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The Good Life

by

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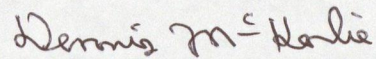
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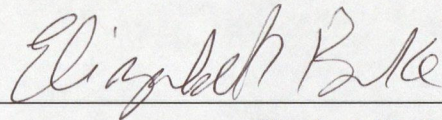
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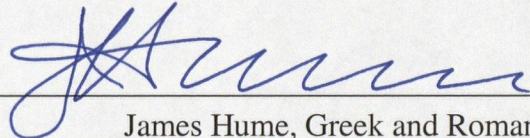
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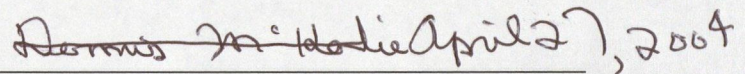
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Abstract

I begin by arguing that well-being is, at least partly, an objective matter: what is good for a person is not only a function of their attitudes. I respond, first, to the idea that well-being is agent-relative because people must have reason to pursue their own good, and reasons are themselves agent-relative. I then argue that relativism about well-being has objectionable implications given the malleability of people's attitudes. At the same time I describe and endorse a "hybrid" theory of well-being. I then try to explain the objective values I endorse, and find foundations in accounts of human nature. I argue, though, that these foundations are to be rooted in Aristotelian or, alternatively, religious conceptual frameworks. Finally, I sketch the relationship between good and moral lives, showing, hopefully, how this thesis is also a contribution to thinking about the foundations of morality more generally.

Acknowledgements

My first debt is to Dennis McKerlie, my supervisor, who has always been available to me, and who is a model of philosophical conscientiousness. I realize, looking over this thesis for the last time before submission, that there are many points at which I have not adequately taken account of Dennis' comments. But I hope that even realizing this shows that I've become a better student under his tutelage.

I would also like to thank Elizabeth Brake and Evan Tiffany for offering me comments on the first chapter while I was preparing it as a writing sample. Thanks as well to James Hume and Elizabeth again for serving on my committee and so actually reading this thing, and for offering me additional suggestions. I read portions of my first two chapters for the department's graduate student colloquium, and I thank my fellow students for their questions and comments. And Sky Coulter, who I think disagrees with just about everything I've said here, has pressed me hard on various points and so forced me to be more honest than I might have been.

I would also like to acknowledge the generous support of a number of organizations during the time I wrote this thesis. The Department of Philosophy supported me with a Graduate Research Scholarship over the summer of 2003, the Provincial Government awarded me a Province of Alberta Graduate Research Scholarship that allowed me to escape teaching duties in my final semester, and The Alberta Heritage Foundation gave me welcome additional support during that semester with a Province of Alberta Graduate Student Scholarship.

Finally, Socrates was right to say that God "is responsible for the good things, but we must find some other cause for the bad ones," and so thanks as well, for what is good here, to Him. In this thesis, of course, that "other cause" will be myself, not God or anyone else I've named here.

To Dennis McKerlie,
my excellent supervisor.

Table of Contents

Approval page	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	iv
Dedication	v
Table of Contents	vi
Introduction	1
Chapter One: Normativity	5
I - Introduction	5
II - Current Views on the Normativity of Welfare	8
II.i - Agent-relative normativity	9
II.ii - Agent-neutral normativity	10
III - Is Welfare a Normative Concept?	13
IV - A Defense of Welfare as a Non-Normative Concept	16
IV.i - The evaluative conception of welfare vs. Darwall	18
IV.ii - The evaluative conception of welfare vs. internalism	20
V - Conclusion	24
Chapter Two: Subjectivity	26
I - Introduction	26
II - Objective Welfare Goods	29
II.i - Sen's problem for subjectivist theories	31
II.ii - Sumner on autonomy	32
II.iii - Internalist views and autonomy	34
II.iv - wrapping up the argument for objective welfare goods	38
III - Subjective Welfare Goods	39
IV - Some Challenges to Objectivist Theories	45
V - Conclusion	47
Chapter Three: Human Nature	49
I - Introduction	49
II - Neo-Aristotelian Approaches	50
II.i - Hurka's perfectionism	50
II.ii - Hursthouse and Foot on 'natural goodness'	57
II.iii - A diagnosis	60
III - What Aristotle can Accomplish	62
IV - Aristotle and Hybridism	70
V - Conclusion	74
Chapter Four: Virtue	76
I - Introduction	76
II - Virtues and the Good Life	77
III - Virtue Ethics?	82
IV - General Conclusion	85
Bibliography	87

Introduction

I was originally motivated to write a thesis on the topic of the good life by my interest in the ethics of virtue - that approach to ethics which takes character, rather than rules or consequences, to be central to the nature of right and wrong action. I have been attracted to this picture of ethics since reading Alasdair MacIntyre's critique (or indictment) of modern moral theory in After Virtue. A customary claim by the proponents of virtue ethics has been that the good life and the moral life are one and the same: there is no genuine conflict between my interests and the demands of morality. Often the story is told in something like the following way: one must be courageous, say, because without courage, how would you get those things you want and need? Or without generosity, how would you keep any friends, and how could anybody want to be without friends? But of course, to be generous is to be morally upstanding in one way, and your courage will benefit your state in a time of war - and so we see that these virtues, although *moral* virtues, are *also* things we need to be happy ourselves.

I've always thought there was *something* to this, and that, indeed, when the world is remade, we will all live well, and there will be no need to distinguish the 'living well' of the upstanding from the 'living well' of the happy. Nevertheless, it often seems that we are very much torn between what we want to do and what we think we ought to do, in such a way that the two things provide very different considerations and suggest very different courses of action. This may be, and I hope it is, illusory, but I am so far unsatisfied with the arguments to that effect, such as the one sketched above.

But I did not set out here to provide a better argument that the virtuous life and the good life are indeed one - I did not even set out to explore whether they might be. I decided that I would start a little smaller and just think about what the good life in fact is, wherever that might lead me.

In the first two chapters of this thesis, I argue that what counts as a good life is not a subjective thing - not just any form of life could count as a good one. If I should be wrong about this, it would certainly be a problem for virtue ethics. If any kind of life could be a good one, depending on what the individual in question were like, then there could be no reason to claim that the good life was the same as the moral life, as it is certainly not the case that just any life can be a moral life. But it has always been my conviction that many at least of the things we find valuable in our lives really are valuable in a way that goes beyond the mere fact that we as individuals have positive affective or cognitive reactions towards them.

Chapter One, "Normativity," discusses the suggestion that 'well-being' is a "normative concept," in the sense that nothing can be good for someone if they have no reason whatsoever to pursue it. The motivation for such a view is strong - to paraphrase one of its supporters, our well-being, or that of those we care about, *matters* to us, so surely we must have reasons and motivations to pursue it? But a very prominent account of what a reason is - an account I feel the grip of - says, roughly, that you cannot have a reason to do something unless you are motivated to do it by some desire you have, the idea being that a reason you have must be something that you could act on, and you couldn't act on it if it weren't hooked up to your motivations. If 'well-being' is a normative concept, and this "internalism" about reasons is true, then what is good for people must be relative to what they in fact care about. So, finding the internalist account of reasons fairly plausible, I spend the chapter arguing that well-being is not in fact a generator of reasons, and that this should not worry us. (It strikes me that a good part of my short philosophical career to date has been spent trying to reconcile internalism about reasons with realism about morality, and objectivism about various important concepts in ethics.)

But subjective theories of well-being - those theories that view the good life for a person as being somehow determined by his preferences or attitudes - need not always involve the claim that 'well-being' is a normative concept, and so require, additionally,

another kind of treatment. I offer it in Chapter Two, “Subjectivity.” The argument here is rather less abstract. I try a liberal sort of argument against these liberal views (motivated, as they often are, by concerns about the “alienation” and “patronism” of objectivist theories): I raise the problem, which is not original to me, that if what counts as a good life is a subjective matter, depending on the individual’s concerns and desires, then the oppressed and deprived, so far as they have only crushed dreams, will come out being made as well-off by apparently trivial goods as we are by apparently great benefits - the importance of the degradation of the deprived will be underestimated. Subjectivists have seen the force of these concerns, but I argue that they cannot offer an adequate response, and so we should reject their theories.

In the course of that argument, I also begin sketching my own theory of the nature of goods or benefits, back at a fairly abstract level. I suggest, as a few others have suggested, that the subjectivist is right that positive attitudes towards one’s own life are important, but that this is only one part of living a good life. More significant than the value derived from simply appreciating the circumstances of one’s life is the value derived from an appreciative engagement with goods of some further, objective, value. Despite the fact that this idea has seemed quite natural to a number of philosophers, it is very uncommon to see any attempt to explain the nature of this objective value. I see an explanation as essential: from whence does this form of value derive and what unites the things having this value? In Chapter Three, “Human Nature,” I point out that universal claims about what is good for humans must be rooted in something about what it is to be human - that is, in an account of human nature. But I argue in that chapter that only a metaphysically ambitious theory of human nature of the sort offered by Aristotle, but in the modern world considered untenable, will do the necessary work. I urge that we should nevertheless hope for some such account.

I had not intended originally to give an account of the form I wound up developing (I was inclined, for example, to make even less concession to the subjectivist than I have now decided is appropriate), but I was very pleased to realize that my discussion naturally

led to the idea that the virtues are important to well-being, and in a different way than is suggested by the sort of account I mentioned above. If living the good life is a matter of being able to respond in certain ways to things that have objective value, then it will be very important for living a good life that one have certain virtues - traits of character that consist of dispositions to behave in certain ways but also, importantly, to recognize things that are good and appreciate them as such. The virtues that will be necessary for the good life may or may not be all of those internal to the moral life, but there is an important overlap. Chapter Four, "Virtue," amounts to a brief exploration of this overlap.

I was quite far into the time available for me to write this thesis before it took on the shape I have just described. Were I to begin anew right now, I'm not at all sure I would do it the same way. But I am glad to have approached my subject without the intention of proving any central thesis I had already settled on ahead of time. I do not mean that I did not have a sense of what had to be accomplished, and of what kinds of claims about lives had to be true - indeed I have for some time now viewed it as a philosophical blessing to have the firm convictions I do. But I was not settled on any kind of theoretical approach to these issues. As a result, I feel that I can now view the result as confirmation of the importance of the virtue ethical approach.

Chapter One: Normativity

I - Introduction

According to many theorists, 'well-being' or 'welfare' is a normative concept.¹ That is, welfare is supposed to be conceptually reason-generating: for something to count as part of someone's good it must exercise a normative pull on someone or other. Ordinarily, this normativity is taken to be *agent-relative*: welfare generates reasons for the welfare subject (internalism about welfare entails this view). But Stephen Darwall has recently defended a novel account whereby welfare's normativity is *agent-neutral*: a subject's welfare generates reasons, but does so for any given agent rather than just from the first-person perspective.² In whatever form, the view that 'welfare' is a normative concept has obvious appeal: presumably good lives *matter*, to us or to those who care about us, and, as Darwall suggests, one might think that this means that we must have reasons to pursue such lives. In this chapter, however, I will argue that in fact 'welfare' is not a normative concept. I distinguish normative from merely evaluative concepts, try to show that, as evaluative but not normative, welfare will still matter, and demonstrate the attractiveness of this position *vis-à-vis* the competing alternatives offered by Darwall and the internalists. The argument here can thus be read as a critique of those views of the good life, and also as a first step towards a more adequate account - in fact, an objectivist account.

It will be necessary to begin by clarifying my thesis, which means clarifying some terms. First of all, while 'normativity' is used a lot of ways, I will be using the term in a somewhat restricted sense here. I am using it in a way I take to be consistent with Darwall's usage, and to some extent at least with Korsgaard's in The Sources of

¹ I treat 'welfare,' 'well-being,' and 'the good for a person' synonymously. Likewise 'goods' and 'benefits' are treated synonymously as constituents or components of welfare.

² in Welfare and Rational Care, Princeton University Press (2002)

Normativity as well. For these authors 'normativity' seems to have an essential connection to reason-generation, though in a somewhat different way for each. Korsgaard offers 'right,' 'good,' 'beauty,' and so on as examples of normative concepts, and writes that "when I say that an action is right I am saying that you ought to do it; when I say that something is good I am recommending it as worthy of your choice."³ On this view, such terms, in their sincere use, purport to offer us reasons to do various things: to seek the good, to do the right, etc. The question, then, if we take this kind of approach, becomes whether our use of these terms is justified: in virtue of what does the fact that something is good supply anyone with a reason to pursue it? It is this sort of question that Korsgaard attempts to answer in her book in the case of ethical concepts. Though Darwall would, I think, reject the prescriptivism implied by Korsgaard's remarks,⁴ we can see his theory and internalist theories as supplying answers to this question in the case of the good life - both as to who has the reasons and why they have them. At least all these would accept that an adequate account of welfare has to explicate the concept in such a way as to capture the origin of welfare-regarding reasons. In Darwall's book one other facet of the putative normativity of welfare also appears. He writes sometimes as if welfare is normative in the sense that it *guides* what Darwall calls "reasons of care": to be rational and to care for someone involves having your other-regarding reasons related appropriately to the other's welfare. So I will understand the claim that 'welfare' is a normative concept to be a claim that welfare is essentially reason-generating and/or reason-guiding.

The view that welfare is normative in this way contrasts with "objective" views about the nature of welfare (perfectionism, for example).⁵ Such views would explicate the concept of welfare in terms of what counts as a benefit to someone, but not in terms of reason-generation (ie. some item, like knowledge, could count as a good for someone

³ Christine Korsgaard, The Sources of Normativity, Cambridge University Press (1996) pp.8-9

⁴ Because he thinks that someone can recognize something as good for him but have no reason to pursue it (Darwall 5-6). Korsgaard might want to play down the prescriptivism suggested by the quotation and my comments. The main point here is just to illustrate a certain approach to the notion of 'well-being.'

⁵ Though it will be clear only later why objective views of welfare conflict even with the notion that welfare is normative in the sense of reason-guidingness.

regardless of whether anyone has a reason to pursue it).⁶ Note, as another example of the special sense of ‘normativity’ being employed here, that an objective view will probably make welfare “normative” in a broader sense - welfare will play a role in a theory of “normative ethics”, for example, which presumably will have something to say at some point about reasons for action. Here we might distinguish the *external* normativity that welfare has on the objectivist view from the *internal* normativity it lacks on such views: objective views need not treat welfare as *conceptually* reason-generating. To see the distinction here, notice that a theorist who believes that welfare has agent-relative normativity (a kind of internal normativity) will ordinarily *also* think that welfare plays some role in a more general normative ethical theory (it is externally normative as well) - the difference is that in the first instance welfare is itself conceptually normative (first-personally) and in the second instance acquires any (third-personal) normative force only in the context of a more general theory. It is whether or not welfare is internally normative that is the issue here, not (directly, anyway) whether it is externally normative or in what way it is externally normative.

The claim that the *concept* of ‘welfare’ is normative also requires clarification. In particular, we need to explicitly distinguish the concept of ‘welfare’ from the constituents of welfare, the latter being the things that actually make a life go better. Which are supposed to generate the reasons? It could be held that one of these is normative while the other is not. For example, we might claim that your *believing* that something is good for you entails that you have a reason to do it - this is one possible elucidation of the claim that ‘welfare’ is a normative concept. But a person who holds such a view might also believe that knowledge is an objective constituent of a good life, and not believe that knowledge is normative in the sense employed here. I will interpret the claim that welfare is a normative concept as a claim about what can count as a constituent of welfare, and I take it that this is consistent with my opponents’ claims. That is, the normativity of welfare would impose a

⁶ Some people will think that I am slipping here between what Darwall calls “metaethical” and “normative” theories of welfare. For now I accept the charge, and acknowledge that to *some* extent this chapter can actually be read as rejecting a (or at least a sort of a) metaethics of welfare.

constraint on goods: something can be good for a person only if someone or other has reason to promote it.⁷

Finally, where it is not otherwise noted, I will also be assuming an internalist account of reasons for action. Roughly, it will be assumed, in the spirit of Bernard Williams' analysis, that a person has a reason to do something if some kind of appropriate connection to his "motivational set" is secured (leaving "appropriate connection" vague).⁸ I am assuming reasons-internalism partly because I am inclined to accept it, but also because I take it to be common ground with my opponents here. Internalism about the good, for example, seems to guarantee quite effectively that a person has internal reasons to seek things that are good for him. One might, I suppose, be an internalist about welfare but not an internalist about reasons in general, but welfare is all that is at issue here, so that possibility should make no difference to the success or failure of my argument. With Darwall the situation is a bit trickier - his position and arguments generally seem to presuppose reasons-internalism, but his position has some peculiarities that will require, and be given, more careful attention later. Notice that taken together with the normativity of welfare, internalism about reasons presents a challenge to objective theories of welfare: if what a person has reason to do depends on what his motivational set is like, and if welfare claims entail reasons claims, then it doesn't seem that an objective theory of welfare (such as an objective list theory) could be correct. My argument, if successful, disarms that threat while allowing reasons-internalism.

II - Current Views on the Normativity of Welfare

Again, welfare is widely, though not universally, understood to be normative in something like the way described above. There are two obvious ways to understand this normativity: we might regard it as agent-relative or as agent-neutral. By saying that the

⁷ At a few points, however, it will still be necessary to talk about the possible normativity of a person's conception of the good life.

⁸ Bernard Williams, "Internal and External Reasons" in *Moral Luck*, Cambridge University Press (1981)

normativity of welfare is agent-relative, we mean that the fact that something is in a person's interest gives him reason to pursue it. For welfare to have agent-neutral normativity is for a person's welfare to generate reasons for anyone to pursue it: such reasons might bear directly on the welfare subject himself, but only in the same way that they would bear on anyone else.

II.i. Agent-relative normativity

The most common position on the normativity of welfare is that it is agent-relative. This is evident from the broad endorsement of internalism as a thesis about the good for a person. Internalism about welfare says that nothing can be good for a person unless it connects in some appropriate way with what he wants (the difficulty, of course, is in spelling out what counts as an appropriate way). This entails that welfare has an agent-relative normativity, since a person's goods are conceptually tied to his motivational set.⁹ It is unsurprising that the internalist thesis is widely endorsed: it offers a straightforward account of the source of the relevant values, and it ensures that the good life for the agent is appealing to him. Peter Railton, for example, writes in its defence that "it would be an intolerably alienated conception of someone's good to imagine that it might fail . . . to engage him."¹⁰ Rational desire theories of well-being, which are again popular, will satisfy internalism. Aside from Railton, rational desire theorists and other internalists include Henry Sidgwick,¹¹ Connie Rosati,¹² James Griffin¹³ and numerous others.

⁹ I assume here that the internalist requirement secures a relationship between goods and current motivations (perhaps adjusted for fuller information and greater rationality), as described in the text. It is also assumed that the appropriacy conditions relating motivational sets to goods are no more flexible than the conditions connecting motivational sets and the objects of internal reasons. We might distinguish weaker forms of internalism about the good (which would not entail that goods generate internal reasons), and I will do so later, but otherwise the stronger form is assumed.

