Does Fairness Require a Multidimensional Approach?

Richard Arneson

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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 X, 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). If the appropriate measure is instead the extent to which one's actual preference regarding her life are satisfied, perhaps magnitudes of actual preference satisfaction can be detected and different persons' scores meaningfully compared (Bykvist, chapter X, this Handbook).

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).

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.

Even a cursory reflection on the question, what makes a life in itself better for the individual who is living it, indicates that there are deep difficulties here. Reflective people passionately affirm different and conflicting answers. There are many dimensions along which a person's life might be ranked as better and worse. Along each dimension, there are continuing disputes as to how to assess people's condition as better and worse. Moreover, there are many ways in which the anyway controversial scores that individuals gain on each of the dimensions can be added together to yield an all things considered overall well-being score. Furthermore, some hold that the appearance of plural dimensions of well-being is illusory; they claim that there is a unitary master well-being value.

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 purpose with multidimensional assessment—various measures of people's dimensional achievements, all things considered assessment being left to intuitive catch-as-catch-can judgment. A theory of well-being would solve these problems, but according to the argument of this chapter, we lack such a theory. BOL is not a theory at all, not even a bad theory.

From this standpoint, there are two sources of the practical necessity of multidimensional assessment. One is slack from characterization to measurement. Example: suppose that welfare is spiritual advancement. We likely have no feasible way of assessing this achievement, but may have some reason to believe it is associated with regular churchgoing, and with performance of good deeds, each of which can be measured. If we must make do with several proxies, we are stuck with multidimensional assessment, for practical purposes. A second source is uncertainty of characterization. If there are irreducibly different

dimensions of well-being, such as pleasure and knowledge, and no method of aggregation, we are stuck with separate scores on the different dimensions plus intuitive balancing.

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 1999, Dworkin 2000). 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 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.

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Comment [1]: Equivalent income belongs here. It is not a measure of well-being, just a measure of advantage that is respectful of preferences.

This chapter defends the appropriateness of seeking an ultimate well-being standard and not resting content with fair well-being. But again, however this issue is settled in theory, it will resurface at a practical level, where what is at issue is how best to implement accepted standards, not choice or discovery of fundamental standards. This leaves us in an awkward position. Suppose you and I agree on an objective-list conception of well-being, and suppose our shared view is correct. If the account is vague and unspecific, it may provide scant guidance.

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 2 introduces perfectionism, the type of objective theory of well-being that is by far the most developed and most popular on offer. Section 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. We lack a theory that explains what unites these goods, makes them good, and gives us anything close to a principled standard for assessing lives as overall better or worse. Section 3 defends this no-theory claim by raising doubts about a partial alternative to perfectionism, the organic unity proposal. Section 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 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 6 considers some sophisticated versions of desire satisfactionism and rehearses some objections against them. Section 7 urges that since we lack anything close to a theory of well-being, we must make do with multidimensional assessment. Section 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. We instead need a standard of how well off or badly off a person is such that for purposes of public policy choice and implementation it is fair to treat people according to that standard. This standard would give us an account of *fair well-being*. 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.

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).

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. (She treats all times in her life impartially, not favoring youth over old age or the

reverse, for example.) But what is it to "do as well for yourself as you can" at any time? This is the question, what is well-being?

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Comment [2]: why? One can be prudent and think that life in youth has greater value.

Derek Parfit has written that 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, Apppendix 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 ___ in 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 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).

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 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.

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 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.

The three "theories" of well-being we are considering are dissimilar in a further way. They do not all 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, as commentators have pointed out, 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, and does not help to understand why the objective list view is not a theory. 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 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, chapter 1). A more comprehensive theory of well-being also

enables us to compare the well-being of 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.

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 and 1992). This is actually a family of views; 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 eighteenth-century, that each human individual is unique and has a unique distinctive nature, unfolding and following which is the unique good for that individual.

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.

