independently of its relations to other things. If you think that eating popcorn is good noninstrumentally, but only if it is buttered, you hold that eating popcorn is not intrinsically good (but eating buttered popcorn might be just that).

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Another way to describe the target idea we are trying to characterize is to ask what a person should seek insofar as her aim is to be prudent. A prudent person seeks to do as well for herself as she can over her life as a whole. But what is it to “do as well for yourself as you can” at any time? This is the question, what is well-being?

Derek Parfit has written that there are three kinds of theory of well-being as just described: “On *Hedonistic Theories*, what would be best for someone is what would make his life happiest. On *Desire-Fulfillment Theories*, what would be best for someone is what, throughout his life, would best fulfill his desires. On *Objective List Theories*, certain things are good or bad for us, whether or not we want to have the good things, or to avoid the bad things” (Parfit 1984, appendix I). This taxonomy is flawed. This shows that the idea of something’s being objectively good for an individual is somewhat tricky.

Consider that Parfit’s theories overlap; they need not be competitors. Suppose that there is one item on the objective list, and it is happiness (feeling good). The objective list theory then just asserts that what is objectively good is happiness and happiness alone.

You might think that an objective welfare standard is one that admits of objective, empirical measurement. Spiritual progress is not objective in this sense, but regular weekly churchgoing is. This is not the contrast we seek. We shall suppose that the objectivity question is the question, roughly, whether there is a difference between something’s really being so and its seeming to us to be so. (On objective theories of value, see Hurka, chapter 13, this Handbook.) A putatively objective welfare standard is one that says that some specified things enhance the quality of the life of the individual who has or achieves them independently of whether or not that individual, or for that matter anyone else, desires or wants to have those things, or has any particular attitudes toward those things, or has any particular beliefs about the value of those

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things. A subjectivist about welfare then is someone who denies that anything is ever objectively valuable in this sense: She asserts that the objective list is empty, contains no items (Mackie 1977, [ch. 1](#)).

The hedonist asserts that the quality of your conscious experience, how things feel to you from the inside, determines whether your life goes well or badly. Notice that pleasure on this view can be good for you regardless of whether you want or desire to have pleasure, subjectively endorse pleasure as valuable, or harbor any other particular attitude toward getting pleasure. To render hedonism and the objective list account genuinely rival and opposed views, let's stipulate that the objective list view identifies the good life for a person with attainment of certain specified things (regardless of the person's attitudes, desires, or beliefs regarding the getting of these things) and adds that there is more than one item on this list.

For the hedonist, your occurrent feelings throughout life determine how well your life goes. A close cousin of a hedonistic account takes well-being to be happiness and happiness to be mainly constituted by emotional dispositions: a happy person is disposed to experience pleasure, not mind pain, not become irritated, be engaged in whatever she is doing, and so on (see Haybron 2008a, 2008b, and [chapter 12](#), this Handbook). The hedonist will respond skeptically: One could be strongly disposed as described but go through life never encountering situations that trigger the disposition to occurrent good feeling. According to hedonism, happiness as just characterized in dispositional terms is an instrumental, not an intrinsic, good.

The reader may feel that the distinctions between the three theories of good claimed to be distinct and opposed are fuzzy. Suppose some person desires to eat cheese. Why can't we say that satisfying this (or any other specific) desire is in itself good for that person, regardless of the person's opinions, attitudes, or desires toward satisfying that desire? After all, I can desire to eat

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cheese without desiring to satisfy my desire to eat cheese. To avoid these complications, we can clear the air by simply stipulating that according to the objective list account, desire satisfaction does not per se make your life go better rather than worse for you.

Some claim that desire satisfactionism and hedonism, but not the objective list account, merit the honorific label “theory.” The desire (or preference) satisfaction view purports to propose a test for deciding whether any candidate thing that you think might be per se good for a person, is so. The test is that the person in question desires that thing. Hedonism also proposes a test: something is good for you in the fundamental way just in case you enjoy it. In contrast, the objective list theory is just a list, with no explanation of what qualifies a putative good thing as really the sort of thing the attaining or getting of which per se enhances the quality of your life.

This contrast is thin. BOL also proposes a test for determining whether any candidate thing is really good for a person. If the thing is an item on the objective list, then obtaining it is good for a person, and if not, then not. BOL in itself includes no explanation of what makes it the case that the list contains the items it has and not other things. But equally, the desire satisfaction view as stated does not offer any explanation of what makes it the case that desire satisfaction alone makes one’s life go better for one, and hedonism offers no such explanation either.

Along with offering a justifying explanation of what makes something valuable, a theory of well-being should (1) advance a test for determining what is basically good for an individual (that is, what is noninstrumentally and intrinsically good), and (2) tell us how to determine the value of states of affairs or ways the world might be at particular times, for an individual, given the proposed test, and (3) tell us how to determine the overall value or well-being that an individual accrues over the individual’s complete lifetime given (1) and (2) (see Bradley 2009, ch. 1). A more comprehensive theory of well-being also enables us to compare the well-being of

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different individuals and determine who is better off and who worse off and by how much. One can see that a hedonistic theory looks to be feasible and simple: determine for each time of a person's life (or possible ways the life might go) what is the net balance of pleasure and pain for that person at that moment, and indicate that balance by a number, and sum the numbers for all the times of a person's life. If one's account of good is pluralistic, developing a theory may be a daunting task.

20.2. Perfectionism

Finding the bare objective list theory to be nothing but a list, one might seek some deeper account that explains and justifies what items belong on the list. The main deeper account that has been actually proposed goes by the name of "perfectionism" or "follow your nature" (Hurka 1993; Nussbaum 1990, 1992; Kraut 2007). This is actually a family of views, with ancient intellectual antecedents; the differences among them won't matter much for our purposes. The rough idea is that each type of being has a nature with essential properties, and the good for a being of the type is developing an exercising and perfecting these essential properties. For example, some think that the essential nature of human persons is a capacity for theoretical and practical reason, and the good for a human person is developing and exercising and perfecting one's theoretical and practical reason. It is supposed to be a merit of this sort of account that it can provide a framework for determining what is good for any type of animal or plant. Regarding humans, one might hold that there are many types of human person, with correspondingly different notions of what is good for the different types, or at the limit one might hold, with the cultural movement of romanticism in Europe and England starting in the late 18th century, that each human individual is unique and has a unique distinctive nature, unfolding and following which is the unique good for that individual.

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Perfectionism as described so far does not necessarily include a standard that enables measurement of the degree of perfection an individual attains. If you have 13 essential capacities, and you could develop in your life any of many different packages of different degrees of achievement of the various capacities, which packages would earn you a higher overall perfection score? One might accept the perfectionist explanatory account and remain skeptical regarding aggregation of disparate perfectionist achievements and measurement of overall perfection.

