Desire Formation and Human Good

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In *Wuthering Heights* a man and a woman fall in love and their passion for each other wreaks havoc on several lives, theirs included.[1] Long after his beloved is dead, Heathcliff's life revolves entirely around his love for her. Frustrated by events, his grand romantic passion expresses itself in destructive spasms of antisocial behavior. Catherine, the object of this passion, marries another man on a whim, but describes her feelings for him as like superficial foliage, whereas "her love for Heathcliff resembles eternal rocks beneath." "I *am* Heathcliff," she declares, shortly before dying at the age of nineteen.

As a reader of the novel, I confess to an impulse to preach little sermons on bourgeois prudence to the main characters.[2] In my family, adolescents caught in romantic turmoil are told, "Men are like buses—If you miss one, another will come along in ten minutes." Buses are heterogeneous, and differ from one another in ways that make them differentially charming, but in important ways they are fungible. It can make sense to become passionately attached to a person or a bus, but not so attached that one is in thrall to that particular attachment and cannot withstand its demise. The love of Heathcliff and Catherine looks to be an instance of the vice that Robert Adams calls idolatry, caring for a finite good to an extent that would be appropriate only for an infinite good.[3]

In the rural neighborhood depicted in this novel, competition for romantic partners takes place on what economists call a thin market. Each person has few options,

few potential partners for interaction. From an individual's perspective, the gap in value between his first choice and his next-best choice may be enormous. However, the degree of adequacy of a given option set depends on one's tastes. The reader is tempted to the conclusion that Heathcliff and Catherine are done in by their desires, which are presented as elemental and wild forces of nature. But this suggests an engineering problem. Dams channel the energy of wild and powerful rivers. *Wuthering Heights* presents a resolution of sorts to the problem of wild desires breaking apart social conventions and social bonds, but the resolution appears to depend on the natural fact that the desires of the children of the next generation are milder and more conventional and hence a better fit with social norms and conventional practices. This resolution has struck critics as evasive, as though one could solve the problems posed by wild rivers by pointing to the existence of tame streams.

The ideology of romanticism suggests another tidy resolution of the tragedy of Heathcliff and Catherine. "Find your deepest impulse, and follow that" is precisely what Catherine fails to do.[4] She passes up the person she loves to marry the person she does not love and thereby triggers melodramatic disruption. But one of the strengths of this novel is that it shows the forces of passion to be enormously powerful, amoral, and capable of destroying social ties in a way that reveals the romanticist creed just quoted to be, if not silly, then one-sided. Nothing guarantees that your deepest impulse will be nice rather than nasty, productively cooperative rather than monstrously destructive. Anyway the notion of one's "deepest" impulse is a metaphor that resists interpretation—what sort of depth are we talking about? If shallow impulses are those that tend to be short-lived or to be easily extirpated, it's hard to see why desires that are deeper (more entrenched)

should just for that reason be regarded as better. The same is true if the shallow is what is socially implanted. In the end the novel declines to draw normative conclusions and just carefully observes a case study in fanaticism, attractively distorted desire.

I shall return later in this essay to the assessment of the desires of Heathcliff and Catherine. This essay explores the normative standards that might guide the formation of desire.

Consider the problem of a social planner whose task is to devise institutional arrangements and changes in practices to maximize some function of human well-being. A part of her task is to consider the impact of proposed changes in institutions and practices on education and socialization of individuals. A part of this subtask is to devise education and socialization arrangements that will influence the formation of desire so as to boost people's well-being. Finally, a part of this component of the task is to propose policies that will alter the formation of each individual's preferences in such a way as to boost the well-being of that very person. This essay explores how three different accounts of well-being would generate standards for assessing the work of the social planner engaged in the project just described.

A similar problem must be solved by the parents or guardian of a child if they are concerned to promote the lifetime well-being of the child and seek to mold the child's preferences to this end. How does one determine which preferences are maximally conducive to well-being? To some extent, of course, responsible parents will seek to induce prosocial preferences in their offspring that will be conducive to the well-being of other people whose lives might be affected by interaction with the child. For purposes of this essay I set this problem of balancing the good of one's child against the conflicting

good of other people to the side and confine attention to what must be done to promote the well-being of one's own child so far as this is a legitimate goal. (In a variant of this problem, an individual might consider self-culture, strategies she might pursue that would alter her desires with the aim of making her life go better.)

I assume that to some extent feasible changes in social and parental policy can predictably influence the formation of desires, so that preference formation in a desired direction can become the object of policy. Of course preference formation is a hit and miss operation, at best, and the lore that we possess about how to mold the desires of people may largely reflect wishful thinking rather than empirical knowledge. The assumption I am making is not obviously and uncontroversially correct, and if it is false, no one should take any interest in the following discussion.

1. Desire satisfaction accounts of human good and preference formation.

According to a subjectivist view, human good is satisfaction of basic (noninstrumental) desires. The greater the extent to which a person satisfies her basic desires (weighted by their comparative importance as rated by that every person), the more she gains what is good. The more she gains what is good over the course of her life, the greater the degree to which her life goes well for her. The idea of a desire here combines two elements. If I have a basic desire for *x*, I am disposed to some extent to choose *x* or pursue it if it is obtainable, and I am also disposed to some extent to feel attracted to *x*. The basicness of the desire consists in the fact that I am disposed to choose x and feel attracted to *x* for itself, independently of any further consequences.

A straightforward implication of a desire satisfaction view of human good is that one can increase a person's well-being by bringing it about that her present basic desires

are satisfied to a greater extent or by bringing it about that she acquires different basic desires that are easier to satisfy and that are satisfied to a greater extent than her initial desires would have been. In principle the one strategy is as good as the other. Either one can achieve the same effect: the person's basic desires are satisfied to a greater extent. If I desire drinking expensive wine and attaining Olympic-quality sports achievements, you can improve my well-being by increasing my means for obtaining the wine and the sports excellence, or you can achieve the same end by inducing me to switch my basic desires toward cheap beer and easy-to-satisfy minimal competence at shuffleboard.