¹⁰ Peter Railton, "Facts and Values," *Philosophical Topics*, vol.14, no.2 (Fall 1986) p.9

¹¹ Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, Seventh Edition, Hackett Publishing (1981)

¹² Connie Rosati, "Internalism and the Good for a Person", *Ethics* 106 (January 1996)

¹³ James Griffin, *Well-Being: Its Meaning, Measurement and Moral Importance*, Oxford University Press (1988)

II.ii. Agent-neutral normativity

In his recent book, Welfare and Rational Care, Stephen Darwall has argued that while welfare is normative, its normativity is agent-neutral. He argues against desire theories of welfare on, partly, fairly standard grounds. For one thing, desire theories suffer from problems of scope: it is not plausible, for example, that the satisfaction of just any desire I have, even rationally, is good for me.¹⁴ I am not aware (and apparently neither is Darwall - 27-30) of a satisfactory solution to these problems. But Darwall's disagreement with desire theories is deeper - he sees their attractiveness as lying precisely in a confusion about the normativity of welfare, and also appears to see at least some of the problems for desire theories as emerging fairly directly from this mistake.¹⁵ Darwall argues that in fact a person's welfare needn't generate reasons for him at all. He suggests, for example, that a person in the grips of self-loathing or severe depression might realize something was good for him, but have no reason to pursue it - indeed he might be motivated to avoid it, seeing himself as unworthy of it.¹⁶ Having rejected the agent-relative normativity of welfare, Darwall rejects internalism about the good life, seeing the motivation for it as coming precisely from the connection it secures between a person's good and their reasons for action (40).

Darwall's own position, again, is that the normativity of welfare is agent-neutral. According to his "rational care" theory of welfare, "what it is for something to be good for someone *just is* for it to be something one should desire for him for his sake" (8, his emphasis).¹⁷ Darwall is not just saying, as he does, that "insofar as we care for someone,

¹⁴ Parfit's case is the classic one here: you meet a sick man on the train with whom you sympathize, forming a desire that his health improve. On parting you never think of the man again and at some point in the future he recovers. Derek Parfit, Reasons and Persons, Oxford University Press (1984) p.494

¹⁵ See p.24 concerning the problem of how self-sacrifice could be possible on the desire account.

¹⁶ Darwall pp.5-6. An interesting literary example of this type of case can be found in Dostoevsky's *Notes from the Underground*, where, in the opening passages, the narrator explains how, out of spite, he refuses to visit a doctor to relieve his ailments, knowing perfectly well that he is only hurting himself.

¹⁷ The "should" just indicates that the desires in question are supposed to be rational (9).

we ought to be guided by his good” (8), but also that the notion of care is primary (and primitive) here: the goodness of a thing for a person is *in virtue* of the attitude taken towards it by the rational carer (71). This means that welfare is conceptually tied to care, and the normativity of welfare is thus third-personal, or agent neutral. The agent-neutral reasons generated by welfare bear on anyone through care (6, 37). Since the normative force of welfare is third-personal in this way, it can generate reasons for the welfare subject, but only in the same way it generates reasons for anyone, that is, again through care (25). Here one might naturally wonder how care is supposed to be understood on such an account. It might be thought that any definition of care would itself have to appeal to welfare, thereby making the account circular, but Darwall argues that in fact no definition of care at all is necessary. His idea is that we can identify the “natural psychological kind” involved in caring, and we can then appeal to this kind in psychological explanations even without a formal definition (12-13). So we can take this psychological kind (identified as “sympathetic concern” - 12, 51) as primitive, and understand goods for a person in terms of what it is rational to want for them from the perspective of this psychological state.

One tension in Darwall’s account is worth pointing out here, as we will need to return to it later. We might expect, given the brief exposition just given, that an agent’s welfare generates reasons for anyone who cares about him. And ordinarily, on casual reading at least, Darwall does seem to write as if the normativity of welfare were hypothetical on care (eg. 37-8, 53). In introducing his account of the normativity of welfare Darwall writes that “*insofar* as one cares for someone, one ought to be guided by the person’s good” (7, my emphasis). The problem with this position is the one Darwall brings up himself: if welfare’s normativity were conditional on care, then you could escape reasons for promoting a person’s welfare by simply giving up caring for him (8).

Darwall goes on, however, to claim that the normative force of someone’s welfare is “conditional ... on a hypothesis one accepts or is committed to *in* caring, namely, that the cared for is *worth* caring for” (8, his emphasis). If the idea is that reasons to promote

someone's good are generated not by *your caring about them*, but by *their being worth caring about*, then Darwall would appear to be an externalist not only about welfare but about reasons for action. This is not, perhaps, a mortal sin in itself, but it would be hard to reconcile this externalism with the rest of Darwall's book. For example, Darwall rejects hedonism and objective list accounts as (what he calls "metaethical") theories of the good on the grounds that they do not capture the normativity of welfare. It is always, he says, a question which remains "logically or conceptually open" why the fact that something is pleasurable, or appears on an objective list, generates reasons for anyone (while internalist theories at least capture normativity, but in the wrong way) (45). But it is quite as difficult to see why the fact someone is worth caring about generates reasons for just anyone. So this interpretation (which we could call the "objective" reading) is somewhat problematic (though I'll say more about it later).

On a third reading, which we may call the "hypothetical" reading, Darwall holds that welfare's normativity *is* hypothetical on care, but in a way that makes it harder to shed one's commitments when one cares. Again, Darwall says that reasons to promote the welfare of another are "conditional ... on a hypothesis one accepts or is committed to *in* caring, namely, that the cared for is *worth* caring for." He adds that "sympathetic concern partly involves seeing the person for whom one cares as having value himself" (8). This seems to foreshadow comments made later in the book, where Darwall writes that sympathy presents harms to someone "as of" agent-neutral disvalue, and so "as if" there is a categorical reason to help the sufferer. We see, from the perspective of sympathy, these reasons as applying to anyone, not just to those who care about the person (70, see also 24). This suggests that Darwall's idea might be that welfare-regarding reasons are somehow conditional, but escaping them isn't a simple matter of giving up caring. His worry about the simple "hypothetical imperative" view seemed to be with the equal possibility of pursuing the means or simply, and casually, giving up the end. But when we do care, the reasons are represented "as if" they were absolute, so we will not view a choice about whether to help someone as a choice about whether to help or casually to give

up caring. Moreover, Darwall might argue that to escape the reasons, we would really have to not only give up caring, but reject the hypothesis that the person is worth caring about, which might be more difficult (there are lots of people we don't feel any real concern for but would admit are *worth* caring about). On this interpretation Darwall's view is, importantly, compatible with reasons-internalism, and I am inclined further to think that this is in fact the correct interpretation of Darwall.¹⁸

III - Is Welfare a Normative Concept?

Darwall believes that welfare is inherently normative (10-1, 45), by which is evidently meant that any adequate account of welfare needs to explain its reason-generating, or reason-guiding, force. Darwall has a sort of argument for this position: we should accept the agent-neutral normativity of welfare because the only other options are that welfare is not normative at all, in which case it is not clear why anyone should care about it, or that welfare is normative in some other way, presumably agent-relatively, which position he believes he has shown to be implausible (104). It is my position that welfare is not normative: not in the way Darwall holds or in the way that is entailed by internalist theories, and not at all. This means I will have to answer Darwall's question as to why anyone should care about welfare. But in this section I simply want to explain what I mean by saying that 'welfare' is not a normative concept.

While 'welfare' is not, in my view, a *normative* concept, it is an *evaluative* concept. As an illustration, consider Peter Geach's claim in "Good and Evil" that 'good' has primarily a descriptive rather than prescriptive force.¹⁹ His position in that article is too extreme in several ways, but I think it is right that we may call a man a good pick-pocket (I've had run-ins with such myself) without this generally being a commendation of him (though on occasion it might be) - rather it tells us something about the pick-pocket and his

¹⁸ Since writing this I've met Darwall, and after a brief conversation am no longer very confident that this is the right interpretation, but it is still at least the most charitable I can see.

¹⁹ Reprinted in Theories of Ethics, edited by Philippa Foot, Oxford University Press (1967).

abilities (Geach 68). It is true that when we want a pick-pocket for some nefarious purpose, we generally want a good one (though as Geach indicates the connection is still not analytic - 69-70). But this does not show that 'good' here operates normatively. There is no essential connection to reasons for action. To say that the pick-pocket is good is a description of him, and any reasons generated in the way of pursuing him depend on your interests regarding pick-pockets. As Geach points out, the situation is the same as that in which you say to someone, "you have ants in your pants" (68). This clearly involves no normative concepts, but will move you quite well to action - and the motivating force is here again just a matter of your (presumably negative) reaction to having ants in your pants. Now, even in these sorts of cases where we might say that 'good' is used descriptively, such as in "good car," to use another example, 'good' is still importantly evaluative, in a way that nothing in "you have ants in your pants" is. That is, both *are* descriptive, but the former is *also* evaluative. For example, two people might agree on every fact about driving and cars in general, and still disagree about what precisely constitutes a good car (one person might emphasize safety while the interests of the other are more in efficiency): agreement on the "facts" does not entail agreement about the application of evaluative judgments. On the other hand, once two people know what there is to know about ants, pants and English grammar (the "facts"), there isn't really the same kind of scope for further disagreement about what it means to have ants in your pants.²⁰

It will be obvious why I make the above point when we consider another argument offered by Darwall to the effect that welfare is a normative concept. Darwall points out that two people might coherently disagree about what is good for some third person they both care about, despite agreeing on every relevant non-normative fact (Darwall 11). Perhaps they disagree about whether it is good for him to labour under some pleasant delusion, for example. Darwall says that in this case they must be disagreeing about what it is rational to want for him ("it is hard to see what else they could be disagreeing about"). So the argument relies on a contrast between normative questions or questions about a person's

²⁰ What would be strictly normative concepts? 'Reason' itself, of course. I would also count 'want,' 'desire,' and similar concepts. I'm unsure about 'pleasure.'

good on the one hand, and factual questions on the other. But I think the considerations above show us that 'welfare' might equally be an *evaluative* concept such that agreement on all the non-evaluative facts does not entail agreement on questions of a person's good, and yet not be a *normative* concept in the sense that implies a conceptual connection to reason-generation. The main point here is that the simple fact that some concept falls on the "value" side of some kind of fact/value distinction does not show that concept to be normative. All the sort of case identified by Darwall shows is that judgments about welfare are (of course) *at least* evaluative.²¹

My position, then, is that while 'welfare' is an evaluative notion, it is not a normative notion in a way that entails a conceptual connection to reasons for action. There is no theoretical problem with not wanting a good car, though there is something theoretically problematic about the idea that, absent special considerations, someone might always choose bad cars when out to get cars (this is another way of thinking about the distinction I am drawing between normative and evaluative concepts). I should make it clear that I am only intending to make use of Geach's suggestions in order to motivate this distinction between normative and evaluative concepts (or deployments of concepts). I am not inclined to accept that there is no such thing as a "predicative" use of 'good', for example, and even those who follow Geach in that respect acknowledge that the functions of 'good' are more complex than he allowed.²² It need not be assumed, then, that to accept

²¹ I want to anticipate an objection I don't want to deal with in detail, and briefly suggest a response to it. One might try to distinguish the "good car" and "good life" cases by claiming that fully rational agents will converge in judgments about the latter but not about aesthetic matters. But aesthetic value and welfare value will overlap - if I prefer chocolate ice-cream to vanilla, having the former is more in my interest, but I don't see any reason to think rational agents would converge in their appreciation of ice-cream flavours. And more generally, I can't see why someone would claim all agents would (rationally) converge in their judgments about welfare value unless he thought that the right analysis of the good life was in objective terms - and in that case, we might as well just offer that theory in the first place. So I think there is a position here in the logical space that I don't deal with, but I don't see much motivation for adopting it.

²² See, for example, J. J. Thomson, "The Right and the Good," *Journal of Philosophy*, v.94 no.6 (June 1997). In "Good and Evil" Geach seems to have taken the view that 'good' is always *substantive-hungry*: "there is no such thing as being just good or bad, there is only being a good or bad so-and-so" (Geach 65). This is false. Things can be *good for* something, or *good at* something, or *good to* do something with, or good in various other ways, and no substantive need be understood.

that 'welfare' is a merely evaluative concept means that 'good life' will have to be treated on a strict analogy with 'good car'. To be sure, thinking about 'good life' this way is a useful way of understanding what is involved in that concept being evaluative but not normative: we might say that just as to have a good car is to have a car with certain properties, like reliability, having a good life is a matter of having a life with certain properties (which we might, unhelpfully, call "goods" or "benefits"). Thinking about welfare this way helps us divorce it from the normative force it is claimed to have, but again, this is just an indication of one way in which we could go from the starting point of viewing welfare as non-normative.

IV - A Defence of Welfare as a Non-Normative Concept

It is time to face Darwall's challenge: if welfare is not normative, why should it matter to anyone? This is not yet the place for a complete answer, which would involve a correspondingly complete theory of the good life. But I want to say enough here that the reader will see it as plausible, as I hope they will, that a fuller, and fully satisfactory, answer might be forthcoming. The first point to make is that welfare is obviously about benefit to a person: this and not normativity is the core of the concept. Thus any adequate account of the good life will explain the nature of such benefits, and I think we might hope it will be obvious why it makes sense to care about benefits, though it need not be *conceptually necessary* that anyone care about them. In his rejection of hedonism and objective list accounts, Darwall complains that we can coherently ask why the fact that something gives pleasure or is on the list generates normative reasons. The question is logically open, he says, even if it "has an obvious answer" (like, perhaps, "because it feels good"? (45). But in my view it is quite enough if we can give the obvious answers if our question is about *benefit* (that is, if we don't assume the issue is *normativity*). Consider here also what Geach has to say about the relationship between choice and good things. He says that it is neither empirical nor analytic, but that 'good' belongs to the "*ratio*" of 'want' and 'choose' (Geach 69). We generally (but don't always) choose a good X when we want

an X, and it would be hard to make sense of much of our talk if we didn't (70).²³ And of course we all live lives and are confronted with choices about how to live. So we will, things being equal, want to choose good lives, just as, things being equal, we will want to choose good cars when we need cars.²⁴ But neither the notion of 'a good car' nor the notion of 'a good life' is normative. Now more will need to be said eventually - we still want to explain what it is about the good life that we like, when we're worried about living, and what the nature of the relevant benefits are. But I hope it is plausible that an account of the good life along these lines, that is, one that tries to make out what it is for something to be a good life, but doesn't try to render good lives conceptually reason-generating, can be successfully delivered.

It may not seem that this account of welfare is incompatible with what I called one facet of the normativity of welfare in Darwall's account, namely its reason-guidingness (see Part I above). This feature of welfare's supposed normativity involves the way in which to care rationally about someone is to be guided in one's other-regarding desires by their good. And that notion seems perfectly compatible with what I have been saying about how 'welfare' is an evaluative rather than a normative concept, and about how welfare should be analysed in terms of benefit. The problem is that this is only a substantive way of understanding the normativity of welfare in conjunction with Darwall's own theory. That is because on Darwall's view, welfare just *is* what it makes sense to want for someone so far as you care about them. I would not argue that the *latter* notion is not a normative one in an important way - the problem is just that it isn't what welfare is (as I'll argue, briefly, in the next section). So suppose we say that welfare is normative in the sense that it guides other-regarding reasons of care, but we don't assume that the rest of Darwall's view is correct (especially in the way it makes care prior to welfare) - presumably caring about someone still involves having reasons to promote their good. But then the thesis that welfare is

²³ I think section 6.4 of Hare's Language of Morals (Oxford University Press, 1952) offers a nice illustration of this point (though it will be evident that I don't accept the whole of Hare's account).

²⁴ If this is all that people mean to commit themselves to when they say that ethical concepts are action-guiding, then I have no disagreement with them. My disagreement will only be with Darwall and the internalists, for whom someone or other *must* have a reason to pursue welfare goods.

normative for care is analogous to the following thesis: pints of Guinness are normative for 'desire-for-a-pint-of-Guinness,' because desire-for-a-pint-of-Guinness is a state such that to be in it is to have reasons to pursue pints of Guinness, and to be in such a state while also rational and informed is to have your "reasons of desire-for-a-pint-of-Guinness" guided by actual pints of Guinness, so that you don't wind up drinking a pint of motor-oil instead. So just anything will count as normative for *some* desire, or type of desire, that someone might possibly have. And I think the sense in which we can say that 'Guinness' is a normative concept is a pretty trivial one.

IV.i. The evaluative conception of welfare vs. Darwall

And now I move more to the offensive. "Welfare is normative for care", Darwall tells us, but it becomes difficult to see why, on his account, we should care about caring: my attempts to explain how welfare, as non-normative, can matter, actually take us further than Darwall can. Notice first that *I* can always appeal to care if I want to talk about welfare-regarding reasons. If we understand care as sympathetic concern - a psychological state such that to be in it is to be motivated to help the person who is the object of concern - then we see that welfare will generate reasons for the carer, regardless of whether or not welfare itself is a normative concept: the motivational state of sympathetic care will do the normative work either way. Now Darwall will object here that on his account, the concept of 'being good for someone' is the very same concept as "the concept of being something we should want for someone for her sake" (Darwall 104). Thus he would presumably say that on his account we see exactly why, when we care for someone, we want his good, whereas on my account we do not - there is no similar conceptual connection between care and welfare if welfare is not normative. I hope, of course, that the considerations offered in the previous section indicate that we need not secure an analytic relationship between welfare and reasons for action in order to show that welfare is important (and why it would make sense to worry about the welfare of someone you care about). But there are also advantages to treating welfare in this way rather than in the way Darwall does. One is that

we avoid the serious oddity of the idea that care is somehow explanatorily prior to welfare.²⁵ But, even more pointedly, if we can explain why welfare is important apart from any conceptual connection to care, as I've suggested we try to do, then we will also have an explanation of the value of sympathetic concern as a psychological state - that is, of the importance of taking up the perspective of care - in terms of the value of its object. But since welfare is conceptually dependent on care for Darwall (one's good is what is wanted for one from the third-person perspective), there doesn't seem to be any kind of similar way for Darwall to account for the importance of taking up the perspective of care. Tying welfare conceptually to care might secure, analytically, reasons to act in promotion of the good of the object of concern, but at the cost of explaining the importance of caring itself.

In the preceding paragraph, I assumed, in keeping with the "hypothetical" reading of Darwall's theory, that on Darwall's account a person's welfare having normative force is conditional or hypothetical on someone's caring. In this case, I argued, it does no harm to simply allow that welfare is not a normative concept, and let care do the normative work itself. But there is also, as noted earlier, an "objective" reading of Darwall's view on which it seems as if the normativity of welfare is supposed to derive directly from the fact that a person is worth caring about - this way a person can't escape reasons to benefit others just by not caring about them (see II.ii above). Now if the value of a person is supposed to generate some kind of categorical, non-internal welfare-regarding reasons, then it seems even less necessary to tie welfare conceptually to care, since the care approach doesn't seem to secure *that* result. But neither does Darwall seem to have any other account of how welfare's normativity works. In fact, it doesn't seem that Darwall *could* offer an account whereby welfare generates categorical, external, agent-neutral reasons, since this would mean that an agent always has reason to promote his own good, which Darwall denies

²⁵ Even Darwall seems to have some trouble keeping it up: the relevant psychological kind, sympathetic concern, is identified as "a feeling or emotion that responds to some apparent obstacle to an individual's good." The researcher (C. Daniel Batson) on whose work Darwall draws most heavily says that this motivational state's "ultimate goal" is "increasing the other's welfare" (Darwall 67). On my view of welfare (and indeed most views of welfare) this sort of talk is as appropriate as it is natural.

repeatedly.²⁶ It seems right, certainly, that welfare is just plain important - but much less clear that there is any likelihood of showing (even if we wanted to) that welfare conceptually generates reasons from any given third-person perspective.²⁷ Better here again to simply try to explain why welfare is important without attempting to show that it is also normative.

