

PRUDENTIAL VALUE AND THE APPEALING LIFE

by

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To Sheila and my family

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INTRODUCTION

It was a terrible thing when several thousands of people were killed or injured in the Haitian earthquake of 2010. There are at least two ways to construe this evaluative claim. On the one hand, it might be interpreted as saying that the event was very bad in general, something that renders our world a worse place than a similar world in which a natural disaster of this kind does not occur. Things that are bad in this way, it has been said, are bad from the “perspective of the universe” or from an “impartial” or “impersonal” standpoint. On the other hand, the claim could be that the event of so many Haitians being killed and injured was very bad *for the Haitians who were killed and injured*. Those individuals suffered a great loss. They were adversely affected by the earthquake in a way that people in other parts of the world were not. These two interpretations reveal a distinction between what is good or bad *simpliciter* and what is good or bad for individuals. It is the distinction between *value* and *prudential value*.

This dissertation is about prudential value. The topic goes by many names in the philosophical literature, including *well-being*, *welfare*, *self-interest*, *one’s interests*, *one’s good*, *one’s advantage*, *personal good*, *quality of life*, and *the good life*. It is also a topic that is central to a great many discussions in ethical theory, political philosophy, and public affairs. Two well-known and historically influential ethical theories, utilitarianism and egoism, are standardly defined in terms of well-being, and it is sometimes thought that ancient eudaimonist theories are primarily concerned with human well-being. The

principles of beneficence and non-maleficence, widely discussed by normative and applied ethicists, enjoin us, respectively, to do what is good for others and to avoid doing what is bad for others. Various ethically significant concepts are analyzable in terms of prudential value, including the concepts of paternalism, luck, and self-sacrifice. Prudential value is also related to the attitudes of pity, envy, care, love, and malice. Engagement with the topic of prudential value is unavoidable if one wishes to grapple with these and many other important issues.

There are various levels at which one might engage with the topic of prudential value. I will focus on two. First, one may theorize about the topic at the substantive level. This involves discussing, exploring, defending, or criticizing proposals as to what things are good or bad for individuals. A *substantive account of prudential value* purports to list the things that are good or bad for individuals in the most direct and fundamental way. At least since 1984, there has been a tradition of distinguishing three popular types of substantive account of prudential value.¹ According to hedonistic accounts, the only things that are good or bad for individuals in the most direct and fundamental way are states of pleasure and pain. According to desire-fulfillment accounts, it is the fulfillment or frustration of one's desires, or (on some versions) the desires she would have if she were in ideal conditions, which might include having true beliefs, being vividly aware of the relevant information, and not reasoning fallaciously.² According to objective list accounts, it is a plurality of things (e.g. pleasure and pain, the success and failure of one's relationships with others, knowledge and false belief, achievements and failures), some of

¹ I am alluding to the publication of Derek Parfit's 1984 book *Reasons and Persons*, which includes an appendix in which Parfit makes this tripartite distinction. See Parfit (1984), pp. 493-502.

² For an introduction to this notion of idealization, see Railton (1986a), Section III. See also Sidgwick (1907), Brandt (1979), and Overvold (1984).

which are good or bad for individuals whether or not they desire or appreciate them. Disagreements about which, if any, of these types of accounts is correct are generally taken to be substantive normative disagreements, to be settled in whatever way such disagreements are settled.

We may also engage with the topic of prudential value at the conceptual level. This involves asking questions and making proposals as to how we should understand the very idea of prudential value and its relationship to other ideas. What is it for something to be good or bad for you, or a benefit or cost to you? What is it for someone to be well or badly off? What is the relationship between the concepts of prudential value, luck, pitiability, and self-sacrifice? The purpose of answering such answers is to gain a clearer understanding of the topic of prudential value. Answering these questions will likely provide new insight into the debate over the correct substantive account of prudential value, but it should not settle the substantive debate. Presumably, a plausible analysis of the concept of prudential value will not imply that hedonistic, desire-fulfillment, or objective list accounts of prudential value are unintelligible positions.