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 perfectionisms along with an alternative "organic unity" approach claim to an explanatory theory of objective value occurs in the next section of this chapter.

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.

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 casually dismissed as a nonstarter, on the ground that our normative theory of welfare must include an explanatory justification of its core elements. BOL is just a list. 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 explanation of why a mistaken proposed account of welfare is somehow correct is not intellectually satisfactory if the account really 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 veggi-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) do not enhance the quality of life of the person who has

these desires. It's not just that satisfaction of such desires are 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 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 passing, I note that it is odd to hold that the nature of a being fixes what it would be good for it to get and do. 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.

After this digression, let us return to perfectionism's mishandling of the cheeseburger test. One response is 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 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 2006). 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.

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 belly-flop. 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.

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 Hurka's chapter in 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, at 366).

Hurka suggests that the main intrinsic goods are knowledge, achievement, pleasure, and virtue. Knowledge and achievement likely are susceptible to explanation in perfectionist or organic unity terms, and virtue involves appropriate higher-order attitudes toward the first-order goods. Virtue is loving the good and hating the bad (and loving the loving of the good and hating the non-loving of the good and so on).

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, 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 yard dash extremely fast can be a very simple and a very valuable achievement. A good poem or art work might display tight unity or sprawling wild disunity.

We should also be wary of the unifying account of virtue in terms of higher-order attitudes. A fair discussion of this issue would need to explore rival conceptions of virtue. This is a large topic beyond the scope of this broad survey chapter. A simple preliminary worry is the thought that many virtues centrally involve dispositions to behavior not attitudes. The courageous person is able to recognize danger and discern what behavioral response it calls for and is reliably disposed to behave in that way. Another thought is that the virtues are more heterogeneous in kind than the recursive attitude account acknowledges.

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 problematic. There are two separate problems here (which is not to say they may not be related). We lack a unifying justifying explanation of what makes valuable things valuable, and we lack a standard of measurement that would enable us to determine the overall value of combinations of value achievements, as they might be found in the various lives that people might lead. BOL makes no significant claims on either front. That is nothing to brag about, but it is better than making false claims.

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) 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 affirmed by suggested by Parfit 1984, Kraut 1994, Adams 1999, Darwall 1999 and others.

A full discussion if 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 consider three examples in the literature.

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. Consider then the physicist whose great accomplishments leave her cold but who finds zest and enjoyment in watching sunsets and joking with friends and consuming pornography. Let's stipulate that since the person is not whole-heartedly engaged in her accomplishments, she does not persistently try hard to succeed. Raz must assess the hypothetical physicist as having zero well-being, but the life can register as high in well-being by objective list assessment, and this is surely the more sensible verdict. One might also note that if success in pursuit of valuable activities is understood as success in fulfillment of life aims that are valuable activities, then unsuccessful pursuit of such aims might yet involve excellent accomplishments that do not amount to success in the activities the individual aims to excel at. 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 or 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). The gulping of a greasy, mediocre cheeseburger can give enjoyment, and it seems dogmatically narrow to rule out enjoyment of the nonexcellent as a genuine good. On the other side, on a straight objective list view, excellent accomplishment in itself enhances the quality of an individual's life even if the accomplishment elicits no subjective approval, endorsement, desire, or enjoyment on the part of the achieving individual.

Ronald Dworkin (Dworkin 2000, ch. 1) imagines two persons, Jack and Jill, whose lives are identical in any respects that seem to matter for well-being (let's understand this as the stipulation that they score exactly the same according to a sensible objective list measure). However, one is satisfied with how his life is going and the other person is not. Jill subscribes to an odd philosophy according to which nothing has any value except the breakthrough accomplishments of a few creative geniuses. Failing to succeed at that level, Jill judges her life to be worthless, whereas Jack embraces a more forgiving measure of life success and so judges that his life is going fine. The two persons live otherwise identical lives, including having lots of enjoyment. Jack endorses the achievements and satisfactions in his life and Jill does not. If one insists that nothing in a person's life can have value unless it is subjectively endorsed by that very person, Jill has zero well-being, Jack a high level of well-being. From an objective list standpoint, this result shows the insistence is unreasonable. If Jack and Jill score equally by the objective list measure, they are living lives of equal well-being. To accept this verdict is to reject any hybrid view that supposes nothing can be good for a person unless she subjectively endorses that thing, judges it to be valuable.