IV.ii. The evaluative conception of welfare vs. internalism

More appealing to me than the notion that the normativity of welfare is agent-neutral in the way Darwall argues is the idea that the normativity of welfare is agent-relative. This is not so much because I think it a better approach to the *normativity* of welfare *per se* (since I don't think welfare is normative at all), but because this view is entailed by internalism, which is otherwise appealing. Recall that Darwall rejects internalism because he sees the motivation for it in the way it secures reasons for action from the agent's perspective, and argues that this is not really at issue when it comes to welfare, since in his view a person might very well not be moved by something that evidently is good for him (the self-loather, say). But I think there is another motivation for internalism, and this has simply to do with benefit. Many people cannot see how something can benefit a person if that person in no way cares about it and would not even come to care about it if rational and informed, and I think this is at least a reasonable concern, leaving aside worries about securing reasons for action. This view of what can benefit a person indeed entails internalism and so agent-relative normativity, but also responds to concerns about alienation, for example (recall Railton's remark, quoted above at section II.i). Since there is this other side to internalism, I think Darwall dismisses it too quickly.

Because internalism about welfare is clearly a claim about the nature of benefits and not just about the normative force of a person's good, it is the more serious contender to my claim that welfare is not normative. If there is any residual doubt about whether an

²⁶ He states or implies this denial on pp. 5-6, 37-8, 40, 46 and elsewhere.

²⁷ Except perhaps derivatively, within some more general ethical theory.

account of welfare that makes it non-normative will be able to explain why the “benefits” it identifies are things anyone should care about, there is no such worry for the internalist. Internalism, after all, guarantees that what is good for someone will matter to him. And then, of course, the internalist can gesture at various natural human sentiments as easily as I can when they want to talk about the source of our reasons for helping each other, and an internalist concept of welfare will presumably fit into any broader ethical theory as easily as a non-normative concept thereof.

Now it would be nice if some kind of ‘internalism’ as a view about the motivational force of welfare were distinguished from an ‘internalism’ about the nature of benefits to a person. On the internalist thesis, these aspects are intertwined. Strictly speaking, showing that something is beneficial for a person but that they don’t want it (even rationally) shows both “internalisms” to be false. Nevertheless, I want to try to separate them in order to deal with the separate intuitions I feel are at play, even if I must do this in a somewhat artificial fashion. I will accept Darwall’s example as showing that “motivational welfare internalism”, as we might call it, is false. A depressive can fail to be at all moved by what is evidently in his interest. To deal with “benefit internalism”, the aspect of internalism that seems to be motivated by fears about alienation, I will do the following. We can identify a weaker form of internalism about welfare than has so far been assumed, which says that “something is not part of my good if I am constitutionally incapable of caring about it.”²⁸ Whatever “benefit internalism” is meant to ensure, one would think it would be at least that much. If we can show that something can be good for someone though he is not even capable of caring about it, this will undermine, in a more satisfying way, benefit internalism. And I think we can. Let us imagine that some person can’t appreciate being loved (perhaps, like Phineas Gage, he had an iron rod through his brain - so this is very

²⁸ David Sobel, “Full-Information Accounts of Well-Being,” *Ethics* 104 (July 1994) p.791. He accepts this form of internalism, but considers it “uninterestingly weak,” claiming that “any otherwise plausible account of well-being will be able to accommodate” it.

much a part of his constitution²⁹). Now, on the internalist view, we cannot say that being loved is good for this man. Some (I count myself undecided) would consider this alone a refutation of internalism. It's sad for a man to be oblivious to the attentions of those who care about him, but it seems sadder yet if no one even does care about him. Still, the internalist claim has some plausibility to my mind - after all, what does he get out of it? It makes no difference to *him* whether anyone loves him or not. On the other hand, however, surely (given what those of us who know about love know about it) it would be good *for him to be able to appreciate being loved*: surely his life does lack something very important. Does our saying this depend on whether he cares, or can care, not about being loved, but about whether or not he can appreciate being loved? I can't see any reason to say yes now. *We* know what he's missing, and he would realize what he'd been missing too if only he could be healed. It strikes me as silly to say that a miraculous healing or complex operation is no part of this man's good just because he can't see the point of it.³⁰ Since this shows, as I believe it does, that something can be a good for someone despite his not even being able to care about it, it also shows that stronger versions of internalism are false as well (that is, versions according to which a thing can be good for you only if it has some suitable connection to your actual current desires).³¹

²⁹ Does this case just involve a (constitutive) failure of rationality? And does that make it uninteresting? I suppose in a way the example *does* involve a failure of rationality: I take seriously the way emotional reaction plays into our capacity to make proper judgments, as described, for example, by Antonio Damasio in Descartes' Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain (HarperCollins 2000). But there need not be any failure of simple means-ends Humean-style reasoning, and that should be enough in the current context. But in any case, a failure to appreciate one's good that results from a constitutive failure of rationality is still a constitutive incapacity to recognize a good.

³⁰ It's hard to avoid slipping into the subjunctive here (as I did above) and this might lead to suspicion that this 'good' is really a good for a person he might be if he were some other way (ie. if he had a different constitution). But this is probably just an artifact of talking about future goods, as we do when we discuss internalism. The question is just whether a future in which this unfortunate man has his brain operated upon is a good one for him, and it seems to me that it clearly is, whether he wants it or not, or can want it or not (though of course it might be *wrong* to operate on him if he doesn't want an operation).

³¹ I do not, it should be noted, intend to close the door on various "subjectivist" or "hybrid" theories that might be offered. Such a theory might say that it is a necessary condition of some person actually realizing some benefit that they appreciate it. That is compatible with everything I have said.

It is one thing to simply show the failings of internalism, but it is also worth drawing out how viewing welfare as non-normative allows a more satisfactory treatment of the relationship between rationality and welfare. The internalist can allow that moral reasons could trump reasons stemming from one's own welfare, but he does at least maintain that we are *never entirely without* reason to promote our own good. Darwall, as noted, rejects this. He thinks that a person can have reason to promote his own good, but only in the same way that anyone else does - that is, he has such reasons insofar as he cares about himself.

Both of these positions are unsatisfactory. It is not true that we always have reason to promote our own good. And here I do not mean to simply be making the point I just made - that something can be part of one's good though it has no hold in terms of one's motivational set. I mean that a person does not always have reason to promote his own good, even as he conceives of it. In this I agree with Darwall. Here we can imagine again the self-loather and the depressive. Likewise, a man might devote his life to avenging an injustice, even knowing full well it would be better for him to learn to forgive. A flagellant or ascetic may view the fact that something would be a good for him as reason to avoid it. The internalist might rightly reject some such offered examples as illusory - perhaps some of these people fail to meet standards of rationality or informedness set by various internalist accounts. And the flagellant may in fact want his good, and just want his own punishment more. But that this kind of answer can be given in every case is, in my view, dogmatic and unwarranted. On the other hand, Darwall's position is also unsatisfactory. We do ordinarily desire our own good, and things that are good for us, and this is not just because we bear some kind of third-personal attitude towards ourselves. We feel our own pains, for example, and the weight of our failures. We have to learn our own lessons and are uniquely responsible for ourselves. While empathy allows us a certain insight into the lives of others, it is not the same insight we have into our own lives. The point isn't just that we will tend to care most about ourselves, but that we care about ourselves in a very different way (though not necessarily more) than we do about others.

The happy medium here is the position I have offered. The internalist can admit at the most only that one might have more reason not to pursue his good than to pursue it. I can say that he can have no reason to pursue it at all. As Geach might say, the good life is of the *ratio* of want and choose - things being equal, people will want their own good, but things are not always equal. But, against Darwall, the good life *is* of the *ratio* of want and choose. That is, we ordinarily have reason to pursue our own good, and not just in the same sense that anyone can have such reason. So long as we choose to go on living, we will ordinarily want to choose good lives. The connection is tighter than Darwall makes it, but not so tight as the internalist makes it. In fact I think this view of the importance of our welfare and its relationship to choice is plausible and attractive independent of theory, and as it fits so well with the claim that welfare is not normative, I take it to support that claim.

V - Conclusion

I've argued here that a good theory of welfare need not show that welfare is normative, and indeed will not. What a theory of welfare must do is capture the notion of benefit, and explain why it is that, generally, we pursue our good, and why, in general, it is rational to do so. That is, we want to capture the *ratio* of good, without making welfare conceptually normative (and I hope it seems promising that we can do so). Such a theory will amount to an improvement over the theories of the internalists and the theory propounded by Darwall, recognizing on the one hand that a person does not necessarily always have reason to pursue his own good (and sometimes may not even be capable of understanding it), but, on the other hand, that the choices he must make about how to live his own life confront him more directly, and in a different way, than the choices about how to help others live theirs.

How to proceed, then, from here? It might seem that what has been said so far offers slim resources or guidance in terms of settling on a more adequate theory of welfare. In fact it gives us some. Having rejected the supposed normativity of welfare, we are free

to ask, not what things people do want, but what things are worth wanting. The argument has, in fact, taken us part of the way to an objective theory about welfare. But it must be emphasized that our position is not simply that of trying to motivate the adoption of a seemingly disparate list of items such as knowledge and virtue and pleasure. The vaguely Geachean insights invoked here suggest that the point is not to find items that have an independent property such that they *ought* to be chosen or pursued, but that we should instead hope to identify items that are such that it is obvious why we do in fact choose them, when things are equal.³² That is what it means to talk about the *ratio* of 'choose'. And that *ratio* could further mean that the goods on any list we wind up with will have a common motivation, and so theoretical unity. So I will try to give, in the next chapter, the outlines of a broadly objectivist theory of welfare that does not treat it as normative, but will satisfactorily answer Darwall's question about how welfare could then matter. And in the following chapter, I will examine the possibility of giving theoretical unity to objective goods.

³² Or things such that it's obvious, on reflection, that those things are what we want, though we might currently be getting it wrong.

Chapter Two: Subjectivity

I - Introduction

In the previous chapter I argued that ‘welfare’ is not a normative concept. I suggested that my argument there took us part of the way to an objective theory of welfare. That is because to show that welfare is not normative is to show that there is no essential connection between welfare and reasons for action, and therefore is to sever welfare from one thing that would essentially relativize it to particular agents with their particular and diverse motivations. But to show that welfare is objective would still require showing that it is not subjective in a broader sense that involves a link between welfare and attitudes, but does not entail anything about reasons for action. In this chapter I will argue for and adopt a “hybrid” theory, incorporating elements of objective and subjective theories. I will distinguish between what I will call objective and subjective welfare goods, the former being a matter of, roughly, what kinds of things *can count as benefits* to a person, and the latter being a matter of what it is to *actually benefit* from a thing. In my view, the former are independent of people’s attitudes, while the latter are not.

According to subjectivism about welfare, well-being is mind-dependent - something’s being good for you depends on your attitudes towards it (and I will always be talking about intrinsic rather than instrumental welfare goods in this chapter). Specifically, good and bad states will correspond to some kind of positive and negative attitudes, respectively. (This account of subjectivism is based on L. W. Sumner’s Welfare, Happiness and Ethics, which I’ll be discussing throughout this chapter.³³) Internalist theories of welfare are subjectivist theories because they tie goods to attitudes, but subjectivism does not imply even the weakest form of internalism distinguished in the last chapter. That is because internalist theories are forward looking, connecting future goods

³³ L. W. Sumner, Welfare, Happiness and Ethics, Oxford University Press (1996), p.38

with current motivations.³⁴ A subjectivist theory could be spelled out such that all that is required for something to be a good is some kind of post-hoc endorsement of that thing - perhaps even after some kind of constitutional change of the sort ruled out by internalism. There is therefore also nothing about subjectivism that makes welfare normative in the way understood in the first chapter. Subjectivism has certainly not been refuted, then, by anything said there.

We might begin by distinguishing several forms of subjectivism. On the strongest form of subjectivism, the right sort of endorsement of the conditions of one's life *as one experiences it* is necessary and sufficient for well-being, or for a thing's being of welfare value. We could also understand this kind of view in terms of what we might call a *strong experience requirement*: something can be good for me only if it impinges on my experience, *and* nothing outside of my experience can matter in terms of my welfare. This would be the kind of view Sumner calls a "mental state" or "state-of-mind" theory (Sumner 82).

A weaker subjectivism would make endorsement of one's life again necessary and sufficient for well-being, but here the circumstances of one's life must be as one thinks they are, at least insofar as your endorsement of your life depends on your beliefs about your life being true (this is part of Sumner's own "authenticity" requirement). That is, mental states are not all that matter, so long as one cares about more than mental states. But what kinds of states *do* matter are fixed by, and only by, one's attitudes. Such a view could further be coupled with an experience requirement or not. So not only mental states matter, but perhaps (if the experience requirement *is* attached) only so far as non-mental states do in fact affect experience. This (*with* the experience requirement) is Sumner's view.³⁵

³⁴ This is rather too simple a characterization of at least some internalisms: see, eg., Rosati, "Internalism and the Good for a Person," p.301. But a lack of subtlety on this point should not affect my discussion.

³⁵ On the experience requirement, see Sumner pp.127-8, and Griffin, *Well-Being*, pp.13-4.

A yet weaker form of subjectivism makes some kind of endorsement or positive reaction to experienced conditions necessary for well-being, but also makes it necessary that the things endorsed actually be objective goods. This type of view (a “hybrid” view) is suggested by Parfit at the end of Reasons and Persons, for example.³⁶ We can distinguish here an “experience” condition, an “endorsement” condition, and a “hypothetical endorsement” condition. The first says that nothing that does not enter experience can affect (or positively affect) well-being. The second says that nothing can benefit a person unless they have some pro-attitude towards that thing, whether or not it actually enters their experience. The third says that something can only be good for a person if they would care about it if rational and informed (for their ideal selves or their non-idealized selves). A theory incorporating one of these conditions is still minimally a subjectivist position. Without some form of one of these conditions this is objectivism.³⁷

I take Robert Nozick’s famous “experience machine” thought experiment, and similar considerations, to conclusively show that mental state theories are false.³⁸ Things beyond our experiences can and do matter to us, and in terms of our own welfare. I will argue, in the next section, that Sumner’s weaker subjectivism is also false. This will involve showing that there are things that are good for people regardless of their attitudes: a person’s attitudes do not completely fix the story about what is good for him. I will argue, in part II of this chapter, that autonomy is one such good.

If some form of hybrid theory is true, then subjectivism about welfare is true. And hybrid theories, as opposed to strictly objectivist theories, have an obvious appeal: how could something be good for me if I don’t have any kind of positive attitude towards it?

³⁶ pp.502-3

³⁷ I am perhaps exaggerating here the continuity between experience and endorsement conditions. Someone’s adoption of the former condition might be motivated by its utility in picking out relevant states, but this is compatible with an otherwise objectivist theory whereby some X is good for you so long as you are aware of it, regardless of whether you have any positive reaction to it at all (or consider that hedonism might be taken to be an objective theory in an important sense). In the text I am imagining that part of the point of an experience requirement is that you appreciate what you experience. In any case, the former sense of the experience requirement as well as the latter will be addressed later in this chapter.

³⁸ Robert Nozick, Anarchy, State and Utopia, Basic Books (1974) p.42-5

Even if we think that it is an objective matter what kinds of things can count as goods, it might seem that a “good” has to *matter to us* if it is going to *count for us* - for us to actually reap any benefit from it. I touched briefly on this matter in the last chapter, but will discuss it further here, in part III. I think that hybridism is in fact correct, and so am in a weak sense a subjectivist. I will still need to defend the existence of objective goods, however, and that means having a fair amount in common with more thoroughly objectivist theoreticians of welfare. Consider that a requirement that says something like “this isn’t the good life for you if you don’t appreciate it” is consistent with “the good life is constituted by such-and-such and you, sadly, won’t live the good life because you are incapable of appreciating such a life.”

II - Objective Welfare Goods

I wish to distinguish, as I said, between what I will call “objective welfare goods” and “subjective welfare goods.” What I have in mind is the difference between saying that such-and-such things, and only such-and-such things, can count as good for a person, and saying that someone has benefited from having those things in his life, perhaps as a result of not only possessing some possible good, but also of *responding* appropriately to it - call this response “appreciation”. For example, we might say that ‘reading the *Lord of the Rings*’ is an objective welfare good, while ‘reading *Mein Kampf*’ is not. In that case, ‘enjoying reading the *Lord of the Rings*’ is a subjective welfare good (enjoying reading the *Lord of the Rings* increases your well-being), while ‘enjoying reading *Mein Kampf*’ is not (enjoying reading *Mein Kampf* does not increase your well-being). So the idea is that if there is such a thing as objective welfare value, something’s having it is a necessary condition for anyone to derive subjective welfare value from it. A subjectivist like Sumner will deny that there are any objective welfare goods. An objectivist will think that objective welfare goods are, *ipso facto*, subjective welfare goods - possession of them makes a direct contribution to a person’s actual welfare. As a hybrid theorist, I will accept and argue, in the present section, that there are objective welfare goods, but also, in the next

section, that something further is necessary to transform an objective welfare good into a subjective welfare good (this will be the point of requiring an endorsement - or “appreciation” - requirement of some kind).

A full elaboration of this general hybridist idea would have to be much more complex, but it would be too tedious to enlarge upon the matter at length. A couple complications should be mentioned, though. For example, it is probably not really true that enjoying something intrinsically worthless (like *Mein Kampf*) is of *no* welfare value whatsoever - indeed I’ll assume at a few points in this chapter that the enjoyment of *anything* has *some* welfare value (though nothing in my argument will turn on this assumption).³⁹ And that means that it is probably better to think of the contribution of objective welfare value as a matter of somehow transcending the value that is gained through mere enjoyment of a thing. Also, we should not assume objective welfare value to be the same thing as intrinsic or objective value *simpliciter*. For example, the unread copy of *Lord of the Rings* on my shelf might have value, but not, just so far as it sits on my shelf, welfare value. But neither should we even assume that anything of objective value can be transformed into some kind of objective welfare value, as in the case where I start reading the *Lord of the Rings*. Some German youngster’s engagement with the adventures of Frodo and Sam might be of objective value, but it’s not obvious that there’s some kind of reaction *I* might have to this state of affairs that would transform that value into some kind of benefit for myself. Or retributionists might say that punishing the wicked has intrinsic value, but such punishment again seems unlikely to make any contribution to my life, however I approach it. Finally, I am using the locutions ‘endorsement,’ ‘pro-attitude,’ ‘caring about’ and ‘appreciating’ to just refer to positive attitudes in the broadest sense. This obscures the fact that we might describe importantly different hybridist theories depending on which kind of attitudes we thought most relevant, and whether we thought

³⁹ That enjoyment does seem to be sufficient for the realization of at least some welfare value probably explains part of the appeal of subjectivism (as opposed to hybridism). For comparison, Stephen Darwall allows both that enjoying something of no value and having something of value but not appreciating it might be of some small amount of welfare value (Darwall 97). Likewise Parfit says that having one or the other might be of “little or no value” (Parfit 502).

benefit should vary importantly with strength of reaction, and whether cognitive or affective reactions are more important.

My present purpose is to show that there are objective welfare goods. This does not mean showing that there are things such that it is always good to have them: that would amount to showing right off the bat that objective welfare goods can make a direct contribution to welfare (objectivism about welfare would be true). It also does not mean showing that there are things such that to be without them is thereby to be worse off. There may be many objective welfare goods, and engagement with some of them to the exclusion of others may result in a perfectly good life: thus a monk or a nun might forego married life for a relationship with God and be no worse off. What we require is to show that something, when appreciated in the appropriate way, benefits us in a way that goes beyond our mere appreciation of that thing. My example here is not going to be especially original: I think there are a lot of objective welfare goods, but in particular I will argue that autonomy is one of these.

