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The Significance of Desire

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There is a venerable tradition of treating practical reason and theories of the good, especially the agent's own good, as grounded ultimately in facts about the responses that an agent does or would have to various situations and options upon suitable reflection. These are *response-dependent* conceptions of practical reason and the good. An important form of response-dependence is a *reductive* form that aims to reduce facts about reasons and the good to facts about desire. Such *desiderative* conceptions of response-dependence treat practical reason and the good as consisting in facts about what an agent would desire to care about and pursue upon suitable reflection. Even those who deny that all reasons or intrinsic goods are grounded in desire often assume that some are desire-dependent. Though I will address the more modest claim that some aspects of practical reason or the good are desire-dependent, it will be easier to begin with *pure* desiderative conceptions. One possible focus is desiderative conceptions of practical reason. But many of the same issues arise for desiderative conceptions of the good as well, and it will be useful to discuss these at points. Indeed, it may be most plausible to assign desire an ultimate role when we turn our attention from practical reason or the good, as such, to the narrower topic of a person's good or well-being.

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There are many possible reasons for focusing on desiderative conceptions of practical reason or the good. I will focus on three apparently independent rationales that I believe to be central and to have been influential. Desiderative conceptions fit with the Humean idea that reason can only be *instrumental*. They also promise to explain the way in which recognizing something as reasonable or as beneficial tends to *resonate* with agents or exert a motivational pull on them. Finally, desiderative conceptions promise to explain the *diversity* of reasons and good lives that most of us recognize. By way of explaining the appeal of desiderative conceptions, I will elaborate these three rationales.

However, despite these sources of potential appeal, desiderative conceptions ultimately prove problematic. Their most serious problem is an inadequate account of the normativity of practical reason and the good. In particular, we lack an adequate account of the *normative authority* of desire. An adequate conception of practical reason or the good must not only provide a decent *fit* with our reflective beliefs about what is or could be reasonable or valuable but must also be able to explain *why* we should care about conformity to its demands. Conceptions of practical reason and the good in which desire plays a genuinely foundational role are problematic along both dimensions. Herein lies the appeal of non-desiderative conceptions of practical reason and the good, especially those that are grounded in agency or other values. I try to explain the special appeal of *perfectionist* conceptions that appeal to rational nature or agency.

The adequacy of this sort of perfectionist conception of practical reason and the good depends, in part, upon its ability to respond persuasively to the considerations underlying the three rationales for desiderative conceptions. The resonance constraint appears to favor desiderative conceptions of practical reason insofar as we assume that motivation involves desire and that motivational pull must be found in antecedently held desires. But if desire can be responsive to reason, rather than its master, then desire and, hence, motivation can be consequent upon recognizing reasons or values. Rejecting the Humean dictum that reason can only be the slave of the passions is the key to accommodating the resonance condition without resort to the problematic commitment to desire-dependence. Moreover, the perfectionist appeal to rational nature or agency allows us to explain the commitment to diversity or pluralism about the content reasons and value without the problematic desiderative commitment to content-neutrality.

For all the problems that desiderative conceptions face, they provide an easy explanation of the evident fact that something's being the object of an agent's desire is normally, if not always, a good reason for the agent, if not others, to care about or pursue that thing. It is a problem for perfectionism if it cannot explain this evident fact. The perfectionist should

locate rational and evaluative significance in choice or rational endorsement, rather than desire, *per se*. Desire inherits significance insofar as it can be seen as the product of reasoned choice or endorsement. But rational nature imparts significance not just to the fact of choice or endorsement but to the content of choice or endorsement as well. This raises a question about what attitude the perfectionist should take toward choice of inappropriate ends. I conclude by exploring different models of how to relate these two aspects of the significance of choice.

1. PRACTICAL REASON, THE GOOD, AND WELL-BEING

I am sympathetic with those who take practical reason to be the ultimate currency of normative inquiry.¹ For this reason, I am especially interested in response-dependent and, in particular, desire-dependent conceptions of practical reason. Such conceptions can be motivated, we will see, by familiar assumptions about the nature, limits, and upshot of practical reason. But the primacy of practical reason within normative inquiry is a contestable position. Others take evaluative categories of the good or the good for a person to be primary. Whether we take practical reason or the good to be primary, many of the same issues that arise for practical reason can arise for value. In particular, there are comparable motivations for response-dependent and specifically desire-dependent conceptions of the good and the personal good.

Indeed, this parallelism should come as no surprise if we can treat reasons and values as interdependent. On one such view, we could treat the good as whatever is a legitimate object of rational concern.

Something is (intrinsically) good just in case it is (intrinsically) rational to care about or pursue it.

We might call this the *Reason–Value Link*.² To accept that the good and practical reason are linked in this way does not prejudge the question of which notion, if either, is explanatorily primary. The biconditional relationship is compatible with the good being prior in explanation and

¹ See e.g. T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), esp. chs. 1–2, and Stephen Darwall, *Welfare and Rational Care* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

² Cf. Franz Brentano, *The Origin of our Knowledge of Right and Wrong* [originally published 1889] (London: Routledge, 1969), 18, and C. D. Broad, *Five Types of Ethical Theory* (London: Routledge, 1930), 283.

with practical reason being prior in explanation. This debate may be relevant later. But present purposes do not require taking sides.

This allows us to link practical reason and the good. It does not yet tell us about the evaluative notion of the good for a person. We can equate a person's good with her welfare or well-being, her self-interest, her quality of life, and, on some views, with her happiness.³ We might link these evaluative notions with rational concern as follows.

Something is (intrinsically) good for X just in case it is (intrinsically) rational to care about or pursue it for X's own sake.

Call this the *Reason–Well-being Link*.⁴ As with the Reason–Value Link, this link does not prejudge which relatum, if either, is explanatorily prior.

Notice that the Reason–Value and Reason–Well-being Links are agnostic about the relationship between the good and the personal good or well-being. Some extreme views eliminate one evaluative concept in favor of the other—denying the existence of the good while recognizing the existence of the personal good, or denying the existence of the personal good while recognizing the existence of the good. For instance, G. E. Moore famously thought that the notion of a personal or relational good is incoherent.⁵ Other views are not eliminativist, but reductive; they purport to explain the good in terms of the personal good, or vice versa. For instance, the classical utilitarians, such as Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, and Henry Sidgwick, all seem to have thought that for something to be good is simply for it to be good for someone and that something's goodness was proportional to how much well-being it advanced.⁶ But we can also imagine alternatives to these eliminativist and reductive extremes. For instance, one might recognize goods for persons and believe that things can be regarded as good (simpliciter) insofar as they are good for people or contribute to their well-being and still recognize some things as good independently of

³ One potential obstacle to equating happiness with these other concepts (personal good, well-being, self-interest, and quality of life) is that, whereas it is comparatively easy to formulate objective conceptions of these other concepts, some people assume that happiness is inherently subjective and does not admit of objective conceptions. For an effective reply that defends the coherence of objective conceptions of happiness, see Richard Kraut, "Two Conceptions of Happiness" *Philosophical Review* 88 (1979), 176–96.

⁴ Cf. Darwall, *Welfare and Rational Care*, 8–9.

⁵ G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903), 97–105.

⁶ See Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* [originally published 1823] (London: Athlone Press, 1970), Ch. I, §§ iii–v; John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism* [originally published 1861] (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1979); and Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* [originally published 1874], 7th edn (London: Macmillan, 1907).

their being good for people. I am not an eliminativist about the personal good, and I think that that the Reason–Well-being Link provides one natural way to approach issues about the personal good. But I will otherwise remain largely agnostic about how best to understand the relation between the good and the personal good.

The Reason–Value and Reason–Well-being Links do not settle substantive questions about either practical reason or the good but they should allow us to move between claims about practical reason, the good, and well-being and to formulate desiderative conceptions of any of them.

2. SKEPTICISM AND INSTRUMENTALISM ABOUT PRACTICAL REASON

In *The Treatise of Human Nature* David Hume famously claims that “Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them.”⁷ It is natural to interpret this and other remarks Hume makes as implying skepticism about practical reason. In particular, Hume understands reason as a faculty that allows us to judge of the truth or falsity of ideas (III.i.1/458). Ideas are representations or copies. Actions and passions, as such, are real existences, not ideas. It follows that neither actions nor passions and desires, as such, can be in conformity with or contrary to reason.⁸ However, Hume does allow that actions and passions can be contrary to reason but only so far as they are dependent beliefs about matters of fact or relations of ideas. Many actions and desires are so dependent. In particular, desires and ultimately actions are often the product of other desires and beliefs about the means or necessary conditions to satisfying those antecedent desires. As Hume writes in his *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*,

Ask a man *why he uses exercise*; he will answer, *because he desires to keep his health*. If you then enquire, *why he desires health*, he will readily reply, *because sickness is painful*. If you push your enquiries farther, and desire a reason *why he hates pain*, it is impossible that he can ever give any. This is an ultimate end, and is never referred to any other object.⁹

⁷ See David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* [originally published 1739], ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), book II, part iii, section 3/page 415.

⁸ Cf. Stephen Darwall, *Impartial Reason* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 53.

⁹ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* [originally published 1751], ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), appendix I, section v.

One can often trace an agent's actions to desires that are *derived* from other desires and the agent's beliefs. And these desires may themselves be derived desires. But ultimately one must trace back through derived desires to some *ultimate* desire that is not derived from others. Derived desires and the actions that are based on them can be unreasonable, Hume claims, in the sense that they can be based on false beliefs about the causal means or necessary conditions to satisfying other desires—false beliefs about what we might call instrumental relations. But, he seems to assume, actions or desires that are not based on false beliefs about instrumental relations cannot be contrary to reason. It follows, as Hume infamously claims, that

'Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger. 'Tis not contrary to reason for me to chuse my total ruin, to prevent the least uneasiness of an *Indian* or person wholly unknown to me. 'Tis as little contrary to reason to prefer even my own acknowledg'd lesser good to my greater, and to have a more ardent affection for the former than the latter. (II.iii.3/416)

Of course, gross solipsism and imprudence can be, and typically will be, contrary to reason in the sense that they will frustrate the satisfaction of other ultimate desires we have that presuppose the continued existence of ourselves and the world. Hume's claim in this passage is presumably that such behavior and preferences are not inherently contrary to reason and are not, considered in themselves, contrary to reason.

Whereas Hume does claim that derived desires based on false beliefs can be contrary to reason, he denies that ultimate desires can be reasonable and that actions or derived desires are rational when they are based on true beliefs about instrumental relations. This asymmetry between ascriptions of irrationality and ascriptions of rationality implies that Hume is best interpreted as a skeptic about practical reason. Not only are no actions or desires inherently contrary to reason but also no actions or desires are rational. The crucial questions in assessing Humean skepticism are why we should accept this asymmetry and why we should think that reason can only judge of the truth or falsity of ideas or beliefs.