This implication of the desire satisfaction view might strike some of us as counterintuitive, but this sense of unease arises from the belief that the satisfaction of some basic desires is inherently less valuable than the satisfaction of others. This way of thinking presupposes that some things we might desire to do or get are objectively more valuable than others. This just asserts what subjectivism denies, so the subjectivist should not attempt to tinker with the desire satisfaction view in order to render the view less counterintuitive in this respect.

The claim that each person seeks to maximize the satisfaction of her own desires does not entail that anyone, much less everyone, seeks to maximize the satisfaction of whatever desires she might come to have. In fact my present desires might include a desire that if I were to develop a dominant desire to skateboard, this desire should be frustrated. I might abhor the skateboarding lifestyle. Moreover, the claim that each person seeks to maximize the satisfaction of her own desires could be true even though no one believes that the good is constituted by desire satisfaction and everyone believes that her own desires uniquely track objective good.

These points may help explain that it will strike many people as incorrect that one can improve the quality of someone's life by inducing her to develop cheap tastes, so that with given resources she can attain a higher level of desire satisfaction. But they are strictly irrelevant to what I am concerned to assert: that if human good or well-being is the satisfaction of desire, then a person's lifetime well-being level can be raised either by changing the world so that it conforms to her desires or by changing her desires so that they conform to the way the world is. By either route, desire satisfaction increases, and thus well-being rises. Developing cheap, easy-to-satisfy tastes is a way of changing one's desires so that they more readily and easily conform to the way the world is.

It is only contingently true that one can improve a person's lifetime well-being prospects, according to the subjectivist view, by changing her desires so that they are cheap, in the sense that with a given level of resources, a higher ratio of satisfied to unsatisfied desires (weighted by their importance to that individual) can be attained. For one thing, there may well be cases in which the level of resources the individual can expect to command over the course of her life will vary depending on the kind of desires she comes to have. The desire for complex work, taken by itself, may be hard to satisfy, but having the desire may increase the chances that one will obtain complex work, and since (if) complex work tends to be lucrative, developing this expensive taste may improve one's lifetime prospects of desire satisfaction, all things considered. Here is another example: Suppose that if I shed my plebeian taste for plonk and reality TV shows and acquire in their place patrician tastes for fine wine and opera, I will attract a network of wealthy friends, interact with them, and significantly increase the amount of wealth at my disposal over the long run. One might then be raising one's lifetime well-being

prospects according to the subjectivist view. The general point is that if well-being is lifetime desire satisfaction, a person who cares for the well-being of another and strives to increase it can sometimes accomplish this task by bringing it about that her desires change in ways that increase lifetime desire satisfaction.

Another possibility to consider is that a person may come to embrace her desires with varying degrees of confidence and wholeheartedness, and other things being equal, the satisfaction of confidently and wholeheartedly held desires contributes more to a person's well-being. One might put this point in terms of higher-order preferences.[5] One person may desire to surf, but has no desires concerning this desire. Another person wants to surf, wants to want to surf, and so on. The latter we may regard as confident and wholehearted embrace of first-order desire. If the two persons are otherwise exactly alike and lead exactly similar lives, with equal satisfaction of the desire to surf, the person with higher-order desires that are themselves satisfied arguably obtains more desire satisfaction overall. Acquiring higher-order desires to have particular lower-order desires and satisfying those higher-order desires might be difficult or easy depending on the case. In some cases higher-order desires can be cheap tastes, like a taste for beer rather than champagne. Being a good philosopher or physicist may be hard but coming to desire being the sort of person who desires to be a good philosopher or physicist and satisfying this higher-order desire may be by comparison quite easy. Socratic achievement may be hard while desiring to desire to be a Socratic rather than foolish person and satisfying the desire to desire to be Socratic may be almost as easy as falling off a log.

One might then speculate that coming to believe in the desire satisfaction account of human good and striving to become a prudent person by its lights by themselves tend

to diminish the degree to which one's embrace of one's own desires is confident and wholehearted. If true, this speculation implies that people will be better off, other things being equal, if they do not believe the desire satisfaction account of human good and try to be prudent by its lights. Notice that this speculation does not gainsay the claim that one can generally improve the lifetime well-being of a person in desire satisfaction terms if one can induce him to acquire more easily satisfied desires.

John Rawls invents the term "bare person" to describe a person who accepts the desire satisfaction view of human good and aims to be prudent in its terms—to maximize her lifetime total desire satisfaction weighted by the importance to her of the satisfied desires. Such persons, he observes, "are ready to consider any new convictions and aims, and even to abandon attachments and loyalties, when doing this promises a life with greater overall satisfaction, or well-being." A society with a public commitment to justice as the maximization of desire satisfaction (he is specifically considering an ordinal version of utilitarianism) he describes as committed to a "shared highest-order preference." He writes, "The notion of a bare person implicit in the notion of shared highest-order preference represents the dissolution of the person as leading a life expressive of character and of devotion to specific final ends and adopted (or affirmed) values which define the distinctive points of view associated with different (and incommensurable) conceptions of the good."[6] Rawls has a point. Suppose I am married to Sam, committed to particular family and friends, dedicated to philosophy and mountain biking, and I am then offered a pill that will immediately and costlessly change my tastes, so that my former desires disappear, and I desire only casual sex, listening to sectarian religious sermons, mindless work, and TV watching. I am assured that taking

the pill will increase my lifetime level of desire satisfaction. If I accept the desire satisfaction view of human good and aim to be prudent in its terms, I will have good reason to take the pill and no good reason not to ingest it.