This is not the lesson that Dworkin himself draws from the example of Jack and Jill. He is discussing what he calls overall success theories of welfare. These hold that one's life goes better, the more successful one judges one's life as a whole to be. The Jack and Jill story illustrates the implausibility of this account of welfare. Dworkin's negative verdict here seems correct. A positive verdict, not embraced by Dworkin, also seems warranted. If two persons' lives are identical in all respects except that one endorses the life as it takes shape and the other does not, the sheer difference in subjective endorsement is insufficient to make it the case that one lives well and the other does not. (This allows that if one correctly assesses the value of the life she is leading and the other does not, this correct assessment might qualify as an objectively valuable achievement and so enhance the quality of life of the one who makes it.)

Marc Fleurbaey 2/4/2015 3:08 AM

Comment [3]: this is confusing. It seems that both negative and positive verdicts are endorsed here.

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.

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, 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.

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. I do not endorse this structured view of the good life, but it captures part of what might attract some toward hybrid views.

5. Alienation.

An objective list account of well-being is often thought to be a non-starter 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.

However, if we opt for a preferentialist or desire satisfaction account of well-being to avoid this alienation worry, we find it comes back to haunt the enterprise. Simple desire satisfaction accounts are not vulnerable to the alienation worry but still seem unsatisfactory, since desires can take silly or pointless objects. If we seek to avoid this objection by switching to some account that identifies what is good for a person with hypothetical desires he would have in ideal circumstances, then there is no reason to think that the actual individual with her actual preferences, warts and all, will not be motivated by her hypothetical ideal preferences. Suppose we identify the good with satisfaction of informed preferences. Becoming fully informed might well change your personality, lead to radical changes in your desires. What my fully informed self would want might well leave actual me cold (Rosati 1995). So a desire satisfaction account advocate cannot appeal to the alienation constraint as a knockdown argument against objective list views. For the desire satisfaction advocate is pushed to a view that also succumbs to the alienation constraint.

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 fall-back position.

6. Ideally informed preferences.

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

Preference or desire satisfaction might seem too encompassing anyway to qualify as a plausible conception of individual welfare. I might begin reading about the Spanish Inquisition and want it to be the case that its aims were not fulfilled. 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

Marc Fleurbaey 2/4/2015 3:29 AM
Comment [4]: ideal preferences appear here, before a section devoted to them.

Marc Fleurbaey 2/4/2015 3:26 AM
Comment [5]: The argument is unfair here. The alienation problem should not refer to ordinary preferences but to ideal preferences. BOL may value things that the ideal preferences of a person would not want. This is the correct version of the alienation objection. Ideal preferentialism is immune to this problem, by construction.

Marc Fleurbaey 2/4/2015 3:30 AM
Comment [6]: in fact the beginning of this section is about other issues (non-personal objects of desires, adaptive preferences)

Marc Fleurbaey 2/4/2015 3:28 AM
Comment [7]: people may have different intuitions about this.

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.

The worries do not stop there. 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 (but for a response, see Bykvist chapter in 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.

A more devastating worry plagues 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. Yet it seems clearly off-base to say of such an individual that if her life goes badly for her, it thereby goes well. If the person's overwhelming desire is that her life go badly, 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. A possible response to say that satisfaction of preferences is what makes one's life in itself go better or worse provided the preferences are about how one's life goes and are desires one's life goes well. But this sounds ad hoc. And suppose the would-be self punisher insists, my life goes well when it goes 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, chapter 7). .