II.i - Sen's problem for subjectivist theories

In Ethics and Economics, Amartya Sen raises a problem about welfare comparisons on views that understand welfare in terms of preference satisfaction, though the problem evidently goes beyond interpersonal comparisons and, as far as I can see, challenges any view, such as Sumner's, that understands welfare goods as being entirely determined by the attitudes of individual subjects. Sen writes that

A person who has had a life of misfortune, with very little opportunities, and rather little hope, may be more easily reconciled to deprivations than others reared in more fortunate and affluent circumstances. . . . The hopeless beggar, the precarious landless labourer, the dominated housewife, the hardened unemployed or the over-exhausted coolie may all take pleasures in small mercies, and manage to suppress intense suffering for the necessity of continuing survival, but it would be ethically deeply mistaken to attach a correspondingly small value to the loss of their well-being because of this survival strategy.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Amartya Sen, On Ethics and Economics, Basil Blackwell, (1987), p.45.

The problem is that on a thoroughly subjective view, a person's welfare is a function of, and only of, a person's attitudes towards their life and its features, and these attitudes can be shaped by oppression and deprivation in ways that will cause a subjectivist's assessment of the quality of such a person's life to be skewed with regards to the weighing of benefits and harms: small mercies will count for too much and significant losses for too little.

I assume that a satisfactory theory of welfare must deal with Sen's problem, and in some way other than by biting the bullet and simply allowing that injuring a meek and poor man is of less import (welfare-wise) than injuring a proud and wealthy man. So far as a subjectivist is inclined to make that response, my argument here will not answer him. But most subjectivists *do* seem to be concerned to handle the problem more subtly, and I will examine a couple of the attempts here.

II.ii - Sumner on autonomy

Sumner identifies well-being with "authentic happiness." Happiness is understood as life-satisfaction: an agent's positive cognitive/affective reaction to the conditions of his life (Sumner 156). The "authentic" part of the formulation is meant in part to take care of the worry that might resurface here about insuring that the goods that make up the satisfying life are fitted to the agent, rather than that, as Connie Rosati puts it, "she has been made to fit them."⁴¹ Authenticity has two components for Sumner - informedness and autonomy. The informedness requirement means that life satisfaction is undermined when it rests on false information. Such is Sumner's deference to the authority of the agent that how much such satisfaction is undermined depends on the assessment the individual would himself make. For an agent's life-satisfaction to count as well-being, the agent must also be autonomous. An agent may fail to be autonomous when he has undergone some kind of indoctrination, or where a lifetime of deprivation and oppression has left him satisfied with the most meagre of goods. Now one might suspect that treating concerns about loss of autonomy this way amounts to the introduction of a special commitment to the (objective)

⁴¹ "Internalism and the Good for a Person," p.302

value of autonomy. It looks as if, on Sumner's account, what matters is personal satisfaction, and the possibility of a non-autonomous person realizing such personal satisfaction simply has to be ruled out by a rather anti-subjectivist appeal to the importance of autonomy.

Sumner thinks, however, that the autonomy condition on goods follows from subjectivism about welfare - the idea that a necessary condition for the possibility of a thing's being good for you is that you have (or would have under appropriate conditions) a positive attitude towards it (Sumner 38). This is because if a subject's values "have been engineered or manipulated by others then they are not truly hers" (174). Now one would think that we could distinguish two forms of subjectivism here - one weaker and one stronger. On the weaker version, benefits and detriments correlate with the positive and negative attitudes of the welfare subject, with no further restrictions. On the stronger version, an agent's proattitudes only count towards determining his good under certain conditions - in particular they do not count if he is not autonomous. Sumner is denying that there is any such distinction to be made: if an agent is not autonomous, on Sumner's view, then his attitudes are not really his own, and so not just anything an agent can be made to care about will be part of his good, since they would not really be *his* cares if he were made to have them. But I think it is clear that an autonomy condition does not follow from subjectivism, because we *can* distinguish between these weaker and stronger forms of subjectivism, and while we need to distinguish the desires that are yours in some sense appropriate to determining your welfare, we cannot do this simply by claiming that the desires that aren't so appropriate aren't yours at all. Of course there is *some* sense in which desires in you which have been manufactured by others are not yours, but there is equally a sense in which they are yours (that's part of why you don't want to be manipulated). But making this observation does not count as a principled resolution of the problem.

Consider what the failure to make this distinction leads Sumner to say about the person who is not autonomous. We cannot know, he says, in what such a person's well-

being consists (218-9). It is clear why Sumner must say this. On his view a person's good is determined by their attitudes, and on his view a person without autonomy has no attitudes or values of his own. Thus there is really nothing to be said about his well-being. But this, and I offer this on purely intuitive grounds, is false. Surely we can at least say that it would be good for him to become autonomous, or escape his oppression or deprivation, or whatever disability is relevant here. Sumner's view, then, does not offer an adequate alternative to thinking of autonomy as an objective welfare good.

II.iii - Internalist views and autonomy

But there have been subtler attempts to deal with the problem of autonomy from a broadly subjectivist perspective. Peter Railton and Connie Rosati have offered internalist accounts of welfare where conditions protecting autonomy appear to arise more naturally from the attempt to constrain a person's future good in terms of his current interests.⁴² These theories try to find an intermediate course between "simple" internalism, which would let pretty much any desired thing count as a benefit, including things that a person would only want upon indoctrination, for example, and revealed desire theories of the good on the other extreme. On Railton's view, an individual's good consists in what that agent would desire for himself looking at his position from a standpoint "fully and vividly informed about himself and his circumstances" (Railton 16). This plays on the notion of an "ideal advisor" - a fully informed version of yourself - whose recommendations you would accept, knowing that your idealized self has your interests at heart (13). This would apparently capture some of what is important about autonomy, as one's ideal advisor will have the vivid awareness of possibilities the deprived person may not, and will not want for you to undergo indoctrination, and so on. Another interesting internalist account is offered by Connie Rosati, who says (roughly) that some X is good for a person if there are some conditions C under which the person would want X for his actual self as a person

⁴² Since these accounts appear only to be attempts to answer questions an agent asks about what kind of life he should now attempt to lead - about what kinds of things to pursue, or what things will now improve his life - they are rather incomplete as theories of the good life (in a way that Sumner's, for example, is not).

about to enter those conditions, and C is such that his actual self would approve of being under C.⁴³ This account would also rule out, for example, the possibility that your good involves KKK membership, because you wouldn't approve of being brainwashed, and allows that your good can include things you may not currently desire, so long as you would currently endorse being under the conditions in which you do desire those things. So, the "over-exhausted coolie" might not desire something which he has no hope of achieving, but that's not to say he would turn down the offer of great wealth, which might provoke more wide ranging interests, if it were offered.

But what really is needed is in fact a more explicit autonomy condition. Conditions like those offered by Railton and Rosati will not do. The problems comes from two main directions. Firstly, it is not difficult to think up cases where a change in conditions would benefit a person, despite the fact that he rejects being under those conditions, or where a person might insist on a course of action despite an advisor's warnings. In respect to the latter, consider people who are weak-willed, or who have very strong desires for harmful things, such that their desires would not track their advisor's advice (on Railton's view it's important that our desires would track the advice of an ideal advisor - otherwise our good as determined by the advisor might have nothing to do with our own desires, in violation of the internalist intuition). And yet resisting, or not experiencing, strong temptation might still be better for someone. Or with regard to Rosati's view, consider the case of Raskolnikov, the character from Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. Before committing his murder he is hardly stable mentally, and afterwards he is a psychological wreck. After going to prison, he begins to experience a new life with the help of Sonya (a woman who follows him to the prison camp) and his Bible (which he comes across in prison). But note the conditions under which Raskolnikov came to discover this new life: imprisonment with hard labour. These were not conditions Raskolnikov approved of - he loathed the idea of

⁴³ Rosati, Connie, "Persons, Perspectives and Full Information Accounts of the Good," *Ethics* 105 (January 1995) p.307. This is an interpretation of Rosati in that I think she misformulates her conditions on p.307. What I've provided is what I take her to have intended.

going to prison.⁴⁴ But this hardly seems relevant. Surely his new life is good for him anyway. I am thus in agreement with David Sobel, who rejects the sort of internalist theories offered by Railton and Rosati for just this sort of reason: “Some people are unreasonable or misguided precisely in failing to see that certain alterations to themselves would place them in better circumstances to see their own good.”⁴⁵ So these views might entail a kind of non-stipulative autonomy constraint on welfare, but at the cost of some implausible claims about the good for a person.

Secondly, on Rosati and Railton’s views, ensuring that an agent is not “made to suit” certain “goods” is accomplished because of the way an advisor’s advice has to appeal to the agent as he is. But on this approach, while we can say that some item is not part of a person’s good because he would have to be forcibly indoctrinated to want it, it is less clear what we should say about his good once he has been so indoctrinated. It seems as if, on advisor views, he now has some new good, constituted in some way by what his new advisor would recommend, even if the new personality is that of a servile chattel. (It might be thought that full-information views in the tradition of Brandt’s “cognitive psychotherapy” - here Railton more than Rosati - might get around this, since one thing cognitive psychotherapy might be expected to do is root out desires formed through various suspect conditioning processes. But presumably people in this tradition also assume that different fully informed and rational people could have different interests. So we can just assume that whatever indoctrination procedure we imagine changes a person so thoroughly - perhaps even through the use of neurosurgery etc. - as to make our subject a very different person, or, rather, a person with a very different personality. And there is no obvious reason to think that this personality *could not* be one of a servile chattel, or something equally worrisome.)

⁴⁴ Actually Raskolnikov does turn himself into prison, but it is out of a need to escape his torment through confession. Still, we can imagine he was arrested if we like. A quite similar literary case (in the relevant respects) is that of Robinson Crusoe.

⁴⁵ Sobel, “Full-Information Accounts of Well-Being,” p.791. I extrapolate with regards to Rosati: Sobel’s remarks were published before Rosati’s paper.

In both cases, the basic problem is that the conditions offered by Railton and Rosati do not allow a distinction between forcible indoctrination and happier cases of personal transformation. For views like Rosati and Railton's, there is a real disconnect between what constitutes a person's well-being before a radical personal transformation and what constitutes it afterwards, and indeed what constitutes it afterwards must not be part of their original good. But surely there is a more significant relationship between the goods of various stages of a life. Part of this relationship is, I think, captured by David Velleman in his excellent paper on "Well-Being and Time," in which he points out that events in a life gain meaning from their "narrative" relationship to other harms and benefits in a life.⁴⁶

What matters in the overall story of a life is not just the sequence of events but how they relate to each other - a success built on the lessons of a failure may have a different impact on one's assessment of the quality of one's life than a failure followed by an unrelated success. In the first case, for example, the failure is redeemed. Likewise, a transformation may mean that some of the things that count as goods in your life are different from what they once were, but an overall assessment of your life will depend upon what lessons are learned from the period before the transformation, whether it is a write-off or can be seen as having involved many valuable experiences, etc. Advisor views do not seem to capture this kind of continuity, because they rule out in advance the possibility that a radical transformation might enhance or at least not detract from the overall shape of your life.

One response to these problems might be to seek different ways of spelling out conditions for an adequate internalism. I have no way of showing conclusively that this is not a worthwhile strategy. But I am inclined to think that the lesson to draw from the above is that since we are evidently worried about autonomy - to the point that subjectivists and internalists take successful accommodation of it to be essential to the success of their programs - then we ought simply to acknowledge that it is an objective welfare good. There is no reason to think that we will capture the importance of autonomy in a principled way without the principle being explicitly about autonomy.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ J. David Velleman, "Well-Being and Time," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 72 (1991), pp.48-77

⁴⁷ Which is not to say that I wouldn't hope to capture the importance of autonomy within some more general hybrid theory.

II.iv - Wrapping up the argument for objective welfare goods

As with other objective welfare goods, to be autonomous is not, *ipso facto*, to be better off. Some things seem to make no independent contribution to welfare beyond being liked, and some do, and the fact that some seem to make an independent contribution to welfare marks them out as objective welfare goods. Autonomy is one of these things. But I have said nothing so far about appreciation of one's autonomous life, and so there will be a temptation to see the lesson of the last few sections as being that one is better off just for being autonomous. In any case, what could it be to appreciate one's autonomy such that it transforms autonomy into a subjective welfare good? One might consider one's freedom and be glad of it, but one does not sit in overjoyed contemplation of it, and even if one did, that would hardly seem adequate to explaining the importance autonomy seems to claim in a good life.

I have proposed that autonomy is an objective welfare good, and that objective welfare goods are transformed into subjective welfare goods by appreciation (I will argue for the latter claim in the next section). I now suggest that we should understand "appreciation" as "appreciation of the thing in keeping with what it is." For example, if friendship is of objective welfare value, appreciating your friends as people with whom to share problems and thoughts, and as people whose company is to be enjoyed, is to render friendship a subjective welfare good, while appreciating your friends as people who can give you nice presents on your birthday is not really to transform friendship into a subjective welfare good in your life, but only to make use of it as an instrumental good. To appreciate autonomy in the way appropriate to *its* nature is to make choices with a kind of awareness of options, to pursue projects of importance, to take pleasure in the commodities one has access to, and so on. And notice that this kind of appreciation *is* necessary for transforming autonomy into a subjective welfare value - the suicidal or radically pessimistic may gain no obvious non-instrumental benefit from their freedom. But notice both that one

could appreciate one's life in this way without actually being autonomous, and that this shows that the value of autonomy is not just instrumental. You can make careful choices, pursue projects that matter to you and value the commodities you possess without being autonomous in the sense in which that term has been understood here - the downtrodden can decide whether to cower or talk back and face the consequences, the indoctrinated can work to please their leader, and the deprived can treasure their meagre possessions. But clearly, to do these same kinds of activities with pleasure, only where you actually *are* autonomous, is to be better off - to deny this is just to be faced again with Sen's problem.

The structure of my argument, then, is analogous to one Plato offers, in the *Philebus*, for the conclusion that pleasure is not the only good. Isn't the pleasurable life better when conjoined with intelligence or knowledge? But if knowledge adds something, then pleasure isn't the *only* good.⁴⁸ My suggestion is similar: assume that the enjoyment or appreciation of just anything has *some* welfare value - surely a person who is autonomous and appreciates his autonomy benefits in a way that *goes beyond* his mere appreciation of that autonomy. Thus the importance of autonomy for welfare goes beyond anything determined by the attitudes of individuals. And subjectivist theories are unable to accommodate that fact. Autonomy is an objective welfare good.

III - Subjective Welfare Goods

One can accept the forgoing argument and still accept, as I have done, that there is something to subjectivism about welfare: the attitudes of the welfare subject matter. One might feel, as I've suggested is the case, that there are indeed objective welfare goods (like autonomy), but that you can't actually benefit from anything you don't appreciate, in some broad sense. There are two main ways this might be meant. First, one might impose an

⁴⁸ Plato, *Philebus*, 60b-e. Aristotle echoes this argument in *The Nicomachean Ethics*, book X, section 2. Nozick's experience machine argument is also similar. That argument works so long as you think that, say, a real wife is better than a simulated one, though perhaps a real concentration camp is not better than a simulated Tahiti. Keeping the experiences constant, real will generally be better.

experience condition on the realization of subjective welfare value. Presumably part of the the point of an experience requirement will be that the experience is positive in some way,⁴⁹ though it might not involve pleasure in the ordinary sense. For example, Sumner endorses an experience requirement (Sumner 128), but seems willing to allow that it was better for Freud to have lived his last days in suffering but with a clear mind than to be drugged into a peaceful oblivion, as the first option was more in line with Freud's own concerns.⁵⁰ But second, one might believe that there are objective welfare goods, but that a positive experiential response is not necessary for subjective welfare goods - instead one might impose an endorsement requirement. This would require a positive attitude to the relevant object, whether or not you are actually aware of its existence.⁵¹ To illustrate the difference, imagine that having one's child succeed in life is an objective welfare good. The experience requirement says that you have to be aware of and feel positively about that success for it to amount to a subjective welfare good. The endorsement requirement says only that it would have to be the case that you would have responded positively to that success had you known about it (though you might in fact have died, or have lost contact with that child).⁵² If either of these are appropriate as conditions on subjective welfare goods, then the best theory of welfare will be a subjectivist one; even if only relatively weakly, since it will be a necessary condition of something being good for you that you have an appropriate attitude towards it.⁵³ We will have, in conjunction with the conclusions of the previous argument, a hybrid theory of the nature of welfare goods.

In this section I will be arguing against accepting an experience requirement, but

⁴⁹ Though there could be other motivations. See n.4 above.

⁵⁰ Sumner, 92-4 (though of course Sumner does not accept that there are any objective welfare goods). The example is from Griffin, p.8.

⁵¹ Alternatively we might talk about a *hypothetical experience* requirement: *if you were to come into experiential contact with the good, you would have a positive reaction to it.*

⁵² It might be wondered whether we should not also distinguish some kind of hypothetical endorsement condition, as I did earlier, such that endorsement need only be endorsement in ideal circumstances of some kind. It seems to me that we need not distinguish such a condition at this point because the topic here is the actual reaping of benefits, and that you would care about something while fully rational does not seem necessary or sufficient for you to benefit from it as you are.

⁵³ As Sumner notes (p.54 n.15), subjectivism is 'dominant' over objective theories given the way he looks at the division (which I've adopted).

will adopt an endorsement requirement, as well as a related, and more general condition. In my view, then, something can contribute to a person's welfare though it does not enter their experience, but it cannot contribute to their welfare if they do not care about it at all. I ought to flag one thing here - there will be some slipping beyond the conclusions of the last section in that I will just assume that there are many objective welfare goods. This is mainly for simplicity. But if one allows that there are any objective welfare goods at all, then I can't see much motivation for thinking there aren't more than one.⁵⁴

One might think that a rejection of the experience requirement just follows if we accept the force of the experience machine thought experiment. Griffin writes that

the trouble is that some of the things that persons value greatly do not [enter experience]. My truly having close and authentic personal relations is not the kind of thing that can enter my experience; all that can enter is what is common to both my truly having such relations and my merely believing that I do. (Griffin 19)

But the fact that things outside our experience can matter to us at all does not settle the question we face now about whether one must be aware of such items in order to realize subjective welfare value. To say that 'truly having close and authentic personal relationships' is important to me and is not something that can enter my experience is not to say that my having the veridical belief that I am in such relationships cannot be necessary if I am to derive any benefit from them. And we are just looking at the experience requirement as a possible necessary condition of that kind on subjective welfare value.

But consider an example offered by Griffin. Griffin suggests that Bertrand Russell might have evaluated his life as more worthwhile if he could have known that his efforts for nuclear disarmament would ultimately play a role in avoiding nuclear war than if he knew the opposite would be true (Griffin 23). This seems right to me (and we need only

⁵⁴ That is not quite true. One reason for thinking autonomy is the only objective welfare good might be the idea that autonomy is itself the condition of other welfare goods, which are relative to an autonomous individual's attitudes. I cannot adequately address this idea here, as it would take me too far into questions about the nature of autonomy, but, roughly, the problem with the suggestion is that the conception of autonomy Sen and I are appealing to here is not characterizable apart from the further characterization of other objective goods: access to basic commodities, breadth of experience, and so on. So I think that if the argument is accepted, the existence of a variety of objective goods is thereby accepted.

appeal here to a person's *own* assessment in this kind of case) - if a person makes a substantial investment in something that really matters to him, it seems appropriate to think that he will feel differently about the value of his life depending on what he believes would be the result of it, and that he will be reasonable in doing so.