If my desire say to mountain bike is stronger than my desire to be prudent (to maximize my lifetime well-being), then I might not take the pill. But still in the scenario as described I have no reason not to take the pill that is not outweighed by stronger reasons. The fact that I will not achieve satisfaction of my mountain biking desire if I take the pill is outweighed by the consideration that other desires will be satisfied to a greater extent. This claim assumes that according to the desire satisfaction view of good, a person has most reason to do what will bring her most good over the course of her life. One might deny the assumption and tie the idea of what one has reason at a time to do to the idea of what one desires at that time to do.[7] On this suggestion, one might have no desire to be prudent (to maximize one's lifetime well-being) or a weak desire to be prudent, in which case, since what one has reason to do is tied to what one desires here and now to do, one has no reason to be prudent. However, it is plausible even on a subjectivist view of good and well-being to detach the idea of reason for choice from current basic desires. A reflective person who accepts the desire satisfaction view of good will see that she will be better off by her own standard if her present desires shift to become more satisfiable, provided that shift results in an increase in overall desire satisfaction. Reflecting on this, she has reason to act to change her present desires just in case this will yield larger lifetime desire satisfaction, regardless of whether or not an actual desire blossoms now from the recognition of this reason.

Sometimes it is claimed that large-scale changes in basic desires break personal identity.[8] If taking the pill that alters my desires would literally make me a different person, then I would not be better off taking the pill, for I do not survive as the post-pill person. This claim introduces a large topic. A short response is that if spatio-temporal bodily continuity is the right criterion of personal identity, desire change cannot bring it about that Dick Arneson at a later time is not identical to Dick Arneson at an earlier time, but if sufficient psychological continuity is the criterion, desire change can do this.

I have conceded that according to subjectivism, a person might be better off if she does not adopt the mind-set that would make her a bare person. But of course, becoming a bare person or ceasing to be a bare person is not a feat I can achieve by an act of will, so given that I am a bare person, I will recognize I have decisive reason to take the pill. And if you are sincerely and strongly concerned to advance my well-being, you would do well to slip the desire-transforming pill in my coffee if your choice is either to give me the pill or to refrain (if you refrain, my desires do not shift).

Does the thought that conceptions of the good are incommensurable free the desire satisfaction view of its commitment to the bare person notion? Suppose we say that the more a person's desires are satisfied, the better her life goes for her. If a person's basic desires change, there is no way to compare her well-being level prior to the change and afterward. On this view, taking the pill could neither improve one's life nor diminish its value. The choice to take the pill or not would have to be seen as a "don't care." If we discovered that a friend accidentally ingested such a pill and suffered involuntarily transformed desires, we should on balance be neither glad nor sad, for the friend's sake, that this occurred. If the bare person idea involves the dissolution of the person as

leading a life expressive of character and of devotion to specific final ends" (Rawls's words), the amended bare person idea joined to a thesis of incommensurability does not block the dissolution.

Repeating myself, I maintain that what fuels resistance to the idea of a bare person implicit in subjectivism is the thought that a basic desire can be mistaken insofar as it is directed toward an object that is not truly worthwhile. If my central life ambition becomes counting the blades of grass on courthouse lawns (Rawls's example), many would say I have suffered misfortune. My main desires fail to track what is truly valuable. The advocate of the desire satisfaction account of human good should not attempt to accommodate this objection, which amounts to blanket denial of subjectivism. The response should rather be that the objection draws its considerable plausibility from the assumption that we can vindicate the idea that some basic aims can be shown to be objectively more valuable than others. The subjectivist denies that this assumption is supportable.

The subjectivist can also point out that human desires form themselves in ways that are to a large extent impervious to voluntary choice and resistant to deliberate manipulation. One cannot just choose to desire to count blades of grass on courthouse lawns, and if one discovers one has such a desire, it may well be inexorable. Even if romantic desires tend to do to our lives what Heathcliff's desire for Catherine did for his, we cannot simply abjure them. Moreover, even if one could instill in one's child a dominant easily satisfiable desire such as the desire to count blades of grass on public property, to organize one's life around this desire would predictably attract scorn and bewilderment on the part of significant others, so the expected satisfiability of the

instilled desire must be balanced against the resultant expectable loss in the child's desire for recognition and acceptance by other people. A better bet is to try to induce one's child to develop desires and ambitions that others in one's community esteem. These responses say that there are limits to the extent to which one can deliberately manipulate the formation of preferences and that inducing a cheap, easy-to-satisfy preference in a person may not be to his advantage all things considered. These remarks do not challenge the claim that acceptance of the desire satisfaction view of well-being implies acceptance of the bare person notion that some find repellant.

Another strategy for driving a wedge between subjectivism and the bare person appeals to the inadequacy of simple desire satisfaction accounts of human good. Unrestricted desire satisfaction accounts count as enhancing a person's well-being the satisfaction of some of her preferences that intuitively do not seem connected in this way to her well-being. For example, one might desire that strangers live good lives, even at cost to oneself, but the satisfaction of this desire would seem to contribute to the strangers' well-being not one's own. This line of thought inspires restricted desire satisfaction accounts of human good. But this intramural dispute among desire satisfaction theorists does not alter substantially the nature of the theory's recommendations regarding desire formation. Much the same holds if we shift from a simple desire satisfaction view to the view that satisfaction of desire enhances well-being to the degree that the actual desires satisfied would withstand critical scrutiny with full information. One should then seek to instill whatever desires will facilitate the person's gaining as much lifetime informed desire satisfaction as possible.

