Searching for the Holy Grail: An Inquiry into the Existence and Content of the Highest Good

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I certify that the content of this thesis is the product of my own work, that no generative artificial intelligence was used in the research or preparation of this thesis, and that this thesis has not been submitted for any other degree. I certify that all assistance received in preparing this thesis and all sources have been acknowledged.

Don Sutton

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Abstract

This dissertation is on the *summum bonum* or the traditional notion of the highest good of human beings. Once considered the most important ethical idea in ancient and medieval philosophy, this notion is now decidedly marginal and borders on obscurity in contemporary philosophy. The two core goals of the dissertation are to establish the existence of the highest good/purpose of human beings, and to determine the content of this highest good.

In the first part I argue for the existence of the descriptive component of the highest good (that there is an ultimate end of one's actions and desires) by expanding on the kind of abstract reasoning Aristotle uses in his defence of the idea in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, and by defending the guise of the good thesis. I also argue for the truth of the normative component of the highest good (that the ultimate end should be the ultimate end of one's actions) by drawing on the contemporary literature on constitutivism. One of my arguments for the goodness of the ultimate end claims to justify the existence of objective morality/normativity from scratch. In the second part I connect the highest good to the contemporary study of well-being and argue that well-being or *eudaimonia* is the highest good of humans. I then assess several different theories of the content of the highest good or well-being (pleasure, objective list, desire fulfilment, knowledge/contemplation), focusing on both contemporary theories of well-being and ancient theories of the highest good. Ultimately, I argue for an original theory which says that the content of the highest good/well-being is loving participation.

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Introduction

> Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Where is it moving to now? Where are we moving to? Away from all suns?
> —Friedrich Nietzsche

This dissertation is a study of the *summum bonum* or the traditional conception of the highest good of human beings. The highest good has two facets. Firstly, the highest good is descriptively the ultimate aim or goal of a person's actions and desires. This makes it the *telos*, purpose, or raison d'être of a person. Secondly, the highest good is normatively what a person should ultimately aim at. It is the ultimate end by which the value of one's actions and pursuits should be appropriately measured. And it is the cause and source of the goodness of all other ends pursued by an individual (Aristotle, NE 1102a3–5; Broadie 2007, 144; Annas 1995, 36).[1] The traditional highest good of a person cannot be an end or state of affairs external to that person's activity, because the traditional highest good cannot be realised by the activity of someone else and can only consist in one's own activity (Annas 1995, 34, 36–38). For example, the highest good of a sculptor *qua* sculptor would be their activity of making sculptures and cannot merely be a state of affairs where more sculptures have been produced, because this end can be realised by the activity of another.

This thesis has two core aims — to demonstrate the existence of the highest good of human beings, and to determine the content of the highest good.

[1] I will outline in more detail the full list of criteria of the highest good in the first chapter.

History of the *Summum Bonum*

The idea of the highest good has a rich philosophical history. All major western ancient ethical theories start from the perspective that human beings have an ultimate end or *telos* (Annas 1995, 34; Plato, Rep. 505d–e; Plotinus, Enneads 1.4.1). This ultimate end is both the ultimate end of one's desires and that which should guide one's actions and how one lives (Annas 1995, 34–35). As a result, all major western ancient ethical theories begin with the problem of what the highest good is. Annas calls this foundational question 'the entry point for ethical reflection' for ancient ethics (1995, 27, 46). The ethical theories of Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, the Peripatetics, Epicureans, Stoics, Sceptics, Cynics, and Cyrenaics not only share this common foundation but are arguably most fundamentally defined according to their response to the question of what the highest good is (Annas 1995, 27, 38; Broadie 2007, 135; Kidd 2005, 82). With the marginal exception of the Cyrenaics, every ancient ethical system is also eudaimonistic in that they understand a person's own *eudaimonia* (happiness) or good life to be their highest good (Annas 1995, 12, 38; Annas 2017, 108).[2] While they share the framework of eudaimonism, ancient ethical theories vary in how they characterise the content of good life.

The concept of the highest good continued to be highly influential in western mediaeval ethics (Aufderheide and Bader 2015, 1). To name a few, Augustine, Boethius, and Aquinas were all teleological eudaimonists, which means to think that the central concern of ethics is the *telos* or ultimate end of human beings and that the *telos* of humans consists in *eudaimonia* (Conolly 2014, 46, 111; Boethius Book III, prose 2). For the mediaevals, though, the

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[2] This idea has been disputed by philosophers such as White (2002), and Whiting (2023). I think an understanding of eudaimonism as outlined in Chapter Three of this thesis goes a long way in dispelling such objections.

eudaimonia or blessedness being aimed at is most fully realised in heaven and not in one's natural life. In addition to Christian philosophy, the highest good and eudaimonism were likewise dominant in Jewish and Islamic mediaeval philosophy (Tirosh-Samuelson 2020, 328, 336; Guerrero 2020, 317). Some of these teleological eudaimonists include al-Farabi, Avicenna, and Maimonides (Miller 2019, 64; Guerrero 2020, 319; Mattila 2022, 17).

However, in modern ethics the traditional highest good became substantially less significant (Broadie 2007, 135; Schneewind 1993, 226). The primary role of the highest good as the central concern of ethics gradually started to be downplayed, eudaimonism is increasingly rejected, and fundamentally different accounts of the highest good emerge which, to varying degrees, depart from and use the fractured remnants of the traditional idea.

The first critiques of the traditional highest good take place in the late middle ages. Duns Scotus is the first figure to undoubtedly split from the consensus of upholding the traditional conception of the highest good. It is unclear if Scotus thinks it is acceptable to aim at one's own happiness or perfection, but it is clear that he thinks we should ultimately aim at justice and what is good in itself independent of its relation to one's own happiness (Toivanen 2024, 255–57). Thus, Scotus rejects eudaimonism and the traditional conception of the highest good because he thinks a person should ultimately aim not at their own good activity but at justice (the divine good and the good of others) (Irwin 2007, 163–65). Ockham did not go as far as Scotus. But Ockham did challenge the idea that descriptively speaking all of one's actions and desires are naturally and necessarily oriented towards a single end (Pasnau 2020, 113–14).

Modern and contemporary ethical theories which reject eudaimonism and the traditional highest good seem to do so in the mould of Scotus and echo Scotus's fracturing of the intrinsic connection between acting in accordance justice/morality and one's own happiness/perfection (Toivanen 2024, 257).

Descartes has an unorthodox account of the highest good. Descartes says that the ultimate end of our actions should be the highest good, but that happiness (*la béatitude*) is our end in a different sense than this because happiness is what makes us desire and seek the highest good (2007, AT 4:275). It is debated whether Descartes is a eudaimonist and how different his conception of the highest good is to the ancients' conception, but the ancients would not say that we can desire the highest good for the sake of a distinct good which results from possessing the highest good (cf. Svensson 2015).

However, many other philosophers in the early modern period continue to hold to the tenets of eudaimonism and the traditional highest good. Spinoza, Locke, and Gassendi are eudaimonists and each base their ethics on the traditional highest good (Smith 2023; Rutherford 2013, 198; Frykholm and Rutherford 2013, 434–37; Sheridan 2016; Locke, Essay IV. xxi. 3). Hobbes explicitly rejects the existence of the traditional highest good and argues that there is no ultimate end of desire (EL I.7.6; Lev. 11.1). But it seems like, as Abizadeh suggests, Hobbes misunderstands the traditional highest good, since he incorrectly treats it as necessarily being a singular momentary state and not an ongoing process (2021, 122; Lev. 11.1; EL I.7.7). Moreover, Hobbes appears to argue that one's felicity is and should be the ultimate end of one's actions because felicity is continual success and prospering (Lev. 6.58, 13; Lev. 11.1; Abizadeh 2024, 121–22, Rutherford 2013, 210–11). And this would mean that Hobbes is a eudaimonist and affirms the existence of the traditional highest good.

Widespread rejection of the idea of the traditional highest good seems to have begun in the eighteenth century, with Kant, utilitarianism, and utilitarianism's precursors. Bishop Joseph Butler denied eudaimonism and the traditional highest good by arguing against the twin ideas that *eudaimonia* or one's own good is descriptively what ultimately motivates a person, and that *eudaimonia* or one's own good should be what ultimately motivates a person (Irwin 2007, 165; Garrett 2023). Instead, like Scotus, he claimed that we are capable of being motivated by non-egoistic concerns and that moral motivation requires a benevolent or disinterested (not self-interested) love (Irwin 2007, 173). Francis Hutcheson reaches these same conclusions (Crisp 2019, 121). Though Butler stresses the normative supremacy of benevolence, and Hutcheson, like Sidgwick and arguably Hume, accepts neither the normative supremacy of self-concern nor of concern for others (Crisp 2019, 120–22, 157; Irwin 2007, 165).

The utilitarian idea that our most fundamental obligation is to maximise the greatest happiness for the greatest number also became influential in the eighteenth century and onwards particularly in Britain (Hare and Herdt 2024). This idea contradicts the traditional conception of the highest good and eudaimonism, because according to the utilitarian formula what a person should ultimately aim at is not one's own activity but a state of affairs largely external to one's own activity. For the same reason the utilitarian and non-hedonistic consequentialist ethics which exists up to today denies the traditional highest good and eudaimonism, due to their identification of the maximisation of goods largely outside of oneself as the supreme ethical aim of a person (Annas 1995, 144; Aufderheide 2015, 1). Nevertheless, early utilitarians still shared some similarities with ancient ethics. Bentham seems to have thought that an individual is ultimately motivated by their own good —

pleasure or happiness (Crisp 2019, 198–99). And Mill is particularly sensitive to the eudaimonist concern of how virtue as an intrinsic good can be included in the hedonistic good life (Annas 1987, 7; Nussbaum 2004).

On the other hand, Kant also rejects the traditional highest good and eudaimonism. Somewhat confusingly, Kant uses the term 'the highest good' in his philosophy. For Kant the highest good of an individual is their complete happiness plus their complete morality or virtue where happiness must be in proportion to virtue (Kant, 5:110–11; Rohlf 2024). And for Kant the highest good of the world is the universal distribution of the complete happiness of individuals in proportion to the complete morality or virtue of individuals (5:110–11; Rohlf 2024). Kant's highest good of the world has some similarities to the traditional concept of the highest good. Both are what should be the final or ultimate end of an individual's practical reason (5:129). For Kant and the ancients, reference to the highest good is how one rationally plans out, and fits together the practical activities of one's life (Louden 2015, 114). And like the ancient highest good, Kant's highest good of the world is also the highest end of a morally determined will (5:115; 5:122). For Kant our duty to promote the highest good of the world is not separate from other duties derived from the moral law; rather, this duty is the sum of all duties derived from the moral law (Rohlf 2024). However, unlike the traditional highest good and like consequentialism, Kant identifies what should be the ultimate goal of the moral person as not the activity of that person but a predominately external state of affairs.

What has become of the highest good in contemporary philosophy? As Aufderheide and Bader put it, the notion of the highest good has 'largely disappeared from the contemporary philosophical landscape' (2015, 1). The rejection of the traditional highest good by the two of the three major approaches of normative ethics in contemporary analytic philosophy (consequentialist and Kantian) helps explain why the traditional highest good is so much less influential than before the eighteenth century. Yet even in virtue ethics — the third and newest major approach in normative ethics which explicitly casts itself as reviving ancient ethical insights — the traditional highest good and a human *telos* tends to be ignored. For the virtue ethical Aristotelian-inspired accounts of Anscombe, Hursthouse, and Foot focus on virtue, agency, and character, and not Aristotle's underlying teleological framework of a hierarchy of ends and values (Aufderheide 2015, 1; LeBar 2013, 3). There are important exceptions to this trend. Relatively recently, Annas, Broadie, and LeBar have studied the highest good and its theoretical role in its own right and independent of its ability to afford a proper interpretation of ancient philosophers (Broadie 2007; Broadie 2009 Annas 1995; LeBar 2013; Aufderheide 2015, 3). Annas and LeBar explicitly support the idea that individuals should have an ultimate end or highest good (which consists in the individual's activity) guiding our actions (Annas 1995, 35–43, LeBar 2013, 3).

In contrast to the idea of the highest good, eudaimonism has seen a resurgence with the development of contemporary virtue ethics. Many virtue ethicists such as Hursthouse, Foot, MacIntyre, and Annas are classed as eudaimonists and like Aristotle ground the nature and normativity of the virtues in their cultivation of *eudaimonia* (Van Zyl 2015, 183, 190). Eudaimonism as I understand it and have used the term is the idea that *eudaimonia* should be the ultimate end of a person's actions. Hence, eudaimonism involves an implicit acceptance of the existence of a normative highest good because it says that an individual should ultimately be guided by the ultimate end of their own *eudaimonia*. However, Baril notes that the term 'eudaimonism' in contemporary ethics is used somewhat loosely and is sometimes simply taken to mean that a person should aim at their *eudaimonia* and that developing virtue plays a role in helping us do this (2014, 23–25). Accordingly, it is often unclear the extent to which 'eudaimonist' virtue ethicists endorse my narrower definition of eudaimonism which sees *eudaimonia* as one's ultimate and supreme end. Yet there are certainly some eudaimonist virtue ethicists (Annas, Russell, MacIntyre, Irwin, and LeBar) who defend eudaimonism as I have described it (Annas 2011; Annas 2007; Russell 2012; MacIntyre 2007; Irwin 2007; LeBar 2013).

Outline

The first of two parts of this dissertation seeks to justify the ancient ethical framework of a hierarchy of ends which individuals should pursue, with the highest good at the top of the hierarchy and giving normative authority to all other ends. This first part, in a similar spirit to Annas and LeBar, attempts to go beyond much of contemporary virtue ethics and eudaimonism by defending the ethical framework of Aristotle and the ancients at the most fundamental level. In fact, to defend the existence of the highest good is to defend the keystone which holds the whole edifice of each ancient ethical theory together. How is my approach in this first part different from the work done by Annas and LeBar? My approach differs significantly in that I will also support the psychological or motivational dimension of the ancient theory of the highest good. Namely, the idea that the highest good is descriptively the ultimate end of each individual's desires and actions. Hence, my approach contends that human beings have an inbuilt *telos*/purpose. Like LeBar, my approach discusses the meta-ethics of the normativity of the highest good (2013, 4). But in contrast to LeBar, my discussion of meta-ethics is not separate from supporting the existence of a normative ultimate end. I will adopt a constitutivist strategy to use the existence of this descriptive ultimate end to establish the objective normativity of one's ultimate end without presupposing the existence of genuine norms.

The second part of this dissertation seeks to (1) justify eudaimonism by identifying *eudaimonia* with the highest good, (2) develop and defend an original theory of the content of the highest good/*eudaimonia*, and (3) critique other theories of the content of the highest good/*eudaimonia*. Contemporary philosophers rarely defend a strong substantive view of what *eudaimonia* consists in. LeBar does not espouse a view on the content of *eudaimonia*, and Annas defends the quite general view that virtue forms at least a part of *eudaimonia* (LeBar 2013, 80; Annas 2011, 6, 169). Bloomfield and Badhwar each argue that virtue is necessary but not sufficient for *eudaimonia* (Bloomfield 2014, 6, 153; Badhwar 2014, 28). Russell argues that *eudaimonia* is a life of virtuous activity but denies that virtue is sufficient for *eudaimonia* (2012, 84). This is because Russell enlarges virtuous activity to mean the activities 'embodied within one's particular attachments and ends', and bodily and external goods might be necessary or constitutive of these activities (2012, 99, 102).

The contemporary field of the philosophy of well-being provides a far greater variety of viewpoints on what *eudaimonia* consists in. Well-being is a translation of *eudaimonia* and I will argue in the first part that well-being is the same as *eudaimonia*, with prudential value being the presence of goodness in a person's life. For this reason I will source several hypotheses of the content of the highest good/*eudaimonia* from the contemporary philosophy of well-being, even though these contemporary philosophers of well-being may not think of their theories as potential proposals for the content of the highest good. Ideally this thesis would also include the evaluation of all major ancient theories of the highest good, but due to limited space I have had to select just two ancient proposals. Given the influence of Aristotle on contemporary ethics and the similarity of Epicurus's view with contemporary views of well-being, I will evaluate Aristotle's and Epicurus's views of the content of highest good. I will not assess the Stoic and potentially Socratic/Platonic view that virtue is sufficient for *eudaimonia* because today it is quite an unpopular view (Russell 2012, 178).

The structure of the second part of this dissertation is modelled on and is meant to be a contemporary version of Cicero's *On Moral Ends*. *On Moral Ends* systematically outlines and assesses Epicurus's, Antiochus's, and the Stoic view of the content of the highest good, and ultimately sides with one of several tested hypotheses. The five proposals of the highest good I will examine are objective list (the highest good being comprised of the combination of several goods), desire-fulfilment, pleasure, knowledge/contemplation, and loving participation. The highest good as loving participation is my own theory which I will develop and argue is superior to all the other examined hypotheses of the highest good. This task of selecting the appropriate highest good among numerous competitors is illustrated in Ovid's famous Judgement of Paris scene where Paris of Troy must decide which of three goddesses was the fairest: Hera offers Paris power, Athena offers wisdom, and Aphrodite offers Helen (Her. 16.63–88).

Relevance

The supreme importance of the highest good in classical philosophy gives us strong reason to investigate and see whether there is anything to this historically significant and influential idea. As we have seen, the highest good is a notion so esteemed that in ancient ethics it was the answer to what was recognised as the most fundamental and important question: 'how should one live?' (Annas 1995, 27). Cicero claims that 'nothing in life is more worth investigating than philosophy in general, and the question… in particular: what is the end, what is the ultimate and final goal, to which all our deliberations on living well and acting rightly should be directed' (Cicero, I 11).

Aside from its history, from the description of the highest good alone, one can grasp the immense significance of investigating the existence and content of the highest good. For if the traditional highest good exists then discovering its content will tell us how we should live, what the good life is, and what the meaning and purpose of life is. In response to Nietzsche's madman it will give us a north star and tell us what we should be ultimately oriented towards. Moreover, if there is a highest good, then determining its content is relevant because by definition this end is both what one should be chiefly concerned with and what one most ultimately wishes for, desires, and pursues (Aristotle, NE 1094a18–20). Just like an archer, knowing exactly what we are aiming at and trying to achieve is the first step to rationally and most easily achieving this ultimate end of desire.

The way in which I will defend the existence of the highest good via constitutivism has the added benefit of, if successful, establishing the existence of normativity and objective morality from scratch.

Even if my arguments in the first part of the dissertation are flawed and the highest good does not exist and eudaimonism is false, the second part of the dissertation would still have relevance. This is because the second part seeks to determine the content of the good life without the use of any premises which require the existence of the highest good. If the traditional highest good is jettisoned through the rejection of any of its facets — i.e. if there is no single ultimate end of one's desires, if there should be multiple ultimate ends, if what should be one's ultimate end is not one's own activity — it will not affect the second part's examination of different views of *eudaimonia*. Even if *eudaimonia* is not the most important thing an individual should be concerned with, it seems like we should be concerned with advancing the *eudaimonia* or good of others, and knowledge of the nature of *eudaimonia* will help with this goal. Additionally, if my argument in the eudaimonism chapter for the equivalence of prudential value with the presence of goodness in a person is sound, then my analysis in the second part of accounts of *eudaimonia* will have obvious relevance for the contemporary philosophy of well-being.

Part One: The Idea of the Highest Good

Before I attempt to answer the main question of this thesis, we must first investigate the question itself. After all, a question can often rest on hidden assumptions which need to be teased out and scrutinised. It is obvious, in this case, that the core assumption of the question 'what is the content of the highest good?' is that the highest good does in fact exist. Hence the aim of the first part of this dissertation is to establish the existence of the highest good. For if the idea of the highest good is to have any real value for us today, then it must meet a minimum standard of plausibility and be seen as viable not just by those in the past.

Like the holy grail, the highest good can be taken to have two meanings: something elusive and universally desired which bestows everlasting happiness, and a mythological fiction believed by those in ancient times. It is fair to say that most contemporary philosophers generally take the highest good to have the latter meaning.

As we have seen, one of the two dimensions of the highest good is that it is the purpose or *telos* of human beings. It is the final cause of human beings, which means that it is the ultimate reason why human beings do anything. Many contemporary philosophers are sceptical of final causality and think that such a notion is fanciful and unrealistic because it upholds a teleological or purposive view of the world that we tend to not agree with nowadays (Korsgaard 2008, 131; Aufderheide and Bader 2015, 2). Specifically, one might be hesitant to assign a purpose to objects other than man-made things, because human beings are a product of evolution and do not seem to be made with a purpose in mind by a higher intelligence. Moreover, the idea that natural objects are moved by an internal force and are in some way aiming themselves to a goal is either outdated or quite controversial depending on the particular scientific field. For instance, Newton's first law of motion — one of the fundamental principles of classical physics — rejects teleology in physics, since it posits that objects are inert and will remain at rest or in uniform motion in the absence of an external force. Nevertheless, in chapter two I will attempt to outline two ways in which we can justify believing in the existence of a *telos* or ultimate end of human beings. In chapter two I will also defend the other dimension of the highest good which says that this ultimate end is intrinsically good and the supreme good which our actions should be directed towards.

Chapter One: The Meaning of The Highest Good

In this chapter I will describe and explain in detail what the traditional 'highest good' means, and in the next chapter I will argue for its plausibility.

The Criteria of the Highest Good

In this section I will outline what I will take the criteria of the highest good to be. These criteria are the traditional requirements of the highest good found in ancient philosophy.

Aristotle begins the *Nicomachean Ethics* by delineating three basic criteria of the highest good. These criteria are (1) that the highest good is a good which we wish for and pursue for its own sake; (2) that all other goods and ends are wished for and pursued for the sake of the highest good; and (3) that the highest good is not wished for and pursued for the sake of anything else (1094a18–22). When combined these three principles form a widely accepted standard definition of the highest good for the ancients, which states that our highest good is 'the ultimate object of desire' (Annas 1995, 35). This means that the highest good is the ultimate end of a human being which unites and organises all other ends by being the pinnacle of goodness which gives direction and meaning to all other ends (Annas 1995, 32, 39).[3] According to this definition, the highest good has a similar functional role to the goal of capturing the opponent's king in a game of chess. They both make the goodness and desirability of all moves and strategies dependent on the degree to which they contribute towards the ultimate goal. Yet there are limitations to this analogy. We are not always consciously aiming at the highest good, and a good chess player sometimes aims at a draw.

[3] An 'end' is a broad term for any object of desire or object of pursuit.

From these fairly simple and common-sense requirements Aristotle later goes on to develop two more fundamental criteria of the highest good which are decidedly more complex (1097a26–1097b21). The first of these is completeness (*teleion*). Completeness at first seems to recapitulate much of the earlier basic criteria. Aristotle says that an end which fulfils both the first criterion (being pursued for its own sake) and the third (never being pursued for the sake of anything else) is complete without qualification and is more complete than an end which only fulfils one of these criteria (1097a31–34). However, Aristotle appears to introduce the completeness criterion to guard against the pervasive misconception of the highest good as, like a block of stone atop a pyramid made up of other blocks, merely one discrete good among other goods, a good which can be placed on a scale of goodness along with all other goods (Annas 1995, 36). Aristotle explicitly argues against this interpretation by explaining that if the highest good were counted as one good among many then the addition of even the tiniest good to the highest good would make the new good more good and hence paradoxically more worthy of pursuit than the highest good (1097b16–20).[4]

The particular way in which the goodness of the highest good goes beyond the goodness of any particular individual good is through it being 'the principle and cause [*aition*] of goods' (1102a3–5; Broadie 2007, 144). In other words, the highest good is the source of the value that all other goods have and is what makes them good, whether they are good as a means to the highest good or are good for their own sake (Broadie 2007, 144).

It is clear that instrumental goods receive their value from their promotion of the highest good. But how can intrinsic goods other than the highest good receive their value from the

[4] This can also serve as an argument for the legitimacy of the fifth criterion of self-sufficiency (1097b20–21).

highest good? If the highest good exists, then is it impossible for any other goods or ends to be intrinsically valuable or desirable? Apparently not. In addition to the two simple kinds of ends — ends chosen for their own sake, and ends chosen for the sake of something else — Aristotle identifies honour, pleasure, understanding, and virtues as each being the third type of end which is chosen both for its own sake and also for the sake of something else (1097b2–5). This hybrid kind of end does not fit neatly into our earlier picture of the highest good. In the chess analogy there cannot be an end other than taking the opponent's king that is desired for its own sake, because such an end could not conceivably have any value outside of it being a pure means to the ultimate end of capturing the king.

So how are we to make sense of this bizarre kind of end? As Ackrill points out, Aristotle says that the subordination of activities to each other can take a form other than the subordinate activity serving purely as a means to another activity like in Aristotle's example of the craft of bridle making being solely a means to the craft of horsemanship (1094a16–18; 1094a10–13; Ackrill 1981, 18). Namely, the subordinate activity can be not absent and removed from but rather involved in the activity or craft which it is subordinate towards. The obvious way to understand how such an activity can be involved in a superior activity while also being pursued for the sake of that superior activity is by seeing the subordinate activity as one part of a whole superior activity (Ackrill 1981, 19). In fact, Aristotle describes this exact kind of relationship shortly afterwards, when he says that the end of the most superior science or activity 'will include' the ends of other sciences and activities (1094b5–7; Annas 1995, 40). Hence, a subordinate activity can, instead of producing a product and being merely a stepping-stone to another craft, take place within the superior activity itself. For example, the activity of celestial navigation can take place within the craft of sailing.

It seems like the more a whole includes intrinsically desirable activities, the more fitting it is to call this larger whole complete and the highest good. Annas calls this inclusion of other intrinsically desirable ends 'comprehensiveness' (1995, 40). For Annas and those who accept the inclusivist account of the highest good, comprehensiveness forms a large part of the completeness criterion of the highest good (1995, 40; Ackrill 1981, 28; Irwin 2019, 380).[5] However, I think the completeness criterion of the highest good should simply be understood to mean an end determining the value and desirability of all other ends. That is, the highest good does not necessarily include all other intrinsically good ends, rather it only necessarily includes and causes the intrinsic goodness and desirability of all intrinsically good ends. Just as the highest good is necessarily the cause of the goodness of instrumentally good ends.

The reason why I favour this account of completeness is because, as Lear notes, it seems possible for a person to desire an end partially for its own sake due to this end approximating the highest good, and for this end to not be included as a part within the highest good (2004, 72–73). For example, suppose a person desires virtue solely for its own sake. It seems possible and even rational for this person to partially intrinsically desire being partially virtuous because of partial virtue approximating and inculcating some of the intrinsic value of virtue. But the lived out human activity of being partially virtuous cannot be included in the lived out human activity of being fully virtuous. You don't add multiple partially virtuous actions to get full virtue; you add multiple fully virtuous actions and multiple instances of a fully virtuous disposition to get virtue. It is true that the abstract value of partial virtue seems to be included in the abstract value of virtue. But this supports my position because here it is

[5] The inclusive vs dominant interpretation of *eudaimonia* is a fraught issue in Aristotle scholarship (Lear 2004, 51; Kraut 1989, 267). See Aristotle chapter for my discussion of this debate more specifically in relation to Aristotle's more substantive claims about the highest good and the good life. In this section I am concerned with how we should formally understand the highest good.

the value or desirability of the end which is included in the higher good, and not the particular instantiation of the value.

Accordingly, we can understand the completeness of the highest good with respect to other intrinsically desired ends in two ways. The highest good is the cause of the value and desirability of partially intrinsically desired ends because these ends are either parts incorporated within the highest good, or they approximate the value of the highest good or one of its parts. Therefore, through understanding Aristotle's third type of end, we can move from the simplified chess analogy to a broader more advanced picture of the relationship ends could have to the highest good.

Completeness is the most important criterion of the highest good, as it was almost universally upheld by the ancients (Annas 1995, 42; Plato, Phlb. 20d). Aristotle's fifth and final criterion however does not have the same widely accepted status for the ancients as completeness does (Annas 1995, 41–42). This last formal constraint of Aristotle's is self-sufficiency (*autarkeia*) (1097b7–8). Aristotle is quick to point out that by 'self-sufficiency' he does not mean what is sufficient for an individual cast out of society and isolated from other human beings (1097b8–10). Self-sufficiency is that which all on its own makes one's life desirable and lacking nothing, and hence this means that for an end to be self-sufficient is for it to lack nothing choiceworthy (1097b14–16; Irwin 2019, 396–97).[6] As Aristotle notes, the self-sufficiency criterion follows from the completeness criterion (1097b6–8). A complete end would have to lack nothing valuable or desirable and hence would have to be self-sufficient, because as I have outlined a complete end includes the intrinsic value and desirability of all

[6] An inclusivist reading would say that what it means for an end to be self-sufficient and lacking nothing choiceworthy is for the end to include all intrinsically valuable ends (Lear 2004, 51; Annas 1995, 41). I reject this reading for the same reason I reject the inclusivist reading of completeness.

other ends. Given that self-sufficiency follows from completeness, it makes sense to treat self-sufficiency as a criterion of the highest good since completeness is widely accepted as a requirement of the highest good.

This clear set of formal constraints on the nature of the highest good provides us with the fundamental standards which we can use to assess different theories of the content of the highest good.

Clarifications

There are several clarifications to be made in order to avoid potential points of confusion surrounding the ancient account of the highest good. For the characterisation of the highest good as the ultimate end of our desires contains assumptions which can escape one's notice. It is noteworthy that the ends we desire are often continued activities. Ends of desire are usually not merely external objects, like gold or a statue, which can be attained and then require no more work to sustain. Rather, if the activity stops then the desire is reignited, just as nourishment stops the desire for food only as long as one continues to be nourished. Hence, the satisfaction of a desire and realisation of an end is often dependent on the continued activity which fulfils the desire. Next, given that the highest good unites and orients all of one's pursuits and desires, the highest good does not just orient one's desires in specific moments and intervals, it orients all of one's desires across time and throughout one's lifetime as a whole. While it is true that we are often torn in different directions by our desires, the notion of the highest good nonetheless claims to be the ultimate fulfilment of all desires. A third assumption is that the desires which are directed towards the highest good are not passions inherently opposed to or divorced from reason; rather according to the ancients, desire (*orexis*) refers to the general motivation we have when doing anything and is often caused by reasons (Annas 1995, 35).

Lastly, at its core the highest good is supposed to combine a descriptive conception of the highest good with a normative conception of the highest good. The highest good is meant to be something that, descriptively speaking, every individual is actually aiming at when we desire and pursue things. On the other hand, the highest good is meant to be what all people *should* be aiming at when we are desiring and pursuing. There are two main obstacles for any attempt to unify these two conceptions. Firstly, what is the point of trying to convince people that they should pursue the highest good when they already are pursuing it? Secondly, it would seem like we could determine the highest good by looking at what people actually desire in the real world, but people frequently do not pursue the actions and the kind of life which they should be pursuing. To take an extreme example, serial killers aim at murdering and torturing people, but these are immoral ends which cannot reasonably form part of a good life or a normative highest good. So how can the highest good be something which everyone desires in every instance of desire when people pursue immoral and irrational ends?

In order to figure out whether it is possible for everyone to be desiring the highest good we must consider the different ways we can desire and pursue it. There are two different ways we can desire the highest good as our ultimate end. These two ways can both fully and partially overlap with each other. The first is at the level of thought where one consciously desires their ultimate end and all of one's other ends are consciously desired for the sake of this ultimate end. In order for a person to desire the highest good in this way, they would only ever desire or pursue something if they consciously thought it would help them achieve their highest good. For example, if someone wanted to become a nurse or a matador they would be consciously thinking that becoming a nurse or matador would help them achieve the highest good. And if someone goes swimming in the afternoon they are doing this because they think it will ultimately in some way help them realise the highest good.

The second way of desiring the highest good is to unconsciously desire it and for all of one's other ends to be unconsciously ultimately desired for the sake of the highest good. Within this second way of desiring the highest good there are two ways we can pursue such an end which we ultimately desire unconsciously. The first is unconscious rational pursuit, where one unconsciously desires an end and pursues that end rationally. This kind of pursuit is manifested at the level of action. Pursuing the highest good in this way need not involve one's conscious pursuit of the highest good or any self-conscious interpretation of how one's ends and desires are organised in relation to the highest good. Instead one's pursuit and desire of the highest good is implicitly expressed in one's actions. If a person pursues the highest good in this first way, then others will be able to infer the content of that person's highest good by analysing what their actions and behaviour seem to aim at across time, and not by looking at what they claim they are pursuing. For instance, if someone devotes all of their time and attention first and foremost to making money we could infer that their highest good (the ultimate end of their actions and desires) is to make money. Even if this person does not agree that making money is the ultimate end of their actions and desires, it would not stop making money from being their highest good according to this first account of pursuit.

The second kind of pursuit is unconscious irrational pursuit, where one unconsciously desires an end but does not pursue that end rationally and pursues the end in such a way that it is not clear what they are really aiming at. Unlike the first kind of pursuit, the motivation behind this pursuit cannot be reasonably inferred from the content of the person's actions because the action is not a reasonable way of achieving what motivated them in the first place. For example, it is possible that the reason why a child intentionally burns down a village which they were shunned and socially ostracised by is so that the child will satisfy their frustrated desire for affection and belonging. In this case, the child's action is a severely irrational way of pursuing affection, and so we could not definitively conclude from their action that they were pursuing affection. Yet it is still possible that the child really was pursuing affection by burning down the village.

We also commonly pursue things in this second way when we are aiming at ends which are not well-defined. If you ask an artist why they want to be an artist they might know that there is a reason or a combination of reasons, but it could be hard for them to explicitly outline what it is that makes them want to create art. The artist might have an intimation of the end they are pursuing but be unable to give a full account of what it is they want. We could try to look at the content of an artist's paintings to determine what they are aiming at. But it is theoretically possible for two artists to have each produced the same paintings and have different underlying motivations. Maybe one is motivated by the calmness they feel when making beautiful things, and the other just wants to be like other artists who make beautiful things. One could argue that the calmness motivation would be reflected in the content of the painting, but it is possible that the artist feels more calm when making chaotic artworks.

In summary, both the first and second way of pursuing involve a desire for the highest good which operates beneath the level of thought, and the pursuit of the highest good is what causes one's pursuits in the realm of action. But unlike the first way, in the second way what one is pursuing as the highest good is not clearly reflected at the level of action. The distinctive feature of the second way is that it says there is something we are desiring/pursuing in our pursuits which need not be the immediate target of our pursuits, but which nevertheless lies behind and inspires our desire for the particular immediate target.

If it is true that we all desire the highest good, then it is impossible for anyone to descriptively desire the highest good entirely in the first way (to consciously desire all ends for the sake of the highest good). For while anyone can consciously desire the highest good, everyone has unconscious desires and a person cannot unconsciously desire an end because they consciously think it would help them achieve their highest good. Hence, everyone must at least partially desire the highest good in the second way and at minimum desire some other ends because they unconsciously think it would help them achieve their highest good.

If we all have the highest good as the ultimate end of our desires, then most people will likely desire the highest good largely in the second way. Most people do not explicitly and consciously connect all of their conscious ends and desires to a single ultimate end. For example, we usually eat food not because we explicitly think that it will contribute towards a good life, but out of habit or an instinct to satisfy hunger.

We have seen that if we all ultimately desire the highest good then we desire it in the second way or in some hybrid of the first and second way. But in what way do we pursue the highest good if it is the ultimate end of our pursuits? While a person could pursue many things consciously for the sake of the highest good, the existence of unconsciously desired/pursued ends means that no one can pursue all of their ends consciously for the sake of the highest good. Thus, we cannot pursue the highest good as our ultimate end in just a conscious way.

In theory it is possible for a person to pursue the highest good in the first unconscious way described above (unconscious rational pursuit). But everyone cannot pursue the highest good in this way because our actions do not always reflect the consistent pursuit of any one thing. People pursue many different kinds of lives and act out lives based on principles which often directly contradict the principles lived out by others. Some pursue a life of wealth but others take vows of poverty, and some pursue a life of pleasure but others pursue a life of asceticism. Even within our individual lives our actions exhibit the pursuit of many contradictory ends and do not perfectly adhere to the consistent pursuit of any one end or principle. For at a minimum we are prone to self-deceptive and self-destructive processes which impair our ability to effectively pursue ends and to form correct judgements about which ends will likely lead to the attainment of other ends. This is seen in cases of addiction and *akrasia*. Furthermore, immoral people such as murderers often pursue ends for their own sake which are not good, so the ultimate end of their pursuits cannot align with the normative conception of the highest good. Hence, we cannot all be pursuing the highest good in the first unconscious way.

Pursuing the highest good in the second unconscious way (irrational unconscious pursuit) is not susceptible to the same problems as the first two ways. It leaves room for the pursuit of unconsciously desired ends to be based in a pursuit of the highest good because it allows for the unconscious pursuit of the highest good. This way also leaves room for the flawed and uncertain pursuit of the highest good. Consequently, it allows for the possibility that people might desire different conflicting ends and kinds of lives while still pursuing the same ultimate end. Therefore, for most people the only way to make sense of how they could always be pursuing the highest good is through this second conception of unconscious pursuit which fundamentally inspires and instigates our actions but is not (necessarily) reflected in the content of our action.

Distinguishing these two ways of desiring and three ways of pursuing the highest good can also answer the problem of how, if we are always pursuing the highest good, the normative conception of the highest good requires us to act differently than we already are. I have argued that the account of how most people descriptively desire the highest good as their ultimate end is primarily through unconscious desire. And I have argued that the account of how most people descriptively pursue the highest good as their ultimate needs to be qualified so as to specifically apply to the third way of unconscious irrational pursuit. With the boundaries of the descriptive account clearly demarcated, the normative implications of there being a highest good can accordingly be seen as applying primarily to the first way we can desire the highest good and the first two ways that we can pursue the highest good. That is, the normative conception of the highest good requires most people to act differently by consciously and explicitly desiring and pursuing the highest good and by rationally pursuing the highest good in our actions. As illustrated in the paradox of hedonism, one's conscious explicit desiring of something may be less likely to result in its attainment. To any extent that this is the case regarding the highest good, the rational pursuit and realisation of the highest good is obviously more important than the constant conscious seeking of it.

Nevertheless, the normative conception of the highest good likely also obliges most people to change part of our unconscious orientation towards the highest good. While I have argued that everyone has an unconscious desire for the highest good if it is the ultimate end of their desires, there can be different levels of unconscious desire where one unconsciously desires an end for the sake of another end they unconsciously desire. These other levels of unconscious desire should be oriented towards the highest good by desiring ends which are conducive to the realisation of one's highest good because our unconscious desires can be more effective in controlling our actions than our beliefs. For instance, a person conscripted into the army who strongly agrees with pacifism and thus believes that they should not fight in the war might still fight because they are compelled by an unacknowledged implicit desire to not be socially ostracised which is stronger than their desire for their actions to be guided by pacifism or by they consider to be reasonable beliefs. Similarly, a person who is persuaded that a wicked person's arguments for murder are reasonable and logically flawless may successfully resist the other's exhortation to murder solely because of their gut-level disgust and revulsion at vicious actions like murder.

It is unclear how we can possibly know what the content of the ultimate end of our desires is, if we pursue our ultimate end in the third way (unconscious irrational pursuit). Analysing thought and action appears to be the only method we can use to determine the content of our desires. And as I have outlined, what a person thinks they desire and what they seem to desire in action can be completely different than what they actually desire at the most fundamental level. One could speculate about the end a person is trying to irrationally and subconsciously desire by analysing their actions, psychology, and personal history. But even if one somehow manages to correctly determine this object, there is no way of knowing if there is in turn another object which is the subconscious reason why the person desires the first subconscious end. There could be several layers of ends which someone irrationally and subconsciously desires, and there seems no way of knowing when you have reached the most fundamental subconscious object of desire. There are no obvious counterexamples which show that people are not consistently desiring and pursuing the same ultimate end in this third sense of pursuit precisely because this kind of pursuit appears to make the content of one's ultimate end unknowable and seals it off in a kind of black box.

Nonetheless, there is another way of determining the content of one's ultimate end apart from trying to infer it from the content of one's actions and conscious desires — we can attempt to discover the content of the ultimate end by analysing the structure of desire itself and looking at the features which are necessarily present in all acts of desire and pursuit. That is, we can investigate if, independent of the content of one's particular actions and conscious desires, there is an end which is implicitly desired and pursued in desire and action itself. If an end is implicitly and necessarily desired in all cases of desire then it is a good candidate for being the ultimate and most fundamental object of desire for people because without the implicit desiring of this end, no other end can be desired. However, if we discover an end which is always implicitly desired, we should go on to consider if it makes sense for this implicitly desired end to be the reason why all other ends are desired or pursued. Being implicitly and necessarily desired is not sufficient to make an end the ultimate end and reason why all other ends are desired, since there may be multiple ends which are necessarily desired in any particular instance of desire. Furthermore, some necessary features of desire, like that one wants the realisation of any end, are so banal and general that intuitively it seems quite implausible that the ultimate end of all desires is simply to desire any random end. It seems like there is something else or many other things which constrain and incline the will towards certain ends more than others.

It is also not obvious how we can know *that* we each have an ultimate end of our desires, if we pursue our ultimate end unconsciously and irrationally. The above strategy of outlining necessary features of desire which seem to be one's ultimate end is also a way of determining whether it is true that we have an ultimate end. I will use this strategy in the following chapter when arguing for the existence of the highest good. But independently of this, I will also argue in the next chapter that we can know that we each have an ultimate end through abstract reasoning about how a hierarchy of ends must be organised.

Chapter Two: The Existence of the Highest Good

With this outline of the nature of the highest good I will now seek to provide a way by which one can defend the existence of the highest good and justify, at least when it comes to human beings, a teleological metaphysics. In the first section of this chapter I will argue for the existence of an end which is descriptively the ultimate object of our desires. In the second section I will provide a second argument which reinforces the idea that we have an ultimate end by contending that the good is the ultimate end of our desires. In the third section, I will argue that the goodness we ultimately desire is not a phantom but that it actually exists and is what we should ultimately desire and pursue.

Section One: The Existence of the Ultimate End

My first argument for the existence of the ultimate end is a bottom-up argument which proceeds from the everyday actions and desires of individuals. This argument is inspired by Aristotle's argument for the existence of the highest good. In the construction of my argument, I will follow Aristotle's argument and provide support for premises which I think require more defence.

The first fundamental point Aristotle makes in this argument for the existence of the highest good is that 'Every craft and every discipline, and likewise action and decision seems to seek some good' (NE 1094a1–2). For instance, an individual's activity of drinking water seeks the good of hydration, and one's activity of sleeping seeks the good of mental and physical rejuvenation. As Annas notes, from this statement we can tease out two distinct claims: that every action of an individual is oriented towards some end, and that every end that is being sought is in some sense good (1995, 29–30). The former claim is uncontroversial and I will expand it to include the equally banal claim that all of our desires are oriented towards some end. I will leave Aristotle's more difficult latter claim about goodness for now, since the goal of my argument in this section is just to establish the existence of the ultimate end and not its goodness.

Aristotle's next fundamental point introduces a hierarchy of ends and notes that some ends are subordinate to and therefore lower than other relatively higher ends (1094a9–10). For instance, the end of hydration is subordinate to the higher end of being healthy because hydration is not desired for its own sake but is desired insofar as it supports and contributes towards being healthy. For if a person drinks so much water to the point that it negatively impacts their health then hydration is no longer desirable, as it has become disconnected from its higher end and source or condition of its desirability. Hence, lower ends are lower because they are sought for the sake of higher ends (1094a15–17). It is easy to see how many of the ends we desire and pursue in our lives are nested within a hierarchy of ends due to the transparently causal connections between many of our ordinary desires and our higher-level desires such as being healthy and having material resources. However, from this common-sense perspective it is not clear what shape this hierarchical structure has.

Aristotle goes on to posit that the structure of our hierarchy of ends has a single ultimate end that is desired only for its own sake and is the reason why we seek and wish for all other ends (1094a18–22, 1097b1–2). However, there are some gaps and jumps in his quite brief reasoning, which I will attempt to fill.

It is important to recognise that it is often unclear what the real and most fundamental way we desire an end is: whether we desire the end solely as a means, solely for its own sake, or in part for its own sake. This is because our personal beliefs about why we desire something can be mistaken. For this reason when I refer to the different ways of desiring an end in this section, I am referring not to one's personal opinion about why one desires an end but the real reason why one desires an end. I will assume that there are only three ways that an end can be desired: for its own sake, for the sake of another end, and both for its own sake and for the sake of another end. From these axioms I will try to determine what one's hierarchy of ends looks like by eliminating the different possibilities of the way ends could be arranged in a hierarchy.

Indefinite Chains

Aristotle starts his clarification of the structure of one's hierarchy of ends by trying to reveal an inherent uppermost limit on one's hierarchy. He argues that we cannot desire all of our ends for the sake of other higher ends, as that would go on *ad infinitum* and our desires would be empty and pointless since it would mean that our desires would not ultimately point to anything and cannot be truly fulfilled (1094a18–22). Yet even though it is difficult to believe that our desires are futile, it is still potentially conceivable, however absurd, that there is no point to our desires and that we have an indefinitely long chain of ends in our hierarchy of ends.[7] Annas and LeBar argue that it would be foolish to have an indefinite chain of ends, but here I am interested in whether it is possible to have an indefinite chain of ends and

[7] It is impossible for us to have an infinitely long chain of ends because of the finitude of our minds. But this does not mean that a chain of ends could fail to reach a natural end and continue indefinitely until something like death interrupts the process.

descriptively speaking what one's hierarchy of ends must necessarily look like (1995, 32; 2013, 34–36).

In considering the possibility of indefiniteness, I am not examining the possibility of new ends being added to or taken away from a hierarchy or chain of ends. New ends could be added to a chain, if a person desires new ends. But this addition does not make either the previous chain or the current one indefinite. Secondly, Aristotle is arguing against the 'upwards' indefiniteness of a chain of ends. Downwards indefiniteness is where, instead of ends being desired for the sake of new higher ends continuously without end, there are continuously emerging lower ends at the bottom of the chain which never cease. I will assume that downwards indefiniteness is impossible since I struggle to conceive of how downwards indefiniteness could work. Unlike upwards indefiniteness, there is nothing about the way ends in a chain are desired which indicates there are other ends desired which have an ambiguous connection to the chain. Henceforth when I talk about 'indefiniteness' I will mean 'upwards indefiniteness'.