Some modern-day conceptions of practical reason and the good appeal to Hume's claims but draw different conclusions. *Instrumentalism* about practical reason accepts Hume's claim that reason can only be the slave of the passions or appetites. Derived desires can be criticized as based on false beliefs about instrumental relations, and so can actions based on such derived desires. But actions and desires are not otherwise criticizable and, in particular, ultimate desires or ends are not rationally criticizable. But, unlike Hume, the instrumentalist does assume that practical reason endorses desires or actions that contribute to the satisfaction of one's

desires, provided these desires are not themselves based on false beliefs about instrumental relations. The instrumentalist rejects Hume's asymmetry about ascriptions of rationality and irrationality. Like Hume, the instrumentalist maintains that ultimate ends are neither reasonable nor unreasonable, but she rejects the conclusion that desires and actions conducive to satisfying ultimate ends are not rational. Because ultimate ends are immune to rational criticism, and because all derived desires relate ultimately to ultimate ends, instrumental rationality can be defined in terms of promoting one's ultimate ends or desires. Instrumental rationality, on this view, is a matter of adopting means and necessary conditions to the promotion of one's ultimate ends. One's ultimate ends can change over time. So presumably instrumental rationality must be temporally relative, relativizing one's reasons for action to one's ultimate ends at the time of action. A great many people recognize instrumental rationality, so construed, as one aspect of practical reason. But if we accept the Humean claim that reason can only be the slave of the passions, then it appears that there could be nothing more to practical reason than instrumental rationality.

Though instrumentalism is typically formulated as a claim about practical reason, related claims can be formulated about the good. Indeed, if we accept the Reason–Value Link, then a purely instrumental conception of practical reason yields a conception of the good that makes something's goodness consist in its conduciveness to satisfying one's ultimate desires.

Though Hume himself draws largely skeptical conclusions from his assumption that reason can only be the slave of the passions, the instrumentalist draws a more constructive conclusion. Because of the basis of instrumentalism in some Humean claims, instrumentalists are often viewed as Humeans. We do no serious harm by calling instrumentalists Humeans, provided that we remember that Hume was no Humean.

3. RESONANCE AND INTERNALISM

Another influential rationale for response-dependent and specifically desiderative conceptions of practical reason and the good is the thought that normative notions, such as practical reason and the good, should not leave the agent indifferent but should *resonate* with her. Resonance requires that normative claims be capable of motivating agents. But motivation is a matter of having suitable pro-attitudes or desires. Hence, normative claims must be grounded in an agent's desires in some way.

We can clarify this rationale by looking at Bernard Williams's influential defense of internal reasons.¹⁰ Williams focuses on reasons for action and identifies internal reasons as ones that are relative to the agent's "subjective motivational set" (pp. 101–2). External reasons, by contrast, would not depend on the agent's motivational set. Williams clearly identifies the relevant elements of a person's motivational set with her desires in a broad sense that encompasses various kinds of pro-attitudes (pp. 101, 105). He is not explicit about the reasons for focusing on desires. Presumably, he is attracted to the familiar view of intentional action as the product of representational states, such as belief, and pro-attitudes, such as desire. On this reconstruction, we can distinguish, at least in principle, between the internalist constraint on practical reason that reasons for action be capable of motivating the agent and a specifically desiderative conception of practical reason that grounds reasons for action in the agent's desires. Because Williams believes that motivational states involve desires, he concludes that only a desiderative conception of practical reason can satisfy the internalist constraint.

Williams makes clear that his preferred desiderative conception of internalism will not simply appeal to an agent's actual desires but will instead recognize idealizations of her desires. An agent does not have an internal reason, according to Williams, to satisfy derived desires that are based on false beliefs about the instrumental means to and necessary conditions of satisfying her more ultimate desires (pp. 102–3). Because an agent may be mistaken about what will be most conducive to satisfying her ultimate desires, she can be mistaken about what her internal reasons are (p. 103). Williams is willing to countenance internal reasons that are relative to the desires that an agent would have after suitable deliberation on and from her initial (pre-deliberative) desires (pp. 104–5).

Unfortunately, Williams is frustratingly vague about what he will count as suitable deliberation (pp. 105, 110). If internalism is to avoid vacuity, then motivation and desire must play the ultimate role in the justification of action. But this precludes appeal to desires that are produced by forms of deliberation that track truths about practical reason or the good. For if the new desires depend upon deliberation about practical reason or the good, the agent would have them regardless of the desires with which she began. But this would violate the demand that practical reason be traceable to the agent's initial motivational set. Presumably, Williams has in mind content-neutral forms of deliberation, such as means–ends reasoning and imaginative and vivid appreciation of the causes, nature, and consequences of one's alternatives.

¹⁰ See Bernard Williams, "Internal and External Reasons" reprinted in his *Moral Luck* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

This gives us a better idea of how Williams understands his preferred desiderative conception of internalism. But why should we accept such an account of practical reason? Williams appeals to connections between motivation and possible explanation.

If something can be a reason for action, then it could be someone's reason for acting on a particular occasion, and it would then figure in an explanation of that action. Now no external reason statement could *by itself* offer an explanation of anyone's action. ... The whole point of external reasons statements is that they can be true independently of the agent's motivations. But nothing can explain an agent's (intentional) actions except something that motivates him to act. (pp. 106–7)

But this appeal to explanation is problematic. We can put the problem as a dilemma.

On the one hand, it cannot be that reasons for action must actually motivate and explain the agent's actual behavior. Conceptions of practical reason are concerned with reasons that would *justify*, rather than explain, action. So we want to allow that an agent's justifying reasons—what she ought to do—may not be the reasons that motivate her or explain her behavior. Moreover, the idealization contained in Williams's own desiderative conception means that internal reasons often fail to motivate and explain an agent's actions. If my desire to drink the substance in this glass, which is petrol, is based on the false belief that it is gin, then Williams thinks that the internalist should recognize no reason to drink the stuff in the glass and a reason not to drink it. But then the agent's internal reason not to drink the stuff in the glass will not explain his actual drinking of the stuff in the glass.

On the other hand, we might loosen the link between reasons for action and motivation and explanation, requiring only that an agent's practical reasons must be *potentially explanatory*. One way to see an agent's reasons for action as potentially explanatory is to recognize that her reasons explain her action just insofar as she is behaving rationally. But this threatens to become a trivial or vacuous requirement. For any conceivable standard of behavior X, no matter how peculiar, it will be true that X explains an agent's actions just insofar as she is behaving X-ly. But that means that this looser version of the explanatory rationale provides no constraint at all on the content of reasons for action.

The problem is that it is not clear that we can motivate and articulate the internalist requirement in a sensible way by appeal to explanation, actual or possible. A more promising interpretation focuses on the potential for *alienation* in externalist conceptions of practical reason. In his earlier influential criticism of utilitarianism, Williams identifies the unreasonable character of utilitarian demands with the way in which they alienates agents from their projects and attitudes.

It is absurd to demand from ... a man, when the sums come in from the utility network which the projects of others have in part determined, that he should just step aside from his own projects and decision and acknowledge the decision which utilitarian calculation requires. It is to alienate him in a real sense from his actions and the source of his actions in his own convictions. It is to make him into a channel between the input of everyone's projects, including his own, and an output of optimific decision; but this is to neglect the extent to which *his* actions and *his* decisions have to be seen as the actions and decisions with which he is most closely identified.¹¹

In "Persons, Character, and Morality" Williams generalizes this concern about alienation from utilitarianism to Kantian and other impartial moral theories.¹² We might then interpret Williams's defense of internal reasons as articulating the conception of practical reason underlying these worries about utilitarianism and other impartial moral theories. On this reading, Williams is appealing to what might be called a *resonance* constraint—an agent's reasons for action, at least when recognized as such, must be capable of commanding and sustaining her emotional allegiance and motivational engagement. Internalist conceptions of practical reason, which relativize an agent's reasons to her motivational capacities, meet this resonance constraint. By contrast, externalist conceptions of practical reason, which do not relativize an agent's reasons to her motivational capacities, appear unable to satisfy the resonance constraint. If, as Williams believes, something is capable of motivating someone in the relevant way only if it is conducive to satisfying her actual desires or the desires she would have were she to follow the right deliberative procedures, then it follows that his desiderative conception of practical reason is the best way of satisfying the resonance constraint.

We might extend this resonance constraint from conceptions of practical reason to conceptions of the good. We are forced to do this if we accept the Reason–Value Link. Intuitionists, such as Moore, advanced theories of the good that treat the good as independent of and prior to the good for a person. Indeed, Moore found the latter notion incoherent. He recognized various

¹¹ Bernard Williams, "A Critique of Utilitarianism" in J. J. C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 116–17. Evan Tiffany helped me see the relevance of Williams's critique of utilitarianism to understanding his defense of internal reasons. See Evan Tiffany, "Alienation and Internal Reasons for Action" *Social Theory and Practice* 29 (2003), 387–418. However, Tiffany's interpretation of Williams seems to distinguish the appeals to a non-alienation constraint and to a motivational constraint. On my view, the motivational constraint is best interpreted as following from a non-alienation or resonance constraint.

¹² Bernard Williams, "Persons, Character, and Morality" reprinted in his *Moral Luck*, esp. 14.

things as intrinsically good—including beauty itself—independently of any contribution that such goods make to a person's good.¹³ But we might well doubt whether Moore's intrinsic goods, understood as impersonal goods, would satisfy the resonance condition.¹⁴ They certainly would be correlated with external, rather than internal, reasons. Indeed, this worry for Moore might extend to any conception of an impersonal good. Why should any conception of the good, which is in no way relative to the interests of persons, resonate with agents?

It is easier to see how a conception of the good for a person or well-being might satisfy a resonance constraint, precisely because an account of the personal good can be internalist and desiderative. Peter Railton appeals to something like a resonance constraint in motivating his own desiderative conception of well-being.

It does seem to me to capture an important feature of the concept of intrinsic value to say that what is intrinsically valuable for a person must have a connection with what he would find in some degree compelling or attractive, at least if he were rational and aware. It would be an intolerably alienated conception of someone's good to imagine that it might fail in any such way to engage him.¹⁵

If we assume that such engagement requires the potential to motivate and that motivation requires suitable desires, then resonance leads us to a response-dependent and specifically desiderative conception of well-being.

Desiderative conceptions of well-being have a distinguished pedigree. In *Utilitarianism* Mill at least suggests an idealized desire conception of happiness when he explains the intrinsic, and not just instrumental, superiority of higher pleasures by appeal to the preferences of a competent judge.