This dissertation is predominantly concerned with questions at the conceptual level. In Chapter I, I defend a new analysis of the concept of prudential value and related concepts. The remaining two chapters explore some conceptual and ethical implications of this analysis. Chapter II explains how the analysis sheds new light on a well-known puzzle about prudential value and time. Chapter III examines the prospects of an ethical theory that is related to the analysis. I sometimes offer my own substantive views about prudential value, though this is typically only for illustrative purposes. My primary objective in this work is not to defend substantive conclusions about prudential value.

Rather, it is to deepen our understanding of the very topic of prudential value in the hopes that doing so will enable clearer discussion and debate at the substantive level.

1. The Motivation for Further Conceptual Work

Philosophers who write on the topic of prudential value tend to focus on defending or critiquing substantive accounts of prudential value. Occasionally, they dive into substantive questions with little or no engagement with conceptual issues. For instance, Parfit's influential appendix "What Makes Someone's Life Go Best" opens with these two sentences:

What would be best for someone, or would be most in this person's interests, or would make this person's life go, for him, as well as possible? Answers to this question I call *theories of self-interest*.³

Parfit then moves directly into a discussion of hedonistic, desire-fulfillment, and objective list accounts and the considerations that speak for and against them. More commonly, however, philosophers who write about prudential value make more of an attempt to specify the concept of prudential value before turning to substantive matters.

The most common method of trying to clarify the concept of prudential value involves invoking a range of phrases and terminology that are thought to gesture at the rough idea. In the passage above, Parfit mentions three such phrases: "what is best for a person," "what is in one's interests," and "what makes one's life go as well as possible for her." There are many others. What is good for a person contributes to her "well-being," "welfare," or "quality of life." To have a high level of well-being is to be "well-off" and to be "doing well" or "faring well." When we are thinking prudentially or "self-interestedly," we are "looking out for ourselves," attentive to "what's in it for us" and

³ Parfit (1984), p. 493.

what we can “get out of” the situation. Things that are good for a person are “benefits” or “personal gains” for the person. Things that are bad for us are “costs” or “losses” to us. Another popular method of specification involves disambiguating talk of a “good life.”⁴ The concept of a prudentially good life, it is said, should not be confused with the concepts of a morally good life, a religiously good life, an aesthetically good life, a perfectionistically good life, and a life that is good *simpliciter*.⁵ If the prudentially best life is, say, the morally best life or the aesthetically best life, that is generally taken to be a substantive normative truth, not a conceptual truth. Other methods of specification include citing features of the well-being property (e.g. gradability, intrapersonal and interpersonal comparability) and noting its scope of application (e.g. people and cows have a level of well-being, stones and pencil sharpeners do not), stating substantive truisms about prudential value (e.g. being in excruciating pain is bad for you), highlighting its relations to various attitudes and concepts (e.g. care, love, pity, envy, luck, self-sacrifice, paternalism), and pointing out roles that the concept is thought to play (e.g. in prudential and benefactive deliberation, in theories of justice).

Given the many methods employed to specify what the concept of prudential value is, it might be thought that no further clarification of the concept is needed. As Susan Wolf expresses the point,

The concept, as opposed to the content of self-interest...seems clear enough. Self-interest is interest in one's own good. To act self-interestedly is to act on the motive of advancing one's own good. Whether what one does actually is in one's self-interest depends on whether it actually does advance, or at least, minimize the decline of, one's own good. Though it may be difficult to tell whether a person is motivated by self-interest in a particular instance, and difficult also to determine whether a given act or decision really is in one's self-interest, the meaning of the

⁴ See, for instance, Sumner (1996), pp. 20-25; Scanlon (1998), pp. 111-13; Feldman (2004), pp. 8-9; and Haybron (2008), pp. 36-37.