In an indefinitely long chain of ends where all ends are desired solely for the sake of a higher end and there are no ends desired for their own sake, we cannot properly explain why ends desired solely for the sake of other ends are desired in the first place. One might think we could explain the desirability of end A by noting that it is desired solely for the sake of end B, and that we could explain the desirability of end B by noting that it is desired solely for the sake of end C and so on. But this just kicks the can down the road and continually delays properly explaining the reason why end A was desired by appealing to other ends which themselves also do not have a proper reason or explanation for why they are desired. End A being desired for the sake of end B does give a proximate sequential explanation for end A's desirability. But this does nothing to properly explain why end A is desired; just as saying that the reason why X is true is because of Y's truth and then never explaining why Y is true except by appealing to the truth of more things whose truth has been unexplained is not a proper explanation of X's truth.

We never arrive at an end or sequence of ends which properly explains what caused any of these ends to be desired for two reasons. First, an end desired solely for the sake of another end, by definition, cannot in itself explain its own desirability. Second, an explanation of a *purely* instrumental end's own desirability *wholly* relies on the explanation of the desirability of other ends. Accordingly, if, in an indefinite chain, there only exist ends that are desired solely for the sake of other ends, then (1) no ends can explain their own desirability, and (2) there are no ends that can explain the desirability of other ends. (2) is the case because in order for an end to (partially or fully) explain the desirability of another end, we must have a (partial or full) explanation of the first end's desirability. Hence, in this chain of ends there are no ends whose desirability can be explained. In fact, because we cannot explain or make sense of how any ends would come to be desired in such a chain, it seems there would be nothing to cause and inspire one's desires for the ends in this chain in the first place. Consequently, it seems like this type of indefinite chain of ends cannot exist.

So there cannot be an indefinite chain consisting of ends which are all solely desired for the sake of other ends. But what about other types of indefinite chains of ends? Could there be an indefinite chain of ends if there ends desired solely for their own sake in the indefinite chain? An end desired solely for its own sake cannot form part of an indefinite chain of ends, because this end must put a stop to the chain of ends and cannot be desired for the sake of another end.

Is it possible for there to be an indefinite chain of ends which has some ends that are desired partially for their own sake (but no ends desired solely for their own sake)? This indefinite chain, unlike an indefinite chain of ends with only ends desired solely for the sake of another end, would contain at least part of the explanation, reason for, and source of the desirability of ends in the chain. The part which is desired solely for its own sake within the end desired partially for its own sake, is what constitutes part of the explanation of the desirability of other ends. There are two relevant ways a chain with ends that are desired partially for their own sake (but no ends desired solely for their own sake) could be organised. The first is if the chain of ends has multiple ends desired partially for their own sake which together could fully explain the desirability of all ends in the chain. In other words, the desirability of all ends in the chain can be tied back to and fully grounded in the intrinsic desirability of ends desired partially for their own sake. This kind of chain could not be indefinite because the desirability of each end is fully accounted for by other ends in the chain and an indefinite chain requires ends in the chain to be desired for the sake of ends not in the chain of ends.

The second way of organising is if the chain of ends has ends desired partially for their own sake which together could only *partially* explain the desirability of ends in the chain. In this chain the desirability of all ends in the chain can be partially but not fully tied back to and grounded in the intrinsic desirability of ends desired partially for their own sake. This kind of indefinite chain could not exist because it is impossible for part of the cause of the desirability of ends in this chain to be explained and accounted for. Like the chain of ends with only ends desired for the sake of other ends, we cannot conceptually make sense of how this chain could exist and what could have caused the ends in the indefinite chain to be desired in this way.

Thus, there cannot be an indefinite chain of ends because all the different possible combinations of ends included in a chain of ends either require the chain to be definite or conceptually cannot account for how the indefinite chain of ends could come into existence. This means that our hierarchy of ends cannot include within it an indefinite chain of ends, and that Aristotle is correct in saying that there must be an uppermost limit on one's hierarchy of ends.

Circular Chains

Aristotle thinks that we desire one highest end solely for its own sake. But how do we know that our hierarchy of ends includes any ends solely desired for their own sake? The necessity of an uppermost limit on one's hierarchy of ends means there must be at least one end which we desire either partially or solely for its own sake. Could our hierarchy of ends include no ends desired solely for its own sake?

Let us first consider the scenario where there is only one end desired partially for its own sake and no other end desired solely for its own sake. In this case we cannot explain what caused the partially intrinsically desired end to be desired for the sake of another end. After all, there is no other end which is fully or partially intrinsically desired in the hierarchy, and only these types of ends can be the ultimate cause of instrumental desirability. Perhaps the unexplained instrumental desirability of the partially intrinsically desired end could ultimately be grounded back in the intrinsically desired part of this end. But this would make the intrinsically desired part of the end an end that is desired solely for its own sake. Hence, there must be either at least one solely intrinsically desired end or multiple partially intrinsically desired ends.

As I have argued, a chain of ends that has multiple ends desired partially for their own sake which together could only partially explain the desirability of ends in the chain, could not exist. But could a chain of ends exist, if the partially intrinsically desired ends could together fully explain the desirability of ends in the chain?

This chain of ends would include a circle or loop within the chain (cf. LeBar 2013, 37). This particular circular way of desiring would look like if end A is desired both for its own sake and for the sake of end B, and end B is likewise desired both for its own sake and for the sake of end A. If we assume that what is intrinsically desirable in each of these two ends is compatible, I think it is clear that desiring these two ends in this way amounts to desiring some kind of combination of these two ends.[8] For if there are two ends desired for their own sake but also desired for the sake of each other, then each contains something intrinsically desirable but each also lacks something intrinsically desirable which the other possesses. And if what is intrinsically desirable in the two ends is compatible, then the combination or synthesis of what is intrinsically desirable in these ends cannot be subordinate to or desired for the sake of its component ends, because it does not lack anything which the component ends possess. Thus, if there are only two ends desired in part for their own sake in the chain/hierarchy, then this new overarching end (end C) will be desired solely for its own sake.

[8] I will argue for the impossibility of action when the highest or most ultimate ends in a hierarchy are incommensurable in the next subsection.

But what if there are other ends desired partially for their own sake added to the circle, and what is intrinsically desired in these new ends is not included in end C? For the same reasons as before, if we assume commensurability, desiring the aforementioned ends in such a way amounts to desiring the combination of what is intrinsically desirable in end C and the new ends. And the end which combines all this intrinsic desirability will be desired solely for its own sake since it will not be subordinate to any end in the hierarchy. This same dynamic takes place in any hierarchy with multiple partially intrinsically desired ends — what is intrinsically desired in all the ends partially desired for their own sake, when combined, forms an end that is solely desired for its own sake and is not subordinate to any other end.

Therefore, there must be at least one end that is desired solely for its own sake in any hierarchy of ends, since a hierarchy must have at least one end desired partially for its own sake and I have shown that any hierarchy with one or more of these ends must have an end desired solely for its own sake.[9]

Multiple Ultimate Ends (or multiple solely intrinsically desired ends)

The next hurdle for Aristotle's account of our hierarchy of ends is to explain why there must be only one end desired solely for its own sake. It seems like there could be multiple ultimate ends that are each only sought for their own sake and occupy an equal rank in one's hierarchy, just as there could be multiple apples which are not lower than any other apple on a tree because the highest apples could be equally high in elevation (Annas 1995, 32; LeBar

[9] Loops or circles of the kind described in this section within a person's hierarchy of ends can be accommodated without violating Aristotle's view of a hierarchy of ends with a single end desired solely for its own sake and for whose sake all other ends are desired. The only requirement for accommodation is that these circles of ends within the hierarchy must not include within the circle the end at the top of the hierarchy, because this would mean that the end at the top is desired for the sake of another end.

2013, 48). For instance, someone could have knowledge and pleasure as their two ultimate ends, with neither end being higher and superior to the other. Abraham might be said to have been in this situation of having incommensurable ultimate values when he was forced to choose between obeying God’s command to sacrifice his son on Mount Moriah and preserving Isaac’s life but disobeying God.

Aristotle appears to reject this possibility by saying that the ultimate end is the most complete (*teleion*) end, and so will include the intrinsic desirability of all ends desired for their own sake (1097a25–30). However, the multiple ultimate ends could potentially be incommensurable or uncombinable with one another. Aristotle does not explicitly address this problem, but from a psychological point of view it seems like in order for a person to act and desire one thing over another, one needs a hierarchy of ends or values where there is one single end that is higher than all others. For if there are multiple ultimate ends equivalent in value and desirability then one will be inexorably torn between several guiding principles. As a result of this, one will be unable to make the simplest decision and act in accordance with it. For like Buridan’s donkey who is exactly halfway between two equally large and desirable haystacks and cannot move because it is unable to decide which one to eat, one has no possible way of resolving the inherent conflict between multiple highest ends of equal standing and determining which end should ultimately be pursued.

This is not to endorse the view that someone who has no rational way of choosing between any two equal ends, like two equivalent cans of soup, will be paralysed into inaction. It is to say that someone who has no way of deciding between two equal but non-identical *ultimate* ends will be paralysed. It might be rational to arbitrarily choose one can of soup over another identical can because one recognises that each will promote the higher ends in one’s hierarchy like nutrition and saving money just as well as the other. But the same reasoning cannot apply for incommensurable ultimate ends because there is no equivalent unified higher standard beyond the ultimate ends which one can use to gauge the preferability of pursuing each end.

Yet why must there be an unresolvable competition between multiple ultimate ends every single time someone has to make a decision? Broadie says we can avoid these conflicts by avoiding situations where different ultimate ends compete and recommend different actions (1991, 14). Nevertheless, these conflicts must always arise because one is unable to gauge the desirability of an end when there are two or more ways of measuring desirability which are irreconcilable and cannot be factored into an overarching 'equation of desirability'. That is, where X is the desirability of an end according to one highest end and Y is the desirability of an end according to another highest end, there is no higher framework or equation that can include these two values and break the deadlock between them. For such a higher framework or equation would itself constitute a higher principle of desirability with no equal. Therefore, if there are two or more incommensurable ultimate ends or standards for evaluating the desirability of an end and the appropriateness of an action, then a person will be paralysed and unable to determine the desirability of an end or judge whether an action is appropriate or not. They will only be able to evaluate the desirability of an end and decide whether an action is appropriate according to the first or second ultimate end. Hence, we do not serve two masters and have multiple ultimate ends; rather we can have only one ultimate end. For we are able to make decisions and perform actions, and if we had several ultimate ends we would be unable to make decisions and perform actions.

One could argue that while it might be impossible for someone to act if they have two incommensurable ultimate ends *and* they can only rationally pursue those ultimate ends, it is still possible for someone to pursue two ultimate ends irrationally. That is, while from a rational perspective one should not prefer ultimate end A over ultimate end B and be stuck between them, one could irrationally pursue ultimate end A over B. For example, let us assume Antigone's dilemma of choosing between the duty of obeying the King's decree and the duty to obey religious law to give her brother a proper burial was a choice between pursuing Antigone's two incommensurable ultimate ends of political and religious duty. In this context Antigone's decision to bury her brother is an irrational way of pursuing her incommensurable ultimate ends because she has prioritised one ultimate end over the other when neither is superior to the other.

Nevertheless, the above arguments for the necessity of one ultimate end for action apply and hold true for any kind of pursuit, whether one is rationally or irrationally, consciously or subconsciously pursuing ultimate ends. This is the case because any action (even irrational action) relies on some kind of framework or standard to determine the desirability of an action. For without any standard whatsoever to gauge if one desires an end, one will not desire ends and hence will not pursue ends. Even a baby pursuing food or throwing away their dummy requires an internal framework or standard of desirability which takes food or throwing away the dummy to be desirable. Therefore, the irrational pursuit of two incommensurable ultimate ends is impossible because the absence of a unified standard means that one cannot come to a conclusion about an end's desirability, and to have two incommensurable ultimate ends simply is to have two irreconcilable standards and no unified standard to judge (rationally or irrationally) whether an action is desirable or not. Accordingly, Antigone cannot have two incommensurable ultimate ends or be irrationally pursuing two ultimate ends because by trying to bury her brother she is applying and acting on a single standard for assessing the desirability of an end and is not paralyzed between the two standards of political and religious duty. Action is possible if one pursues some combination of the two ultimate ends which one takes to be more desirable than either ultimate end on its own. The combination could either give each ultimate end's desirability a weighting of fifty percent or prioritise one end's desirability over the other. But given that this combination creates a new end which is superior to both ultimate ends, it renders both ultimate ends non-ultimate and not solely desired for their own sake due to their overall inferior desirability compared to the new end.

Another objection one could make is to admit that whenever one acts one must act out the pursuit of one ultimate end, but to argue that one could still subconsciously and irrationally *desire* an end for the sake of two incommensurable ultimate ends. For example, a person could subconsciously and irrationally desire all of their ends ultimately for the sake of both virtue and vice even though these two ends are irreconcilable. But if one subconsciously desired two ultimate ends then one would still be unable to act. This is because if, for a particular action, one is subconsciously desiring two incommensurable ultimate ends, then one will be unable to subconsciously apply one standard or measure when determining whether an action is desirable or not. And for this reason, one will again be unable to act without subconsciously desiring some combination of the two ultimate ends, which as we have seen is to desire a single ultimate end.

In summary, since any particular action requires the use of some standard which determines (even if irrationally or subconsciously) that an action is preferable to other actions, one cannot act if one is pursuing or desiring two incommensurable ultimate ends because to do so means that one cannot apply one unified standard when considering the desirability of an action.[10] This means that at any one moment of time a person can only have one ultimate end, and hence can only have one end which is desired solely for its own sake.

During the period of time when a person has the same ultimate end, are all of the ends one desires subordinate (partially or otherwise) to one's ultimate end? All ends that a person desires must necessarily be at least partially subordinate to one's sole ultimate end. That is, all ends must be desired as a part of a whole, as a means to, or along the way to the ultimate end (i.e. once achieved inspire desire for the ultimate end), since these relationships entail that the first end is subordinate in some way to the second end. This is because if an end is not partially subordinate to the ultimate end and is not desired along the way to the ultimate end, then it introduces a source of ultimate intrinsic desirability which is independent of and not ultimately grounded in the desirability of the supposed sole ultimate end. This would result in one's hierarchy of ends including either two solely intrinsically desired ends, or one solely intrinsically desired end and another partially intrinsically desired end. However, I argued earlier in this subsection and in the previous subsection that neither of these two scenarios are possible. Therefore, all ends that a person desires (other than their ultimate end) must necessarily be at least partially subordinate to one's sole ultimate end.

This further illuminates the structure of our hierarchy of ends and reveals that our ends are ordered in a pyramid-like shape with a single highest point which everything else in the structure supports and is subordinate to.

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[10] In the objective list chapter I will consider arguments which claim that we can rationally decide between incommensurable values when they conflict. I have not included these arguments here because they do not engage with the points I am making, and they are primarily concerned with the possibility of rational choice involving incommensurable values, as opposed to the possibility of choice more generally given incommensurable values.

Changing Ultimate Ends

Even if someone must have one ultimate end when making a decision, this does not show that, as Aristotle indicates, a person must have the same ultimate end across time. For example, someone could spend the first half of their life ultimately pursuing virtue but then switch to pursuing the end of pleasure for the rest of their life. I do not know how a person could change their own ultimate end which is prior to and inspires all their actions and desires, but it is conceivable that one's ultimate end could change randomly or due to factors outside of one's control. Furthermore, even if a person has the same ultimate end across time, it seems possible that we do not all have the same ultimate end. Perhaps some people have the ultimate end of pleasure and others have the ultimate end of virtue.

However, if, as Boethius and Aquinas thought, the ultimate end is perfect, then I think we could establish the constancy of the same particular ultimate end across individuals and across time within individuals (Book III, prose 10; ST I–II, 1, 5, co.). Based on the work done in this chapter, I think we can establish that in any one moment of time there is only one ultimate end that perfectly fulfils our desires, but not that this end is actually perfect.

As I have argued, there must be a single ultimate end that is desired solely for its own sake and is not partially subordinate to any other end in one's hierarchy. This means that the ultimate end cannot once achieved inspire desire for another end and be desired along the way to another end, since this requires the end to be in some way subordinate to and lack part of the desirability of another end. Consequently, for the ultimate end to not be subordinate in any of these ways, it must perfectly and fully satisfy one's desire so that no further ends are desired. As Aquinas says, ‘it is necessary for the last end so to fill man’s appetite, that nothing is left besides it for man to desire’ (ST I–II, 1, 5, co.).

Nonetheless, an ultimate end not being inferior in desirability in any way to all other ends, does not necessarily mean that an ultimate end is perfect in every way. There is a difference between an end perfectly fulfilling one’s desire and an end actually being perfect or flawless. An ultimate end which perfectly fulfils one’s desire could be an immoral end or an end which is only partially good. In the next section of this chapter I will argue that one’s ultimate end is perfect by defending the view that the good is the ultimate end of one’s desire.

Section Two: The Guise of the Good and the Implicit Desire for the Ultimate End

So far we have established through abstract reasoning that descriptively speaking in any given moment there is one ultimate end which all of our desires are oriented towards. However, empirically it is not obvious that we only have one ultimate end in any given moment. In this section I will argue that the ultimate end of our desires is the good. This will achieve two things. It will strengthen my descriptive account of the existence of an ultimate end of desire at any one time, by showing that this account is supported by our everyday experience of desire. And it will demonstrate that, with one qualification, there is only one ultimate end across time and across people.

I will start my defence of the good as the ultimate end of our desires by supporting the guise of the good thesis. The guise of the good thesis generally argues that everything we desire and pursue is good in some sense (Tenenbaum 2013, 2262). Both Aristotle and Plato defend a version of this thesis (Tenenbaum 2010, 4). As we saw, Aristotle claims in the first point in his argument for the existence of the highest good that every action seeks some good (1094a1–2).

Which Guise of the Good Thesis?

At first glance, the guise of the good thesis can seem far too vague in its claim that all ends pursued and desired are in some way good. In this subsection I will outline several different accounts of the guise of the good thesis, and will pin down which account of it I will defend in the rest of the section by figuring out its most reasonable form.

Barney notes that Plato appears to argue for two seemingly incompatible specifications of the good which is always the object of our desire (2010, 34–35).[11] On the one hand Plato says that the good which all of our desires are oriented towards is the *apparent* good, it is what the individual takes to be good. On the other hand, Plato says that the good which we desire can only be what is really and truly good. These two specifications appear to plainly contradict each other. If the good always being desired is really and truly good, then this seems to deny the possibility that we could be mistaken about the goodness of a desired end. Yet we would seemingly need to be able to be mistaken about the goodness of an end in order for us to desire the apparent good and not just the good.

Barney reconciles the conflict between these two specifications —what she calls the appearance thesis and the reality thesis — by maintaining that for Plato these are not two independent theses but rather the reality thesis is an 'interpretation and clarification' of the appearance thesis (2010, 37). That is, the reality thesis is not to be understood in its strongest

[11] Aristotle also upholds a combination of these same two specifications (Moss 2010, 65).

sense as meaning that we are incapable of desiring anything which is not in fact good. The reality thesis is meant to accompany the appearance thesis and clarify that the idea that we only desire what seems good does not mean that we desire ends under the label 'what I happen to see as good' (Barney 2010, 38). On the contrary, we desire an end because we really take the end to be truly good (Barney 2010, 38).[12]

This clarification of the appearance thesis is a much more plausible and compelling specification of what it means to say that 'every end which we desire is good' than either of the two theses taken by itself. For the idea that all the things we desire are truly good cannot survive the basic fact that human beings often desire and pursue things which are not truly good and which we ourselves frequently recognise to be not actually good. We desire unjust revenge on someone who has slighted us, and eat what we know is too much for dessert. Moreover, we desire such a myriad of things that if everything we desire is really good then this makes the category of the good so broad as to be meaningless.

Conversely, the view that we desire ends purely because they happen to seem good to us and not because of their connection, whether real or illusory, to a good is also flawed. If we desire an apparent good then it seems like we are not desiring that thing *as* an apparent good or under the aspect of apparent good, but are instead desiring it because we take it to be good and desire it under the aspect of good. For apparent goods are not a natural kind of good that we could prefer to real goods; rather an 'apparent good' is something which an individual takes to be good because it *appears* to be good (Barney 2010, 35). Counterexamples such as

[12] At this stage I will not presume that true goodness cannot be created by one's desires in certain circumstances. I will address whether we take our ultimate end to be objectively good in the desire-fulfilment chapter.

akrasia make this view more controversial. I will address these counterarguments in the next two subsections.

The reconciliation of the appearance and reality theses avoids the above problems because it rejects the extremes of both theses and combines what is most plausible in each — our desire for the good and the fallibility of desire — under a new thesis. Therefore, the version of the guise of the good thesis which I will examine claims firstly that whenever we pursue and desire an end we are desiring what subjectively appears good to ourselves, and secondly that we desire what appears good not out of a preference for illusory goods over true goods, but out of a desire for what is truly good.

However, there is another important clarification and dimension which can be added to the guise of the good thesis. Barney's reading of Plato's guise of the good thesis seems more intellectualist in that it says our desires are always based on an evaluative *belief* in the value of the object of desire's value (2010, 46).[13] This type of emphasis on belief as a necessary basis of desire has led critics of the guise of the good thesis to charge it with viewing everyone as conventional, earnest, and boring agents who only care about goodness, while disregarding the rebellious, spontaneous, and lethargic elements of human psychology (Velleman 1992, 3). Yet much of the initial sceptical reaction to the guise of the good could be addressed by recognising that in desiring an end one does not necessarily need to see oneself as explicitly desiring the good. All that is needed is for an end to take on some general positive value or valence for the person in question.

[13] Barney's discussion of appetitive desires makes unclear the degree of belief or cognitive capacity which must be involved in desire (2010, 45).

These two different accounts of what it means to desire an end as good constitute two more versions of the guise of the good thesis — the content version and the attitude version. There is nothing in Barney's basic framework I have described of reconciling the appearance and reality guise of the good theses which prevents it being combined with the content or attitude version respectively. The content version claims that when we desire and pursue ends we *believe* that those ends are good. Whereas the attitude version claims that when we desire and pursue ends we have an attitude towards those ends which *takes* those ends to be good.[14] As Tenenbaum explains, in the attitude version, the 'guise' or appearance of goodness 'does not appear in the content of any of the agent's attitudes, but it is part of the nature of the attitude itself that in having such an attitude we somehow take, or hold, its content to be good' (2020, 229). I will interpret the reason why the attitude version claims an agent's attitude necessarily takes its object of desire to be good, is because the implicit valuing of an end is necessary for one to desire or have any pro-attitude towards an end. This implicit valuing is a kind of pre-reflective perception of goodness and can exist without a conscious evaluative belief about the goodness of a thing. For example, an advertisement could cause someone to take a brand of milk to be good, even if they did not consciously believe that the brand of milk was good. Similarly, someone might have an attitude of being anxious about going to the airport without consciously believing or being aware that they are taking going to the airport to be something potentially bad. Romeo might be convinced that all Capulets are bad in every way while simultaneously having an attitude towards Juliet which takes her to be good due to a subconscious reflexive disposition, a fluttering of the diaphragm, which cannot help but perceive value in remarkably beautiful things.

[14] From now on I will use 'believe' to represent the attitude where one consciously accepts an end as good, and use words like 'take' and 'hold' to express a broader attitude towards ends in which an individual need not consciously believe that an end is good.

In addition to not making agents boring and conventional, another advantage the attitude version possesses over the content version in explaining how all of our desires can be for the good is that the content version is unable to account for appetitive desires and the desires of infants. The content version requires individuals to be able to intellectually possess a concept of value or goodness so that they can believe that a particular end is good.[15] However, infants do not have the conceptual resources needed to represent the idea of good and thus cannot form beliefs about the goodness of things. Similarly, appetitive desires are subconscious natural desires which do not involve the conscious belief of propositions. The attitude version in contrast is not subject to these problems as it claims the end's 'guise' of goodness for an agent is not revealed at the level of the agent's conscious beliefs but in their more general pro-attitude towards the object of desire. Furthermore, it makes sense to understand appetitive desires as desires for the apparent good, since our appetites seem to require the pre-rational awareness and perception of value in order to be attracted and propelled towards ends. For example, when a person feels hungry without consciously thinking that they should eat, it seems to be because they are subconsciously taking food to be good for oneself and to have value. Otherwise, it is hard to see how one could desire food, if one did not have a pro-attitude towards food and thereby take food to be good.

Hence, the attitude version is a better formulation of the guise of the good thesis because it provides a more sophisticated account of how we desire and pursue different kinds of ends. Consequently, the specific version of the guise of the good I will defend is the attitude version of the aforementioned clarification of the appearance thesis.

[15] I will treat value and goodness as interchangeable.

I think the attitude version of the guise of the good thesis is true because desiring an end seems to clearly necessarily involve some implicit valuing or taking to be good of the end desired. For it is hard to see how having a pro-attitude towards an end could not involve valuing that end on some level. I think the reality clarification of the appearance thesis is also correct, because an attitude cannot value an end by merely taking it to be apparently and illusorily good. An attitude which just takes the goodness of an end to be illusory and only good in appearance, simply does not value the end. Perhaps one could value an end because of its illusory goodness. But this is to take its illusory goodness to be good, and to value illusory goodness because one takes illusory goodness to have a relationship to genuine goodness.

Abstract Critiques of the Guise of the Good Thesis

Velleman has posed several challenges to the guise of the good thesis. I will start by considering Velleman's more abstract arguments about the nature of desire, and then move to more concrete counterexamples to the guise of the good thesis given by Velleman and others.

Velleman suggests that our desires are not aimed at the good because while desiring might involve regarding that something is 'to be brought about', this attitude does not attempt to be correct about whether the object of one's desire should be brought about (1992, 17). Hence, desire is not a value judgement since a value judgement needs to try to be right about whether a thing should be brought about (Velleman 1992, 17). Velleman grounds this argument in a disanalogy between the attitudes of belief and desire. For him, belief is a two-tier attitude which, like assuming and fantasising, regards its object as true but, unlike assuming and fantasising, the manner in which it regards its object as true is 'designed to reflect whether it really is true' (1992, 13, 16–17). In contrast, desire is an attitude that expresses a direction of fit which regards the object of one's desire to be made true or brought about, and therefore does not involve a second-order attitude, like truth does, which aims at the correctness of the first order attitude (1992, 14, 16).

On top of this two-tier difference, Velleman maintains another core difference between belief and desire is that belief has the direction of fit of cognitive attitudes and desire has the direction of fit of conative attitudes (1992, 12–13). Cognitive attitudes relate to the world by grasping their object as 'patterned after the world', and conative attitudes relate by grasping their object as 'a pattern for the world to follow' (1992, 8). This difference contributes to the first difference, but can also be true independently of the first.

With respect to the first difference concerning first and second order attitudes, Velleman's two-tiered account of belief seems unnecessarily complicated and his account of assuming and fantasising seems unrealistic. Feser questions this two-tier structure of belief and outlines a more plausible alternative account where belief simply regards its object as true, and the attitudes of assuming and fantasising, instead of regarding their object as true, treat their object as if it were true (2014, 98). This account is superior because it is hard to see how assuming or fantasising regards its object as true except within the context of a hypothetical exercise. Hence, it is more apt to describe such attitudes as treating its object as if it were true. Moreover, Feser's reframing reveals the higher order attitude of belief to be superfluous, as the second-tier attitude of belief — 'accepting the proposition with an eye to its truth, or with truth as one's aim' — already seems incorporated within belief's first-tier attitude of regarding something as true, especially once the distinction between regarding as true and regarding as if true is made (Velleman 1992, 14). After all, to regard x as true seems to entail a commitment to the truth of x, unless a clarification is made which alters the initial regarding relation to aim at something other than actual truth. At the very least this shows an alternative account is available which does not give rise to a disparity in the structure of belief and desire, as they can both be one-tier attitudes without higher order attitudes.

Velleman's second 'direction of fit' incongruity between belief and desire has the similar problem that it lays out a schema which establishes a difference between belief and desire without sufficiently defending the schema or recognising the existence of alternative schemas. Velleman claims that belief's direction of fit treats its object as reflecting prior fixed conditions, while desire's direction of fit dictates conditions to be brought about (1992, 12). However, this just begs the question against the guise of the good thesis, since it assumes that desire's sole direction of fit is one that treats its object as 'a pattern for the world to follow' (Feser 2014, 98). Desire certainly has a creative direction of fit which seeks to achieve something in the world that does not already exist. But desire could also have a *mimetic* direction of fit, like belief, which treats its object as a pattern in the world by taking its object to have preexisting value.[16] And whether a mimetic direction of fit grounds desire's creative direction of fit is precisely the core question that needs to be addressed when evaluating the guise of the good thesis. For instance, by desiring a coat to be protected from the cold, one's desire has a creative direction of fit because it wants its object to be brought about. But one's desire for a coat could also have a mimetic direction of fit because it takes this end to be good, which means that the desire 'conforms itself to the world' by being or trying to be in accordance with goodness. Therefore, Velleman's second argument does not

[16] 'Mimetic' is used here to signify the opposite of a creative direction of fit, since this direction of fit takes itself to be conforming to and reflecting prior fixed conditions in the world.

work because it fails to recognise that a mimetic direction of fit could exist at the same time as a creative direction of fit.

Velleman provides a third reason for thinking that desire does not have a mimetic direction of fit when he argues that the good is not a necessary aim of desire (1992, 17, 24). He argues that instead of being aimed at the good, desire aims at the *attainable* (1992, 17). According to Velleman, desire aims at the attainable because one cannot desire something that seems impossible or seems to have already been realised (1992, 17). However, it seems clear that we can desire both the impossible and what has already come about (Feser 2014, 99). We can desire to hold infinity in the palm of our hand, and we can want to step in the same river twice and relive a past experience exactly as it happened, even when we know that these things are impossible. Velleman might explain these conative attitudes as wishing and hoping, since he admits that one can wish for the impossible and hope for what has occurred (1992, 17). But wishing and hoping are both kinds of desire. Perhaps Velleman considers 'desire' to have a narrower meaning, like action-based theories of desire, where desire is closely tied to action and other attitudes which aim at an impossible action are just conative attitudes which are not seen as true desires. Under this conception of desire it would make sense for attainability to be a necessary part of desire, but I am only interested in the broader understanding of desire which includes all conative attitudes. Thus, the necessary feature of a narrower conception of desire is not relevant here since I am examining the nature of the broader concept.

Therefore, Velleman's abstract arguments against the guise of the good thesis are unsuccessful as he fails to demonstrate that there is a relevant disanalogy between belief and desire, and he does not show either that desire in the broader sense aims at the attainable or that desire in any sense does not aim at the good.

Counterexamples

Apart from the above abstract arguments, Velleman and others appeal to various counterexamples. The most common type of argument against any version of the guise of the good thesis tries to highlight examples of human action and desire which the thesis is unable to accommodate. One of the most significant types of counterexamples are cases of *akrasia* (See Watson 1975, Chislenko 2020). *Akrasia* or weakness of the will is when an agent pursues or attempts to pursue ends which they believe are not good or less good than alternative ends. For instance, if I am woken by my alarm and know that I should get up, but I go back to sleep because I am lazy and have failed to act in accordance with my better judgement, then I have performed an akratic action. This phenomenon is seen as contradicting the guise of the good thesis, since the akratic agent either desires something they consider to have no goodness or desires something in a way that treats it as having more value than one considers the thing to have.

However, this problem can be addressed by distinguishing between the content and attitude versions of the guise of the good thesis. As we have pointed out, one does not necessarily need to believe an end to be good in order to take the attitude towards it that it is good. Infants take ends to be good and consequently desire and pursue ends without the cognitive resources to have beliefs. If pre-reflective valuing is able to form desires and inspire actions without the aid of beliefs in the thing's goodness, then all we need to square the guise of the good thesis with akratic examples where one pursues an end one believes to not be the good option is to illustrate how one's non-evaluative pre-reflective valuing can override one's beliefs. Ironically cases of *akrasia* are examples of just such a phenomenon.

The Müller-Lyer illusion, which shows two lines that are equal in length but appear to us as longer and shorter than each other, is often presented as an illustration of how things can appear one way while we simultaneously believe they are another way (Tappolet 2003, 111; Tenenbaum 2020, 231). While this illustration is about non-normative matters, it can be used as a template for how our belief about and attitude towards the exact same thing can diverge to the point where one's beliefs are opposed to one's pre-reflective perceptions at the exact same time.

Let us now turn to normative examples about a thing's value which outline how taking an end to have a favourable appearance can cause us to pursue an end while we simultaneously believe that we should not pursue that end. Advertising is able to sway people and make one want a product one knows is bad for them. When successful, this kind of advertising seems to change one's attitude and one's behaviour not by using reasoning but playing on what one's mind finds salient —the association of the product with celebrities, flattering tastes and sounds, and a flashy or suave presentation. Similarly, as depicted in Dostoyevsky's *The Gambler*, a person can be fully aware that it is irrational to spend large sums of money gambling and chase their losses but continue to do so due to the addictive feeling of winning which makes far more salient one's distorted perception of the value of continuing to gamble than one's beliefs about the efficacy of continuing to gamble. Lastly, imagine you are stranded in a desert dangerously dehydrated and you suddenly see a sheet of water far off in the distance. However, because of your map which you know to be accurate, you believe there is no water in that direction and that a real water source lies much farther away in the opposite direction. Even though you think the nearby oasis is a mirage, your uncontrollable thirst causes you — like a sailor upon hearing the song of the sirens — to start moving towards the mirage. It is obvious that here the individual pursues the mirage because, in spite of their beliefs about the mirage, they on some level take and perceive it to be real and valuable.

Therefore, these examples of *akrasia* show that, as Tappolet argues, we can explain and make intelligible cases of *akrasia* by conceptualising akratic action as action performed according to one's perception of an end's value when this perception differs from one's evaluative judgement of the end's value (2003, 111). In light of this, not only does akratic action involve one taking an end to be good, but cases of *akrasia* actually support the attitude version of the guise of the good thesis. For it is hard to explain how *akrasia* is possible without a person on some level taking the pursued lesser end to be good or valuable.

Another especially powerful type of counterexample to the guise of the good thesis are cases of perversion or of the pursuit of evil (See Stocker 1979, Velleman 1992). I will focus on purported cases of *de dicto* pursuit of evil (where evil is pursued because one desires evil for its own sake) as opposed to cases of *de re* pursuit of evil (where an evil end is pursued but not because one desires evil), as the former presents a much more significant challenge to the guise of the good thesis. In order for counterexamples to be effective they must be shown to be realistic characterisations of some of our desires and pursuits. However, a problem for establishing the credibility of cases where someone pursues badness for its own sake is that that person should pursue badness in all of its forms (Tenenbaum 2017, 11). Two cases which are frequently appealed to as *de dicto* pursuits of badness are Satan (illustrating someone who is fully evil and rotten to the core), and a young Augustine who stole pears from an orchard not for profit or food but for the wrong of stealing itself. Yet it is not the case that Satan and Augustine pursue badness in every form; Satan does not play the violin out of tune or devise incredibly flawed ways of stealing people's souls, and Augustine does not try to eat pears by shoving them into his ears. Nevertheless, it still seems reasonable to say that Satan and Augustine are pursuing moral evil and perversity for its own sake, which is a particular kind of badness that is related to but distinct from other kinds of badness. Not also pursuing other kinds of badness may make them irrational, but it does not make their morally bad pursuits impossible or implausible.

A particularly persuasive reading of Satan's and Augustine's motivation argues that they pursue evil out of rebellion and an attempt to assert their freedom and independence (Anscombe 2000, 75; Tenenbaum 2017, 12). One might conclude from this that Satan and Augustine are not pursuing evil per se. However, it is questionable whether there is any real difference between evil and extreme rebellion or the unsubmissiveness of one's will in relation to some kind of just authority. Perhaps Satan is an archetypal figure of evil precisely because each entails the other, with evil intrinsically involving the attempted expression of absolute and unconstrained freedom, and this extreme rebellion and untrammelled freedom necessarily devolving into profound wickedness.

The challenge which arises from Augustine's and Satan's *de dicto* pursuit of evil is that it forces the proponent of the guise of the good thesis to say that in pursuing evil Augustine and Satan must be accepting something along the lines of 'Acting badly (performing a bad act) is good (is a good act)' (Tenenbaum 2017, 9–10). This is a manifest contradiction which cannot reasonably be attributed to figures like Augustine and Satan who are not known for being debilitatingly illogical and would have recognised this glaring inconsistency. For if they were so intellectually incompetent as to not realise that thinking that a bad act is a good act is like thinking A is not A, then how would they be able to produce coherent sentences and outsmart others. However, the attitude version can yet again be used to resolve this problem and prevent Augustine and Satan from being at least explicitly committed to this contradiction. As Tenenbaum outlines, the manifest contradiction relies on 'good' being in the content of Augustine's and Satan's attitude along with 'acting evilly' or 'being evil' (2017, 13). Yet according to the attitude version, 'good' does not have to dwell in the content of one's beliefs; rather 'good' is a feature of the attitude itself such that in pursuing something one is implicitly holding that thing to be good without necessarily believing that the end is good (Tenenbaum 2017, 14). Augustine's and Satan's motivation to do evil still involves a contradiction since they implicitly hold pursuing evil to be good, but it is no longer a manifest contradiction. It is a subtler kind of irrationality which can plausibly be attributed to these figures and which one might expect from a flawed character who pursues acts of wickedness.

Therefore, the guise of the good thesis can account for the pursuit of evil for its own sake because the evil agent does not need to consciously think that evil is good. Instead the evil agent only has to have the attitude where they implicitly take evil to be good. Once again, the cases of Satan and Augustine actually support the theory that the agent pursuing evil holds evil to be good. For the pursuit of evil for its own sake seems to require one to, on some level, implicitly take evil to be good or to have some value. It is hard to see how a person could pursue evil if they did not take evil to be more valuable than doing nothing. More specifically, if Augustine did not take evil to be good or perceive value in evil then he could not have written that he 'relished and enjoyed' his sin (1961, 49). He could not have said that if any of the stolen pears touched his lips 'it was the sin that gave it flavour' — that it was the taste or perception of sin that gave the endeavour its value (1961, 49).[17]

These responses of the attitude version of the guise of the good thesis to the above cases also support the reality thesis's clarification of the appearance thesis (that we desire not illusory goodness but what appears to us to be genuinely good). A person desiring an end which they know to be only apparently good over an end which they know to be truly good might seem to undermine the reality thesis's clarification. But, as we have seen, the attitude version can get around this concern because it says one's desire for true goodness is expressed not in one's thoughts but in one's attitude towards the end in pursuing it. A person can desire what they know to be only an apparent good, and at the same time implicitly take this end to be actually good and have value by virtue of their pro-attitude towards the end. Moreover, I previously noted that it seems like to desire a known illusory good over a known good is to take the illusory good to be more good or more valuable than the alternative. For I have argued that desire and pursuit presupposes a valuing of one end over another. Thus, even the desirability of an illusory good seems to originate from it appearing to have *value* and not from it appearing to have a false value.

Determining Our Descriptive Ultimate End

The account of the guise of the good I have defended is a combination of the attitude version and the reality thesis's clarification of the appearance thesis. This says that we implicitly take

[17] It is noteworthy that our desires and pursuits of bad/evil things frequently involve the pursuit of things which are not wholly evil. For example, people choose to watch Riefenstahl's Nazi propaganda film *Triumph of the Will* which is deeply enmeshed with moral evil but could have intrinsic aesthetic value. Explaining how a person desires such objects under the guise of the good is easy since we can say they are desiring the object because of the object's good aspects. Even if one desires the object in part because of its bad aspects then we can explain this part of the desire using the same reasoning as for purely evil things.

an end to be truly good whenever we desire an end. If this is true then it seems like the reason why we desire any end is because we value the end and take it to be truly good. For to desire is at least in part to value, and what causes valuing is taking something to be good.

How does this account of the guise of the good thesis help determine our ultimate end? I think that the ultimate reason why we pursue or desire anything is out of a desire for the good. The guise of the good thesis tells us that whenever one desires an end one desires that end because one takes it to be good. Hence, it seems like whenever one desires an end, one desires it because of and out of a desire for goodness. But could a person implicitly desire this goodness for the sake of another more ultimate end? According to the guise of the good thesis, if a person did desire goodness for the sake of another end then, since they desire this more fundamental end, they would have to in turn desire this more fundamental end for the reason that they take it to be good. Hence, the guise of the good thesis means that the most ultimate end of our desires must be goodness or value, because there cannot be a more fundamental reason why an end is desired other than goodness.

The necessity of goodness as the ultimate end of one's desires seems like a very common-sense idea. In response to the question 'why do you want this?', there are many different possible answers like 'because it is pleasurable' and 'because it is interesting'. But if someone keeps on asking 'why do you want this?' for every subsequent reason given, it seems like you will eventually reach the stage where the only answer you can give is 'because it seems good/valuable' or 'because, as far as I can tell, it is good'. After all, any reason for desiring, like 'because it is pleasurable', appears to implicitly contain the attitude of wanting pleasure because it seems good. For how could anyone desire pleasure if they had a negative or neutral attitude towards pleasure? Furthermore, it seems once you reach the ‘because it is good’ justification, you can only respond to the ‘why do you want this?’ question with the same answer: ‘because it is good’. These identical responses indicate that you have reached your most fundamental standard/motivation because if a person is asked why their most fundamental standard is justified, the only thing they can do is refer back to their ultimate standard since nothing else undergirds it.

However, there are possible objections to the idea that the good being the ultimate end of one’s desires follows from the guise of the good thesis.

I have argued that we desire apparently good ends for the reason that we take them to be truly good and out of a desire for true goodness. In other words, we desire apparently good ends out of a desire for and because we take them to be particular instances of true goodness. Nevertheless, desiring instances of the good is different than desiring the whole good or goodness as such. How do we know that all of our desires are aimed at *the* good, and not just different particular goods at different times? All of our desires are aimed at *the* good because when someone desires something, they desire that thing because they take it to be truly good. Therefore, if one desires something, then they are desiring it as an instance or manifestation of true goodness. And when one desires something as an instance or manifestation of some larger whole *for the reason that* it seems to (partially or otherwise) embody this larger whole, it follows that they also implicitly desire this larger whole. If the association of an end with goodness itself is what causes one’s desire for this end, and one desires goodness itself, then it seems like one’s desire for the whole good or goodness itself is what causes one’s desire both for the end and for the particular instance of goodness which one takes the end to embody.

The kind of goodness I am invoking here as the aim of all our desires is the formal concept of the good. The formal conception of the good is the non-restrictive general or abstract concept of the good (Barney 2010, 46). By 'formal' I do not mean simply something which is only good *de dicto* or referred to as good, but something which is good *de re*. Formal goodness is contrasted with substantive conceptions of the good which represent the content of the good (Barney 2010, 40, 44). Thus, even though we desire things which are not good, these desires can still be characterised as desiring the good because they involve an implicit desire for the formal or general notion of the good. That is, one could have no idea what the content of the good is and still implicitly desire the good by desiring the formal notion of the good. For one's desire of the good is expressed not in the content of one's particular actions and desires but in the very fact and structure of action and desire itself, with desire for the good being necessary for action and desire to take place.

Yet, it is important to recognise that when one desires the formal good (or desires things under the aspect of the formal good), one also desires the content of the good. This is because it is impossible to desire the general category or idea of the good without implicitly desiring *de dicto* whatever its substantive content might be. It is like valuing the idea of the beautiful without also implicitly valuing the embodiment or expression of the beautiful — if a person values a general quality while not valuing in principle true manifestations of that quality, we would question if they really value that general quality. Hence, if one desires things under the aspect of the formal good, then one also implicitly desires these things under the aspect of the substantive good.

These arguments for why we implicitly desire goodness in every instance of desire and the earlier arguments for the guise of the good thesis can sometimes seem to reduce the conclusion being defended to something trivial or tautological. These arguments have the advantage of escaping the empirical problems that beset accounts of desire which claim to be universal — namely, that the diversity of different people's pursuits strongly indicates the pursuit of different kinds of substantive ultimate ends and different ideas of what the content of goodness is. This is because the universal pursuit of formal goodness is compatible with the pursuit of radically different notions of what the content of goodness might be. But this advantage comes with the drawback of seeming to stretch the concept of goodness to something so broad that it becomes too thin and vague to have any relevance.

Nevertheless, Barney highlights the meaningfulness of saying that desire is aimed at the formal concept of goodness by comparing this view with Hobbes's deceptively similar purely subjectivist account of desire (2010, 46). Hobbes's account claims that 'Whatsoever is the object of any mans Appetite or Desire; that is it, which he for his part calleth Good' (Lev. 6.7). Hobbes says everyone considers what they desire to be good, but by 'good' Hobbes does not mean what is 'simply and absolutely' good; rather 'good' is 'The common name for all things that are desired, insofar as they are desired' (Lev. 6.7; DH I.xi.4). The core difference between the subjectivist account of desire and the formal goodness account is their explanatory direction and whether what is desired precedes the good or vice versa (Barney 2010, 46). For Hobbes our desire comes first and then the label of 'good' is then attached to whatever the object of our desire happens to be. But for my account we only desire what we already take to be good. Thus, for the latter kind of account 'desiring is a teleological business governed by intrinsic norms of success. When we desire *there is something we are trying to get right*' (Barney 2010, 46).

Having the formal concept of goodness define these intrinsic norms of success does not make the account trivial, because it retains the significant and contentious idea that our desires are governed by norms which in turn seek to be guided by a larger normative reality that exists beyond the bounds of oneself. It is in a sense a fundamental axiom of desire which precedes any particular instance of desire and cannot be disowned.

To summarise the moves made so far, I have argued that all of our individual desires are aimed at what appears good. Then I argued that because when we desire apparent goods we desire them under the aspect of the true good, our desire for what appears good proceeds from a desire for a particular instance of true goodness. From this I maintained that our desire for a particular instance of goodness is grounded in an implicit desire for the formal concept of goodness or the whole of goodness itself. And lastly, I argued that if one desires the formal good, they will desire the substantive good or what constitutes goodness. This means that one desires what constitutes goodness through one's desire for the formal good and not necessarily because one has an idea of the true substantive good ingrained in one's mind.

To be clear, this is true of all desires and even someone like Procrustes, who tortured his guests for no apparent reason by either putting them on the rack or amputating them so that they would fit the length of a bed, desires and is pursuing the good by doing this. This is because the reason why Procrustes wants to torture people is because he at minimum implicitly takes that end to be good or valuable; otherwise he could not have desired the end. And if the reason why Procrustes wants to torture people is because he implicitly takes this end to be good, then it seems like Procrustes desires this end for the reason that he implicitly desires the instance of goodness he takes the end to represent. Further, given that Procrustes desires this instance of goodness for the reason that it is good and embodies the larger whole of goodness itself, it seems the reason why Procrustes implicitly desires the instance of goodness is because of and out of an implicit desire for goodness itself.