If I am asked what I mean by difference of quality in pleasures, or what makes one pleasure more valuable than another, merely as a pleasure, except its being greater in amount, there is but one possible answer. If one of the two is, by those who are competently acquainted with both, placed so far above the other that they prefer it, even though knowing it to be attended with a greater amount of discontent,

¹³ *Principia Ethica*, 83–5. Cf. W. D. Ross, *The Right and the Good* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), ch. 5.

¹⁴ Some claim that the real legacy of Moore's open question argument is recognition of the normativity of ethics and, in particular, the good. See e.g. Stephen Darwall, Allan Gibbard, and Peter Railton, "Toward *Fin de Siècle* Ethics: Some Trends" *Philosophical Review* 101 (1992), 115–89, and Connie Rosati, "Naturalism, Normativity, and the Open Question Argument" *Noûs* 29 (1995), 46–70. If normativity is articulated in such a way as to yield an internalist constraint, then Moore's own conception of the good threatens to run afoul of the open question argument.

¹⁵ Peter Railton, "Facts and Values" *Philosophical Topics* 14 (1986), 9. See also Connie Rosati, "Internalism and the Good for a Person" *Ethics* 106 (1996), 297–326.

and would not resign it for any quantity of the other pleasure which their nature is capable of, we are justified in ascribing to the preferred enjoyment a superiority in quality so far outweighing quantity as to render it, in comparison, of small account. (*Utilitarianism* ii.5)

At one point in *The Methods of Ethics* Sidgwick proposes that we understand a person's overall good to consist in "What he would now desire and seek on the whole if all the consequences of all the different lines of conduct open to him were accurately foreseen and adequately realized in imagination at the present point in time" (*Methods* 111–12). In *A Theory of Justice* John Rawls adapts Sidgwick's proposal and identifies a person's good with a rational plan of life. "It is the plan that would be decided upon as the outcome of careful reflection in which the agent reviewed, in light of all the relevant facts, what it would be like to carry out all of these plans and thereby ascertained the course of action that would best realize his more fundamental desires."¹⁶ In *A Theory of the Good and the Right* Richard Brandt identifies a person's well-being with what it would be rational for her to desire, and he understands rational desire as desire that would survive a process of cognitive psychotherapy that requires full and vivid exposure to logic and the relevant facts.¹⁷

However, appeal to resonance suggests some modifications in the classical informed desire theory of well-being. Recognizing that even in a more idealized state we might have desires that we do not endorse or identify with, David Lewis proposes that something is good just in case one would, under conditions of full imaginative acquaintance with the alternatives, desire to desire it.¹⁸ Railton notices that an ideal appraiser is likely to be very different from the actual self that it idealizes and that, consequently, what my idealized self may want for himself may not be appropriate for me. For instance, education appears to be a good for my actual self, but because my idealized self is already fully informed,

¹⁶ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 417.

¹⁷ Richard Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and the Right* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), esp. chs. 4–8.

¹⁸ David Lewis, "Dispositional Theories of Value" *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, suppl. vol. (1989), 113–37. However, the merits of idealizing to second-order or aspirational desire is open to question. Some appeal to aspirational desires to reveal an agent's "true" self or values. But I see no reason to privilege aspirational desires in this way. If the unwanted first-order desires systematically regulate the agent's deliberations and actions and contrary aspirational desires express themselves only occasionally and ineffectually, as in so many New Year's resolutions, then it's hard to treat the aspirational desires as reflecting the agent's true self or values. It is also hard to see how in such a case reasons or values grounded in merely aspirational desires could be more resonant than those grounded in central first-order desires.

he may not desire (or desire to desire) to get an education. To remedy this source of potential alienation, Railton proposes that we appeal to what the ideal appraiser would want his actual self to want—in effect, what A+ would want A to want. “[A]n individual’s good consists in what he would want himself to want, were he to contemplate his present situation from a standpoint fully and vividly informed about himself and his circumstances, and entirely free of cognitive error or lapses of instrumental rationality.”¹⁹ Railton’s Ideal Advisor theory is perhaps the most sophisticated articulation of the informed desire theory of well-being, and it will be useful at points to focus on it.²⁰ Railton’s theory illustrates well how appeal to resonance lends support to desiderative conceptions of well-being.

4. PLURALISM ABOUT PRACTICAL REASON AND THE GOOD

A final rationale for desiderative conceptions of practical reason and the good is its ability to explain the apparent diversity of rational plans and goods, especially good lives. It is common to think that there is typically more than one reasonable course of action in a given situation. Even where there is a uniquely reasonable course of action for an agent to take in a given situation, that path is typically uniquely reasonable relative to an agent’s larger plan of life. But it also seems evident that there are many different equally or comparably reasonable plans of life. What is evident about practical reason is also evident about the good, especially well-being. Indeed, given the Reason–Well-being Link, the diversity of possible objects of rational concern insofar as one is concerned about someone for his own sake implies the diversity of well-being. Typically, at any one point in a person’s life, there are many different activities, projects, and commitments that would contribute constitutively to an agent’s good. Even where one activity, project, or commitment is uniquely valuable, such goods are typically uniquely beneficial relative to some previous and larger activity, project, or commitment. But there surely is a plurality of diverse projects

¹⁹ “Facts and Values” 16.

²⁰ Also see Thomas Carson, *Value and the Good Life* (Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000). In “Internalism and the Good for a Person” Rosati suggests that to avoid alienation Railton needs to add that one’s actual self (A) be prepared to care about the way in which one’s ideal self (A+) is different from one’s actual self. However, idealization is a normative notion. If A+ is better situated epistemically than A, then A ought to care about A+’s advice for A. +, after all, is essentially desirable.

and lifestyles that are equally or comparably good for the person whose life it is.²¹

Desiderative conceptions appear well positioned to explain this kind of pluralism about the reasonable and the good. Desiderative conceptions are *subjective* insofar as they ground practical reason and the good in an agent's contingent and variable psychological states. Because of this subjectivity, desiderative views appear to underwrite pluralism. Now it should be noted that the most interesting desiderative conceptions do not appeal to actual desires, but rather to *idealized* desire. While it is quite evident that people do differ in their actual desires, it is less clear that they will differ in their idealized desires. This will depend in part upon the sort of idealization in question. For instance, if the relevant idealization simply incorporated certain rational concerns or values, then there would be no reason to expect a diversity of idealized desires. But, in discussing Williams, we saw that any such conception of the process of idealization would no longer assign desire a foundational role. Desire would not explain reason or value, because the relevant desires would presuppose prior reasons or values. What a genuinely desiderative conception of practical reason or the good requires is a conception of idealization that is *content-neutral*. This, I suggested, is a constraint that Williams has reason to recognize on the form that deliberation may take within an internalist view. Moreover, this is a constraint that appears to be observed by all those advancing desiderative conceptions of well-being, certainly by Rawls, Brandt, Lewis, and Railton. Provided the relevant kind of idealization is content-neutral, desiderative conceptions must allow for the possibility of diverse objects of desire both for a given agent and for different agents.

The subjectivity of desiderative conceptions contrasts with more objective conceptions of practical reason and the good. In fact, we could just equate objective and non-desiderative conceptions. On this view, a conception of practical reason or the good is objective just in case it identifies things as reasonable or valuable independently of being the object of the agent's actual or informed desire. For instance, external reasons would be objective in this sense. If there is a categorical reason to be concerned about one's own good or the good of others, whose authority is independent of one's caring about these things, then practical reason will be objective. Moreover, one might understand a person's good in objective terms as consisting, for example, in the *perfection* of one's essential (e.g. rational or deliberative) capacities or in some *list* of disparate objective goods (e.g. knowledge, beauty, achievement, friendship or equality). The invariant character of

²¹ By comparable value I have in mind something like the notion of parity defended in Ruth Chang, "The Possibility of Parity" *Ethics* 112 (2002), 659–88.

objective reasons and goods appears to restrict severely the diversity rational plans and good lives.

5. THE REDUCTIVE CHARACTER OF DESIDERATIVE CONCEPTIONS

Desiderative conceptions of practical reason and the good identify the reasonableness or value of something with its tendency to produce a certain sort of response in an agent or appraiser. As such, desiderative conceptions represent a kind of *dispositional* and *response-dependent* approach to practical reason and value. It is important to notice, however, that desiderative conceptions involve a *reductive* form of dispositionalism and response-dependence. In particular, desiderative views reduce normative notions of reasonableness or value to non-normative facts about desire.²²

We might contrast desiderative conceptions with two different kinds of *non-reductive* dispositionalism. One form of dispositionalism is *overtly* non-reductive, because it expressly invokes normative notions into the dispositional analysis of normative notions. One way for normative notions to figure overtly within a dispositional analysis of normative notions is for it to focus on responses that involve normative belief. For example, an attempt to analyze the good in terms of things that an appraiser is disposed to judge valuable would clearly be non-reductive.²³ Alternatively, the idealization, rather than the response itself, may be overtly normative. For example, John McDowell proposes that something is valuable just in case it is such as to *merit* approval.²⁴ Other forms of dispositionalism, while not overtly non-reductive, are nonetheless *implicitly* non-reductive. This will be so when either the response itself or the idealization is implicitly normative. For example, if we were to analyze something's value in terms of its tendency to elicit certain kinds of emotional responses, such as pride or resentment,

²² Brandt is clear that his concept of rationality "does not import any substantive value judgements" (*A Theory of the Good and the Right*, 13). Lewis explicitly acknowledges the reductive character of his dispositional conception of value ("Dispositional Theories of Value," 113). Railton comes close ("Facts and Values," 9). Though proponents of desiderative conceptions do not always explicitly acknowledge the reductive character of their views, I don't think that this aspect of their views is in dispute.

²³ For instance, Firth resists Ideal Observer Theories that analyze the rightness of conduct in terms of its tendency to elicit beliefs that it is right. See Roderick Firth, "Ethical Absolutism and the Ideal Observer" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 12 (1952), esp. 325–9.

²⁴ John McDowell, "Values and Secondary Qualities" in *Morality and Objectivity*, ed. T. Honderich (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985). Cf. Darwall, *Welfare and Rational Care*.

under certain conditions, then our view would be non-reductive, insofar as these emotional responses involve constitutive normative judgments about something being valuable or involving wrongdoing. Alternatively, our idealization might be implicitly normative. For example, David Wiggins proposes that something is valuable just in case it is such as to produce approval in the *appropriate* sort of appraiser.²⁵ Though one could have a reductive conception of an appropriate appraiser, Wiggins makes clear that he thinks that an appropriate appraiser is a good judge and that a good judge is one who is apt to get things right.²⁶ There is a final way in which a dispositional or response-dependent conception might be implicitly non-reductive. A dispositional view might analyze normative notions of reasonableness or value in terms of tendencies to elicit psychological responses that do not themselves involve normative judgment, but it will still be implicitly non-reductive if the rationale for focusing on those particular responses or responses formed in that particular way is the desire to constrain the results in ways that meet some independent normative criteria. For instance, if we understand appeal to an ideal appraiser or advisor as an impartial and sympathetic appraiser whose desires are formed on the basis of an equally sympathetic identification with the interests of all affected parties, then our conception of idealization is not content-neutral; it stacks the deck in favor of some normative outcomes.²⁷ Such a view would not be genuinely reductive, because it explains normative notions in terms of a class of psychological states that has been selected on normative grounds.