⁵ I clarify these concepts in the final section of Chapter I, Section 3.

claims in question seems unproblematic.⁶

In line with this sentiment, some may question the need for further conceptual work. Surely, it might be thought, our grasp of the concept of prudential value is sufficiently clear to proceed with substantive inquiries. But the question is whether our grasp has been clear enough to address substantive questions about prudential value effectively. There are various indications that it has not been. I will focus on indications found in two areas: the debate between subjectivists and objectivists about prudential value, and discussions concerning a puzzle about prudential value and time.

Subjectivists about prudential value believe that something is intrinsically good for a person (or good for her, in and of itself) only if that person does or could in some specified way endorse or appreciate it and intrinsically bad for a person only if that person does or could in some specified way have an unfavorable attitude toward it.⁷ An influential statement of the subjectivist sentiment comes from Peter Railton:

Is it true that all normative judgments must find an internal resonance in those to whom they are applied? While I do not find this thesis convincing as a claim about all species of normative assessment, 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.⁸

This thought has given rise to a popular distinction between two types of substantive normative accounts of prudential value. *Subjective accounts* of prudential value are those

⁶ Wolf (1997), p. 207. Of course, Wolf is not expressing her own settled view of the matter. A few sentences later, she remarks that a consequence of adopting the view she favors is that “the concept of self-interest which formerly seemed so clear begins to grow fuzzy.”

⁷ This characterization of subjectivism and objectivism is drawn from Sumner (1996), p. 38. It appears to be the most popular way of making the distinction.

⁸ Railton (1986b), p. 9. It is not clear that Railton intended for this claim to apply to the notion of prudential value, as it is standardly understood. In a footnote, he suggests that the notion of one's good, which is his concern, is distinct from that of one's welfare or well-being (p. 30n9). Even so, this passage is often cited in the well-being literature as capturing the motivating thought behind subjectivism about prudential value.

that recognize things as having intrinsic prudential value or disvalue for a person only if they bear the right relationship to the attitudes of the person, or the person's idealized self. Desire-fulfillment accounts are widely recognized to be the quintessential subjective accounts. *Objective accounts* of prudential value violate the subjectivist constraint. They imply that there are possible cases in which a thing is intrinsically good for a person though it does not resonate with the person, or would not resonate with her if she were in ideal conditions. In the contemporary tradition, the quintessential objective accounts are so-called "objective list" accounts. These are *list* accounts because they are pluralistic, recognizing two or more basic kinds of prudential value. They are *objective* accounts because at least one item on the list is an "objective good," something that benefits an individual whether or not that individual, or her idealized self, wants or appreciates the thing.

Hedonistic, desire-fulfillment, and objective list theories are standardly recognized as the three leading types of substantive accounts of prudential value. This implies that the disagreement between subjectivists and objectivists is substantive in nature. Yet, some philosophers have suggested that objectivists are either conceptually confused or talking about some other concept. In discussing the "teleological theory," which identifies a thing's welfare with its distinctive excellence, L. W. Sumner claims that proponents of the theory conflate the concept of prudential value with that of perfectionist value.⁹ (According to Sumner, "To say that something has [perfectionist] value is to say that it is a good instance or specimen of its kind, or that it exemplifies the excellences characteristic of its particular nature."¹⁰) Sumner believes that the

⁹ Sumner (1996), pp. 69-80, particularly p. 78.