Interim Conclusions

The idea that our desires ultimately aim at goodness itself appears to conflict with the traditional view of the highest good which asserts that one's ultimate end consists in one's own activity. For the concept of goodness is not one's personal good activity. Nonetheless, there is precedent among the ancients for identifying one's ultimate end as goodness itself. Plato appears to claim that the form of the good or goodness itself is the ultimate end of human beings (Rep. 505d; Phlb. 20d). How can we square this idea with the notion that one's ultimate end consists in one's own activity?

We can explain how these two ideas can both be true by employing a subtle distinction highlighted by the Stoics between the *telos* of an individual and the *skopos* of an individual (Annas 1995, 34). Someone's *skopos* is the target they are aiming at and the thing they are trying to hit, whereas someone's *telos* is the hitting of the target and the activity of doing or achieving something (Annas 1995, 34). For example, as an archer, Paris' *skopos* is the object of Achilles' heel, but his *telos* is the activity of striking of Achilles' heel. If we apply this way of thinking to the ultimate end, we could consistently say that on the one hand goodness itself is the ultimate end for humans in the sense that it is the *skopos* or ultimate target which human beings are aiming at. But on the other hand say that goodness itself is not the ultimate end for humans in the sense that it is not the *telos* of human beings. For the *telos* of human beings is the individual's immanent activity when one achieves and hits the ultimate target (*skopos*) of goodness itself, and this activity is not exactly the same as transcendent goodness itself.[18]

The *skopos*/*telos* distinction can also tell us about the constancy of the ultimate end. My arguments that the good is the ultimate end of one's desires mean that one's ultimate end is perfect. For goodness itself is perfect, flawless, or as good as possible. What effect does the perfection of an ultimate end have on the constancy of ultimate ends? One might think that it is impossible for there to be different ultimate ends across time and across individuals, because there is only one end that could ever reach the absolute and uncompromising standard of flawless perfection (Book III, prose 10). Boethius argues that there cannot be two non-identical ends which are perfect or flawless because these two ends must necessarily be different from each other and this difference will, even if ever so slightly, impact the perfection, quality, and desirability of an end (Book III, prose 10). Indeed this argument does demonstrate that the ultimate end is always the same if by 'ultimate end' we are talking about the ultimate *skopos* of a person. After all, one's ultimate *skopos* is goodness/perfection.

But this argument does not guarantee that the *telos* of a person or of different people will always be the same because it is possible that what is perfect or good for one person might change across time or be different for another person. For instance, desire-fulfilment theory says that the good for a person is determined by their desires, and desires can vary. Nonetheless, we can say that the *telos* of a person and of different people will always be the same insofar as it will have the same organising principle. A person's *telos* will always have the same overarching thing which causes it to be one's *telos*, and this organising principle is

[18] The eudaimonism chapter further argues for the deep connection between goodness per se and the individual's good activity.

goodness. Therefore, the ultimate end is always the same if we are referring to one's ultimate *skopos*, and if we are talking about the organising principle of one's *telos*.

The *skopos*/*telos* distinction can be used to address a *reductio ad absurdum* objection to my arguments for goodness and perfection as our ultimate end from abstract reasoning and facts about desire and agency. These arguments seem likewise able to be applied to any living thing which performs actions and has desires. For the only substantive facts about humans my arguments rely on to establish perfection as the ultimate end of humans, are that humans can perform actions and have desires. If we apply these arguments to all living things which act and have desires so that perfection is the ultimate end of all these different kinds of beings, then it implies that beings of these various kinds of species have the same ultimate end. However, it is hard to believe that two radically different kinds of beings like humans and bears could have the same ultimate end.

It does seem like the perfect target (*skopos*) of one kind of being must be exactly the same as the perfect target (*skopos*) of any other kind of being, because in order for that target to be perfect it must be goodness itself. Nevertheless, it seems possible for the activity of a being perfectly hitting (*telos*) the perfect target of goodness itself, to vary for different kinds of beings. This is because the perfection of a being's activity of hitting the target is derived from how well the subject hits the target of goodness itself. And different kinds of beings have different capacities and abilities to perform certain kinds of activities. For example, the best way in which a bear can act in accordance with goodness might differ from the best way in which a human can act in accordance with goodness because human beings have a greater capacity to reason and can engage in activities using this faculty which a bear cannot.

It might appear absurd for animals to desire and be pursuing goodness because they do not have the capacity to represent and comprehend abstract concepts. But just as the attitude version of the guise of the good can allow infants to desire and thus pursue the good through their pro-attitudes and not through propositional representation, so too can it allow animals to desire and pursue the good.

Therefore, in this section I have argued that goodness is the ultimate end of our desires in the sense that everyone always is aiming at goodness and that to achieve this ultimate end is to realise goodness in one's activity.

Goodness

Now that I have defended the existence of an ultimate end by using both abstract and more empirical arguments, let us now investigate whether this ultimate end of human beings is actually good. For the traditional highest good is both descriptively the ultimate end of desire, and normatively what should be the ultimate end of one's desire.

It might seem obvious that the ultimate end of one's desires is normatively good, since goodness is the ultimate end of one's desires. It also may seem that the ultimate end of one's desires is objectively good. After all, one's ultimate end is to hit the target of perfect goodness, for an end to be perfect is for it to be maximally great and as good as possible, and being objectively good seems to be included in what makes a thing as good as possible and maximally great. Hence, objective goodness is also the ultimate end of one's desires. But as we have seen, we can desire things which are impossible. We can want to experience the immortality and bliss of the inhabitants of the Elysian fields even if the heavenly Elysian fields do not exist. Similarly, genuine goodness might not exist and thus might be impossible to achieve. Thus, just because a commitment to the goodness of our ultimate end is embedded and built into the very process of how we desire and act in the world, this does not mean that it is good to be explicitly or implicitly committed to the goodness of our ultimate end.

Regardless of whether goodness actually exists, the attitude version of the guise of the good thesis tells us that we take all of our ends to be good and therefore that we must take our ultimate end to be good. Moreover, we must always take our ultimate end to be good, since whenever we desire something we also desire our ultimate end. Nevertheless, in order for one's ultimate end to have genuine normative force and for us to know that goodness should be the ultimate end of our desires and pursuits, we need to know that goodness exists. I will address this issue in the next section.

Section Three: Constitutivism

In the first two sections of this chapter I have defended the existence of the purely descriptive conception of the highest good, which claims that there is an ultimate end of our desires. The goal of this section is to establish the truth of the normative conception of the highest good, which claims both that our ultimate end is actually good and that it is the supreme good which our actions should be most fundamentally directed towards. I will attempt to establish the actual goodness of our ultimate end by adopting a constitutivist strategy. In this section I will analyse the structure and effectiveness of constitutive arguments, and will develop two constitutive arguments for the normative authority of one's ultimate end.

Setting

Constitutive arguments generally claim that there are certain features of action which necessarily constitute actions, and therefore ensure that whenever we act we do so out of a commitment to these necessary features of action (Tubert 2010, 656). The two basic kinds of commitments appealed to in constitutive arguments are a commitment to aims, and a commitment to principles. For example, Velleman argues that all our actions have the constitutive or necessary aim of self-understanding, and Korsgaard says that all our actions are governed by the principle of the Categorical Imperative (Katsafanas 2018, 367, 377). Though constitutive arguments usually focus on intentional action, there are other kinds of activities from which constitutive features can be extracted; Street focuses on valuing, and Smith focuses on fully rational action (Katsafanas 2018, 373–74). My arguments concentrate on the constitutive features of desire, and by extension the constitutive features of action since I take it for granted that all action involves some kind of conscious or unconscious desire.

Constitutivist arguments have a two-step structure where they begin by describing a necessary feature of a particular activity, and then seek to derive normative claims from this descriptive account. Constitutivist arguments are only as plausible as the descriptive accounts on which they are based (Katsafanas 2018, 376). If the normative claims generated are from an inaccurate descriptive account of human activity, then the normative claims will likewise be inaccurate.

I have already outlined a constitutive or necessary feature of desire and action when I maintained in the previous section that whenever we desire a particular thing we also implicitly desire and aim at our ultimate end of goodness. The second step in my constitutive arguments is to develop the normative implications of having this necessary feature of desire. Given that my descriptive account argues that our desires and actions are aimed at the good, its corresponding normative conclusion is that we should rationally aim at the good and that one should try to rationally achieve and realise goodness in one's own activity.

In order to determine whether these normative conclusions can in fact be derived from this account of desire I will assess the efficacy of the general structure of constitutive arguments and will consider whether constitutivism has the ability to ground normative claims.

An immediate objection to constitutivism questions why one must engage in the activity which is outlined in the descriptive stage of the constitutivist argument as having certain necessary features. Enoch asks why one cannot be a 'shmagent' and perform 'shmactions' which are actions in every way except in that they do not possess the relevant constitutive feature of action (Enoch 2006, 179). This is analogous to asking why one has to follow all the exact rules of chess, instead of playing a variant of chess which has slightly different rules and does not include some of the necessary features of action when playing regular chess such as trying to checkmate the opponent's king (cf. Enoch 2006, 185). However, Enoch's objection assumes that we can simply decide to perform shmactions instead of actions and be a shmagent instead of an agent, and thereby avoid enacting the constitutive feature of action (Katsafanas 2018, 384). Yet I have argued that desiring the good is a necessary feature of all kinds of actions and desires. Hence, for this shmagent objection to work one would have to show that there are practical alternatives similar to action or desire which do not have the constitutive feature of aiming at the good.

Enoch also questions the plausibility of saying that everyone has a constitutive aim that they consciously care about (2011, 214). But I only claim that people implicitly care about their constitutive aim in the sense that people are causally governed by their constitutive aim and their constitutive aim is the ultimate end of their desires.

The most substantial of Enoch's objections claims that even if our actions have a necessary constitutive aim, this is not enough to establish the normative authority of this constitutive aim and show that we have reason to give our constitutive aim a normatively relevant and non-arbitrary status (2006, 181; 2011, 209). There are two approaches that constitutivist arguments can take — an ambitious approach and a modest approach. The ambitious approach attempts to ground morality or normativity by only using what is constitutive of a particular activity, while the modest approach allows itself to rely on other normative assumptions and reasons for action which are not justified by the constitutivist argument itself (Ferrero 2019, 147). Unlike the ambitious approach, the modest approach has an easy answer to Enoch's challenge. This is because the modest approach only claims to transmit normative authority to one's constitutive aim and not to generate normative authority in one's constitutive aim, and Enoch is primarily challenging whether one's constitutive aim has any normative authority of its own accord (Ferrero 2019, 148, 155). Given that I am trying to justify belief in the highest good and am not necessarily trying to avoid referring to any other source of normativity, I could use either approach. I think both the modest and ambitious approaches are able to support belief in the highest good, but that the modest approach is only able to partially support belief in the highest good.

Modest Constitutivism

Starting with the modest approach, I think we can ground the normative legitimacy of one's constitutive aim in anything that a particular individual thinks they have legitimate normative reason to care about or aim at. That is, the authority of one's constitutive aim can be transmitted from any standard for action or desire that is already accepted as authoritative. This is because I have argued that in order for an individual to care about or aim at anything they must implicitly care about and aim at their ultimate end. And if it is legitimate for an individual to care about X, and caring about Y is a necessary condition for caring about X, then it is legitimate for the individual to care about Y. Hence, because desiring, caring about, or aiming at one's ultimate end is a necessary condition for being motivated by anything and for acting out a commitment to the normative importance of anything, a commitment to the legitimacy of any reason for or against action entails a commitment to the legitimacy of caring about one's ultimate end.

For example, if someone does not think people should consciously pursue the ultimate end of their desires and actions because it is unjustified, then that person thinks that acting in accordance with what is reasonable, true, or justifiable is a normatively legitimate thing to do. But in order to aim at acting in accordance with reason, one must also implicitly aim at their ultimate end. So if aiming at acting in accordance with reason is legitimate then aiming at one's ultimate end must also be legitimate.

A second similar way to ground the authority of one's constitutive aim in accepted reasons is to focus on the desire for one's constitutive aim not just as a necessary component of desiring, but also as a desire which if unjustified makes all of one's desires and pursuits unjustified. The way in which an unjustified ultimate end would make one's desires and pursuits unjustified is from a first-personal perspective, where one's personal reasons for desiring and pursuing are unjustified. An unjustified ultimate end does not make one's desires and pursuits unjustified from an objective perspective. Why is it relevant to talk about justification from a first-personal perspective? We should care about justification from a first-personal perspective because we most fundamentally occupy first-personal perspectives and not objective perspectives. A person can only value an objective perspective from their first-personal perspective.

Velleman describes Bernard Williams's internalism about reasons as claiming that reasons for acting 'must be able to engage a motive that the agent already has' (Velleman 2009, 119, 147). I will not defend reasons internalism because it seems like there could be objective reasons for acting that do not engage the desires or motives of individuals. But I think it is clear that in order for someone to justifiably think that they personally have a good reason for action, the reason must be connected to something which that person cares about and is motivated by. For even if one is convinced that they have an objective reason to do something, in order for someone to justifiably consider it personally a good reason for action, they must care about objective reason or what one has reason to do.

Thus, a motivation is a necessary part of what makes a reason a relevant and legitimate reason for an individual. I have argued that desiring and caring about one's ultimate end is the cause of and reason why one cares about and aims at all other ends. If this ultimate motivation and source of all other motivations is unjustified then it makes all of one's motivations personally unjustified, because the cause and reason why one has all these motivations is unjustified. And if none of a person's motivations are justified, then they cannot be justified in thinking that any reason is a personally relevant and legitimate reason to do something. After all, a motivation is a necessary part of what makes a reason a relevant and legitimate reason for an individual. Therefore, if the ultimate motivation (one's desire for one's ultimate end) which someone necessarily relies on when recognising that they have a legitimate reason to aim at a particular end is itself unjustified, then it compromises the whole process which is used to arrive at a legitimate reason for action or desire.

To be sure, it may be possible for someone to have a personally unjustified motivation to care about a reason, when this reason is an objectively good and relevant reason for action. But there is no way for the individual to justifiably care about this reason without first being justifiably motivated in caring about this reason. For example, it could be objectively good to not murder and a person could be committed to not murdering. But this does not mean that the person is personally justified in having this commitment because their personal motivation and reason for being committed to not murdering is unjustified.

Thus, these two arguments show that if someone accepts that they have any legitimate reason to do or not do something, then they must also accept that they have a legitimate reason to desire and pursue their ultimate end. Moreover, the second argument demonstrates that any reason which someone might use to support the idea that people should not pursue their ultimate aim will paradoxically be reliant on the legitimacy of aiming at one's ultimate end in order for the evidence to have any relevance or legitimacy from any person's first-personal perspective.

The necessity of caring, for the development of personal reasons, can also answer the challenge of whether what an individual thinks they should ultimately desire and pursue, can override the authority of one's implicit and unconscious ultimate end. The need for motivation and desire in order for one to personally recognise a reason as relevant shows that what one thinks should be one's ultimate end must be grounded in one's ultimate end of desire. This is because in order for one to personally think that they should desire and pursue something, they must care about and be motivated by something, and this motivation will by definition be grounded in one's ultimate end of desire. Hence, from one's first-personal perspective one's ultimate end must have at least an equal authority as any other legitimate end, because any recognition of the authority of an end for oneself must be grounded in one's desire for one's ultimate end.

Nonetheless, a limitation of the modest constitutivist strategy's grounding of the authority of one's constitutive aim in existing reasons, is that the strength of a constitutive aim's authority is only as good as the authority of the reason on which it is based. And it is discordant for the most ultimate object of concern for an individual to have its normativity derived from an object of lesser concern. Therefore, the modest constitutivist strategy can establish (if one accepts that they have a legitimate reason to do something) both the normativity of one's ultimate end and that the normative status of one's ultimate end is not lesser than any other commitment one has. But the modest strategy does not necessarily establish that one's ultimate end has supreme normative authority and therefore cannot fully support the normative conception of the highest good.

Ambitious Constitutivism

The ambitious constitutivist approach is naturally harder to defend in light of Enoch's challenge of why we should care about our constitutive aim and why one's constitutive aim has normative authority. Most attempts to ground normativity directly in one's constitutive aim rely on the inescapability of one's constitutive aim (Tubert 2010, 662–63; Ferrero 2019, 155). The two kinds of inescapability employed are natural inescapability (Velleman 2009, 136–37), and dialectical inescapability (Velleman 2009, 137; Ferrero 2018, 113). The natural inescapability response to Enoch's challenge is centred around the idea that not only do we already care about our constitutive aim, but we also cannot help caring about our constitutive aim. For whenever one acts or desires one inescapably aims at their constitutive aim.

Enoch thinks noting that you care about your constitutive aim is an irrelevant response to his challenge of why you should care about your constitutive aim (2011, 215). He says that a person caring about x is not a suitable reason for why that person *should* care about x, since 'noting that I do Φ is never a good answer to the question of whether I should Φ' (Enoch 2011, 215). For the same reason Enoch thinks that appealing to the inescapability of one's constitutive aim is irrelevant because noting that you inescapably Φ is no more relevant than noting that you actually Φ (Enoch 2011, 216). They both lack any reference to normativity and consequently fail to justify an ought claim since they only use 'is' claims. For instance if someone aims at and implicitly cares about gambling or even does so inescapably, then it does not mean that they have an authoritative reason to care about or realise their aim of gambling.

Velleman seems to be aware of this problem and argues that the reason why natural inescapability is important is because, rather than answering, it renders moot the question of whether someone should care about their constitutive aim (Velleman 2009, 137; Enoch 2011, 216). After all, 'you cannot help having this aim, like it or not' (Velleman 2009, 137). However, even if aiming at one's constitutive aim is inescapable, the question of whether one should care about or pursue their constitutive aim is still relevant. While natural inescapability might show that we necessarily aim at a particular end, constitutivism attempts to go beyond pointing this out and tries to show that because we have this necessary implicit aim we should rationally pursue it. If constitutivism did not attempt this then it would be hard to see the relevance of just pointing out the existence of a constitutive aim. The mootness response gives no answer to the question of why we should aim at our constitutive aim in a way that is different from how we already necessarily do. For in order to arrive at these normative conclusions of how we should behave differently with respect to the object of our constitutive aim, we must establish the normative authority of our constitutive aim. For this reason I will not defend the natural inescapability strategy.

The dialectical inescapability response works differently than the natural inescapability response to Enoch's challenge. It points out that simply by asking the question and considering whether we should aim at or desire our constitutive aim, we are still engaging in activities such as aiming and desiring, and therefore are still aiming at or desiring our constitutive aim even when reflecting on the normative authority of our constitutive aim (Ferrero 2009, 309; Velleman 2009, 137).[19] This response initially does not try to give a positive answer to Enoch's challenge. Instead it begins by targeting Enoch's assumption that the reason for aiming at and desiring our constitutive aim must be external and come from outside of the activity of aiming or desiring (cf. Enoch 2006, 186; Rosati 2016, 203). Enoch claims that just as one requires an external reason for playing chess to know if one should care about the constitutive aim of chess, one also needs an external reason for being an agent to know if one should care about the constitutive aim of agency (Enoch 2011, 211). This precludes the possibility of using ambitious constitutivism to provide a reason for caring

[19] In what follows I will defend Ferrero's account of the dialectical inescapability response. I reserve judgement on the effectiveness of Velleman's defence of the dialectical inescapability response.

about our constitutive aim, because the ambitious constitutivist strategy attempts to locate reasons for action internally and within the particular activities from which a constitutive aim has been extracted (Rosati 2016, 203–04).

Nonetheless, Ferrero notes that the dialectical inescapability of agency (which includes aiming and desiring) shows that there is no standpoint external to agency from which Enoch's challenge could be raised and considered (Ferrero 2009, 311; Ferrero 2019, 156–57). This is because in order to occupy a standpoint external to agency, aiming, or desiring, one must suspend these activities and not be subject to their constraints while assessing their justifiability (Ferrero 2019, 157). This means that the challenge of why we should care about our constitutive aim is only intelligible when made internally and from within the practice of aiming, since the only standpoint from which we can develop and address questions about the normativity of aiming or of our constitutive aim is from within the practice aiming itself (Ferrero 2018, 127–28).

Enoch takes issue with Ferrero's and Velleman's use of dialectical inescapability because he thinks they make the mistake of dramatising the conflict between the constitutivist and the sceptic as an 'adversarial duel' where the sceptic is unnecessarily turned into an actual person with a position to defend (Enoch 2011, 219). Enoch provides an example of how such dramatisation can go wrong where there is a paper-sceptic who thinks there are reasons why philosophy should only be written in books and not in papers, but presents her arguments and reasons for this in the form of a paper (2011, 219–20). Although the paper-sceptic writing her arguments in a paper format is self-defeating, it seems clear that paper writing philosophers should still contend with her arguments. So likewise, constitutivists should still contend with the concerns of the sceptic about the normativity of one's constitutive aim.

However, Enoch's example is misguided because it fails to take into account the internal/external standpoint distinction which is essential to the dialectical inescapability response. It is possible to challenge the practice of paper writing from an external standpoint and outside of paper writing, but the dialectical inescapability response relies on it being impossible for us to question the legitimacy of our constitutive aim from a standpoint external to agency. Thus, Enoch's paper-sceptic example is disanalogous with the case of agency's dialectical inescapability, and does not show that dialectical inescapability inappropriately dramatises the conflict between the constitutivist and non-constitutivist.

Nevertheless, Ferrero acknowledges that recognising the dialectical inescapability of aiming at our constitutive aim does not allow the constitutivist to just ignore Enoch's challenge of why we should care about our constitutive aim, after showing that the challenge cannot be answered externally (2018, 130). This is because dialectical inescapability leaves open the intelligibility of an internal challenge within the practice of desiring and aiming (Ferrero 2018, 132). Ferrero says that the internal form of Enoch's challenge can be broken down into two distinct questions — the first-order normative question which asks why one should continue to be an agent and continue to be subjected to the pressures of one's constitutive aim, and the meta-normative question which asks about the source of our constitutive aim's authority (2019, 157–58).

The first-order question in its internal form is intelligible because it is possible for someone to stop being an agent and to stop aiming at their ultimate end by becoming temporarily or permanently unconscious, even if this process by which one exits agency necessarily involves agency. However, when this challenge is made from the internal standpoint it loses much of its power. This is because when someone considers whether they should continue to aim at their constitutive aim, due to standpoint inescapability, they cannot evaluate whether they should continue to aim at their constitutive aim independent of the norms and standards of their constitutive aim (Ferrero 2018, 153). One cannot suspend the authority of one's constitutive aim and stop being subject to the inherent constraints of aiming and desiring while assessing whether one should continue to aim and desire, because the very activities of aiming and desiring involve a commitment to the normative authority of one's constitutive aim (Ferrero 2019, 158). Hence, when the first-order question is made within the practice of aiming it allows the standards of aiming to be seen as normatively authoritative. And if the standards of aiming can be seen as authoritative, then, given that one's ultimate end is a standard of aiming, one's ultimate end can be used to answer the first-order question of why one should continue to be an agent.

There are a few possible follow up objections to this response. Firstly, Enoch does not think that this response to the internal challenge involves a vicious circularity, but he says that the constitutivist needs an explanation for why there is no vicious circularity (2011, 221–22). Ferrero demonstrates that no vicious circularity takes place by noting that the internal response uses the authority of the norms of agency not to show that these norms are authoritative, but rather to show that within agency and *given* the norms or standards of agency one should continue to be an agent and continue to be committed to the standards of agency (Ferrero 2019, 158). Secondly, Ferrero acknowledges that it is possible that the internal norms of aiming and desiring might not support continuing the practice of aiming and desiring (Ferrero 2018, 153–54). For example, if one's constitutive aim was self-destruction then this internal standard would recommend not continuing to be an agent. But if, as I have argued, achieving and realising goodness is the ultimate end of one's desire, then this constitutive aim would support one continuing to be an agent because being an agent seems necessary for achieving goodness.

Thirdly, there are more specific possible internal inconsistencies in one's first-personal internal standpoint, and not just the general internal standpoint of the practice of agency, about whether one should care about the standards of one's constitutive aim. Instead of asking if the standards of one's constitutive aim undermine being an agent, this third objection accepts that we are committed to the standard of one's constitutive aim but notes that we can be committed in a different way to other contradictory standards also from within our internal standpoint (cf. Enoch 2011, 222; 2006, 183–84). One could be implicitly committed to and motivated by one's constitutive aim, but not consciously believe that one should be committed to and motivated by one's constitutive aim. For example there could be an internal inconsistency in a person's standpoint where a person's actions are guided by one's ultimate end of watching paint dry, but that person also thinks they should not care about watching paint dry. Or to return to a previous example, Procrustes, like everyone, ultimately desires the good and therefore desires to not torture people, but he also consciously desires the bad end of torturing people. Why should a person attach greater value to the end of an implicit desire than the end of an explicit desire? If anything, it seems like the explicit desires we develop after reflection are more important to us than instinctual desires which we do not choose or assent to.

Nonetheless, of these two kinds of commitments it is impossible for one to give up one's implicit commitment to one's constitutive aim, and possible to give up one's explicit rejection of the standards of one's constitutive aim. Therefore, the only way a person can avoid this inconsistency is by changing one's explicit commitments to align with the necessary implicit commitments of their ultimate end. However, a person could place more value in their belief that their ultimate end is worthless, than in the combination of consistency and acting in accordance with one's constitutive aim. It seems like if a person's commitment to the explicit belief in the non-importance of one's ultimate end takes precedence over the opposing commitments in their internal standpoint, then they should (rationally) act in accordance with their explicit belief.

Yet, one's implicit commitment to and desire for the good is the most fundamental commitment and desire that one possesses because it is the ultimate end of one's desires. As I have argued, one's commitment to and caring about anything (and therefore one's commitment to any explicit belief), is ultimately derived from and grounded in one's desiring and valuing of their ultimate end. Hence, there is nothing in one's internal standpoint which can come close to challenging or outweighing one's commitment to their ultimate end, because no commitment can exist without reinforcing and validating one's commitment to the ultimate end. Even if a person had no explicit commitments, they would still be implicitly committed to their ultimate end. Therefore, if there is an inconsistency in one's internal standpoint, then one should care more about their implicit ultimate end. For this is one's strongest internal commitment, and one cannot renounce this strongest internal commitment because there is no way of acting or desiring which does not most fundamentally reinforce one's commitment to their value of their ultimate end.

This same ultimate source of desires and commitments argument can be used to address the potential issue of there being additional necessary or constitutive aims other than one's ultimate end. If Velleman's or Korsgaard's proposed constitutive aims of self-understanding or the categorical imperative also exist, then it seems the ambitious constitutivist strategy can establish their normative authority just as it did for our ultimate end. But even if we are also committed to the authority of these other standards, these aims are not what grounds all other commitments. Therefore these standards have less authority than our ultimate end from our internal standpoint because we are less committed to these standards than the standard of our ultimate end.

The meta-normative question about the source of the authority of one's constitutive aim is essentially the same old question about why one's constitutive aim has normative authority. But it becomes quite a different question when presented in its internal form within the standpoint of aiming and thus within the standards of aiming and one's constitutive aim. It is a kind of Trojan horse strategy where instead of asking from an external standpoint what reason we have to consider our constitutive aim normatively significant, one acknowledges their reliance on the standards and authority of their constitutive aim when questioning and then from within this internal standpoint one attempts to expose inconsistencies and problems with seeing one's constitutive aim as authoritative. This is why instead of asking for a justification of the authority of one's constitutive aim, Ferrero's meta-normative question asks for an *explanation* of its authority (Ferrero 2019, 159).

Constitutivists often attempt to bypass standard or traditional metaethics, with Korsgaard claiming to stand behind and not take part in the debate between cognitivism and non-cognitivism, and Velleman being sceptical of most ways of how metaethics is commonly studied (Silverstein 2016, 239). However, this question forces the ambitious constitutivist to engage with metaethical questions or elsewise show how some alternate method can derive normative claims from a descriptive account about the nature of agency without recourse to norms. It appears one's constitutive aim must at minimum be actually and truly good for it to have normative authority. For it is hard to see how one can extract normative content out of a purely descriptive and non-normative account (Silverstein 2016, 229). It is beyond the scope of this chapter to engage with all the different attempts by constitutivists to ground normativity, but it seems to me that a reasonable answer to the meta-normative question would need to ground the authority of one's constitutive aim in the authority of objective ethical truths which are true independent of whether they are the ultimate end of people's aims and desires. For alignment with objective goodness would allow the robust and thicker authority of moral obligation to be grounded in the authority of one's constitutive aim. But a non-objective goodness seems like it could be too weak a source of authority to justify the stronger claims of moral obligation.

My explanation of the robust authority of one's constitutive aim is for it to be truly good and to be aligned with independent objective normative truths, but how do we know that this explanation is true? To answer this question we can use the same internal/external standpoint distinction strategy we used to answer the first-order normative question. One has no way of knowing whether goodness or objective goodness exists outside of one's first-personal perspective. This is because we cannot occupy what Nagel called a 'view from nowhere'. One could think that one is looking at the world from a purely objective God's-eye view of the world, but any imaginative attempt to adopt this perspective must still take place from within one's first-personal perspective. Given that we cannot adopt an external standpoint outside of our own first-personal subjective point of view, we can only try to determine the existence of goodness within this internal personal point of view.

Does goodness or objective goodness exist within our internal standpoint? It is possible for someone to be sceptical of the idea that goodness or objective goodness exists and the idea that one's constitutive aim has any normative authority. However, as I argued previously, we are committed to the authority of our ultimate end. To be committed to the authority of a thing is to treat it as something which exists and to be committed to its existence. I have argued that goodness/perfection is the ultimate end of our desires, and that the perfection of our ultimate end means that it is in theory objectively good.[20] Therefore, because we are committed to the authority of our ultimate end, we are committed to the authority and existence of goodness and objective goodness. This does not demonstrate that goodness or objective goodness exists from an objective standpoint, but it demonstrates that we are committed to the existence of goodness and objective goodness.

I have argued that one's commitment to the authority of their ultimate end is stronger than any other commitment one can have. Thus, because goodness and objective goodness is one's ultimate end, within one's internal standpoint, one's commitment to the existence, authority, and value of goodness and objective goodness supersedes all other commitments. This justifies the meta-normative explanation of the authority of one's constitutive aim which grounds its authority in the authority of objective ethical truths, because we are both necessarily committed to the existence of objective goodness and its identification with our ultimate end. It also justifies the supreme goodness of one's ultimate end as that which all actions should be directed towards, because one cannot determine what is supremely good outside of one's internal standpoint, and within one's internal standpoint one is inescapably most strongly committed to the normative authority of their ultimate end.

[20] See desire-fulfilment chapter for a non-perfection-based argument that we necessarily treat our ultimate end as objectively good.

Conclusion

In summary, in this section I have used constitutivist strategies to bridge the is-ought gap and argue that one's ultimate end has normative authority and is objectively good. I argued that a modest constitutivist approach is able to demonstrate the goodness of one's ultimate end, but only on the condition that the person who is considering the argument already accepts that they have a legitimate reason for doing something. However, this strategy does not demonstrate the supreme goodness of the ultimate end, because it does not show how the strength of the authority of one's ultimate end can exceed the authority of one's already accepted reasons for action.

I also argued that an ambitious constitutivist approach can ground normative claims. I maintained along with Ferrero that the dialectical inescapability response to Enoch's challenge of why one's constitutive aim has normative authority allows the standards and commitments of aiming must be seen as authoritative. And since the pursuit of one's ultimate end is a constitutive feature and necessary standard being aimed at in the practice of aiming, I argued that the standard of one's ultimate end can be used to answer the first-order normative question of whether one should continue to be subjected to the pressures and commitments of desiring and acting. Then I addressed the meta-normative question which asks about the source of the authority of one's ultimate end, and contended that the authority of one's ultimate end can be explained through its alignment with independent objective normative truths. To justify this explanation I used the same approach as the earlier dialectical inescapability argument. I argued that we can only assess this explanation from our internal standpoint, and then claimed that our internal commitment to the existence of objective goodness is stronger than any other internal commitment. Lastly, I argued that ambitious constitutivism can justify the supreme and ultimate normativity of the ultimate end, because it shows that one's commitment to the existence, authority, and value of the standard of one's ultimate end is the strongest commitment one has and is that which grounds all other commitments.

Thus, because it shows that one's ultimate end is what one should rationally most ultimately pursue, my ambitious constitutivist argument establishes the truth of the full normative conception of the highest good.

Conclusion

I began this chapter by arguing in the first section that at any moment of time we only have one ultimate end. That is, we only have one end which is solely desired for its own sake, and is the reason why we seek and wish for all other ends. In the second section, I argued that the guise of the good thesis shows that the good is the ultimate end of our desires and pursuits. This further supports the existence of the ultimate end and helps us more intuitively understand why and how all of our actions and desires implicitly aim at one ultimate end. In the third section I developed two constitutive arguments for our ultimate end having genuine normative authority. Both of these arguments rely on the descriptive account of a constitutive feature of desire I defended in the first two sections when I argued that we implicitly desire our ultimate end whenever any end is desired. I argued that we can ground the normativity of our ultimate end both in existing reasons for action and in one's commitment to their ultimate end. I also maintained that the ambitious constitutivist argument can ground the supreme normativity of our constitutive aim in one's supreme commitment to their ultimate end.

Therefore, in this chapter I have argued that the highest good exists by defending the existence of the descriptive conception of the highest good (an ultimate end of all desires), and then establishing both the goodness and the supreme goodness of this ultimate end.

Part Two: The Content of the Highest Good

Chapter Three: Eudaimonism and Prudential Value

> The poet who declared his opinion at the god's site in Delos, inscribing it on the gateway of the Temple of Leto, distinguished the good, the fine and the pleasant as not all belonging to the same thing… We should not agree with him. For happiness, being finest and best, is the most pleasant of all things.
> —Aristotle

In the previous part of this thesis I argued that the highest good of humans exists. In this second part I will investigate what the content of this highest good is. In the first section of this chapter I will argue for the ancient assumption that the content of the highest good is *eudaimonia*. I will then try to outline the relationship between *eudaimonia*, prudential value, and morality. Lastly, I will defend the idea that *eudaimonia* is justified as the ultimate normative standard of one's action.

The Good Life

Aristotle thought that the highest good of human beings is *eudaimonia* (NE 1095a17–20). *Eudaimonia* is often translated as 'happiness', 'flourishing', or 'well-being', but it can be a rather tricky concept to grasp since we might be inclined to view happiness or well-being as something that is fundamentally subjective and based on satisfied mental feelings (Irwin 2019, 380; Hursthouse and Pettigrove 2022). Given that *eudaimonia* is treated synonymously with living a good life and doing well, *eudaimonia* must involve the whole of an individual's activity and their entire life as opposed to just fleeting moments of happiness (Irwin 2019, 207). Hence 'flourishing' has the advantage of tapping into the idea that one's ultimate end is not confined to a particular state but is a way of living (Annas 2001, xx). Another term which is helpful in illuminating the meaning of *eudaimonia* is '*makarios*' or 'blessedness' which is interchangeable with *eudaimonia* (Annas 1995, 44). A blessed life, compared to a happy life, seems to better reflect some of the criteria of the highest good like completeness and self-sufficiency, while still retaining a common-sense appeal and sense of pervasive desirability.

Aristotle acknowledges that the notion that *eudaimonia* is the highest good is not especially ground-breaking (1095a20–22). *Eudaimonia* is a very general concept and almost everyone in Aristotle's time agreed that *eudaimonia* was the highest good, with the significant disagreements being about how to interpret the content of *eudaimonia*. Given that one's highest good must consist in one's activity, *eudaimonia* or the good life is a very intuitive answer to the question of what our highest good is. For the good life is simply the manifestation of goodness across one's whole life, and it seems like one's entire life going well would be preferable to just a particular time period in one's life going well. Moreover, I argued in the first part that the highest good of humans is to hit the target of goodness, and it seems obvious that a person hitting the target of goodness is to realise goodness throughout their whole life and live a good life.

The alternative to thinking that the highest good of humans is *eudaimonia* is to think that one's highest good is a particular temporal instance of goodness, and is not the overall end of living a good life. This view seems to have been held by the Cyrenaics who maintained that 'the end is a particular pleasure, and happiness [*eudaimonia*] is the aggregate consisting of particular pleasures' (Diogenes II 87). A large part of the reason why the Cyrenaics thought the overall good life is only worth choosing for the sake of the particular good activities included within it, is that they saw the good as a particular kind of pleasure (kinetic pleasure) which cannot endure beyond a given moment (Diogenes II 88, X 136). However, even if *eudaimonia* has no value independent of the instances of goodness within it, it seems like *eudaimonia* is more valuable than any one instance of pleasure. And if *eudaimonia* is more valuable than an instance of pleasure, then *eudaimonia* is more choiceworthy and therefore is a more fitting candidate for one's highest good.

Commentators have tried to reconcile the superiority of the good life with the Cyrenaics' apparent rejection of *eudaimonia* as the highest good by suggesting that for the Cyrenaics either there is not an extended self which could experience the good life, or each instance of desire only aims at a particular instance of goodness or pleasure and does not ultimately aim at any good beyond this instance of goodness (O'Keefe 2020, 2). Regardless of whether these interpretations are correct, they seem like the only two ways to treat something other than *eudaimonia* as the highest good. The first account of the self as not extending across time is quite radical and hard to accept. For it is common-sense and highly intuitive that one's personal identity holds across time. In the first part of this thesis I argue against the second account and claim that we always ultimately aim at the whole good beyond any particular instance of goodness. Therefore, the highest good of humans is not an instance of goodness but a whole good life or *eudaimonia*.

This chapter does not make any narrow substantive claims about the content of the highest good. The core claims defended in this chapter are that the highest good is *eudaimonia*, and that both *eudaimonia* and prudential value are each the presence of goodness *simpliciter* in a person's life. Goodness *simpliciter* refers to a most basic and unqualified goodness. I will treat 'goodness itself' and 'goodness *simpliciter*' as interchangeable. Notably, this chapter does not rule out subjective theories of the content of well-being. It is conceivable for the content of our well-being to be defined by aspects of our subjectivity like personal desires or beliefs, and also for this kind of well-being to be good in itself. In this chapter I will often assume that there are prudential goods other than virtue since this is by far the dominant view in contemporary philosophy and contemporary society. Comprehensive engagement with the theories that virtue is the only prudential good or is not a prudential good is needed to fully support the above view, but this is outside the scope of this chapter.

Prudential Value and Moral Value

The idea of the good life is so open-ended that it is unclear how it relates to prudential value, and moral/ethical goodness.[21] As outlined previously, our highest good/ultimate end is the hitting of the ultimate target of our desires. In the first part I argued that the ultimate target of our desires is goodness itself. If the ultimate target of one's desires is goodness itself then it follows that hitting the target is the activity of living in accordance with goodness itself. Presumably this activity would have to be good in itself. Furthermore, by definition the highest good is meant to be the most good activity of a person, and an activity being good in itself seems necessary for it to be the most good activity. So if *eudaimonia* is the highest good, then *eudaimonia* must be good in itself. How is the good of a person (the highest good and *eudaimonia*) related to what is 'good for' a person (prudential value), and the moral goodness of a person?

Does being good in itself mean that *eudaimonia* is the same thing as being morally good? It does according to the ancients, because for them morality did not just have to do with how

[21] In this section I will treat 'moral' and 'ethical' as interchangeable.

one treats other people but rather involved all areas of one's life which enable one to live well (Annas 1992, 119, 127; Bloomfield 2007, 4). This is why for the ancients the concept of the good life or *eudaimonia* was itself a fully moral/ethical category, and the question of what *eudaimonia* consists in was the entry point for ethical reflection (Hursthouse and Pettigrove 2022; Annas 1995, 46).

However, our modern intuitions so closely associate ethics with virtue and right action that it sounds ridiculous to say that someone is less ethical or moral because of changes in their well-being they cannot control, like being unjustly thrown in prison. For this reason I will adopt the modern definition of morality, which is centred on right action, over the ancient definition, which focuses more broadly on a right way of living. If goods other than virtue can be manifested in humans, then the good life cannot be the same thing as being moral. But if virtue is the only genuine good which can be manifested in human beings, then the good life will be the same thing as being moral. Irrespectively, being moral forms at least as a part of the good life. For a life which does not include a thing that is good in itself fails to live up to the name of the good life.

Does being good in itself mean that *eudaimonia* is the same thing as being prudentially good? Prudential value or well-being is what is 'good for' someone.[22] It is what is in one's self-interest and what personally benefits an individual. Given that 'well-being' is used in contemporary philosophy to describe prudential value and is one of the translations for *eudaimonia*, one might think that *eudaimonia* and prudential value are the same thing. Indeed the ancients thought that prudential value — one's personal self-interest or well-being — was not just one dimension of the good life, but that it was the same as the good life (Annas 1995,

[22] I will use 'well-being' interchangeably with 'prudential value'.

73; Singer 1993, 24). For it would be strange for something included within *eudaimonia*, flourishing, or blessedness to not be good for the person involved.

Yet most contemporary philosophers contrast the normativity of what is good for a person with the normativity of goodness itself or goodness *simpliciter*, which I have said is the normativity involved in *eudaimonia* or the good of someone. It is said that the crucial difference between 'good for' and goodness itself is, as the name suggests, the 'subject-relativity' of being 'good for', where what makes something good for a person is at least in part the relationship the thing has to a particular person (Campbell 2015, 403). In contrast, plain or simple goodness is impersonal and absolutely good regardless of its relationship to anyone. For example, one might say that it is good for a person to relax and enjoy oneself regardless of whether this activity is good *simpliciter*. There are also subclasses of goodness *simpliciter* such as moral, epistemic, and aesthetic goodness, which appear to not always track with prudential goodness (Tiberius 2015, 158; Crisp 2021). It is plausible that the presence of aesthetic value in something (a painting, an animal, a person) might not be good for that thing. Similarly, it seems good for the guilty defendant to be acquitted, but bad in itself for them to be acquitted because this outcome is morally bad. And it seems like it is morally good to be selflessly charitable like St Francis of Assisi, but charitable acts which put one in a state of poverty seem to not be good for one's personal welfare.

Hence, it is thought that the subject-relativity of prudential value distinguishes the normativity of prudential value from the normativity of goodness *simpliciter*. The subject-relativity which characterises well-being and the good for relation does not necessarily mean that the concept of 'good for' or well-being is determined subjectively and dependent on one's attitudes (Tiberius 2015, 159). However, subjective theories of well-being often capitalise on this aspect of well-being.

Hurka notes that there are two potentially overlapping ways of understanding how subject-relativity makes 'good for' distinct from 'simply good'. Firstly, the relationality of 'good for' can refer to 'the ground of the proposed value' and 'the properties that make something good for you' (2021, 803, 810). This means generally that for something to be good for you it must have some kind of significant relation to you, where it is not the nature of the 'good for' value in itself which makes something good for you, but facts about your relation to it (Hurka 2021, 811). For instance, this relation could be, as it is for Railton, that you find something compelling or attractive such that it has an internal resonance with your attitudes (2003, 47). Or like for Kraut, the relation could be that it contributes towards the full development of your capacities (2011, 70). However, Hurka argues that if what makes 'good for' a distinctive concept is that it involves a certain relation towards someone, then this supposedly distinctive relation can also be true of a thing that is good in itself (2021, 812). For it could be simply good for a thing to resonate with your attitudes or contribute towards your capacities. One might counter by saying that a thing cannot be simply good by virtue of its relationality, and must be simply good by virtue of its intrinsic properties. But Hurka points out that many reject this Moorean view of simple goodness, and that it seems prima facie possible for relational states like knowledge, and successfully interacting with the world to be simply good (Hurka 2021, 812). Hence, this first strategy gives no reason for why 'good for' cannot be included as a conceptual subset within goodness *simpliciter* which differs from other kinds of simple goods because of its relationality (Hurka 2021, 812).

The second understanding of how subject-relativity could make ‘good for’ distinct from goodness itself is for ‘good for’ to express an altogether different value *qua* value and for the relationality of this value to not be in what grounds the value but in the value itself (Hurka 2021, 813). This understanding of subject-relativity would seem more suited to making ‘good for’ distinct from goodness itself. But as Hurka notes it is unclear how a value, as opposed to what grounds or underlies it, can be ‘for you’ (2021, 813). And because no contemporary philosophers of well-being appear to recognise these two different interpretations of subject-relativity, there is no explanation given for how the ‘good for’ value might be in itself relational (2021, 813).

One potential way of explaining how a value can be, *qua* value, relational, is by saying that a value is good for you if you personally have a unique reason or more of a reason to value it. Yet Hurka says this confuses ‘good for’ with agent-relative goodness, which he defines as what is good relative to you or from your point of view and therefore gives you personally a reason or more of a reason to value it (Hurka 2021, 807, 813; Hurka 2003, 611). Agent-relative goodness is different to the good for relation because a thing can be good from your perspective without being good for you (Schroeder 2007, 272–73). For example, it is conceptually possible for states of affairs, like the well-being of an animal, to be good from your perspective but not be good for you (Fletcher 2012, 2). Moreover, it is possible for there to be a conflict between the two concepts, where the sacrificing of one’s own well-being for the sake of others can be good from one’s perspective but not good for oneself (Schroeder 2007, 272–73). Lastly, it is unclear why agent-relative goodness or what someone personally has a special reason to value cannot be good *simpliciter*. The value of agent-relative goodness, while being relational in itself, could again be a unique type of value that is included within the broader category of simple goodness.

One might argue that just as simple goodness was for Moore, ‘good for’ is an unanalysable concept which cannot be explained. It is hard to know if a concept is unanalysable or not, but one way of assessing this is by looking at whether the concept has any explanatory power (Hurka 2021, 813–14). Hurka notes that simple goodness as an evaluative concept can explain and add to merely deontic concepts like ‘fitting’ and ‘ought’ by explaining why it is fitting or why we ought to do something (2021, 814). But it is unclear how ‘good for’ could have a similar independent explanatory power (Hurka 2021, 814).

Thus, since ‘good for’ is an evaluative concept and we have not found any justified way of using subject-relativity to meaningfully distinguish ‘good for’ from goodness itself, it seems like the concept ‘good for’ must in some way derive from the more fundamental concept of goodness itself. This interpretation of the conceptual nature of well-being is the locative interpretation which says that ‘good for’ should be understood in terms of goodness itself and its presence in someone’s life (Campbell 2015, 406).

There are of course many objections to this locative view of ‘good for’. As we saw earlier, Crisp says that kinds of goodness can be manifested at the level of objects, like beauty in a painting, and still not be good for the object in which the value has manifested (Crisp 2021). Yet it seems like we can talk of beauty as being good for a painting, just as we can say that it is not good for a painting to be exposed to flash photography. As Fletcher notes, we use ‘good for’ with reference to similar objects when we say that sand is not good for watches and that sharpening is good for knives (2012, 11). However, this use of ‘good for’ seems to be referring to a thing’s contribution to the attributive goodness of an object (Fletcher 2012, 11). Attributive goodness is the property of being a good kind of thing, like being a good corkscrew, and is typically distinguished from predicative goodness, which is the property of being good.