Perfectionism attracts objections. It is odd to hold that the nature of a being fixes what it would be good for it to get and do (Kraut 2007). It would be good for me if I could learn quantum physics, despite the fact that this achievement is beyond my natural abilities. If I could be granted the benefit of cognitive enhancement that would enable me to learn quantum physics, that would per se improve my life. But then it is far from clear why the same isn't true of a dog or a cat or a crocodile. One might worry that some changes in a being would make it a different entity, so the changes could not count as improvements in its welfare. If you magically transformed me into a dragon, I would cease to exist, so the dragon's welfare would not accrue to *me*. But there is no such problem in imagining (for example) a cat being given some fancy genetic therapy that would improve its cognitive power without rendering it no longer the same individual cat. So imagining the cat's life being improved by its learning physics is coherent even if far-fetched.

Sometimes the nature of a being includes features that do not so much limit what it can achieve as set conditions of a sort that determine what qualifies as achievement of that sort for that being. It would be a great athletic achievement for me if I could jump high and eat leaves growing far from the ground; for a giraffe, this is a trivial feat.

It remains the case that one cannot infer what is good for a being from a statement of its natural capacities. Humans have natural capacities for violent aggression and bullying and some natural proclivities toward these traits. There is nothing in itself good in developing and exercising such capacities. If you say, what is good for a being is developing and exercising its valuable natural capacities, your claim presupposes some further unspecified account of what is valuable (good) and what is not.

There might be a limited perfectionist account that does not claim to provide a unified explanation of what makes anything good for a person, but offers to unify some categories of goods under an explanation for that class of goods. Such an account would go beyond BOL to some degree. Some criticism of such a limited “organic unity” approach to an explanatory theory of objective value occurs in the next section of this chapter.

20.3. The Bare Objective List Vindicated?

Controversy about the nature of the good is endemic. I shall suggest some adequacy conditions for any proposed account of the good (that is, welfare or well-being). If an account fails to satisfy one or more of the conditions, that account, I submit, is counterintuitive, and very likely false.

The adequacy conditions advanced here proceed from two assumptions. One is that what makes something good for a person is objectively rather than subjectively determined. The second assumption is that there are plural basic goods and no overarching structure unifying them (so far as we can discern). But these assumptions are just what is in dispute, so how can we be making any progress? The suggestion is that when one considers particular candidate basic goods, subjectivism and monism drive one to verdicts one cannot accept. The intuitive momentum thus generated for objectivism and pluralism is a strong wave.

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There is a further agenda implicit in the adequacy conditions proposed. The adequacy conditions proposed support not merely the objective list view, but more specifically the bare objective list view (BOL). BOL is often dismissed on the ground that our normative theory of welfare must include an explanatory justification of its core elements. Defending BOL, I submit that being accompanied by an explanatory justification is a desideratum, something it would be nice to have, but not an adequacy condition on a correct account. A satisfying fancy explanatory account is not intellectually satisfactory if the account excludes candidate goods that need to be included.

1. **The cheeseburger test.** A satisfactory theory of the good must be compatible with the fact that simple ordinary pleasures of daily life such as eating a cheeseburger (or veggie burger) and watching a colorful sunset significantly enhance the quality of life of those who have these experiences.

2. **The duck test.** Satisfying such desires as having a whim to quash a duck with a big rock (Kraut 1994) or wanting to collect a large store of belly-button lint (Brink 2007) or seeking to count the blades of grass on courthouse lawns (Rawls 1999) does not enhance the quality of life of the person who has these desires. It's not just that satisfaction of such desires is only very slightly good; they aren't valuable at all.

3. **The pain test.** Experiencing a severe pain such as what standardly occurs when one places one's hand on a hot griddle is a significant bad, and chronic severe pain can wreck one's life.

4. **The friendship test.** Having a good friend and being a loyal friend can in themselves enhance the quality of one's life even if these achievements bring about zero

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pleasure for oneself. Moreover, even if one has no desire for friendship, and no belief that it is worthwhile, if one really sustains a good friendship over a significant time, that in itself makes one's life go better, compared to the alternative state of affairs in which one's life contains no such friendship.

The entities claimed to be goods and bads according to the tests are common as rain, and judgment about classifying them is not seriously controversial. Nor should we change our prereflective convictions on these points after further reflection. So the fact that prominent theories of welfare fail the tests, or struggle inconclusively to pass them, constitutes a strong reason to reject them. Another possible response is to revise a challenged theory so that the revised doctrine accommodates the concern; we examine several responses of this type in later sections of this chapter. My general sense is that the revisions introduce further problematic elements into the theories or fail to meet the initial concerns or exhibit both problems together.

Perfectionism fails the cheeseburger test. Eating a cheeseburger calls on no special skills or talents and does not develop in any way one's potential for the excellences of achievement in art, science, mathematics, administration, and so on that constitute the perfection of the special rational nature of human persons. Simple pleasures do not qualify as goods, and certainly not as significant goods, according to perfectionism.

In the face of this objection to perfectionism, one possible response would be to retreat to the position that the perfectionist account provides a unifying explanation of some but not all basic goods for human persons. But having accepted pluralism by this response, the perfectionist has no principled ground for rejecting further candidate goods that cannot be fit into her perfectionist schema from the list of objective goods.

The desire satisfaction theory (also known as preferentialism) fails the duck test.

Someone might form a desire to squash a duck with a rock, and if so, sheer satisfaction of the desire makes one's life go better according to this theory of good. This is implausible. Notice that the satisfaction of desire need not be experienced as satisfying, pleasurable. If squashing the duck gives one a thrill of pleasure, then there is another possible good in the picture, and one who accepts that pleasure is per se good might discern an enhancement of the quality of life in the squashing of the duck. ("Might discern," because a hedonistic view of good or of a component of good might deny that sadistic pleasure is in itself good.) The desire satisfaction theory is committed to the claim that if one has a desire of this sort and the desire is barely satisfied, without being accompanied by further goods such as enjoyment, one's life per se goes better for one. We should be dubious of this claim. Further discussion of the desire (preference) satisfaction account is resumed in section [20.6](#) of this chapter. The desire satisfaction theory admits of fancy variations, which attract further objections.

Perfectionism fails the pain test for roughly the same reason it fails the cheeseburger test. Experiencing pain does not in itself thwart the flowering of one's natural capacities any more than experiencing pleasure advances such flowering. If pain does not hinder one from achieving the excellences that according to perfectionism constitute human good, there does not seem to be anything bad in it from this standpoint. Or suppose that an extended bout of pain would have a slightly positive effect on one's lifetime perfection score, somehow bringing it about that some slight achievement one attains is just ever so slightly better. Perfectionism cannot acknowledge that this tiny boost in perfection is doubtless more than offset by the badness of the large pain that facilitated it.