Though I believe that the reductive character of desiderative conceptions of practical reason and the good ultimately poses problems for the normative adequacy of such conceptions, their reductive character looks like a virtue in a dispositional analysis. Such conceptions present an informative dispositional analysis of normative notions in which the appraiser's or advisor's response does genuine explanatory work. By contrast, non-reductive forms of response-dependence threaten to provide analyses that are circular, in which the responses do no real explanatory work, or that are comparatively uninformative.

For instance, someone might analyze goodness as a property of objects that tends to elicit in ideal conditions and appraisers the judgment that

²⁵ David Wiggins, "A Sensible Subjectivism?" in his *Needs, Values, and Truth* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987).

²⁶ Ibid. 194–5.

²⁷ Smith's dispositional analysis of rightness is non-reductive in this way insofar as he places substantive constraints on the kinds of acts that a fully rational person would desire to perform. See Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), chs. 5–6, esp. 184.

it is good or valuable. Here we invoke the very value we are analyzing in our analyses. It is true that, on this view, we analyze X, not in terms of X, but in terms of beliefs about X. But if we accept the not unreasonable assumption that any story about what makes a belief a belief about X must eventually advert to X, then it appears that this sort of analysis is ultimately circular.²⁸

Even non-reductive conceptions that are not strictly circular may deprive the appraiser's response of genuine explanatory value. Any conception of ideal conditions, the ideal appraiser, or her responses that is not content-neutral threatens to make the appeal to her responses otiose. We could apparently bypass her responses and appeal directly to the normative criteria that inform the selection of specific kinds of idealization or sensibilities. Just as a rigged election means that the voting itself does not explain the outcome, so too a content-specific conception of ideal conditions, the ideal appraiser, or her responses threatens to make the appraiser's responses an idle wheel.²⁹

Finally, even if the non-reductive analysis is not strictly circular and the response is not explanatorily idle, the analysis is likely to be comparatively uninformative. Consider the Reason–Well-being Link, which could be used to analyze well-being in terms of what it would be rational to care about for someone for his own sake. This might be put forward as a non-reductive form of response-dependence about well-being that is not circular and in which concern plays an important explanatory role. Even if this is true, the view is comparatively uninformative about what well-being consists in. An important measure of content or information is what possibilities are ruled out. But the Reason–Well-being Link places no substantive constraints on well-being. So even if it is true, it is comparatively uninformative.

²⁸ Here, I've been influenced by Jonathan Cohen. It is a somewhat open question just what conclusion to draw from the circularity of some non-reductive forms of dispositionalism. Wiggins is happy to concede the circularity of his form of dispositionalism. He views circularity as a defect in a definition or analysis, but not in the sort of commentary or elucidation that he claims to offer. All he cares about is whether the biconditional is true ("A Sensible Subjectivism?" 188–9). I have some sympathy with Wiggins's more modest methodological aspirations. However, I think that the capacity of this sort of circular elucidation to illuminate is limited.

²⁹ Stephen Darwall notes that I tend to equate reduction and content-neutrality and suggests that some forms of dispositionalism might be non-reductive but content-neutral. One conception of well-being that might be like this results from accepting the Reason–Well-being Link but treating reasons for concern as explanatorily prior to well-being. I am sympathetic to this view, but it strikes me as a conceptual proposal about how to understand the interdependence of reason and value, rather than a substantive conception of well-being. Moreover, insofar as it grounds well-being in rational concern, I doubt that desire plays any significant explanatory role in this view.

6. THE NORMATIVE ADEQUACY OF DESIDERATIVE CONCEPTIONS

We have examined three rationales for desiderative conceptions of practical reason and the good. We now need to ask about the normative adequacy of such conceptions. We might begin by noticing the way in which desiderative conceptions promise to reconcile two distinct, and potentially conflicting, dimensions of normativity. Normative considerations purport to guide conduct and concern and to provide reasons for conduct and concern. This may lead us to think that normative considerations ought to be capable of motivating agents to conform to their guidance. We interpreted this idea as imposing a resonance constraint and saw how grounding practical reason or the good in an agent's actual or idealized desire promises to satisfy this constraint. But the need for normative guidance presupposes the possibility that one's actual ends or desires are mistaken or defective in some way. In practical deliberation, we are interested not just in discovering what we already want, but also what we should want. Normativity presupposes *fallibility*. Simple desire-satisfaction conceptions of practical reason or well-being are poorly placed to recognize robust forms of fallibility. But idealized desire conceptions promise to recognize ways in which an agent's actual goals can be mistaken and criticizable while maintaining the connection with desire apparently necessary to secure resonance.

In assessing the normative adequacy of any conception of practical reason or the good, we must bear in mind two issues. One aspect of normative adequacy is how plausible we find the actual and potential guidance that the conception offers. How well does it accommodate what we are prepared, on reflection, to think about the normative valence of various actual and hypothetical situations? Call this dimension of normative adequacy reflective *accommodation*. No conception is likely to be a perfect match with our reflective judgments, if only because our reflective judgments about various actual and possible situations are likely not to be perfectly consistent. If so, perfect accommodation is impossible and any acceptable conception of practical reason or the good will be revisionary to some extent. But we should be skeptical of conceptions that are highly normatively revisionary, especially if the view has no compensating theoretical virtues. All else being equal, we should prefer a conception that provides greater accommodation of our independent beliefs about practical reason or the good to one that provides less accommodation.

A second aspect of normative adequacy is how well a conception of practical reason or the good explains the normative *authority* of whatever

it takes to be fundamental. If a conception of practical reason or the good is to supply normative guidance about what agents should care about or how they should act, it ought to be able to explain why we should care about whatever it takes to ground reasons for action or value. Any adequate conception must provide a *rationale* for the normative authority of its demands.

Despite various kinds of potential appeal, desiderative conceptions of practical reason and the good are problematic along both of these dimensions of normative adequacy.³⁰ They provide poor accommodation and lack an adequate rationale. We have identified idealized desire conceptions as the normatively most adequate version of the desiderative approach, but it will be useful to begin with difficulties for desiderative conceptions that involve less idealization and recognize fewer kinds of fallibility.

We might begin with the basic desire-dependent conception of practical reason and its failures of accommodation. Some of its problems are precisely those most obviously corrected by idealization. It attaches normative significance to satisfying desires that are based on mistaken factual beliefs, for instance, about the instrumental means to satisfying other desires or that are based on faulty inferences. But there are other problems. Agents can fail to have desires to do things that they appear to have reason to do.

Most of us recognize other-regarding moral duties of justice, fidelity, forbearance, and aid, and many would think that these moral duties generate at least *pro tanto* reasons for action, such that noncompliance is at least to that extent contrary to practical reason and open to rational criticism. But it seems quite possible for someone to be indifferent to such duties, if not as a matter of principle, then at least in particular cases. Perhaps depression or some more systematic neurological dysfunction underlies the indifference. In such cases, the basic desiderative model fails to recognize reasons that many of us would.

Another problem concerns time preferences. It is a common view that practical reason requires a temporally neutral concern with the way in which goods and bads are distributed within lives. Various forms of temporal bias are among our paradigms of irrationality. For instance, the long-term benefits of regular, routine preventive and corrective dental care make such treatment rational, even if it involves more short-term discomfort than ignoring one's dental health. Similarly, the long-term benefits of good

³⁰ My claims here merit comparison with those of Richard Kraut, "Desire and the Human Good" *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 68/2 (1994), 39–54, and Richard Arneson, "Human Flourishing Versus Desire Satisfaction" *Social Philosophy & Policy* 16 (1999), 113–42.

grades and a good education justify the short-term sacrifices involved in doing one's homework and studying hard for major exams. But it is also a familiar, if unfortunate, fact that many people are temporally biased, investing proximate goods and harms with significance out of proportion to their actual magnitude. But if the temporal bias or discounting is strong enough, then the basic desiderative model must endorse its rationality and condemn temporal neutrality. This fails to account for what many would regard as the unconditional irrationality of temporal bias.³¹

These problems with the basic desiderative conception of practical reason might lead us to explore its plausibility as a conception of the narrower concept of personal good or well-being. As the Reason–Well-being Link implies, we need here to ask whether the satisfaction of desire, whether actual or idealized, is what guides what we care about when we are concerned for someone's own sake. But the implications of the desiderative model are not much better here. Some problems carry over. The basic model implausibly attaches significance to desires that are based on mistaken factual beliefs and faulty inferences. Moreover, temporal neutrality is at least as plausible a constraint on an agent's overall good as it is on practical reason, as such. But then the basic model must condition the rationality of temporal bias on the psychological fact of temporal bias. But this ignores what appears to be the unconditional irrationality of temporal bias within a conception of someone's good.

Another problem for the basic desiderative model of well-being is that it attaches significance to satisfying desire without in any way constraining the content of desire. But most of us think that people can be satisfying their deepest desires and yet lead impoverished lives if their desires are for unimportant or inappropriate things. For instance, we are unlikely to view the life of someone devoted to collecting lint as a richly valuable life, no matter how successful a lint collector he is.³² What I would want for my son for his own sake is not content-neutral in this way.

Moreover, desire-satisfaction would seem to counsel *adapting* our desires to fit our circumstances, for by adapting our desires, we increase the probability of achieving our aims. Such adaptive views of happiness are familiar from Plato's *Gorgias* and Epicurean ethics. No doubt there is an element of truth in this view, insofar as it often seems advisable to maintain some degree of realism in one's aspirations and ambitions. But there are many ways to

³¹ For a partial defense of temporal neutrality, see David O. Brink, "Prudence and Authenticity: Intrapersonal Conflicts of Value" *Philosophical Review* 113 (2004), 215–45.