The connection of ‘good for’ to attributive goodness challenges the locative interpretation of ‘good for’, because a thing can be attributively good without being good in itself. Fletcher suggests that because of this issue, we should restrict the locative interpretation of ‘good for’ to just apply to humans and animals (2012, 12). After all, it seems like attributive goodness is what is good for non-living objects, but it does not seem like the attributive good of a being is necessarily what is good for that being (Fletcher 2012, 12). For instance, even if what it is to be a good kind of human is to promote the continuation of genetic profiles most similar to one’s own, it does not seem like doing this will necessarily maximise a person’s well-being. Thus, we can reasonably limit the locative view of ‘good for’ to only living things and tolerate counterexamples which undermine the locative view for non-living things.

Another class of objections to the locative view generally claim that there is something which is good but when actualised at the level of an individual person is not good for that person. For instance, Sumner contends that since beauty is a kind of goodness, the locative understanding of ‘good for’ means that physically beautiful people ‘are necessarily better off, at least in one respect, than plain or ugly ones’ (1996, 50). Fletcher accepts that this is a plausible conclusion, as it seems like if given the choice one would choose physical beauty over its absence (2012, 9). Notably, according to the locative analysis one does not have to think that physical beauty makes one’s life significantly or even moderately better; it is enough to think that it only slightly increases the goodness of one’s life (Fletcher 2012, 9).

It may not sit well to say that aesthetic value makes a life slightly better than another life which has less aesthetic value and is the same in all other respects. However, the extra aesthetic value that a life has is not a moral value, and does not impact the moral character of a person. Aesthetic value also does not have to impact the fundamental value of an individual person to the point where a more beautiful person is intrinsically better or more valuable than another person. There is a difference between the presence of goodness within a human life, and the inherent goodness of the person themselves, which is the value of a person *qua* person. For instance, someone who knows more than someone else might have more epistemic value in their life than the other person, but it would be odd to suggest that the presence of epistemic value increases the value of the person themself.

If one still thinks, even with these qualifications, that aesthetic value does not and should not make one's life slightly better, then one can avoid this conclusion by simply accepting that aesthetic value is not good in itself. In fact, a strong case can be made for physical beauty to be merely extrinsically good because it is often valued because of its effects, whether in our own minds or the minds of other people. Hence, the locative view does not need to be committed to the idea that being physically beautiful makes one's life better. Regardless of whether physical beauty has intrinsic value or makes one's life better, one's intuitions about whether physical beauty has intrinsic value will likely align with one's intuitions about whether physical beauty makes one's life intrinsically better. And this alignment is all that the locative view requires.

Some have argued that more recognisably moral goods can be abstractly good but not good for an individual. A frequently used example is that it is good that someone is punished for committing a genuine crime, but it is surely not good for that individual to be punished as this decreases their well-being (Kagan 1992, 185; Dorsey 2021, 16). Interestingly, Kagan and Dorsey are openly not concerned with whether punishing a criminal is good in itself, and are more interested in the conceptual difference between personal goodness and absolute goodness that the example illustrates (1992, 185; 2021, 11). Yet, the issue at hand is whether it is possible for something to be simply good and not personally good for someone. So, if punishment is not simply good, the objection has no impact.

A better way of making this objection would be to argue for the simple goodness of punishment by saying that the conjunction of crime and punishment is good on the whole. After all, there are cases where it seems like punishment in the form of imprisonment is worth doing, and if the act of punishment is worth doing then there must be some intrinsic goodness brought about by the punishment which outweighs the intrinsic badness of harming the criminal (Hurka 1998, 310). However, punishment itself, taken independently of whether a genuine crime has been committed, cannot be intrinsically good because the punishment of an individual is not good if no crime has been committed. Then what is it, if not punishment, that outweighs the intrinsic badness of harming the criminal? A reasonable answer seems to be that the goodness of justice brought about by punishment outweighs the harm the criminal undergoes. The advantage justice has over mere punishment is that the goodness of an act of punishment corresponds with whether the act of punishment is a just act or not. Taking this into account we can reframe the initial objection to the locative view this way — justice is good *simpliciter*, but a particular manifestation of justice is not good for an individual on the receiving end of the punishment imposed by justice.

When reframed in this way it is easier for the locative theorist to explain the disparity between impersonal goodness and personal goodness. The first reason why this particular manifestation of justice is good abstractly but not good for the individual being punished is because it is an imperfect manifestation of justice. It is imperfect because a society in which no one commits crimes or does wrong is more just and more good than a society which pursues the most just response to unjust events. Hence, if the manifestation of the good of justice were perfect then the criminal would have never committed the crime to begin with, and they would not need to be punished and have their well-being impaired. The second reason why the realisation of imperfect justice is bad for the criminal is because the goodness of imperfect justice is manifested in and derived from its impact on society as a whole and not just from its impact on the criminal.

The St Francis counterexample is another instance of the ‘good does not entail good for’ critique. It contends that while St Francis’s life was morally good, his life was not good for him in the sense that his own personal welfare was not significantly high (Feldman 2004, 10–11). However, it is understandable for moral goodness to not always be prudentially good for a person, because it is possible that there are multiple goods other than moral goodness which are included in the good life. That is, too much virtue can be bad for someone because overemphasis on a part of the whole is not conducive to the good of the whole. One can have too much of a good thing. Thus, it is entirely reasonable that not properly proportioning one’s life towards the value of different goods can be not good for a person.

Another, more extreme, way of formulating the conflict between morality and prudential value is to argue, as Wolf does, that you cannot be maximally moral (a moral saint) and have maximal well-being (1982, 419). It is for this reason that Wolf contends that being a moral saint is not the sole ideal with which to assess one’s life and that we have good reasons for not acting in accordance with the ‘moral point of view’ as much as possible (1982, 437).

Wolf says the reason for this conflict is not so much logical as it is practical (1982, 421). After all, if at any point in time the moral saint intentionally gives precedence to non-moral goods over moral goods, then they seem to diminish their level of moral perfection (Wolf 1982, 424). For example, if the moral saint chooses to sleep any longer than is necessary to function morally well or engages in any non-moral activities like playing sport, reading, or socialising for any reason other than for their instrumental moral value, then they will be compromising their level of moral goodness. The moral saint does not need to dislike these non-moral goods, they just cannot value them for their own sake. Hence, Wolf's point is not that particular tricky situations, like a judge being threatened by the mafia, cause morality to conflict with prudential value; it is that beyond a certain threshold of moral goodness, being moral necessarily reduces one's well-being.

I think this conflict between an extreme level of moral goodness and one's well-being is unavoidable. For sacrificing one's health or subjective satisfaction (two apparent prudential goods) will always free up time and resources to be spent on advancing the good of others. And the moral saint is obligated to only devote time or resources to their own well-being to the extent that increasing parts of their own well-being instrumentally increases their own moral goodness. One might think this indicates that well-being is not simply good, because it means the presence of a form of simple goodness in a person not only fails to be good for them but is actually bad for them. But again, it is possible for one type of goodness to be emphasised to the point where it crowds out the other kinds of goodness included in well-being. Hence, the conflict between extreme moral goodness and non-moral prudential goodness does not show that well-being is not simply good. However, it does indicate that an extreme concern with morality or the interests of others cannot make up part of well-being because an extreme commitment to the good of others requires one to ignore goods (other than being moral) which appear to contribute to one's well-being.

Lastly, another objection to the locative view is the inverse of the 'good does not entail good for' critique. This objection claims that something can be non-instrumentally good for a person and at the same time can be not good *simpliciter*. For example, one might argue that the pleasure a masochist gets from inflicting pain on someone else is morally wrong but is good for the masochist, since pleasure is a simple good (Fletcher 2012, 18; Feldman 2004, 39). We can respond to this is by saying, just as we did for the previous objection, that the simple good of pleasure can be bad for someone when pleasure has a severely negative impact on other elements of the good life like virtue, and therefore causes an imbalance in the different goods that constitute the good life which is not conducive to the good of the whole. Thus, we can say that immoral pleasure is not good for a person because for something to be a good part it must be good in relation to the whole in which it is manifested.

In summary, these objections fail to show that there is any normativity involved in what is prudentially good for a person other than goodness itself and whatever its subcategories might be such as moral and aesthetic goodness. Therefore, the highest good or *eudaimonia* of a person is conceptually the same as the well-being or prudential good of a person because they are both the presence of simple goodness in one's life.

The equation of *eudaimonia* with well-being means that being moral also forms at least a part of a person's well-being. For I argued at the start of this section that being moral forms at least part of *eudaimonia*. Yet, assuming that there are non-moral prudential goods, being moral also constitutes no more than a part of a person's well-being and there is a threshold at which moral behaviour starts to not be good for a person.[23]

Egoism

The conflict between perfect morality and well-being, outlined by Wolf, raises questions over the justifiability of *eudaimonia* as the normative ultimate end of one's desires. It indicates that treating one's *eudaimonia* as the ultimate standard by which one should evaluate how one should act is lacking in normative authority, because it seems to prioritise one's own well-being over the well-being and interests of others. One's well-being as the ultimate standard has a similar problem to that which being moral would have as the ultimate standard of one's action (if there are non-moral prudential goods). Morality, as the ultimate standard, would be unable to recognise the value of goods other than virtue which contribute to one's personal well-being. As Wolf puts it, the moral saint's interests outside of morality 'are not simply sacrificed but removed, suppressed, or subsumed' (1982, 424). Hence, it seems reasonable to put limits on the extent to which one values morality.

Should there be similar limits on the extent to which one values *eudaimonia* and treats it as an ultimate standard? In the remainder of this chapter I will argue that we should not place limits on the valuing of *eudaimonia* because one can properly value the interests of others with the good life as one's ultimate standard.

The main problem with *eudaimonia* as one's evaluative ultimate standard is that this framework seems far too egoistic. Many theories of *eudaimonia* attempt to avoid the egoism

[23] If there are no non-moral prudential goods, then being moral is equivalent to well-being.

charge by including other sources of value within the framework of eudaimonism and regarding virtue, respect for the interests of other people, and a concern for what is good in itself to be an integral part of what the content of *eudaimonia* consists in. If virtue forms part of *eudaimonia* then in order to achieve what is good for oneself, one must become virtuous and care about the well-being of others. For example, this would mean that one has reason to give to charity, not cheat on one's taxes, or volunteer to support a foreign nation in a just war. Moreover, if virtue forms part of the intrinsically valued whole of *eudaimonia*, the eudaimonist can care about virtue and the well-being of others for its own sake.

This response works against a basic version of the egoism charge. However, there is another formulation of the egoism charge which attributes a structural egoism instead of a substantive egoism. For instance, Hurka has argued that any ethical theory which grounds an individual's motivation and reasons for action in their own flourishing is 'foundationally egoistic' (2001, 232).[24] After all, even if someone is aiming at virtue for its own sake, it seems like if one's underlying reason for being virtuous primarily comes from a concern for one's own well-being, then it prevents a genuine virtuous concern for another person by ultimately turning one's concern for others into a concern for oneself. One could try to respond to Hurka's objection by making a similar move to the previous one and noting that if virtue is included in *eudaimonia* then a virtuous motivation is also a necessary part of *eudaimonia*, because someone cannot be truly virtuous if they only pursue virtue for their own personal gain. Consequently, it could be argued that while one's own interests might motivate one to pursue virtue, once one recognises that a virtuous motivation (a genuine concern for others and what

[24] For simplicity in this section I will use 'ethical', as many of the authors cited do, to mean any normative theory of action and not a moral theory which is solely concerned with the interests of others.

is good in itself) is needed to be fully virtuous, one will adopt or try to adopt a virtuous motivation (Annas 2007, 209–10; Hurka 2001, 246).

Nevertheless, Hurka claims that this new selflessly virtuous motivation taken together with the original egoistic motivation makes the ethical theory ‘self-effacing’. A ‘self-effacing’ theory tells people to not be explicitly motivated by and to not pay attention to their primary reason for being motivated in the first place because directly aiming at this goal will be counterproductive (Hurka 2001, 246). Self-effacement can exist at a societal level where a select few have a clear vision of the goal of an ethical theory and manipulate everyone else into promoting this aim without full knowledge of what they are promoting (Annas 2007, 210). And it can exist at an individual level where there is a split in one’s practical reasoning, with one part of the person being aware of the outcome it is trying to achieve and pulling strings behind the scenes to get the other part of the self to promote the aim of the enlightened part without knowing that it is doing so (Annas 2007, 211). Eudaimonism which values virtue for its own sake appears to be self-effacing because, on the one hand, it says that the reason why one should care about the well-being of others is because it promotes one’s own *eudaimonia*. But on the other hand, in order to be truly virtuous and achieve *eudaimonia*, the theory claims that one must act as if one does not care about the well-being of others for the sake of one’s own *eudaimonia*. Hurka argues that the problem of individual self-effacement is even worse for a eudaimonistic ethics that takes virtue to be intrinsically good than consequentialism (2001, 247). Consequentialism is only allegedly self-effacing because consciously using the consequentialist method of reasoning happens to not generate the best outcomes. But for eudaimonism, Hurka says that a virtuous motivation necessarily conflicts with the original egoistic motivation (2001, 247).

Annas takes issue with Hurka's conception of egoism and his assertion that a person's motivation is egoistic merely because one is aiming at their own flourishing (2007, 209; 2001, 232). Instead, she says that an egoistic motivation is where one tries to aim at their own flourishing *and* one's interests are put first ahead of the interests of others (Annas 2007, 213). An example of this eudaimonistic egoism could be Epicurus's ethics, where *eudaimonia* is one's personal pleasure and this makes all other motivations subordinate to this aim. This is an important distinction and Annas's understanding of egoism isolates many of the negative aspects we associate with egoism. But I still think an ethical theory which is focused on an individual's well-being and takes the good of the self as its primary motivation can be appropriately described as egoistic or self-centred. Regardless, the real issue at hand is whether ultimately aiming at one's own flourishing deserves any of the negative connotations we associate with egoism.

Annas does not think that there is any problematic self-effacement in eudaimonistic theories where virtue is included in *eudaimonia*, because she does not think that this kind of theory is objectionably foundationally egoistic (2007, 220, 213–14). Annas says that to aim at one's own virtue is just to try to be virtuous in living one's own life, and that it would be objectionable for one to try to live the lives of others (2007, 220). This makes sense and I will echo a similar sentiment later in this chapter. Nevertheless, Annas appears to miss Hurka's concern outlined previously about whether genuine virtue conflicts with eudaimonism's foundational priority of one's own well-being. At the very least, there seems to be a tension between the foundational self-centredness of eudaimonism and the subsequent other-centredness of eudaimonistic theories which value virtue for its own sake. In particular, when the eudaimonist is justifying their ethical theory after learning to be motivated by virtue for its own sake, it seems odd for them to start with their personal well-being and to say that the reason why someone should care about morality and the interests of others must ultimately be traced back to and grounded in one's own personal well-being. After being enlightened by the intrinsic value of virtue and being motivated to be virtuous and serve the interests of others for its own sake, one's original goal of achieving one's personal good, which was satisfactory at first, now seems like a less-than-optimal ultimate justification. After all, this egoistic foundation means that the interests of others are always secondary and downstream of one's own good.

To be sure, I think that for eudaimonistic theories it is not necessarily incoherent to be concerned with one's own flourishing and concerned with interests of others. This is because when one desires their own well-being, one does not necessarily desire their own well-being in opposition to the well-being of others. In fact, if one truly desires their own well-being, then one would have to be open at the outset to the possibility that a genuine concern for the good of others might be a necessary part of one's well-being. Thus one would have to have no qualms about desiring the good of others as a result of this primary egoistic motivation. I even think that the eudaimonist can intrinsically value the interests of others, since as we saw in the second chapter you can value something for its own sake and also for the sake of something else. But it remains the case that the foundational and supreme principle of eudaimonism is the actualisation of one's own good, and not, from the outset, the good of others or what is good in itself. And this suggests that the eudaimonist cannot properly value the interests of others, because the reason the eudaimonist has for intrinsically valuing the good of others is reducible to a concern for oneself.

Thus, in line with Hurka, I think it is fair to describe the eudaimonist's primary egoistic motivation and subsequent altruistic motivation as not fitting together well and being in tension with each other. This tension between the altruistic and egoistic motivation along with the primary position of the egoistic motivation greatly undermines eudaimonism's status as an ethical theory, because it gives one's personal good foundational priority over the good of others.

However, it is possible for the eudaimonist to get around this problem by looking to the principle of *eudaimonia*.[25] The organising principle or principles of *eudaimonia* is what makes one's life good as a whole and what confers goodness on the parts which make up a good life. In other words, living and acting in accordance with this overarching principle is what makes one's life good. For instance, if the organising principle of the good life is knowledge, then a good life will involve the cultivation of knowledge and activities which are oriented towards this good. According to the locative view, well-being or what is good for a person is the presence of simple or intrinsic goodness in their life.[26] This means that *eudaimonia* and what makes someone's life *eudaemon* is the presence of intrinsic goodness. Therefore, the organising principle of the good life must be intrinsic goodness. Or if there is no single unified principle of intrinsic goodness, then the good life must have multiple organising principles which, when they come together, form intrinsic goodness.

By being motivated by one's own *eudaimonia*, one is obviously aiming at one's own good life. But one is also necessarily aiming at and devoting oneself to the principle of one's *eudaimonia*. To be sure, someone could only explicitly care about immanent goodness in their life and not the overarching principle of transcendent goodness. You could only care about pleasure in your life without caring about the transcendent value of pleasure

[25] I do not claim that all eudaimonists think this way about the organising principle of eudaimonia; rather my argument is that if one is a eudaimonist then one should think this way.
[26] I will now treat simple and intrinsic goodness as equivalent given my argument in the previous section.

independent of its instantiations. However, aiming at and being devoted to transcendent goodness is entailed by the pursuit of the immanent goodness of *eudaimonia*, because one's immanent life is made good by living in accordance with the transcendent principle of goodness. That is, by aiming at the good life one is implicitly aiming at and committing oneself to the organising principle which is actualised through the realisation of the good life and is the necessary condition for achieving the good life; just as desiring a bad life necessarily involves a commitment to the principle(s) of badness, or desiring a life of knowledge necessarily involves a commitment to the value of knowledge.

The reason why it follows that the eudaimonist must implicitly value ideas like the principle of the good life is not because their mind explicitly takes an attitude towards this concept. Rather it is because the concept that one's mind does explicitly take an attitude towards (one's *eudaimonia*) is necessarily connected to other concepts regardless of whether one thinks this relationship between the two concepts exists. For example, someone wanting to be the best sailor involves commitments to what it means to be a sailor regardless of whether that person recognises the relationship between being a good sailor and those other commitments. One might say they want to be a good sailor and also say that they do not care about the skill of tying knots or clear communication. However, these things are integral to being a good sailor, so this person does actually care about these skills. Thus, one can take an attitude towards concepts one is not even aware of via and simply by virtue of the relationship between the concept one does recognise and other concepts.

Does it follow from the eudaimonist's implicit devotion to the value of intrinsic goodness that they implicitly value intrinsic goodness not only in their own life but also value its presence wherever else it can be manifested? It is certainly possible for someone to value a good without implicitly valuing its instantiation in other places. One can value rest for an instance without valuing rest in all instances of one's life and in the lives of others. The reason why one does not have to be universally devoted to rest is because one's devotion to the value of rest could be nested within the devotion to a higher principle or larger activity like health or a good life. Hence, it is possible for one to only care about the principle of goodness in a limited way and only in one's life, if one also is devoted to a principle other than goodness which takes precedence over goodness in some cases. But according to eudaimonism, the supreme and foundational principle of ethics is one's own *eudaimonia*. And as I have outlined, to be committed to one's *eudaimonia* is to be committed to the principle of intrinsic goodness because a good life is one devoted to intrinsic goodness. This means that for the eudaimonist there is no circumstance in which a principle takes precedence over intrinsic goodness. If this is the case, then the eudaimonist must value intrinsic goodness outside of their own life and in an unlimited way.

Consequently, we can show how in a eudaimonistic framework the good of others can be included from the start within the primary motivation to pursue one's *eudaimonia* through a double movement. The first is to recognise that to ultimately aim at the activity of the good life is to ultimately implicitly value and be committed to intrinsic goodness, because intrinsic goodness is the organising principle of the good life and is what a good life is ultimately committed to. The second step is to realise that because the eudaimonist is most ultimately committed to the value of goodness, they implicitly value and are committed to the manifestation of goodness in an unlimited way which therefore includes the manifestation of goodness in the lives of others. The good of others is simply the presence of goodness in their lives. For I have argued that the organising principle of a person's *eudaimonia* is intrinsic goodness. Additionally, if what is good for an individual is the presence of intrinsic goodness, then it seems reasonable that the organising principle of the common good is intrinsic goodness and what is good for a collective of all people is also the presence of intrinsic goodness. Hence, the eudaimonist's valuing of the good of others and the common good is already implicit in the valuing of their own *eudaimonia* because (1) to ultimately value the good life is to ultimately value its organising principle, and (2) if you ultimately value the principle of goodness then you must implicitly value the manifestation of goodness elsewhere in the lives of others.

Again, someone could still consciously pursue their individual good without consciously pursuing the good of others, because they do not recognise that the pursuit of one entails the pursuit of the other. But the two-step relationship I have outlined between one's individual good and the good of others, means that pursuing one's good entails the pursuit of the good of others just as pursuing being a good sailor entails the pursuit of being a good knot tyer. Thus, if one is aiming at one's individual good, then one must be aiming at the good of others.

Returning to the case of the egoist who learns the value of virtue for its own sake, we can now retrospectively say that their primary goal of achieving their personal good is not in tension with their subsequent purely altruistic motivation, because the primary goal of *eudaimonia* from the start necessarily entails the motivation to advance the good of others. The inclusion of goodness itself, as something simultaneously within one's good and beyond one's good, in the foundational eudaimonistic motivation is what allows the incongruity between personal goodness and the goodness of others (the self-centredness and other-centredness of eudaimonistic theories) to be resolved.

Moreover, this makes the altruistic motivation significantly less removed from the motivation to pursue one's *eudaimonia*. This is because, unlike clarifications of the content of *eudaimonia*, the desire for one's own good all on its own and independently of any further information about whether virtue is included in the content of *eudaimonia* necessarily entails and necessarily extends to include the implicit desire for the good of others. Instead of deriving new aims which follow from contingent facts about the content of *eudaimonia*, these movements simply reveal what was always being aimed at when aiming at one's own good from the outset. One could argue that new information about intrinsic goodness as the organising principle of *eudaimonia* appears to build in new aims into the pursuit of *eudaimonia*. But this new information clarifies what concept is being talked about by defining its fundamental nature and does not build new content into the concept of *eudaimonia*.

It is noteworthy that having the same organising principle does not erase all of the differences and tensions between one's own good and the good of others. One's own good is still different from the good of others because the locus of one's good is one's individual activity and the living of one's life. Hence, there can be conflicts between one's own good and the good of others. For example, it could be good for a judge to convict a criminal because it is good for a person to act in accordance with justice, but bad for the criminal to be imprisoned. These potential conflicts appear to reveal that we must give priority to either our own good or the good of others in our actions. Nonetheless, it seems like an individual should choose between these two goods by appealing to whether one's promotion of one's own good or the good of others in each particular case embodies more of a commitment to and is more in line with intrinsic goodness. In principle, it makes sense for the action which is more devoted to the value of goodness itself and not any particular good to be the better action because goodness itself is what makes particular goods good. Furthermore, goodness is a better adjudicator than the common good because the common good seems to receive its value from its organising principle of goodness itself and from its manifestation of intrinsic goodness. It seems reasonable that whether Socrates should flee Athens or accept the punishment of the jury should be determined not by his own good, the good of others, or the good of Athens, but by which action is most aligned with goodness itself. On its own this does not tell us what Socrates should do, but it provides a goal for practical guidance to aim at.

The priority of goodness itself over both one's own good and the good of others does not make the resulting ethical framework any less eudaimonistic, because the good life is living in accordance with intrinsic goodness. Thus, by being ultimately committed to goodness itself and wanting to live in accordance with goodness, one is simultaneously being committed to one's own *eudaimonia* because *eudaimonia* is living in accordance with goodness. Accordingly, we can justify why eudaimonism focuses so much on one's own good life by pointing to the fact that one's life and one's personal activity is the locus in which one can manifest their commitment and devotion to the overarching principle of the good.

If giving priority to the good is the same as giving priority to one's own good because one's good is living in accordance with the good, then this means that the foundational principle of eudaimonism, which is a commitment to one's good, is the same thing as one being committed to the good. However, if the foundational principle of eudaimonism is living in accordance with the good, then does it render the good of others and a concern for them downstream of and less foundational than one's own good? The altruistic motivation is necessarily entailed by eudaimonism's foundational motivation to pursue one's *eudaimonia*, and therefore forms part of one's foundational motivation. Yet this account of eudaimonism seems to make the good of others to some extent less primary and foundational than the good and one's own good. Nevertheless, this time the eudaimonist need not feel uncomfortable in admitting the priority of one's own good, because the priority of one's own good is the priority of the good. And it seems entirely justified (at least according to a locative view of well-being) for an ethical theory to first and foremost be concerned with the good when the good is what makes other people's well-being good and justifies one caring about the well-being of others. After all, if the interests and well-being of someone has no value then it is hard to justify valuing it.

Thus, eudaimonism is foundationally egoistic but is justified in being so. It is important to note that there are two ways of interpreting the most foundational principle of a theory, and that when I say that eudaimonism is egoistic I mean it only in the first sense. As a theory which outlines how individuals should act, eudaimonism is foundationally egoistic because it takes one's concern for one's good/the good as primary. But as a theory outlining the nature of value and the reasons for caring about things, eudaimonism is not foundationally egoistic because it takes the good to be the source of the value of one's well-being and the reason why one should care about one's well-being.

Therefore, the ability of eudaimonism to appropriately account for both the value of one's own well-being and the value of the well-being of others strongly supports *eudaimonia* as the most justified highest good or fundamental standard we can use for human action.

Conclusion

In summary, I started this chapter by arguing that *eudaimonia* or goodness across one's life is the highest good. I then argued that prudential value or well-being is the presence of simple goodness in one's life, which means that well-being is the same as *eudaimonia* or the good life. I also argued that an optimal non-maximal level of being moral forms part of well-being/the good life. Lastly, I defended the idea that *eudaimonia* is a suitable normative ultimate end by arguing that it is not problematically egoistic. If *eudaimonia* is the highest good of a person then we can use *eudaimonia* as a lodestar to guide us when evaluating the plausibility of different theories of the content of the highest good.

I argued in the first part of this thesis that descriptively we have a single ultimate end which is the reason why we pursue all things. But even if this is not psychologically true of human beings, it is still worthwhile investigating the content of a purely normative conception of the highest good. For knowing the content of the normative highest good tells us what we should pursue, and thus provides the basis for rational action. And secondly, I have identified the normative highest good with *eudaimonia*, which means that this second part's search for the content of the normative highest good is also an investigation into the independently interesting topic of what constitutes the good life and a person's well-being.

Chapter Four: Objective List Theory

The first hypothesis for the content of the highest good/well-being I will assess is objective list theory. Objective list theory is one of the three major contemporary theories of well-being. Contemporary theories about well-being are relevant theories to be assessed in the proceeding chapters because, due to my argument that the highest good is the organising principle of well-being, these are theories about the highest good.

There are many different ways one can interpret the objective list theory of well-being (Fletcher 2016, 49). In the contemporary literature it is common practice for any theory of well-being which says that there is at least one good that is objectively good for people, is an objective list theory, as long as it does not say that pleasure is the only good (Fletcher 2016, 49–50). However, I will define an objective list theory as one which both claims that there are multiple objective goods included in well-being, and does not outline a specific substantive value which serves as the organising principle of a good life. This is because the view that knowledge or virtue is the only good which makes up well-being or is the single organising principle of well-being hardly seems like an objective list theory.

In the first part of this chapter I will assess objective list theories in which the goods involved in well-being are incommensurable and have no common formal principle which determines the value of these goods. And in the second part of the chapter I will discuss objective list theories in which there are multiple commensurable goods that contribute towards well-being.

Throughout this chapter it is useful to keep in mind four different categories on the monism/pluralism spectrum of how to describe well-being. At the two extremes there is pure monism which says that there is only one substantive value which is intrinsically good for people (e.g. pleasure is the only good), and radical pluralism which says that there are multiple incommensurable values which are intrinsically good for people. In between there is regular pluralism or sophisticated monism which says that there are multiple commensurable values which constitute well-being, with the common value uniting the various values being generic goodness or prudential value. In between this sophisticated monism and pure monism is what I call hierarchical monism. Like sophisticated monism, hierarchical monism says that there are multiple values included in well-being and a single organising principle of well-being. But it differs from sophisticated monism in that it identifies the organising principle of well-being with a specific substantive good (e.g. pleasure, virtue, knowledge, etc.) and therefore is a substantively monistic and not an objective list theory of well-being.

Incommensurable Objective List Theory

Some philosophers, such as Chang, distinguish incommensurability from incomparability and say that incomparability means that there is no positive value relation between two value bearers (2015, 205). A positive value relation outlines how things do compare (x is better than y), as opposed to outlining how things do not compare (x is not better than y). And they consider incommensurability to have the narrower meaning that there is no common *unit* of value which can be used to measure the exact value of two goods (2015, 205). However, I will follow other philosophers like Raz in using the terms ‘incommensurable’ and ‘incomparable’ interchangeably because I do not find the distinction helpful. For it seems in order for two things two be comparable there must in principle be some common measure or scale which enables such a comparison. The common ancient example used to illustrate incommensurability — the length of the diagonal of a square and one of its sides being comparable but unable to be placed on the same numerical scale — is now known to not be an example of incommensurability because real numbers can include both rational and irrational numbers (Chang 2015, 205). Hence, in the remainder of this section I will use the terms 'incommensurable' and 'incomparable' interchangeably. In any case, according to Chang's above definitions, in this section I will argue against the incommensurability of the components of well-being. This means that I will also be arguing against the incomparability of the components of well-being because commensurability requires comparability.

In the first part of this thesis I argued that it is impossible for a person to act if they have two incommensurable ultimate ends. But I have also argued that the good life or well-being is the ultimate end of everyone's pursuits. This means that an incommensurable objective list theory of well-being cannot be true, because if the components of well-being are incommensurable, then one has multiple incommensurable ultimate ends and will be unable to act. I will now consider more possible objections to my earlier argument about the impossibility of pursuing two incommensurable ultimate ends, by looking at arguments defending the possibility of rational or not irrational choice between incommensurable or radically plural values. If there is a way to rationally or arationally choose between incommensurable values then one can act as if there are two incommensurable ultimate ends, and my above argument against an incommensurable objective list theory of well-being will not work.

If there are incommensurable or radically plural values which make up well-being, then it is hard to see how we could rationally choose between these values when they conflict. For instance, consider the scenario where pleasure and virtue are both fundamental values, and these two values are incommensurable because there is no good measure that goes beyond and incorporates the goodness of the individual measures of pleasure and virtue. It appears as though any decision which involves these two values will have to give an arbitrary weighting to the two values.

One strategy used to explain the possibility of rational choice is by appealing to practical wisdom. Nagel argues that practical wisdom or the faculty of judgement gives us the ability to resolve value conflicts in a rational way on a case by case basis, independently of our ability to explicitly outline and recognise general principles which can resolve value conflicts (1979, 134–35). Nagel is open to the possibility that our exercise of practical wisdom can involve the unconscious use of general principles, but says that this unconscious use of general principles is not necessary for the operation of practical wisdom (1979, 135). I do not take issue with Nagel's claim that practical wisdom is able to rationally adjudicate between conflicts of values that we don't explicitly or consciously know how to rationally adjudicate. However, the relevant part of Nagel's argument for our concerns is its contention of the possibility of rational choice between incommensurable values. Nagel gives no evidence for his claim that the unconscious use of general principles is unnecessary for the exercise of practical wisdom. His interest appears to be not in describing the operation of practical wisdom, but in normatively pointing out the dangers of adopting a single general theory which tells us what to think and having an overly rigid systematic theory that excludes all considerations which cannot fit easily into the system (1979, 135–37). As such Nagel does not explain how we could use practical wisdom to rationally resolve value conflicts without implicitly giving a weighting to the incommensurable values. Indeed the reference to practical wisdom seems to just relocate the question of how one can rationally act when different incommensurable values recommend different courses of action to the domain of practical wisdom, without going on to do the necessary hard work of explaining how practical wisdom is able to give such rational judgements while treating multiple values as incommensurable (Mason 2023).

Another strategy which might explain the rationality of choosing between incommensurable values is the super scale approach, which contends that there is some scale or measure we can use to generally compare incommensurable values but also claims that this scale is not itself a 'super-value' (Griffin 1986, 90). Griffin argues that the super scale which should be used to rank and compare values is 'worth to one's life' (1986, 90). It seems obvious that worth to one's life is a value and it is hard to see how something which is itself not a value could possibly have the normative authority to rank values. Nevertheless, Griffin clarifies that by 'super-value' he means a substantive value and not just 'the quantitative attribute "value"' (1986, 89). So we can interpret Griffin as saying that the super scale being used to rank values is a generic formal concept of value or prudential value (Raz and Griffin 1991, 101–02).

While Griffin's super scale strategy may allow rational choice between plural values, it does not allow rational choice between radically plural or incommensurable values. This is because if some kind of generic value is a scale on which we can compare substantive values, then the substantive plural values in question are not incommensurable or incomparable. The same limitation holds for similar super scale arguments like Stocker's employment of a 'higher level synthesising-category' to explain comparison (1992, 172). It enables the pluralist to rationally choose between plural values without accepting substantive monism, but it does this by accepting a sophisticated monism where all plural values are a manifestation of a generic non-substantive value.

A third response the radical pluralist could have is to say that because practical reason does not give us a way of deciding between or weighing incommensurable values, we should ‘plump’ or arbitrarily choose one value over another (Chang 2015, 218). In short, there is no ranking or weighing of incommensurable values which is irrational because there is no rational way of doing this. Chang describes this selection as taking place in a normative void where we are not guided by values and reasons, and says it is akin to how Sartre thought we must choose our fundamental values (2015, 218). In this section we are examining objective list theory and the ability of well-being to be constituted by incommensurable objective goods. So the radical pluralist viewpoint we are engaging with would have to treat its incommensurable values as objectively valuable. Hence, the radical pluralist we are engaging with can only potentially decide what relative weighting the different values will be given, and not whether they are valuable.

However, it seems like there are more and less rational ways of weighing fundamental values. This is especially true for moral values, since it seems like it is not up to you to give virtue a value weighting of virtually zero or 0.1%. Furthermore, even if there were no moral values included in the good life, it seems illogical to weigh and reweigh continually and arbitrarily the most important values of a good life. It feels irrational to treat knowledge as the overwhelmingly superior value for one minute, and then switch to treating pleasure as the paramount value for the next minute, and then switch to health for the next minute and so on. One’s pursuit of different values would likely end up working at cross-purposes with each other and one would achieve very little. Hence, the plumping strategy is wrong to regard ways of valuing incommensurable objective values as outside the scope of reason and no more or less rational than any other ways of valuing incommensurable objective values.

Therefore, these three attempts to make choices between incommensurable values rational or not irrational are unsuccessful. This reinforces the idea that it is impossible to pursue and act as if one has multiple incommensurable ultimate ends, and therefore also reinforces my previously mentioned argument that it is impossible for an incommensurable objective list theory of well-being to be true because well-being is the ultimate end of our pursuits.

Let us now move to an argument in favour of value incommensurability more generally. The 'small improvement argument' is one of the most prominent arguments for the idea that, from the point of view of practical reason, the value of two options can be incomparable. The argument starts with the premise which has the general form: if A and B are neither better nor worse than each other, A+ is better than A, but A+ is not better than B, then A and B are not equal (Chang 2002, 667–68). From this premise it follows that A and B are not comparable according to the three standard comparison relations of better than, worse than, and equal to (Chang 2002, 668). There are everyday examples of options which appear to fit the above conditions. It seems possible that one can reasonably judge that (1) a musical career is neither better nor worse than an engineering career, (2) a musical career with a slightly higher salary would be better than the original music career, and (3) the slightly better musical career would not be better than the engineering career (Chang 2002, 668).

However, some have contended that these supposed examples of incomparability are actually examples of vagueness and can be best explained with reference to the notion of vagueness (Hsieh and Andersson 2021). Our language is often vague, with the concepts outlined by words lacking sharp boundaries. It is vague and unclear whether something is a heap, and whether someone is tall, or is rich. Comparatives can also be vague. It is unclear if dark purple or turquoise is bluer than the other. And considering whether a cloud is larger than another will somehow involve the volume, surface area, and distributed density of the cloud, but there is no known well-defined measure of 'being larger' which precisely factors in these different dimensions. This notion of vagueness appears to be a plausible reason for why 'superhard' cases of evaluative comparatives yield the paradoxical results given in the small improvement argument (Elson 2017, 345–46). After all, the measure by which we are supposed to judge the value of different careers is not well-defined. Just like in the cloud case, we can judge the extreme of a career of forced labour in a sweatshop to be worse than a regular musical career. But it is less obvious what the value relation between careers is in borderline cases when two careers are quite different yet seem to similarly match the ability, interests, etc. of the individual.

This same borderline phenomenon is true for other value comparison examples which have been said to indicate incomparability, like whether Mozart is more creative than Michelangelo. The covering concept of creativity seems vague because it is multidimensional (there are many different ways of being creative), and it is not obvious how these different dimensions of creativity fit together and should be weighed (Andersson 2017, 71). Thus, the vagueness of the covering concept of creativity or a good career and the uncertainty about how to properly integrate its various elements, allows one to reasonably reject the idea that the two items being compared are incomparable. This is because vagueness can plausibly say that the reason why it seems like none of the three standard comparison relations of better than, equal to, and worse than hold true is because the value relationship between the two items is indeterminate or vague (Hsieh and Andersson 2021; Wasserman 2004, 396–98). That is, it is possible that the relationship between the creativity of Mozart and Michelangelo or between the value of two qualitatively different careers, has one of the three standard relations and that it is unclear and potentially unknowable which is the true relation.[27]

Nevertheless, Chang gives two reasons for why the superhard evaluative comparative examples of the small improvement argument are not 'borderline applications of a vague comparative' (2002, 682). Chang's first argument tries to point out differences between how we are inclined to make judgements for edge cases in the two types of scenarios (2002, 682). However, Wasserman points out that Chang does not hold all of the variables constant and compares the consequences of whether we are willing to judge that a *predicate* applies, with the consequences of whether we are willing to judge that a *comparative* does *not* apply (2004, 399).

What Chang regards as her more significant argument claims that there is a difference in the way one can admissibly resolve the perplexity of a borderline vague case and a superhard evaluative case. It seems like we can admissibly respond to a borderline vague case, like whether one cloud is larger than a similarly sized cloud, by arbitrarily choosing one of the three comparative relations (Chang 2002, 684). Yet Chang notes that it also seems like we cannot admissibly respond to a superhard evaluative example by arbitrarily going with one comparative relation. If, when forced to choose, one person says that Mozart is more creative than Michelangelo and another goes with the option that Mozart and Michelangelo are equally creative, then there appears to be a genuine disagreement between the two people regarding the level of creativity of the artist (Chang 2002, 684–85). However, Elson points

[27] I have argued for an epistemicist way of interpreting the vagueness of comparability, but there are other proposed ways of interpreting vagueness such as claiming that there is a fourth positive comparative relation like 'on a par' or 'roughly equal' which cannot be reduced to the three standard comparative relations (Andersson and Herlitz 2022, 12).

out that there cannot be a genuine substantive disagreement over superhard cases if the two things in the superhard case are incomparable, because to think that two things are incomparable is to think that there is no determinate fact of the matter (2017, 356–57). If someone thinks that Sumatra Gold neither tastes better than, equal to, nor worse than a cup of Pearl Jasmine, then it is incoherent for them to also think that others should choose Pearl Jasmine and that they are in substantive disagreement with someone who chose Sumatra Gold (Elson 2017, 357).

Yet there does seem to be a divergence in our intuitions regarding the borderline and superhard cases. We seem less willing to arbitrarily choose between comparative relations in the superhard evaluative cases than in the regular borderline cases. We feel less resistance to arbitrarily deciding between which cloud is larger than arbitrarily deciding whether Mozart or Michelangelo is more creative. Wasserman suggests that the reason for this is that in evaluative cases we are more inclined to think that there is some 'hidden fact of the matter' (2004, 400). In borderline comparatives like whether someone is balder or whether a cloud is larger, it is easier to be sceptical of whether there is a correct objective way of judging. It feels easier to defend one's arbitrary choice by claiming that the comparative concept is vague and there is no definitive measure which exists to adjudicate these cases.

Elson argues that arbitrary choice can in fact be acceptable in superhard evaluative cases. For example, it seems acceptable for admissions selectors who are told to 'admit the best candidates' to in some way arbitrarily choose which measures they will favour over others (Elson 2017, 358–59). If selectors are not told how to decide the best candidates, it is permissible to give more weighting to a student's median subject score than their average subject score and vice versa. One might think this challenges Wasserman's explanation for the divergence in our intuitions regarding the borderline and superhard cases. But the greater permissibility of arbitrary choice for some superhard evaluative cases, actually supports Wasserman's more fundamental point that we are more willing to accept arbitrariness if we think there is no hidden fact of the matter. For in Elson's admissions example is one where we are less inclined to believe that there is an objective way of judging how two similar items compare. Accordingly, whether we think there is a hidden fact of the matter is a better explanation than incomparability, of the divergence in our willingness to accept arbitrariness in borderline and superhard cases.

Thus, Elson's and Wasserman's arguments effectively combat Chang's objections to the vagueness explanation of the small improvement argument.

The concepts we have encountered in the discussion of vagueness make it easier to grasp a new argument against incommensurability. If well-being is made up of incommensurable goods, then the covering concept of well-being must be made up of multiple partially conflicting dimensions. Well-being would be like the concept of 'a good career' if there was no way that the different dimensions of a good career could all coherently fit together. That is, it would be like if the dimensions of achievement, income, personal interests, and facts about the rest of your life all contributed to what makes a good career, but there was no correct way of determining how much weighting should be given to these different dimensions in any scenario.

However, if well-being is made up of multiple partially conflicting dimensions, then the concept of well-being as a whole is unstable and does not actually or intrinsically exist because it is merely a byword for a loose agglomeration of factors which partially fit together but cannot be fully integrated. The existence in principle of the measure of a thing is necessary for a thing's intrinsic existence because if there is in principle no correct measure of something, then the different dimensions of that thing cannot be ontologically integrated as a whole. And if the parts cannot be integrated into a whole then the whole does not intrinsically exist. Well-being as a loose agglomeration of factors is like if we had established measures of creativity for sculpting, painting, and composing music, but no correct general measure for creativity as a whole. In this case, saying that something is creative as a whole would be a category error. Just like if general intelligence did not exist, saying that someone is intelligent would be a category error. You could make a positive claim about a person's verbal or abstract intelligence, but if you start talking about general intelligence then you are talking about something which has no intrinsic reality. Thus, to make a claim about well-being as a whole would likewise be a category error if well-being had in principle no correct measure which incorporated different aspects of well-being like achievement, pleasure etc. You could make a positive claim about the nature of achievement, but once you relate achievement to well-being as a whole you are now talking about achievement in relation to an illusion.

One might accept that well-being as a whole is not a fully coherent concept, but still argue that well-being as a whole is partially coherent and has some intrinsic reality because the dimensions of well-being can be partially united in different ways. This would mean that while we cannot talk about well-being as a whole, we can instead talk about partial well-being or different possible combinations of the dimensions of well-being. Nevertheless, if there is no complete measure of well-being as a whole, then well-being cannot have partial intrinsic reality. This is because (1) in order for well-being to have partial intrinsic reality, there must be a partial measure of well-being, and (2) in order for there to be a partial measure of well-being, a complete measure of well-being as a whole must exist. (1) is true because a thing cannot have partial intrinsic reality without there being in principle a correct measure of its partial intrinsic reality. After all, the in-principle non-existence of this measure means that the aspects of the thing's partial intrinsic reality cannot fit together into a coherent whole. And (2) is true because a thing can exist as a part only in relation to a whole: if the whole does not actually exist, then the part of this whole cannot truly exist as a part (cf. Plato, Rep. 504c). Just as you cannot be a member of a group that does not exist.

Therefore, if, as the incommensurable objective list theorist says, there is no complete measure of well-being as a whole, then well-being cannot intrinsically exist as a whole, which also means that we cannot make positive claims about well-being. Yet it seems like well-being as a whole does actually exist, and I have argued earlier in this thesis that the highest good of human beings exists and that well-being is our highest good. Moreover, incommensurable objective list theory itself makes positive claims about well-being. Hence, because well-being seems to intrinsically exist and it seems reasonable to make claims about a person's well-being and what goods might contribute to it, it follows that there is a correct measure of well-being and the values which make up well-being are not incommensurable.

I will finish this section on incommensurability by considering if there are practical examples of moral phenomena which indicate the incommensurability of values. Some have argued that moral dilemmas, like Sophie's choice where Sophie can save only one of her two children by choosing which one to save, suggest the incommensurability of values (Andersson and Herlitz 2022, 7–8). This is because it appears one is unable to justifiably compare the value of one child to another. However, it seems comparing the value of the two children is wrong only insofar as one treats a child and their inherent value as replaceable

(Andersson and Herlitz 2022, 8). It is hard to see what is objectionable about merely saying that the two children have equal inherent value. Even if the Sophie's choice scenario demonstrates the incomparability of the value of individual human beings, it does not demonstrate the incomparability of abstract values like the ones involved in the good life. While we are uncomfortable treating someone's intrinsic value like a number in an equation, it remains to be shown that we experience a similar discomfort when deciding between prudential values and including them in an overarching measure of the good life.

A more germane example of a moral dilemma is Agamemnon's choice between saving his daughter and saving his nation from defeat in war. Unlike Sophie's choice, this example can target the incomparability of prudential values and not only the incomparability of the value of human beings. For the radical pluralist could argue that the difficulty we have in judging the virtuousness of Agamemnon's different courses of action indicates that there is no single measure of the prudential value of virtue. But once again, this difficulty could be the result of vagueness where it is simply unclear which of the three standard comparative relations exists between the two options. Furthermore, this apparent conflict between different parts of virtuous concern is not intrinsic and fundamental to the nature of the value itself; it is created by practical circumstances where one cannot work towards both things the virtuous person should work towards. Clearly the virtuous person should care both about one's child and one's community. This means that the conflict between Agamemnon's concerns does not exist at the level of the measure of virtue itself, but at the level of the parts when each part is separated from the other and thus turned into a suboptimal expression of virtue.