The desire satisfaction view also seems to fail the cheeseburger and the pain tests. One might lack any basic desire to eat a cheeseburger or gain cheeseburger-type pleasure and might also lack any desire to avoid pain. Nonetheless, if one really gets the enjoyment and avoids the pain, one's life thereby goes better, according to any version of BOL that specifies, as any plausible version will, that pleasure is on the objective list of goods and pain on the objective list of bads.

The appearance that desire satisfactionism flunks the cheeseburger and pain test might be misleading. What seems so might not be so. This depends on the correct way to conceive pleasure and pain. I have been so far supposing they are felt qualities of sensation. If so, the objections stick. On an alternative understanding, pains are disliked sensations, ones that one basically desires not to have, and pleasures are liked sensations, ones that one basically desires to have (Parfit 1984; for criticism, see Crisp 2006a and 2006b). On this conception, hedonism becomes a subjective view. The objections that hedonism will attract then shift: hedonism on the subjective interpretation becomes a dogmatically narrow form of desire satisfactionism. If attitudes pro and con some types of experience make it the case that they are basically good or bad for one, why cannot attitudes toward other types of thing by the same token make it the case that *they* are basically good or bad for one?

The disagreement regarding the nature of pleasure and pain (enjoyment and suffering) introduces some verbal complexity into the deployment of the four adequacy condition tests. But the basic objections against subjectivism and monism stay the same. However one conceives of pleasure and pain, both hedonism and desire satisfactionism are vulnerable to strong objections encapsulated in the tests.

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Hedonism fails the friendship test, however one conceives of pleasure and pain. If one has a good, long-lasting friendship, one gains a significant good, and one's life goes better by virtue of that fact. Friendships normally are pleasurable for all involved parties, but this is not necessarily so. Some friends are just irritating, and some friendships are a pain, pure and simple. Or even if it is a necessary condition of friendships being per se good that it must also be instrumentally good in some way, note that friendship could contribute to other worthwhile goods other than enjoyment and pain avoidance. One's joyless friendship with Fred might enhance his artistic achievement, and thus pass the condition just suggested, without being accompanied by any enjoyment at all. Failure to register the intrinsic value of friendship vitiates any hedonistic or quality of experience theory of good.

Failing to pass the friendship test is the tip of an iceberg of a problem with hedonism.

Whereas it is overwhelmingly plausible that pleasure (and avoidance of pain) is one good thing, it is also overwhelmingly plausible that there are other intrinsic goods besides pleasure (even if pleasure is broadly understood so the experience of watching an interesting play can count as enjoyment). So pleasure is not *the* good but just *a* good.

This cursory discussion at least makes a case for the position that all extant theories of good except the bare objective list theory fail one or more of the adequacy conditions for an acceptable account. However, adherents of the views that the proposed conditions sweep off the table can challenge one or more of the conditions. The argument supplied is not anything close to a knockdown demonstration. All I hope to have done is to make a preliminary case for a view that many economists and other social scientists might be inclined to dismiss out of hand.

It would be nice to have a deeper explanation of what makes good things good, but the main extant proposal under the heading of an objective account is perfectionism, or follow your

nature, and this turns out to be a bellyflop. Perhaps there is no deep explanation that reveals why such disparate things as simple pleasure, friendship, sports accomplishments such as running a fast mile, and scientific discovery are in themselves valuable and enhance the life of the person who gets or achieves any of them. If there is such an explanation, we surely do not know what it is.

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Perfectionism is not the only possible unifying justifying explanation of what items belong on the objective list. Thomas Hurka suggests an interesting partial account: organic unity (Hurka 2006 and chapter 13, this Handbook). On this account, achievement and knowledge are the main first-order goods. In achievement, one pursues an aim and changes the world so the world fulfills one's aim. In knowledge, one has a belief and one's belief represents the world in a way that corresponds to how the world actually is. Both involve a mind-world matching. Neither counts as valuable unless obtained nonaccidentally. The value of achievement and knowledge is partially fixed by their formal features. A complex achievement requires other achievements as means, and these may be nested: goals needed for further goals needed for an ultimate goal. The more subgoals, the greater the achievement. A similar structure holds for knowledge: knowledge is more valuable when it is more systematic, when one knows one truth that explains many other truths. The general idea is that "intrinsic value is created whenever initially diverse elements are brought into an organized unity" (Hurka 2006, 366).

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Hurka does not claim all values are unified by organic unity or that nothing fixes degree of value other than degree of organic unity. So even if the account succeeds, a unifying justifying explanation of what makes valuable things valuable is still lacking. But the account is implausible. Initially diverse elements can be brought into a unity that is valueless, as when the person whose aim in life is to count blades of grass on courthouse lawns expands his vision and

starts also counting grains of sand in vacant lots and whiskers on kittens and clouds in the sky. The value of an achievement in different fields is fixed by the nature of each different field and standards inherent to it, and also varies by context. What makes a creative insight a valuable insight is a matter of substantive judgment, not reducible to counting formal features such as those to which the organic unity accounts appeal. Nor is the organic unity account plausible for knowledge. A good historical biography or an anthropological study can amount to valuable knowledge of particulars without displaying systematic explanatory power. Discovering laws of nature has enormous value, but this has to do specifically with the field-specific character of empirical explanation. A detective's discovery of who did the crime can be a brilliant achievement even if the insight is simple, not layered and complex. Running a 100-meter dash extremely fast can be a very simple and a very valuable achievement. A good poem or artwork might display tight unity or sprawling wild disunity.

The organic unity account does not look to be the promising beginning of what might eventually blossom into a unifying justifying explanation of what constitutes value. To reiterate: the BOL account defended here is less ambitious than objective theory rivals, and that is nothing to brag about, but it is better than making false claims.

20.4. Hybrid Accounts

We should also note the possibility of hybrid views. One might hold that nothing is intrinsically good for a person unless it is both enjoyed and desired. More commonly, philosophers analyzing well-being affirm that getting or attaining something is only in itself good for a person if it is both objectively valuable and the individual has some positive subjective orientation to it. The subjective requirement might take different forms: one might hold that what is in itself good for a person must be (a) desired, or (b) enjoyed, or (c) affirmed by some other positive attitude, or (d)

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endorsed or believed to be valuable—by that very person. One might also affirm that some combination of (a) through (d) is necessary. Versions of hybrid views are suggested by Parfit (1984), Kraut (1994), Adams (1999), Darwall (1999), and others.

A full discussion of hybrid views cannot be undertaken here. They might seem to hold out the possibility of an appealing compromise that captures the truth in both subjective and objective accounts of well-being. However, hybrids, like most mongrels, have their own problems. To illustrate the problems, I briefly consider two versions of the idea. (For a related view, see Dworkin 2000, ch. 6.)