This problem seems to me to be devastating for the preference satisfaction account, in any version. 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 back yard. 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 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. (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

Marc Fleurbaey 2/4/2015 3:33 AM
Comment [8]: this is not interesting: it all depends on playing with two meanings of "life going badly". Once a particular meaning is adopted, the paradox disappears.

Marc Fleurbaey 2/4/2015 3:34 AM
Comment [9]: funny but not meaningful.

Marc Fleurbaey 2/4/2015 3:36 AM
Comment [10]: one example of silly preferences does not undermine a theory of "ideal" preferences

Marc Fleurbaey 2/4/2015 3:37 AM
Comment [11]: it is not clear why one should exclude instrumental desires. The more they are satisfied, the more the non-instrumental desires are satisfied too, mechanically.

Marc Fleurbaey 2/4/2015 3:40 AM
Comment [12]: this relies on a "bucket list" view of preferences which is confusing. Preferences are not the same as (specific) goals.

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. Suppose I want to work at learning quantum physics. If I were fully informed in this matter, I would already know quantum physics, and would cease to have a desire to work at learning it. I might know that if I were to have the experience of using cocaine, I would become addicted, but not knowing what it is like to experience cocaine does not subvert the reasonableness of my desire not to use cocaine to avoid becoming addicted. 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.

Marc Fleurbaey 2/4/2015 3:43 AM

Comment [13]: the example is bad. The desire should not be about "learning", but about "knowing".

This last objection plagues a fancy version of the informed desire satisfaction account. This is the ideal advisor account, which holds that what is basically (noninstrumentally and intrinsically) good for a person is satisfaction if 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 of 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 in this volume).

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 the M. Fleurbaey chapter in this Handbook, also Fleurbaey 2007 and 2012 and Fleurbaey and Blanchet 2013). This chapter does not discuss the equivalent income approach and a fortiori ventures no assessment.

Marc Fleurbaey 2/4/2015 3:46 AM

Comment [14]: but section 8 deals with the family containing equivalent income.

7. The objective list account of well-being, the lack of an agreed standard, the need for multi-dimensional 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. The spectre of arbitrariness looms. Our inability to rationalize the selection and dissolve the appearance of arbitrariness invites skepticism (Mackie 1977).

By itself, this ghost maybe should not frighten us. Some ethical claims may rest on substantive judgment. If any ethical claims are true, they cannot be true by virtue of representing the empirical facts of the world as they actually are. The truth-maker for an ethical claim would be ideal coherence of reflective belief. Ethical truth is what would be believed at the limit of ideal reflective inquiry, after all pertinent

arguments and reasons have been properly weighed. In this state of ideal reflective equilibrium, we would agree on general ethical claims that explain and justify all the particular judgments to which, after ideally extended inquiry, we are committed. No one has reached ideal reflective equilibrium, so the ethical claims we now embrace should be regarded as fallible, liable to be overturned by further experience and reflection.

You might be skeptical that ideal reflective equilibrium is well-defined, or that, were we to reach it, it would have non-zero positive content. These are reasonable doubts, but they apply to claims about what is morally right, what we owe one another by way of due consideration, as well as to claims about self-interest, the nature of good, what constitutes a life that is good for the person. If you aren't a complete moral skeptic, you should not be a skeptic about the nature of the good life. Ask yourself: is there less agreement among people as to whether friendship, love, pleasure, meaningful work, and achievement in themselves make one's life go better than there is about whether there should be redistribution between rich and poor or whether there are moral constraints on what we may do even to achieve the best attainable outcomes? Also, people are divided about the good to some extent not by normative disagreement about what is good but by broad empirical and metaphysical disagreement about the nature of the world we inhabit: is there a God who will reward and punish us in the afterlife? If one confines oneself to this-worldly assessment, disagreement about the good is far less than you would suppose by reading academic philosophy articles.