Lastly, some have argued that incommensurable plural values are the best explanation for *akrasia*. Nussbaum claims that the unique specialness of the end that is 'in some sense less good over all' than its alternative, explains why we often choose the less good end (2001, 116). That is, the akratic agent chooses this particular bagel, activity, or person because it has a special kind of goodness which does not exist in its alternative. (Nussbaum 2001, 116). Similarly, Wiggins contends that incommensurability better accounts for *akrasia* because it allows us to understand the fragmentation in one's judgement as being caused by the incomparable heterogeneity of the values being considered (1998, 266). Yet it seems like in order for an action to be an instance of *akrasia*, the agent must not choose the good that is overall better than the other. Hence, positing an akratic act already admits the comparability of the values involved in akratic deliberation. Additionally, Stocker points out that the cognitive and affective ways of desiring and being attracted towards an end can likewise explain how one can simultaneously think one option is better overall and not choose that option (1992, 216–17). It could be the conflict between the rational and non-rational parts of one's psychology, and not the intrinsic conflict between values, that explains the conflict in *akrasia*.

Commensurable Objective List Theory

The other kind of objective list theory is one where the multiple objective goods which contribute to well-being are commensurable. An example of this kind of theory is Plato's view in the *Philebus* where he argues that both knowledge and pleasure are included in the good life, but also says that there is something which makes this mixture of knowledge and pleasure the right kind of mixture (66a–c; Barney 2016). Plato simply calls this organising principle 'measure' (*metrion*). The difference between a commensurable and an incommensurable objective list theory is that the former says there is a real formal concept of goodness or well-being which makes different prudential values prudentially valuable. I am classifying theories with a non-substantive conception of the organising principle of the good life as objective list, and classifying theories with a substantive conception of the organising principle as not objective list but according to what they identify as the substantive organising principle. For instance, if pleasure is the organising principle of the good life then it is a hedonistic theory.

A potential objection to both commensurable and incommensurable objective list theory is that it is alienating. There are several different ways of formulating exactly what it is that makes a theory of well-being alienating, but Rosati notes they all seem to be motivated by the basic intuition that if something is intrinsically valuable for a person then it must be made for or suited to them (1996, 298). If someone's well-being is suited for and is not alien to them, then it follows that they must have the capacity to find what constitutes their well-being compelling and attractive (Rosati 1996, 298–99; Railton 1986, 9). Hence, it seems objective list theory is alienating because it does not ensure that a person finds the elements of their well-being attractive.

I think this alienation objection to objective list theory works against objective list theories which allow a person, in non-alienating conditions, to be uncompelled by and not positively engaged with the objective goods which make up their well-being. For example, the objection would work against an objective list theory which says achievement and knowledge are the two goods which make up well-being, and the only way you can get some people to genuinely care about knowledge and achievement is within alienating conditions which amount to brainwashing. For these theories of well-being would say that it is possible for a person to have all the objective goods which make up well-being while being dissatisfied and unfulfilled. But it seems like to be dissatisfied is to lack complete well-being. Hence, this kind of objective list theory of well-being does not accurately describe the well-being of people who are dissatisfied with what the theory claims constitutes well-being.

However, not all objective list theories have to claim that a person can have complete well-being while being subjectively miserable or apathetic. Subjective states like pleasure, being satisfied with one's life, and even not being alienated from what is objectively good for oneself could be regarded as goods which are objectively good (Arneson 1999, 140–41). Hence, because these subjective states can be objectively good they could be included among other goods in an objective list theory. An objective list theory of this kind which counts subjective states like satisfaction or non-alienation as parts of well-being is untouched by the above alienation objection.[28]

Another objection to commensurable objective list theory is that it is explanatorily inadequate. If a theory says that multiple goods such as pleasure, friendship, virtue, and knowledge constitute well-being, then the theory's unexplained plurality can give the impression of being somewhat random and ad hoc. As Bradley notes, we are tempted to ask 'why should these things be on the list? What do they have in common? What is the rational principle that yields the result that these things, and no others, are the things that are good?' (2009, 16). An objective list theory can partially explain why different goods are on the list. It could explain part of the goodness of pleasure with reference to the enjoyment and subjective satisfaction it brings, and it could explain part of the goodness of knowledge by saying that it puts one in contact with reality. However, an objective list theory which completely explains why different goods are on the list ceases to be an objective list theory. This is because a

[28] See desire-fulfilment chapter for the discussion of a stronger alienation objection to objective theories of well-being.

complete explanation of why each good contributes to well-being would explain how the substance of these different goods are connected to each other and explain why the organising principle of well-being unites only these particular goods under itself. In order to give this complete explanation of why particular goods are good, a theory must specify a non-generic value measure to explain why each good contributes to well-being. And a theory which does this would have to be a kind of substantive monistic theory where there is a single value or good-maker which determines and measures the value of other values. In other words, the theory would not be an objective list theory because an objective list theory can only have a formal or generic single value or good-maker.

The objective list theorist could respond with a *tu quoque* argument and say that the substantive monist also cannot completely explain why and what the rational principle is which determines that well-being only has one good or good-maker (Fletcher 2016, 56; Lin 2015, 335). I think recognising that there must be one organising principle of well-being can explain why there is only one value which makes other goods conducive to well-being. As I argued in the incommensurability section, if well-being objectively exists, there needs to be something which holds the disparate aspects of well-being together and something which is able to serve as a true measure of well-being. I also argued that only a value has the ability and authority to measure the goodness of other values. Thus combining these two ideas, there must be one value which serves as a measure of well-being and determines the goodness of the parts of well-being.

To be sure, this explanation is itself not fully complete in other senses. It does not give a full explanation of what goodness is and of what caused well-being to exist objectively. It is extremely difficult to give a non-trivial explanation for why what seem to be fundamental truths about reality are the way that they are (Fletcher 2016, 56). Nevertheless, theories which lack a complete explanation do not all have equal explanatory power. Substantive monistic theories are able to explain more than objective list theories can, because objective list theories cannot give a unified explanation for why each of the different goods are on the list but other things are not. Moreover, even if a substantive monistic theory cannot explain why there is a single good-maker, a theory which cannot explain why there are 4 or 17 goods which form well-being appears more arbitrary and explanatorily inadequate than a theory which cannot explain why there is one good-maker (Lin 2015, 336).

Nevertheless, the ability to give a unified explanation for the inclusion of particular goods in well-being is only one factor among many. A substantive monistic theory like pleasure might do well on this one factor but face so many other problems that it is a far less plausible account of well-being than an objective list theory. Hence, the explanatory inadequacy objection should only give one reason to reject objective list theory if the overall plausibility of a particular substantive monistic theory of well-being outweighs the plausibility of a particular objective list theory. In chapter seven I will argue that loving participation as the organising principle of well-being is more plausible than any objective list theory, because it can explain how several different goods can constitute well-being under a single organising principle of the good life without giving rise to other limitations.

My theory occupies a similar place between the two extremes of pure monism and radical pluralism that the commensurable objective list theory does. Yet my theory differs from the regular pluralism/sophisticated monism of objective list theory in that it tries to specify what the substance of the singular good is which makes other goods contribute towards the good life. I call this type of theory hierarchical monism, because it acknowledges the existence of multiple prudential goods, but claims that each of these different goods are made good through their participation in the substantive value which is the organising principle of well-being. This capacity to say that other goods receive their goodness through their relationship to the substantive organising principle significantly enhances the ability of a non-objective list theorist to argue that their particular proposal of well-being is complete and includes all intrinsic value, because they can acknowledge the existence of multiple distinct goods included in well-being.

However, it is much harder to show how different goods participate in and are made intrinsically good through their relationship to an overarching principle of well-being, than it is to simply stipulate that there are multiple independent objective prudential goods. To illustrate how a connection of this kind might be made between two goods, we can look to how pleasure might be considered intrinsically good in a theory where health is the highest good and organising principle of well-being. It is possible that a certain amount of pleasure is needed in order to be fully and most optimally healthy. Hence, pleasure can be seen as intrinsically good solely by virtue of its relationship to the highest good of health and health's intrinsic goodness. For in this case, pleasure receives its goodness purely through forming a part of health in humans and its participation in the value of health. One might think the admission that pleasure can be intrinsically good makes the good of health incomplete and thus not the highest good. But the good of health is not incomplete in this example because pleasure has no value independent of health, and health is still the source of all intrinsic goodness.

While this new way of integrating different goods into well-being helps a hierarchical monistic theory like my own answer objections about the completeness of its proposed highest good, it also means that it is harder to raise objections about the incompleteness of alternative hierarchical monistic theories of well-being/the highest good.

Conclusion

I started this chapter by arguing against the idea that there are multiple incommensurable goods which make up well-being. Picking up from part one, I further defended the idea that one cannot make rational or arational decisions when there are multiple incommensurable goods. I then argued against the small improvement argument, and the appeal to moral dilemmas and *akrasia* arguments for value incommensurability. I mainly argued that the vagueness interpretation of these phenomena is a viable alternative explanation of their paradoxical results. I also presented a new argument against the value incommensurability of well-being, which claimed that a singular measure of well-being is necessary for the existence of well-being.

In the second section of this chapter I explored two arguments against commensurable objective list theory. I maintained that an alienation objection is unsuccessful against all objective list theories because an objective list theory can include the subjective requirements for non-alienation as things which are objectively good. I also argued that the explanatory inadequacy objection is effective, but in order for one to reasonably reject objective list theory because of this problem, there must be an overall more plausible monistic theory. Lastly, I attempted to explain how a hierarchical monistic theory can integrate different values into its account of well-being.

Chapter Five: Desire-Fulfilment Theory

The second hypothesis for the content of the highest good/well-being I will examine is desire-fulfilment theory. Desire-fulfilment theory is one of the three major contemporary theories of well-being. The desire-fulfilment theory of well-being has many different variations all classed under one category. The most basic desire-fulfilment theory, which all other versions make amendments to, claims that what is prudentially good for a person is good for them because it fulfils their desires, and that what is prudentially bad for a person is bad for them because it frustrates their desires. Crucially, desire-fulfilment theories do not merely say that one's desires track and align with what is independently good for oneself. Rather, one's desires determine what is good for oneself and are capable of creating prudential value in things which previously held no value, simply through one's desire for them.

Does this thoroughly subjective account of well-being conflict with the metaethical arguments and conclusions I have made in the first three chapters of this thesis about well-being, normative authority, and desire? In the eudaimonism chapter I claim that well-being is the presence of goodness *simpliciter* or goodness itself in one's life. This is not a problem for the desire-fulfilment theorist since they may say that what is good *simpliciter* in one's life is determined by one's subjective desires. In the first part of this thesis I argued that we are justified in accepting the existence of objective goodness, and that our ultimate end is to hit the target of perfect goodness which includes objective goodness. To hit a target including objective goodness is to realise objective goodness in one's activity. This makes objective goodness included in one's well-being, because I claim that well-being is the presence of goodness itself in one's life. The idea that at least part of well-being is objectively good obviously contradicts desire-fulfilment theory which says that no part of well-being is good independently of one's desires.

In the first part I also argued that the guise of the good thesis is true. In the first section of this chapter I will argue, without assuming that our ultimate end includes objective goodness, that the guise of the good thesis ensures that the desire-fulfilment theorist undermines their own theory.

The Euthyphro Objection

The 'Euthyphro objection' to desire-fulfilment theory claims that instead of our desires creating norms, our desires aim at norms (Heathwood 2016, 145). I have defended the guise of the good thesis which says that we desire ends because we take them to be truly good. The guise of the good thesis may appear to support the Euthyphro objection to desire-fulfilment theory. But it is possible both for one to cause the prudential goodness of ends by desiring them, and for all desires to be caused by taking one's object of desire to be good. Nonetheless, I will argue that from the acceptance of both of these ideas, it follows that we necessarily implicitly value prudential goodness ultimately because of its association with desire-independent goodness. This way of valuing prudential goodness contradicts desire-fulfilment theory, because the theory says that the value of prudential goodness is created solely by one's desires, but the way of valuing says we take the value of prudential goodness to be grounded in desire-independent goodness.

It seems like, and the guise of the good thesis holds that, one needs to implicitly take prudential goodness to be good in order to value and desire that which is prudentially good.

One might think it is possible to desire prudential goodness by merely taking it to be prudentially good and not also taking prudential goodness to be good *simpliciter*. Nonetheless, it seems much more intuitive to say that the reason why I care about prudential goodness is because it is good or valuable, than to say that it is just because prudential goodness is prudentially good.

A good reason for thinking that we do not value prudential goodness due to its relation to goodness *simpliciter* is if the normativity of prudential goodness does not come from goodness *simpliciter* and is of an altogether different kind of normativity. However, I argued in the eudaimonism chapter that available proposals explaining how the normativity of prudential goodness is radically different from that of regular goodness are unconvincing. Each kind of goodness possessing a different kind of normativity also has the disadvantage of meaning that we cannot rationally compare the value of and adjudicate between prudential goodness and goodness *simpliciter* in cases where they conflict. This is because firstly, the normativity of each kind of goodness is so different that one cannot be characterised in the terms of the other. And secondly, goodness *simpliciter* is the most basic possible measure of goodness, so if this value cannot be used to compare the two values then it is difficult to see how anything else could be used to compare the two kinds of normativity.

If taking prudential goodness to be good is a necessary condition for desiring prudential goodness, then the initial taking of prudential goodness to be good cannot occur after one has desired prudential goodness. Therefore, one's desire cannot project prudential value onto prudential goodness without taking prudential goodness to be good either prior to or at the same time as the enactment of the desire and the projection of value onto prudential goodness. If one takes prudential goodness to be good prior to one's desire projecting value onto it, then one has taken prudential goodness to be good independently of one's subsequent desire for it because at that stage one did not desire prudential goodness. On the other hand, if one takes prudential goodness to be good at the same time as one's desire projects value onto prudential goodness, then the reason why one took prudential goodness to be good cannot be due to one's simultaneous creation of value in prudential goodness, because prior to taking prudential goodness to be good it had no created value. Even if it was the case that desiring and taking to be good was the exact same act, one taking prudential goodness to be good could not have been caused by the desiring involved in this same act because something cannot cause itself.

Thus, according to each account of when one initially takes prudential goodness to be good, one takes prudential goodness to be good independently of one's desire for prudential goodness and not because one's desire creates value in prudential goodness.

However, there is another possible way to explain how a person could take the value of prudential goodness to be desire-dependently good when they desire prudential goodness. The desire-fulfilment theorist could argue that a person can take prudential goodness to be good because of its relationship to another end which one has made good through one's desiring of it. For example, if one desires goodness and makes goodness good through one's desiring of it, then one could take prudential goodness to be good because of its relationship to the subjectively good end of goodness.

Nevertheless, this explanation merely kicks the can down the road. It needs to account for how one originally took this other end, which one has made good through one's desiring of it, to be good. Yet for the same reasons as for prudential goodness, the only way for one to avoid taking this new end to be desire-independently good is to posit that the goodness one recognises in this end is received from yet another end which has been made good through one's desiring of it. However, if an end's association with another subjectively good end is continually the reason why one takes an end to be good and is continually the explanation for the proximal source of an end's perceived normativity, then this scenario results in an infinite regress. This is because the scenario continually points to another desire in order to explain how the initial desiring of an end does not involve the recognition of goodness which was not created by one's desires.

This infinite regress is problematic because it requires that there is no ultimate first cause or reason in a chain of causes for why one desires and takes any given end to be good. And without a first cause the rest of the causes in the chain cannot arise and there can be no desire. The infinite regress is also explanatorily deficient because it cannot explain the ultimate source of an end's perceived normativity — pointing to another desire generates the same problem of explaining how one can take this new end to be good without reference to desire-independent goodness. The only way to stop this infinite regress of pointing to another desire is to acknowledge that the goodness one initially recognises in the most fundamental end (the first end desired in the chain of ends) is not created by one's desires. For if the only end in which desire-independent goodness is perceived is an end after the most fundamental end in the chain, then we cannot explain the ultimate source of the most fundamental end's perceived normativity.

Therefore, if the guise of the good thesis is true, then the source of the perceived value of prudential goodness must be received from and grounded in the value of desire-independent goodness. For it follows from the guise of the good thesis that desiring prudential goodness requires one to ultimately take prudential goodness to be good because of its connection to an end whose goodness was not initially created by one's desires. Hence, the guise of the good thesis undermines a person's belief in desire-fulfilment theory, because desire-fulfilment theory holds that the value of prudential goodness is only subjectively good and is a product of one's desires, and we necessarily take the value of prudential goodness to be received from its connection to desire-independent goodness. To be sure, perhaps what we necessarily take to be the case (the objective goodness of prudential goodness) is not true. But I am merely arguing that the Euthyphro objection highlights an inconsistency of the desire-fulfilment theorist.

Yet, how significant is this contradiction for the desire-fulfilment theorist? It could be argued that one just needs to admit a single instance of taking prudential goodness to be desire-independently good, and afterwards one can come to value prudential goodness because of the value one has projected onto prudential goodness in desiring it. One could also go on to create a multitude of prudential values whose goodness is caused by one's desires. However, this contradiction is exceptionally consequential because all of one's desires and all of the prudential values one has gone on to create are most fundamentally grounded in and derived from what one initially took to be good independently of desire. Even after having created new values, the ultimate reason why one values these new values must be traced back to this initial desire and perception of objective goodness.

Does Wanting Always Make It So?

Let us now turn to the class of objections to desire-fulfilment theory which attempt to point out counterexamples of specific types of desires whose fulfilment do not seem to be prudentially good for a person who has these desires. Responses to these counterexamples either meet the objection head on and argue that a particular kind of desire really does make its object good for a person, or they introduce a new criterion which restricts the number of desires whose fulfilment is good for a person (Fletcher 2016, 37). In this section I will consider whether adjusted versions of desire-fulfilment theory can help respond to objections, but I will talk specifically about idealised versions of desire-fulfilment theory in the next section.

Before we get into counterexamples, it is important to recognise that right from the start the desire-fulfilment theorist has to make decisions about which desires matter and if certain desires should be emphasised over others. One reasonable and often assumed restriction on which desires create prudential value, is for the fulfilment of purely instrumental desires to not be intrinsically good for oneself, and for only the fulfilment of intrinsic desires (desires in which we desire a thing for its own sake) to be intrinsically good for oneself (Heathwood 2016, 139; Fletcher 2016, 28). For example, if one wants to buy some bait in order to go fishing, it makes sense that acquiring the bait will not be good for oneself all on its own. Desire-fulfilment theories might also exclude or weigh differently the value of fulfilling desires depending on when the person desired the end. For it is unclear whether the fulfilment of only present desires is good for a person or if the fulfilment of past and future desires should play a role.

A common kind of counterexample to desire-fulfilment theory is when one has desires which one simultaneously does not want to have. For example, a person could be addicted to a drug and receive an immense sense of satisfaction from fulfilling their desire for the drug, while at the same time not wanting to have the desire for the drug in the first place (Parfit 1986, 497).

In Parfit's version of this scenario he says that taking the drug will not frustrate other desires (health, personal relationships, income etc.); it will merely prevent the later pain of withdrawal and will have no other positive or negative effects while and after one is injected with the drug (1986, 497). I am unsure if, as Parfit stipulates, a person with an unfulfilled craving could experience no pain at all for the first hour that they possess the craving. But it seems like the drug could make having a strong desire pleasurable and this pleasure could offset any pain resulting from the unfulfilled craving. Hence, if fulfilling addiction-based desires in this scenario did increase well-being, then it would not be due to the person taking the drug reducing the pain they are in, because reducing this pain would also reduce the pleasure from having the craving.

According to a basic desire-fulfilment theory, a person continually fulfilling intense cravings for Parfit's drug significantly increases their well-being. And fulfilling the less intense desire to not have powerful cravings significantly worsens the person's well-being because any increase caused by the fulfilment of the smaller desire is offset by the frustration of the more intense desire. However, it seems like satisfying one's intense addiction-based desire for Parfit's drug every day does not significantly increase a person's well-being, particularly when one does not want to have the addiction-based desire for Parfit's drug.

This problem prompted the development of an adjusted version of desire-fulfilment theory which says that instead of the well-being of a life being measured by the number and intensity of instances of desire satisfaction (the summative version), one should give priority to desires about one's life as a whole (the global version) (Parfit 1986, 497–98). That is, if a person desires a particular aspect or an overall shape of a life more than an increase in a life's summed units of desire satisfaction, then the life with more units of desire satisfaction will be less good for that person than the other life (Parfit 1986, 150). Kraut also appears to defend this kind of account when he says that placing special weight on second-order desires (desires about desires) allows a life which includes desires created by addictions to have less well-being than one without the addiction (2004, 40). However, Heathwood points out that there are some people who do not and cannot have higher-order desires (2016, 142). Some do not reflect on how they want their life to go. Hence, for these people a global version of desire-fulfilment theory will not stop satisfying addiction-based desires from significantly increasing their well-being. Nonetheless, Heathwood notes that we can effectively respond to Parfit's addiction counterexample without recourse to higher-order desires and by instead distinguishing between desires for ends one consciously thinks are genuinely attractive, and appetitive desires for ends one finds oneself subconsciously compelled to pursue (2016, 142–43). After all, in cases of addiction it seems like one does not consciously find the end truly appealing, and it makes more sense for genuine appeal to determine well-being than mere subconscious compulsion.

Aside from addiction, there are other conditions in which one's desire is formed that cast doubt on whether the fulfilment of a desire truly advances one's well-being. Two of these condition-based counterexamples are ill-informed desires and manufactured genuine desires. An example of an ill-informed desire is an orphan who has been a monk from a young age and has little or no knowledge of other careers on offer (Crisp 2021). Basic desire-fulfilment theory says that only the fulfilment of one's actual and not hypothetical desires is good for a person. Yet, it seems possible that the orphan monk could prefer careers like being a painter, a doctor, or an astronaut. And if the monk would prefer another career if he knew more about it, then it seems like all else being equal the monk would be better off having this other career than remaining a monk. So this example appears to undermine basic desire-fulfilment theory.

Nevertheless, if the monk would hypothetically intrinsically desire a different career with more knowledge of it, then that would be because the career resembles an activity which the monk actually (unconsciously or consciously) intrinsically desires. For it is unclear how only information can cause a person to find an end to be desirable when the end has no perceived association with something that the person previously (unconsciously or consciously) desired. Hence, the desire-fulfilment theorist can explain why it is better for a person to live a life they are ignorant of via the connection of that life to what the person actually intrinsically desires.

A manufactured desire is when a person has been manipulated into forming a genuine desire which they previously did not either have or want to have.[29] For example, a person could be in an abusive relationship but not want to leave because over time they have been manipulated into intrinsically valuing remaining in this relationship (Fletcher 2016, 34–35). It appears that the fulfilment of an intrinsic desire which a person is deceived into developing — such that the desire does not rationally follow from what one previously intrinsically desired, and even could be the opposite of one of their naturally occurring desires — does not increase the manipulated person's well-being to the same extent than if one of their initial naturally occurring desires of the same strength was fulfilled prior to manipulation. But this contradicts basic desire-fulfilment theory which says that the fulfilment of natural desires and irrationally manufactured desires have the same impact on one's well-being.

Nonetheless, I think desire-fulfilment theory can defeat the manufactured desire counterexample if it gives more weight to more fundamental desires. A desire is more

[29] An addiction-based desire could be seen as a manufactured desire. But I am classifying manufactured desires as only those in which one consciously finds the end one desires truly and intrinsically appealing.

fundamental than another if the desire is the reason why one has the other desire. For example, if one desires wealth for the sake of power, then one's desire for power is more fundamental than one's desire for wealth. It seems reasonable for more fundamental desires to have greater influence on one's well-being. Whenever a person is manipulated into irrationally forming an intrinsic desire, it appears the reason why one forms a desire for this end is because of its perceived connection to another end one already intrinsically desires. For instance, in order for a person to be manipulated into desiring being malnourished for its own sake, then it seems like this end would have to receive its intrinsic desirability from a connection the person's mind has forged with being malnourished and another end which the person desires for its own sake, like attractiveness or social status. Thus, if we posit that more fundamental desires have a substantially greater impact on one's well-being, then it allows for all manufactured or deception-based desires to impact well-being much less than other desires.

The counterexamples to desire-fulfilment theory, of addiction, ill-informed, and manufactured genuine desires argue that the fulfilment of certain desires has less of an impact on one's well-being by pointing to how these desires arose. The next three types of counterexamples we will look at argue that the fulfilment of certain desires has less of an impact on one's well-being by pointing to the objects of these desires.

Remote desires are another type of counterexample to desire-fulfilment theory given by Parfit. Say you meet a stranger on a train and, upon learning that this stranger has a life-threatening illness, you strongly wish that the stranger is cured. Unbeknownst to you, the stranger is later cured of his illness. Parfit implies that it is implausible that the fulfilment of desires, like those about the stranger's health, which occur in places so far removed from one's everyday life can cause one's life to be better off (1986, 494). I think it is not overly ridiculous to think that the fulfilment of remote desires, like that the stranger is cured, are able to slightly increase one's well-being. But what if a remote desire is one's only intrinsic desire or is the most powerful desire one has? Fletcher notes that it is hard to see how the unknown fulfilment of remote desires, like wanting there to be life on Mars, can fully realise or be the most significant factor for increasing a person's well-being (2016, 36).

There are several variations of basic desire-fulfilment theory which attempt to escape the problem of remote desires. Overvold proposes that the only desires whose fulfilment contribute towards a person's well-being are those which require the person to exist at the time that the desires are fulfilled (1980, 118). It is possible for the stranger on the train to be cured when the acquaintance of the stranger is no longer alive. Hence, according to Overvold the acquaintance's desire for the stranger to be cured does not contribute to the acquaintance's well-being. However, there are many desires whose fulfilment seem to be good for a person even if that person does not need to exist in order for their desires to be fulfilled. The desire that one's friends and family live good lives, does not require that one exist when these ends are realised (Fletcher 2016, 43–44). Thus, Overvold's amended version does not work because it excludes desires whose fulfilment seem good for a person.

Scanlon proposes that if the achievement of aims is what is good for a person, where an aim in addition to being a desire is also an intention of actively pursuing an end, then many problematic kinds of desires could be barred from contributing to well-being (1998, 35, 118–20).[30] This would definitely cause many remote desires to not affect one's well-being. For instance, if a person is not trying to contribute to discovering if there is life on Mars, then the

[30] Scanlon talks about the achievement of rational aims, but we will deal with idealisation later in this chapter.

fulfilment of their desire to know if there is life on Mars will not be good for that person. However, one could want one's friends and family to live good lives, and be unable to actively advance this end because one is in prison. It seems like the awareness of this desire being fulfilled or not impacts one's well-being even if one is not actively pursuing it.

Heathwood argues, in response to the remote desires objection, that the only desires whose fulfilment contribute towards a person's well-being are those which a person believes has been fulfilled (2006, 543, 548; 2021, 72). This experientially focused version of desire-fulfilment theory means that the acquaintance of the stranger will not be better off after the stranger has been cured because the acquaintance does not think that the stranger was cured (Heathwood 2006, 550). But this amendment makes desire-fulfilment theory vulnerable to the experience machine objection, because if one's perception is all that matters then the experiential desire-fulfilment theorist has no reason to avoid plugging into the experience machine.[31] A more everyday example of how something other than experience seems to affect well-being is the case of the deceived businessman (Kagan 1998, 34–35). This man died satisfied, thinking that his family love him, the community respects him, and that he built a successful business. Yet in reality he has been fooled. People did not love or respect him and his business is about to go bankrupt. To say the least, the deceived businessman does not seem to have been as well off in life as he could have been. His perception of himself living a good life could have been aligned with reality instead of being an illusion.

In response to these scenarios, Heathwood maintains that 'what you don't know can't hurt you' (2021, 62). He accepts that there are things 'amiss' in the life of the deceived businessman — respect, achievement, love etc. (Heathwood 2021, 61–62). But Heathwood

[31] See hedonism chapter for the experience machine objection.

does not think that being deceived about the presence of these goods harms one's well-being. This move clearly relies on there being a relevant difference between prudential goodness and other kinds of goodness. For it assumes that some goods can be not good for a person. However, I argued in the eudaimonism chapter that prudential goodness is the presence of goodness in one's life. This means that the absence of goods, like dignity, in a life does influence a person's well-being. Thus, experiential desire-fulfilment theory is implausible because it cannot allow that, beyond one's perception of things, the actual presence of certain goods in a life influences well-being.

A fourth way of responding to the remote desires objection, also suggested by Heathwood, is to say that both one's experience of one's desire being fulfilled and the thing one desires actually occurring, are necessary for the fulfilment of one's desire to advance one's well-being (2021, 72). This version of desire-fulfilment theory would not be vulnerable to the experience machine objection. Furthermore, the awareness requirement would allow the unknown curing of the stranger to not be good for oneself.

Is the 'correct awareness' requirement enough to shore up the apparently tenuous connection between well-being and the realisation of remote desires? If a remote desire is a person's only intrinsic desire, then this version of desire-fulfilment theory says that the correct perception of this desire's fulfilment fully constitutes one's well-being. The awareness that one's remote desire has been fulfilled appears to make the fulfilment of this desire more relevant to one's well-being than if one remained ignorant of its realisation. But if the object of one's desire is for something so remote from one's life, like that a tiny creature one will never interact with on a planet on the other side of the universe lives a good life, then it seems quite farfetched to think that one's well-being solely hangs on one's correct awareness of the quality of this creature’s life. The counterexample is even more convincing if the person does not passionately desire this end and it is merely the only end they ever so slightly intrinsically desire. The desire-fulfilment theorist might double down and say that if a person really only intrinsically desires this creature’s well-being and is aware that this one thing they want is in fact true, then the person’s well-being is determined by their knowledge of this creature’s well-being. But it seems quite a stretch to say that the whole of a person’s well-being is subject to the fulfilment of one tiny desire about something so disconnected from one’s life. Therefore, each of these four variations of desire-fulfilment theory fail to effectively respond to the remote desire objection to desire-fulfilment theory.

In addition to the remote desire counterexample, I think the counterexamples of immoral and pointless desires are also successful objections to the desire-fulfilment theory of well-being.

The immoral desires objection claims that one’s desires cannot determine what is good for oneself because achieving immoral desires does not seem like it is good for a person (Parfit 1986, 500). There are several ways of motivating this particular objection. Firstly, if a person’s only intrinsic desire is to torture animals for fun or to burn other people alive inside Phalaris’s hollow bronze bull, then it is hard to accept that achieving this desire would maximise that person’s well-being. Secondly, even if one also has many other intrinsic desires, it seems like the fulfilment of one of the above severely immoral desires does not on balance increase the presence of goodness in a person’s life, and therefore (due to the locative account of well-being) does not on balance increase one’s well-being. Thirdly, it is absurd to think that the fulfilment of one’s desire for torturing oneself would on balance increase one’s well-being.

The pointless desires objection posits that pointless desires cannot substantially contribute towards a person's well-being. It is hard to see how the life of Rawls's gifted mathematician, who only wants to and organises his whole life around counting blades of grass in Harvard yard, can be the best possible life for him (Lovett and Riedener 2024, 1150; Rawls 1971, 432). The desire-fulfilment theorist might be willing to bite the bullet on this example and accept that whatever life this person desires — even a life which does not seem very meaningful to us — is good for them (Heathwood 2016, 141; Lukas 2010, 22–23). After all, Rawls himself thought what is good for the mathematician is to count blades of grass (1971, 432). Nonetheless, I think a different example of a pointless desire invites a stronger reaction. If all a person wants is to sit in a room with no light counting upwards and downwards from one to ten, then that life simply seems nowhere near as good for them as it could be. The counterexample is even more convincing if this single end the person desires is only ever so slightly intrinsically desired by them.

Desire-fulfilment theorists often respond to the immoral and pointless counterexamples by arguing that the examples conflate fundamentally different measures of evaluation (Lin 2022, 6; Heathwood 2021, 18–20). One might say that what is missing in the life of the sadist is moral goodness and what is missing in the life of the number-counter is meaning or achievement, but this does not mean these lives are deficient in prudential goodness. However, the locative view of prudential goodness I have defended does mean that the absence of moral goodness and meaning makes a person's life worse off, since it says that well-being is the presence of goodness in one's life.

The desire-fulfilment theorist might counter by accepting the locative view of prudential goodness and then arguing that moral goodness and meaning does not contribute to well-being, because moral goodness and meaningfulness either do not exist or are determined by one's own desires. However, while a full defence of the objectivity of moral goodness and meaning is beyond the scope of this chapter, the torturing and idle counting examples are themselves meant to motivate belief in the existence of moral goodness and meaning beyond one's desires. These counterexamples require the desire-fulfilment theorist to more fully explain and justify why we should reject what I think is an intuitive and compelling reaction to the examples — the objective nature of moral goodness and meaningfulness. Hence, immoral and pointless desires are powerful objections to the desire-fulfilment theory of well-being.

Idealisation

We have seen three unsuccessful and three successful types of counterexamples to basic desire-fulfilment theory. A common response to any of the counterexamples we have seen is to advance a modified version of desire-fulfilment theory, which says that the desires which influence well-being are the desires a person would have in certain idealised conditions and are not necessarily the desires a person actually has (Lin 2022, 4–5).[32] These idealised conditions are usually if a person is rational and if they possess all information about the possible things one could desire.

Idealised versions of desire-fulfilment theory might be able to respond to the kinds of counterexamples I have already accepted as unconvincing (ill-informed and manufactured desires). But it is less clear if they can resolve the remote, immoral and pointless desire

[32] Proponents of idealised desire-fulfilment theories include Sidgwick, Rawls, Brandt (1979), Railton (1986), Baber (2010), and Goldman (2018) (Rosati 1995, 297–98).

counterexamples, since it seems possible for some people to have these desires while being fully informed and instrumentally rational (Arneson 1999, 134; Fletcher 2016, 39; Lin 2022, 5). To be sure, there are some scenarios where a person would no longer have remote, immoral, and pointless intrinsic desires if they were rational and fully informed. For example, if a person developed an intrinsic desire for hurting others because of its association with their more fundamental intrinsic desire for pleasure, when it only makes sense for them to extrinsically desire hurting others insofar as it produces pleasure, then the ideal version of that person would not intrinsically desire hurting others.

But what if any of these three irregular desires are among a person's most fundamental intrinsic desires, or these irregular desires do not conflict with a person's more fundamental desires? It is hard to see how instrumental rationality and more information could change a person's most fundamental intrinsic desires. Like in the orphaned monk scenario, more information could cause a person to desire ends which one did not desire previously. But the reason why the monk desires this new end is because they were unaware that this end helped advance one of their intrinsic desires. Hence, more information and instrumental rationality only seems to be able to take away and add desires which are downstream of more fundamental desires. This means that idealisation cannot stop desire-fulfilment theory from erroneously seeing remote, pointless, and immoral desires as being good for a person if any of these irregular desires are (or do not conflict with) a person's most fundamental intrinsic desires.

Perhaps human nature could make it impossible for a person to fundamentally desire these irregular ends. But we need good reasons for thinking this is descriptively the case. Even if this were the case, it seems possible that human nature could be slightly reengineered so that we can have these irregular fundamental desires. This slight human variant would constitute a counterexample to desire-fulfilment theory, because it undermines the basic principle that the fulfilment of a creature's desires is good for that creature. And it would be odd if the desires of humans could determine what is good for humans, but the desires of an incredibly similar being capable of rationality could not determine what is good for them.

Alternatively, one might think that my description of the good as the ultimate end of our desires means that the immoral and pointless desires described cannot be the most fundamental desire of a person. But if the good which is the ultimate end of our desires is subjectively good, then there is no reason why the good of that person cannot be determined by immoral and pointless desires. And if the good which is the ultimate end of our desires is objectively good, then it undermines desire fulfilment theory because it means the good and by extension one's well-being is determined by objective goodness.

Therefore, idealised desire-fulfilment theory cannot effectively respond to the remote, immoral and pointless desire counterexamples, because there are circumstances — when these desires are among or do not conflict with a person's most fundamental intrinsic desires — in which it sees the fulfilment of these irregular desires as being good for a person.

There is another kind of idealisation which differs from what we have discussed because it broadens the range of desires which a person's desires should be responsive to. One might argue that an idealised desire-fulfilment theory which is eudaimonistic can make the fulfilment of immoral desires intrinsically bad for oneself. For in chapter three I claim that the eudaimonist should value and thus desire the good of others because they should value the manifestation of the organising principle of the good life elsewhere in the world.

Consequently, the eudaimonist desire-fulfilment theorist has reason to not have immoral desires like torturing others if fulfilling these desires frustrates the desires of another person to a greater degree than it fulfils one's own desires. After all, a person's fulfilment of one of these kinds of desires would cause there to be less desire-fulfilment in the world, and thus one would fail to most optimally be committed to what a eudaimonist should be ultimately committed to (the organising principle of the good life, which in this case is desire-fulfilment).

However, this argument assumes that immoral desires always cause a greater degree of desire-frustration than desire-fulfilment in the world. My previously mentioned example of someone wanting self-torture undermines this account of immorality, since it seems like a person torturing themself or helping a person torture themself is morally bad regardless of whether that person wants to torture themself. Moreover, it seems like the fulfilment of the desires of a large crowd in a colosseum and the frustration of the desires of a few humans and animals fighting and being tortured in the colosseum causing on balance more desire-fulfilment than desire-frustration, does not make the fulfilment of the crowd's desires not immoral.

With respect to remote and pointless desires one might argue that according to eudaimonistic desire-fulfilment theory, my counterexample scenarios which say that what is good for a person is the fulfilment of a single desire (either a remote or pointless desire) are impossible because a person should desire desire-fulfilment elsewhere in the world. Yet it is theoretically possible either that there are no other beings with desires in the world, or that all other beings with desires in the world have the exact same single remote or pointless desire as the person in the counterexample scenario. Hence, this scenario of having a single desire which is either remote or pointless is not impossible even for eudaimonistic desire-fulfilment theory.

Therefore idealised eudaimonistic desire-fulfilment theory also cannot effectively respond to the remote, immoral and pointless desire counterexamples.

Resonance

I have pointed out several problems with desire-fulfilment theory in this chapter, but does it have any advantages over other theories of well-being, like my own, which say that the content of well-being is determined at least partially by objective goodness? One of the core animating motivations behind desire-fulfilment theory or any subjective theory of well-being is the resonance constraint which says that a person must find their own well-being and what is good for them subjectively compelling and non-alienating (Rosati 1996, 299; Heathwood 2021, 18). Unlike other motivations (like responding to the experience machine), it is commonly thought that the resonance requirement cannot be plausibly achieved by objective theories of well-being (Heathwood 2021, 18; Lin 2022, 10, 18).

Yet, it is not straightforward for even subjective theories to fulfil the resonance requirement. The resonance or non-alienation requirement must not be so broad that it considers an individual to be genuinely attracted to and not alienated from something if they are in alienated conditions. Alienated conditions are where one is not thinking calmly or rationally and can include being hypnotised, indoctrinated, or under the influence of drugs (Rosati 1996, 305). On the other hand, the non-alienation requirement should not be so narrow that someone will only care about what is good for them in extremely idealised conditions. For if the difference between a person and their idealised counterpart is too great, then the normal person could be alienated from their idealised counterpart and feel like the desires and attitudes of their idealised counterpart are too distant from one's own desires and attitudes (Fletcher 2016, 73–74). For example, the idealised person might want to have the rigorous childhood education of John Stuart Mill, but the actual person might not find this compelling. This concern about the potential conflict between the desires of an actual person and of an idealised person, caused Railton to propose that what is good for an actual person is not what the fully informed rational person would want for themself but what the idealised person would want for an actual person taking into account the actual person's character and desires (1986, 16).

In the objective list chapter I argued that objective list theories could accommodate a basic version of the resonance requirement in their account of well-being, because it is possible for subjective states (like being compelled by and not being alienated from what is objectively good for oneself) to be objectively good. This means that objective theories of well-being can consistently hold that a person cannot achieve complete well-being unless they are genuinely attracted to whatever objective goods constitute their well-being. But the inclusion of being compelled by one's prudential good as a part of one's well-being, does not mean that objective theories can fulfil a stronger version of the non-alienation requirement which requires that descriptively speaking a person is compelled by what is good for themself. It is possible both for a person to not be genuinely attracted to the objective good of knowledge, and for being genuinely attracted to knowledge to increase one's well-being. Furthermore, it seems impossible for an objective theory to guarantee that no individual will find the goods which make up their well-being alienating, because an objective theory says the goodness of prudential goods are not determined by the individual's desires but by facts independent of their desires.

Nevertheless, my general account of an objectively good well-being or *eudaimonia* as the ultimate end of one's desires is able to guarantee that a person's well-being will resonate with them (except in alienating conditions where we would expect a person to not be consciously compelled by their well-being). For if, as my account outlines, objectively good well-being is the ultimate end of every person's desires, then it follows that everyone is most fundamentally drawn towards and compelled by what is objectively good for themself. Accordingly, all people will be attracted to both their own well-being as a whole and the parts of whatever objective goods make up their well-being. It is always possible that a person might not be consciously attracted to what is objectively good for themself, but according to my account a person is in an alienating condition when this happens. This is because the person has come to believe that that which they most fundamentally care about, that which grounds all of their conscious and unconscious cares and motivations, is not a thing they are attracted to. Hence, we do not need a subjective desire-fulfilment theory to fulfil the stronger resonance requirement and establish a permanent universal link between what genuinely most fundamentally resonates with a person, and what is good for that person.

Moreover, I think my account connecting well-being with the ultimate end of one's desires makes it perfectly positioned to resolve the two competing non-alienation concerns even better than many subjective theories of well-being. As we have seen, the desires of an idealised counterpart can be for ends which do not resonate with the actual person, and what resonates with an actual person can be manufactured in alienating conditions. So restricting the desires which determine well-being to either just the desires of the actual person or just the desires of an idealised counterpart, will only solve one of these non-alienation concerns. But if a subjective or objective theory identifies one's most fundamental desires as the desires which determine/track well-being, we firstly can justifiably say that the manufactured desires of a person do not determine/track well-being. And secondly, we do not need to appeal to an idealised counterpart, because fundamental desires are the actual (though often unconscious and implicit) desires of the person.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have evaluated the desire-fulfilment theory of well-being and argued that it has significant flaws. I began by supporting the Euthyphro objection to desire-fulfilment theory and argued that even if one's desires can generate prudential value, in order to desire an end one must implicitly ultimately desire an end because of its perceived association with this desire-independent goodness. In the next section, I considered six different types of counterexamples to desire-fulfilment theory which attempt to point out desires whose fulfilment does not seem good for a person. I argued that addictive, ill-informed, and manufactured genuine desires are unsuccessful counterexamples, because desire-fulfilment theory could exclude non-genuine desires from and weaken the role of less fundamental desires among those desires which impact a person's well-being. Yet I also maintained that remote, immoral, and pointless desires are successful counterexamples to desire-fulfilment theory, especially when a person only has one desire which is a very slight desire for one of these types of ends. In the third section, I contended that idealised versions of desire-fulfilment theory cannot effectively respond to the remote, immoral, and pointless desire counterexamples. And in the final section I argued that some objective theories of well-being, including my own, are able to fulfil the resonance requirement and can resolve the competing non-alienation concerns better than many subjective theories of well-being.

Chapter Six: Hedonism

The third hypothesis for the content of the highest good/well-being I will examine is hedonism, which claims that pleasure is the highest good and the organising principle of well-being. Various hedonistic theories may define pleasure differently or place more importance on a particular kind of pleasure, but at their core they all identify the good with some kind of pleasure. Hedonism also argues that pain is intrinsically bad and is fundamentally relevant for determining the good, because pain is seen as the opposite of pleasure (Tilley 2001, 568; Mill 2002, 39). The inclusion of pain along with pleasure in defining good and bad doubles the intuitive strength of hedonism. For it incorporates another morally and prudentially salient value into the theory, in a way that avoids the establishment of two discrete conflicting standards for the good which would compete for the position of one's highest good.

Hedonism is one of the three most prominent theories for what constitutes well-being in the contemporary literature, and it is one of the most significant ethical theories in ancient and modern philosophy. At least two articulations of hedonism — Epicurus's and Mill's — are specifically designed to fulfil the completeness criterion of the highest good. In this chapter I will consider several objections to basic hedonism (which says that all kinds of pleasure are equally good), and in examining each objection I will also analyse whether other variations of hedonism are susceptible to each particular objection. The four other kinds of hedonism I will focus on are Epicurus's hedonism, a slight variant of Epicurus's hedonism, Mill's hedonism, and Feldman's hedonism. It is debatable whether the changes these theories make to basic hedonism amount to a renunciation of hedonism by adopting new standards to measure the value of pleasure. But since this question is beyond the scope of this chapter, I will take for granted that these theories are truly hedonistic.

To clarify, I am analysing hedonism within the framework of eudaimonism because I have defended eudaimonism in the eudaimonism chapter. Here I also argued that a eudaimonist should value the presence of the overarching value of the good life in places other than just their own life. It follows from this that the eudaimonist should also disvalue badness everywhere in the world, because badness is the opposite of what they should value everywhere in the world. This means that the hedonist eudaimonist can justifiably value pleasure in the lives of others independently of its benefit to oneself, and justifiably disvalue pain in others' lives independently of its harm to oneself.

The two central challenges all forms of hedonism share are to withstand objections which claim that pleasure is not the only thing which has (prudential or moral) intrinsic value, and to withstand objections which claim that pleasure is too broad a category and includes some pleasures which are not (prudentially or morally) intrinsically valuable. All of the critiques of hedonism I will consider in this chapter fall into these two classes.

Immoral Pleasures

Let us start with the 'too broad' challenge to hedonism, which highlights undesirable pleasures and claims that this means pleasure itself is not necessarily good and does not necessarily contribute towards one's well-being. The most common form of this objection to hedonism notes that there are many base and immoral pleasures, such as the enjoyment received from torturing someone or seeing them suffer, which not only fail to be good but are positively bad. Moreover, these immoral pleasures like malice and schadenfreude appear intrinsically bad not in spite of but precisely because of their pleasantness (Broad 2014, 234). For the pleasantness of these experiences is grounded in a love of evil and another's pain for its own sake (cf. Hurka 2001, 93).

How might the basic hedonist respond to this objection? Given the value of pleasure and the disvalue of pain in the lives of others, the hedonist can coherently say that causing the pain of others is bad. Nevertheless, this response only makes any causal role a person has in the pain of others objectionable from a hedonist perspective. It does not stop the act of taking pleasure in the pain of others from being good. For example, the pleasure a bystander has in observing someone else being tortured would still be considered intrinsically good according to the hedonist, because the bystander's pleasure has not caused the pain of the tortured person.