¹⁰ Sumner (1996), p. 23.

teleological theorists' conflation is explained by the ambiguity of phrases such as "a good of one's own":

'The good of x' can mean, among other things, either 'the welfare of x' or 'the goodness of x'. Where a thing is capable of having perfectionist value we can certainly speak of its goodness or excellence. In that sense it undeniably has a good, which is its own in virtue of being grounded in its nature. But it is a fallacy to slip from saying that something can be good or bad of its kind to saying that it therefore has a welfare.¹¹

Daniel Haybron raises a similar charge against Aristotelian eudaimonist approaches. He believes that Aristotelians often work with an understanding of "*eudaimonia*" that is supposed to be a rough synonym of "well-being" and also to represent "whatever it is that would constitute an ideal life, a life that is most choiceworthy..."¹² This has the effect of stipulating that any account of prudential value that cannot credibly serve as an account of the choiceworthy life is a non-starter. Given that many contemporary philosophers are interested in prudential value and take this to be a separate issue from that of the choiceworthy life, Haybron remarks:

We should not be surprised, then, that Aristotelians and their critics, notably subjectivists about well-being, so often seem to end up talking past each other, and that they frequently regard each others' views with bafflement, if not outright contempt.¹³

For a different reason, Shelly Kagan has also thought that individuals in the well-being debate may be talking past one another. He suggests that philosophical discussions of prudential value have been running together two distinct topics: how well-off one is, and how well one's life is going.¹⁴ Kagan thinks a conflation of these two topics "would go a long way toward explaining why any given theory can seem at one moment inescapable

¹¹ Sumner (1996), p. 78.

¹² Haybron (2008), p. 171.

¹³ Haybron (2008), p. 172.

¹⁴ Kagan (1994).

and at the next moment absurd.”¹⁵ In his original 1994 discussion of this conflation, Kagan focuses on the disagreement between hedonists and desire-fulfillment theorists, implying that the former might be offering an account of well-being whereas the latter might be offering an account of how well a life goes for an individual. In a more recent discussion, Kagan insinuates that the conflation might explain why people are drawn to objective accounts:

...I am assuming that we can and should draw a distinction between two questions that we normally conflate: First, how well off is someone? And second, how well is their life going? The former concerns the level of individual well-being, the welfare of the given person; the second concerns the quality of their life. I believe — though I won’t argue the point here — that we should be open to distinguishing between these two subjects. Someone’s *life* might be going fairly well, even though *she herself* is not particularly well off. That’s the situation we have, I suspect, if someone’s life contains objective goods, but the person takes no pleasure in their possession. Though such a life is hardly perfect, it might still be a rather good one all told (if, say, the person has accomplished a great deal); yet because they take no pleasure in the goods that they possess, the person herself is not particularly well off.¹⁶

In this passage, Kagan implies that objective accounts may seem attractive because they provide sensible accounts of the quality of one’s life, though not of well-being. Finally, Chris Heathwood echoes some of the sentiments above when he suggests that some objectivists might be offering accounts of the choiceworthy life rather the prudentially good life. He writes:

Perhaps the advocates of the more objective theories...disagree so deeply with the advocates of more subjective theories because the two parties are in fact offering theories of different phenomena....Advocates of the objective theories may be telling us which sort of life is most worth choosing, while advocates of the subjective theories may be telling us in which sort of life one would be most well-off.¹⁷

¹⁵ Kagan (1994), p. 309.

¹⁶ Kagan (2009), p. 257.

¹⁷ Heathwood (2010), p. 654.

Thus, Sumner, Haybron, Kagan, and Heathwood have all expressed the opinion or suspicion that some or all objectivists are not focused on the concepts of prudential value and well-being that interest subjectivists, even if their language implies otherwise.

The charges made by these philosophers suggest that perhaps the concept of prudential value is not so clearly grasped after all. For if these philosophers are correct, a number of the (apparent) participants in the substantive prudential value debate have been conflating different topics. One motivation for doing further conceptual work is to find out whether these charges are on target. Are there, as Kagan suggests, two topics of interest where previously it has been thought there is only one?¹⁸ Furthermore, irrespective of whether everyone has been trying to talk about prudential value (as opposed to some other topic), it is worth asking whether it is possible to endorse an objective account of prudential value without being guilty of any conceptual confusion. An analysis of the concept of prudential value should help us settle this matter. Among other things, it will make clear if we can distinguish subjectivism and objectivism about prudential value at the substantive level.