³² Cf. Rawls's discussion of a person whose chief desire is to spend his life counting the blades of grass in the fields around him (*A Theory of Justice*, 432).

explain the importance of realism in one's aims. The basic desire-satisfaction model seems committed to unrestricted adaptation. The extreme adaptive approach to happiness is effectively criticized in Aldous Huxley's dystopia *Brave New World* in which Deltas and Epsilons form the working classes who are genetically engineered and psychologically programmed to acquiesce in and indeed embrace intellectually and emotionally limited lives that are liberally seasoned with mood-altering drugs.³³ Deltas and Epsilons lead contented lives precisely because they are satisfying their chief desires. They've got what they want. It's their desires that are frightening. We do not (in general) increase the value of our lives by lowering our sights, even if by doing so we increase the frequency of our successes.³⁴

Furthermore, we may wonder whether the basic-desire satisfaction conception of well-being doesn't confuse what is in our interests and what interests us.³⁵ For it is not clear that everything that one might desire, even reasonably desire, would contribute to one's good. Satisfying my desire for personal achievement or friendship might be good for me. But it is not at all clear that the satisfaction of my desire that a cure for AIDS be discovered or that world hunger be relieved contributes to my well-being (assuming that I do not suffer from AIDS or hunger). Without further argument, it is hard to believe that the satisfaction of these desires, however admirable, contributes to my own good.³⁶

One might try to respond to this worry by focusing, for purposes of well-being, on a narrower class of desires. For example, one might focus, as the Reason–Well-being Link also does, on desires one has for

³³ Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World*, 2nd edn (New York: Harper & Row, 1946). I take Huxley's *Brave New World* to be not merely a dystopia but an allegory for certain aspects of modern life. Interestingly, Huxley suggests that the proper lesson to be drawn from such a dystopia is recognition of a higher (perfectionist) form of utilitarianism (ibid., pp. viii–ix).

³⁴ This reflects the tension between control and completeness constraints in ancient discussions of *eudaimonia*. *Eudaimonia* can only be fully within the agent's control if we sacrifice completeness. Callicles implicitly recognizes this when he replies to Socrates's adaptive conception of happiness by saying that Socratic happiness is fit only for a stone or corpse (492e5). Cf. "Better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all."

³⁵ See Kraut, "Desire and the Human Good," 40–1 and Stephen Darwall, "Self-Interest and Self-Concern" *Social Philosophy & Policy* 14 (1997), 158–78.

³⁶ Though we don't want to identify what interests us with what is in our interest, the two can be interdependent. If, for instance, I make a life's project out of pursuing a cure for AIDS or fighting poverty, then it is more plausible to treat the satisfaction of such projects as contributing to my own well-being. Scanlon makes a similar point by distinguishing between informed desires and rational aims, and using the latter, rather than the former, to inform his conception of well-being. See Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other*, 120–6. This difference between the role of desires and projects within an account of well-being can be explained, I believe, by the sort of perfectionist conception I defend below.

someone's own sake. Presumably, the basic desire model would explain X's well-being in terms of the satisfaction of desires that X has for her own sake. The problem with this proposal is that we can't understand the focus of such desire—one's own sake—independently of well-being. But then if the basic model is restricted in this otherwise natural way, it ceases to be reductive and so loses a principal virtue of the desiderative form of response-dependence.

So the basic desiderative model of practical reason and well-being does not accommodate many of our intuitions about reasons and value. But also it fails to explain the normative authority of desire. Though it may be commonly assumed that our desires always provide reason for action or that their satisfaction contributes to our good, it is not at all clear why we should care about the satisfaction of desires independently of the way in which they were formed or of their content. There is no apparent rationale for the normative authority of desire.

It might seem that we could answer some of these doubts about the normative significance of desire by appeal to idealized desire, which is precisely the approach to desire contained in all of the major desiderative conceptions that I surveyed earlier. For we might expect inappropriate and unimportant desires to wash out when we launder preferences through an ideal advisor who represents all aspects of all possibilities fully and vividly in her imagination and makes no mistakes of fact or inference. Moreover, idealization appears to be a normative notion. So even if actual desire lacks normative authority, idealized desire appears to possess it.

Unfortunately, I think that laundering preferences in this way does not help. For one thing, it introduces new problems, not afflicting the basic desiderative model. For all of the idealized desire conceptions appeal to the idea of an appraiser who is fully informed about all of his opportunities and vividly represents their various features, so that he is omniscient with respect to all the experiential and non-experiential aspects of the options available to him. But there are serious questions about the coherence and normative significance of an ideal of omniscient and vivid representation.

An ideal appraiser must evaluate different possible lives. But one question is whether it is possible to combine wildly disparate lives and perspectives into one overall evaluative perspective.³⁷ The conditions that make a vivid appreciation of one perspective accessible may make a vivid appreciation of a very different perspective inaccessible. For example, the conditions that

³⁷ See David Sobel, "Full Information Accounts of Well-Being" *Ethics* 104 (1994), 784–810, and Connie Rosati, "Persons, Perspectives, and Full Information Accounts of the Good" *Ethics* 105 (1995), 296–325.

make a naïve or insular perspective accessible, such that one can appreciate its attractions, may make a cosmopolitan perspective inaccessible, and vice versa.

Furthermore, even where diverse possibilities are jointly accessible from a common perspective that does each phenomenological justice, we may wonder whether the effect of vivid representation is normatively significant. One can't rule out the possibility that full confrontation with the facts wouldn't extinguish desire or shape it in ways that one would pre-theoretically identify as pathological.³⁸ Perhaps the weakness of altruistic impulses is typically due to an inadequate appreciation of the suffering of others. But vivid exposure to the enormity of suffering involved in world hunger may overwhelm or de-sensitize appraisers so as to suppress, rather than elicit, sympathetic response. Here, vivid representation produces what are intuitively exactly the wrong normative results.

Moreover, the old problems about normative accommodation that plague the basic desiderative model also apply to idealized desire models. The basic worry, fueled by adaptive considerations, is that desiderative conceptions cannot explain what is wrong with shallow and undemanding lives provided that they are successful in their own terms. While full and vivid information about one's alternatives might extinguish preferences for such lives, it is hard to see how idealization can guarantee this. We can articulate this problem in terms of a dilemma that the ideal appraiser or advisor theory faces.

To be a genuinely desiderative conception of well-being, the ideal advisor theory must take the form of a reductive brand of dispositionalism. But for the dispositionalism to be reductive, the process of idealization must be purely formal or content-neutral. But if the idealization in question is purely formal or content-neutral, then it must remain a brute and contingent psychological fact whether suitably idealized appraisers would care about things we are prepared, on reflection, to think valuable. But this is inadequate inasmuch as we regard intellectually and emotionally rich lives as unconditionally good and intellectually and emotionally shallow lives as unconditionally bad. That is, for a person with the normal range of intellectual, emotional, and physical capacities it is a very bad thing to lead a simple and one-dimensional life with no opportunities for intellectual, emotional, and physical challenge or growth. One's life is made worse, not better, if, after informed and ideal deliberation, that is the sort of life to which one aspires.

Alternatively, we might conclude that anyone who would endorse shallow and undemanding lives simply could not count as an ideal appraiser or

³⁸ See Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 20.

advisor. Consider, in this context, some of Mill's claims in his defense of the intrinsic superiority of higher pleasures or pursuits over lower ones. He claims that competent judges categorically prefer higher pleasures. But he sees the need to explain this categorical preference for modes of existence that employ their higher faculties, which he does by appeal to a competent judge's sense of his own dignity.

We may give what explanation we please of this unwillingness [on the part of a competent judge ever to sink into what he feels to be a lower grade of existence] ... but its most appropriate appellation is a sense of dignity, which all human beings possess in one form or other, and in some, though by no means in exact, proportion to their higher faculties. (*Utilitarianism* ii. 6)

But if this is to explain how the life of the contented swine is categorically bad, then it must be that one won't count as an ideal appraiser unless one possesses a sense of dignity that reflects a belief in the value of activities that exercise one's capacities as a progressive being. But such a notion of idealization carries substantive evaluative commitments and is not content-neutral. Suitably idealized desire, understood this way, presupposes, rather than explains, the nature of a person's good. This is one sign that Mill's defense of higher pleasures might be best interpreted as expressing his commitment to a perfectionist conception of happiness, rather than one in which desire or preference plays an ultimate explanatory role.³⁹ But it also shows why ideal appraiser or advisor conceptions of well-being cannot accommodate our considered evaluative views about categorical goods and bads without relinquishing their distinctive reductive explanatory ambitions.

Finally, I would note that idealization seems unable to address the worry about the normative authority of desire. As long as idealization is a purely formal or content-neutral process, it cannot create normative authority where none existed before. If we lack an explanation about why we ought to care about the satisfaction of desire, as such, regardless of its historical pedigree or content, then we lack an explanation about why we should care about the satisfaction of fully and vividly informed desire, regardless of its historical pedigree or content. Laundering preferences may remove stains, but it does nothing to compensate for poor taste.

7. THE PER SE AUTHORITY OF DESIRE

Before turning to non-desiderative conceptions of practical reason and the good, it is worth considering a different rationale for a desiderative approach

³⁹ I go a little further in articulating this perfectionist reading of Mill in "Mill's Deliberative Utilitarianism" *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 21 (1992), 67–103.

to practical reason. In an interesting and resourceful article entitled “The Authority of Desire” Dennis Stampe defends the thesis that practical reason can begin in desire because desire enjoys per se rational authority.⁴⁰ Stampe rests his case for the authority of desire on an analogy between the way in which perception has authority in theoretical reasoning and the way in which desire has authority in practical reasoning.

Stampe characterizes the difference between beliefs and desires in terms of their different *directions of fit* with the world.⁴¹ On a now familiar version of this view, we might see the difference between beliefs and desires as a special case of a more general difference between representations and pro-attitudes. On this view, representations, such as beliefs, are states of the agent whose content she adjusts to conform to information she receives about the state of the world. By contrast, pro-attitudes, such as desires, are states of the agent on the basis of which she acts to make the world conform to them. We can think of the difference in terms of the response to a perceived mismatch between the content of the intentional state and information about the way the world is. If the state is a belief, the agent tends to respond to such a mismatch by modifying the content of the intentional state to match the way the world is or appears. If the state is a desire, the agent tends to respond to such a mismatch by acting so as to modify the world to conform to the content of the state. On this sort of belief–desire psychology, agents act in order to satisfy their desires based on their beliefs about the world, in particular, their beliefs about the causal means to and necessary conditions of satisfying their desires.⁴²

Despite this important difference in the functional profiles of beliefs and desires, Stampe thinks that they play analogous roles in theoretical reasoning and practical reasoning, respectively. Just as what one perceives provides defeasible reason for belief, so too, he claims, what one desires provides defeasible reason for action.⁴³ Stampe thinks that the parallel is strengthened by seeing desire as directed at the good, as belief is directed

⁴⁰ Dennis Stampe, “The Authority of Desire” *Philosophical Review* 96 (1987), 335–81.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* 354–6.

⁴² See e.g. Elizabeth Anscombe, *Intention* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1957), 56; I. L. Humberstone, “Direction of Fit” *Mind* 101 (1992), 59–83; David Velleman, “The Guise of the Good” *Noûs* 26 (1992), 3–26; and Smith, *The Moral Problem*, ch. 4.