Another way the hedonist could respond to the immoral pleasures argument is by conceding that while all pleasure is not ethically good, all pleasure and therefore immoral pleasure is prudentially valuable (Fletcher 2016, 20). They could argue that, for instance, a bystander who experiences pain or no pleasure while observing torture is less well off than a bystander who experiences pleasure while observing torture (Fletcher 2016, 21). Yet I have argued in the eudaimonism chapter that the presence of intrinsic goodness (and therefore of moral goodness) in one's life contributes towards one's well-being. Furthermore, Fletcher points out that many would still think that a torturer who experiences no pleasure when torturing is more well off than a torturer who experiences pleasure (2016, 21). After all, it is intuitive that the enjoyment of bad or evil things would be bad for the person themself. And it follows from Fletcher's point that many would also think that a bystander who experiences no pleasure when observing torture is more well off and has greater well-being than a bystander who experiences pleasure.

A more convincing hedonist response to the problem of immoral pleasures would be to either introduce another standard to assess the goodness of pleasure which is different than a purely quantitative measure of one's hedonic level, or to redefine what one means by 'pleasure' and narrow down what kinds of pleasure can be intrinsically good. Mill adopted the former approach and argued that the quality of pleasures, in addition to the raw amount of pleasure, contributed towards the value of pleasure (2002, 8). According to Mill, what makes certain pleasures more valuable and of a greater quality than others is that they are derived from higher faculties like the intellect, whereas pleasures of lesser quality are those that are derived from lower faculties like the body (2002, 8, 11). This shows how intellectual pleasures like reading Shakespeare could be better than more trivial lower pleasures like that of a pig, but it does not address the problem of immoral pleasures. Mill could perhaps say that the pleasure enjoyed by a sadist is a lower pleasure and therefore is significantly less valuable than other pleasures. But according to Mill's account, the pleasure enjoyed by the sadist is still intrinsically valuable, which means that Mill's hedonism still cannot make sense of immoral pleasures without endorsing them to at least some degree.

The latter approach of wholesale redefining intrinsically valuable pleasure has been taken up by both Epicurus and Feldman. Epicurus distinguished between kinetic and static types of pleasure and argued that static pleasure was our complete and ultimate end (Annas 1995, 85). Kinetic pleasure is the pleasure felt when the lack of or need for something is being taken away, and static pleasure is the pleasure felt once the pain or need for something has been removed (Annas 1987, 8). For example, the pleasure taken in the process of drinking is kinetic, but the subsequent pleasure of having quenched one's thirst is static (Cicero, II 9). For Epicurus static pleasure is also the pleasure which follows from the fulfilment of natural desires, which are the desires we cannot stop ourselves from having (Annas 1995, 337). In other words, static pleasure is the pleasure enjoyed when one is functioning normally and unperturbed in a natural state (Annas 1987, 8–9). This natural state includes *aponia* which is the absence of pain, and *ataraxia* or tranquillity which is the absence of worry, trouble, or disturbance (Epicurus, LM 128; Annas 1995, 336).

Epicurus's hedonism is unable to get around the immoral pleasures objection because even if immoral pleasures could only be kinetic pleasures and not static pleasures, Epicurus thought that kinetic pleasures were intrinsically good, albeit less good and less choiceworthy than static pleasures (KD 8). But I think a variation of Epicurus's hedonism which does not say that kinetic pleasures are intrinsically valuable, can withstand the immoral pleasures objection if immoral pleasures are only kinetic pleasures, and hence do not have intrinsic value. One could take issue with the idea that immoral pleasures cannot be static pleasures and argue that in rare cases a person can be in a state of tranquillity after experiencing immoral pleasure. Yet immoral pleasures more closely resemble kinetic pleasures because the pleasure of observing others' misfortunes does not appear to even temporarily quench the pains, lacks, and needs of the spectator. Immoral pleasures are far more akin to the exciting and frenetic kinetic pleasure of drinking in an uncontrolled way than the calmness of having drunk. In a similar way that continually taking a drug can cause addiction, engaging in immoral pleasures repetitively can even generate new unnatural and immoral desires which in turn do not bring about satisfaction but plunge one further into desire, irritation, and mental troubles. Hence, it seems like this variation of Epicurus's hedonism can deal with immoral pleasures and confine them to kinetic pleasure, since it is hard to see how a psychopath could not be aroused, not feel any mental disturbance whatsoever, and be in a completely tranquil state after watching someone be tortured or enjoying any other immoral state of affairs.

Feldman distinguishes between sensory and attitudinal pleasure, and claims that attitudinal pleasure is the good and appears to claim that sensory pleasure is not good independent of attitudinal pleasure (2004, 3, 57, 107). Sensory pleasure is a feeling where one feels pleasurable sensations, whereas attitudinal pleasure is a propositional attitude where one enjoys, is glad about, or is delighted by something (Feldman 2004, 2, 55–56). Sensory pleasure is a feeling similar to the feeling of heat and cold and is often derived from eating and drinking (2004, 56). And attitudinal pleasure is derived from being pleased about or adopting a pro-attitude towards some state of affairs like there being no wars in the world (2004, 56). Feldman's standard attitudinal hedonism would have to regard immoral attitudinal pleasures — pleasures about bad or immoral states of affairs — as intrinsically good, because it says that all attitudinal pleasures are intrinsically good (2004, 66).

Nonetheless, Feldman also describes several variants of attitudinal hedonism, and desert-adjusted intrinsic attitudinal hedonism would be able to exclude immoral pleasures from the intrinsically valuable pleasures. This variation stipulates that the intrinsic value of an episode and of a life of attitudinal pleasure is equal to its 'desert-adjusted' amount of pleasure, which is whether something deserves to be or should be an object of pleasure (Feldman 2004, 120–21). The desert variation of attitudinal hedonism manages to not treat immoral pleasures as intrinsically valuable, but it seems like this is only because it is an ad hoc adjustment which is specifically designed to get around the problem of immoral and trivial pleasures (Olsaretti 2006, 414). The adjustment uses the idea of desert to reduce or eliminate the goodness of a class of pleasures, without fully unpacking the concept of desert and explaining why we cannot consider things other than attitudinal pleasure to be intrinsically good when they seem to deserve to happen. For example, why is it not intrinsically good, independent of our attitudinal pleasure, if there are no wars in the world? Therefore, desert-adjusted attitudinal hedonism requires a more acceptable defence of its core features to be able to properly respond to the problem of immoral pleasures.

In summary, the immoral pleasures objection is successful against basic hedonism, the hedonism Mill, Epicurus, and Feldman, but is unsuccessful against a slight variant of Epicurus's hedonism.

Virtue & Pleasure

Let us now switch to arguments in line with the second type of challenge to hedonism which tries to reveal and capitalise on sources of intrinsic value outside of pleasure. An obvious problem for hedonism is how virtue can be considered intrinsically good if pleasure is the highest good and is the complete good (which means that it makes all other goods good). We touched on whether some pleasures can be not intrinsically good in the immoral pleasures argument, but this new objection deals more specifically with (1) whether virtue is intrinsically valuable, and (2) whether there is an inherent conflict between virtue and pleasure which stops virtue from being included in the hedonistic good life. The aim of the current argument is to show that the category of pleasure is not large enough because there are goods outside of pleasure. Whereas the former immoral pleasures argument wanted to show that pleasure is too broad a category for intrinsic goodness because not all pleasures are good. Hence, this challenge cannot be resolved, as the immoral pleasures objection was with the variation of Epicurus, through the introduction of a moralised conception of pleasure which either excludes or adjusts the value of immoral pleasures, because it does not address the existence of intrinsic goods outside of pleasure.

The hedonist could double down and claim that our valuing of virtue for its own sake is mistaken and that we should desire virtue only as a means to achieve pleasure. This option would involve adopting a revisionary understanding of virtue which revises the content of the virtues to be the disposition to promote pleasure in oneself and others (Annas 1995, 340). But it is hard to swallow the idea that virtue, as it is normally understood, has no value independent of its propensity to increase pleasure. It seems intrinsically wrong to break promises and take pleasure in the harming of others even if it increases one's own pleasure or the aggregate pleasure of others. For instance, it seems wrong for several bystanders or a large sadistic audience to take pleasure in the torturing of a person, even if the total pleasure of the audience is far greater than the pain of the person being tortured. Moreover, a virtuous life of a conventionally wise person lived in accordance with justice, courage, and temperance but without any pleasure, would seem to have at least some intrinsic goodness included within it. And as we have seen, the act of taking pleasure in another's torment appears to make the bystander's life less good in at least one respect than if they did not have this immoral pleasure. To be sure, the goodness of behaving virtuously might well be outweighed by the goodness of pleasure depending on the situation, but this does not question the independent value of virtue.

Epicurus and Mill were well aware that one of the main challenges hedonism faces is to explain how pleasure could be complete when we seem to desire and value things like virtue for their own sake and not for the sake of pleasure (Mill 2002, 36; Annas 1987, 10–11). In *Utilitarianism*, Mill attempts to avoid this instrumental valuing of virtue and remain a hedonist. He insists both that virtue should be desired disinterestedly for its own sake, and that pleasure is our ultimate end (2002, 36). To justify this claim Mill cleverly notes that each of the diverse 'ingredients of happiness' are desired for their own sake and 'not merely when considered as swelling an aggregate' (2002, 36). For example, the particular pleasure of exercise may be desired for itself and not simply a means to the comprehensive end of happiness, if it forms part of happiness. Hence, the hedonist can desire virtue for its own sake if virtue forms part of a pleasurable life or a hedonistic account of happiness. One might think this move turns Mill's hedonism into an objective list theory of *eudaimonia*, but if the part of virtue receives its value because it increases the amount of pleasure in one's life, then the theory will still treat pleasure as the highest good and organising principle of *eudaimonia*.

Annas argues that Epicurus has a similar response to the dilemma, where he values virtue for its own sake while also affirming pleasure as the highest good (Annas 1995, 339–41). Epicurus claims that virtue is inseparable from pleasure in the sense that virtue is necessary for a life of pleasure, and that one cannot fail to live pleasantly if one lives a life of virtue (Annas 1995, 340–41; Diogenes, X 138).[33] Hence, like Mill, Epicurus sees virtue as an integral part of *eudaimonia*.

In *De Finibus*, Cicero, in response to Epicurus, gives two reasons why virtue might not constitute part of the good life when defined as a life lived in accordance with the superordinate value of pleasure. First, if there is a conflict between being virtuous and feeling pleasure, one will have to choose pleasure and vice over virtue (Cicero, II 51–59). It might be only in unusual or extreme circumstances, like when death is close at hand or when someone

[33] There are contradictory passages in Epicurus which sometimes advance an instrumental view and sometimes a non-instrumental view of virtue (Annas 1995, 339–41).

feels no remorse for doing wrong, when pursuing pleasure to the detriment of virtue brings about more personal pleasure than being virtuous. But if the long-term personal pleasure benefits of being virtuous are likely to not eventuate, then according to hedonism one will be obliged to act immorally. This point does not show that virtue cannot be included in the hedonistic good life or that it is not included in hedonistic good life in the vast majority of circumstances. However, it does show that virtue and pleasure are not necessarily bound up with each other and that virtue being included in *eudaimonia* is contingent upon external circumstances.

Second, Cicero notes that in order for one to be truly virtuous, one must desire virtue disinterestedly or 'independently of any utility, and of any reward or profit that it may accrue' (Cicero, II 45, 59). This appears to make it impossible for virtue to constitute part of the hedonistic good life, because as Mill and Cicero outline the only reason why the hedonist should desire virtue is because it forms part of a life of pleasure. For if the hedonist desires virtue independently of pleasure then they accept the existence of value independently of pleasure. Hence, the hedonist seems incapable of being virtuous, because desiring virtue for the reason that it will increase the pleasantness of one's life prevents one from having the virtuous motivation of pursuing virtue for its own sake and out of a respect for others. After all, it is hardly virtuous for someone to want to keep promises or not want to slander people only because it will backfire on themself and decrease the pleasantness of their life.

Nevertheless, I think there is a way that the hedonist could include virtue and a virtuous motivation in a hedonistic good life. As Annas suggests, we could remove the problematic desiring of virtue for the sake of pleasure while retaining pleasure as the ultimate end, by implementing a two-level theory where there is one theory which correctly outlines the nature of the good life and what is included in it, and a different theory which is used to motivate one's actions (1987, 15). In the former theory pleasure would be our final end, but in the latter theory virtue would not be subordinate to pleasure. Hence, one could be virtuous and not desire virtue for the sake of one's pleasure by being unaware of the true theory where virtue is subordinate to pleasure. One might argue that if hedonism about the highest good is true and pleasure is the ultimate end of one's desires, then someone who pursues virtue must, descriptively speaking, ultimately desire virtue for the sake of pleasure. Yet the motivation to pursue virtue for the sake of pleasure is not a conscious decision where one has explicitly conceived of virtue as being subordinate to pleasure. And if one does not consciously pursue virtue for the sake of pleasure then it seems like one's moral character will not be corrupted.

While it is somewhat paradoxical that a person must not believe in hedonism in order to live a hedonistic good life which includes virtue, this in itself does not mean that hedonism is false or that one cannot live a hedonistic good life which includes virtue. It just means that an agent cannot both agree with the former and achieve the latter. Hedonism being true or false does not affect whether it is possible for someone to live a hedonistic good life which includes virtue; it is only the individual accepting hedonism as true which prevents this possibility. Thus, from the perspective of hedonism one could live a life in which virtue is not subordinate to pleasure, but still have a very pleasant life where one gains pleasure from pursuing virtue solely for its own sake.

Another possible way of including virtue in the hedonistic good life is through eudaimonism and adopting the same general strategy which I used to argue against an egoistic view of eudaimonism in the third chapter. The eudaimonist can value goodness in the lives of others for its own sake because the eudaimonist's life should be committed to the organising principle of *eudaimonia* which is goodness. Thus, if pleasure is the highest good and organising principle of *eudaimonia*, then the eudaimonist hedonist can value and desire the pleasure of others for its own sake because pleasure is the highest good and organising principle of *eudaimonia*. However, this solution does not work since it requires virtue and its value to be reducible to caring about pleasure in oneself and others, which I argued at the start of this section is implausible.

The practical ability of virtue to be included in a hedonistic good life does not invalidate all arguments which try to undermine hedonism by highlighting a conflict between virtue and pleasure. From a theoretical perspective, highlighting the fact that it seems like virtue is intrinsically valuable independently of whether it increases pleasure poses a challenge to hedonism. This is because the independent value of virtue contradicts the central theoretical claim of hedonism which says that there is nothing which has intrinsic value independent of its relation to pleasure.

Earlier in this section I argued that virtue is valuable independently of one's own pleasure and the pleasure of others. This point all on its own presents a significant problem for hedonism because hedonism cannot explain the existence of intrinsic value outside of pleasure. It is noteworthy that this argument leaves open the possibility that the value of pleasure is greater than the value of virtue, since all the argument needs is for the value of being virtuous to not be fully reducible to the value of the pleasure received directly or indirectly from being virtuous. There is a more ambitious version of this argument which questions if pleasure is actually superior to virtue, and argues that virtue has either a similar or a greater value than pleasure. I propose that our intuitions about the following scenario where there is a conflict between virtue and one's own pleasure support both the moderate and ambitious version of the argument from virtue. For our intuitions about it further support the independent value of virtue, and demonstrate that the value of virtue can not only supersede but also invert the value of pleasure.

If, after the death of a loved one, you were given the opportunity to take a tablet which would stop you from feeling pain when remembering the death or absence of that person and instead would cause you to feel pleasure, would you take the tablet? The basic hedonist would have no choice but to take the tablet. We can tie up any loose ends, by adding that a side effect of the drug is that the recipient immediately forgets that they took the tablet and forgets they have experienced pleasure when they normally would have felt pain. This amendment means that one cannot appeal to any possible future pain which may have been caused by taking the tablet. From a moral perspective it would be quite objectionable to not only avoid honouring the life and memory of a loved one, but to violate their memory by indulging in and deriving pleasure from their death. And prudentially speaking this kind of life which has a respectful and humane relationship with others seems better and healthier than a life which extracts the maximum amount of pleasure from the outcome of others' misfortunes.

The preference for virtue in a case where virtue and pleasure contradict each other indicates at the very least that virtue and pleasure have a similar value. This example on its own is not enough to prove that virtue is superior to pleasure, since one could argue that it makes us choose between momentary gains in pleasure and an extreme degree of vice. Yet the ability of virtue or its opposite to transform an instance of pleasure itself into something bad lends particular credibility to the superior value of virtue over pleasure. In contrast, it does not seem like pleasure or its opposite of pain can transform an instance of virtue itself into something intrinsically bad. Adding pain to an instance of virtuous activity could make the whole activity have a negative value, but when a virtuous act is painful it is the overall activity which combines pain and virtue which is intrinsically bad and not the virtuous act in itself. In contrast, when an act of taking pleasure is immoral, it turns the experience of pleasure itself into something intrinsically bad. Hence, the unique ability of virtue's opposite to transform an instance of pleasure itself into something bad strengthens the case for the idea that virtue is more valuable than pleasure.

In any case, aside from these inferences about the relative value of pleasure, our intuitions about this example reinforce the value of virtue independently of pleasure by outlining a specific instance where virtue is preferable even when it will cause pain.

I have argued that the argument from grief and the more general argument from the independent value of virtue are successful against basic hedonism, but are they successful against the hedonism of Mill, Epicurus, and Feldman?

The argument from grief is successful against Mill because Mill has no way of negatively valuing any kind of pleasure except in its propensity to increase pain or decrease pleasure in the long-term. Similarly, the only way that attitudinal hedonism could defeat this argument and negatively value attitudinal pleasure about death is through a desert-adjusted version, but this version has conceptual difficulties mentioned previously. It seems the pleasure one takes in the death and misfortune of a loved one would have to be kinetic and not involve a purely tranquil static pleasure. For how could one not feel some disquiet in taking pleasure in the misfortune of a person if they really love them? Hence, the argument from grief works against Epicurus's hedonism because, since it intrinsically values kinetic pleasure and cannot value virtue independent of pleasure, it would recommend taking the tablet. Yet the grief argument does not work against the slight variant of Epicurus's hedonism which says that kinetic pleasure is not intrinsically good, because it does not see the immoral kinetic pleasure of taking the tablet as being intrinsically valuable.

However, the broader argument which emphasises that virtue is intrinsically valuable independent of its relationship to pleasure would work against all types of hedonism. For none of them — not even the Epicurean variant which excludes immoral pleasures from being intrinsically good — can account for the existence of an intrinsic good independent of pleasure.

Opposites and Supervenience

The grief example's critique of hedonism is echoed by Seneca in his admonishment of Epicureanism when he asks, 'what is more disgraceful than to seek pleasure in grief itself' (Ep. 99.26). Seneca says this in response to a letter written by Metrodorus, an Epicurean, to his sister who was mourning the death of her son. Specifically, Metrodorus states that 'There is a kind of pleasure akin to grief, which we must hunt at this time' (Seneca, Ep. 99.28). While it is tough to determine what Metrodorus meant by this remark, it can reveal insights about the nature of pleasure and how it is related to pain (Graver 2015, 208). The examination of this relationship is relevant because it informs us about the two pillars on which hedonism and its credibility is grounded.

An idea one could derive from Seneca's and Metrodorus's remarks is that it indicates that pleasure can be founded on and arise from one's own pain. Perhaps the most obvious phenomenon which reflects this idea is melancholy. For as Victor Hugo said, 'melancholy is the pleasure of being sad' (1866, 318). Notice he did not simply say 'melancholy is the mixture of pleasure and sadness'; rather it is *through* the pain of sadness that one feels pleasure. However, this means that pleasure and pain are not opposites, as it is impossible for something to be derived from its opposite. Coldness cannot be derived from heat, and darkness cannot be generated from light. Yet if pleasure and pain are not opposites then the hedonist is forced to choose between whether pleasure or freedom from pain is the highest good, because the two standards are no longer equivalent to each other. Thus, only one of the two pillars of hedonism can preserve its primary position and the other must be secondary and subordinate to the other. This dilemma effectively halves the plausibility of hedonism, since taken on their own pleasure and freedom from pain are much less likely to be complete and to encompass all that is good or desirable for a human being.

If pleasure can be built on or derived from pain then another problem arises out of this fact because it seems to mean that pleasure can be grounded on anything. Pleasure being grounded on anything is a central feature of Aristotle's account of pleasure in Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, where pleasure always accompanies another activity (1175a20–21). Aristotle clarifies the manner in which pleasure accompanies activities by noting that 'pleasure completes the activity–not… by being present <in the activity>, but as a sort of supervenient end, like the bloom on youths' (1174b31–33). This is to say that pleasure is something extra which complements and is a consequence of its associated underlying activity, like the bloom of a youth's face complements and is a consequence of their underlying activity of being healthy (1175a6).

Aristotle's account and the accompanying nature of pleasure explains how pleasure can be derived from pain and why it could be built on anything. However, if pleasure just supervenes on other activities, like ripples spreading across the surface of a lake, then it is incredibly difficult for the hedonist to plausibly maintain that the afterglow of pleasure is not only the most desirable and most good thing, but is the sole source of everything which is desirable and good for human beings. For one would expect the highest and most complete good for human beings to include and be manifested in the activity which pleasure supervenes on and to not be restricted to one's superficial or surface-level experience.

The problem of pleasure and pain not being opposites works against Mill's and Feldman's hedonism since you can derive both intellectually-based and attitudinal pleasure from pain. For instance, you could take pleasure in your own more intellectual and less bodily pain. However, this objection does not work against Epicurus because, given that Epicurus's static pleasure is defined by the absence of pain and disturbance, you cannot derive static pleasure from pain. The supervenience objection works against all three theories. While Mill, Epicurus, and Feldman attempt, to varying degrees, to tie the value of pleasure to its underlying activity, it is pleasure and pleasure's relationship to the underlying activity which has value and not the underlying activity itself. For example, it is only the pleasure gained from swimming or acquiring knowledge that makes the activity good and the rest of one's activity which pleasure supervenes on has no impact.

The Experience Machine

The next argument against hedonism I will examine is Nozick's famous thought experiment of the experience machine. Nozick's experience machine allows you to have any experience you so choose, as neuropsychologists have programmed the machine such that it will cause your brain to think and feel like you are having desirable experiences while you are really just ‘floating in a tank, with electrodes attached to your brain’ (Nozick 1974, 42). Nozick contends that we would not plug ourselves into the machine because there is something which matters to us other than our internal experience (1974, 44) However, hedonism recognises only pleasure as the source and cause of intrinsic value. And pleasure fully takes place within the confines of one’s internal experience and thus can be replicated in the experience machine. Therefore, by declining to plug into the experience machine one is implicitly rejecting hedonism, because one is recognising a source of value which is independent of experience and thus is independent of pleasure.

I will focus on a precise and less ambitious version of the experience machine objection given by Lin and Fletcher which, unlike other versions, does not rely on the undesirability of a life of substantial or maximal pleasure in the experience machine (Lin 2016, 320–21; Fletcher 2016, 15–16). Instead, this version contrasts two lives which have identical experiences and therefore identical pleasures which do not differ in degree, kind, or when they occur in one’s life. The only difference between these two lives is that one of them is lived in the real world, and the other is lived in the experience machine. This formulation of the experience machine objection accommodates a person’s potential willingness to plug into an experience machine if plugging in resulted in greater pleasure than they would have in the real world. For it places the competition between the two lives on a level playing field, where pleasure is a controlled variable and reality/illusion is the independent variable (Lin 2016, 320–21).

Of the two lives described, the life in the real world appears more desirable. It seems like almost everyone would prefer a pleasurable life in the real world over an identically pleasurable life plugged into the experience machine. Lin notes that we would feel pity for someone who has been plugged into the experience machine since birth, because they have never interacted with or received care from other human beings and their very existence is unknown to all other humans (2016, 321). As outlined previously, the intuition that there is a difference in the value of the two lives strongly indicates that there is a source of intrinsic value for people other than pleasure. This source of value seems to be being in contact with reality and interacting with real human beings as opposed to mere phantoms.

A common general strategy for the hedonist to take against the experience machine objection is to undermine or debunk the intuition that makes us think the experience machine is comparatively undesirable (Fletcher 2016, 16–17; Crisp 2021). If successful, this strategy would demonstrate that it is not unreasonable to choose the life in the experience machine. Silverstein notes that our desires are not an infallible source of evidence for what constitutes our well-being (2000, 288). This does not cast any particular doubt on our intuitions about the experience machine since all intuitions can be mistaken. But it does open the possibility for the undermining of our intuitions.

There are a variety of ways that one could challenge the intuition to prefer a life in the real world over one in the experience machine. One could attack the intuitive desirability of not being in the experience machine with a debunking approach which categorically says that a desire for pleasure is what ultimately undergirds all of our desires and intuitions (Silverstein 2000, 293–94; Lin 2016, 327–28). If true, this means that our desire to not be in the experience machine is actually grounded in a more fundamental desire which is indifferent as to whether one receives pleasure in the experience machine or outside of it. Consequently, if our desire for the life in the real world compared to the experience machine life is wholly founded on an indifferent desire for pleasure, then we have no reason to desire either life more than the other.

However, for this debunking objection to work we need good reason to think that pleasure is what motivates our desires and intuitions. Silverstein, drawing from Brandt and Railton, appears to argue that happiness or pleasure is the source of our desires (2000, 293–94). Yet he focuses on the process of how we can come to desire the opposite of our true desire, and not on why pleasure is our one true aim. It is true that associating pleasure with a state of affairs generally makes something desirable. But associating immoral pleasures with something can make it undesirable, and other features like being in accordance with reality could also influence desire. Hence, without good reason to think that our intuitions and preferences are derived solely from the desirability of pleasure, the objection does not get off the ground.

In contrast to the above argument that pleasure most fundamentally informs all intuitions, one could make more specific arguments to undermine the intuitions used to assess the experience machine scenario. One could argue that our preference in this scenario is influenced not just by prudential value, but also by moral, aesthetic, and perfectionistic considerations (Silverstein 2000, 290–91; Bramble 2016, 139–40).[34] For the influence of these factors to introduce bias, one has to show that these factors do not contribute towards prudential value. I have argued that being moral forms part of well-being, and it is possible that aesthetic and perfectionistic factors might partially contribute towards well-being or what is good for a person. Yet we can respond to this hedonist counterargument even if each of these three factors are shown to not contribute towards prudential value. Nozick tries to

[34] Perfectionism ascribes value to the development of human nature.

remove moral concerns by saying that others also have the choice of entering into the machine (1974, 43). We could likewise attempt to exclude aesthetic and perfectionistic concerns by telling people to disregard aesthetic and perfectionistic factors and to only assess the well-being of the two lives. It seems at least to me that if we bracket these kinds of factors, people would still prefer a life outside of the experience machine. Making these explicit qualifications might not necessarily remove all bias and dislike of the experience machine based on the above factors, but outlining the measures one should not use to evaluate the desirability of a life will greatly reduce the impact this kind of bias can have.

Two other key biases mentioned in the literature which could cause people to reject the experience machine are the status quo bias and the bias against deception. The status quo bias says that people tend to prefer the way things currently are over different circumstances, and that because we are in the real world we will have an irrational preference for it (Fletcher 2016, 16–17, Bramble 2016, 139). The bias against deception suggests that we will be inclined to avoid the deception of the experience machine because in the real world people who are deceived often suffer because of their deception (Fletcher 2016, 16; Silverstein 2000, 296).

Nevertheless, again, it seems like adjusting the framing of the experience machine scenario can in large part reduce these biases. Rowland developed a prompt which stresses that the experience machine will not break or malfunction, and asks if someone who has spent half of their life in the experience machine and the other half out of it should live the remainder of their life in the machine (2017, 114–15). The results were that 90 percent of subjects thought that that person should choose to live in reality (2017, 116).

But there are other reasons for thinking these biases do not influence our response to the experience machine scenario. The status quo bias in particular is unlikely to influence our assessment because our lives are increasingly dominated by digital technology like social media where we don’t directly interact with the real world. This kind of prolonged isolated interaction with a simulated reality quite strongly resembles what one’s life would be like in the experience machine. Hence, the experience machine is not as far removed from the status quo as the objection suggests. The bias against deception argument is similarly unpersuasive since it does not demonstrate that our dislike of deception is actually a bias. It may be the case that we avoid deception solely because of the bad track record that deception has in the real world. But it is just as plausible that we avoid deception either solely or in part because we have an intrinsic desire to not be deceived and that we value knowledge and contact with reality for its own sake.

It is always possible that analysing and becoming aware of real biases and irrelevant influences on one’s decision to avoid the experience machine will not eliminate the bias. Yet insisting on the possibility of the presence of bias is not enough to serve as a strong counterargument to the experience machine argument. One needs to show that the deciding reason why many or most people still prefer a life in the real world is because they are influenced by bias. One way to support the argument could be to show that those who do not change their minds about the experience machine after being presented with potential reasons for bias are generally less rational and have a worse ability to recognise when heuristics fail in different circumstances than those who do change their mind. However, we do not have evidence that this is the case.

Therefore, taking these objections into account, the experience machine remains a powerful argument against basic hedonism because it strongly indicates that there is something independent of experience, and therefore independent of pleasure, which is intrinsically valuable. The hedonism of Mill, Epicurus, and the variation of Epicurus are also susceptible to this objection since each locate pleasure wholly in the mind and in one's experience.

Feldman's attitudinal hedonism is likewise vulnerable to this objection because you can take attitudinal pleasure in a state of affairs which does not really exist, and a life in which one only takes pleasure in a false reality seems less desirable than a life where one takes pleasure in true state of affairs. Feldman responds to this problem by proposing a truth-adjusted attitudinal hedonism which says that the value of an instance of pleasure is significantly lower if the object of one's attitude is false (2004, 192). This adjusted version would allow an attitudinal hedonist to consistently reject a life in the experience machine.

Attitudinal Hedonism

Given that these adjusted versions of attitudinal hedonism have circumvented many of the objections to hedonism we have looked at, I will now evaluate Feldman's attitudinal theory itself. As I mentioned previously, Feldman's hedonism is founded on the distinction between attitudinal and sensory pleasure, and takes only attitudinal pleasure to be the good. Feldman says attitudinal pleasure often comes together with sensory pleasure because when we are happy about some state of affairs we usually take sensory pleasure in that state of affairs (2004, 56). Yet Feldman maintains that you can have attitudinal pleasure without sensory pleasure when, for instance, one has the attitude of being pleased about one's sensory pain becoming less intense, but one does not *feel* any sensory pleasure and only feels less pain (2004, 56).

Haybron points out that the mere attitudinal pleasure of having a pro-attitude towards something appears to take all the fun out of pleasure (2008, 64). Indeed a propositional attitude which is closer to a belief, hope, or desire than a feeling, at the very least fails to capture a large part of the pleasantness and value of pleasure (Feldman 2004, 56). For example, the pleasure received from liking the taste of guava juice has a strongly compelling value and desirability which is either totally absent or severely lacking in merely liking the fact the guava juice tasted the way it did or liking the fact that one is drinking guava juice (Haybron 2008, 64–65).

Furthermore, Haybron notes that in cases of extreme suffering, it is not, as Feldman's attitudinal hedonism must say, just one's attitude towards the pain which is intrinsically bad; it is also the excruciating pain (2008, 65). How one responds to and frames the pain being experienced can definitely improve one's well-being. But once pain goes beyond a certain threshold it becomes very hard to see how one's well-being could be fully restored without addressing the sensory pain one feels. Feldman thinks that what makes sensation painful or pleasurable is one's attitude towards the fact that you are feeling the sensation (2004, 80). This would indeed make attitudinal pleasure sufficient to improve any negative sensory impact on well-being. But it is highly questionable if changing one's attitude towards a pain is enough to turn extreme pain into either pleasure or no sensation at all. If someone is glad about the fact that their leg is being amputated because it will prevent infection — and hence is glad that they are feeling the sensation of their leg being amputated because it means their goal of non-infection is being achieved — they will still feel an immense amount of pain. The pain will not turn into ecstasy simply by virtue of one's attitude towards it. As Haybron puts it, we give those in pain morphine and not a copy of the *Enchiridion of Epictetus* primarily because it relieves people of sensory pain and not merely because we want to change their attitude towards a fact (2008, 65). Thus, attitudinal hedonism does not properly account for the value of sensory pleasure and the negative value of sensory pain.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, throughout this chapter I have argued against the hedonistic theory that pleasure is the highest good and organising principle of well-being. I defended four main objections to basic hedonism. The first argued that pleasure is not the highest and complete good because there are some immoral pleasures which are not intrinsically good. The next three objections contended that we have reason to think that there are things which are intrinsically valuable for human beings other than pleasure. While I supported the view that virtue can be included within a hedonistic good life, I argued that virtue is valuable independently of pleasure. Next I argued that it is reasonable for the highest good and best activity of human beings to include not just the surface-level experience of pleasure but also the underlying activity which pleasure supervenes on. Lastly, I defended the experience machine objection which similarly maintains that there must be something independent of pleasure and experience which is intrinsically valuable.

During the examination of these objections I also considered if each of them could be successful against Epicurus, Mill, and Feldman's versions of hedonism, and a slight variant of Epicurus's hedonism. I argued that the immoral pleasures objection is successful against Epicurus, Mill, and Feldman; that the experience machine objection is successful against

Mill, Epicurus, and the variation of Epicurus; and that supervenience and independent value of virtue objections work against all four specifications of hedonism. I also contended that Feldman's attitudinal pleasure is not the good because it fails to capture much of the value and pleasantness of sensory pleasure.

Chapter Seven: Loving Participation

In this chapter I will advance my own proposal of what the content of the highest good/organising principle of well-being is. The test for the truth of this proposal is if a life which fully embodies the proposed highest good lacks any goodness. For if the full instantiation of an organising principle leaves out some good activity which could be instantiated in a thing, then this organising principle cannot fulfil the criterion of completeness or being the source of all intrinsic value. The way that a hierarchical monistic theory of well-being like mine must show that its account of the content of the highest good is complete, is by explaining how this organising principle causes the value of all goods which seem to exist in the good life of a human being.

Section One: Generating an Embryonic Hypothesis of the Highest Good

The I-Thou Relationship

In order to more easily determine the content of *eudaimonia* or well-being, we must first break down this problem into smaller and simpler components. Aristotle does this while developing his argument for the highest good, where he looks at how we answer simpler questions such as what makes a craftsman or a body part good, so as to use the same method to answer the analogous harder problem of what makes a human being good (NE 1097b25–34). I will begin my attempt to determine the highest good by using the same basic strategy illustrated in the 'ascent of desire' section of Plato's *Symposium*. In this section Socrates relates Diotima's account of how one can come to have knowledge of beauty itself by studying phenomena in concrete particular instances. The ascent starts with one's love of a particular individual's beautiful body (210a). Then that person 'will realise for himself that the beauty of any one body is closely akin to that of any other body' and recognise that 'it is folly not to regard the beauty in all bodies as one and the same' (210a–210b). This quality which is shared by all beautiful bodies is the pattern or form of beauty (210b). Thus, one proceeds from an understanding of multiple instances of beauty to a clearer overall understanding of the pattern which unites those instances.

Analogously, we can answer the question of the nature of the good and most desirable life by first investigating what the best and most desirable particular instances of human activity are. The smaller moments of good activity and the larger whole of a good life both participate in the pattern or form of intrinsic goodness, with each activity instantiating goodness on different timescales. So by looking at multiple instances of the most good moments of activity, we can extract the pattern of goodness which is present in each of these instances and then apply this pattern to the higher level of an entire lifetime of activity to understand the nature of the good life.

One might think a better strategy of using good instances to determine the good life is to continually replicate the best instance of activity within a lifetime so that a person's entire life exclusively involves these best instances. If this continual replication is not possible, then one could try to arrive at the best approximation of the highest good by packing as many ideal moments into a person's life as possible. However, adding up moments of ideal activity will not produce a lifetime of *eudaimonia*, because the whole of a life is other than the mere summation of its individual moments. Thus, just as you do not get your best thousand-page novel by imitating the best page you can write a thousand times, you will not get the good life by simply adding up moments of good activity. The pages or moments must be integrated into a coherent whole. My previously outlined approach enables us to preserve the full pattern and organisation of goodness as recognised in a particular instance and apply it in proportion to a larger whole.

I think an exceptionally good and desirable particular instance of activity for human beings is transcendently meaningful experiences in which a part of the world discloses its inherent intrinsic value or beauty to us. When I refer to the intrinsic value or beauty of a thing I am talking about the inherent value of a thing and not the thing's possession of intrinsically good mutable qualities like being healthy. I believe transcendent experiences as I have defined them are the same as what Martin Buber describes as the 'I-Thou relationship' in his book *I and Thou*. My regard for these transcendent experiences was in part inspired by Buber's work. However, my aim in this section is to express how I understand these transcendent experiences. As such I will reference ideas found in Buber's work to convey what I take to be involved in transcendent experiences. But I will not explain and interpret in full Buber's view of the I-Thou relation, so as to not get bogged down in the interpretation of Buber's almost exclusively metaphorical and poetic language which is not easily understandable from the perspective of analytic philosophy.

Buber says that our way of attending to the world and the things in it comes in two fundamentally different forms — the 'I-Thou' relationship and the 'I-It' relationship (19). The 'Thou' and 'It' components of the relationships do not each exclusively denote specific things like only people or only non-living things; rather they signify the *relationship* between the individual and what they are focusing on (19). Thus, the 'I' in each of the attitudes is technically not the same, since it is transformed by the attitude in which it stands (19–20). The I-It relationship is the opposite of the I-Thou relationship and hence is the opposite of what I take to be transcendent meaningful experiences (36). As such, these two primordial relationships are best explored and understood in contrast with each other.

In the I-It relationship, a person has a *thing* for their object (20). They treat what they are relating to as something dead, and having only instrumental value. The 'I' perceives, thinks, or wills a discrete thing that exists in a world of other discrete things, where there is always a rigid degree of separation between the subject (I) and the object (It) (20, 35). In fact, Buber calls the 'I-It relationship' the relationship of separation (35). It is the kind of relationship a taxidermist has towards an animal. In contrast, in the I-Thou relationship, the Cartesian subject-object distinction falls away and one treats what is being attended to as a subject, as a you or Thou, which one stands in direct relationship to (26). Instead of being a relationship of separation, in the I-Thou relationship there is an unmediated presencing and interchange between the 'I' and the 'Thou' where, as Johnson notes, there is a 'radical openness to the Thou being addressed' (Buber 27; Johnson 2020, 153–54). In this mode of relationship there is a progressive unfolding of oneself and the other, like that in a face-to-face encounter, which cuts through any reservation or separation based in self-consciousness, boredom, or being overly conscious of other matters. In this relationship one necessarily treats what one is relating to as having intrinsic value and being intrinsically meaningful (26). In Kantian terms, one treats the other not as a mere means but as an end in itself (Johnson 2020, 155–56). This is not simply a matter of internally assenting to a proposition stating the intrinsic value and meaning of the other, but rather requires the reality of this idea to be grasped and fully salient to oneself by being deeply embedded in one's perspective. For a person, like Ivan Ilyich, can propositionally affirm that all humans will die, while still resisting the existential weight and force of the idea as it applies to one's own life (Tolstoy 2004, 79).

Buber gives the example of the consideration of a tree. When we merely perceive the movement, shape, or colour of a tree, when we study and classify it, the actual presence of the tree is being stringently subdued so that the tree becomes a mere object that occupies space and time (22–23). This is the I-It relationship. However, Buber notes that we can become bound up in relation to the tree such that the tree is no longer a detached object being analysed, but is an other and a Thou which is being encountered (23). Notably, one does not need to ignore the qualities of the tree in order to enter this latter mode of engagement. This is because every aspect of the tree including its structure, movement, colour, and composition, is presented in a single whole when one encounters the tree itself (23). To use another example, the I-It relationship is exemplified when a person is trying to count and discern the different colours of a rainbow from each other. And the I-Thou relationship is exemplified when a person is gripped by the majesty of a rainbow. Where a person marvels at the rainbow itself, not its mere characteristics, but the fullness of it which includes all of its characteristics.

I think these ideal moments of transcendently meaningful experiences, as characterised by the I-Thou relationship, occur whenever one opens oneself up uniquely to the presence of an other. An example of this is the goosebumps felt when listening to a piece of music in just the right frame of mind where one is drawn towards something of value in the song and responds by setting aside one's preconceptions and devoting all of one's attention to the song in inviting the whole value and reality of the song to be unfolded and make itself known to oneself. Another is looking into the eyes of an animal or a human being with a kind of gratuitous receptive self-disclosure, whereby that which is revealed by the other in one's attending to them feeds back on oneself and further calibrates one's mode of engagement calls forth the part of oneself and needed to properly intimate the full intrinsic meaning and value of the other. But any experience in which one relates towards and is overcome by the intrinsic beauty and value of a thing, falls within what I mean by a transcendent meaningful experience.

Can transcendent meaningful experiences involve things which are evil? While evil is not intrinsically good, one might argue that evil can be intrinsically beautiful like in Riefenstahl's Nazi propaganda film *Triumph of the Will*. This would allow an intrinsically evil thing to genuinely disclose some intrinsic value and thus be the subject of what I am calling a transcendent meaningful experience. I will hereafter exclude this subclass of meaningful experiences from the meaningful experiences I am talking about, on the grounds that a transcendent experience of this kind which engages with evil is considerably less good than one which does not engage with an evil thing.

Transcendently meaningful experiences are obviously quite highly desired by people. If asked to choose moments of their life which stood out as being particularly desirable, it seems like people would most often pick those moments when they are overcome by the intrinsic beauty and value of a person or thing. Along with desirability, blessedness is another standard we can use to judge the goodness of a particular instance of human activity. This is because *eudaimonia* can mean 'blessedness', and a good moment of human activity ought to reflect at a smaller scale the goodness of the good life. Transcendent meaningful experiences or the I-Thou relationship seem especially blessed moments of activity because they involve an intense re-enchantment with the world. In speaking of these moments of revelation we encounter which are 'saturated with meaning, but whose meaning cannot be put into words', Scruton says it is as though 'we suddenly come across a window, through which we catch sight of another and brighter world' (2010). This re-enchantment with the world is especially salient in an encounter with the mysterious beauty presented in music, art, poetry, and literature. But it also occurs whenever one solely relates to a person or any other thing as a source of intrinsic value. Therefore, transcendent meaningful experiences are especially desirable and blessed particular instances of activity.

But are meaningful experiences the best instance of activity? An enormous problem with using meaningful experiences to determine the highest good of humans is that it seems like meaningful experiences are not complete and can exclude some goods. If we try to apply the pattern of goodness in an incomplete good to a person's whole life, then the goodness in the person's life will likewise be incomplete and not the highest good. Four major things other than meaningful experiences which appear to be good are virtue, (well-directed) pleasure, knowledge, and health. While being distinct from meaningful experiences, the good of pleasure is obviously present in meaningful experiences. A person could experience pain while encountering a sculpture depicting a grief like the Pietà, but being overwhelmed by the disclosure of meaning and value seems to always produce pleasure. Thus, the good of pleasure supports and does not count against the completeness of meaningful experiences.

A kind of knowledge is also present in meaningful experiences because these experiences require being in contact with reality. As covered in the hedonism chapter, a major problem with the experience machine and pleasure as the highest good is that we desire to live in contact with reality. Being in contact with reality — the reality of the thing disclosing its intrinsic value — is an important part of why I think transcendent meaningful experiences are exceptionally good particular instances of activity. A transcendent meaningful experience could occur in the experience machine if the person plugged in is in contact with the intrinsic reality of the thing one is relating to. For example, in the experience machine the intrinsic beauty of the pattern or form (though not the fake material aspects) of the Mona Lisa can disclose itself and be truly present to a person in the experience machine. However, a transcendent meaningful experience cannot occur when a thing does not actually disclose its intrinsic value, and one falsely perceives the thing as having intrinsic value. Consider someone who does not realise that a person they take to be intrinsically valuable is actually an illusion created by the experience machine. An illusion of this kind which, unlike the Mona Lisa simulation, does not present and enable contact with intrinsic reality, simply cannot disclose intrinsic value. The person in the experience machine might think they are having an experience which discloses the intrinsic value of a thing, but in reality the thing which seems to reveal its intrinsic value does not exist and therefore is incapable of having and disclosing its intrinsic value. Therefore, like pleasure, knowledge/contact with reality is an integral part of a transcendent meaningful experience, because contact with reality is necessary to reveal the intrinsic value of what one is relating towards.[35]

Yet the other two goods of virtue and health do not seem to be necessarily present in transcendent meaningful experiences. Moreover, it seems like a virtuous and healthy person having a meaningful experience is a more good instance of activity than a non-virtuous non-healthy person having a meaningful experience. The superiority of a momentary conglomeration of goods would appear to support an objective list theory of well-being, since extracting what makes this best instance good and applying it to a whole life results in several separate goods (virtue, meaningful experiences etc.) forming part of the good life. However, a reasonable explanation which uses a single good to explain what makes each of these goods good would turn this theory of well-being into a hierarchical monistic theory.[36] I think

[35] This similarity does not mean that knowledge/contact with reality is enough to constitute a transcendent meaningful experience because knowledge does not necessarily involve the disclosure of intrinsic value or pleasure.
[36] See objective list chapter.

extracting the form of the best activity which has goods integrated with each other, is the best hope of arriving at an explanation of what makes each of these things good. After all, the best singular activity which does not merely list goods involved but integrates them under a larger cohesive form (like pleasure and contact with reality are integrated into meaningful experiences) could indicate how other goods might be integrated under a substantive higher principle.

So we can reconceptualise my strategy in this chapter as not logically proceeding from the complete ideal moment of activity to the complete good life, but rather as using the best cohesive moment of activity as a stepping-stone which might gesture towards a highest substantive principle which explains the goodness of other goods.

I have already argued for the exceptional goodness of meaningful experiences, which are cohesive moments that include multiple goods. Another strong candidate for the best cohesive moment of activity is an instance of virtuous activity where a virtuous person takes pleasure in enacting virtue like being courageous in war or giving money to the poor. Yet it seems like the reason why one takes pleasure in this activity is because partaking in the activity further reveals and causes one to be in contact with the intrinsic value of the external good which the moral act is directed towards, like the reduction of suffering. Another non-mutually exclusive reason for taking pleasure in virtue is because one's contact with virtue through exercising virtue discloses the intrinsic value or beauty of virtue. The truth of either of these explanations mean that taking pleasure in virtue is itself a kind of transcendent meaningful experience, because it involves the disclosure of intrinsic value. And since what unites virtue with pleasure in this activity is the meaningful experience and not some other principle/good, the activity of taking pleasure in exercising virtue will point to the same higher uniting principle as any other activity of meaningful experience.