Joseph Raz has proposed that well-being is the “whole-hearted and successful pursuit of valuable activities” (Raz 1994). *Whole-hearted* pursuit seems to involve trying hard and also being subjectively engaged in a positive way with what is being pursued. This might be enjoyment or endorsement or some mix. From an objective list standpoint, the proposal is open to intuitive counterexamples. Suppose the objective list includes enjoyment and accomplishment. These need not co-occur. One’s enjoyments may be found in areas of life that have nothing to do with one’s accomplishments. Also, one’s accomplishments may arise via half-hearted or quarter-hearted engagement. Or one might be pursuing what is in fact a valuable activity, but one is just doing it to earn an income. One might also pursue aims and utterly fail at them but along the way succeed in valuable achievements one is just pursuing as a means. Aiming to be a good horse trainer, I might fail, but succeed at being a good horse rider.

Robert Adams suggests that what is good in itself for a person is enjoyment of the excellent—objectively valuable accomplishment that the person enjoys (Adams 1999). As stated, this suggestion fails the cheeseburger test (as does Raz’s similar proposal).

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One should observe that there are intermediate possibilities between the objective list view and hybrid views as so far specified. A plausible intermediate possibility here is that although some things can be in themselves good for a person regardless of her subjective orientation to them, nonetheless getting or achieving something might be in itself more valuable for a person if the person has a positive subjective orientation to it. In this way subjectivity would play a subordinate role in a bare objective list account (McKerlie 2013, [chs. 6–7](#)).

However, this intermediate view is also open to challenge. Suppose that two individuals achieve an accomplishment of identical quality. Each writes a poem that is equally good. If one takes pleasure in the accomplishment and the other does not, the pleasure is an extra good, attained by just one individual. If one person correctly assesses the value of the poem she has created and the other does not, again the correct assessment is another extra good that one gains and the other does not, on an objective list view that recognizes knowledge as valuable (and self-knowledge as one especially valuable kind of knowledge). This does not yet establish an example in which a sheer positive subjective orientation toward some aspect of one's life in itself enhances its value. Compare two individuals, with identical accomplishments and attainments of the various goods that are items on the objective list. One gets enjoyment from her valuable accomplishments, while the other gets an identical amount of enjoyment from her worthless accomplishments (without being mistaken about their worthlessness) or from intrinsically worthless aspects of the circumstances in which she finds herself. If we judge that the two individuals are living lives of equal value, that shows we reject the intermediate view (but see Dorsey 2012 and Sumner 1996). Another test case: suppose a person has many goods in her life but counts them as worthless for bad reasons, then comes to value them slightly positively for even worse reasons that have nothing at all to do with their actual meritorious qualities.. The

intermediate view counts the person as living better in the second scenario, but this is implausible.

BOL allows the possibility that a person might achieve high welfare but be utterly bereft of subjective satisfaction or joy throughout her life. Some might balk at this implication. The balking might have various sources. We could acknowledge a problem with a joyless life without accepting hybrid views. We might instead hold that it is very important that a person gain a threshold amount of certain objective goods, perhaps especially enjoyment, in order to have a minimally decent life. The value of other achievements in one's life is dampened or discounted, to an increasingly greater degree, the further one's lifetime enjoyment falls below the minimally decent level. Such a structured view of the good life captures part of what might attract some toward hybrid views.

20.5. Alienation

An objective list account of well-being is often thought to be unacceptable because it could be that a person attains huge amounts of the items on the list over the course of her life but cares nothing for any of these attainments. They all leave her cold. How could this be a good life for that person? Peter Railton puts the point in these words, “What is intrinsically valuable for a person must have a connection with what he would find compelling and attractive, at least if he were rational and aware. It would be an intolerably alienated conception of someone's good to imagine that it might fail in any such way to engage him” (Railton 1986). This thought underlies the appeal of hybrid views, but also might be thought to support preferentialist accounts. On a preferentialist view, nothing is in itself good for a person if the person lacks any desire or preference for it. On this type of view, what is good for a person must be able to motivate her.

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The alienation objection might take either of two forms, actual and hypothetical.

According to the first, one is alienated from putatively valuable elements in one's life to the degree that one does not actually care about them or have positive attitudes toward them.

According to the second, one is alienated from putatively valuable elements in one's life to the degree that one would not care about them or have positive attitudes toward them under specified ideal conditions (for example, being fully informed and thinking clearly). A person could be alienated in the first sense but not the second, or alienated in the second sense but not the first (Rosati 1995). Against BOL, the objection can be raised that a life could register as excellent according to BOL but fail to pass either the actual-nonalienation test or the hypothetical-nonalienation test.

The alienation objection has greater intuitive force if directed at a version of BOL that does not include the hedonistic goods of enjoyment and avoidance of suffering as important items on its list of items that in themselves make someone's life go better. However, these hedonistic goods do belong there: feeling good is an important constituent of the good life. One might go further, insisting that avoidance of suffering and attainment of some enjoyment at some threshold level are necessary prerequisites of a good life, or more weakly that these goods should be heavily weighted in an overall ranking. If we consider a person who get enjoyment from his life, and is achieving valuable goods, but cares nothing for the achievements, the BOL advocate will allow it would better for the person if he recognized the value of his achievements (this would constitute valuable knowledge), but insist that his life goes better with the nonmotivating achievements than without them.

If a person's achievements are actually valuable, she would believe they are valuable in an ideal epistemic state, if she could attain it. So a person who achieves a good life according to

the BOL standard would not be entirely hypothetically alienated from them: were she in an ideal state for belief formation, she would have the positive attitude of believing correctly that they are valuable. She might still not care for them or be motivated to seek them, however. Since in normal circumstances one is unlikely to achieve, for example, significant sports achievement if one does not care about it and is not motivated to seek it, caring for what is valuable (that one has a reasonable chance to achieve) will tend to be instrumentally desirable according to BOL.

Also, it should be noted that some valuable achievements that appear on the BOL list will themselves have attitudinal and volitional components. Suppose that a friendship between A and B exists just in case (1) A has affection for B, (2) A is disposed to make sacrifices and favor B on appropriate occasions to advance B's welfare, (3) A has the disposition mentioned in (2) because he has the affection mentioned in (1), and (4) the situation is reciprocal, B has affection and so on for A. To be a good friend, one must care about one's friend.

Alienation might anyway be a bullet the objective list account advocate should be happy to bite. If something can be good for one independently of the orientation of one's subjectivity toward that thing, it automatically follows that there is no guarantee that one's subjectivity will affirm the thing (for a vigorous defense of subjectivism, see Sumner 1996). And one should notice also that if the alienation concern proved to be a devastating objection to a simple objective list account, the hybrid views are available as a fallback position.