Another strategy responds more directly to something in the vicinity of the bare person worry. The strategy distinguishes autonomous and nonautonomous desire formation and holds that the satisfaction only of autonomously formed desires contributes to well-being. A weaker version of this view holds that the contribution that satisfaction of a desire makes to a person's well-being varies with the extent to which the desire was autonomously formed, so other things being equal, autonomously formed desires have more weight in determining the degree to which a person leads a life that is good for her.[9]

To the degree that the person is autonomous in the process by which a particular preference of that very person is formed, we count the preference as autonomous and its satisfaction counts for more.

According to this account, a subjectivist account of human good properly conceived should be associated not with the conception of the person as bare person but rather with the conception of person as autonomous bare person. Consider the example of the desire to count blades of grass on courthouse lawns (assumed to be extremely easy to satisfy). If one brings it about that one has this desire by a process of autonomous character formation, the value of satisfying this desire is accordingly amplified, and if the desire is intense, its satisfaction can make a great contribution to one's well-being. In contrast, if some other agent sets in play some causal process that induces the grass-counting desire in a way that bypasses the individual's own faculties of deliberation and reflection and choice, the value of satisfying the desire is accordingly dampened, and even if the resultant desire is intense, its satisfaction counts for little toward the individual's well-being. Insofar as the agent actively directs the course of her life, in part by choosing the processes by which her present desires will be further formed, if she

accepts the autonomous desire satisfaction view of human good, and seeks to maximize her well-being, then she ought autonomously to select modes of desire alteration that contribute to this end. This will mean that other things being equal she should prefer to extirpate any present desire no matter how intense and heartfelt if she can substitute for it a desire that is more easily satisfied and thus contributes more to her lifetime well-being.

Echoing Rawls, the critic will say that conceiving oneself and one's good in this way "represents the dissolution of the person as leading a life expressive of character and of devotion to specific final ends and adopted (or affirmed) values." Once again, I suspect the critic's objection is toothless unless an objective account of human good can be justified.

As a bare person, I aim to maximize my lifetime well-being, and I interpret well-being as desire satisfaction (or desire satisfaction qualified in some way). It might be thought that in so conceiving my aims, I am conceiving my desires as mere means to some further goal, the maximization of desire satisfaction. If my desire is to be loyal to my friends, what I really care about (according to the critic) is not that per se, but only as abstract desire satisfaction. This emerges when it is noticed that I would not regard it as any sort of loss if my desires suddenly shifted and the loyalty-to-friends desire were replaced by some substitute that promised to be equally or more conducive to boosting my overall desire satisfaction level. The substitute could be the desire to be disloyal to friends.

Granted that the bare person stands in a somewhat alienated or detached relation to her own desires, I note that something similar will be true if one adopts an objective list account of human good. If I am committed to maximizing my well-being, I will from

this perspective regard as equally satisfactory the state of affairs in which my satisfied desire for some object that is an entry on the objective list is eliminated and replaced by any satisfied desire for any other entry on the objective list with the same objective value.

If I seek *x* as partly constitutive of my good while recognizing that there are equivalents for *x*, this is not to regard *x* as mere means to what is valuable. What is replaceable is not valueless in virtue of its replaceability. I might desire the taste of honey for itself, while recognizing that if my taste buds were to alter so that I came to desire the taste of sour pickles instead, then that taste would be desirable for itself.

2. Objective list accounts of human good and preference formation

An objective list account of human good or well-being merely denies subjectivism. According to the objective list account, a life goes well (for the person whose life it is) to the extent that the individual attains items that occur as entries on a list of objectively intrinsically valuable things. If one gets some item on the list, one's life thereby goes better, independently of one's subjective attitudes or opinions toward getting that thing. If sexual pleasure appears on the list, then getting it adds to one's well-being, even if one is of the opinion that sexual pleasure is worthless or has no desire for sexual pleasure. A more developed account would specify an index, so that for any combination of instances of items on the objective list, one could in principle determine what the total value of the combination is. For my purposes in this essay I do not need to take any stand on the possibility of interpersonal comparisons of well-being, though I do assume the possibility of cardinal comparisons of well-being across temporal stages of the same person.

The status of desire satisfaction according to the objective list account depends on whether or not desire satisfaction can or should appear as one entry on the objective list. My sense is that desire satisfaction should be excluded. The core of the objective list idea is that there are desires whose satisfaction contributes nothing at all to well-being. Consider an example suggested by Richard Kraut: A boy forms the desire to throw a rock at a duck. One might hold that satisfaction of this desire contributes nothing at all to the boy's well-being.[10] This judgment is compatible with holding that desire satisfaction is intrinsically valuable provided some condition or conditions are satisfied. (The whole consisting of the desire satisfaction plus its fulfilled conditions is intrinsically valuable.) I suppose it is coherent to maintain that the satisfaction of a desire (with the necessary conditions satisfied) is valuable in itself, independently of the individual's subjective attitudes or opinions toward getting that desire satisfaction. Compare Parfit's characterization of the objective list account: "According to this theory, certain things are good or bad for people, whether or not these people would want to have the good things, or to avoid the bad things." My strained loose interpretation of this claim holds that (given the satisfaction of some condition) the satisfaction of desire can be among the certain things that are good or bad for people, whether or not they desire them. Desire satisfaction is then good, contributes to your well-being, whether or not you desire the desire to be satisfied. But this gambit, besides committing the sin of splitting hairs, looks to be implausible. I might want to desire taking heroin, without desiring at all that this desire should be satisfied. So if I succeed in getting myself to desire taking heroin, it hardly follows that it is good for me that this desire be satisfied even if all along I don't desire it to be satisfied. So let's suppose that desire satisfaction does not appear on the

objective list. (Another qualification is discussed below, when we consider whether desiring what is in itself good might be in itself good.)