⁴³ However, even on Stampe’s proposal, there is a disanalogy between the role of perception in theoretical reason and the role of desire in practical reason. For, on his view, it is the perceiveds, rather than perceivings, that figure as the starting point for perceptual reasoning, whereas it is desirings, rather than the desireds, that figure as the starting points for practical reasoning (“The Authority of Desire,” 335–7). I remain somewhat unclear about the bearing of this disanalogy on Stampe’s argument.

toward the true. On this conception of desire, it is the perception of things as valuable. This, Stampe concludes, gives desire *per se* authority for action comparable to the *per se* authority that perception seems to have for belief. In the case of perception, perception appears to provide *pro tanto* but defeasible reason to believe. My perceiving something to be the case provides me with *per se* reason to believe, such that I have some reason to believe it even when I have no other reasons to believe accordingly or even other reasons to disbelieve. Similarly, Stampe claims, my desiring something confers *per se* authority on bringing it about, such that I have reason to bring it about even when I have no other reason to behave that way or even have other reasons not to behave that way.

Stampe's argument for the *per se* authority of desire depends on his good-dependent conception of desire. This raises questions about whether his view really assigns desire a fundamental explanatory role in its account of practical reason, inasmuch as desire is treated as the perception of value. However we resolve that issue, Stampe's argument is problematic. We can and should reject the *per se* authority of desire even if we accept the good-dependence of desire. Moreover, it's doubtful that desire, as such, is essentially good-dependent.

First, the *per se* authority of desire does not follow from the good-dependence of desire. Even if I do conceive of the objects of desire as good, my desires need not confer reason for action if they are based on false beliefs about the value of the objects of my desire. Stampe says that my desire for something that I otherwise believe or know to be valueless nonetheless gives me *pro tanto* reason for action just as my perceptual belief that the needle on the gas gauge in my car points to Full gives me reason to believe that my tank is full even if I believe or know my gauge to be broken (e.g. stuck on Full).⁴⁴ These are reasons, Stampe says, even if they are outweighed by other reasons or not even good reasons.⁴⁵ But though we should recognize *pro tanto* reasons that fail to be reasons all things considered, I don't know what a reason is that is not a good reason. In particular, I don't see why perception provides reason to believe or why desire provides reason to do when all the other evidence suggests that the perceptual belief is false or that the object of desire is valueless.

Moreover, I think that we should be skeptical of the assumption that desire is essentially good-dependent. No doubt many of our desires are in fact good-dependent in the sense that the desire was generated by or is sustained by the belief that the object of desire is valuable. As we will see shortly, the possibility of good-dependent desire in this sense is essential to agency. But we can admit this without concluding that desire,

⁴⁴ Stampe, "The Authority of Desire", 364–5.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 342, 364.

as such, is good-dependent. I am inclined to recognize various kinds of good-independent desires. First, I recognize the possibility of desires for things the agent regards as thoroughly bad, as might be the case with the self-loathing drug addict or the self-loathing pedophile. Second, I recognize the possibility of desires produced by sub-rational processes, such as hypnosis or suggestion, and these seem not to be produced or sustained by the thought that the objects of desire are good. Finally, I recognize the possibility of desires in animals and small children where these states are apparently not mediated by value concepts for the simple reason that the subjects themselves seem to lack value concepts.

These possibilities motivate skepticism about the assumption that desire, as such, is good-dependent. However, it would be nice to have an account of desire that explained what desire is such that it need not be good-dependent. But we have the beginnings of such an account in the familiar idea, which Stampe himself endorses, that desire is an intentional state with a specific functional profile given by its direction of fit to the world. Desires are states of the agent or subject in which she tends to adjust the world so as to make it conform to the content of the state. Genuine agents may well have such states as the result of beliefs about the way in which the world ought to be, but actors who are not agents, such as brutes and small children, and even genuine agents can have states that dispose them to change the world so as to conform to the content of these states independently of any belief about the value of the world so represented. Insofar as Stampe's defense of the *per se* authority of desire depends upon this good-dependent conception of desire, we should reject it.

8. NORMATIVE PERFECTIONISM

Despite their promise to reconcile resonance and fallibility, idealized desire conceptions of practical reason and the good fail to deliver a satisfying account of normativity. In particular, they score poorly along the dimension of normative accommodation, and they lack a clear rationale for the normative authority of desire. We might consider two apparently different ways forward.

We saw that Mill achieves normative accommodation, explaining what is objectionable about shallow and undemanding lives, by appeal to a conception of ideal desire in which ideal appraisers are guided by their sense of their own dignity as progressive beings. On this reading, Mill is appealing to good-dependent desires. He needn't assume, as Stampe does, that all desire is good-dependent, only that it can be good-dependent. This suggests that we might understand well-being in terms of objective goods.

One form of objectivism is a list of objective goods, such as knowledge, beauty, achievement, friendship, and equality.⁴⁶ Such a list may seem the only way to capture the variety of intrinsic goods. But if it is a mere list of goods, with no unifying strands, it begins to look like a disorganized *heap* of goods.⁴⁷ One objective conception of the good that goes beyond a mere list of goods is *perfectionism*. There is a venerable perfectionist tradition, common to Aristotle, John Stuart Mill, and T. H. Green, among others, that identifies a person's good with the perfection of her nature and, in particular, with the development of her deliberative competence and the exercise of her capacities for practical deliberation.⁴⁸

Not only might we understand well-being in terms of objective goods. We might understand practical reason in terms of objective goods. What we have reason to do, on this view, is what is objectively good. This sort of view might explain the good in terms of the personal good, representing things as good insofar as they contribute to people's well-being, or it might recognize goods that are fundamentally impersonal. Such a view would embrace the Reason–Value Link, but it would treat value as the explanatorily more basic notion, and provide an objective conception of value. We might treat any such good-dependent conception of practical reason as a *teleological* conception. But this kind of teleology can be substantively ecumenical. In particular, it need not presuppose consequentialism, because central among the objective goods may be moral goods, and rational action can involve either *honoring* or *promoting* objective values.⁴⁹ Moore is one prominent example of someone who embraces this sort of good-dependent conception of practical reason, but there are other proponents as well.⁵⁰

Any conception of well-being or practical reason that appeals to objective value is likely to fare well along the dimension of normative accommodation,

⁴⁶ Moore endorses an objective list in *Principia Ethica*, ch. 6, as does Ross in *The Right and the Good*, p. 140. Derek Parfit discusses such theories sympathetically in *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 493–502.

⁴⁷ This is like the criticism, made by Joseph, among others, that the intuitionist's objective list of right-making factors amounts to nothing more than an "unconnected heap" of obligations. See H. W. B. Joseph, *Some Problems in Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1931), 67. Just as a suitably structured or unified theory of the right avoids Joseph's heap objection, so too a suitably structured or unified theory of the good avoids this heap objection.

⁴⁸ A vigorous contemporary statement of perfectionism is Thomas Hurka, *Perfectionism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

⁴⁹ I borrow this useful distinction from Philip Pettit, "Consequentialism" reprinted in *Consequentialism*, ed. S. Darwall (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

⁵⁰ A good-dependent conception of practical reason is at work in Thomas Hurka, *Virtue, Vice, and Value* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002) and Donald Regan, "The Value of Rational Nature" *Ethics* 112 (2002), 267–91 and in unpublished work by Derek Parfit and by Diane Jeske.

because it can appeal to whatever values are necessary to vindicate our intuitions about well-being and practical reason. However, not all teleological conceptions provide a rationale for the normative authority of objective values.

This seems especially true for many lists of objective goods. For example, why should beauty, knowledge, friendship, or equality engage my will? Of course, if it is a plausible list, most of us will already care about the items on the list. But to have normative authority, we must be able to explain why we should maintain our concern for items on the list if we already care about them and why we should care about items on the list if we do not yet. Of course, if the Reason–Value Link is correct, then we do have reason to be concerned about and promote anything that is good. And if the Reason–Well-being Link is correct, then we have reason to be concerned about something for someone’s own sake just insofar as it is good for her. But if we make normative authority a condition of the good or well-being, then we ought to be able to explain for any candidate good how it enjoys normative authority. Standard lists of objective goods do not meet this demand.⁵¹

But perfectionist conceptions of the good may not be well positioned to address the issue of normative authority either. Perfectionists identify the good with perfecting one’s nature. This might suggest that a perfectionist should base her conception of the good on claims about what is distinctive or essential about human nature. Some perfectionists understand the appeal to human nature as an appeal to a *biological essence*. But it is hard to find capacities that we have as a biological species that are essential and whose exercise provides reason for concern. For example, perfectionist ideals often prize creative achievements that exercise the agent’s rational capacities in some way and condemn shallow and undemanding lives. But it is hard to see how this sort of perfectionist content could be justified by appeal to a biological essence. Genotypic and phenotypic diversity make it difficult to see how there could be a substantive species essence, especially one in which rational capacity figures prominently. One could appeal to the reproductive closure of the species, so that the species includes as members all and only individuals capable of breeding with other members of the species. But there are many members of the species human being that satisfy this

⁵¹ I believe that the normative inadequacy of the simple appeal to objective values also animates Christine Korsgaard’s criticisms of what she calls “substantive moral realism” in *The Sources of Normativity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 28–48. While a normatively adequate account of objective values or moral requirements must explain why we should care about value or moral requirements, I don’t see anything inherent in objective values or moral realism that prevents addressing this legitimate explanatory demand.

reproductive criterion that lack basic cognitive and affective capacities that we think of as normal and desirable. The biological perfectionist must claim that these individuals are abnormal. But we can imagine circumstances in which they need not be abnormal in a statistical sense. If they are abnormal, it appears that it must be in some normative sense. But this concession would defeat the project of deriving perfectionist norms from a biological essence.⁵²

Once one recognizes the legitimacy of the question about normative authority, it can seem difficult to answer. For any putative standard of reason or value, we can always ask why we should care about conforming to that standard. This difficulty explains, I think, the appeal of a broadly Kantian approach that seeks a standard rooted in rational agency itself. For the demands of any such standard would be rooted in practical reason itself. To some minds, the Kantian appeal to agency and practical reason is fundamentally opposed to teleological approaches. However, I think that we can reconcile the Kantian insight with a form of perfectionism.