A lot of people have rejected this kind of suggestion, of course. A simple, and perhaps quite appealing, defence of the experience requirement is simply the invocation of an intuition that the dead cannot be further harmed or benefited. As Parfit has pointed out, if events outside of one's knowledge can affect one's well-being, then it must be allowed, as in the example above, that events after one's death can do so as well - death just ensures you'll never find out about them (Parfit 495). Sumner takes a different view: "dying has precious few consolations," he says, "but surely one of them is that beyond that threshold we are safe from any further misfortunes."⁵⁵ Since the possibilities of posthumous and unacknowledged harms and benefits apparently go together, this intuition probably accounts in part for the insistence on an experience requirement.⁵⁶ Now I think it clear that the value of one's life can be increased or lessened by things outside one's experience, including posthumous events. Most people will agree with this, but it is now common to disagree about whether the kind of value at stake here can be "prudential" value - the kind of value relevant to *welfare*. For example, Sumner responds to the above case by saying that of course Russell's life would have had greater *instrumental* value had his efforts succeeded, and perhaps also greater *perfectionist* value, given his achievements (Sumner 126-7). But from the fact that Russell's life might have been made better in these ways after his death, says Sumner, nothing follows about whether it was better *for him*. Sumner distinguishes, that is, between what he calls different "dimensions of value". In particular,

⁵⁵ Sumner p.127. The appropriate way to put it, of course, is that your life *was* better or worse in virtue of what was going to come of it - it isn't that it *gets* better or worse after your death.

⁵⁶ Velleman points out that one could hold that things outside of experience could affect well-being but only if they occur during life (Velleman 56). This position is not, certainly, incoherent, but it seems an odd way to draw the line. If the death of a loved one, say, could affect your welfare if it occurs just moments before you die (perhaps far enough away and so soon before you die that you never even *could* have known about it), then why couldn't it do so if that loved one had died just a moment later?

he identifies aesthetic, perfectionist, and ethical value as especially needing to be distinguished from prudential value (20-5).

Now I do not think these distinctions are worthless, and I have sometimes tacitly assumed them. But it is going to be a real strain to interpret away in this fashion the posthumously-reaped value of a life in every case, and the strain already shows in this example. It is plausible, if success is a perfectionist value, that Russell's life would indeed have greater perfectionist value for his posthumous achievements. Now Russell's life could have this kind of perfectionist value whether he cared about perfectionist value or not. But if, as we've been imagining, Russell does care about this kind of success, then we should allow that there is some other kind of value here as well. As Sumner himself recognizes, success along one dimension of value can affect success along another dimension (Sumner 23). This is because the success or failure of important projects can affect the prudential value of one's life, and in the case of Russell the prevention of nuclear warfare was an important personal project. That is, even if Russell's successes would be, strictly, a matter of instrumental and/or perfectionist value, Russell made real investment into realizing these kinds of value in his own life, and thus I can see no reason why higher or lower scores on those scales will not bear on the prudential value of his life. If I can, on consideration of the different things that might happen after my death, say how I would evaluate my life as a whole, and how pleased I would be with the way I've lived it on the assumption that various of these possibilities were realized, it seems silly to insist both that I must just be pleased by the prospect of realizing some other kind of value, and that this other kind of value couldn't possibly bear on my well-being.

Other reasons are offered for holding onto an experience requirement. One important motivation comes out of consideration of desire-fulfillment theories of well-being. It is widely, and correctly, acknowledged that one is not made better off by the satisfaction of just any desire. Parfit's example of the stranger on the train with whose story I sympathize is the famous one here (Parfit 494): If I wish him to succeed, but upon our parting never think of him again, it does not seem plausible that I am made better off if

he does indeed gain success at some distant point in the future. For desire theories to be made more plausible, they need to be restricted in some fashion. An experience requirement is an obvious way to do this. Sumner says that only such a requirement will prevent the excesses of a desire-based approach to well-being, and Griffin, while not agreeing on that point, recognizes the same motivation for experience requirement.⁵⁷ Now it's perfectly true that it violates the notion of welfare that the satisfaction of any desire could count towards it, but as Griffin points out, we also distort the nature of welfare when we claim that things outside our experience can't benefit us (Griffin 19). More pointedly, whether or not desire theories can find the middle ground isn't the issue. The fact is that there are clear cases, or so at least it seems to me, in which our lives are made better or worse by some events we are never made aware of. To ignore those cases and argue for an experience requirement on the basis of a particular failure of a certain type of theory is inadequate. A desire theory is not the way to go, and what we do need is a theory that doesn't allow too much to count but also not too little.

A possible source of confusion over this matter is an asymmetry in the way my welfare can be affected by things that I don't know about. It seems to me that I might think I've had quite a worthwhile life and be very wrong, because of the ways my happiness was predicated on false beliefs about my present situation or the future. But it is much less plausible that I might have had a good life if I always assessed it as a bad one. Here again my negative assessment might be predicated on false beliefs. But in this case the fact that things are not as I think they are almost seems to heighten the tragedy of my situation. Because of this asymmetry, an experience requirement formulated as "X can only have an impact on well-being if it enters experience in some way" is much less plausible than one formulated as "X can only have a positive impact on well-being if it enters experience in some way." I believe the latter is still false, however. In the Russell case, or in similar cases, I think we should say we may be benefited even in ignorance. That there is an asymmetry is an interesting matter, however - probably it is indicative of the fragility of a

⁵⁷ Sumner, p.128, Griffin, p.19. Of course Sumner does not attempt to prove this by considering every possible adjustment to desire theories. For an effort to offer appropriate restrictions on a desire theory, see Griffin, p.22.

good life. It also shows that experience very often *is* crucial.

Two weaker conditions are in order, however. If it is plausible that Russell's posthumous success can count as a subjective welfare good for him, though he knows nothing of it, that plausibility seems to disappear if we imagine that in fact he really wouldn't care whether there is nuclear war or not after his death (he's just putting on a front so people will think him a good man). Here it does seem more appropriate to say that his life might have some *other* kind of value because of his contributions to others' lives, but not welfare value. Or, as I said earlier, autonomy might be an objective welfare good, but it seems to have little value for the suicidal. This suggests that we should adopt what I earlier called the endorsement condition: X cannot be a subjective welfare good for a person unless he would endorse the presence of X in his life if he knew about it. And the asymmetry identified above suggests that we should accept what I will call a "satisfaction" requirement: a person cannot be living a good life without being at least minimally satisfied with his life.

Accepting these two conditions on subjective welfare goods means accepting a very weak form of subjectivism. You can't reap benefits if you don't care about the items that constitute those benefits, and you can't be living the good life and not be aware of it. So we cannot describe the good life without mention of a person's attitudes. However, my position is an objectivist one in a more interesting sense: some things have a value that transcends a person's appreciation of that thing, and other things do not (eg. autonomy and lack of autonomy respectively).

IV - Some Challenges to Objectivist Theories

I now want to briefly examine some of the arguments that have been offered against objective theories, and see how well a mildly subjectivist, or hybridist, approach of the type I am recommending can stand up to them. One general worry about objective theories

of value springs from a skepticism about the possibility of giving an account of any kind of value apart from the attitudes of human beings, which might seem to be required in accounting for objective welfare value. I agree that there is a need to offer a theoretical foundation for the sorts of objective value claims I have made here, and will concern myself with that matter in the next chapter. Another general and related concern is that a person and their good ought to be reasonably suited to each other - a concern especially prominent in internalist theories. As I've argued, these worries really motivate the adoption of an objectivist and not subjectivist theory, and beyond that, accepting the subjectivist conditions I have offered ought to be adequate to assuage these worries, so long as the objective welfare goods we identify do indeed seem important, as autonomy does.

One problem Sumner raises for objective theories is that they will have difficulty explaining the subject-relativity of welfare: an essential feature of the notion of welfare is that it is about the ways things can be good or bad *for* people. Subjective theories capture this easily, by reference to the subject's attitudes, and objective theories are, by definition, deprived of this strategy (Sumner 42-4). This seems not to be a problem for the position I am advocating, since my view does impose subjectivist conditions on subjective welfare goods, which makes it quite adequate for capturing the agent-relativity of welfare goods. (though, for the record, I'm not convinced this should really be taken to be a serious problem for any view, however objectivist).

But Sumner also disagrees with the objective elements introduced in hybrid theories of the present sort. He characterizes these views as incorporating two conditions: an endorsement condition and an independent value condition (the "value requirement" - Sumner 163-4). In my terms this would be equivalent to saying that subjective welfare goods are only realized in the endorsement of objective welfare goods. As I hinted at above, I think that view would in fact be of dubious plausibility - it doesn't seem like fondue needs to be of objective welfare value in order for me to derive subjective welfare value from enjoying it. But Sumner's complaint is evidently more about the very notion of

objective welfare goods, or “independent” values, which I *have* endorsed:

How are we to determine which aims or activities or forms of life
really are valuable? Can we rank them in terms of value? And who are
 ‘we’? The enlightened élite? Mill’s ‘competent judges’? Philosopher
 kings? (Sumner 164)

But this is more rhetoric than anything else - or perhaps also a challenge to offer the kind of theory about value I have just acknowledged we should try to offer. Certainly it does not outweigh the importance of incorporating the value of autonomy into our theories of welfare, and we have seen that Sumner’s own theory does that poorly.

Sumner also complains that value requirements are “unacceptably patronizing and puritanical in their implications concerning the quality of people’s lives” (166). This complaint would have some force if it were claimed that enjoying fondue can only be good for you if fondue is objectively good, or that teaching is a worthwhile practice but not lawyering, but it seems rather weak if the kinds of things we are claiming are of objective welfare value are things like autonomy. Sumner is also imagining cases where we revise, over the course of our lives, our beliefs about what things are of value - must we now decide that our earlier lives really hadn’t gone so well as we had once thought? May we not think that our lives were still good for us as we were then (165)? The short answer is that sometimes we can. It depends on what kinds of values we’re talking about. If you’ve been liberated from an oppressive situation, then the answer should probably be ‘no’ - anyway not correctly.

VI - Conclusion

We should accept subjectivism in a weak form: a positive reaction to one’s life is a necessary condition for living a good life. But this is quite compatible with thinking that not just any kind of life can be a good one, and it might be that not everyone will be able to live a good life. This is because there are such things as objective welfare goods - a person who lives without these, or without appreciation of them, will not live a good life (or will live one much less good than it might have been, anyway). This will be jarring for those who

are hesitant to judge the lives of others. But to recognize that not all lives are good ones is just to recognize the serious evils in our world, and the consequent fragility of human lives.

I have, in effect, answered Darwall's question about how welfare can matter despite the fact that it is not conceptually linked to reasons for action. But rejecting the idea that welfare is normative and accepting that it is objective leaves us without the option of simply cataloguing and explaining the value of welfare goods by reference to the attitudes of individuals. So then what is on the list of objective goods? Can this list be given theoretical unity? What grounds this kind of value? These are questions the hybridist faces as much as does the strict objectivist, though these questions are far too rarely addressed by either camp. The arguments in this chapter have appealed to common moral intuitions, but those intuitions themselves need vindication. In the next chapter I will argue that if we are to hold on to the intuitions invoked here by the problem Sen raises for subjectivist theories of well-being, we must ground the resulting objectivist or hybrid account in a theory of human nature, and, moreover, an ambitious one that does not shy away from teleological thinking.

Chapter Three: Human Nature

I - Introduction

My goal in this chapter is to give an account of the nature and source of objective welfare value. This must involve discussing human nature, for the very simple reason that an objective theory of welfare claims to tell us that certain things are good for people whatever their attitudes. If that is so, we must explain what it is about humans that could ground or justify this claim.⁵⁸ The suggestion that human nature is the proper starting point for an account of the good for humans is very far from being a new one. In the Nicomachean Ethics, Aristotle famously argues from the function of man to the good for man.⁵⁹ Many commentators have been very suspicious of this move, partly because of skepticism about the very notion of human function, and partly because of doubts about the success of the normative (employing that word now in its more general sense) deductions even granting that humans have a purpose. Modern defenders of Aristotle and those carrying on the Aristotelian tradition in ethics have played down the role of teleological thinking while still trying to give accounts of the human good. But Aristotle's own theory relies on substantial metaphysical assumptions, and in this chapter I argue that it can do work no theory without those metaphysical notions can. I recognize, of course, that a strongly teleological account of human nature will not be popular (that is why I spend as much time as I do in this chapter arguing that nothing else will do). So much the worse, it will be thought, for objective theories of welfare if they rely on that kind of teleology. Indeed I will set up just such a dilemma at the end of this chapter. I have already provided

⁵⁸ There is, certainly, a difference between saying that "X would be good for you though you don't now care for it" (as we might say that the Christian life turned out to be better for Raskolnikov than the life of the amoral superman), and saying that "some X is good for every human so far as they are human" - but it is only in virtue of the latter sort of claim that we can in certain important cases (such as Sen's), make the former sort of claim.

⁵⁹ Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, David Ross trans., Ackrill and Urmson rev., Oxford University Press (1998) I.7.

independent evidence for objective welfare goods, and so the choice will be between giving up our intuitions about the lives of the oppressed and accepting that humans have a *telos*. I urge the latter option.

II - Neo-Aristotelian Approaches

Here in part I, I will be examining the problems neo-Aristotelian theories of human nature face when they eschew teleological thinking, in order to show the difference teleological thinking makes. Because I am now engaged in a search for foundations, I will not accept at face value intuitive claims offered by my interlocutors about human nature or the human good. It is not that I do not accept many of these claims, and I employed them myself in the last chapter. But in this chapter I am interested in the derivation and theoretical justification of these claims.

II.i - Hurka's perfectionism

Thomas Hurka, in Perfectionism, sets out to give the best possible Aristotelian theory about what it is to lead a good human life.⁶⁰ Such a theory attempts to characterize those things that “constitute human nature or are definitive of humanity.” Perfectionism understands the good life as one in which these qualities are cultivated (Hurka 3).

The first task is to determine those properties the having of which we take to constitute human nature. Hurka employs two tests: 1) the concept of our nature we come up with should seem morally important, and 2) we want the moral consequence of this account to look right as well. Something will have gone wrong if it turns out that our good involves developing qualities we find trivial or distasteful, and this can be called the “wrong-properties” worry (Hurka 9-10).

Hurka considers a few criteria for identifying the properties constitutive of human

⁶⁰ Thomas Hurka, Perfectionism, Oxford University Press (1993)

nature. We might, first, look at properties distinctive of or unique to humans. Hurka rejects this for familiar reasons: humans are unique in possessing properties that are morally trivial or even abhorrent, and it doesn't seem as if our good ought to depend on what other animals happen to be like (10-1). He then considers an essential properties criterion, understood in terms of a combination of a Kripkean approach (a property is essential to a kind when "in every world where the kind exists, its members all possess it"), and an explanatory method (an essential property should play a central role in explanations of, in our case, behaviour, say). This is rejected as being too inclusive: it falls to the wrong-properties objection by including properties such as being self-identical (what would it even mean to develop this property?) and so on (11-2, 34-5, 37). Hurka accepts a modification of this line of thought, however. "The best perfectionism," says Hurka, "equates human nature with the properties essential to humans and conditioned on their being living beings" (17). This rules out properties that are essential to us only *qua* physical object, for example. Also excluded, however, are those properties peculiar to us as individuals, and I will return to this matter later. What are retained in Hurka's concept of human nature are properties essential to us *qua* living beings, animals, and humans (14-6).

So what exactly are these properties? Hurka identifies two main areas for "Aristotelian" perfection. We are, first, essentially embodied, and our bodies have a "fairly determinate structure." It is intuitively not human, says Hurka, if it does not have a body that allows it to "breathe, move, process nutrients, and exercise central control" (37). Second, we are essentially rational, forming and acting on "sophisticated beliefs and intentions." Again, "beings who never envisage or plan for a future are not, intuitively, humans" (39-40). We can perfect ourselves as embodied beings by cultivating health and athleticism, and as rational beings by developing our capacities for theoretical and practical thought.

Hurka is careful to avoid "accretions" to his "stripped-down" perfectionism. A couple of these are worth noting. First, his account is not teleological - Hurka points out

that teleology is metaphysically contentious, and further, claims that it has no moral implications in any case, whether in the form given it by Aristotelian biology or by theology (24). Also counted accretions are “tendency doctrines,” doctrines which assert that humans naturally strive for perfection, or find perfection pleasurable. Perfectionism proper should do without these theses (24-6).⁶¹ I think Hurka is wrong to think that a perfectionist thesis is tenable without building in these “accretions” (the importance of the first, of course, is the central topic of this chapter), and I will return to these points in my critique of Hurka’s position.

All this is supposed to amount to a foundation for certain normative claims. Our concept of human nature allows us to talk about the good human life - the life in which these capacities are developed. And it is an ideal that people ought to pursue: the perfectionist ideal “supports categorical, not hypothetical, imperatives” (17). That is not to say that Hurka thinks his account necessarily amounts to a complete analysis of the good life. In neither case is this meant to be a complete specification. A good person will do more than act on perfectionist principles, and perfectionist goods are probably not the only goods for a person. For example, Hurka is prepared to countenance the possibility of a pluralistic account that allows pleasure, say, to also be counted a fundamental good (27-8).

I think that Hurka’s account fails. His account of human nature is inadequate, both because it is not true that anything without the properties Hurka discusses would not be human, and because many of the properties we come up with using Hurka’s method still turn out to be morally irrelevant. Philip Kitcher has made these points very nicely, and I will draw heavily on his article “Essence and Perfectionism” here.⁶² But, as we will see, even were we to pass over these problems, there is no reason to think that what Hurka describes is in fact the good life for us. All of these problems are fatal, but it is worth being reasonably thorough, as I will argue later that these sorts of objections fail against Aristotle precisely because of his teleological assumptions.

⁶¹ Though Hurka grants that some weak tendency doctrine *might* be true: that we find satisfaction in, though not exclusively in, self-perfection, for example (27).

⁶² *Ethics* 110 (October 1999), pp.59-83

Let us first address Hurka's claims about the essential properties of humans, beginning with their bodily essence. As we saw, Hurka claims that humans are creatures with a fairly determinate bodily structure, and that if a being does not have a body that allows it to "breathe, move, process nutrients, and exercise central control," it is not human (Hurka 37). This is manifestly false. Examples of humans not meeting these conditions are patients on breathing-machines, the paralyzed, the comatose, and fetuses.⁶³ That all these exist is, as Kitcher points out, a sad fact about humans (here excepting the fetuses), and what makes it sad is precisely that it *is* a fact about humans (Kitcher 68-9). There is a more general problem lurking here: the more general the properties we identify as essential, the less they will be able to play significant roles in explaining distinctively human behaviour (these bodily properties will be shared with all kinds of other animals),⁶⁴ and the more specific they are, the more humans won't actually share them. There appears to be no middle ground here - the effort to locate essential biological features of human is bound to fail.⁶⁵

Hurka's claim that anything that does not plan for its future is not human is also false. Kitcher puts it nicely when he says that this claim is "unfair to many actual members of our species" (Kitcher 73). Fetuses are an example here again, as are the comatose; others could include the severely mentally handicapped. Of course Hurka does address this problem. He tells us that fetuses, babies and the mentally demented are not humans, or are perhaps only almost-humans. Of course a fetus is a human *fetus*, but it is not a human being proper. Fetuses lack the bodily structure and rationality of "paradigm" humans

⁶³ It might be thought that this is not the most generous interpretation of Hurka's remarks. But I'm not sure what else he could mean that would not simply render the account uninteresting in the way suggested by the rest of the paragraph.