20.6. Preference Satisfaction and Ideally Informed Preference

Satisfaction

One might hold that a person is better off the more her preferences are satisfied. However, an intrapersonal ordinal measure of preference satisfaction seems to provide no toehold for

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interpersonal comparisons, needed if one is to identify what groups in society are worse off than others.

This chapter does not sharply distinguish between preference satisfaction and desire satisfaction. One might distinguish them on the basis that desire is more of a felt craving, an insistent aspect of experience that directs one's attention toward the object of desire. What falls under the heading of preference and desire is motivating; the alienation objection does not apply. Believing that there is beer available in the fridge, and preferring the state of affairs in which I drink a beer now to the state of affairs in which I do not, I walk toward the fridge.

A preference satisfaction account of individual well-being might appear to have the attractive feature that it leaves each individual sovereign over her own good. If I prefer X over Y for its own sake, then obtaining or achieving X makes my life go better for me, independently of what other people might prefer or believe. There is no basis for any other person to override my own preferences as to how my life should go, to be valuable, on the basis of any claim to superior knowledge about what is really good for me. This feature of the doctrine has an undoubted appeal.

One worry about the doctrine is that an individual's preferences sometimes change over time, and someone might presume to override my present preference for fish later on the ground that later I will no longer prefer to have fish. Another is that my own preferences might not align with my own subjective beliefs as to what is valuable: my basic preference for fish now might be opposed by my judgment that fish now would not be intrinsically valuable for me, enhance my life (Dorsey 2012). Should those who have the aim of helping me boost my well-being defer to my belief or my preference? To simplify, this discussion restricts attention to examples in which these complications are not present.

Preference or desire satisfaction might seem too encompassing anyway to qualify as a plausible conception of individual welfare. I might want there to be conscious life in distant regions of the universe. The satisfaction of such desires does not seem to enhance the quality of my life. Restricted preference satisfaction accounts are more plausible. They stipulate that only the satisfaction of an individual's preferences that are about how her own life goes affect her welfare.

Consider that you can achieve more preference satisfaction either by changing the world so it fulfills your preferences or by changing your preferences so that they match the existing world. Generally speaking, the latter seems a more reliable and effective strategy for achieving preference satisfaction, but that simply calls our attention to the glaring fact that preference satisfaction and well-being are not plausibly regarded as the same (for another discussion of this issue, see Bykvist, chapter [11](#), this Handbook). Notice that an objective list account has a plausible line on the evaluation of adaptive preferences. My desires and preferences from the objective list standpoint are to be evaluated instrumentally, as helps or hindrances to achieving what is valuable. My unrealistic overwhelming desire to be a movie star might simply be counterproductive, and if I can be induced to shift my basic desires toward wanting love, friendship, good health, and steady paid employment, I am then motivated toward what is more likely to improve my attainment of worthwhile things.

Here is another worry that casts a shadow on the identification of the good for a person with preference or desire satisfaction. An individual might desire that her own life go badly for her. She prefers states of affairs in which she is worse off to ones in which she is better off. The individual we are imagining is not committed to any particular analysis of what makes a person's life go well or badly. Her desire is that her life go badly according to whatever is the correct

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account. Now assume that desire satisfaction is the correct account. If it turns out that her preference satisfaction and dissatisfaction overall is just balanced, apart from the desire that her life goes badly, then we get incoherence: if this desire is satisfied, her life goes badly, and yet if this desire is satisfied, her strongest desires overall are satisfied, so her life goes well, not badly. If we say preference satisfaction makes one's life better but only when the preferences have the right content, such that their satisfaction makes one's life go better, we are appealing to some unstated unspecified independent account of what makes someone's life go better, and thus rejecting the preference satisfaction account of well-being (Kraut 1994; Adams 1999; Hausman 2012, ch. 7).

This worry might strike some as devastating (Bradley 2009). To others it might seem a puzzle to be solved. But let's set this objection aside. We might still worry that some preferences are uninformed, and their satisfaction does not seem necessarily welfare-enhancing. Gertrude drinks what she thinks is wine, but is really poison. This is not an objection to a preference satisfaction account of welfare. Some things people want for their own sakes, some as means to what they want for its own sake. Set aside merely instrumental desires. Let us say a person's life goes better for her, the more her noninstrumental desires concerning her own life are satisfied. Call these *basic* desires or preferences.

A further idealization or laundering of the preferences whose satisfaction counts toward increase of welfare is possible, and seen by some as desirable. Some basic preferences would not withstand confrontation with knowledge of some facts. Suppose my wife dedicates her life to building a huge Stalinist style statue of her husband in our backyard. This is her one desire in life, and over the course of many years, she succeeds in fulfilling this aim, and dies. She has satisfied the desire that was rated by her as of overwhelming importance, so this looks to be a

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perhaps odd but good life. But suppose it is also true that if she became aware of a certain fact, namely that I have subpar virtue not the character of a hero, this desire on her part would have extinguished. Knowledge of facts would cause a shift in basic preferences. Now the claim that my wife lived well looks worse than dubious. This sort of example suggests that the desire satisfaction account of welfare needs to be revised along these lines: A person's life goes well for her insofar as she satisfies her basic desires (rated by their importance to her), provided those desires would withstand full awareness of relevant empirical facts. The relevant facts are the ones that would have causal efficacy if known.

This ideal preference satisfaction view can take different forms (Brandt 1979; Griffin 1986). One version goes hypothetical: the good life for a person is constituted by satisfaction of the basic preferences she would have if fully informed of relevant facts. This version allows that getting X can in itself enhance the quality of my life even though at no time in my life do I want X or prefer it to alternatives. One version subtracts: The good life for a person is constituted by satisfaction of those of her actual preferences that would withstand her becoming fully informed of relevant facts. But suppose all of my actual basic preferences except a very minor one would extinguish if I were to be fully informed; does my life's welfare then hinge on satisfaction of this trivial desire? Another version: in order to live well, one must develop a set of preferences that would withstand one's becoming fully informed of relevant facts, and satisfy those preferences, especially those that one rates as important, with one's importance ratings also made in ways that would withstand confrontation with the facts. This version as stated is silent as to how to assess the welfare of people, presumably most if not all of us, who do not succeed in developing a set of preferences all of which would withstand confrontation with the facts.

There is another problem that lurks in the informed preference satisfaction account. The difficulty to my knowledge was first raised by Allan Gibbard and has been forcefully stated by Shelly Kagan (Gibbard 1990; Kagan 2012). In many examples one's desires would be causally extinguished by becoming fully informed about their objects, yet this does not seem to impugn the reasonableness of the desire. If I were to become vividly aware of the gross processes that go on in my digestive system when I eat ice cream or drink a beer, that knowledge might dull or extinguish my desire to eat ice cream or drink beer, but intuitively that fact does not in any way make it any less reasonable for me to want to eat ice cream or drink beer. The worry here threatens to unravel the informed desire satisfaction account. Information concerning an aim I might affirm lessens its reasonableness only if the information somehow suggests reasons that render the aim unworthy or not valuable. The issue really is what doings and beings a person might perform and have are valuable and worthwhile, not whether the desire for the performing and having would causally survive confrontation with the facts.