According to the objective list account of the good, so interpreted, desire and for that matter desire satisfaction contribute to the desirer's well-being, if at all, only as helps or hindrances to the attainment of items on the objective list.

Looked at from a certain angle, the view that desire satisfaction and frustration in and of themselves have nothing to do with well-being is just as paradoxical and opposed to common-sense as the subjectivist view that desire satisfaction is the alpha and omega of well-being. If one describes a person's life by noting that all of her most deeply cherished lifelong ambitions were fully satisfied, it sounds odd to add that this of course has no bearing on the question of well-being—to what extent the person's life went well for her.[11]

Ordinary common-sense lore on happiness and well-being probably allows that desires can be mistaken in the sense that they are directed toward inappropriate objects. Common sense surely affirms that desires can become disproportionate and in that way lead the desirer to become self-destructive. A desire may become bloated and crowd out all other desires, but common sense does not then say that the person's life goes well for her provided the single dominant desire is satisfied. But the objective list account as I interpret it goes further in downgrading the status of desire. That I desire *x* may cause me to seek *x*. If my desire for *x* indicates that there is something valuable about *x*, the desire can be an indicator of reasons that have a bearing on what I should do. But the mere fact of desiring per se does not establish that there is any value at all in satisfying the desire and hence does not establish that there is any reason to choose to pursue what

one desires. Even if my desire is persistent, strong, deeply entrenched, heartfelt or whole-hearted as we might say, that is all consistent with there being no reason whatsoever for me to act on the desire or to think that other things being equal I am better off if the desire is satisfied rather than frustrated.

If one cares about a person and wants him to enjoy a life that is good for him, accepts an objective list account of human good, and believes one can influence to some degree the formation of his desires, what sorts of desires should one seek to instill? What sorts of desires should one want for oneself, insofar as one is concerned about the impact of one's desires on one's prospects for one's own well-being? The abstract answer is that one should seek to influence the formation of desires so as to maximize the person's lifetime well-being. Since having a desire tends to induce the desiring person to behave in ways that bring about its satisfaction when he believes that is feasible, one should want to instill desires for what is valuable.

In constructing a plan of life with the aim of amassing over the course of one's life the largest feasible weighted sum of objective goods, one will have to attend carefully to one's basic desires--their actual and expected future character and the extent to which these are alterable by actions one might take. One seeks a mesh between one's enduring strong basic desires and goods one can achieve. Someone who has mathematical talent, but finds that she is deeply and irremediably averse to doing mathematics, would be ill-advised to form a life plan in which doing mathematics looms large. To understate the point, one is unlikely to accomplish anything significant that requires sustained dedicated effort over the long haul against the grain of one's desires.

Desiring what is valuable in proportion to its objective value is appealing, but may get in the way of attainment of objective value in the course of one's life. Desires animate action toward what is desired, and it is better for a person if her desires point her toward the best goods she can achieve, or has a realistic chance of achieving. If ballet is ten times more valuable than square dancing, and my desire for ballet achievement is correspondingly ten times stronger than my desire for square dancing achievement, then proportioning my desires to the values of their objects may simply lead to the situation in which I hopelessly pine after achievements I cannot reach and have insufficient psychic energy at my disposal for seeking the achievements that are within my reach.

One's value judgments may function as helps and hindrances to the attainment of value in much the same way. Overvaluing an activity may help to rouse desire for succeeding in that activity, and if the activity is the best that one can reasonably hope to engage with any prospect of success, overvaluing what one can get can help one to get it.

A variant on the fable of the fox and the grapes illustrates the point. Suppose there are wondrous grapes clearly beyond the fox's reach, and acceptable grapes that are just barely within the fox's reach if she musters a supreme effort. If the fox correctly assesses the relative merits of the grapes beyond reach and the grapes marginally within reach, and proportions her desires for these goods to their objective merits, she may find her desire for the reachable grapes insufficiently motivating. If on the other hand she forms an exaggerated estimation of the barely reachable grapes and thereby comes to have an urgent desire to attain them, she may be motivated to put forth the extreme effort that is necessary to give herself the best chance of gaining the maximal good she can achieve.

There may be other ways in which correct appraisal and correspondingly appropriate desire may inhibit maximal attainment of items on the objective list. If superlative grapes for once in the fox's life are barely within her reach, correct appreciation of her situation may lead to fright or exhilaration that impedes putting forth her best effort. Undervaluation or desire that is weaker than the object deserves on its merits may increase the prospects for gaining as much objective good as is feasible (maximizing rationally expected good). These discrepancies between the desires that are a proper evaluative fit with their objects and the desires that are most helpful to the attainment of maximal objective goods may occur not just in specific situations but globally over the course of an individual's life.

These strategic considerations are usually not in tension with the ideals of correct appraisal and proportionate strength of desire and aversion. We usually suppose that training an individual to appreciate and love correct values will help that individual orient herself in the world so as to achieve these values. But thinking about possible cases in which, as it were, one hits the target by aiming away from it, reveals that there are two different and sometimes opposed ideals that require somehow to be reconciled or integrated.

What kinds of desires should we want to have, so far as our aspiration to attain our own well-being is concerned? On the one hand, desires are means to achieving valuable goods. They should be selected so as optimally to facilitate achievement. On the other hand, desires can be intrinsically good or bad. They should be selected so that the ensemble of our desires is intrinsically best.