⁶⁴ It might be objected here that Hurka only has to account for human behaviour, not *distinctively human* behaviour. I think this response fails, since if we are to take essential properties seriously as explanatory, as Hurka wants to, they should be able to help us explain more specific features of human activity (such as bipedal gait, to use Kitcher's example).

⁶⁵ See Kitcher p69 on this point. Of course one might make other moves here - try to locate essential features of human beings in genotypic traits, for example. Kitcher discusses a few routes briefly and finds them wanting. I think he is right, but will leave it at that. David Hull's "On Human Nature," reprinted in *The Philosophy of Biology*, Oxford University Press (1998) is another useful article on this issue.

(Hurka 47). But this is mere stipulation, totally contrary to ordinary usage of the term 'human,' and apparently invoked for the sole purpose of preserving the theory: I myself worked for several years with mentally handicapped adults (some very severely handicapped) and I and my coworkers would have been horrified by the idea that whatever it was we were working with they weren't humans. Not only is this *ad hoc*, it is contrary to modern biological practice: it "violates biologists' commitment to reproductive closure of species," as Kitcher observes (Kitcher 65). The foetal stage is a stage in the development of a human organism (66). But the problem is more than verbal or taxonomical. Presumably the mentally handicapped and babies have a good. In what would Hurka say this good consists if not in physical health and development of theoretical and practical rationality? Leaving aside for now questions about specifically individual goods, it seems to me that for any member of the species *homo sapiens*, the perfectionist goods will have to be the same on Hurka's account, even if some of those members might be prevented by disability from achieving those goods. But it seems reasonable to say that the good of each is the same precisely because they are all humans (and this is especially obvious in the case of babies).

It also turns out that Hurka's account falls to the wrong-properties objection. Development of our physical properties, involves, for Hurka, cultivating our health, and, at a higher level, athletic achievement, where our physical systems perform to particularly excellent degrees (Hurka 38-9). But why concern ourselves with dexterity and skill, as Hurka would have us do? People "who can eat vast quantities of food display the efficacy of their digestive systems, [and] fraternity contests reveal differences in the ability to metabolize alcohol" (Kitcher 70). These feats certainly seem morally trivial, but the obligation to develop these capacities follows on Hurka's account as much as the obligation to achieve other kinds of physical fitness.

The above problems are fatal. Since Hurka fails to come up with an adequate conception of human nature, neither his normative claims about what is good for a person or what a good person does will go through. It's not that I think there is something

dramatically wrong with the conclusions, but it's no good to derive normative claims from human nature if you've handpicked the humans. But even if we were to ignore all this, Hurka's account still would not succeed in grounding claims about the good life. Here we can also pass over Hurka's claim that his account grounds categorical imperatives. This is clearly false, but it is beside the point in any case: it might be that a balanced diet is good for me, but I am not rationally impelled to watch what I eat. At most there can be a hypothetical imperative for me to eat a balanced diet, based on my desire for health or whatnot, but a balanced diet is, in an absolute sense, good for me nonetheless ('welfare' is not a normative concept). So Hurka's task is less than he perhaps think it is. But he does need to show that the perfectionist-prescribed life is actually a good life (or that the activities it prescribes are part of a good life).

Clearly Hurka's method of arriving at his concept of human nature is normatively loaded. He excludes some properties (eg. mass) from consideration on the grounds that they are morally trivial. Whether this is legitimate is a complex question, and for the most part I am prepared to overlook it. But I also noted above that Hurka excludes from consideration properties that are not essential to humans as such, but might be important qualities of individual people. His main reason for this is that perfectionism is supposed to be an ideal for all humans, and recourse to the peculiar properties of individuals would obviously undermine this. Hurka is cognizant of the possibility that one might claim that individual essence is plausibly more worth cultivating than more generally human essence, but Hurka feels this perfectionism falls to wrong property objections.⁶⁶ I don't want to get bogged down in disputation over essential properties here, but it seems to me that a person might very well happen to be psychologically wired in such a way that they derive absolutely no pleasure from cultivating their health or their rational capacities, or in fact derive satisfaction from doing things that damage these capacities, or from doing things that they could do better if they were without these faculties. Consider Rawls' grass-counter

⁶⁶ 'Essence' might carry some Kripkean baggage unwanted in this context. I do not really mean to be talking here about properties of individuals such that without those properties they would not be who they are. I am just concerned with the possibility that it might be worthwhile, from the perspective of well-being, to cultivate personal qualities at the expense or neglect of more broadly human qualities.

(and there are real-life examples of this type). Hard as it is to understand, such a person might derive great pleasure from his trivial exercises (and hopefully does!). Perhaps the grass-counter would be able to pursue his task even better by disabling himself mentally or physically in some way (by, say, removing that part of his brain that suggests to him that he might be wasting his life, or cutting off his legs which might tend to cramp up when he sits for long periods). A more serious example could cite the deaf lesbian couple that recently decided to ensure that their child would also be deaf.⁶⁷ They apparently felt that there are goods internal to the deaf community that are more important than hearing. So why shouldn't we say that destroying people's faculties in these ways can help them to lead better lives?⁶⁸

Presumably Hurka's response would be that health and developed reasoning skills are absolute goods for anyone, regardless of their desires. Perhaps Hurka will even allow that in some sense mental disability of certain specific kinds can *also* be goods for some people. But here I think we see the problem that stems from Hurka's refusal to build any tendency doctrines into his perfectionism. A plausible perfectionism would have to say at least that people take pleasure in self-perfection, or only benefit so far as they do so. If we allow that there is no particular reason to think that self-perfection should lead a person to taking pleasure in that self-perfection, it is hard to see why it would be good for them to pursue it over anything else. An endorsement condition as offered in the last chapter is a reasonable constraint on a theory of the good for persons, and Hurka's account fails it. Hurka allows that you could be a perfect human being, perfectly developed rationally and physically, and still not care *at all* about any of this - indeed you might be miserable. Some kind of tendency doctrine is crucial to a perfectionist theory of welfare. It is no mere accretion. A perfectionism that purports to have something to do with the human good must

⁶⁷ "Couple 'choose' to have deaf baby," <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/1916462.stm>, Monday April 8th, 2002. Pulled December 6th, 2002.

⁶⁸ It is interesting to note that these are cases where a person actually *alters* what Hurka takes to be one of their essential (human) features. Hurka can complain, of course, that in doing this kind of thing you are destroying yourself - rendering yourself something other than human - but I don't actually see that we can just assume that this has anything to do with the question of what is good for the individual.

come with more substantial psychological theses (controversial as they may be).⁶⁹

To summarize. Hurka fails to give an adequate account of any purported human essence: most seriously, too many humans are left out, and the account seems to call for the cultivation of morally trivial properties. Even if we let the account of human nature stand, it does not ground claims about the good human life - it is indifferent to people's interests, and Hurka is unwilling (unsurprisingly) to accept controversial psychological theses to get around this problem. But not only has Hurka failed at these points, it seems that no account of this sort *could* succeed. This is largely because the search for essential properties of humans in the Kripkean sense is hopeless. Nevertheless, it will be my contention that a robustly teleological theory can overcome the difficulties Hurka encounters.

II.ii - Hursthouse and Foot on 'natural goodness'

I want to first look more briefly at a couple of other neo-Aristotelian approaches, namely those of Rosalind Hursthouse⁷⁰ and Philippa Foot.⁷¹ I discuss these naturalistic accounts together, first, because I think there is substantial agreement between Hursthouse and Foot, and second, these theories are developed at rather a more general level than Hurka's - these authors rely more (too heavily, I believe) on judgments about the logical structure of normative evaluation and dedicate less effort to precise accounts of what it is that constitutes human nature. For the latter reason I will also take the liberty of delving into details a little less. I'll undoubtedly be leaving aside some complexities in the individual accounts, but not, I think, to such a degree that the general thrust of my argument is undermined. And looking at these theories will bring into clearer relief what is wrong generally with neo-Aristotelian approaches.

⁶⁹ Of course an endorsement condition could be imposed without accepting a tendency doctrine. But part of my idea here is that we would want the nature of the good life to emerge naturally from the account of human nature without having to append rather more *ad hoc* conditions. But one way or another, something like the endorsement condition must be preserved.

⁷⁰ Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics*, Oxford University Press (1999)

⁷¹ Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness*, Oxford University Press (2001)

Foot and Hursthouse say that our evaluations of humans “share a basic logical structure and status” with our evaluations of plants and animals.⁷² So what is this structure? We can evaluate plants and animals using all sorts of criteria, of course, but what we are concerned with here, in the context of naturalism, is our evaluation of them as good and bad “*qua* specimens of their natural kinds” (Hursthouse 197). For Hursthouse this means examining four aspects of a specimen (or fewer, depending on its sophistication): its parts, operations, actions, and desires or emotions, and evaluating these with regards to how they are contributing, “in the way characteristic of such a member of such a species,” to four ends: a characteristic form of survival of the organism, the propagation of its species, a characteristic freedom from pain and enjoyment of pleasure, and the functioning of the social group it is a part of (198-200). Foot, too, talks about “natural goodness” in terms of “parts, characteristics, and operations” (Foot 26-7). And she also emphasizes the characteristic operations of the species of which an individual is a member - a cat is defective when it has three legs because there is a clear sense in which it is true to say (though hard to render quantificationally) that cats have four legs (28-30). Foot adds a “teleological” spin to this: we want to distinguish “the case of leaves rustling when it is windy from that of flowers opening when the sun comes out” (30). Foot secures this distinction by appealing to the role a feature plays in the life of an organism (31). This is reminiscent of Hurka’s appeal to explanatory utility in picking out essential properties.

The real difficulties will come in the attempt to use this schema when evaluating human lives, but there are problems even here. Already there are gaps between what it is to be a good animal on the Hursthouse/Foot account and what is good for an animal. This is not just because we can imagine situations where the fastest deer, ahead of the rest, is the one to stumble into the trap, to use an example both writers employ. Rather, I worry that “good deer” really just means something like “characteristic specimen of natural kind ‘deer’” for Hursthouse and Foot. This is because of their emphasis on performance in *characteristic* ways. But is a deer really defective if, for example, it outwits rather than outruns its pursuers? If this is a successful strategy (or as successful as any other) for the

⁷² Foot 26. See also Hursthouse 195.

deer, it seems to be wrong to say that the situation is somehow bad for it. It is also far from clear that the deer is defective even *qua* deer, and yet it seems that both Hursthouse and Foot are committed to these claims (see Hursthouse 199-201, Foot 33-4). So already some of the purported normative derivations look to be pretty uninteresting or just false. The problem is far greater in the case of human lives.

Both Hursthouse and Foot explicitly open the question of whether this kind of schema can be applied to humans (Hursthouse 206, Foot 39). Hursthouse thinks that the four ends mentioned above will still be important, but points to the new need to take rationality into account (208, 205). Foot continues to stress that “good” means the same when applied to humans as when applied to animals (39) but seems even less interested than Hursthouse in maintaining much of her framework in the face of the evident diversity of human ways of life. Certainly neither wants their theory to have the implication that, for example, homosexuals and monks are defective members of the species.

Foot comes closest to recognizing the problem generated by the diversity of human lives (though I suggested a similar problem exists even in the case of animals). She writes that

when we think about the idea of an individual's *good* as opposed to its *goodness* . . . human good must indeed be recognized as different from good in the world of plants or animals, where good consisted in success in the cycle of development, self-maintenance, and reproduction. Human good is *sui generis*. Nevertheless, I maintain that a common conceptual structure remains. (Foot 51, her emphases)

I am sympathetic with Foot's point about the “grammar of ‘good,’” and I think it amounts to evidence in favour of pursuing virtue ethical theories. But Hursthouse gives us some insight into *how* these two ‘goods’ come apart in the human case. As we saw, she suggests four aspects of animal life that are supposed to correspond to, and be evaluated by reference to, four ends. But when she introduces a fifth aspect, rationality, relevant to humans, she finds no corresponding end (218). Instead she just tells us that the “characteristic way of going on” for humans is “a rational way” (222). This is fine, but the

question of what the missing end might be is suggestive.⁷³ Wouldn't it make sense to say that there is no one end but rather a huge plurality of ends? Namely all the diverse ends that humans actually care about and choose, reflectively, for themselves? And we might very well think that these ends have something to do with the good for an individual.

At about this point in their respective accounts, Hursthouse and Foot have to start appealing to platitudes about the importance of the virtues: "without honesty, generosity, and loyalty we would miss out on ... loving relationships" (Hursthouse 209). It is undoubtedly true of the vast majority of humans that they desire loving relationships, but a naturalistic account has to do more than offer generalities. Hursthouse and Foot had very nearly put their fingers on the point that humans have diverse goals and ends they desire to see fulfilled, and that they typically see their good as involving the realization of their aims. This is surely why internalist theories of the good are so popular. It's hard for many people to see, given this points, how there can be a *unitary* human good. It is hard, further, to see why there has to be even a unitary *core* of human goods - aren't hermits human, though they may detest human company? Are sadists defective (as opposed to merely immoral in the standard sense), and if so, in what way? Can't they "go on in a rational way?" And if not, what is the notion of rationality that is being appealed to? Are we so confident that every human *needs* genuine relationships and the other things these authors take to be basic parts of human nature? Is there something incoherent about being happy as a freeloader, or without human company, or spending life deceiving others, as Thrasymachus recommends?⁷⁴

II.iii - A diagnosis

I want to make two general points here before moving on to Aristotle's own account. It would be dull to have to reject neo-Aristotelian theories one by one, and we can

⁷³ Not that I mean to take this structure of evaluation overly seriously.

⁷⁴ The point is not that that we do not all in fact need loving relationships and so on, but we are looking now for something that will *vindicate* of these sorts of judgment. So I really do mean to press what might seem to be almost skeptical questions about what all humans supposedly need.

do better. The first point is that a virtue ethics has to make substantial psychological claims: the virtue ethicist needs to claim that a person who thinks he is happy (or happy as he could be) as a hermit is wrong - which is to say they need to subscribe to at least a minimal tendency theory. I think this goes beyond what Hurka, Hursthouse and Foot are willing to do. But what they are left with is just, in the case of Hursthouse and Foot, general platitudes about the importance of courage, etc., or, in Hurka's case, a simple insistence that something can be good for you even if it makes you miserable.

The second is that there is a serious mistake in attempting to ground normative claims simply in an account of *humans as they are*. This is what all the authors we have looked at attempt to do: Hurka by searching out essential properties, Hursthouse by looking for characteristic activity, Foot by appealing to features that play central roles in the lives of the organisms in question. Christine McKinnon, another virtue ethicist who I think would be in substantial agreement with Foot and Hursthouse on many points, is very explicit on this point.⁷⁵ She tells us she is "arguing that we need a moral theory that is grounded in a conception of human nature because moral theories are for humans." Further, "it is a naturalistic understanding that is sought, not a metaphysical one" (McKinnon 21). This is brought out further by her rejection of the idea that we are after an idealized conception of humans:

Moral challenges, both interpersonal and intrapersonal, confront persons in this world, not in some idealized version of this world, and so the normative recommendations have to be grounded in the way things are in this world. (15)

There is a confusion here. There is a sense, of course, in which this is right - on a naturalistic approach, we have to generate our conclusions from human nature, and certainly our conclusions have to be applicable to humans as they are. But this does not mean that our notion of human nature can or should be generated simply from the ways we see humans being and acting.

Alasdair MacIntyre has made the point admirably in After Virtue.⁷⁶ He argues that in

⁷⁵ Christine McKinnon, Character, Virtue Theories, and the Vices, Broadview (1999).

⁷⁶ Alasdair MacIntyre, After Virtue, second edition, Notre Dame University Press (1984).

the ancient and medieval worlds, there was a basic moral scheme that was destroyed in the enlightenment:

Within that teleological scheme there is a fundamental contrast between man-as-he-happens-to-be and man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature. Ethics is the science which is to enable men to understand how they make the transition from the former state to the latter. . . . Each of the three elements of the scheme – the conception of untutored human nature, the conception of the precepts of rational ethics and the conception of human-nature-as-it-could-be-if-it-realized-its-*telos* – requires reference to the other two if its status and function are to be intelligible. (MacIntyre 52-3)

MacIntyre's argument is that by rejecting the notion of human-nature-as-it-could-be, the enlightenment project of justifying morality was bound to fail, attempting as it did to make sense of the moral rules only by reference to empirical human nature. I am concerned with the good for a person rather than morality, but we have seen here several instances of the failure MacIntyre expects. Without appealing to a fully teleological account of human nature, we either get accounts that simply fail to be accounts of human nature, because they rule out too many actual humans, like Hurka's, or they just help themselves to a normative account of human nature that really needs teleology to be legitimate, as is the case with Hursthouse and Foot (who try to get away with claims like "cats have four legs" and "humans need love" - claims of indubitable plausibility but dubious philosophical import). Without serious teleology, the normative derivations fail in each case.

III - What Aristotle can Accomplish

On not every interpretation of Aristotle's theory will it avoid the problems I have been discussing. On some interpretations it fares even more poorly than the accounts I've canvassed. This is the case, for example, if we take Aristotle at face value when he says that "we are seeking what is peculiar to man" in order to give an account of his good (NE 13). Bernard Williams, for example, does so.⁷⁷ I will not discuss or argue for or against various interpretations here, but I think we need not accept those interpretations, like Williams', which make Aristotle look rather silly. I do not think, especially, that any interpretation of Aristotle that plays down the role of teleological thinking will result in a

⁷⁷ Bernard Williams, Morality: An Introduction to Ethics, Harper & Row (1972) p.59

workable account, just as I think that no such perfectionism will. Nevertheless, not everybody has felt that we need to see Aristotle as invoking metaphysically contentious principles in his ethics. Again, I will not argue otherwise. What I *do* hold is that Aristotle *could* have appealed to his metaphysical principles, and that it is when such an appeal is made that the theory is workable and can be seen to be far more coherent than neo-Aristotelian theories.

Terence Irwin contends that “the argument of the *Ethics* depends on more than common sense. It depends on the whole view of natural substances outlined in Aristotle’s metaphysics and psychology.”⁷⁸ I agree with this claim (though not with everything Irwin has to say), and spelling this out will show how much Aristotle can establish that the likes of Hurka and Foot cannot. Irwin holds that the notion of function appealed to in section I.7 just refers to the essence or form or soul of man (Irwin 48). I’m not inclined to think that this is quite right, since Aristotle clearly seems (for better or worse) to be appealing to a *special* feature of the soul of man - that is, its rationality, not its perceptive or nutritive qualities. The function is not the soul but specifically “an activity of soul which follows or implies a rational principle.” (NE 13). Nevertheless, Irwin is right to introduce the connection between soul and form (see also Irwin 37). The notion of form will help us greatly with the discussion of human nature. “To identify something’s form,” says Irwin, “is at least to identify the natural kind it belongs to” (Irwin 37). To have a certain form will be to have certain essential features, where these are something a little different than necessary properties, since there will be some of the latter that are merely “intrinsic concomitants,” explicable by reference to genuinely essential properties (38-9). These intrinsic concomitants could include the property of “being a body” (43). But the soul will be the essence of the living organism (41).