An important strand in the perfectionist tradition understands the appeal to human nature, not in biological terms, but in normative terms. I believe that this sort of *normative perfectionism* is evident in Aristotle, Mill, and Green. But I will focus on Green's version, as articulated in his *Prolegomena to Ethics*,⁵³ because the Kantian influence on his perfectionism is clearest. Green conceives of persons as agents who are responsible for their actions. Non-responsible agents, such as brutes and small children, act on their strongest desires; if they deliberate, it is only about the instrumental means to the satisfaction of their desires (§§ 86, 92, 96, 122, 125). By contrast, responsible agents must be able to distinguish between the intensity and authority of their desires, deliberate about the authority of their desires, and regulate their actions in accordance with their deliberations (§§ 92, 96, 103, 107, 220). This requires one to be able to distinguish oneself from particular appetites and emotions—to distance oneself from them—and to be able to frame the question what it would be best for one on the whole to do. So a person acts not simply on desires or passions but on the basis of ought judgments.

These deliberative capacities are essential for responsible willing and action, but they do not yet tell us what separates a good and bad will (§ 154). However, Green argues that it is the very capacities that make moral

⁵² Philip Kitcher raises some related difficulties for Hurka's appeal to a biological essence in "Essence and Perfection" *Ethics* 110 (1999), 59–83.

⁵³ T. H. Green, *The Prolegomena to Ethics* [originally published 1883], ed. D. Brink (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003).

responsibility possible in the first place that determine the proper end of deliberation (§ 176). Responsible action involves self-consciousness and is expressive of the self. The self is not to be identified with any desire or any series or set of desires; moral personality consists in the ability to subject appetites and desires to a process of deliberative endorsement and to form new desires as the result of such deliberations. So the self essentially includes deliberative capacities, and if responsible action expresses the self, it must exercise these deliberative capacities. This explains why Green thinks that the proper aim of deliberation is a life of activities that embody rational or deliberative control of thought and action (§§ 175, 180, 199, 234, 238–9, 247, 283).

This sort of normative perfectionism promises to address questions about the normative authority of the good. For Green's defense of self-realization makes the content of the good consist in the exercise of the very same capacities that make one a rational agent, subject to reasons for action, in the first place. This promises to explain why a rational agent should care about the good conceived in terms of self-realization.

But why should we think that the exercise of practical deliberation must favor lives that embody or exercise rational nature? Green, like Kant, is interested in the question what one would care about insofar as one is rational. Consider an analogy. Insofar as one is a wine connoisseur, there are determinate things that one cares about. One cares about developing general wine competence (e.g. knowledge about wine varietals, conditions for growing and harvesting grapes, and methods of fermenting and aging wines) and about the consumption and appreciation of fine wines by themselves and as parts of meals. Similarly, insofar as one is a rational agent, one cares about developing one's deliberative competence and sensitivity to reason and one chooses environments, projects, and activities that allow scope for deliberative control of thought and action. In this way the exercise of practical reason can be the object of practical reason, much as the exercise of wine connoisseurship can be the object of the wine connoisseur. This addresses the issue of content, but not the issue of authority. But whereas assuming the perspective of the wine connoisseur appears rationally optional, assuming the point of view of practical reason cannot be comparably optional. Anything that practical reason, as such, would endorse necessarily enjoys normative significance.

This justification of self-realization also explains why Green treats the imperative of self-realization as a categorical imperative. Like Kant, Green seeks an account of the agent's duties that is grounded in her agency and does not depend upon contingent and variable inclinations. The goal of self-realization, Green thinks, meets this demand.

At the same time, because it [self-realization] is the fulfilment of himself, of that which he has in him to be, it will excite an interest in him like no other interest, different in kind from any of his desires and aversions except such as are derived from it. It will be an interest as in an object conceived to be of unconditional value; one of which the value does not depend on any desire that the individual may at any time feel for it or for anything else, or on any pleasure that ... he may experience. ... [T]he desire for the object will be founded on a conception of its desirableness as a fulfilment of the capabilities of which a man is conscious in being conscious of himself. ... [Self-realization] will express itself in [the] imposition ... of rules requiring something to be done irrespectively of any inclination to do it, irrespectively of any desired end to which it is a means, *other then this end, which is desired because conceived as absolutely desirable*. (§ 193)

Because the demands of self-realization depend only on those very deliberative capacities that make one a responsible agent, they are categorical imperatives.

9. INSTRUMENTALISM, RESONANCE, AND PLURALISM REVISITED

Normative perfectionism promises to succeed along dimensions that desiderative conceptions of practical reason and the good fail. It addresses concerns about the normative authority of perfectionist goods better than desiderative conceptions address parallel questions about the normative authority of desire. Moreover, normative perfectionism is well positioned to accommodate and explain the evident fact that intellectually and emotionally rich lives are unconditionally good and intellectually and emotionally shallow lives are unconditionally bad for a person with the normal range of intellectual, emotional, and physical capacities. But if we are to take normative perfectionism seriously, it must have something plausible to say about the considerations that made us take desiderative conceptions seriously in the first place.

The instrumentalist makes several claims. One claim is that an agent has reason to take means or necessary conditions conducive to satisfying her desire, or at least her ultimate desires. Many people seem to assume that instrumental rationality, so conceived, is a part of practical reason. What separates the instrumentalist from others is that she assumes that this is not only a part but the whole of practical reason. The instrumentalist accepts this stronger claim, because she believes that we can reason only about means and not about desires, in particular, not about ultimate desires.

We can reject the stronger claim that practical reason is purely instrumental, because we can in fact reason about both the value and the authority

of desires. Indeed, a great many desires are judgment-dependent in the sense that they are predicated on a belief in the value or appropriateness of the object of desire and, hence, are sensitive to reappraisals of the judgments of value and worth. If the perfectionist is right to locate the normative authority in the value of rational agency, then we can ask if a given set of desires is appropriate for us given the sort of beings we are. In particular, we can ask if a particular set of commitments is appropriate for agents who are capable of regulating their lives in accord with practical reason.

But we should reject even the weaker claim that instrumental rationality is a part of practical reason, provided we understand instrumental rationality as claiming that one always has a reason to adopt means or necessary conditions to the satisfaction of one's (ultimate) desires. For we have rejected the proposition that desire, as such, has any normative authority. If so, we must deny that instrumental rationality, so conceived, is even part of the correct account of practical reason. If this conclusion seems like throwing the baby out with the bath water, it is probably because we fail to distinguish instrumental rationality, so conceived, from a different conception of instrumental rationality that is genuinely indispensable. On this alternative conception, one has reason to adopt causal means to and necessary conditions of that which one *already has reason* to do. This conception of instrumental rationality is really a conception of *derivative* or *conditional* rationality.⁵⁴ It is in no way reductive, and makes no appeal to desire. Accepting instrumental rationality in this sense as part of the truth about practical reason concedes nothing to Humean instrumentalism.

The Humean instrumentalist also believes that reason can only be the slave of the passions. But practical reason, we just said, can judge some commitments appropriate and others inappropriate. But then one would expect desire to be capable of responding to reason. Judging a potential commitment appropriate tends to awaken desire, and judging an existing commitment appropriate tends to sustain desire. By contrast, judging a potential commitment inappropriate tends to produce aversion, and judging an existing commitment inappropriate tends to weaken desire.

These familiar observations are reinforced if we adopt a version of the sort of belief–desire psychology often associated with Humean moral psychology. On this view, as we have seen (§ 7 above), intentional action is viewed as the product of representational states, such as belief, and pro-attitudes, such as desire, which display different directions of fit with the world. On this sort of belief–desire psychology, agents act in order to satisfy their desires based on their beliefs about the world, in particular,

⁵⁴ Cf. Darwall, *Impartial Reason*, 79.

their beliefs about the causal means to and necessary conditions of satisfying their desires. But, on this sort of psychology, we can also understand how normative beliefs would tend to influence desire. For normative beliefs are beliefs about how the world should be. But if desires are precisely states that tend to make agents modify the world in accordance with their content, then we should expect normative beliefs normally to affect desires.⁵⁵ This is Green's view (§§ 130–6). He accepts belief–desire psychology, because of their different directions of fit, and argues that for this reason desire can be responsive to ought judgments. This shows how one can accept the Humean dictum that action depends on desire without accepting the Humean dictum that reason can only be the slave of the passions.

But if reason can be the master of the passions, then we can see how we can accept the resonance constraint without endorsing desiderative conceptions of practical reason or the good. Williams appeals to the idea that practical reason must be capable of resonating with agents to accept the internalist claim that practical reason must be relativized to elements of the agent's subjective motivational set. Because he assumes that something is capable of motivating someone only if it is conducive to satisfying antecedent desire, he concludes that reasons for action must be relativized to the agent's antecedent desires. We saw how idealized desire conceptions of well-being can be motivated by a similar argument. But if desire can be responsive to reason, then we can accept the demands that practical reason and well-being be resonant without concluding that practical reason or well-being be relativized to antecedent desire. If we accept belief–desire psychology, then desire is necessary for resonance. But desire can and will normally be consequential on recognition of reasons for action or value. This means that motivational capacity exerts no real constraint on the content of practical reason or well-being. Someone who recognizes imperatives of self-realization as imperatives of practical reason will, for that reason, tend to desire to conform to these imperatives. Such imperatives would be resonant and capable of motivating, even though they are not grounded in desire. The fact that desire can be responsive to

⁵⁵ To say that normative beliefs can and normally do influence desire is not to say that normative beliefs have such influence necessarily. Other things being equal, normative beliefs have conative influence. But other things need not be equal if there is some relevant form of psychological interference. In some cases of weakness of will, normative beliefs apparently motivate but provide insufficient motivation. In other cases of weakness of will, normative beliefs may not motivate at all. This second sort of weakness of will will be selective if the interference is intermittent; it will be systematic if the interference is systematic. Depression might produce selective weakness of will, but damage to the prefrontal lobe of the cerebral cortex (as in the famous case of Phineas Gage) might produce systematic weakness of will.

reason means that the resonance constraint does not favor desire-dependent conceptions.

What it implies about internalism depends on how we understand that doctrine. If we understand internalism more generically as the view that normative facts must be capable of motivating the agent, then the proper moral to draw is that internalism follows from resonance but that it is a fairly ecumenical constraint and does not support a desiderative conception. Alternatively, if we understand internalism, as Williams sometimes does, as committed to the more sectarian claim that reason or value must be relativized to antecedent desire, then we should deny that resonance implies internalism and recognize that externalist conceptions of reason and value can meet the resonance constraint.

Finally, we should revisit the pluralist rationale for desiderative conceptions. Such conceptions seemed plausible, because they promised to sustain an attractive sort of pluralism about the content of reason and value. By contrast, objective conceptions of reason and value seemed hostile to pluralism. But this pluralistic rationale is misguided. First, objective conceptions can recognize a plurality of equally or incommensurably reasonable and good activities. This would certainly be true of conceptions of reason or value based on a list of objective goods. Activities and lives could combine different goods in different amounts, yielding the result that quite different activities and lives could be equally or comparably worthwhile. Moreover, the normative perfectionist can recognize that there is a diversity of activities and lives that exercise one's capacities for practical reason. The artisan who makes important decisions about the organization of her craft and the production and distribution of her product exercises deliberative control within her life just as much as the intellectual or artist. So pluralism is not the exclusive province of desiderative conceptions.