But the objective list of goods is surely a motley. Suppose the entries on the objective list include at least pleasure, achievement, and friendship and love. Other things equal, a person's life goes better when it contains more pleasure rather than less, and better when it contains more achievement, and better, when it contains more friendship and love. We have no clear idea how to construct an index that enables us to determine, for any amount of pleasure of varying sorts, how many achievements of varying degrees and kinds, how much friendship and love, and so on, that accrue in a person's life, what the person's overall lifetime well-being score is, aggregated across these and all the rest of the disparate dimensions of well-being. Without being skeptical of the possibility of establishing an objective measure of well-being, we must acknowledge that we aren't likely to accomplish this task anytime soon. Perhaps there is only partial commensurability, not full commensurability, across the goods that together constitute well-being. We also are not in position to settle on a partial comparability measure.

We seem to have reached a quick argument for the necessity of multidimensional assessment of individual well-being. If there are irreducible plural goods, then either we can identify an authoritative index, that enables us to compute, from any individual's achievements along various dimensions of good, an overall well-being score for that individual, or we are left with separate assessments of the plural goods. There are in fact irreducible plural goods. No authoritative index is identifiable by us now. So we must make do with multidimensional assessment.

Here's another way of stating this line of thought. There are several noninstrumental intrinsic goods, getting any of which in itself makes people's lives go better. One of these goods is pleasure (enjoyment). Kahneman's objective happiness measure is a good indicator of enjoyment. We lack any way of incorporating amounts of pleasure experienced into an overall measure of how well her life is going, given what she gains of other goods (and bads). At best, we might have some standards for assessing each of these other intrinsic noninstrumental goods, or maybe different standards for different types of each of the goods. Given indications of how well a person is doing along the various measures, we then must make do (for now) with intuitive all things considered assessment of the degree to which the person is doing well or badly. In this exercise the information we get from (for example) indications of Kahneman objective happiness is not rendered otiose by any inclusive measure. So we need multidimensional assessment.

The argument stated just above does not deny that as a matter of metaphysical fact, there may always be a determinate answer to the question, for any combination of intrinsic goods and bads an individual's life might contain, exactly how good overall is the life the individual is leading (how much well-being does the life contain). The argument instead appeals to the thought that even if there are determinate answers to all such questions for any individual in any circumstances, we currently lack access to a standard that would determine the overall well-being or prudential quality of an individual's life given all the circumstances she might encounter.

Even if we had such a standard, we might still lack a feasible means of instituting a measure of well-being as a guide to public policy selection. This might be the case as a result of the operation of any of several causes.

Marc Fleurbaey 2/4/2015 4:01 AM
Comment [15]: the problem of disagreement is not mainly about identifying the goods, but about weighting them.

Marc Fleurbaey 2/4/2015 4:04 AM
Comment [16]: The main objection against the belief that such a measure is worth seeking, is that it is possible to have different conceptions of the good life. Some may prioritize friendship, others will focus on knowledge. There is nothing wrong about such differences, and forcing a single index on these people is showing disturbing disrespect.

Marc Fleurbaey 2/4/2015 4:05 AM
Comment [17]: the third (better) alternative is to allow personalized indices that take account of people's conceptions of the good life.

Marc Fleurbaey 2/4/2015 4:06 AM
Comment [18]: ideal preferences seem better than nothing

Marc Fleurbaey 2/4/2015 4:07 AM
Comment [19]: why not allow for several reasonable answers that are equally acceptable?

First, even if there is a correct standard of well-being that in principle allows us to compare the well-being of any two individuals and determine who has greater well-being, it might yet still be so that people steadily disagree about what the standard is and how to interpret it, so that no implementation if a public policy could be the object of a consensus or near-consensus among citizens. Even if people agree about the nature of good so long as the issue is posed in very abstract and general term, at a fine-grained level they disagree.

Second, even if we could achieve a consensus about an interpretive characterization of the good, we might lack any workable measure of well-being. Analogy: even if we could agree that the heavier people are, the better off they are, we might lack any effective technology that would enable us to weigh individuals or otherwise make accurate estimates of their weight. This might be the situation with respect to well-being.