In the *Physics*, Aristotle says that organisms have a formal cause in them, and the

⁷⁸ Terence Irwin, “The Metaphysical and Psychological Basis of Aristotle’s Ethics,” in Rorty ed., *Essays on Aristotle’s Ethics*, University of California Press (1980) p.51

formal cause is identified with the final cause, or the end, of that organism.⁷⁹ So final cause exists in the organism (*Phys.* 199b10-11), and each stage in that organism's existence is for the sake of the ones after it (199a15-6). An organism, then, "having started from some principle in itself, finally arrives by a continuous motion at a certain end" (199b16-19). Sometimes, however, an organism can aim at some end and fail, and in these cases we get "monstrosities" (199b3-5). So the organism will proceed to its end but can be obstructed or fail in its progress (199a8-12).

This rough schema can be applied directly to problems surrounding the attempt to give an account of what it is to be a human being. Hurka appealed to essential properties, but in citing rationality and a determinate sort of bodily structure as instances of these properties, he ruled out a substantial number of actual humans. I suggested, following Kitcher, that this sort of approach was hopeless, as any list of essential properties would either consist of trivial properties or be inaccurate. Foot's way of getting around this appeared to be to just make generic claims like "cats have four legs" and any cat that failed on this criterion was defective. She called these sorts of facts "Aristotelian categoricals." I didn't see how she was entitled to appeal to such categoricals, but I think it is clear from the foregoing that Aristotle *is*. On an Aristotelian metaphysical scheme, we can understand 'human being' in an intuitive way: humans are rational, have two each of eyes, ears, arms, hands, legs, lungs, etc., etc. The human end will involve realizing an existence of this sort (and engaging in appropriate activities, and so on). So what to say of fetuses? They have the same form as any human, they are just at an earlier stage. They are humans, *pace* Hurka, in virtue of having that form. And the severely mentally disabled, or those missing limbs? They, too, are humans, in virtue of their form, but they have in various larger or smaller ways failed of their end, or have met obstructions (some of them will be examples of Aristotle's "monstrosities"). Another worry is met here as well. In order to avoid wrong-properties objections, Hurka had to simply discount certain kinds of properties (eg, those we possess *qua* physical object). There is, as I noted, something rather suspicious

⁷⁹ Aristotle, *Physics*, Hippocrates Apostle trans. & ed., Indiana University Press (1969). 199a31-33.

about his method, as it seems normatively loaded. In Aristotle's scheme, we can allow that these properties are necessary, but only as intrinsic concomitants: they are not part of the essence of a human being in any important way.⁸⁰ The same will go for our capacities concerning the consumption of alcohol, and so on.

So we can see Aristotle as having an account that is in a way like Hurka's: it appeals to certain properties as essential to being human, but these properties are the target, or the end, of humans. One is a member of the species if one's natural goal is the appropriate development of those properties. So you are a human if you *would* have, or *will* have, those properties had you developed, or if you develop, normally. It is a weaker account than Hurka's in one way: Aristotle can say that rationality is an essential property of humans even if there happen to be some humans who are not in fact rational. In another sense it is much stronger: it claims that these properties are built into humans as a target: humans have a *telos*.⁸¹

I have argued that Aristotle's metaphysical commitments allow us to make better sense of talk about human nature than if we avoid teleological language. And since a hybrid theory, like virtue ethical theories, will need to make use of the notion of human nature, I don't see how we can do without that teleological language, however unpalatable metaphysically some may find it. What remains is to show how Aristotle can connect our end with our good. Of course in a trivial sense this can be achieved just by identifying a thing's good with its final cause, as Aristotle apparently does. I don't think this gets us very far by itself. What it might seem to get us is an account of "good organism" in the sense of "good specimen." So, "this cat is a good cat because it has four legs, etc., etc." Let us just grant this. What it won't give us is an account of what is good *for* an organism, at least not for more sophisticated organisms. This is because thus far we have no more in

⁸⁰ Of course it may seem that distinguishing essential properties from intrinsic concomitants is also normatively loaded. I think that this is probably true. I will have to leave aside matters of moral epistemology arising here. But this is an important gain on Hurka's position because it gives us a way to do *something* with these properties beyond ignoring them.

⁸¹ And of course DNA or whatnot won't play this role - some DNA encodes defects.

this respect than is provided by Hurka: there is no requirement here that this account of “good for” satisfy the endorsement requirement. In a way this already seems less worrisome in Aristotle’s case than in Hurka’s, since it seems intuitive that one would never be happy acting against one’s own natural ends, but we want this spelled out (Sumner will otherwise surely accuse us of confusing perfectionist and prudential value).

What we want now are reasons for thinking that a “tendency doctrine” and a teleological theory go well together, or, equivalently, that it is part of living in accord with one’s nature that one enjoys the goods internal to a life of that type, thereby satisfying the endorsement requirement (remembering that it is also our goal here to give an account of the nature of welfare goods). We want to go beyond simply stipulating that the form incorporates facts about what the organism must enjoy (though presumably the form *will* incorporate such facts somehow).

It’s worth thinking back here to the internalist theories offered by Rosati and Railton, and discussed in the last chapter. I pointed out there that on Railton’s view it is important, in order to satisfy internalist intuitions, that our desires would track the advice given us by our ideal advisors. He supposes that were we to be vividly confronted with the fact that we would fail at the pursuit of some object we currently consider important, our desire for that thing would lessen. For example, Railton imagines a character who loves writing but is no good at it. Her lack of talent as a writer, he says, derives from “some underlying facts about her psychology.”⁸² “These selfsame facts,” he adds, “*constitute* the fact that writing is not part of her good” (my emphasis). But then it seems that we needn’t really appeal to desires here. These psychological facts are what do the real work in Railton’s theory (otherwise why not say that a person’s good may involve going through some kind of therapy or surgery to have his psychology brought in line with his desires?).⁸³ Or with Rosati we might say about a case of indoctrination that being a KKK member doesn’t suit you, and the case in which you like being in the KKK is just a case where *you*

⁸² Railton, “Facts and Values,” p.26

⁸³ Of course psychological facts might include facts about desires, but won’t be limited to them.

have been made to suit *that*.⁸⁴ Again desires are not, it seems, of primary importance.

It would be a mistake to tie the good too closely to contingent psychological makeup, but it seems reasonable to say that the good life for a person ought to *somehow* suit him psychologically (and, we might add, physiologically). It won't be good for you to attempt to become a pianist if you aren't capable of ever playing well, as you'll just frustrate yourself, and it isn't good for you to be dishonest if you are prone to feel deep shame when you are so. But if we have a teleological theory, it would seem reasonable to say that everyone's soul is directed towards psychological and physiological development on a particular pattern (or a certain range of patterns, to allow for reasonable differences of individuality, gender, culture, and whatnot), and I think we can assume that such a pattern, whatever exactly it is, would be consistent, by which I mean that the needs and capacities of individuals would be mutually or simultaneously satisfiable or realizable. Notice that while this seems like a very natural assumption given a teleological framework, it would be hard to see what justification there could be for holding it without such a framework. It also seems reasonable to think that, given the complexity of psychological states, the range of consistent patterns of needs and drives would be very narrow, and so deviation from the teleological pattern would destroy the consistency of one's psychological state. So we might get people who have an intense desire to create music and yet have no talent for it such that it is impossible for those people to satisfy all the different demands placed on them by their psychological makeup. In some cases important needs might be hard or even impossible to satisfy.

We can now clarify the suggestion made above: instead of saying just that a person's good should be suited to his psychological makeup, we can say that the life that is good for an individual will be a life that is in harmony with the psychological condition that would be the proper realization of his essence. For those who deviate from the proper psychological states (and this will be everyone to one degree or another) we would recommend dedication to personal growth (for mild cases), or therapy or even

⁸⁴ Rosati, "Persons, Perspectives and Full Information Accounts of the Good," p.302

neurosurgery (for more serious cases), or perhaps just pity those with radically discordant psychological states (maybe the person who wanted to be a good kindergarten teacher but finds himself sexually attracted to children). Now this suggestion about the good life does not entail the endorsement condition, but it does make it plausible to claim that a perfectionist life will generally and naturally be a good life, as we hoped to show.⁸⁵

Aristotle still has a lot to add to this account, though. Consider the following sorts of objections to the sketch I've given. One might say that the good for a severely mentally handicapped person isn't something unachievable related to his essence, but loving attention and care and so on - things relevant to his actual condition. Or one might argue that we can at least imagine consistent psychological constitutions that nevertheless deviate from the human essence, even very distasteful ones - a consistent sadist, say. So why shouldn't we allow that there can be good lives other than the life appropriate to the person as they would have been had they developed in accord with the human essence? My initial temptation is not to take these worries too seriously. Of course it is easy to stipulate that other consistent psychological makeups might exist, but it seems unlikely to me that any would *actually* exist, or that they would be consistent *human* psychological makeups. But perhaps this is unconvincing. Aristotle has a suggestion here.

Given the popularity of the "you need virtues to achieve your ends" approach, it is a striking feature of the Nicomachean Ethics that Aristotle does *not* take that approach there, though of course he does think that acting virtuously leads to the good life (or, more accurately, constitutes it). He does not think that the virtues are of instrumental value. The reasoning seems to be more like this: virtue aims at honour or what is noble (NE 65), and "virtuous actions must be in themselves pleasant" (17). In effect, the virtuous man judges

⁸⁵ An interpretive aside: Aristotle could probably endorse my augmentation of his view. The evidence for this is provided in book I of the Politics, where Aristotle discusses the different virtues of citizens, slaves and women. Aristotle holds that these different groups of people have, in virtue of their different natures, different sorts of rational capacities, and thus different sorts of goods (the citizen's good is to rule and the slave's good is to be ruled, etc.). Of course this is rather more pluralistic an account of human ends than we will want. Aristotle, Politics, C.D.C. Reeve trans., Hackett Publishing (1998)

well about what is noble, and delights in acting nobly (I.8). This is a consistent theme in the *Ethics*: courage (65-6), temperance and the rational principle (78) and friendship (193) are all said to be noble or aim at the noble. The force of this comes out nicely in a couple of Aristotle's examples. One shows up in the discussion of courage, where Aristotle says that the courageous man isn't the one who risks death at sea, but the one who risks death in battle (64). If courage were just a matter of weighing possible gains against possible losses and acting appropriately in an effort to achieve your ends, then we would think that both seafarers and soldiers could be brave. But for Aristotle what is important is the nobility of the actions, and seafaring just isn't as noble as fighting in battle. Another example is found in Aristotle's claim that the short life ending in self-sacrifice in battle is a much better life than a longer life without that end (237).⁸⁶ This is not compatible with an account of virtues that makes them important just because they are necessary whatever your ends happen to be: Aristotle doesn't characterize virtues apart from *proper* ends.

Clearly an instrumentalist approach is inadequate as an interpretation of Aristotle on virtue, since for Aristotle there is something inherently noble about virtuous actions, and acting nobly is what makes our lives go well. But the main point I want to make here is that Aristotle appears to have a conception of what is valuable that is in a way prior to the account of what makes lives go well. It isn't so much that something is noble because it makes us live well (or serves the community, or whatever) but that these things just *are* noble, and if we are virtuous we will realize that and delight in acting appropriately. This is most obvious in the discussion of contemplation in book X, where it is argued that since God, whose activity is most blessed, contemplates, contemplation must be the highest form of happiness (268). Some interpreters may be dismayed by this, but it is a perfectly natural idea if Aristotle thinks that we should pursue things because they are noble. "The absolutely good," says Aristotle, "is pleasant absolutely."⁸⁷ Given this it makes good sense that even if the contemplative life is "too high for man," we should still "strain every nerve"

⁸⁶ And this still supposedly meets the Railtonian constraint, since Aristotle claims that self-sacrifice is immensely pleasurable (237).

⁸⁷ *NE* XIII.3. This is Rackham's translation (Wordsworth Editions 1996). All other quotations are from Ross.

in an attempt to attain it (265).

We can see, then, what would be Aristotle's response to the idea that there might be a special good for the mentally handicapped person or the psychologically well-organized sadist. What is in some sense appropriate for these people is not really good for them, because it is worthless. A person who delights in hurting others is delighting in worthless things, and this is not a good life at all (or at least not much of a good life). And I think we've seen in the last chapter that this is a perfectly intuitive idea. These ideas in Aristotle, as well as his adoption of a tendency doctrine are summed up in the statement that "the lovers of what is noble find pleasant the things that are by nature pleasant" (16). Finally, and relatedly, this conception goes remarkably well with what I said about how some life can be good for someone even if they can't achieve it - we could follow Aristotle in saying that the intrinsic value of the life makes it worth pursuit even if it is "too high" for one. Regarding the mentally disabled, we should remember, additionally, that of course we may by circumstances be limited to providing the *best life possible*, rather than a really good life. I pointed out in chapter one and in my discussion of Hurka's views that the mentally handicapped, or those who have not yet developed into rational, adult human beings, do not differ from us in having a different good: the difference between the foetus or the curably ill and the permanently disabled in regards to their good is only the greater tragedy of the latter situation - an infant will at least still be able to grow up.

IV - Aristotle and Hybridism

Aristotle's teleological thinking allows us to spell out a notion of human nature that, while metaphysically contentious, avoids the problems other accounts of human nature have. Specifically, it allows us to provide a detailed account of human nature without saying that those people that don't actually have the relevant properties are not humans. It also allows us to avoid wrong-properties objections by making a distinction between essential properties and properties that are merely necessary concomitants. And obvious similarities are appearing between Aristotle's view and the independently plausible

hybridist view I proposed and sketched in chapter two. It is easy, indeed, to read Aristotle, who could say that “pleasure completes the activity . . . as an end which supervenes as the bloom of youth does on those in the flower of their age,” as a hybridist himself (NE X.4). But the last couple paragraphs of the previous section may seem to suggest that we will not be able to follow Aristotle very far if our goal was to find a foundation for objective welfare goods in an appeal to human nature, since he himself appeals to the objective value of various activities in describing the good life. Nevertheless, here is my suggestion. We should understand objective welfare goods as being those items that are productive and sustaining of those features in us which realize our *telos*, or which are exercising of those abilities the exercise of which is necessary to the realization of our *telos* (ie. activities). This allows for the plurality of objective welfare goods we thought proper in the last chapter - different people might exercise and sustain themselves through very different commodities and practices, but be no worse off for that, so long as in each case these commodities and practices are conducive to a life in accord with the human *telos*. Objective welfare goods are rendered subjective welfare goods by, as we said, endorsement, and as has been illustrated above, this dovetails nicely with a teleological account of human nature, since we could expect a life in accord with its *telos* to be a rewarding one, and a life not so in accord to be a frustrated one.

Is there anything then to be made of the idea that the good life involves engagement with values beyond ourselves? It would seem this would have to be the case with Aristotle’s courage, where the values courage protects are paradigmatically those of the state and the community, and yet this is supposed to be value *for you*, as according to Aristotle there are, again, few lives better than the one ended in battle (NE IX.8). In fact the analysis of these values should be just the same as the one I just gave for those values that seem more directly related to our own development. Indeed, the vindication of a virtue ethical theory must consist precisely in showing that my development hinges as much on the satisfaction of communal needs as personal ones. In some cases the possibility of such a demonstration is more obvious than in others - the realization of his *telos* by my child

may be first of all a good for him, but in virtue of that is *also* a good for me and a further realization of my own *telos*. That there might be an interesting overlap (or even no difference at all) between the moral virtues and those we might call “prudential” is an interesting matter and one I will briefly address in the concluding chapter of this thesis. But for now it can be left open whether we benefit from engagements with values that emerge from the interaction of communities, or only from engagement with some smaller set of values more narrowly our own.⁸⁸

The account arrived at is not, then, circular, though it is of an interesting shape. A good life consists primarily in engagement with objective goods that are goods precisely because of the role they play in allowing us to exercise our faculties. The good life turns out to be the enjoyment of that life for which we are at bottom suited. Hybridism, then, for which we have independent intuitive evidence, is at home in a teleological account of human nature, which can be used to explain the origin of the objective goods appealed to by hybridism. And in fact we have seen that a teleological account of human nature itself leads naturally to a hybridist account of well-being.

I have said nothing so far about what human nature is exactly or how we might justify an appeal to human nature. And I will have nothing to say about the former matter beyond what negative answers emerge from my thoughts about the latter problem.⁸⁹ Some people will think that it would have been much easier to just accept hybridism than the sort of teleological theory I have sketched. But I have, I hope, set up a dilemma. It is my suggestion that our intuitions about the poor and oppressed require giving the grounding I

⁸⁸ It must be noted, however, that the twist I've given Aristotle's view will result in a question-begging response to the problem of the sadist unless we believe that communal goods are a kind of personal good that the sadist can never realize and for which the sadist has no equivalent counterpart.

⁸⁹ It is worth noting that, as Kitcher observes, one attraction of Hurka's failed project is that it appears to offer a clear method for determining human goods - you just look at empirically essential human properties and perfect them (Kitcher 82-3). The Aristotelian account I've given doesn't do this, particularly because 1) it distinguishes essential properties from necessary concomitants, and 2) essential properties might not be universally or even widely realized in actual humans.

have offered.⁹⁰ We should either give up those intuitions and accept some kind of subjectivist theory of welfare, or accept that humans have a function or purpose or goal. I urge that we do not give up those intuitions. But how can we accept that humans have a built-in goal? I do have a few remarks to make about this. The lesson of part II of this chapter has been that no account of human nature rooted in empirical observation is going to be acceptable.⁹¹ The flip side of this is that empirical observation will generally not be able to falsify an account of human nature.⁹² To give a parallel example, if God created the universe, then it may be perfectly legitimate to say that the very atoms have a purpose - not individually, perhaps, but as a class - in the way they play a role supporting the life that we may imagine was God's goal. Atheists and theists can happily do physics side by side, and nothing in physics could show that the universe has no point. The case is the same with regards to human nature - in Kantian terms, there may be no possible (non-moral) experience that can establish the existence or non-existence of any goal-directedness in human life as a whole, but practical reason may still demand the assumption of such purpose: I am reminded of Kant's remark that "anthropology, which issues from merely empirical cognition, can do no damage to anthroponomy."⁹³ But Kant also saw that we may not just assume whichever "transcendental ideas" we need, rather we must accept them as a coherent system. That, I think, is why he says we must, for practical reasons, accept the existence not only of immortality and freedom, but also of God, to orchestrate the happiness Kant thinks must reward the moral life.⁹⁴ Likewise we may not help ourselves to

⁹⁰ One might, certainly, look for another foundation, but I myself see no other serious options.

⁹¹ This might be a bit too strong. Some kinds of observations might in principle be able to establish the content of the human essence - but this seems highly unlikely to me. More likely empirical observation could serve as a kind of confirmation of what we learn by revelation. Certainly any search for properties possessed by all and only humans is futile.

⁹² "Generally," because I would take it that the suggestion that the goal of human life is to lock oneself in a closet and starve to death is in such gross violation of what we understand about ourselves, just on empirical grounds, as to merit no consideration. But at the other end of the spectrum, I hope we are beyond feeling positivistic qualms about claims for which we have no empirical verification or falsification (at least so long as we can offer *some* decent reason for offering those claims).

⁹³ Kant, Immanuel, *Metaphysics of Morals, Practical Philosophy*, Mary Gregor trans. & ed., Cambridge University Press (1996) p.534

⁹⁴ I am thinking primarily of Kant's discussion in the "Transcendental Doctrine of Method" in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Pluhar trans., Hackett Publishing (1996).

human nature without some sense of why we could believe in such a thing, given that modern biology will certainly not supply it to us. My introduction of God to the discussion was not accidental. A religious or otherwise spiritual system would fit the bill here, and probably not much else.