There is a danger of begging the question here against preference satisfactionism. From the objective list standpoint, the individual is not sovereign over the question, what would make her life go better for her. The life of sex, drugs, and rock and roll is either objectively worthwhile or it is not; I cannot make it cease to be worthwhile for me by disparaging or disavowing it. The preference satisfaction view is perhaps best understood as resting on skepticism regarding these objective value claims (Mackie 1977, [ch. 1](#)). If there are no objective truths in this domain, we can't anchor choice of action or policy on them. Another view is also possible: even if there are objective values, they are irrelevant to the question, what is ultimately good for an individual. A compromise position, a hybrid of preference satisfactionism and objective list, says that

something can be in itself valuable for a person only if it is both subjectively desired by him and objectively worthwhile (see Bykvist, chapter 11 this Handbook).

Consider also the ideal advisor account, which holds that what is basically (noninstrumentally and intrinsically) good for a person is satisfaction of the desires an ideal counterpart of oneself that is fully informed and makes no cognitive errors would want one to have. And ideal advisor views are problematic if construed as providing a standard for determining whether a person succeeds in living a good life. I might be a person with miserably poor capacities in horribly poor conditions, and knowing this, my sympathetic ideal advisor might want me to have only very modest and limited desires, since anything grand and ambitious would have no prospect of success and would just lead to frustration. Satisfaction of these desires, even if this were to lead to the best life I can get, would still not qualify as a good life to lead.

The most developed account of how we might move from observations of people's preferences over states of affairs to interpersonal judgments of people's well-being has been worked out by John Harsanyi (1953; for criticism, see Roemer 1996). This account is based on the idea of extended preferences. Matthew Adler has proposed a sophisticated version of the proposal. Roughly, the idea is that "individual well-being consists in those things that individuals, with full information and deliberating rationally, contemplating the prospect of living different lives, converge in self-interestedly preferring" (Adler and Posner 2008, 257). One sees how this approach yields an interpersonal cardinal standard of individual well-being. Whether the approach answers the worries about preferentialism this chapter claims to be devastating is left for the reader to judge (see Adler, chapter 17, this Handbook, also Adler 2012, 2014).

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Finally, we should note that the basic idea that the right measure of individual well-being for public policy purposes registers what that very individual cares about can take a variety of forms beyond what has been sketched here (see the discussion of equivalent income in Fleurbaey, chapter [16](#), this Handbook, also Fleurbaey 2007, 2012 and Fleurbaey and Blanchet 2013). This chapter does not discuss the equivalent-income approach, but some of the discussion in the next section bears on its viability.

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[20.7. The Objective List Account of Well-Being, the Lack of an Agreed Standard, the Need for Multidimensional Assessment](#)

Just suppose an objective list account of individual well-being is correct. There are things that it is objectively good for a person to get or achieve. The more the person gets or achieves these things, weighted by their importance, over the course of her life, the better her life goes. (This last formulation assumes that the order in which a person has goods and bads in her life does not in itself affect the amount of well-being she gains in her life. This assumption is contested.) This leaves open the questions, what are the items that belong on the objective list, and how do we determine whether a candidate item merits inclusion. For illustrative purposes, let's just stipulate that the items on the list are friendship and family ties, enjoyment, knowledge, meaningful work, and achievement in art, science, sports and physical accomplishment, and management and business. These items might need to be refined so they are disjoint (and we need a complementary list of intrinsic bads), but I think genuine disagreement about basic goods is not so deep and widespread as philosophers imagine.

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What follows, by way of guidance for public policy and personal life? So far, not much. Or rather: it all depends. For guidance, we would like to make quantitative comparative assessment of lives. Ideally one wants a standard that given any combination of possible

accomplishments by any person of items on the list (any particular mix of intrinsic goods and bads) determines the overall value of the combination. We lack such a standard. We make rough qualitative assessments, and there is widespread agreement about extreme cases, but that is all.

To rank mixes of goods, imagine two worlds that are exactly alike except that in one an individual has a certain amount of putative good X and in another he has instead a certain amount of good Y. Which world do you judge better? Vary the goods and make further judgments. Keep going. We might identify the correct standard of well-being as the one an ideal judge, reasoning perfectly and canvassing all relevant arguments and choices with full relevant information, would affirm. The ideal epistemic situation would give us access to this standard if it is there to be discovered. In our actual epistemic situation, people who seem reasonable and competent disagree both about what items actually belong on the objective list and about the comparative evaluation of mixes of various amounts of these items that someone's life might contain. The members of any modern society will also disagree on the question, who among them are reasonable and competent judges. The objective list advocate is committed to there being correct answers and better and worse judges, but that is different from any claim that we are in or near being able to settle these issues.

A more defensible claim is partial commensurability. Let's say some people reasonably disagree about well-being assessments: when they disagree, each has good reasons for her claims, there are no others who are in possession of decisively stronger reasons for their claims, and none of these reasonable judges is substantially more likely to be right than any other so far as we can tell from the best epistemic position we can attain now with current resources. Partial commensurability says that current disagreement on value and well-being extends far beyond reasonable disagreement as just understood. So even if we can't identify the very best rankings,

we can identify bad ones. For example, there might be reasonable disagreement as to whether sexual pleasure belongs on the list, but no reasonable disagreement with the claim that both friendship and enjoyment are included. And while there may be reasonable disagreement concerning the comparative ranking of many mixes of friendship achievement and pleasure attainments, there are also large classes of rankings that are just unreasonable and so to speak beyond the pale.

A further conjecture is that there is a greater range of reasonable disagreement concerning the comparative rankings of mixes of different items on the list than reasonable disagreement regarding the relative value of different amounts of achievement of any single item. There is more reasonable disagreement concerning how sports and science achievements compare to one another than concerning how to rank achievements of one or the other type.

What role value judgments of what makes an individual life go better for that individual play in determining appropriate choices of individual action and social policy depends on the theory of moral right and social justice that is attached to these judgments about good. What do we owe one another? Let's make a pretty minimal assumption: there is a beneficence component of social justice, and the norm of beneficence has an egalitarian tilt. On this assumption each of us has a moral duty, to a certain extent, to help in the project of bringing about good lives for people, better lives rather than worse, with good fairly distributed across people. What makes people's lives go better fixes the proper goal of morally required beneficence.