Third, even if those who sincerely seek to understand the nature of individual well-being and to find a standard of assessing individual well-being and to identify practical techniques for measuring well-being according to this standard will converge on answers to these questions, it still could be the case that in the rough and tumble of politics, attempts to deploy assessments of individual well-being and judgments concerning how to increase it will tend to be counterproductive.

Difficulties of any of these three types might render it the case that in particular circumstances, which might be ubiquitous, we should eschew a general policy of seeking to deploy individual well-being assessment as an input into public policy choice. Instead a hodgepodge of strategies might be helpful depending on circumstances.

Between (1) an extreme perfectionism that provides a unifying justifying explanation of all items on the objective list and on that basis provides a single measure of overall perfectionist attainment and equates one's score on that measure with one's well-being and (2) an extreme skepticism about the prospects for unifying justifying explanation and for developing a single measure of objective well-being there are many intermediate possibilities. Does my position just boil down to rejecting 1 and asserting 2 in a loud voice?

No. I reject 1 but do not affirm 2. Perfectionism looks to be a dead end. To what extent a unifying justifying explanation of the items on the objective list can be developed remains an entirely open question. We should simply acknowledge, no one has to date advanced a promising explanation of this sort. Whether or not such an explanation can be found, the possibility of developing an index of objective list attainments should be treated as a separate and independent issue. An index that we should accept might be discovered even if the quest for unifying explanation proves hopeless. What we should instead acknowledge, and what is relevant for public policy guidance, is that to date no serious proposals or developing a measure of objective list goods are on the table and nobody has a clue about how to make progress on this front. This is simply our current epistemic predicament not a prophesy of epistemic doom and gloom, still less an argument denying the possibility of progress along this front.

Suppose for simplicity that there are just two goods on the list—pleasure and achievement, and we have an unproblematic measure that enables us to determine, for anyone in any circumstances, how much pleasure and how much achievement his life contains. How good overall is his life? A simple possibility is lexical priority—the smallest amount of the one good outweighs any amount however huge of the other. If lexical priority does not obtain, we can compare different lives containing different mixes of pleasure and achievement, and make intuitive judgments as to which life is better. Convergence of judgment among observers most competent to assess would start to reveal the comparative importance of different constituents of well-being.

Marc Fleurbaey 2/4/2015 2:54 PM
Comment [20]: why is there no space for multiple views about the relative importance of pleasure and achievement?

Notice that some prominent social justice proposals conspicuously eschew all-things-considered assessment of how well a person's life is going. For example, Martha Nussbaum identifies several basic capabilities and affirms that social justice demands that every person be sustained at a threshold decent or good enough level of each and every one of the basic capabilities. Notice that this view of social justice does not require us to aggregate an individual's achievements along the various dimensions of capability into one all things considered assessment of the person's condition with respect to capabilities. (Nussbaum 2006). In the terminology of this chapter, Nussbaum acknowledges the necessity (at least in our present epistemic condition) of multidimensional assessment.

8. Well-being measures as fair guides to public policy not as measures of the objective worth of individual lives.

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).

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 desire or preference satisfaction account of well-being for purposes of public policy choice might be justified in the same way. In fact we find advocates of such views saying exactly that. For example, Marc Fleurbaey explicitly suggests that we should when choosing public policies seek to advance each person's good in terms of what that person cares about, whether or not we are confident that what the person cares about coincides with her true well-being. 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 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 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, 2011 and 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. The observation of pluralism of belief suggests the moral constraint that society should not base its treatment of individuals on controversial and sectarian conceptions of good that some individuals will have reason to reject from their own evaluative standpoints.