Thomas Hurka has suggested that desires and aversions are intrinsically good when they are the appropriate or fitting attitudes to their objects. Loving for itself what is intrinsically good is intrinsically good, as is hating for itself what is intrinsically evil. Loving the good is being for the good, having a positive orientation to it. Hurka explains, "One can love *x* by desiring or wishing for it when it does not obtain, by actively pursuing it to make it obtain, or by taking pleasure in it when it does obtain."[12] Perhaps with respect to pursuit it is better to say that one form of loving something is being disposed to act to bring it about (for itself, not for any further consequences) when the agent believes such action can be efficacious. We can fold all of this into the notion of desire if we say that the appropriate, intrinsically good attitude toward an intrinsic good is desiring that it obtain when it does not exist and desiring that it be sustained and increased when it does, adding that as G.E.M. Anscombe once noted a primitive sign of wanting is trying to get.

There is a rich world of goods spanning a wide range of degrees of value. The acme of scientific achievement is intrinsically good, and so is enjoying the taste of ketchup on a hamburger. The appropriate attitude toward the diversity of goods (and evils) is to love (hate) them in proportion to their comparative objective value. There does not seem to be any absolute normative ceiling to the degree of attitudinal enthusiasm with which it is appropriate to respond to any good or type of good. If there were a being that responded with incredible heights of ecstasy to an infinitesimal good, that would not amount to defective desiring provided the being's responses to greater goods was proportionately greater. It is intrinsically good to divide our love in proportion to the objective value of the goods that there are.

Alongside the ideal of loving the good (and hating the bad) proportionately one should set the ideal of loving the good (and hating the bad) effectively. Loving the good effectively is loving it in such a way as to maximize one's attainment of good.

These two ideals often run together. Loving romantic marriage-like commitment more than casual sex in proportion to the greater comparative value of the former, Randy and Tom are thereby rendered more likely to achieve the better good rather than rest content with the inferior one. But the two ideals are different, and they can and probably do conflict. Sometimes getting more of the one leads to getting less of the other, so tradeoffs are necessary. It is plausible to think that desiring to achieve Olympic-quality athletic achievement with disproportionate excess is instrumentally advantageous, for some people in some contexts, and conduces to maximizing their athletic achievement. Here loving the good proportionately is at odds with loving the good effectively.

According to the objective list account of human good, the desires we should wish to have for our own good are those that constitute the proper mix of desires that are intrinsically good, as just characterized, and the desires that are instrumentally good.

The tradeoff between loving the good proportionately and loving the good effectively stands in the background as a regulative norm when one considers vices of fanaticism. Our condemnation of the fanatic who loves some good disproportionately should be tempered by the consideration that loving excessively in this way might also be loving to exactly the right extent if what we are measuring is effective love of the good. Although plausible examples seem to me to be harder to find, in principle we should also see the phenomenon of tempering the impulse to negative judgment on someone who has

desires that significantly impede his achievement of good to the extent that those desires exhibit the virtue of loving the good proportionately.

It seems to me that people generally are quite tolerant even of significantly distorted evaluation on the part of an individual when the distortion is harmless to others and works to enhance the individual's achievement of significant goods. It is also sometimes uncertain how seriously to take a profession that the segment of the world of goods in which one's life is engaged is superior to all others. A person may be wildly enthusiastic about soccer and hold it to be the world's greatest sport but also recognize that if she had been raised in another country or culture she would have come to have loved and esteemed, say, rugby, to the same great extent that she actually loves and esteems soccer. Here perhaps the person does not seriously affirm a distorted assessment. What is happening is that intense desire is coloring evaluation and exerting a psychological pressure to magnify positive evaluation of what is so strongly desired--a pressure that the person does not reflectively endorse.

Regarding the ideal of loving the good effectively, we should give full credit to a person whose desires are prudent in that they are well adapted to maximizing her expected well-being given available knowledge at the time of desire formation. We should not criticize people for having expected well-being maximizing desires even if things turn out badly.

Consider Heathcliff and Catherine, the characters in *Wuthering Heights*, in the light of this discussion. If we regard their romantic passion for each other as fanatically excessive, are we measuring their desires against the standard of intrinsically good desiring (loving the good proportionately) or instrumentally good desiring (loving the

good effectively) or both? One view is that each of these characters' intense passion is an appropriate response to the nobility and sex appeal of the beloved, hence an intrinsically good desire. The problem is in the arena of bourgeois prudence: a different constellation of desires, moderation all around, would be a set of desires with higher expected well-being than the intrinsically good desires thy end up holding.

We might even refrain from rendering a negative prudential judgment: not all fanaticism or extremism is irrational. If achieving a life together would be a sufficiently great good, and if other options are bleak, then a life plan that yields even a small chance of achieving this great good may be the one that maximizes their expected well-being, and their hyper-intense love may be an expected-well-being maximizing desire. Even if speaking of their choice of life plan is a misdescription, because their lives are driven by inner forces beyond their power to control, we can still affirm their unchosen life plan as one that would have been reasonable to choose.

The question arises whether the ideal of proportionate love of the good is really desirable, and has any weight at all in competition with the ideal of effective love of the good. If someone loves the good effectively, is there any defect at all present if effective love involves some strategically disproportionate love? Here what is called into question is the ideal of loving the good proportionally that Hurka affirms and that I have been accepting so far in this section.

For any position that embraces moral cognitivism, there will be an intellectual flaw in a person whose evaluations of goods and bads are incorrect. If the sport of judo is three times better than the sport of wrestling, it would be a failure of moral knowledge in

a wrestling fan to overvalue the relative merits of her favored sport, compared to those of judo.

It is not clear that disproportionate desiring per se is defective. There is a universe of diverse goods. Any individual has limited capacities for coming to appreciate and crave particular instances of goods and also kinds of goods. Beyond some point, which may differ for each person, further attempts to broaden the scope of one's desiring of the good would dilute the quality of one's sensitive and nuanced desirous response to goods in the limited scope. If we conceive of different persons, and the same person at different times, as varying in their total capacities to desire, one question is whether or not it is intrinsically better to have the capacity for greater rather than lesser desires in the aggregate. Another question can be posed: for any finite stock of capacity to desire is it intrinsically better to divide the stock of desire in proportion to the values of the things desired? Once the intellectual apprehension issue is distinguished from the strength of desire issue, I see no reason to affirm the idea that it is intrinsically better that desire should vary in strength with the goodness of its object.