One might think that being virtuous is more desirable and is a better cohesive moment of activity than any transcendent meaningful experience. But the transcendent meaningful experience of both being virtuous and taking pleasure in it, includes more goodness than just being virtuous.

Therefore, we have good reason for thinking that a transcendent meaningful experience or an I-Thou relationship is the best instance of cohesive activity. For it seems a meaningful experience (either any meaningful experience or specifically taking pleasure in being virtuous) is better than any other cohesive good instance of activity like just virtue, health, knowledge, or pleasure. It is irrelevant for my argument if only taking pleasure in virtue is better than any other cohesive good activity, because the organising principle of these two classes of transcendent meaningful experiences are the same as each other. For both classes of activity are most fundamentally the disclosure to oneself of a thing's intrinsic value.

Importantly, my larger argument in this chapter is not reliant on a meaningful experience being the best cohesive instance of activity. It is enough to show that meaningful experiences are especially good instances of activity, since especially good instances of cohesive activity can still be used to gesture towards and arrive at a principle which might turn out to determine the goodness of all goods included in the good life. Ultimately my argument rests on whether the instantiation of the organising principle of meaningful experiences in a human life results in a life which includes all things which seem to be good, and if this principle can explain the goodness of these goods.

Making the Ascent

Now that we have posited an instance of human activity especially suited to the task of determining the organising principle of the good life, we can turn to the next objective of outlining the pattern or form of the goodness of meaningful experiences. In order to outline the pattern involved in meaningful experiences without reference to the pattern's instantiation in anything, it will help to consider what this pattern might look like when instantiated at a different level in which the activity is more spread out. This is what Plato does with beauty in the *Symposium*, where he looks at beauty in bodies, souls, laws, and human practices (210a–c).

I think the form of meaningful experiences instantiated at a longer timespan yet still involving a focus on one particular thing would look like a relationship of loving participation. Just like in meaningful experiences, in this long-term relationship one grasps the intrinsic value of the other and the revelation of the other's intrinsic goodness naturally leads one to love the other. Secondly, also like in meaningful experiences, it is the direct active contact or participation with the reality of the other thing which reveals the value of it. Yet in a long-term relationship one's contact with the other is ongoing and continually reveals new aspects (or the same aspects in a new light) of the other and their intrinsic value.

It is possible to have a long-lasting relationship with non-living things but it is often hard to sustain one's love and the continual revelation of a non-living thing's intrinsic goodness. A new favourite song can suddenly become boring when played too much. One could be intellectually aware that the song has some value, but there is no longer any active participation with the song of the kind that caused one to become aware of and gripped by its value. Accordingly, a paradigmatic example of the long-lasting relationship of loving participation is a relationship — whether friendship, a familial relationship, or a romantic relationship — between human beings. For even relationships with non-human things of sufficient complexity (nature, Bach's music, the heavens, laws of physics and mathematics) seem to capture less of loving participation than those with other humans due to both the similarity or closeness of human beings with each other and the capacity of humans to significantly develop in concert with and as a result of each person's interaction with another. There is still a sensed meaningfulness in this longer interpersonal relationship but it is distributed throughout time and does not always have the same incredibly concentrated sense of meaning as in transcendent meaningful experiences. Furthermore, unlike the momentary meaningful experience, in the long-term relationship you can treat the other as an object and a means to other ends, but not solely as a means. You can get a lift from a person and use them as a means to get to a place, but you also have to continue valuing them for their own sake and to not merely use them as a means.

Therefore, combining the two fundamental features of meaningful experiences and long-term loving relationships, it seems like the overarching form of goodness in these two activities is loving participation with intrinsic value and that which is intrinsically valuable. Before we map this pattern onto a whole life and one's relationship with all things, we need to have a clearer understanding of what this form of loving participation is.

Section Two: Outlining the Hypothetical Highest Good

In this second section I will try to articulate more precisely what exactly this 'loving participation' is which I have claimed to be the form of the best cohesive moments of activity and have suggested might be the form and organising principle of the good life. I will develop my account in stages, but in brief the account I will defend says that loving participation consists in the mutual indwelling of souls with one another, and that unconditional love of the other in and of themself underlies loving participation.

Subsection One: Participation

While it is not clear what the exact nature of the participatory aspect of loving participation is, it is clear that some kind of participation increases the goodness of the activity of loving another thing. All else being equal, an instance of love which is participatory and interactive seems more valuable and more desirable than in an instance of non-participatory love. Two people who live on opposite sides of the world and have never met or communicated to each other but love one another (they value or will the good of each other) seems a less desirable instance of love than if they both loved and regularly interacted with each other. So in order to understand the goodness of loving participation and how it might be the organising principle of the good life, we need to understand its participatory nature.

The participation part of loving participation makes loving participation different than the mere psychological love of intrinsic value and that which is intrinsically valuable. Furthermore, given that the participation in the meaningful experience and the long-term relationship involves an active direct contact with the reality of the thing loved, loving participation also is not equivalent to two mutual psychological states of love. For if two people love each other but have never met and have no way of contacting each other, this hardly seems like an instance of loving participation.

Some of the psychological forms that love could take are expressed in the three general contemporary conceptions of love —love as valuing, love as an emotion, and love as robust concern. Love as valuing says that love consists either in an appraisal and recognition of value or in a bestowal and projection of value (Helm 2021). For instance, Velleman says that love for a person consists in acknowledging the incomparable value or dignity of a person in virtue of that person having a rational nature (2009, 99–100). And Singer emphasises that love includes the arational creation and projection of importance onto the object of love (2009, 2, 39). This valuing may cause one to have emotions, but for valuing conceptions of love these emotions are only effects of love. In the emotion view of love, it is the other way around. For example, Brown describes love as a cherishing emotion where emotions are 'caused by the agent's evaluation or appraisal of some object or situation' (Helm 2021; Brown 1987, 14, 106–07). Emotion views generally characterise love as a basic affective state or complex of affective states directed towards an object. The feel of this emotion varies, where sometimes it can be elating and other times can feel distressing. Lastly, the robust concern view of love says that love is to will the good of the other or care about one's beloved for their own sake. Here love is not affective like in the emotion view or cognitive like in the valuing view; rather it is volitional and hence primarily has to do with the 'motivational structures' that shape, guide, and limit our preferences and conduct (Frankfurt 1999, 129).

This thesis is not committed to any one view about what love consists in. I am only interested in giving a proper account of loving participation. However, I will attempt to integrate these psychological features of love into my account of loving participation after outlining the nature of the participatory aspect.

One might think that communication and physical interaction is enough to constitute the participation part of loving participation. Yet the interaction involved in meaningful experiences goes beyond this because it reveals not just any information about the thoughts, qualities, and behaviour of the other person or thing; it puts one in contact with the intrinsic reality of the person or thing itself. For a contact with the intrinsic reality of the thing itself is necessary for the thing to directly disclose its intrinsic value to oneself. Only the qualities of a person could reveal the value or beauty of the qualities to oneself, but this would mean that the object of one's meaningful experience/loving participation is the quality of the person and not the person themself. The necessity of one being in contact with the intrinsic reality of the thing disclosing its intrinsic value, means that loving participation involves some kind of unmediated unity or togetherness with its object. Though it is unclear how this unity works.

Knowledge

I think we can determine the nature of the participation in the form of loving participation by looking at an account of knowledge and its description of how there can be an unmediated unity or togetherness beyond the unity of particular substances. Substantial unity is the unity of a substance or physical thing where, for example, the molecules of an apple are held together to form one discrete thing. Some examples of a higher-order unity which is more comprehensive than and transcends the unity of substances are the unity of a family, tribe, or nation. Here the parts or individuals are united by fitting into part of an overarching identity or category without losing their own individual identity as persons (cf. Schindler 2018, 65).

The trans-substantial unity of a tribe or nation does not match the unity of loving participation, because the relationship between a person and a thing in a transcendent meaningful experience is direct and not mediated by each thing's relationship to an overarching category. Yet knowledge is able to satisfy the condition of there being a direct unmediated union between two substantially distinct things. Moreover, the relationship between knower and known, just like loving participation, involves one's contact with the other thing in itself.

When we come to know a thing our mind appears to have a kind of unity or togetherness with that which it knows. By 'unity' I do not mean a fusion or merging of identity but a more general being-together-with. One might argue that the unity or togetherness of knowledge is just the conceptual unity of the correspondence between a proposition in the mind and reality, and that only a small subset of instances of knowledge are like meaningful experiences in that they involve a direct contact with the intrinsic nature of a thing. Yet I think true knowledge of things which objectively exist always involves a direct contact with reality. A proposition in a person's mind could correspond to reality, but in order to have knowledge of that aspect of reality one must not treat the proposition as reality itself but go further and use the proposition to directly grasp the reality represented by the proposition. To know what DNA is one has to not merely mentally represent a drawing of DNA, or mentally represent the strokes of lines which make up the acronym 'DNA' or its definition. Rather one must treat these things as images through which one's mind can grasp the underlying reality of DNA which is represented by the images. For if one stops at contact with the downstream representations of a thing, then one incorrectly treats the thing itself as something reducible to its representations and cannot be said to truly know or understand the thing itself. It would be like treating musical notation as mere lines on a page and not as a window through which we can grasp the reality the notes symbolise — the song itself which the lines are abstractions of. Therefore, one's mind has a kind of union with the reality of the thing known through the process of coming to know it.[37]

I think the relationship and participation between knower and known can be accurately described as a union of souls. What does 'soul' mean and how can there be a union of souls?

By 'soul' I mean the essence, fundamental reality, or being of the thing itself. The soul of a person is their bare personal identity which unites all the different particular aspects and characteristics of the person.[38] It is the person themself. Like Aristotle's and Aquinas's account of the soul, my view is that the soul of a particular thing is the form or substantial form which unites the different aspects of a thing and constitutes its nature (Pasnau 2022).[39] Critically, the soul of a thing is not the form of a thing considered abstractly and completely removed from the material world (e.g. the form or pattern of deerness), but is the particular form instantiated in the particular thing (e.g. the particular form which unites the aspects of a particular deer). It is not the same form or soul that exists in all deer, but the same kind of soul with the nature of deerness that exists in all deer. Aristotle and Aquinas do not think that inanimate things have a soul because they also identify the soul with the internal principle of

[37] My argument is based on 340d–344c of Plato's *Seventh Letter*. My account also resembles Aristotle's theory of knowledge in *De Anima*.

[38] My identification of the soul with personal identity is similar to Plato's view of the soul as interpreted by Long, which treats the soul as largely equivalent to the contemporary conception of a person (2005). However, I adopt a simplified conception of the soul and remain agnostic about any of the more uniquely Platonic claims about the soul.

[39] When I say the soul is the essence of a thing I do not mean that it is what Aquinas calls the essence (*essentia*) of a thing: the combination of its form and potentiality. I am using 'essence' Aristotle's sense as 'the what it is to be' (*to ti ên einai*) of a thing (Perl 2014, 152).

a thing which causes it to act and be animated. However, I will treat inanimate things as having a soul because each inanimate object, like a bridge, seems to have an essence or form that holds together their different aspects and characteristics. The form or thing that holds together the particulars of a thing (e.g. an apple or a boat) in a certain moment also seems to endure and be the same thing that holds together the particulars of the same thing in other moments.

My view of the soul is different to Descartes's understanding of soul which equates the soul with the mind and treats the substance of the soul/mind as fundamentally distinct and of a different kind than the material substance of the body (2017, AT 7:14; Broadie 2001, 295). I think the soul is what unites both the mind and physical aspects of a being. This means that my account of the soul as constituting the personal identity of someone is also different to Descartes's view which identifies personal identity or the self with one's soul/mind (2017, AT 7:78; Broadie 2001, 295). Both my account and Descartes's account of personal identity are non-reductionist accounts which means they say that what gives identity across time is simply presence of the same basic entity. Reductionist accounts, which include Locke's and Parfit's views of personal identity, reduce identity to just the connection (similarity or continuity) between the physical or psychological states of a person at different times (Parfit 1986, 210).

Now that I have outlined what I mean by 'soul', we can turn to why I think the participation between knower and known can be described as a union of souls. By 'union' I do not mean that there is a fusion or combination of souls which produces a single soul or some new identity created by the union, as Solomon says there is in his union account of love as a union of souls (Solomon 2006, 24, 65).[40] I mean that there is a union in the sense that there is an indwelling or presence of the souls of the known and knower in each other, where the identity of each thing remains separate.

I have argued that in order to know a thing, one must be in direct contact with the reality of the thing. This contact must result in one's comprehension of the reality of the thing; otherwise one can hardly be said to know the thing. This is why the soul of the known must indwell in the knower. For if the reality or soul of the known is not present in the mind of the knower then one cannot have knowledge of it. From another angle, for one to have knowledge of the thing itself, it seems one must be in some way present in the thing itself. Otherwise, one is in every way outside of and apart from the reality of the thing. And this means that the reality of the thing will be unable to be extended into one's mind and one will be unable to understand or make intelligible any aspect of a thing's reality or nature. One might think that types of knowledge such as knowledge gained from the testimony of others does not involve direct contact or presence of the reality of the thing in one's mind. For instance, a person today might have knowledge about the character of Ancient Roman culture but not have the reality of the culture's character in one's mind. To be sure, the depth of knowledge and degree to which the reality of Ancient Roman culture is present in our minds centuries on will be far lesser than that of an Ancient Roman. But if one truly has any knowledge of the culture's character (true, justified belief about it and whatever else might be needed) and thus comprehends the reality of the culture, then that part of the reality of the culture's character which one comprehends and has knowledge of must be directly present in one's mind.

[40] Union accounts of love say that love consists in the union of lover and beloved.

However, it does not seem like one's mind is present in the reality of the thing, since when we know the nature or reality of a thing like a plant, a building, or glucose we do not feel as though our mind exists within that thing. I think the most reasonable candidate for how the knower is present in and indwells in the thing known is for the soul of the knower to be present in the thing known. This is because if any of the aspects or characteristics of a person are present in the thing known then they will turn into characteristics of the thing known. But as we see when the soul of the known indwells in the knower, the soul of something can indwell in and extend itself into another thing while retaining its uniqueness and without becoming a new quality of the thing it is indwelling in. Therefore, the union of knower and known seems to be a mutual indwelling of souls.

While the existence of souls is highly disputed, I think an account of how there can be knowledge or an unmediated unity beyond the substance of a particular thing needs to say there is something like a soul that unites the different aspects of a particular thing. This is because if the particular aspects of a thing are held together by a higher reality (the thing itself), then it provides a way for the unity of knowledge (and of loving participation) to not consist in the fusion or similarity of particular properties. Instead, the unity can consist in the unity of the higher realities which each unite the particular properties of their respective things.

Connecting Knowledge to Loving Participation

If the relationship between knower and known is a union of souls and knowledge of/contact with a thing's intrinsic reality is the primary interactive element of loving participation, then the participation involved in loving participation is likewise most fundamentally a union of souls. Hence, I think the participation which grounds the union of souls in loving participation is a mutual indwelling of souls. I have drawn on Schindler's conception of love in explaining how the unity of knowledge works, and what I call the mutual indwelling of souls seems to be the same as what Schindler describes in his conception of love as a 'mutual indwelling' where lover and beloved are 'present *in* one another' (2018, 54). Schindler describes this mutual indwelling as arising out of a reciprocal '*ecstasis*' or 'movement beyond the self' in which one joins with and becomes attuned to the reality of the other (2018, 54–55). This joining and attuning involves a kind of co-identification, where there is an intimate identification with and partaking of the other through which one is present to the other and affected by it/them in an 'immediate and unreflective way' (Schindler 2018, 65). To illustrate this joining Schindler uses the example of someone's affection for a reading chair and the spontaneous experience of loss and a kind of pain if the chair is damaged or is taken away (2018, 65).

The indwelling in and being present in the soul of another thing can explain how there is a union with another thing, but it is less clear how there is an ongoing interaction with the object of loving participation especially when the object is an inanimate object or an abstract concept. The continuing interaction between, for example, moral goodness and a person occurs in the attuning of oneself and one's understanding of moral goodness to moral goodness itself. This attunement involves being receptive to the reality of moral goodness and being open to reframing one's understanding of moral goodness due to the concept's existence beyond oneself and the possibility of one's misunderstanding or limited grasp of it (cf. Schindler 2018, 55). Similarly, we can interact and participate with inanimate objects by continually attuning and reproportioning ourselves to the reality of the object (Schindler 2018, 55). Thus, the continuing participation with the object of loving participation through the object's self-disclosure of its reality to us, follows from loving participation's partaking in and being in contact with the reality of the other.

The account of union outlined will help us respond to a common objection to union views of love which could question the goodness of my account of loving participation. Namely, that in emphasising the merging and lack of distinction between lovers, union accounts undermine the independence and autonomy of the individuals involved (Soble 1997, 68–69; Helm 2021). Unlike the more extreme union views which propose a fusion of identity (Solomon 2006) or a fusion of interests and concerns (Scruton 1986), my account of union claims to preserve a large part of the necessary autonomy and difference between lovers by recognising a unity which does not seek to substantially merge the psychological or metaphysical integrity of its parts. This approach is similar to Friedman's federation model of union where lovers share many feelings, desires, and concerns in common but are still separate individuals with distinct agencies (2003, 118–19).

Admittedly, the independence and autonomy of lovers is at least partially diminished in a relationship, since to be in any kind of union is necessarily to establish some bond outside of oneself and place some kind of limit on one's independence. So my account of loving participation does restrict the independence of lovers. But it seems like some bond or restriction on absolute autonomy is a key element of love. Moreover, one of the things that appears to distinguish 'love' from 'liking' is a strong sense of identification with the object of love (Helm 2021). And it would be unusual if this strong identification with another did not give rise to a kind of linking of selves. So in order for the lack of autonomy objection to stand it must demonstrate why complete independence is necessary.

One way to do this is to argue, as Soble does, that a loss of independence in love makes robust concern and willing the good of the other for their own sake incomprehensible (1997, 75). This is because when there is a union of two people's interests and concerns, another's interests become one's own (Soble 1997, 76). Soble notes that the promotion of joint interests does not make one selfish, it just fails to reach the level of genuine robust concern which Soble regards as 'something beyond benevolent self-interest' (Soble 1997, 76–77). For it means that any increase in the good of the other ultimately ends up also being beneficial for oneself. However, in my account of union, while there may be significant overlap between the interests of lovers, there does not have to be a total fusion where another's interests become one's own. And Soble's argument does not show that a union view which allows for such a differentiation of interests and concerns cannot involve genuine robust concern.

What if one disagrees with my account of personal identity/the soul or my account of knowledge or the participation in loving participation as a mutual indwelling of souls? One can reject these accounts while still accepting my general account of the participation in loving participation primarily as a (trans-substantial unmediated) unity or togetherness between lover and beloved. It is just that this general account is quite vague and does not explain how the unity in loving participation works.

In sum, the participation of loving participation is a mutual indwelling of souls with the object of loving participation. Nevertheless, I think something else has to ground the participation aspect of loving participation. Namely, the psychological aspects of love. So we can now turn to the love part of loving participation.

Subsection Two: Unconditional Love

My account so far leaves out the psychological aspects of love which seems necessary to explain the love part of loving participation. In this subsection I will attempt to show how the emotion, valuing, and robust concern forms of love are involved in loving participation and how they help ground the union between beings capable of such psychological states. Before connecting these three components with my account of participation, I will first illustrate how these different psychological aspects of love can be integrated with each other. In so doing I will also defend an account of what the object or focus of genuine love is.

I think the psychological aspect of love which most fundamentally grounds loving participation is unconditional love. Unconditional love is a generous love which is motivated by and grounded in not the beloved's particular qualities or characteristics but rather the very essence or being of the beloved. Unconditional love is the love desired by a girl who, as Velleman puts it, 'wants to be loved but not for her yellow hair—and not, we should add, for her mind or her sense of humour, either' but for herself alone (Velleman 2009, 98; Yeats 1956, 208). Velleman sees a rational will or nature as someone's essence, but the essence I am referring to is not a necessary quality or characteristic of a person; it is closer to the essence that Frankfurt identifies as someone's bare personal identity (Kolodny 2003, 173–74). As mentioned before, I regard essence not as a general category which distinguishes one class of beings from another, but as the person themself and the unique personal identity which holds together the different characteristics of a person.

One might think that this unconditional love sounds more like respect than love, because from a Kantian perspective respect is what we owe everyone on account of their humanity or moral status as persons with a rational nature (Naar 2017, 1000). At least one difference between unconditional love and Kantian respect is that respect seems to be focused on caring about a person as a member of a class. It feels as if respect is a kind of sanitised substitute for love which allows one to care about another for their own sake but only as a thing belonging to a category worthy of regard and not in the other's own right as a living breathing person. In contrast, unconditional love emphasises caring for a person as an individual in their uniqueness and particularity, which consequently involves significantly more emotional investment.

The quality view of love says that the love of particular aspects and qualities of a person is what should ground and justify a person's love for their beloved (Lewis 2023, 1675). This is quite a popular view in the philosophy of love (Keller 2000; Naar 2019; Lewis 2023) and it stands in direct opposition to my claim that love of the person themself is what grounds love in the good of loving participation. Two of the main challenges to the quality view ask how the love it describes is a love of persons and not of properties, and accuse this kind of love as treating its beloved as replaceable.

The irreplaceability objection says that treating a person as replaceable is antithetical to genuine love, and that if what justifies love in the quality view is the qualities of the beloved, then the beloved can be replaced with another person who also possesses the same qualities (Smuts 2014, 520; Naar 2019, 990–91). For example, if you love someone because of their sense of humour or intelligence and they lose these qualities and you find someone new who has them, then you are justified and perhaps even obligated to shift your love from the first person to the second. A common quality theorist response to this argument notes that there are not just non-relational qualities like intelligence, but also relational qualities such as the historical relationship one has with that person which can constitute a reason for loving a person (Keller 2000, 166; Naar 2019, 996; Shpall 2020, 428–29). Nevertheless, just like for non-relational qualities, it is questionable if relational qualities are enough to justify regarding one's beloved as irreplaceable.

Naar argues that if one has been in a valuable relationship with two people and cannot continue to love both of them then one will have to treat each person as replaceable with the other, since they each provide equivalent reasons for love (2019, 996–98). Having a unique historical relation with one person is a relational quality which can have a similar form to your relationship to another person. But the historical particularity of the relationship and thus the other's relational quality, cannot be *exactly* the same for any two relationships. Hence, Naar's argument does not show why this kind of relational quality as the condition for love, results in the beloved being treated as replaceable.

Yet Naar also notes that treating any relational quality as the condition for love appears to give the beloved themself a mere 'secondary role in the generation of reasons for loving them' (2019, 986). That is, if relational qualities are what justifies love, then the identity or bare personhood of the beloved themself is irrelevant in determining the appropriateness of loving one's beloved. To use an example similar to Naar's previous one, if it were possible to go back in time and replace with someone else the person one had developed a loving relationship with, then one would have absolutely no reason to care about this replacement of their beloved. For the person themself is not what grounds one's love for them. Instead, it is only the secondary effects that person has on oneself and one's relationship with them which matter. Thus, it seems like the only way to truly and justifiably treat one's beloved as irreplaceable is by primarily loving the person themself independent of any relational or non-relational qualities, because these qualities can be separated from the person themself.

Regarding the first objection about whether the real object of love in a quality view is the person or their qualities, it is often noted that in making this objection Vlastos fails to notice that the ground of love need not be exactly the same as the object or focus of love (Kolodny 2003, 154; Grau 2010, 260). A love which is grounded in a love of good qualities can be directed towards both the good qualities and the person in which the qualities exist. If you value aesthetic quality, then you can value a novel because of its aesthetic quality and do not need to limit your aesthetically-grounded valuing to aesthetic value itself. However, there is more to Vlastos's objection which is often neglected. Vlastos suggests that if one's justification for loving another comes from the valuable qualities instantiated in them, then this love is quite different from a love of the person themself (1974, 33). After all, how can one love a person as an end in themself when they are only loved as a person insofar as they manifest good qualities (1974, 31–32)?

Kolodny seems to pick up on this objection when he reflects on whether his relational quality view requires that we value our beloved merely extrinsically. He considers if the relational quality theorist values their beloved 'in the way one might value a now useless pen that once belonged to Winston Churchill: as an extrinsically worthless object that merits a certain response because it is associated with something of final worth' (2003, 156). Kolodny denies that the quality theorist must love in this way because he says that treating one's beloved with final (non-extrinsic) value is constitutive of valuing one's relationship with their beloved (or valuing the relational qualities of one's beloved) (2003, 156). But it seems possible to love a person because of one's relationship history with them, and to value that person extrinsically like Churchill's pen. Except in this case the lover values the other person like they value a pen which they themself have had for years but do not regard as having any intrinsic worth in itself. Furthermore, it is hard to see how one could come to intrinsically value another person for their own sake without an intrinsic love for the person themself forming at least part of the grounding for one's love of the other. Hence, unconditional love seems to be the only way to intrinsically value another person (and to not merely intrinsically value their qualities).

On other grounds Kolodny questions the appropriateness of unconditional love by suggesting it would be unreasonable to want one's beloved to love them if they had never met and lived lives with other people (2003, 157). It would definitely be unreasonable to want one's beloved to love them romantically and in the same way if they had never met. But it does not seem unreasonable to want them to intrinsically value and will the good of oneself.

While I think that a genuine love which treats one's beloved as irreplicable and intrinsically valuable must be an unconditional love, I think it is still possible for the love of the other person's relational and non-relational qualities to be involved in unconditional love. It appears that the love of another's particular qualities can be included within unconditional love if this love of particulars is not opposed to unconditional love but is rooted in a love of the person themself. For example, if one's love of the eyes of another person is born out of and consonant with a deeper unconditional love of the person themself, then the love of that person's eyes is grounded in an unconditional love. Furthermore, it is often through a love of the particular qualities of a person that one comes to love the person themself independently of their characteristics, as the particulars can serve as a window through which one can recognise and appreciate the person in themself. Thus, I will distinguish conditional love as the love that *only* adheres to a love of the particular aspects of a person. A good test for whether a love of particulars extends from an unconditional love or love of the other for their own sake is if the love of an aspect treats the other person themself as something replaceable.

This distinction between unconditional and conditional love helps to excise the problematic aspects of *eros* or the passionate emotion of love which are too focused on personal gain and lack a genuine love of the other. How does the rest of the non-problematic *eros* fit together with *agapic* unconditional love? Since *eros* is a passionate love, *eros* can be easily incorporated into unconditional love as a love which has all the features of unconditional love or *agape* but has the additional quality of being more intense and emotionally charged than some of the more passive and subdued instances of *agape* which are akin to a more reserved and detached robust concern. This is what Gregory of Nyssa had in mind when he called *eros* a 'heightened *agape*', which better expresses the surplus of unconditional love (de Andia 1997, 39–40; Osborne 1996, 70). What distinguishes this passionate love from the passionate love found in carnal or acquisitive love is that the former is a love which does not isolate one aspect of the person in its passion but is directed towards the entire being of the other. Further, the emotion in unconditional love is born out of a love and concern for the beloved for their own sake.

This synthesis of *eros* and *agape* shows how the emotion and robust concern elements of love not only fit together but are mutually supporting. Each without the other — unconditional love without emotion, and loving emotion without the devotion of robust concern — results in a lesser form of each kind of love. This synthesis also includes the valuing element of love because valuing is implicit in emotion and robust concern. And the type of valuing implicit in unconditional love's emotion and robust concern is an intrinsic valuing of the soul of the other (the other person or thing itself). Hence, unconditional love combines the three psychological aspects of love of emotion, valuing, and robust concern.

I think the loving participation of meaningful experiences and a long-term relationship is just the mutual indwelling of souls described in the previous subsection plus unconditional love for the object of loving participation. The requirement that loving participation involves the disclosure of the object's intrinsic value makes loving participation different than just any knowledge or mutual indwelling. But my addition of unconditional love makes loving participation different than just knowledge of and contact with the intrinsic reality of a thing. Though to be sure, unconditional love would seem to arise in response to the object's disclosure of its intrinsic value.

In summary, three core facets characterise the form or overarching principle of loving participation. Abstractly, there is a harmonious unmediated unity which differs from the unity of other relationships in that the unity takes place without the parts forming one substance. Secondly, the mutual indwelling of souls explains the exact nature of this unmediated unity and how it is achieved. Thirdly, unconditional love of the other and their good describes the psychology of a person or any being capable of unconditional love, in the relationship of loving participation. Each of these facets are essential since unconditional love alone does not account for the unity and participation involved in a loving relationship. And without unconditional love, the unity and participation facets do not explain the psychological love that seems to undergird and motivate loving participation.

Section Three: Returning to the Cave

Having clarified the meaning of loving participation which I have suggested might be the form and organising principle of the good life, we can now map this form of meaningful experiences onto a whole life and one's relationship with all things. This will allow us to test whether loving participation is the highest good by seeing if this life lacks any goodness and if the principle of loving participation can explain the goodness of other goods.

The Objects of Love

When describing loving participation, I often focused on the simpler model of a relationship between two people. But a life of loving participation should not be exclusively concerned with forging an ideal relationship of loving participation only with one or a few particular individuals; it should attempt to embody a devotion to the principle of loving participation in the whole of one's life and activity. While there are many objects of love in a life of loving participation, the primary object of love is the principle of loving participation itself. This is because a life's activity fully devoted to the principle of loving participation will have loving participation as its organising principle. Hence, a life that embodies the pattern of loving participation is a life which acts out a devotion to harmonious unity, mutual indwelling, and unconditional love.

Other than the principle of loving participation itself, what should the person devoted to a life of loving participation love? In the form of loving participation one intrinsically values the thing one is in a relationship with, and the value of the thing is genuinely and intrinsically good, because it discloses its intrinsic value to oneself. So a person embodying the form or principle of loving participation should love and value whatever is intrinsically good. This means that one should only unconditionally love the soul or reality of another thing and will its good for its own sake, if its good or purpose is actually intrinsically good. Secondly, a person should not love what is intrinsically bad, because to love what is intrinsically bad would be to be devoted to an inversion of the principle of loving participation with what is intrinsically good. Thirdly, a person embodying the principle of loving participation should not love and value something which is in part intrinsically evil. This is because I excluded things which are intrinsically evil in one way (e.g. *Triumph of the Will*) from the kind of transcendent meaningful experiences I used to extract the form of loving participation for the reason that these experiences seem less good than experiences with things that are in no way intrinsically evil.

With this in mind, which beings or things should one love? I argued in the first part of this thesis that the purpose or ultimate end of human beings is intrinsically good. I also suggested that the purpose of all living things which perform actions and have desires is intrinsically good. So one should love and will the good of all individual human beings and living things with desires. Notably we do not need to treat the good of all these beings with intrinsically good purposes as having the same value, since the degree of intrinsic goodness of different kinds of beings could differ significantly.

A difficulty with the good or purpose of so many living things being intrinsically good is that living things often appear to rely on the bad of other living things for their own good. For example, jackals depend on eating animals and parasites depend on harming different kinds of animals. Yet, it seems like in these cases the harm done to another being is not intrinsically good for the jackal or the parasite; rather it is instrumentally good, with the intrinsic good being the nutrition received from other animals and not the harm done to the animals (Fletcher 2012, 18). Furthermore, even if the attributive good of a creature is to harm other beings, a thing harming and being parasitic on the intrinsic good of another strongly indicates that the good of that thing is not actually intrinsically good. But if a thing's good or purpose is only attributively good and not predicatively or intrinsically good, then there is no problem with its attributive good conflicting with the good of others because we do not have reason to care about mere attributive goodness.

One should also love the full manifestation of intrinsic goodness in the universe, which I will call the (predicative) good of the world. The good of the whole world may just be equivalent to the summation of the good of individual beings. But having the good of the whole as an object of love is important because the good of the individual parts cohere and belong in the good of the whole, and the good of the whole stresses that the good of individual beings do not in principle conflict with each other. One might think it is possible for the good of a being to not align with the good of the whole by conflicting with harmonious unity or the manifestation of goodness in the rest of the world. For example, if desire-fulfilment is what is good for a person then it could be good for a person to harm other people if they want to harm other people. But just as we saw in the parasite example, it seems like an activity harming the good of another being and conflicting with harmonious coexistence strongly indicates that the activity is not intrinsically good.

There are also non-living things, other than the form of loving participation, that the person devoted to the form of loving participation should love. They should love things like virtue, health, knowledge, and (well-directed) pleasure, because they seem intrinsically good. The love of these four goods is included within a love of the good of individual beings, since these goods seem to form part of the good of and only be instantiable in individual beings. However, one should not be absolutely devoted to any of these four goods, because none of them on their own seems to constitute the good or the form of goodness. One should love these goods to the extent that they form part of what is intrinsically good and to the extent that they are conducive to the good of beings.

The Objects of Loving Participation

So we should love and be devoted to the good of all intrinsically good things, but which things should we actually be in a relationship of loving participation with? The most important thing a person should be in a relationship of loving participation with is the principle of loving participation itself. One enters into this relationship and mutually indwells with the soul or reality of loving participation by having the intrinsic value of loving participation disclosed to oneself either through contemplating the form of loving participation (studying it in the abstract or in its instantiation in things), or through acting out a commitment to it and embodying the aspects of loving participation (harmonious unity, mutual indwelling, love of what is inherently good) in one's life.

This means that a person's relationship of loving participation with the form of loving participation is not separate from but is necessarily realised through a person's relationship of loving participation with other things. For in participating and interacting with a thing, one also participates in what holds together and characterises the relationship between oneself and the other. It is this kind of overarching participation that Aristotle is referring to when he outlines utility, pleasure, and virtue as three types of friendship (NE 1156a7–1157a32). Each type of friendship is characterised by the overarching object of love in the relationship (utility, pleasure, or virtue) which according to Aristotle is what causes and sustains the relationship (1156a8–10). The nature of the relationship between two individuals is inseparably bound up with the overarching object of love, as each object of love also corresponds to a type of love and interaction between two people (1156a8–10). For example, if the overarching object of love in a relationship is utility, then the interaction between the two people will reflect and embody this love of utility. And likewise if the interaction between the two people primarily reflects a love of utility then the overarching object of love will be utility. Therefore, a relationship of loving participation with a thing or a being is triangular in that it also involves a participation in and devotion to the overarching value of loving participation.

One is not strictly speaking in a relationship of 'loving participation' with a thing if its inherent value is not disclosed to oneself. But embodying aspects of loving participation without the revelation of a thing's value is still good because the activity still partakes in the value of loving participation, albeit to a slightly lesser extent, by acting out a commitment and devotion to loving participation as a whole or one of its facets. Hence, even an activity with no mutual indwelling or disclosure of value, like willing the good of a person while being unaware what this good is, is intrinsically good because it partakes in an aspect of the form of loving participation. Yet notably, an activity which partakes in some aspects of loving participation is not necessarily choiceworthy and intrinsically good because, as we will see regarding relationships with evil people, the same activity can partake in the inversion of other aspects of loving participation.

In theory, the person's life that perfectly embodies the principle of loving participation will have a loving relationship in which there is a mutual indwelling of souls with all beings and things that are intrinsically good. However, it is not possible to sustain an ongoing relationship with all these things. Just for human beings, Dunbar's number says that there are only roughly 150 people which one person can maintain a stable social relationship with at any one time. Moreover, the attempt to maximise the number of people that one knows and is in a relationship with will result in all of one's relationships being incredibly superficial. They will involve minimal interaction and one will know each of these people only slightly more than a complete stranger. Hence, these relationships will involve a negligible degree of mutual indwelling and loving participation. Cultivating one close relationship seems to be more valuable and involve more unity and mutual indwelling of souls than the total unity of hundreds or thousands of vague contacts.

Aside from limited time there is another good reason to not be in a loving relationship with people whose purpose and soul are intrinsically good — if a person has a morally evil character. In this chapter I argued against the quality view of love. A common objection to non-quality views of love such as Velleman's and Setiya's which say that a person's humanity justifies loving them, is that if we should love all humans then it leads to the absurd position that it is acceptable to love an evil person (Shpall 2020, 415; Lewis 2023, 1677).[41] For example, it seems inappropriate and unjustified for one to love and be in a loving relationship with Hitler when one is aware of Hitler's morally repulsive character (Smuts 2014b, 102–03; Shpall 2020, 414–15).

Loving a person themself might be enough to justify entering into a loving relationship with that person, but if one loves a person themself then there are overriding reasons which can

[41] The objection usually focuses on romantic love of an evil person, but I am concerned with love more generally.

justify not entering into a loving relationship with the person. Some of these reasons are that an evil person is likely to harm you if you are in a close relationship with them, that you yourself could become more evil as a result of spending time with an evil person, and that being in a loving relationship with an evil person causes you to participate in and condone evil. These boil down to two fundamental reasons: one can only enter into a highly impaired loving relationship with an evil person (they will not be committed to your good and may be committed to harming you), and being in a loving relationship with an evil person impairs one's overarching loving relationship with the good and the rest of the world. This last reason is the same reason I used to justify the selectivity of loving relationships. However, even though we should not be in a relationship of loving participation with an evil person, we should still love the evil person because their moral character does not change their bare personal identity. They are still a person so we should still care about them and will their good for their own sake.

Just as one should love non-living intrinsically good things (virtue, pleasure etc.) to the extent that they form part of the good, one should be in loving participation with non-living intrinsically good things to the extent that they form part of the good for oneself. For focusing too much on contact with pleasure's inherent value through embodying it in one's life will be done at the expense of contact with the value of other goods through personal embodiment. And these other goods also form part of what is intrinsically good for oneself. Thus one should be in a relationship with each good which does not overemphasise or underemphasise their value at the expense of the value of other goods.

Ultimately, the general principle for evaluating the appropriateness of commitments and relationships boils down to whether it most optimally acts out a devotion to the principle of loving participation. This fits with my defence of eudaimonism, since the standard the eudaimonist should use to judge the goodness of their life and their activity should be *eudaimonia*, and I have posited loving participation as the organising principle of *eudaimonia*.

One might consider it problematic for a person to think that their relationship of loving participation with another person is justified by one's relationship of loving participation with the form of loving participation. However, according to my arguments, the form of loving participation is simply goodness or the form of goodness because I have argued that the organising principle of the good life is intrinsic goodness and that loving participation is the (substantive) organising principle of the good life. Seen in this light, saying that the justification for being in a relationship with one's beloved is one's relationship with the form of loving participation is just another way of saying that the justification for one's actions is one's relationship with goodness. In the eudaimonism chapter I respond to objections to one's relationship with goodness being the ultimate justification for one's actions. Moreover, having one's relationship with goodness as the justification of one's relationship with another person does not contradict the unconditional love requirement by causing one to not intrinsically value and love the other person themself, because the other person in themself can be intrinsically good and be valued and loved as such.

Practical Reasoning

Which broader framework of practical reasoning is the best one to use in acting out a commitment to this general principle? Given that the actions one should perform are downstream of the nature of the good life and what kind of person one should be, we can rule out deontology, which prioritises acting in accordance with absolute rules and principles over living the good life. Additionally, while the consequences of actions might play a large part in one's reasoning, a major problem with the application of consequentialism here is that it is unable to recognise the importance of one's activity independent of its consequences. For the activity involved on the way to bringing about *eudaimonia* should still in itself express a commitment to the overarching principle of the good life, because this activity takes place within one's life and therefore contributes towards living a good life. The explicit outcome which the activity is aiming at tells us part of what an action is guided by, but the medium and manner by which the outcome is pursued also tells us which principles or values the activity is in part committed to. For example, if one tries to achieve the good of other people by controlling them then, independent of the effects or explicit aim of this activity, the way one relates to other people in this activity embodies and participates in the prioritisation of certain principles, like the subjugation and instrumentalistion of people, over other values. Hence, the medium itself of an action is not neutral and must be analysed when considering the goodness of an action.

I think the best way to assess the activity of a person which is under that person's control is by determining whether the activity is performed in accordance with virtue. In this context by 'virtue', I mean virtue formally speaking as a character disposition which is not necessarily primarily aiming at moral goodness or the good of only other people, but could have any good as its aim. Virtue ethics is the best framework for assessing voluntary commitment to the principle of loving participation because a person with a virtuous disposition is able to care about several factors such as the consequences of an action, the values an action in itself might be committed to, and the context of a particular action. All of which need to be accounted for when determining which action is most conducive to *eudaimonia*. Perhaps this is why most eudaimonist theories are virtue ethical in terms of practical reasoning (Van Zyl 2015, 186; Baril 2014, 23).

For the ancients and contemporary virtue ethicists, virtue is a state or a stable disposition which is not merely a feeling or capacity, because being virtuous is something one is responsible for and is the result of self-discipline and the way one has made oneself (Annas 1995, 49–50; Hursthouse and Pettigrove 2022). Virtue is not just a constant inclination or tendency to do the right thing, because virtue is deeply rooted in one's character and involves deliberate choice (Annas 1995, 49–51). Annas outlines the two core parts of the disposition of virtue as being intellectual and affective. The intellectual aspect is the ability to reason well and to understand the right thing to do in practical situations, and the affective aspect is the ability to feel and affectively react in the right way which is in accordance with right reasoning (Annas 1998, 40; Annas 1995, 49). In the eudaimonism chapter I argued that the ultimate standard which correct reasoning and feeling should aim at is *eudaimonia*. This means that if loving participation is the organising principle of *eudaimonia*, we can define an individual virtue as a stable disposition or character trait which enables one to live in accordance with the principle of loving participation.

Completeness

Now that we have a general outline of what a life devoted to the form of loving participation looks like, we can consider the goodness of this life and test whether it is reasonable for loving participation to be the organising principle of the good life.

In the first section of this chapter I noted that transcendent meaningful experiences are not complete in goodness because they do not always include the goods of moral virtue or health. But when the form of meaningful experiences (loving participation) is applied to a person's life, we can see that this life is complete in goodness, because the instantiation of any good in oneself and one's recognition of its value is an instance of loving participation and therefore acts out a devotion to the principle of loving participation. Thus, a life of loving participation is complete and does not lack any goodness.

Yet in order for my account to not be an objective list theory of the good life, it must show how a substantive organising principle (in this case loving participation) explains why different goods are intrinsically good. Knowledge or contact with reality is an integral feature of loving participation. Pleasure, and more specifically pleasure in the good, is obviously present in both transcendent meaningful experiences and a long-term relationship of loving participation. For the combination of the emotional aspect of unconditional love with the disclosure of the other's intrinsic value and the direct active participation with the reality of the other, make it hard to see how pleasure could not be involved in loving participation. Hence, the goodness of pleasure and knowledge can be explained as deriving from pleasure's and knowledge's participation in the goodness of the principle of loving participation.

The goodness of virtue or moral goodness seems to derive from its caring about and being committed to the good of other people. I have argued that what makes a person's life good is loving participation, hence the goodness of virtue ultimately derives from loving participation. The goodness of health can be explained through health's substantial harmonious unity between the different parts and systems of the body being an approximation of the harmonious trans-substantial unity of loving participation.[42] One might object that approximating goodness is too general and weak a relation for a thing to receive the value of goodness. For example, badness approximates goodness because both are scalar and can be manifested in varying quantities. However, it does not seem like the scalarity of goodness contributes to the goodness of goodness, since scalarity does not form part of the content of goodness. Hence, badness's sharing of scalarity with goodness does not make badness good, because the aspect of goodness which badness approximates is not itself good. In contrast, harmonious unity does seem to contribute to the goodness of loving participation.

Therefore, loving participation is the highest good or organising principle of *eudaimonia*. This is because firstly, a life that is devoted to and whose activity fully manifests the form of loving participation includes all things that are intrinsically good for a person. And secondly, the organising principle of loving participation is a substantive good that can explain the goodness of each of the four other intrinsic goods which seem to contribute to the good life.

The Life of Loving Participation

We have outlined the objects of loving participation and seen how certain goods are made good by the substantive good of loving participation, but in more concrete terms what will a life which properly reflects the principle of loving participation involve?

There are two ways of conceptualising a life in accordance with loving participation and of a good life generally. These two ways correspond to Aquinas's distinction between *beatitudo* and *felicitas* as two forms of happiness (ST I-II, 5, 3, co.). The former is a perfect or heavenly

[42] See Aristotle chapter for a more detailed explanation of my argument for the goodness of health.

happiness which is true of a life that is good in every way, and the latter is an imperfect or worldly happiness whose goodness has certain limitations by virtue of external circumstances and practical necessities, such as death and pain, of what our lives are like under the sun. The perfect good life, and not the imperfect good life, is the ultimate end of one's desires because it is superior in goodness. Yet we can still aim at the imperfect good life for the sake of the perfect good life, by virtue of the imperfect good life being the most practically achievable approximation of the perfect good life on earth, and the imperfect good life receiving its goodness and desirability from the extent to which it participates in the ideal standard of goodness found in the perfect good life. This distinction between two types of good life allows us to understand how a good life or a life of loving participation can involve some badness or lack of goodness without compromising on the idea that a good life or a life of loving participation is the highest good and ultimate end of one's desires.

While there is only one overarching substantive good or principle (loving participation) which makes one's worldly life good, what a person's worldly good life looks like can take many different forms. Just as beautiful flora could have the same one principle (beauty) which makes them beautiful but partake in this principle in different ways and have particular qualities like colour, shape, and size which are drastically different from other flora. What a person's worldly good life will look like depends on one's particular characteristics and the particular circumstances one is conditioned by and born into. For example, the life of a person born with cystic fibrosis will only be able to have a limited amount of the intrinsic good of health. The life of a Hebrew child born in Egypt wanted dead by the Pharaoh could involve less pleasure and more pain due to growing up with some amount of rational fear for their life and their family members' lives for harbouring them. But these people's lives can still be a good life or a life of loving participation if it reflects the principle of loving participation in other aspects.

Perhaps there is one kind of concrete worldly good life whose elements make it most conducive to fully embodying the principle of loving participation. However, this kind of life will likely be unavailable to many people because their circumstances limit the total goodness present in their life compared to this best worldly good life. People often have unchangeable physical and mental health conditions, and are treated badly by others and unjustly by regimes. Moreover, it seems like there are many lives, such as those mentioned earlier, which fail to meet the highest worldly threshold of intrinsic goodness and can still be reasonably considered to be a good life if they involve enough goodness or loving participation.

There being no single concrete worldly good life means that answers to more specific and concrete questions about what a life of loving participation involves often have no uniform answer but depend on the context of a person's life. The more general and abstract the statement about the good life, the easier it is to justify because its generality gives room for the same principle to apply across different particulars. In response to the question of which intrinsic goods will be included in the life of loving participation, we can observe that a good life generally involves loving relationships and the intrinsic goods of virtue, pleasure, knowledge, and health because we have explained why these things are good with reference to loving participation. Yet if one asks what kinds of loving relationships, virtues, pleasures, and knowledge are most important, I think the answer will vary in the following ways.