These observations suggest a way of clarifying the role that teleological thinking is meant to play in my view. I do not think that it is necessary that it be part of the human constitution that we have some kind of substantial form. What is important is that there is *a way humans were meant to or ought to be*. Whether this is true cannot be settled empirically, nor is it a fact that in any way “supervenes” upon physical facts. But a human being who has achieved his *telos* could be a purely physical being, only one with a psychological and physiological constitution that would allow him, assuming him to be provided with essential external goods, to live a life than which there could be no better human life. That there is a constitution of this sort, and that it is the constitution we were meant to have, is what grounds objective goods. What is metaphysically ambitious about this view is not that it requires the existence of immaterial souls or forms - indeed there needn't be anything really “metaphysical” about the *telos* at all - but that it clearly depends on some deeper metaphysical commitments about the universe or its Creator.

V - Conclusion

I have argued in this chapter that an objective theory of well-being demands support from a picture of human nature, but that neo-Aristotelian theories are insufficiently metaphysically ambitious for this purpose. Aristotle's own account, however, can provide the needed support for welfare objectivism, and itself leads naturally to the kind of theory offered in chapter two. But the notion of a human *telos* is not popular, and hence we face a dilemma of either accepting such a notion or rejecting the intuitions that Sen has invoked. I have generally not discussed the *morally* good life in this chapter, but I think we have seen good reason emerge (as will be explained) to think about the virtues, moral and prudential.

In my concluding chapter I will leave aside to at least some extent the more contentious claims here, and explore what warrant we might have for thinking that there is indeed a significant relationship between these two kinds of virtue.

Chapter Four: Virtue

I - Introduction

I have argued in the foregoing chapters that there are objective goods, and that realizing these goods in one's life requires appreciation of them, but also that the existence of these objective goods entails that there is a way it is to be properly human. I believe that these arguments give us a number of reasons to be interested in the relationship between the good life and virtues, though I intend my claims here to be accessible to readers who reject those arguments. In this chapter I explore, in a less formal manner, the relationship between living the good life and possessing the moral virtues.

If the discussion of this chapter will not hang on that of previous chapters, it nevertheless receives its impetus from the conclusions in them. If, first of all, there are objective welfare goods, and one must appreciate them to benefit from them, it will be important to possess certain capacities or dispositions to respond appropriately to goods. I take this kind of responsiveness to be part of what is involved in possessing a virtue. From the other direction, if, as suggested in the previous chapter, the good life consists importantly in the sustaining and exercise of those characteristics and activities which realize our *telos*, we will need to have those traits which allow us to pursue such activities successfully (we will also need the "goods of fortune" and the emphasis on virtue is not meant to undermine the importance of those). These will again be (or at least include) virtues. And the suitability of an objectivist account of welfare to an account of welfare featuring the virtues is reciprocal: as Christine McKinnon points out, virtue ethical theories will be concerned "with what kind of desires are *worth* having".⁹⁵ Here my principle aim will be to describe the good life in such a way that, even given the way we differentiate between the moral life and the good life, we will find it plausible that the prudential virtues are in fact the same as the moral virtues.

⁹⁵ McKinnon, Character, Virtue Theories, and the Vices, p.26. My emphasis.

It is not, however, my intention to mount a thorough defence of a virtue ethical theory here, though we may very well hope, and I do, that a plausible moral theory can be developed from an account of human nature if we are optimistic about what human nature is (not as we see it, but in its essence). But, as I said, neither do I mean to rely on the ambitious argument of the last chapter in discussing virtue here. I want to explore the relationship between the good life and virtues in the intuition-mongering fashion more akin to the discussions by Foot and Hursthouse I so objected to earlier. Foundations are necessary, but discussions at other levels can still be worthwhile in the absence of complete agreement.

II - Virtues and the Good Life

There have been a number of attempts to show that the living of a good life requires possession of the virtues or at least certain virtues. These attempts may or may not be in aid of a “virtue ethics” that tries to understand right and wrong action in terms of virtues, where ‘virtue’ and ‘character’ become the basic ethical concepts. But they are generally attempts to display at least some convergence between the good life and the moral life. I will describe (though only in a cursory and incomplete manner) a couple of these attempts here, and argue that while they may show that certain virtues are important in the good life, it is usually less than clear that these are really *moral* virtues. Note that the accounts I will describe are not incompatible, and I think there is at least some truth in all of them. And some of them at least *will* turn out to point us in the direction of real moral virtues.

In After Virtue (hereafter AV), Alasdair MacIntyre, after exploring various conceptions of the virtues, tries to set out an account of the ‘core’ of the notion, or of the “necessary background against which the concept of a virtue has to be made intelligible” (174). His account proceeds through several stages, but it begins with a description of the notion of a “practice,” which is

any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. (175)

Involvement in practices so understood is clearly a prominent feature of human life. But then the importance of several central virtues follows fairly directly: honesty, because as we are introduced to new practices we will need to recognize our own inadequacies and respond scrupulously to the facts of the situation; justice, because pursuit of the goods internal to a practice requires treating others with whom we are related in that pursuit by the impersonal standards inherent in it, and so on (178-9). More recently, in Dependent Rational Animals, MacIntyre describes a different role played by the virtues in the good life.⁹⁶ Here he argues that if we are to become, and sustain ourselves as, effective and independent practical reasoners, we will again need virtues such as honesty: effective practical reasoning requires a self-knowledge that in turn requires truthful self-examination and a willingness to acknowledge inadequacies (95-6).

Going only so far, both of these approaches have evident weaknesses. For example, if honesty is needed both for induction into the practices within which so many goods are realized and for the development of practical rationality, this need not, it seems, be a particularly *moral* form of honesty. I will not succeed in philosophy, for example, if, in discussion with a teacher, I am unwilling to admit difficulty understanding a point, or if I am unprepared to make my own views plain for fear that they will be revealed to be faulty or unpopular in various ways. Or, to the extent I *do* succeed, it will not be so much in attaining the goods internal to philosophy as those external to it (and who would pursue philosophy solely for the external goods its practice can generate?). But that I speak freely in class seems quite compatible with, say, wilfully failing to inform my classmates of scholarships they might apply for, in order to reduce competition for myself. And in general, the form of 'honesty' required within a practice bears no very obvious relationship

⁹⁶ Alasdair MacIntyre, Dependent Rational Animals, Open Court (1999). Hereafter DRA.

to the distinctly moral honesty that is not essentially located within practices.⁹⁷ Likewise, as we become more efficient practical reasoners, surely we can better distinguish those truths we must tell in order to advance our own development from those we would be better served by not admitting. What I am suggesting is not so much that MacIntyre's general approaches are thoroughly flawed - we will see shortly that he has more to offer - as that we ought to be attentive to the difference between *prudential* virtue and *moral* virtue. That attaining some good requires the exercise of the former does not show it to require the exercise of the latter. Consider also those virtue ethical accounts (which I have already described briefly) which claim we need various virtues, such as courage, in order to achieve our individual ends. It certainly seems fair that we must, generally, and whatever our ends, find a mean between timidity and incaution. We might call this mean 'prudential courage.' But having this trait seems compatible with having nothing recognizable as *moral* courage: nothing about the courage needed to attain my contingent ends seems to involve, for example, the willingness to die in defence of the *polis* that is the hallmark of Aristotle's courage. How could *that* kind of sacrifice be called for by any character trait required by people with just any given set of ends? Now the fact that certain character traits - the prudential virtues - might be necessary for the living of good lives is not, I think, devoid of philosophical interest. But to show that is *not* to show, as seems to often be thought, that moral living is an essential feature of the good life. Showing *that* requires a different sort of description of the goods of the good life.

In fact, I believe it is the case that the good life involves the kind of engagement with other people that requires recognizably moral virtues. Seeing this requires acknowledgement of the extent to which the projects through which we pursue goods are *common* projects, a feature Robert Adams has emphasized.⁹⁸ Indeed, as Adams points out, our own good is itself a common project, shared by those who care about us (305-6). MacIntyre makes that point nicely when he says that we will achieve our own good "only if

⁹⁷ It is worth noticing that a lot of very distasteful things could count as practices.

⁹⁸ Robert M. Adams, "Common Projects and Moral Virtue," in Ethical Theory: Character and Virtue, *Midwest Studies in Philosophy*, vol. XIII, University of Notre Dame Press (1988)

and insofar as others make our good their good” (DRA 108). That this is so is especially obvious when we think about childhood.

But the point of saying that many of our projects are jointly pursued is not just that it is often important or essential for the pursuit of certain goods that we help each other out. That is an important part of it, but if that were *all* there were to it, we would not, in terms of explaining the necessity of the virtues, have gotten much beyond what MacIntyre says about what is needed for success within practices. The point is also that many important goods are, as MacIntyre says, “neither mine-rather-than-others’ nor others’-rather-than-mine, but instead are goods that can only be mine insofar as they are also those of others.”⁹⁹ To illustrate the difference we might compare the good derived from contemplation to the good derived from certain kinds of relationships. If we simplify a bit and assume the good of philosophical contemplation to be understanding, this is a good that can be realized by an individual just as an individual, though the individual is unlikely to go very far without a community of others who share the same goal. But the good involved in a relationship such as a friendship cannot be achieved by a single individual alone - it is his good only so far as it is shared between him and another person. Or, put less mysteriously, it is a necessary condition of either of the two in the relationship realizing the relevant goods that both do.

Both types of goods - those that have to be jointly pursued and those that are essentially the goods of groups - imply a need for virtues. Adams points out that pursuit of the first type will require, for example, loyalty to the common project (198). But as I noted, the virtues required in those contexts are only those operating *within* those practices or projects, and those projects may themselves be immoral or, in any case, those virtues are always subject to being overruled by concerns external to the project. But the case seems to be different with those goods that are truly shared. If I am part of a community composed of interlocking networks of relationships, then my good is realized in substantial part in the shared good of those I am in relationship with, whose good in turn hangs on the good of

⁹⁹ DRA 119. In MacIntyre’s case I am pulling together bits and pieces. In DRA in particular, I think his discussion is seriously infected by the failure to distinguish prudential and moral virtue.

others in the community. Now the importance of *moral* courage for the individual's good becomes clearer. As MacIntyre says, courage is a virtue necessary to the sustenance of the community (AV 115), and courage is related to care and concern - the person who is not willing to risk himself for the community puts in doubt his concern for the relationships around him (179). And a person who does not care about these goods is a person who will not realize his own good. (I put it in those terms because the point is not that an individual has self-interested reasons to be courageous but that a person who is not courageous is not properly oriented towards the good that is both his and others'. I will say a bit more about this shortly.) That this is indeed a truly moral form of courage is evidenced by the demands that can be placed on us because of our commitments to our community. Entangled in a network of relationships, we may be required to give well out of proportion to that which we received, and to others than those from whom we received: we will often repay what our parents gave us by giving to our own children, and nothing guarantees that our own children won't be a much greater burden on us than we were on our parents (see DRA 108). We may even have to die for our community - besides the fact that it may sometimes be better to die than to lose certain of the goods in our lives, we see in these cases that the commitment to others required by the possibility of deriving goods from relationship with them may sometimes have to be unconditional. Thus to refuse these burdens is, again, just to show that you are failing to realize the goods of the community in your life, whether through misunderstanding or through cowardice.

Is life within a community an essential part of the human good? An affirmative answer is needed to support what has been said so far. Certainly it was part of Aristotle's picture of human nature that we are social and even political creatures (NE IX.9). And I don't think that too much can be said in support of an answer one way or another without appeal precisely to his kind of ambitious account of human nature. Nevertheless, if we may remain on a more intuitive level, consider the handling of the pastoral life offered in *As You Like It* by Shakespeare, to my mind an almost unrivalled student of humanity. The banished Duke in the play, forced to live in the wilds - though admittedly not entirely

without company - can say that

this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.

But tellingly, when, later in the play, he hears that his banishment is over and his lands and titles restored, the Duke immediately announces his intention to return to his court. And also at the end of the play, his usurper, now reformed, has retreated from his former society for the life of a religious order. In Shakespeare's play, the countryside and even the very absence of the trappings of culture have their indubitable charms, but they are, finally, no substitute for society, and even where there *is* a choice to retreat from society, that choice takes itself a social form. At least within a religious worldview, even the hermit has a social role, and this directs us to the more general point that choices are nearly always to be understood against the backdrop of social practices.¹⁰⁰

I suggest, then, that the good life must involve moral virtue. I have only really considered the case of courage, but I think the same general line of thought could be extended to show the importance of other virtues as well. This line depends on certain commitments: to the idea that valuable human relationships cannot be simply parasitic, that no one will live very well without relationships, and so on. I have backed off of the more contentious metaphysical claims of the previous chapter, and so have only tried to present these thoughts in an intuitive, undogmatic and exploratory way. It seems clear to me, though, that the conclusions here depend, like those of chapter two, on a metaphysically involved account of what it is to be human.

III - Virtue Ethics?

Although I do not believe that a virtue ethical approach to moral theory can be vindicated in the absence of an account of human nature, and though I haven't tried to

¹⁰⁰ Both of these points are to found in After Virtue; see for example, p.161. The latter point is also made by Nancy Sherman in Making a Necessity of Virtue: Aristotle and Kant on Virtue, Cambridge University Press (1997) p.190-1. Chapter 5 of Sherman's book deals interestingly with similar issues to those discussed here.

show that the good life *is the same life as* the moral life (preferring to simply demonstrate some of the overlap between moral and prudential virtue), it will be obvious that I am more than a little sympathetic to virtue theory. And there are three issues constituting *prima facie* problems for virtue theories that I feel particularly well-suited to comment on briefly at this point: the questions of the nature of moral motivation, whether virtue theories can be action-guiding, and what the scope of the moral community is.

It is often claimed that according to virtue theories our moral reasons are fundamentally, and objectionably, rooted in our self-interest. Thomas Hurka makes the criticism this way:

If a person has most reason to benefit another, say, by giving her pleasure, what is the ultimate explanation of his having this reason? A flourishing-based theory says the explanation is self-regarding: that the action will make his own life better or more flourishing. But this is not, intuitively, the right explanation. The right explanation is that the action will make the other's life better.¹⁰¹

There is indeed a regrettable tendency on the part of virtue theorists to speak as if our reasons are all ultimately related to our flourishing.¹⁰² But it is not the case, first, that the fact something is good for us shows that we have reason to pursue it (see chapter one). And second, we can have reasons to do pretty much anything - with Williams, I hold that what we have reason to do depends on what we desire. So my reason for not doing something to another person may just consist in my belief that the action would harm him, along with my desire not to harm him. Fair enough. But what if I *do* want to harm him? Does the reason then why I should nevertheless not do so consist finally in my desire not to hurt myself? (We want to show, after all, that moral claims get a grip on *everyone*, or at least nearly everyone.) Maybe - but that is *not* the same as saying that *all* our other-regarding reasons are so constituted. It is true that everyone who cares about their own good will have a reason to concern themselves with others, but the reason for this has less to do with any derivation we could perform for an egoist than with the fact that to be realizing one's good is to see the concerns of others as generating reasons. *That* is the

¹⁰¹ Thomas Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value*, Oxford University Press (2001) p.248

¹⁰² See, for example, MacIntyre, *DRA* p.86.

crucial point. I suggested above that friendship is a part of the good life, but then, as Sherman (discussing Aristotle) points out, friendship involves seeing the pain of the friend as a reason - indeed it involves feeling their pain yourself.¹⁰³ To adapt a point of MacIntyre's, there is, for a person living well, no way to distinguish my goods from yours (AV 213). So it is in fact precisely a special strength of virtue ethics, that it shows why (virtually) all of us are subject to moral reasons, while also allowing that "because it hurts him" counts as one of those moral reasons.

It is also often asked what practical advice virtue ethics can give us. It is all very well to say that one should be courageous, but in particular cases, what does courage involve? Aristotle's own account, for example, tells us to look to the wise man for a model, but how do we even know, if we lack virtue ourselves, who the wise man is? There is certainly a problem here, and I think it stems from the unwillingness of virtue theorists to spell out a clear account of human nature. Simply talking about the virtues is not adequate, because different lists of virtues are possible, as are different conceptions of particular virtues (a point MacIntyre emphasizes). But it should be, at least in principle, quite clear what virtues we need and what these virtues consist in once we do have a clear and correct account of human nature. Once we know what our end is, a list of the traits that help to achieve that end should just fall out. Or, to put it in a different way, once we know what precisely the goods to be preserved are, we will know what the nature of our commitment to them must be if we are to realize them. And then it should not be difficult to see what kinds of actions the virtues recommend. But again an account of human nature is essential.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Sherman 206. Notice the way a person who is able to live the good life is in fact susceptible to harms that the vicious will not be susceptible to.

¹⁰⁴ This is to put an emphasis on ends or goals or goods in a way that may be seen, by some proponents of virtue ethics, to detract overly-much from the importance of character. But as I have said, the virtues cannot simply be appealed to without a conception of the ends to be attained - there are too many possible conceptions of virtue and the virtues. I am myself appealing to them primarily as a way of connecting the good life to the moral life via a conception of the human end. But I think that what I am suggesting is still a virtue ethics in that an ideal character and form of life is still my basic concept.

Finally, what, on a virtue ethical view, is the moral community? My suggestion above was that moral lives and good lives overlap because of the way we need to locate ourselves in a network of relationships. But what of those who are outside of our own communities? Are they without moral standing? As Sherman notes, there is no conception in Aristotle's writings, for example, of the community of human beings as such (Sherman 218). But even if I thought it were worth (as I do not) appealing here to a Kantian notion of the Kingdom of Ends or the supposed moral status of all those who feel pain, that would involve a very different foundational approach to moral theory. If every human does have moral status, as I believe, and we are also to justify a virtue ethical approach, we must have some way of showing that every human is part of a single community (though I acknowledge that this claim requires a much expanded argument). Such a demonstration would seem to stand or fall, again, with an account of what it is to be human. (My own view: we are a community in virtue of our relationship, recognized or not, with and to God. This is a community even more inclusive than the collection of rational agents or of humans.)

IV - General Conclusion

I began this thesis with a chapter on the normativity of welfare, arguing that there is no essential connection between reasons for action and goods. This has been pressed into some service in this final chapter, and would see yet more, I believe, in a sustained exploration of metaethics in the light of the notion of well-being.¹⁰⁵ But here it has largely been part of a more extended argument, continued in chapter two, to the effect that the nature of the good life is not simply relative to particular individuals. In the later chapter I concluded that certain highly intuitive assessments of the way lives are going commit us to an objective theory of well-being. Objective theories of well-being, I pointed out, in turn commit us to an account of human nature, and I argued in chapter three that modern,

¹⁰⁵ In particular, I take the discussion of the current chapter to suggest that it is misguided to even ask certain traditional metaethical questions granted virtue ethics. Or insofar as such questions could be raised, the only sensible position would be moral realism, since moral claims will just be (at some level) empirical claims about what kinds of activities and traits conduce to the human end.

stripped down accounts will not do the requisite work. That kind of work requires a metaphysically ambitious theory, one of the sort offered by Aristotle, and in the modern period one that can probably only find a place in a religious or spiritual system (this thesis can thus be read as a sketch, fuller in some places than in others, of a moral argument for the existence of God). As I said in my introduction to this thesis, I am interested in the nature of the good life in part because of the role this concept plays in virtue ethical theories. I am therefore pleased to have arrived at the discussion of the present chapter. And here I have suggested that the good life and the moral life overlap at a deep level, and made a few remarks about the prospects of a virtue-based ethics. Ultimately I believe that the positive claims of this chapter, like those of the the second chapter, rely on the more contentious claims of the third.

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