The rejection of the ideal of proportionate desiring might seem most plausible when the goods in question are particular persons who might be selected as friends or associates. Sally might desire friendship with Sue a lot and with Samantha hardly at all even though she sees clearly that Sue's merits are not greater than Samantha's. The same goes perhaps for categories of goods. Someone might desire to become accomplished at painting but not at philosophy or physics without being tempted to claim that painting is an inherently more excellent kind of activity than the undesired others.

Even if proportionate desiring were intrinsically desirable, it might be perfectly acceptable all things considered for Sally to desire friendship only with Sue and for someone to desire only to pursue painting achievement not other kinds. This is so because the disproportionate desires might be strategically valuable, aids to maximizing well-being. So to fix on the question that concerns us, we need to suppose that instrumental considerations are not in play. Suppose my total stock of desires will be deployed effectively in any case, whether I proportion my desires to the value of their objects or not. Suppose I can bring it about that I love painting, philosophy, and physics is strict proportion to their objective merits or disproportionately. To repeat, there is no loss or gain in expected well-being from choosing one or another of these constellations of desires, so there is no trade-off issue to consider. Nor will the aggregate amount of desire alter with one or another choice.[13] The only difference is in the distribution of fixed stock of desire. In this scenario, is proportionate desiring intrinsically better than disproportionate desiring? I'm unsure, but I have no strong impulse to answer affirmatively.

Perhaps a decisive reason for an affirmative answer emerges once one notes that desiring the good can be intellectualized or simple. An intellectualized desire for something that is intrinsically good is a desire for it as good. As Hurka notes, discussing this point, "here one's love derives from a prior judgment of intrinsic value."[14] In contrast, a simple desire for something that is intrinsically good is a direct positive emotional response or orientation, "direct" in the sense that it is unmediated by any value judgment.

Consider intellectualized desires for goods. If one's desire for *x* proceeds from a value judgment that *x* is intrinsically good, then if this value judgment is accurate, it will register the comparative merits of goods. If chess is intrinsically better than checkers, the value judgment that is ingredient in one's intellectualized desire for chess will register that fact. It would be odd to say the least, and perhaps defective, if one's intellectualized desires fail to be proportionate to their objects. Can one reasonably love chess as valuable without loving it more or less, according to the extent of its intrinsic value?

This question does strike me as rhetorical. For any intrinsic good or type of good, it is better that one's desire for it be based on correct judgments, so that one appreciates the good properly. Still, the desire so based might be disproportionate, as when one knows full well that Hong Kong action movies are not an excellent aesthetic type but loves the type anyway. Moreover, even if it were true that intellectualized desires ought to be proportionate, there does not seem comparable reason why simple desires should be the same. There can be different mixes of intellectualized and simple desires in one's overall affection for any good, and so far as I can see no practical imperative that the mix should include any particular ratio of one type than the other. So there does not seem to be an imperative of practical reason prescribing that other things being equal one ought to have desire for goods proportionate to their intrinsic excellence.

An objective list account of human good or well-being implies that insofar as one aims to increase the well-being of a person (the person might be oneself) by influencing the character of her desires, one should strive to alter or form desires with a view to inducing a set that is maximally efficient for the goal to maximizing the person's lifetime achievement of the entries on the objective list. This aim should perhaps be balanced

against the aim of altering desires so as to maximize the extent to which having those desires is itself intrinsically good. But the ideal of proportionate desiring is looks problematic under scrutiny, whereas the ideal of effective desiring should be uncontroversial.

3. Hybrid accounts of human good and preference formation.

This section is unfinished.

A hybrid view holds that nothing that an individual does or gets contributes in itself to her well-being unless the thing is both objectively valuable and positively engages her subjectivity.

Derek Parfit mentions such a view.[15] Robert Adams suggests that well-being is constituted by enjoyment of the excellent.[16] Stephen Darwall comes close to asserting a similar view.[17] Ronald Dworkin urges that nothing can contribute to a person's well-being that fails to elicit the endorsement of that very person.[18] I focus on Adams's suggestion.

The hybrid view's recommendations regarding policies of desire formation will be broadly similar to those of objective list accounts.

The enjoyment that according to the hybrid view is required for well-being must be enjoyment taken in what is objectively valuable. One must enjoy not merely what is in fact excellent, but an excellent aspect of it. So if I am a defensive end and play football at a high level of excellence, but enjoy nothing about this achievement except the sensation of smashing my body into opponents' bodies, this does not suffice. One must enjoy the excellent as excellent. This enjoyment might be intellectualized, mediated by a

value judgment to the effect that what one is doing or having is excellent, or simple and direct, unmediated by any such value judgment.

An objective list view can grant that other things being equal, it is better that one's objectively valuable achievements and attainments be accompanied by pleasure, since this adds to the overall well-being boost that one gains thereby. In a similar way, since knowledge is better than confusion or ignorance, a person who does or gets what is excellent and understands what about it is excellent and to what degree is gaining more well-being, other things being equal, than someone whose attainment of the excellent is unaccompanied by these correct beliefs.