Loving participation is a kind of meta-virtue, since I argued in the practical reasoning subsection that being in accordance with the principle of loving participation is what makes a stable disposition or character trait a virtue. In other words, loving participation is both what determines where exactly the golden mean of an individual virtue lies on the continuum between excess and deficiency, and is what calibrates each of the virtues such that potentially conflicting character dispositions, like justice and temperance, and truthfulness and modesty, can be properly reconciled in being directed to and following a higher standard. Hence, the virtue of loving participation is the most important virtue because it has priority over all the other virtues and is implicit in all other virtues.

However, the centrality of other virtues in a life of loving participation seems to vary relative to one's circumstances. This is not merely to say that the action a virtue prescribes is relative to a person's circumstances, as Aristotle does in noting that the amount of food temperance allows a wrestler to eat will be greater than that of a non-athlete (NE 1106b1–8). Rather it is to say that for some people some virtues will play a greater role in a good life than others. For example, the good life of a soldier appears to require more courage than the good life of a baker. A judge living in accord with loving participation will generally draw on the virtue of justice more than other professions. The good life of the manager of a household or a businessperson will especially involve prudence in balancing the books and foreseeing challenges. Different people who are equally and ultimately committed to loving participation can justifiably have different professions, because having certain unique interests and abilities will enable some people to perform better in those kinds of professions than others, and thus enable their lives to include more goodness and to increase goodness in the rest of the world. A person aiming at a life of loving participation who would be a skilled and motivated teacher but a bored and subpar architect would have good reason to become a teacher.

The kind of knowledge which is intrinsically most important in a life of loving participation is informed by several factors such as how intrinsically valuable knowledge of a thing is for different areas of one's life (people one has relationships with, and one's profession), which things one is most drawn to, how accessible knowledge of the thing is, depth or complexity (e.g. Shakespeare compared to a list of news events), and the goodness of the thing one comes to know. For each of these facilitate a greater degree of loving participation and mutual indwelling with the beings or things one comes to know. It seems like generally the most important kind of knowledge in a life of loving participation is knowledge/mutual indwelling of souls with other people and with intrinsic goods like virtues. This is because, as we have seen, the first reflects most directly the principle of loving participation and the second is a necessary part and the preeminent driver of all of one's controllable well-directed activity. Other more recreational or intellectual forms of knowledge might not play a role in a good life at all. The life of a subsistence farmer devoted to loving participation may have no time for such activities due to the high demand providing for their household has on their daily life.

I think the pleasures in a life of loving participation will not be their own separate objects of pursuit, but will supervene on most activities in one's life and form part of a proper way of acting in the world by being a way of valuing and giving glory to good things in the world. All good lives also seem to most optimally involve a baseline of pleasure or quiet joy in some good operating in the background of almost all of their activities. To be sure, there are some moments and circumstances where boredom will likely be an unavoidable part of life, and sometimes a lack of pleasure or even severe pain is an appropriate response to events. Finding out about the death or suffering of loved ones should cause one suffering because this seems a necessary part of truly loving and caring about another person. A life of loving participation has room for lower sensory pleasures like those of eating and relaxation as long as they do not conflict with other goods like health, since these pleasures can be directed towards goods, albeit more minor ones, and these activities appear beneficial for productivity by preventing burnout. Nevertheless, these kinds of pleasures will not be central to a life of loving participation. As with knowledge, the pleasures involved in one's relationships of loving participation with others and the highest goods seem to have the most significant role in a life of loving participation. These pleasures are primarily, though not exclusively, higher pleasures due to such relationships most fundamentally being the mutual indwelling of souls.

This distinction between higher and lower pleasures leads us to the nature of relationships of loving participation and the importance of physical and spiritual (or non-physical) dimensions of these relationships. Aside from physically being in the same room together, non-romantic loving relationships do not appear to require a physical dimension. Nonetheless, physical intimacy, and thus its attendant 'lower' pleasures, would seem to form part of romantic relationships of loving participation. Physical intimacy can be present in relationships where people do not love each other. The attendant pleasures in this relationship would be solely lower pleasures due to their being no unity or mutual indwelling of souls. Yet in relationships of loving participation, where each has unconditional love for the other, physical intimacy often contributes to spiritual intimacy and the lower pleasures of physical intimacy can be bound up with higher non-physical pleasures arising from closeness and intimacy with the other person themself and not just their physical qualities.

Therefore, we can observe general truths of what a good life or life of loving participation looks like including what goods are involved and which form of these goods are most important. Yet the concrete particularities of and even the prominence of certain goods in a life that is properly devoted to and reflects the value of loving participation can vary significantly across individuals depending on their circumstances, conditions, interests, abilities.

Conclusion

I began this chapter by arguing that one can determine what the highest good is by first figuring out the best and most desirable particular instance of human activity. From this microcosm of *eudaimonia*, I contended that one can extract the form of its goodness and map it onto the whole life of a human being to arrive at our ultimate end. I noted that a moment of activity which includes a loose conglomeration of several goods seems like the best moment of human activity. This supported objective list theory. But I suggested that there might be a substantive organising principle of the good life which explains the goodness of these goods, and that determining the form of the best cohesive moment of activity is a reasonable way of ascertaining what this principle might be. I argued that the best cohesive moment of activity is an I-Thou relationship or transcendent meaningful experience, and I maintained that the form of transcendent meaningful experiences is loving participation with what is intrinsically good.

In the next section I clarified the meaning of ‘loving participation’. I started by arguing that the loving participation of meaningful experiences involves a participation which cannot be reduced to communication and physical interaction, and that this participation is abstractly speaking a trans-substantial harmonious unity. I proposed conceptualising this union as the mutual indwelling of souls explains how a harmonious unity can occur without compromising the integrity and distinctness of the beings involved in the union. Then I maintained that, in addition to this participatory relationship, one’s unconditional love for the other undergirds loving participation. Lastly, I concluded that together these three facets characterise the form of loving participation.

In the third section, I applied this form of loving participation onto a human life. I argued that in a life of loving participation one loves the principle of loving participation itself, the intrinsic good of beings and things, and the good of the world. I then outlined how a person devoted to the principle of loving participation should evaluate the appropriateness of practical actions, and how they should place limits on how they love intrinsically good things. Finally, I contended that loving participation is the highest good or organising principle of *eudaimonia* because a life that fully reflects this value includes all goods, and the form of loving participation can explain the goodness of several other intrinsic goods which appear to contribute towards *eudaimonia*.

Chapter Eight: Aristotle

Since it was Aristotle who formally introduced the idea of the highest good, it is only fitting that we consider his proposal for the content of the highest good. Immediately after arguing that *eudaimonia* is the highest good and recognising that we need a clearer idea of what the good life is, Aristotle attempts to determine the content of *eudaimonia* using his famous ‘function argument’ (NE 1097b22–24). In this chapter I will assess his function argument, and in the final section of this chapter I will use the structure of Aristotle’s function argument to develop my own function argument in defence of my theory of loving participation as the highest good.

The Beginnings of the Function Argument

Aristotle begins the function argument by claiming that we can discover the highest good of a human being by first determining the function (*ergon*) of a human being (1097b24–25). In addition to ‘function’, ‘*ergon*’ can also be translated as ‘task’, ‘characteristic activity’, and ‘work’ (Irwin 2019, 377–78; Kraut 2022). For us today and for Aristotle the function of something is closely tied to the idea of the purpose or end of a thing (Irwin 2019, 372, 378; Barney 2008, 300–01). We would say that the function of a watch is to fulfil its purpose of accurately keeping time. And Aristotle explicitly says that the function of a thing is its purpose (*telos*) (EE 1219a8; Met. Θ 1050a21–23).[43] Hence, I will treat ‘function’ as the proper activity of a thing in accordance with its purpose. For example, the function of the harpist is to play the harp because that is the activity in accordance with the purpose of a harpist (NE 1098a11–12).

[43] At this stage of the chapter, I am treating ‘purpose’ as something which may or may not be intrinsically good.

How do we know that human beings have a function? In a strikingly brief passage Aristotle suggests that a human being is not by nature idle or without function because just as 'the carpenter and the leatherworker have their functions and actions' and 'eye, hand, foot, and in general, every bodily part apparently has it function', humans appear to have a function (1097b28–34). The obvious challenge to this inductive inference is that there are significant differences between humans and occupations and body parts, and that more is needed to show what similarity to humans these things have which indicate that humans likewise have a function. Barney in particular has developed and defended a more sophisticated account of Aristotle's arguments from crafts and from organic parts (2008). But we can skip this discussion and more quickly defend the existence of a human function by using ideas which I have already defended in this thesis.

In the first part of this thesis I argued for the existence of a purpose or ultimate end for human beings by drawing from 1094a–1097b21 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. If we take the existence of a human purpose for granted, it guarantees the existence of a human function because a function is just the proper activity of a thing in accordance with its purpose. Hence, if humans have a purpose then they will have a corresponding function which is simply activity in accordance with that purpose.

In fact, this move from the fact of a thing's purpose to the fact of its function is one way of making sense of Aristotle's puzzling argument that just as a craftsman and body parts have a function, human beings likewise have a function (1097b28–34). For if we interpret Aristotle here to not be defending but rather assuming the existence of a purpose for humans, a craftsman, and a body part, we can understand Aristotle as arguing in these lines that if something has a purpose then it has a function or a non-idle activity which is directed towards its purpose.

Aristotle defends his strategy of using the function of humans to uncover the good of humans, by observing that the good for a flute player, a sculptor, and indeed every craftsman or entity which has a function, seems to rely on its function (1097b25–27). Hence, Aristotle concludes that if human beings have a function, their good similarly seems to depend on their function (1097b27–28). One of the most significant objections to the function argument is that in this move Aristotle confuses and fails to distinguish between 'the good *for* a human being' and 'a good human being' (Lawrence 2011, 335–36). The distinction is between what is prudentially good for someone and what is attributively good for someone. Attributive goodness is what it means to be a good kind of thing, and therefore seems to correspond to the (not necessarily intrinsically good) purpose of a thing. For instance, it seems like what makes someone a good sculptor (sculpting well or producing good sculptures) is different to what is good for a sculptor (well-being). Similarly the attributive good of a German Shepherd dog seems to be to herd and guard sheep, but the prudential good of a German Shepherd might not involve the exercising of this capacity and could instead be achieved by going for walks and being treated with affection.

Critics accept that Aristotle would be right in thinking that the function of a human being can tell us about what it is to be an attributively good human being, but note that it is unclear how the function of a human tells us about what is prudentially good for a human (Wilkes 1978, 555; Korsgaard 2008, 131). Glassen says that what is good for a lyre player does not follow from the function of a lyre player (1957, 320). And Korsgaard notes that it makes sense to ask, 'whether it is good for a human being to be a good human being', and whether good functioning will make a person happy or bring about ‘some condition welcome from the person’s own point of view’ (2008, 131). To illustrate this problem Korsgaard uses an example from the *Republic*, where Socrates appears to concede that when performing their function, the guardians of the ideal state might not be very happy and may not achieve the best good for themselves (2008, 131). Thus, it is argued that by appealing to the function of humans, Aristotle is determining what it is to be an attributively good human, but he seems to mistakenly think he is also determining what is good for a human.

Is there a connection between attributive goodness and prudential goodness which allows us to reach conclusions about prudential goodness from knowledge of a thing’s attributive good? Kenny tries to establish a connection between attributive and prudential goodness by claiming that ‘what is good for a man, *qua* man, to do [prudential goodness] is what the good man in fact does *qua* good man [attributive goodness]’ (1965–6, 96). Kenny argues that counterexamples which purport to divorce the good for from the good of, are merely applying the same concept of ‘good for’ to different entities. For example, the apparent difference between the good for and the good of a sculptor actually demonstrates the difference between ‘what was good for sculptors *qua* men and what was good for them *qua* sculptors’ (Kenny 1965–6, 96). However, Lawrence notes that it is hard to grasp what it means for something to be good for and benefit a sculptor *qua* sculptor (2011, 350–51). It seems like the only reasonable answer is that it is what helps a sculptor be a good sculptor (Lawrence 2011, 350–51). This means that we give ‘good for’ an instrumental definition and define what is good for X as that which instrumentally helps X be an attributively good X. But this definition of ‘good for’ ignores the concept of prudential value and its potential conflict with attributive goodness, because it just defines what is good for a human based on the good of a human.

Hence, Kenny does not address the problem we have outlined and bridge the disconnect between prudential and attributive goodness.

Whiting by contrast seems to argue that the function or good of a natural kind of thing necessarily contributes towards what is good for that thing (1988, 36, 40). That is, a member of a species realising the good of that species is good for the member regardless of the actual interests and desires of the member. For the good of a human seems to be good for a human in the sense that it benefits their biological health (Whiting 1988, 40). Whiting does admit that the good of a human might only partially constitute what is beneficially good for them and might leave out possible prudential goods relative to an individual's beliefs and desires such as wanting to engage in certain recreational activities (1988, 36, 40). But this partial connection between prudential goodness and function is too moderate to satisfy Aristotle's concluding claim in the function argument to have learnt about the overall nature of the human good or *eudaimonia* (1098a16–17).

Nevertheless, conclusions which I have defended in chapters two and three of this thesis about the highest good and *eudaimonia* show that the attributive good of a human is what is prudentially good for them and vice versa. Firstly, I argued that the purpose or ultimate end of human beings is intrinsically good. As pointed out a few paragraphs ago, the purpose or ultimate end of a thing is the attributive good of a thing, because it seems like a good kind of thing is that which acts in accordance with its purpose. Hence, the attributive good of humans is intrinsically good because their purpose is intrinsically good. Secondly, we can link the purpose of human beings with prudential goodness because I have argued that the purpose of a human being is the good life, and that what is good for someone is the presence of intrinsic goodness in their life.[44] These two steps allow us to identify the attributive good of humans with the prudential good of humans because they make the function of a human the activity of living an intrinsically good life, and the activity of living an intrinsically good life what is prudentially good for a human being. These connections also help address Korsgaard's concern about one's function being not desired by or in the interest of the individual, because being both one's prudential good and the ultimate end of one's desires, makes one's function personally valuable and relevant.

The Crux of the Function Argument

Now that we have defended the relevance of the function of a human being in determining the good life of a human being, we can now move on to the heart of the function argument and examine how Aristotle tries to discover the nature of *eudaimonia*. Aristotle tries to determine the function of humans by looking for the special or peculiar (*idion*) function of human beings. He says that our activity of living is shared with plants and that because we are looking for the peculiar activity of humans, 'we should set aside the life of nutrition and growth' (1097b35–1098a1). Next Aristotle claims that the life of sense perception cannot be our function because it too 'is shared with horse, ox, and every animal' (1098a1–3). Lastly, Aristotle says that the only enduring candidate for our function is a 'life of action of the part of the soul that has reason', seemingly because this is the only kind of life which is unique to humans (1098a3–4).

[44] Aristotle agrees with the former claim that one's purpose is the good life, and the latter claim is one available reading of Aristotle (Hurka 2021, 808–09).

Critics have pointed out several potential problems with this part of Aristotle's argument. First, it is possible that other non-human animals like dolphins or aliens share the purportedly unique human quality of being rational (Korsgaard 2008, 132). Broadie notes that the mere possibility of discovering human activities present in other species means that our ethics rests 'on the fragile empirical claim that we alone of mortal beings are rational' (1994, 35). And it is hard to accept that our most foundational ideas about the good life could be subject to a complete revolution if this fragile empirical claim is found to be false (Broadie 1994, 35). Second, Aristotle himself thinks that we share our ability to contemplate with the gods, and this activity clearly involves the rational part of the soul (1178b21–23; Kraut 1979, 467). Third, if an activity which is unique to humans is what we should be using to determine the human good, then there are numerous other activities which are characteristic of humans such as making fire, acting out of spite, telling jokes, and killing things for fun (Korsgaard 2008, 132). But it would be ridiculous to say that these activities contribute to the good life and that we should strive to replicate these unique activities in our lives (Nozick 1981, 516). Hence, Aristotle appears to cherry-pick rational activity as the unique activity of human beings and ignore the problematic activities. Framed in this light, the idea that our purpose is to act in accordance with reason because it is our characteristic activity, appears foolish and short-sighted.

It is worthwhile outlining Aristotle's implicit psychological and metaphysical assumptions in his function argument. The three different kinds of lives which are described in the function argument correspond to the three different kinds or parts of the soul outlined by Aristotle in *De Anima* (II.2; Irwin 2019, 216). The first and most basic kind of soul or way of living is the life of nutrition and growth which is shared by all living things and is the only kind of soul which plants have (413a25–35). The soul of animals includes this nutritive part and also a second part of the soul or way of living which is a life of sense perception (413b1–413b10). For Aristotle the sensory faculty of the soul is deeply connected with the locomotion and appetite (general desire which does not come from reason), and these things all separate plants from animals (414a31–414b6; 433b27–434a9). Appetite is the perceptual faculty 'in relation to what is good or bad', and locomotion requires appetite (431a10–14). In addition to these first two parts of the soul, the soul of human beings has a third part which is a life of reason, and this distinguishes it from the soul of animals (413b24–28; Korsgaard 2008, 142).

Note that unlike the conception of the soul as a substance which is separable from the body or matter of a thing, the Aristotelian soul is not detachable from a thing's body as it is the very activity of a living body (Irwin 2019, 397). For Aristotle, the soul is the primary way by which a thing lives, which is why the soul is the actuality, form, and organisation of a living thing, and is not the matter or potentiality of a thing (414a13–30). For example, if an eye were an animal, its soul would be sight because it is the activity of the eye, and the physical material of the eye would be the matter which is organised by the form/soul of the eye (412b18–22).

Why is the soul of a thing relevant for determining a thing's function? The soul is relevant because the soul is the mode by which a thing acts and the function of a thing is its activity in accordance with its purpose. So the activity of a thing's function will be in the mode by which the thing acts and lives. Hence, a thing's function is an activity which is deeply connected to the nature or form of a thing (cf. Barney 2008, 301, 314; Pol. 1253a24; Meta. Θ 1050a21–23). This relationship of a thing's function to its nature and identity explains why Aristotle tries to outline the human function by contrasting the activity of humans with other living things.

I think the most accurate explanation of why Aristotle undertakes his eliminative strategy of ruling out the activity of other beings to determine the human function is Kraut's interpretation that Aristotle assumes that the function of plants and animals are inferior to our function (1979, 477). But I also think we can use Aristotle's psychology to develop an explanation of Aristotle's eliminative strategy and appeal to peculiarity, which can respond to the three above objections without introducing the superiority of humans or the rational soul any earlier than it has to be.

This explanation of peculiarity makes two claims. Firstly, for Aristotle, the peculiarity of the human function, does not mean that the human function must exclude all activities which are performed by or included in the function of other beings. The main advantage of this first understanding of peculiarity is that it is much more in line with Aristotle's metaphysics than expecting the human function to exclude any activity which is shared with any other kinds of beings. The connection outlined between function and identity does not give us any reason to think that one's function must not involve any activity shared with other beings. In fact, it would be very odd for Aristotle to think that the function of humans in principle cannot involve any shared activity, when he both thinks that humans share rational activity with the gods, and seems to hold that the function of plants (nutrition) and animals (nutrition and perception) includes activities which are not unique to those beings. After all, Aristotle identifies the soul/form of a thing with its purpose, and thus identifies the soul of a thing with its function (Phys. B 198a26).

This first negative interpretation of peculiarity enables us to respond to the first and second objections to Aristotle's function argument mentioned above regarding the non-uniqueness of rationality for humans. For this interpretation allows the human function to share activities of the rational part of the soul with other beings.

The first interpretation of peculiarity might lead us to think that instead of only involving activities unique to humans, the function of humans must, as a whole, be unique to humans and not the same as any other beings (cf. Whiting 1988, 38). After all, the rational activity of the gods is not a counterexample to the overall uniqueness of the human function, because for Aristotle humans have different souls to the gods (who only have the rational part of the soul) which suggests they must have a different overall function to humans (Meta. Λ 1072b24–31). However, it seems possible for there to be another kind of being which has the same general tripartite soul as humans which includes the rational, sensory, and nutritive parts. And it is hard to believe that Aristotle would think that humans have no function if they shared the same soul and hence shared the same overall function as another kind of being. So I think the second interpretation about Aristotle's peculiarity we should make on top of the first is that the peculiarity of the human function does not mean that the function of humans is unique to humans, but rather that the human function is unique to beings with the general tripartite soul of humans. For if Aristotle thought that the overall function of a being must be unique to the particular species of that being, then Aristotle would not have treated the function of different species of non-human animals as the same, and the function of different species of plants as the same (NE 1097b33–1098a3).

This second interpretation of peculiarity helps us with the third cherry-picking objection regarding why the only kinds of activities Aristotle considers are nutrition, sense perception, and rational activity. The three kinds of lives outlined by Aristotle appear to be the most reasonable candidates for the most fundamental and primary ways by which an animate being can live and function. Moreover, in contrast to more idiosyncratic characteristic activities of humans like making fire, rational activity seems like an essential and foundational activity of human beings to the point where it is hard to see how one could live a fully human life without any rational activity. In the same way it is hard to see how an animal in a coma without sensory perception can fully function as an animal. Some species classified as animals like barnacles might be able to function properly in a comatose state, but like plants these species would seem to have only a nutritive soul.

However, while this response deals with the cherry-picking objection, it leaves unanswered a similar objection to Aristotle's eliminative strategy. Given that the soul of humans has nutritive and sensory/appetitive parts in addition to the rational part, it seems like the function of humans should involve the activity of all of the parts of the soul and not just the rational part of the soul (Nagel 1972, 254). Nevertheless, Nagel notes that the three activities/capacities of humans are not merely conjunctive like that of a corkscrew. Rather, like a giraffe or any complex organism, one's function is not the sum of its parts but the activity of the total system where its parts are integrated and organised into a coherent whole (Nagel 1972, 255–56). Hence, one potential way to defend Aristotle's priority of reason is by recognising that the addition of a new higher part of the soul fundamentally transforms an organism's overall activity and the manner in which it lives (Korsgaard 2008, 142). For example, a non-rational animal's appetitive activity is guided by instincts, but if that animal suddenly gains the ability to be rational then their desires can now be guided by reason because the ends which that animal pursues can now be determined by rational reflection (Korsgaard 2008, 142–43). This fits with Aristotle's claim that the function of human beings involves not just the purely rational part of the soul but also the activity of the appetitive part of the soul because this part is able to have reason by obeying and acting in accordance with reason (1098a3–5, 1102b25–28).

However, while Aristotle includes the appetitive part of the soul in the human function, he excludes the nutritive part of the soul from the human function, seemingly because it cannot be governed by or explicitly directed towards the aim of reason (1102b13, 1102b29–32). Aristotle's exclusion of the activity of the nutritive part of the soul from the human function is puzzling, because Aristotle accepts that nutrition and generation is an essential part of the human soul and therefore of human activity (DA 434a20–26). Thus, it seems like Aristotle excludes the basic nutritive activity of humans from our function not because of his psychology and metaphysics, but instead because of his ethical views about the priority of reason. This subverts what appeared to be the purpose of the function argument — to determine the nature of the good life by looking into the nature of human beings without any substantive ethical presuppositions. Yet there is space in Aristotle's argument for the use of independent ethical premises, because function is normative concept and a thing's function is its good and excellent activity (1098a7–15). We can focus first on how a thing behaves to tell us what kind of activity is involved in a thing's function, and then use normative premises to determine what the excellent performance of this fundamental activity would look like. Aristotle appears to hint at this two-step process when, after describing the human function as activity in accordance with reason, he stresses the normative nature of a thing's function and uses this idea to specify the human function as *excellent* activity in accordance with reason (1098a8–15).

Hence, if we adjust our expectations of the function argument so that it is trying to use both ethical assumptions and descriptive facts about the nature of humans to discover the content of the good life, then we do not need to object to the type of presuppositions it involves. Instead, we need to see how Aristotle might justify the ethical inputs of his function argument in order to evaluate the ethical outputs of the function argument.

After the function argument Aristotle gives a potential reason for thinking that the nutritive soul has no share in human virtue or excellent activity. He says that in sleep without dreams, where nutritive activity seems to be the only activity of the soul present, the good and the bad person are least distinct and happy people seem no better off than miserable people (1102b4–12). But his argument for the irrelevance of nutrition comes across as half-hearted, since he already seems to take it for granted that nutrition has no share in human virtue (1102b9, 1102b12–13). Thus, we must look elsewhere to find Aristotle's justification of his assumption of the priority of reason.

Reason

I think we can discover the primary motivation behind Aristotle's prioritisation of reason by looking at Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. I also think along with Kraut, Lear, and others that this book is needed to explain Aristotle's understanding of the content of *eudaimonia* and the conclusion of the function argument in Book I.

During the function argument of Book I, after concluding that the human function is the 'activity of the soul in accord with or requiring reason', Aristotle argues that the function of a good or excellent person is to perform the rational activity of the soul well and finely (1098a7–15). This means that the human good is the activity of the soul in accordance with the virtue or excellence (*aretê*) which is proper to the soul (1098a16–17; Irwin 2019, 401).

The virtues of thought like wisdom are the excellent activities of the fully rational part of the soul, and the virtues of character like temperance are the excellent activities of the appetitive part of the soul when it is obeying reason (1103a3–7). Aristotle does say that external goods like wealth are necessary in order to live a good life, but they are instrumentally good because they prevent things like pain impeding *eudaimonia* (1099a31–32; 1153b17–19).

In chapter seven of Book X, Aristotle picks up from the end of Book I and says, 'if happiness is activity in accord with virtue, it is reasonable for it to be in accord with the supreme virtue' (1177a11–13). This supreme virtue is the virtue of the best thing, which is understanding and 'to understand what is fine and divine, by being itself either divine or the most divine element in us' (1177a13–16). He then says this means that complete *eudaimonia* is activity in accordance with this proper virtue, and that this activity is an activity of contemplation (*theoria*) (1177a16–18). This contemplative activity is not the kind of activity where one is trying to fill a gap in one's understanding; it is where one is beholding something in full view (Irwin 2019, 398). It is important to remember that in contrast to a Humean instrumental view of reason, Aristotle's conception of reasonable activity is not a purely instrumental serving of higher ends. If his view of reason was instrumental, it would be hard to justify reason's association with the highest good which is chosen solely for its own sake.

It is unclear if Aristotle is saying that the *eudaimonia* of humans simply is the activity of contemplation, or if *eudaimonia* is an activity which is predominantly characterised by contemplation and might include activities other than contemplation (Irwin 2019, 353). Yet Aristotle does repeatedly make clear that *eudaimonia* is primarily connected to the most supreme element of a human being, the corresponding activity of this supreme element, and the activity of the best virtue which is the virtue of this supreme element (1098a16–18, 1177a5–6, X.7). *Eudaimonia* is not primarily concerned with the compound of the elements of the human being or the compound of virtuous activities, because the compound is inferior to the best and divine element (1177b28–30). Aristotle is equally clear that this supreme divine element of humans is understanding and its corresponding supreme activity is contemplation (1177a2–1178a3). He argues that contemplation is the most self-sufficient end, seeks no further end, and is the most pleasant end (1177a24–1177b2). But his most striking argument for the superiority of understanding/contemplation is that contemplation is the only activity of the gods and the gods are happier and more blessed than anyone (1178b8–23; cf. Pol. 1323b21–26, Met. 12.9). Accordingly, Aristotle says that the human activity which is most akin to this divine activity will have the character of happiness, and the 'human life is blessed to the extent that it has something resembling [contemplative activity]' (1178b22–27).

Therefore, Aristotle attempts to justify the substantive ethical assumption about the priority of reason used in the function argument through his theology. Before we evaluate Aristotle's function argument in light of his theological argument in Book X, we must first try to square Aristotle's claims about contemplation with the rest of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

It has long been noted that Aristotle's claims about *eudaimonia* being activity in accordance with contemplation in Book X.7 seem to be inconsistent with the rest of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Ackrill 1981, 15; Whiting 2009, 70; Irwin 2012, 495–96). This is because Aristotle says that complete human virtue includes the moral virtues of character, and that their corresponding morally virtuous actions must be chosen for their own sake (1178a35–1178b1, 1105a32). But in Book X he singles out the activity of a particular virtue — theoretical wisdom — as being the most divine, and the activity of understanding and as being superior to activity in accord with other virtues (1177b16–22). There are two general ways of interpreting Aristotle's theory of *eudaimonia*, with Kraut, Lear, and others advancing a 'dominant' monistic conception of *eudaimonia*, and Ackrill, Whiting, Irwin, and others advancing an 'inclusivist' pluralistic conception of *eudaimonia*. The monistic conception of *eudaimonia* says that it only has one good included in it, whereas the inclusivist conception of *eudaimonia* says that it is made up of multiple ends or goods (Ackrill 1981, 17; Lear 2004, 31).

These different interpretations can be surprisingly slippery. The *eudaimonia* which is said to be monistic or pluralistic could refer to the actually lived good life, or the organising principle of both the actually lived good life and the concept of *eudaimonia*. Earlier monistic interpreters like Hardie (1965) and Kenny (1965–6) thought that Aristotle's good life only consisted in the activity of contemplation (Ackrill 1981, 17). But recent influential monist interpreters such as Lear and Kraut accept that the lived good life for Aristotle includes goods other than contemplation (2004, 6; 1989, 155). I think the more recent monists are right to reject monism about the lived good life, since it is clear that for Aristotle virtues of character, along with contemplation, are included in the good life.

But is monism or inclusivism about the good life's organising principle(s) the correct interpretation of Aristotle's account? Is there only one organising principle or multiple organising principles of the good life? It seems undeniable that for Aristotle there is only one organising principle of the good life and that this principle is contemplation. There simply is no other way of reading Aristotle's various claims in Book X.7–8 mentioned earlier about *eudaimonia* being activity in accordance with contemplation, and the character of human *eudaimonia* being most akin to and blessed to the extent that it resembles divine contemplation. If this is Aristotle's view then how can he reconcile it with his claim that we should choose virtues of character for their own sake? One could argue that virtues of character are desirable for the sake of their tendency to promote the good of contemplation (cf. Kraut 1989, 179–80). But this does not show that moral virtue is good for its own sake. Another way of accounting for 'middle-level ends' like moral virtue is to say that moral virtue forms a part of the highest good (the organising principle of *eudaimonia*), since parts can be desired both for their own sake and for the sake of wholes (cf. Irwin 2012, 510; Ackrill 1981, 21). But I have argued that for Aristotle contemplation is the highest good. And because it seems the virtues of character cannot be included in the value of contemplation, virtues of character cannot form part of the highest good.

However, Lear points out that for Aristotle another way of choosing an end for the sake of another end is by choosing an end which approximates or imitates the other end (2004, 72–73). For example, the continuous circular movement of the first heaven (primum mobile) can be done for the sake of being like the prime mover, since continuous circular motion is the best available approximation and imitation of the perfect activity of god for a thing with no rational soul (Lear 2004, 79). An end chosen as an approximation of an intrinsically good end seems to share in the goodness of that end because through its approximation it inherits part of the value possessed by the paradigm (Lear 2004, 85). This means that an end which imitates an end desired for its own sake can itself be desired for its own sake, because it partakes in the ultimately desired end and its intrinsic value. Lear claims that this relation can explain the intrinsic desirability of moral virtue and argues that for Aristotle moral virtue is intrinsically valuable due to its truthfulness and fineness approximating the theoretical excellence of contemplation (2004, 132).

Now that we have outlined Aristotle's highest good or organising principle of *eudaimonia* as contemplation and the reasons why Aristotle's takes *eudaimonia* to be the activity of the soul in accordance with reason, we can now turn to evaluating Aristotle's theory.

One of the only critiques of the function argument which is still relevant here is the objection that rational activity cannot be the highest good because it can be used for evil (Williams 1993, 60; Korsgaard 2008, 132). For Aristotle not all rational activity is good; in order to be excellent rational activity it must be done in accordance with the end of contemplation. But if actions receive their value from their promotion of contemplation, then one should perform evil or immoral actions if they advance contemplation (Ackrill 1981, 32). In fact, the issue is not just that since contemplation is more valuable than its approximation of moral or character virtue, the promotion of contemplation can overrule the promotion of moral or character virtue. Rather, what is morally virtuous for Aristotle is determined by its approximation and promotion of contemplation. Hence, a society would have a 'moral' reason to adopt a eugenics program which tries to breed people with a greater capacity for contemplation or grasping theoretical truths, and sterilise those with a lesser capacity. Responses to this immorality objection often show how Aristotle can consistently treat moral virtue as intrinsically good, but they do not consider the problems with contemplation determining the content of moral virtue (Meyer 2001, 61–65; Charles and Scott 1999, 226–27).

The second worry I have with Aristotle's account is directly with the ideal of goodness/blessedness from which Aristotle derives the *eudaimonia* of humans. This ideal is the contemplative rational activity of the gods. However, it is hard to believe that this is the most blessed activity because the activity of Aristotle's god is extremely solipsistic or self-centred. In the *Metaphysics* Aristotle describes god as the pure actuality of thought thinking itself (Λ 1072b15–31; Λ 1074b23–24). Thought or intellect has itself as both the object of its thought and the subject which is doing the thinking. This activity of the unmoved mover is the best kind of activity for Aristotle because it both involves the best kind of soul (the intellect) and the activity of thought is directed towards the best object (pure thought). However, this image of a being solely contemplating itself is somewhat unenviable. Certainly from a moral perspective, something being completely self-absorbed and not recognising the existence of anything outside of itself is objectionable. But apart from this there is something saddening and pitiable about a mind being isolated in an eternal fortress of solitude. At the very least, it is hard to think that this kind of life in which one knows and feels nothing about the rest of the world and has no contact with anything outside of oneself, is the most blessed and perfect kind of activity.[45]

One might accept that this solipsistic critique makes sense with respect to Aristotle's god, but argue that the solipsistic critique cannot be made of human *eudaimonia*. After all, Aristotle thinks the *eudaimonia* of human beings involves our relationships with others because humans are social/political animals (NE 1178b5–6, 1097b8–11). However, the only reason why Aristotle thinks that goods not included in the activity of god, like friendship, are goods for humans is because the human good life is a defective imitation of the paradigm of the divine contemplation.[46] Moreover, the lack of self-centredness in the *eudaimonia* of humans is not the issue being objected to. My objection is about the goodness or perfection of the ideal which was used to determine *eudaimonia* for humans. Hence, if the ideal is flawed then

[45] Some have argued that the object of the thought of Aristotle's god includes intelligibles or the forms of other things in the universe because Aristotle's god 'is simply the formal-noetic structure of the cosmos *as conscious of itself*' (Kahn 1985, 327; Gerson 2005, 273–275). If this is true then my solipsistic objection to the activity of god would not work, but this interpretation does not affect my other objections.
[46] Cf. 1178b24–28, and Aristotle's description of friendship with others as being derived from the paradigm of friendship with oneself (NE 1166a1–1166b2).

we have good reason to think that the account of human *eudaimonia* which primarily relies on that ideal is also flawed. Perhaps Aristotle's account could still get many things right about the content of the good life even with this incorrect reasoning. Nonetheless, my argument against the ideal of divine contemplation still points out problems with regarding contemplation as the organising principle of human *eudaimonia*. This is because the organising principle of human *eudaimonia* is goodness itself, and a being's activity which perfectly embodies the organising principle of goodness (Aristotle's god) should be perfectly blessed and perfectly good. So if the activity of Aristotle's god is not perfectly blessed then it indicates that contemplation is not the organising principle of goodness, and by extension, is not the organising principle of human *eudaimonia*.

A third issue with Aristotle's account of contemplation as the highest good/organising principle of *eudaimonia* is that contemplation of some things for their own sake seems intrinsically wrong. To contemplate the nature of evil or to think about acts of evil committed could be instrumentally good insofar as it helps one to avoid becoming evil and to recognise and resist evil elsewhere in the world. But to contemplate the nature of evil and dwell on acts of evil like mass murder, genocide, and torture for no other purpose than to contemplate evil would appear intrinsically bad. Even if one does not take pleasure in this contemplation, it seems bad to continually focus on these things for their own sake because to contemplate and know evil is to have the reality of evil enter into oneself and one's psyche at some level.

A fourth issue with Aristotle's account of contemplation as ideal activity is that the activity of contemplation seems less good than loving participation as I described it in the previous chapter. Like contemplation, loving participation also involves knowledge of and direct contact with the reality of the thing known. However, unlike loving participation, Aristotle's contemplation does not involve a love of the object of thought. The addition of love to the activity of understanding when the object of understanding is intrinsically valuable, seems to make the activity better, more blessed, and more desirable than just understanding. For instance, the activity of both contemplating and loving a beautiful thing like a bee includes more goodness than mere understanding.

Therefore, Aristotle's highest good of contemplation is not the best value and most blessed kind of activity for human beings or for a god. In fact, because the ideal of contemplation seems inferior to loving participation, I think we can reconstruct a new better function argument that shares many of Aristotle's premises but maintains that loving participation is the highest good.

A New Function Argument

In line with my analysis of Aristotle's function argument, there are four main points which serve as reasonable premises of the new function argument. First, that human beings have a function which is the proper activity directed towards its purpose. Second, that we can learn about the function of a living thing through means other than merely making inferences from the intrinsic good of a thing. Namely, by looking at the fundamental way and mode by which a thing lives. Third, that the three types of lives of rational, sensory/appetitive, and nutritive activity are fundamental ways of living. Fourth, that one can use normative premises in order to reasonably further clarify the human function, because a function is the soul's excellent activity. The way that one can reasonably assess the truth of these normative premises is through our intuitions about what values and human activity seem intrinsically good and prudentially good for a person.

All of the differences between this new function argument and Aristotle's stem from what is identified as the best and most complete virtue which the human function acts in accordance with. Aristotle says that it is contemplation, whereas I claim that it is loving participation. This normative premise can help determine the human soul's excellent activity. In order to fully defend an account of the soul's excellent activity, one must engage with alternative theories of the highest good or best and most complete activity because one could be focusing only on one good ignoring the best good. This is a challenging task for any function argument. But it is not a problem for my argument because I have argued against other theories of the highest good in other chapters of this thesis.

One may be tempted to ask what the purpose is of the function argument up until the use of normative premises, given that the comparison and analysis of various theories of the highest good would be enough to constitute an argument all on its own for one theory of the highest good. I think the value the initial premises of the function argument bring is that they provide a second source of evidence in reasoning about the highest good which can be used jointly with normative intuitions about good activity. This second source of evidence is the fundamental ways of living through and by which a thing can perform excellent activity. For example, if we know that the only kind of fundamental activity of a tree is nutrition and growth then the intrinsic good of a tree cannot consist in excellent reasoning; rather if it exists at all, the good of the tree will consist in the excellent performance of nutrition and growth.

Therefore, because the fundamental ways of living included in a human life are nutritive, sensory/appetitive, and rational activity, the human good life will consist in the excellent performance of each of these activities as long as it is possible for each activity to be performed in accordance with intrinsic goodness. This requirement that the normative must be present in each activity for the activity to be included in a thing's function, provides Aristotle an opportunity to exclude nutritive activity from the human good. For, as we have seen, Aristotle uses rational activity as his normative premise and the nutritive cannot be controlled by reason like the appetitive can. One could object to this interpretation by noting that in *De Anima* Aristotle indicates the activity of generation and nourishment partakes in 'the everlasting and the divine', which for Aristotle is the model of the best activity (415a26–415b1). Hence, one could argue that my interpretation makes Aristotle's philosophy inconsistent because it seems like this ability to partake in intrinsic goodness, means that nutritive activity should be included in Aristotle's account of the human good. Nonetheless, Aristotle specifies that it is the form of the nutritive soul, and not the particular nutritive soul, that partakes in the divine by reproducing and existing continuously (415b3–7). Hence, Aristotle is consistent in not including an individual's nutritive activity in the human good, because it is unable to partake in Aristotle's ideal activity of divine contemplation.

Which fundamental human activities can be performed in an intrinsically good way, if loving participation is the best kind of activity? Rational or cognitive activity is needed for humans to love and have knowledge of a thing. Thus, rational activity forms a necessary part of the highest good for humans. Human appetitive activity is also capable of being intrinsically good. For it is intrinsically good to desire and pursue the good due to this manifesting a love of and devotion to goodness. And the correct desiring and pursuing of the good (virtues of character) are, at least largely, part of the appetitive faculty.

The intrinsic goodness of individual nutritive activity is harder to justify. But I think Aristotle's strategy of approximation can be used to support the goodness of the activity of biological health. A healthy body seems to consist first in the unity of the body, where its various parts are gathered together into a single organic whole, and second in the body and its parts functioning in such a way as to preserve this unity. For example, the parts of a red blood cell must work together for the whole cell to perform its function of carrying oxygen from the lungs and delivering it throughout the rest of the body. Likewise, the parts of the organs and the organs themselves of the immune system need to work together to perform their function of defending the body from infection. This unity of the various parts of the body and the activity which is necessary for the parts to hold together, seems to approximate what I have called loving participation's trans-substantial unity. The unity of a substance like the body is not the same as the unity involved in love because lover and beloved do not come together to form one substance. But the unity of a substance like the body is analogous to the higher-order unity of two souls because they both involve the agreement and harmonious unity of the things partaking in the union. The harmonious unity just takes place at different levels, where one occurs between distinct beings and the other occurs within a being. Health's approximation of loving participation's unity means that health receives part of the intrinsic goodness of loving participation's unity through its resemblance and participation in the form of this intrinsic good.

Hence, because all three of Aristotle's ways of living can be performed by humans in an intrinsically good way, they are all included in the excellent function or purpose of a human being. Accordingly, the methodology of the function argument and its focus on the attributive good of a thing can be used to discover new information about that thing's highest good. In this case, it demonstrates that health and virtues of character are intrinsic human goods and can be integrated in a hierarchy with loving participation as the highest good.

Conclusion

I began this chapter by supporting the foundations of Aristotle's function argument. I argued that humans have a function, because they have a purpose. And I argued that the attributive good of humans can be used to determine the prudential good of a person, because the attributive good is the purpose of a thing, the purpose of humans is intrinsically good, and prudential value is the presence of intrinsic goodness in someone's life. In the second section I turned to the part of the function argument where Aristotle tries to determine the function of humans by looking for the peculiar function of human beings. I maintained that Aristotle is correct in thinking that we can learn about the function/purpose of a living thing by investigating its fundamental modes of activity, because it is in these modes that a thing must perform its function. Hence, it makes sense to determine the human function by contrasting the activity of humans with the fundamental activity of other kinds of beings. However, I noted that Aristotle does not include the nutritive activity of humans in their function, and argued that this is because Aristotle has imported a normative premise about the superiority of reason.

In the third section I assessed this normative premise and contended that Aristotle motivates this premise when he later argues that contemplation is the highest good and best kind of activity. Then I argued that contemplation is not the highest good because firstly it has immoral ramifications, can be intrinsically bad, and is inferior to the activity of loving participation. And secondly because Aristotle's ideal activity of pure contemplation is too self-centred. In the fourth section I presented my own function argument which, in contrast to Aristotle, imports the normative premise that the best activity is loving participation. Here I argued, using the function argument, that virtues of character and biological health are intrinsically good if loving participation is the highest good.

Conclusion

The two fundamental questions this dissertation set out to answer was whether the traditional highest good of human beings exists, and what the content of this highest good is.

In the first part I argued for the existence of the traditional highest good by (1) defending the existence of an end which is descriptively the ultimate end of every person's desires and actions, (2) arguing that this end is what should rationally and explicitly guide a person's desires and actions, and (3) showing how achieving this ultimate end consists in the activity of the person aiming at the end. In the second part I maintained that our ultimate end is *eudaimonia* or the good life and then I tried to determine more specifically what the content of *eudaimonia* is. Ultimately, I argued that *eudaimonia* is a life of loving participation, with loving participation being the organising principle which explains the goodness of all other goods included in the good life. I also argued against the respective hypotheses that the highest good (or organising principle of *eudaimonia*) is non-substantive goodness, desire-fulfilment, pleasure, and knowledge/contemplation.

If correct, this dissertation has several implications for ethics and its subdisciplines. Most fundamentally, it means that the idea of the highest good is not an antiquated notion, but that it is the most important idea in ethics because the highest good is what should ultimately guide one's actions and what makes all ends worth pursuing. Hence, my research is in line with recent philosophy such as virtue ethics which supports a return to ancient ethical approaches. The existence of the highest good is obviously relevant for normative and practical ethics, because the highest good and its content is the standard by which all values and all practical actions receive their goodness from. My defence of the supreme normative authority of our ultimate end also has significant implications for metaethics. For my version of an ambitious constitutivist argument claims to establish the existence of normativity and objective goodness without assuming the existence of any goodness.

Other significant conclusions this dissertation has with respect to ancient ethics are that it connects the contemporary study of well-being to the ancient study of the good life or the content of the highest good, supports the ancient ethical framework of eudaimonism, and argues against Epicurus's and Aristotle's views of the highest good. With respect to contemporary ethics more specifically, I argued against all three major contemporary accounts of the content of well-being — objective list theory, desire-fulfilment theory, and hedonistic views. Instead, I proposed and defended an original theory of well-being as having the organising principle of loving participation.

Additional topics in contemporary philosophy this dissertation makes contributions to include the guise of the good thesis, constitutivism, the metaethics of prudential value, value incommensurability, and what grounds genuine love. Finally, if the organising principle of the good life is goodness, then it would seem like the organising principle of the good of a collective of individuals has the same organising principle of goodness. This line of enquiry could tell us about the common good and thus has relevance for political philosophy.

There are two areas of future research which would improve the plausibility of my argument for loving participation as the highest good, and any study of the content of the highest good more generally. First, there are many other theories of the highest good and of well-being across time and cultures which I have not considered. The ethics of Plato and the Stoics were quite influential in antiquity and they each had a view of the highest good. The Cynics, Sophists, and Presocratic philosophers also seem to have a view of well-being but their work is either not directly passed down to us or quite fragmentary. Religious and philosophical accounts of well-being in the European Middle-Ages, the Middle East, and Far East would also provide alternative views of well-being to engage with. Second, in order to support or undermine theories of the good life it would help to examine particular types of moral phenomena and see whether they fit given accounts of the highest good. For example, one could focus on the virtues (wisdom, temperance, courage, and justice) and see if it makes sense for the goodness of these individual virtues to derive from the purported highest good or organising principle of goodness in one's life, just as we did in the love chapter for the general goods of pleasure, health etc. Other kinds of moral phenomena which might be helpful to consider are forgiveness, moral dilemmas, and evil.

In *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor says that 'without a clear perception of his reasons for living, man will never consent to live, and will rather destroy himself than tarry on earth, though he be surrounded with bread'. I hope to have contributed to answering this question of the purpose and meaning of life.

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