Another area that reveals the need for further work in clarifying the concept of prudential value is the *Timing Puzzle*.¹⁹ The Timing Puzzle arises from three sources. First, there are certain types of things—most famously, death and posthumous events—that appear (to many people, at least) to be good or bad for people under some circumstances. Second, it seems plausible that something can be good or bad for an individual only if it is good or bad for that individual at one or more particular times. Third, there appear to be no particular times at which the above items can be good or bad

¹⁸ Kagan (1994), p. 324.

¹⁹ I borrow this phrase from Luper (2009), Chapter 6.

for us. The puzzle is that we are attracted to three beliefs that are jointly inconsistent. Solving this puzzle involves finding the best way to avoid this inconsistency.

What is interesting about the Timing Puzzle, for present purposes, are certain disagreements in the philosophical literature about the legitimacy of proposed solutions. As a first example, some philosophers have argued that there are particular times when death can be good or bad for us—namely, times after one’s death.²⁰ This type of position about the time of death’s badness is standardly called *subsequentism* because the prudentially significant times are located after death. Ben Bradley summarizes his preferred subsequentist solution as follows:

Death is bad because (and when) it makes its victim’s actual life worse than the life the victim would have had. It is bad to the extent that the victim’s life would have been better if the victim had not died. It is bad at all those times at which things would have been going better for the victim had her death not occurred. And it is bad at a time to the extent that things would be going better for the victim at that time than they would have been had her death not occurred.²¹

On Bradley’s view, whenever death is bad for a person, it is bad for the person at those posthumous moments at which she would have had been better off, had she not died. Likewise, whenever death is good for a person, it is so at the posthumous moments at which the person in question would have been worse off had she not died. Part of Bradley’s view is that the dead have a well-being level of zero. This is what enables us to assess, in principle at least, how much better or worse off an individual is than she would have been had she not died. Yet, the claim that the dead have a level of well-being is a very controversial aspect of Bradley’s view. As he notes, some philosophers “insist (feet stomping, fist pounding) you just cannot have a welfare level at times at which you are

²⁰ See, for instance, Bradley (2009), Chapter 3, and Feit (2002).

²¹ Bradley (2009), pp. 110-11.

not located! Not even zero!”²² In some cases, the disagreement appears to be conceptual in nature—and, more specifically, to hinge on one’s understanding of what prudential value is.²³ For instance, Steven Luper denies that the dead have a level of well-being based on the fact that the dead are not responsive:

[A] creature is responsive at T just in case it has the capacity to accrue at T the intrinsic goods or evils in which welfare consists....For a subject S to be harmed at a time T, it is not enough that S lacks a salient good G at T. S must be responsive at T. (Living) people meet this condition, and can be deprived of goods, with corresponding dips in well-being, while they are alive; shoes fail the condition and can never literally be deprived of goods. The dead fail the condition, too. No one is responsive *while* dead...²⁴

In drawing a parallel between dead people and a pair of shoes, Luper seems to be making the point that it is a conceptual category mistake to think that the dead can be harmed. Thus, there is reason to think that Luper takes the claim “S can be harmed at t only if S is responsive at t” to be a conceptual truth about prudential value. An analysis of the concept of prudential value might uncover whether or not Luper is correct and make it more apparent whether it is intelligible to think that things can be good or bad for people after they die.

Other controversial moves that have been made in an attempt to solve the Timing Puzzle seem to draw upon a particular way of understanding prudential value. Consider these claims:

1. Something can be good or bad for a person timelessly or atemporally.²⁵
2. Something can affect how well one is doing or faring at some time period without impacting how well that individual is doing or faring at any particular moment within that time period.²⁶

²² Bradley (2009), p. 99-100.

²³ This is not true in all cases. Some philosophers reject the view that the dead have a well-being level of zero on metaphysical grounds. See, for instance, Hershenov (2007), p. 174.

²⁴ Luper (2009), pp. 132-33.