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. Whatever is the best construal of fair well-being, we might conjoin it to a principle that bids us, for example, to maximize its aggregate across persons, or to

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Comment [21]: At last. Perhaps this consideration should be announced or developed in the previous section. It seems orthogonal to whether wellbeing should be measured in terms of the good or in terms of fairness.

maximin, or to equalize, or to maximize an aggregate adjusted to give priority to gains for the worse off, or to ensure that everyone has a sufficient or adequate amount, and so on. We have identified three views that might be regarded as candidate construals of fair well-being: (1) preference satisfaction, (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 question identified in the previous paragraph would be important to resolve if we suppose that fair well-being diverges from what we might call ultimate well-being. But an argument needs to be made for this divergence. In broad terms, much recent philosophical writing on distributive justice is concerned with this question. The Rawlsian project of political liberalism, in a nutshell, is based on the idea that the use of state power against members of society is only acceptable if it can be justified in terms of principles of justice that all reasonable persons can accept, along with the further proviso that basing policy on sectarian and controversial conceptions of human good would be failing to treat members of society in ways that all reasonable persons can accept.

Everything turns here on the interpretation of "reasonable." The political liberal wants to interpret "reasonable" loosely, so that ordinary reasonable citizens in effect have a veto power on legitimate uses of state power. But ordinary reasonable people can make mistakes, affirm doctrines that people making no cognitive errors would not make. Ordinary reasonable people might be unreflective, and affirm religious and moral views that further reflection would rule out as morally inadmissible. Rawls tends to place weak epistemic constraints and some moral constraints on the classification of citizens as reasonable: reasonable citizens affirm liberal rights and eschew the aspiration to use state power for sectarian ends and are not egregiously irrational in belief formation. This allows that some reasonable persons might be in the grip of cognitive error. Nussbaum proposes further relaxation of the epistemic standards of reasonableness, in the interests of wide toleration (Nussbaum 2012). But it is not disrespectful to persons to use state power in ways that affect them and cannot be justified in terms of principles they actually accept but that are justifiable in terms they would accept if fully rational—if their ethical views correctly registered the reasons there are.

From the standpoint of an objective list conception of human good, not all uses of state power to advance the good life for members of society are objectionably sectarian, even if they are controversial. Perhaps left to myself, I live badly; pushed by the laws and social policies, I live better. One might hold it is more respectful to my status as a person with rational capacities to press me to behave in accordance with good reasons, good reasons regarding due consideration for others and good reasons regarding my prudential interests.

One might object that coercive restriction of an individual's liberty against her will for her own good is wrongfully paternalistic. But first, commitment to an objective list conception of welfare for public policy purposes does not necessarily imply commitment to paternalistic restriction of liberty. For example, J. S. Mill as interpreted by David Brink is committed to a perfectionist ideal of human good but argues in *On Liberty* that according to the lights of a utilitarian conception of justice, perfectionist human good is best promoted by a strict no-paternalism constraining guiding choice of state policy and individual actions (Brink 2013).

Second, acceptance of a no-paternalism constraint does not rule out state policies designed to advance an objective conception of human good. A society might constrain its choice of means to promote people's attainment of what is objectively valuable to nudge techniques that exploit defects in human decision making without significantly restricting anyone's liberty (Thaler and Sunstein 2008, Sunstein 2014). A society might also straightforwardly subsidize valuable activities with the aim of inducing people to sample them and perhaps to become attached to them.

Some might hold that the underlying grounds for rejection of paternalism sweep more broadly than a constraint on certain coercive restrictions of liberty and extend to nudge policies, subsidies and tax penalties designed to give people incentives to sample good options, and so on. The thought is that it is wrongfully disrespectful to interact with a person in order to advance her good on the basis of one's conviction that one knows better than the person one is dealing with what would really be good for her. This offends against our moral status. We all have the moral status of being free and equal, and interacting with each other in ways that register adequately this shared moral status requires (among other things) refraining from paternalistic treatment of others (Quong 2011).

In reply: Let it be the case that we all have the moral status of being free and equal. Nonetheless, it is not inherently disrespectful to a person to act toward him on the basis of accurate knowledge of his traits and circumstances, including his defects and inadequacies. Hence even paternalistic restriction of my

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Comment [22]: equivalent income mixes preference satisfaction and resources…

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Comment [23]: supposed?