If BOL is right, insofar as justice has a beneficence component, we are required to help each other gain objectively worthwhile goods. This is thin and abstract, but has a substantial, controversial content. My desires and preferences might fail to track what is good, so BOL-qualified beneficence can conflict with the aim of helping me satisfy my desires and preferences,

even the ones that I would have if fully informed. Partial comparability qualifies but does not obliterate this implication. My desires and preferences may not be tracking what is within the zone of reasonable views about what's good. Same goes with a person's judgments of life satisfaction; there is no limit to how far they might diverge from the BOL assessment.

Recalling debates between partisans of the doctrine of neutrality on the good and their opponents may help clarify the point (Patten 2012; Quong 2011). The neutrality doctrine holds that the state in choosing policies and actions should not (a) aim to promote one controversial conception of good (or way of life) over others, (b) confer advantages or disadvantages on citizens on the basis of their adherence to favored or disfavored controversial conceptions of the good, or (c) choose policies or actions on the basis of claims that some controversial conception of the good is superior to others. An example of a policy that the neutrality would condemn would be making a particular religion such as Roman Catholicism the established religion with special privileges and entitlements that place it above other religions or singling out Roman Catholics specifically for special benefits not accorded to adherents of other religions or to the nonreligious. Another example would be state subsidies to promote soccer over other sports that such as cricket and tennis that some citizens favor. Those who reject neutrality hold that the state ought to promote valuable activities and strive to bring it about that citizens have wider opportunities to engage in valuable activities and that they are motivated to take up these provided opportunities. The idea is that it is a legitimate aim of the state to steer people toward worthwhile activities and ways of life. This is really just the idea that BOL should guide policy.

The term "controversial" as it occurs in the statement of the neutrality doctrine might be interpreted in a normative or a descriptive sense. In the descriptive sense, a claim is controversial if and only if it is actually controverted. People disagree about it. In the normative sense, a claim

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is controversial if there are good reasons for and against it and no decisive case for or against. People should disagree about it, or at least, perfectly reasonable people can disagree, given the available evidence and arguments.

Given partial commensurability, the disagreement between advocates and opponents of neutrality on the good becomes narrowed, provided that the neutrality advocate holds that the state should be neutral between conceptions of the good that are controversial in the normative sense. If what is beyond reasonable disagreement according to our partially commensurable BOL standard will also be classified as not normatively controversial according to the neutrality doctrine advocate, it might seem that all conflict between partisans of neutrality and of BOL will have evaporated. Suppose it is actually controversial in our society, but beyond reasonable disagreement, that certain musical works (perhaps of a wide variety of types) are superior to others. It might then seem that there are beneficence reasons of justice to promote superior music over other music and confer advantages on followers of this music, to provide incentives that will encourage people generally to shift their musical tastes in a healthy direction.

This is so, but does not yet justify adopting nonneutral policies in order to promote the good. Even if it is knowable in present circumstances that certain goods are more valuable and some less valuable, it does not follow that it would be fair to promote the more valuable, because some individuals may reasonably be pursuing a plan of life that aims at the less valuable. From the fact that learning quantum mechanics would be highly worthwhile for me it does not follow that it would be a good idea for me to pursue it—I may lack the talent needed to learn quantum physics, or the circumstances I face may be inauspicious for taking up this aim, or both. The same holds with my relation to superior music and other goods. In other cases, individuals may be so firmly committed to life plans that aim at the less valuable that policies aimed to induce

them to shift toward the more valuable will be unavailing. To justify state policies aimed at promoting what is truly worthwhile and valuable in order to help them lead better lives, we need to check to make sure the impact of the policies (taken as a whole; we should not focus on a single policy in isolation) is fair to the individuals affected by them, including those who end up losers rather than gainers.

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Nonetheless, BOL is one important input into the all things considered judgment of fair policy. The fact that a policy to promote the good disadvantages me may not give me a complaint of unfairness, if either (a) even though I actually end up worse off, the policy boosted my chances of living a better life, or (b) even though the policy expectably made me worse off, this effect was an unavoidable byproduct of achieving significant well-being gains for others, especially those who would otherwise have been very badly off in BOL well-being terms. The fact of disagreement about the good does not rule out justified state policy (and personal action as well) aimed at promoting the good, and if BOL is the correct interpretation of well-being, BOL is not an idle wheel in choice of policy.

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State policies aiming to steer members of society toward more worthwhile lives qualify as paternalistic in a broad sense of the term favored by some writers and as objectionable in virtue of that fact. Amending a proposal advanced by Seana Shiffrin, Jonathan Quong defines *paternalism* as an act by a person A directed at a choice problem that another person B faces and aimed at advancing B's welfare or interests, the act being motivated by a negative judgment about even a fully informed B's ability to make the right decision or manage the situation effectively (Quong 2011; Shiffrin 2000). Paternalism so described need not involve coercing someone or restricting her liberty; policies that aim to induce desired behavior by carrots rather than sticks can also be coercive. Paternalism so construed is deemed to be objectionable because

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disrespectful to the individual who is its target. The paternalizing agent treats the intended beneficiary as less than his equal.

In response: Some policies that aim to promote the good need not be motivated by any general belief that those adopting the policies are superior to its intended beneficiaries. The negative judgment involved in paternalistic action may be due to deficiencies acknowledged to be common to all of us. Also, one might hold that if I am really making a mistake, including a mistake about where my own good lies, and your action toward me is based on your recognition that I am making a mistake, your acting on this basis is not in itself inherently disrespectful. You are acknowledging my rational agency along with the imperative of helping me and presuming that on a deep level as a rational agent my aim is to live well, not just seemingly well according to my current beliefs about how to live well.

Since people reasoning well will disagree about how much weight to put on each of the components of the good life even if they agree on the set of constitutive components, there will not in expectable epistemic circumstances be one grand measure of aggregate well-being that should command assent. If there is less disagreement about how to aggregate achievements within one type of good, in practice measures of people's achievements of single components will be useful and perhaps sometimes decisive for policy purposes. For example, when facing a choice between policies A and B, the finding that A would be better for all affected individuals according to a Kahneman-type hedonic measure, or that B would be utterly disastrous in hedonic terms for some significant fraction those affected, in conjunction with conflicting recommendations issuing from other pertinent measures, might suffice to single out A as a likely better choice (Kahneman and Sugden 2005; Kahneman and Krueger 2006).

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20.8. Well-Being Measures as Fair Guides to Public Policy, Not as Measures of the Objective Worth of Individual Lives

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We should notice another possible response to concerns about whether authoritative measurement of well-being is possible. We might drop the assumption that the relevant measure of a person's condition for purposes of distributive justice has anything to do with how well her life is going for her. These judgments of ultimate value and success in individual lives are anyway beyond the proper purview of society—all of us regarded together—and of the government as an agency of society. Instead justice demands that society ensures that all individuals have access to fair shares of general purpose resources such as income and wealth and liberties and opportunities that will be useful to individuals as they construct and pursue their own life plans. Provided the distribution of resources is fair, no assessment is made of individual life success. That is deemed the responsibility of individuals, not the responsibility of society. This line of thought gets us to something in the neighborhood of a Rawlsian primary social goods standard for assessing people's condition for purposes of distributive justice (Rawls 1996, 1999; see also Scanlon 1998).