The disagreement between the objective list view and the hybrid view emerges clearly in cases where the individual could be induced either to achieve a greater weighted sum of entries on the list or a smaller sum when only the lesser attainment satisfies the enjoyment condition. Suppose that Smith could be brought to lead one of two lives. The lives are identical except that in the first, Smith gains lots of pleasure from reading trashy novels (of nil excellence) and attains lots of excellent but purely mercenary achievement as a scientist (so the achievement is accompanied by nil enjoyment), whereas in the second life there is far less pleasure and less achievement overall but the two are integrated--the scientist enjoys his modest achievements. No matter how great the shortfall in the total pleasure and achievement registered in the second life, the hybrid view will rate the second life as greater in well-being, whereas the objective list view disagrees, and depending on the sums, will sometimes favor the first life. Notice, however, that the difference between the hybrid view and the straight objective list view need not be that the former but not the latter holds that it is a condition

of one's life counting as good for the one who lives it that it must contain enjoyment. A version of the objective list view might hold that no life counts as good for the one who lives it unless some threshold level of enjoyment (and perhaps other goods) is achieved. The difference is that the hybrid view holds that no achievement however great adds to one's well-being unless it is enjoyed and no enjoyment however great adds to one's well-being unless it is directed at what is excellent.

The upshot, if we are considering how we should try to shape people's desires, is that the hybrid view as described above takes a sterner line than the objective list view against cheap thrills, trashy pleasures, the enjoyment of the nonexcellent.[19] The hybrid view urges more decisively than the objective list view that we should train people if we can not to desire the cotton candy of life. Regarding excellence, the hybrid view like the objective list view favors the training of desire so that desire is maximally instrumentally efficacious for the attainment of well-being. The difference is that the hybrid view sees no point in inducing desire for excellence that can be achieved but that cannot (or, one foresees, will not) be enjoyed, and no point in bringing about enjoyment if enjoyment is taken in what is nonexcellent. So besides counseling against developing basic desires for the nonexcellent just on the ground that doing so will lead to enjoyment of the nonexcellent, the hybrid view will by the same token counsel against seeking and even desiring excellent achievements if those excellent achievements will certainly never be enjoyed. The hybrid view seeks an overlap. At least, this will be the recommendation if the task is to shape an individual's desires in ways that are conducive to the well-being of that very individual.

[1] . Emily Bronte, *Wuthering Heights*, ed. David Daiches (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1963). Originally published 1847.

[2] For a far more affirmative view, see Martha Nussbaum, "*Wuthering Heights*: The Romantic Ascent," *Philosophy and Literature*, vol. 20 (1996), pp. 362-382. See also my discussion toward the end of this essay.

[3] . Robert M. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1999, p. 200.

[4] . The quoted words are those of D. H. Lawrence, as cited by Bernard Williams in *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p. 86.

[5] . Conflict between lower-order and higher-order preferences cannot be all there is to less than wholehearted embrace of a lower-order preference. One might have an unconfident and halfhearted preference for a thing, supported by an unconfident and halfhearted second-order preference concerning it, and so on, up the hierarchy.

[6] . John Rawls, "Social Unity and Primary Goods," reprinted in *John Rawls: Collected Papers*, ed. Samuel Freeman (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 359-387; see pp. 382-3.

[7] . The best analysis of these issues regarding reasons and prudence is still in Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

[8] . Philip Bricker considers this idea in "Prudence," *Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 77, no, 7 (July, 1980), pp. 381-401. My analysis of the "bare person" issue generally is indebted to this excellent essay.

[9] . Jon Elster takes this line in "Sour Grapes," reprinted in his *Sour Grapes: Studies in the Subversion of Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 109-140. Elster distinguishes autonomy and utility and seems to regard both as enhancing an individual's quality of life.

[10] . Richard Kraut, "Desire and the Human Good," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association,* vol. 68, no. 2 (November, 1994), 39-54.

[11] . There may be problematic slippage here. Satisfying one's desires is one thing and fulfilling one's life aims or ambitions is another. The latter involves a commitment, an orientation of the will, in a way the former does not. The theory of the good might treat desire satisfaction and aim fulfillment differently.

[12] . Thomas Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 13.

[13] . Is it intrinsically better to have more rather than less desire in the aggregate (I assume desire is being conceived in such a way that its total amount per person varies)? In *On Liberty*, John Stuart Mill suggests that having strong desires is potentially instrumentally better than having weak desires. He seems to envisage that one person may have more, and more intense, desires than another person, in total: "To say that one person's desires and feelings are stronger and more various than those of another, is merely to say that he has more of the raw material of human nature, and is therefore capable, perhaps of more evil, but certainly of more good. Strong impulses are but another name for energy" (chapter 3, paragraph 5). I don't understand the "perhaps" and the "certainly" in the first quoted sentence, but having more and stronger desires surely can be instrumentally valuable to maximizing one's expected well-being if the desires are well-aimed. But I don't see that it is intrinsically better or worse to have more rather than less desire in the aggregate.

[14] . Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value*, p. 14.

[15] . Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 501-502.

[16]. Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods*, chapter 3. Adams backs away from the view by the end of the chapter, so his position is not that enjoyment is necessary for it to be the case that excellence adds to the well-being of the one who does or gets it, but rather that the well-being value of excellence without enjoyment and of enjoyment without excellence are steeply discounted. So understood, Adams's position is close to Darwall's. Serena Olsaretti has developed another version of the hybrid view. According to her position, no achievement however great adds to the well-being of the person unless that very person has some pro-attitude toward the achievement itself (regarded apart from its further consequences).

[17] . Stephen Darwall, *Welfare and Rational Care* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), last chapter.

[18] . Ronald Dworkin: *Sovereign Virtue: The Theory and Practice of Equality* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), chapter 6.

[19] . But the extent of disagreement here depends on one's views on the nature of the excellent. Adams's theistic Platonism appears to understand the *excellent* to be a broadly encompassing category, so that simple ordinary pleasures such as scratching one's nose might qualify as an instance of the excellent. For

Adams, finite goods are fragmentary shards of the infinite, and what constitutes them as excellent is their greater or lesser resemblance to infinite good.