Moreover, it matters how one justifies pluralism. Desiderative conceptions of practical reason and value are not just pluralist, but relativist. They are relativist, because they are content-neutral, placing no substantive constraints on the content of practical reason or well-being. But we saw that relativism faces problems of accommodation. Most of us are not prepared, on reflection, to judge that there are no substantive constraints on practical reason or the good. In particular, we said that shallow and undemanding lives are necessarily bad for those with a normal range of talents and capacities. It is a vice of desiderative conceptions that they derive pluralism from the more extreme and unsustainable commitment to content-neutrality. It is a virtue of objective conceptions that they can explain pluralism without the unsustainable commitment to content-neutrality. In particular, it is a virtue of normative perfectionism that it endorses pluralism while explaining what

is wrong with shallow and undemanding lives, even when they are successful in their own terms.

10. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF CHOICE

In rejecting the content-neutrality of desiderative conceptions of practical reason and the good, we have rejected the normative authority of desire, as such. On the one hand, it seems right that the mere existence of a desire, regardless of its historical pedigree or content, has no normative significance. On the other hand, it certainly does seem in a great many cases that the fact that an agent wants something is a reason for her to care about and pursue it and often a reason for others to care about her caring about and pursuing it. How can we account for this?⁵⁶

We ought to distinguish between the significance of choice and of desire. It is choice, rather than desire, as such, that has normative significance. Non-responsible actors have and act on desires. What makes someone a person or an agent is that she has the capacity to assess her options and act for reasons. She is not compelled to act on desire but can step back from existing desires, assess them, modify them, and form new desires. Kant appeals to this capacity to set ends as the source of normative significance. In *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* he writes, “Freedom of the power of choice has the characteristic, entirely peculiar to it, that it cannot be determined to action through any incentive *except so far as the human being has incorporated it into his maxim* (has made it into a universal rule for himself, according to which he wills to conduct himself)”.⁵⁷ As Henry Allison has interpreted Kant’s *incorporation thesis*, it implies that inclination or desire is not itself a reason for action but can become one through being incorporated into a maxim expressing a judgment about the principles on which one should act.⁵⁸ Green, who develops some Kantian claims within a perfectionist framework that treats moral personality as the source of value, distinguishes desire, as such, which has no normative significance, from the will, which does (§§ 139–42). An agent acts not simply on appetites or passions but on the basis of ought judgments or a

⁵⁶ Stephen Darwall raises this question in “‘Because I Want It’” *Social Philosophy & Policy* 18 (2001), 129–53, though he provides a different answer than I will. Though our answers are different, I hope that they are not incompatible.

⁵⁷ Immanuel Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason* [originally published 1793], ed. A. Wood and G. di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 6: 24.

⁵⁸ Henry Allison, *Kant’s Theory of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 39–40.

conception of goods. Green thinks that when an agent endorses a course of action as a result of such judgments, this affects her desires; it can weaken or strengthen existing desires and create new desires. He identifies the will with post-deliberative desire or desire that is the product of deliberative endorsement. Only the will has genuine normative significance.

This perfectionist conception of the significance of choice or post-deliberative desire may sound remarkably like an informed desire conception of practical reason or the good. But notice some important differences. First, an informed desire conception defines normatively significant desire by appeal to a *counterfactual* condition. Is the desire one which *would* emerge from some suitable idealization of the agent's current desires? By contrast, the perfectionist conception appeals to an *historical* condition. Is the desire one which was produced or is sustained by a suitable kind of deliberation? Also, deliberation need not be ideal in order to have normative significance for the perfectionist; the normative significance of one's choices can be proportional to the amount of deliberation that produced them or sustains them. Moreover, whereas the informed desire conception appeals to a conception of idealization that is explicitly non-evaluative, the perfectionist conception appeals to an essentially evaluative conception of deliberation.

This perfectionist defense of the significance of choice will be of limited help if deliberative endorsement is a rare occurrence, making unusual demands on agents. But exercising one's will is not an exceptional feat accomplished only when one takes time consciously to survey and evaluate the alternatives and their grounds. One exercises one's will when one acts on standing principles and commitments that reflect those principles and when one concludes there is no special need or justification for renewed deliberation. One also exercises one's will when one acts on desires that are sustained by reflective endorsement, even if they did originate in reflective endorsement.

Choice is an exercise of the will and, as such, expresses agency. Because the perfectionist treats agency as the source of reasons for action and value, she regards choice as normatively significant. Indeed, if the will can be identified with desire that is the product of rational endorsement, then the perfectionist can explain why a significant class of desires has normative significance, even if she denies normative significance to desire as such.

11. WEIGHING CHOICE AND THE CONTENT OF CHOICE

But even if choice has significance, it is not the only thing that has significance. To treat choice as the only thing of significance would yield

not just pluralism, but relativism. We would have serious problems of normative accommodation and would not have improved much on desiderative conceptions of reason and value. Any plausible conception of reason or value must recognize substantive constraints on the content of choice—constraints on which choices are reasonable, appropriate, or valuable.

For present purposes, I would like to remain agnostic about the precise source and nature of these constraints on the content of choice. In particular, I won't try to decide here between two different conceptions of the source of such constraints.

On a *monistic* view, the source of these constraints is the same as the source of the significance of choice, namely agency. Kant is usually read as this sort of monist. On one reading of Kant's *Groundwork*, he begins with the idea that moral requirements must be inescapable, which requires that they be represented as categorical, rather than hypothetical, imperatives (414, 416, 420, 425).⁵⁹ But this means that moral requirements must apply to people insofar as they are agents, that is, insofar as they have capacities for practical reason to set ends (408, 426). This is the source of both the Universality and Humanity formulations of the Categorical Imperative. It implies that moral requirements must have a sort of universality such that one may act only on maxims that one can will to be universal law (421). But it also sets the stage for recognizing the value of rational nature itself (428). For the one thing that one would value just insofar as one is rational is rational nature itself. This means that one should act only in ways that respect humanity or rational nature, whether in one's own person or that of others, as an end in itself and never merely as a means (429). In this way, rational nature is supposed to constrain and guide the content of the will.

Green, as we saw, is another monist who thinks that rational nature is not only a condition of the will and responsible action but also sets the proper object of the will (§ 176). He thinks that responsible willing requires consciousness of oneself as distinct from one's appetites and passions and as able to set ends. If responsible willing must aim to express the self, then it should aim to develop and exercise well those very capacities for setting ends. This requires undertaking projects that allow scope for the agent's deliberative control of his own fate. For reasons that defy easy reconstruction, Green also thinks that self-realization can only take place when an agent recognizes the reality of other agents, which leads him to claim that self-realization requires each agent to aim

⁵⁹ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals* [originally published 1785], tr. M. Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

at good that is common to himself and others. In this way, he traces a perfectionist path from rational agency as condition of responsibility to something like Kant's Humanity formulation of the Categorical Imperative.⁶⁰

However, some may doubt the adequacy of these monistic conceptions of the normative constraints on the content of choice. One might question whether one can really generate a constraint to treat all rational agents as ends in themselves or to promote the common good from the assumptions about agency required for responsible action. Alternatively, one might concede this but question whether the constraint to treat people as ends or to promote a common good exhausts the constraints and guidance about the content of choice that we want to recognize. One might think that an adequate account of the constraints on the content of choice must recognize values other than rational agency—objective values, sensitivity to which should guide autonomous choice.⁶¹

Whether monists or pluralists about constraints on the content of choice, we need to ask a question about how to weigh the significance of the fact of choice and the significance of the content of choice. In particular, one wants to know whether the fact of choice should have normative significance when the content of the choice lacks significance. Do a person's choices give her reason for action when they are substantively bad? Is it good for her for her choices to be successful even when her choices are substantively inappropriate? Let's consider briefly some different models.

Dualism of Choice and Content

In cases where there are substantive but comparatively minor problems with the content of choice, it is tempting to recognize the value of the choice itself. Most of us make decent but non-optimal choices about many things, including career and friends. Surely, one has reason to act on such choices, and we might judge one's success in life at least in part relative to the content of such choices. If we generalize this intuition, we might recognize the choice itself and the content of choice as independent and potentially conflicting values. On this model, if one's choice is sufficiently substantively bad, this can outweigh, but not cancel, the value of the choice itself.

⁶⁰ I try to reconstruct and assess some aspects of Green's perfectionist defense of the common good in *Perfectionism and the Common Good: Themes in the Philosophy of T. H. Green* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003).

⁶¹ See e.g. Regan, "The Value of Rational Nature".

Choice Limited by Content

In cases where the choice is substantively deeply flawed relative to other available options, one might be tempted to deny any significance to the choice itself. Suppose that someone chooses to sell himself into slavery and has no very good justification for this choice. It was not forced on him by economic necessity; he just liked the idea of belonging to someone. The monist will have no problem explaining how this choice is substantively bad—it is an exercise of agency that abdicates agency. Pluralists may have other objections as well. One might be tempted not to accord any significance to this choice in determining what the person has reason to do or what would contribute to his well-being. Generalizing this response, one might say that if the choice is substantively problematic, then the choice itself has no significance. On this model, the substantive merits of the choice condition or limit the significance of the choice itself.

Choice Limited by Threshold Content

But this second model makes the significance of choice depend upon choice with ideal content. It seemed a virtue of the first model that it avoided this result. A compromise solution would be to modify the second model so that it accords significance to choice itself only when a threshold of substantive merit has been reached. Above the threshold, choice itself matters. Below the threshold, choice itself does not matter. But this third model leaves awkward questions often associated with thresholds. Where exactly do we locate the substantive threshold? And how can choice matter just above the threshold and not at all below the threshold?

Choice as Proportional to Content

An obvious response to worries about thresholds is to go scalar, claiming that the magnitude of the value of choice itself is proportional to the magnitude of the value of the substance of the choice. We can explain why choice itself is significant when the substance of choice is acceptable but not optimal. Moreover, we can explain why choice itself has little, if any, significance when the content of choice doesn't either.⁶²

⁶² Indeed, the scalar model presumably implies that the fact of choice has negative value when the merits of the choice do. Is this implication acceptable?

These are just four of the most obvious models for relating the significance of choice and content. Of these, the scalar model looks most promising. One might well prefer a model for weighing the significance of these two variables that had a deeper philosophical rationale, but at least this model has the virtue of initial plausibility. Until we identify a better or more theoretically satisfying model, we might defeasibly embrace the scalar model.