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Comment [24]: here you seem to forget the issue of the multiplicity of reasonable conceptions of the good. If this multiplicity is genuine, there is an additional problem for the state: which one to adopt when dealing with a particular individual?

liberty can express proper respect for my moral status and a morally appropriate concern for my well-being, which my false beliefs about what is worthwhile and how to achieve it and my incompetence at taking effective steps to achieve my goals threatens. To reiterate: Acting toward me on the basis of a standing presumption that as a partly rational agent I want to act on good reasons does not offend against my status as a free and equal rational agent but rather honors it (provided what you are doing to me is otherwise justifiable).

Compare the legitimacy norm: It is wrong to use state power in ways that are only justifiable by appeal to empirical theories and empirical claims of fact that some ordinary reasonable citizens reject. This empirical legitimacy norm is unacceptable. The claim to empirical expertise is less controversial than the appeal to moral expertise, because moral theory is in an undeveloped state, but if there are objective moral truths, epistemically accessible to humans, in principle the claim to moral expertise can be correct, and the liberal legitimacy norm unacceptable.

The attentive reader might object that one cannot combine (1) skepticism about the claim that we are in possession of anything close to a standard of measurement for determining which lives among those a person might lead are better and which ones worse and (2) endorsement of state policies of paternalism—restricting people's liberty or interfering with their autonomous choice against their will for their own good. If we cannot say which lives are better and which worse, we cannot determine that Fred would be better off living life A rather than the alternative life B to which he is inclined.

But this objection is mistaken. It confuses some and all. Lacking a standard of measurement, an index of objective goods, there are an infinite number of comparisons of lives, among which we have, at present, no rational capacity to choose. Even if there is a metaphysical truth that orders every possible human life in any possible circumstances, we lack access to it. But these humdrum commonsense admissions of epistemic lack are fully compatible with the further claim that some choices people might make are knowably bad and it would be good, and maybe morally right, to steer people away from them (or subsidize better choices, or otherwise nudge them in the right direction).

Example: Someone can make a bad choice of romantic mate, such that even casual acquaintances know the person is making a bad choice. You don't need to be in possession of a rank ordering of the possible lives the person might lead to know this. Intuitive claims to knowledge about what would make for a better life for a person are fallible, like any knowledge claims. That does not undercut the point.

Example: in a modern, complicated society, in which people face many options, an education that is broadly liberal in exposing people to many samples of good things to learn and do and training people into skills to be able to go many different ways in life and inculcating in people the ability and disposition to think critically about the choices they face is best. Christians who believe that a good education orients us to toward obeying the commands of God as found in a sacred book and interpreted by the right church are just wrong (though how wrong they are depends on the content of the commands they take God to be issuing). Traditionalist conservatives who doubt that a liberal education is suitable for people of below-average intelligence are just wrong.

Example: public policy toward recreational drug use needs to accommodate the plain fact of hedonism: feeling good, which includes getting high, is undeniably an enhancement of people's lives, and as such is to be promoted. Public policy in this sphere also needs to accommodate the plain fact of pluralism: feeling good is one good among many others, not the most important among them, and the pursuit of enjoyment in complicated and various ways tends to crowd out the attainment of other goods. These banal truths bear differently on different people in different circumstances, so public policy somehow needs to be both for and against recreational drug use, and for it for some people at some times and against it for other people at other times. In navigating these murky waters, we need good social science. For example, we need the knowledge of what causes people to get more of what Daniel Kahneman calls objective happiness (roughly, feeling good moment by moment). This is one dimension of the multi-dimensional assessment that can guide and channel our intuitive all things considered judgments.

9. Conclusion.

The considerations adduced in this chapter do not amount to a proof or vindication of the bare objective list account and with it, the imperative of multidimensional assessment. They just stir the pot.

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