

## Objective Goods and the Good Life

### I. Recap

What makes someone's life go best? What constitutes an individual's well-being? Possibilities (those in italics we will discuss today):

#### Experiential Quality Theories

Narrow Hedonism (Bentham)  
*Preference Hedonism*

#### Desire Satisfaction Theories

Unrestricted  
Informed/Rational Desire Satisfaction (Brandt)  
Souped-Up Agent's Rational Desire Satisfaction (Railton)  
*Significant Global Rational Desire Satisfaction (aka Success Theory)*

#### Objective List (Health, Wisdom, Creativity...) Theories

#### Hybrid Theories

### II. Preference Hedonism

Recall that according to hedonistic theories, experiences--states of your mind--are the only thing that matter for your well-being.. How the world is outside your mind doesn't matter.

According to narrow hedonism, there is some intrinsic *felt quality* that makes an experience valuable. However, it seems plausible that it isn't the intrinsic quality of an experience that makes it good. Perhaps we can address these issues, Parfit suggests, with:

**Preference Hedonism:** What is good for me is to have the kinds of experiences I want to have, i.e., to have *welcomed* experiences.  
E.g., Freud preferred agonized lucidity to numbness. According to preference hedonism, he was better off.

#### *Problems?*

1) On this view what makes an experience good is that I desire it. So it seems that what really matters is that I'm getting what I want. But I desire things other than experience. So why shouldn't getting those other things make my life better too? In other words, why focus exclusively on what *experiences* I desire?

2) Seems to be susceptible to Nozick's experience machine objection: I can guarantee that I have experiences of the kind that I prefer by entering the experience machine. But is entering the machine better for me?

This pushes us back to desire satisfaction accounts.

### III. The Success Theory

Brandt and Railton showed us that we can make progress in sorting through our desires by considering what a better informed rational counterpart of me would desire. Can we continue with this project to get an adequate account?

## Success Theory

What is good for me is to have desires *about my life* satisfied.

What's this "about my life" adding? It is meant to rule out whims and far future desires. But what makes a desire "about my life"? Parfit doesn't say explicitly. Possibilities:

- It must be a desire for something I can control.
- It must be a desire for something that contributes to my success, where success is a matter of goals I have set for myself.
- It must be a desire for how a biggish chunk of my life should go, not how the next few minutes should go.

Compare:

I have a child who I've never really known because since she was born I've been stranded on a desert island. I want her life to go well. If it does go well, am I better off (than I would be if her life went badly)? Parfit suggests not.

I work hard to be a good parent and am later in life stranded on a desert island. I want my child's life to go well. Her life goes well because of the upbringing I have given her. Am I better off (than I would be if her life went badly)? Parfit suggests yes.

## Super Success Theory ??

## IV. Objective List Theories

### Objective List Theory

What's good for me is getting things that are objectively good, e.g., health, wisdom, creativity, awareness of true beauty, loving and being loved.

Is there a real difference between the success theory and the objective list theory? If I have the right desires, then don't they coincide? E.g., if I desire not to be deceived, then I am better off if I am not deceived, just as the objective list theory says. BUT: the two give a different explanation of what make something good for me. According to the success theory, not being deceived is good for me *because* I desire not to be deceived. According to the objective list theory, not being deceived is good for me *because* it is objectively good not to be deceived. Compare: getting what I desire is good because it is for what is objectively good v. getting what I desire is good because what is good (for me) is a matter of what I desire.

Deciding on the objective list: On what basis can we claim that a particular list of goods is *objective*? Isn't there disagreement about what is good or bad, and how can we settle these disagreements?

Nussbaum's response:

- There is considerable agreement across cultures on the basic human goods.
- We can begin to determine what the basic goods are by asking "What are the functions, lacking which, a life is not fully human?"
  - What changes in a life would destroy the human being?
  - What must be present in a life alien from ours that qualify it as a human life?

**Central Human Functional Capabilities** (tentative list), pp. 41-2.

1. *Life*
2. *Bodily health and integrity*
3. *Bodily integrity*
4. *Senses, imagination, thought*

5. *Emotions*
6. *Practical reason*
7. *Affiliation*: (a) being able to live for and in relation to others; (b) having the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation.
8. *Connection to other species*.
9. *Play*
10. *Control over one's environment*: (a) Political: being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; (b) Material: being able to hold property, having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others; freedom from unwarranted search and seizure.

Nussbaum argues that these are things such that "it is always rational to want them, whatever else one wants." (45). Note the distinction between basic capabilities, internal capabilities, and combined capabilities. Her view is that governments and public policy ought to make it a goal to provide each of these capabilities to its citizens, allowing them to decide for themselves whether and to what extent to realize the capability.

*Problem*: Would my life be better if I got these (allegedly) objectively good things but didn't want them? Last time we considered the following principle:

**Internalist Principle**: *How things go for X is determined – to some substantial degree – by what X desires.*

The objective list theory doesn't do justice to this idea. Parfit suggests that we can fix this by making a hybrid view:

**Hybrid Theory**                      What's good for me is wanting things that are objectively good and getting them.