In fact the idea that an account of well-being that is appropriate for public policy guidance does not aim to assess what ultimately makes an individual's life go better or worse but instead represents a (component of an overall) fair and respectful way of treating the members of society has a broader scope, beyond views that take resources to be the proper currency of justice. A view that for purposes of deciding on just policies we should identify an individual's condition with some function of what they favor or care about might be justified in the same way. In fact we find advocates of such views saying exactly that. For example, Marc Fleurbaey suggests that we should when choosing public policies seek to advance what each person cares

about, whether or not we are confident that what the person cares about is objectively worthwhile. Respect for individual preferences is an important mode of respect for persons (Fleurbaey 2012).

Discussions of the capability approach to social justice as pioneered by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum (Sen 1992; Nussbaum 1990, 1992) and others standardly interpret a capabilities approach to reflect the judgment that the more an individual has capabilities to function in ways she has reason to value, the better her life goes. A capabilities standard of well-being is thought to be a type of objectivist characterization of well-being (see Adler and Posner 2008). Whether the capabilities I have are ones I have genuine reason to value is not fixed by my subjective evaluations, which might be confused or ill-informed.

However, the capabilities approach makes more sense if interpreted as an answer to the question, how is it fair and respectful to assess how well things are going for people for purposes of public policy evaluation. Notice a simple point. I might enjoy an enormous heap of capabilities and enjoy tremendous opportunities, that would yield a very good life for me if I chose well among the options in my capability set and worked persistently to transform my capabilities into good functionings (ways of doing and being). However, I might instead choose badly or fail to take effective steps to transform my wondrous capabilities into good functionings (the elements of a good life). In such a case, surveying the wreck I have made of my life, we might say I had great opportunities but misused them, and ended up with a miserable life. In other words, the capabilities approach can be interpreted as incorporating an element of personal responsibility and respect for individual sovereignty into its account of a proper characterization of well-being for public policy purposes. The capability approach advocate can reasonably be regarded as holding that if society is arranged so that all individuals have a fair share or set of

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capabilities made available to them, how they use their capabilities to live their lives is up to them and not a matter for further social evaluation. To use an example that Nussbaum has pressed, if society provides individuals the capability for religious and spiritual expression and growth, it is up to the individual whether or not she wishes to make use of this capability to achieve any level of religious and spiritual functionings (Nussbaum 2006, [chs. 1–3](#); 2011; 2012).

This position gathers further support from the consideration that philosophical questions about what is ultimately worthwhile and choiceworthy in human life and thus what makes an individual's life go better rather than worse for her are controversial in modern society. We find stable pluralism of belief about the nature of human good among ordinary competent individuals and no tendencies toward convergence on any one uniquely authoritative theory of human good.

One question that immediately arises is, if we understand well-being measures to be components of fair ways of treating people, not attempted measures of what ultimately makes one person's life go better than another's, which of the characterizations of well-being currently on offer is best from this standpoint? Let us say that from this standpoint we seek a fair well-being standard. A well-being measure is a component of how it is fair to treat people, because an overall account of fair treatment needs to consider the further issue of fair principles of distribution. We have identified three views that might be regarded as candidate construals of fair well-being: (1) preferentialist views including the equivalent-income approach, (2) capabilities to function in ways that people have reason to value, and (3) resources or primary special goods or the like—general purposes means suitable for obtaining any of a wide array of goals that people might seek in life.

The issues raised by the idea that the concept of individual welfare relevant to social justice is shaped by what we owe each other, not by what ultimately makes a person's life goes

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better, raises large issues this survey chapter cannot explore. I simply note one reason for resisting the proposal from the BOL standpoint.

First, BOL itself takes no stand as to what is fair social policy all things considered. Nor does BOL take any stand as to what proxies for well-being might be useful guides for social policy. However, if we have as part of justice duties a beneficence duty to improve people's lives, our duty is just that—to facilitate people's lives going better according to whatever is the correct conception of that notion. From the BOL standpoint we should always be looking behind whatever resources or opportunities or capabilities or other types of benefits we tend to believe our institutions should be supplying people, to see if our resource/opportunity/liberty/capability provision is really doing anything to improve people's lives, and to explore whether we could do better. If the distribution of whatever we have decided should count as fair well-being is perfect according to the principles we embrace, but the result is people leading avoidably squalid lives, a BOL advocate should say it would be fetishistic to claim that justice is being done.

Think about what you would feel bound to do to help a person you cared about deeply. Suppose you could either help your friend by supplying general-purpose means to achieve any goals a person might be likely to embrace, or by supplying limited-purpose resources that are generally helpful for the worthy goals she is pursuing, but which you happen to know will not be suitable for her, or by supplying an odd mix of stuff that will effectively facilitate her actual achievement of her worthy goals. Why make a fetish of supplying means and resources when you know there is a better way to help your friend live well?

What makes sense for private decision-making does not determine what public policy ought to be. But here the issue is what should we embrace as the beneficence component of the

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fundamental principles that are the standard for assessing public policies. At this level the fetishism worry is pertinent.

Also, we should distinguish different levels of moral thinking. Along with the level of fundamental principles, there are the further levels of laws, social norms, and a public social morality. The last-mentioned level consists of moral rules to be proclaimed in public and which we are to be trained and socialized to internalize. This is what R. M. Hare called intuitive-level moral thinking (Hare 1981). Ideally it should be designed and implemented so as to maximize fulfillment of fundamental moral principles. It is possible that fundamental moral principles that require us to help one another lead genuinely good lives would be best implemented by, among other things, a social morality that requires society to supply fair shares of resources to individuals and pay no heed to the well-being levels they then reach. If so, a social morality that is in this sense neutral on the good is justified by fundamental principles that require maximizing and fairly distributing well-being across persons.

The issue of principle arises when this harmony does not obtain. Suppose we have implemented a social morality that tells us to pay no heed to people's actual well-being levels and seek instead to boost their capacities and resources, and the result is that people end up leading avoidably miserable lives. A conception of social justice that includes a beneficence doctrine that requires us to seek to boost people's actual attained well-being will condemn this social morality and call for its reform. From this standpoint a "fair well-being" standard is only fair if it is effective as a means to bring about actual well-being advancement.

20.9. Conclusion

The considerations adduced in this chapter do not amount to a proof or vindication of the bare objective list account and the limited commensurability it affords. They just stir the pot.

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