²⁵ Steven Luper [(2009), pp. 124, 139] explicitly endorses this claim. John Bigelow, John Campbell, and Robert Pargetter implicitly endorse it; see Bigelow (1990), p. 121. The claim is entertained as a possibility in Broome (2004), pp. 47, and Bradley (2009), pp. 74-78.

3. Something that occurs at one time can be intrinsically good or bad for an individual at another time.²⁷

Do these claims make sense? If so, are they putative conceptual truths or substantive normative truths? It is difficult to assess this without having a better grasp of the concept of prudential value. Once again, an analysis of prudential value may shed some light on the issue.

This concludes my initial case that further work on the concept of prudential value is needed. Over the course of the dissertation, I hope to establish that analyzing the concept of prudential value provides answers to several of the aforementioned questions, as well as many others.

2. Looking Ahead

This dissertation is comprised of three chapters. Chapter I presents the central idea of the entire work. In a nutshell, the idea is that prudential value may be fruitfully understood as that which contributes to the appeal of being in one's position. Suppose that you postpone doing some work to spend the afternoon at a local art gallery. As it turns out, the experience of engaging with art for a few hours is both pleasurable and inspiring. Plausibly, it is good for you to have this experience. To think this, I propose, is to think that engaging with art on this afternoon contributes to the appeal of being in your position or of being "in your shoes." To think that something is bad for you is to think that it detracts from the appeal of being in your position. If something is good or bad for you in the fullest possible sense, it contributes to or detracts from the appeal of being in

²⁶ Velleman (1993) defends this claim.

²⁷ Philosophers who endorse "priorism" about the timing of death's goodness or badness appear to endorse this claim. See, for example, Pitcher (1984).

your position in the fullest possible sense. Having a person's life, as I will understand it, just is to be in that person's position in the fullest possible sense. Thus, the analysis of prudential value that I am proposing provides a way to understand the notion of "the good life" or a prudentially good life. A prudentially good life is a life such that having that life (i.e. being the bearer of that life) is worthy of appeal, in and of itself.

Chapter I explains the components of the *appealing life analysis*, as I call it, and offers a preliminary defense of it. The first part of this defense seeks to establish that the appealing life analysis satisfies a range of desiderata for an analysis of prudential value. In particular, it fits well with various terms and slogans that are commonly associated with prudential value; provides a way to analyze the concept of well-being (including restrictive forms of well-being); preserves the connection between prudential value and the attitudes of concern, love, pity, and envy; and enables promising analyses of related concepts (e.g. luck, selfishness, self-sacrifice, paternalism). In the next negative portion of my defense, I consider three competing analyses of prudential value, highlighting ways in which they fail to satisfy the desiderata and explaining why the appealing life analysis does not fail in these ways. Finally, I argue that the appealing life analysis provides insight into the relationship between prudence and morality and the debate between subjectivists and objectivists. It is popularly thought, if not presumed, that "being moral" in paradigmatic ways is not the sort of thing that is, in and of itself, good or bad for a person. Giving your excess income to those in need or being a kind person might give you pleasure, enable you to have better relationships, or bring about other instrumental benefits, but it does not benefit you in the most direct and fundamental way. I call this the *morality-excluding view*. The appealing life analysis reveals that the morality-excluding

view is not a conceptual truth and also provides answers to the earlier questions about subjectivism and objectivism. Since it is intelligible to think that being moral contributes to the appeal of being in one's position, irrespective of whether being moral resonates with the individual in the specified ways, the appealing life analysis implies that one can intelligibly endorse an objective account of prudential value without being guilty of any mistake.

In Chapter II, I turn to the Timing Puzzle. In the first portions of the chapter, I explain what the puzzle is and provide some initial motivation for the three sources of the puzzle. I then critically examine some ways that philosophers have sought to solve the Timing Puzzle *via* the first and second strategies. In the final parts of the chapter, I interpret the puzzle through the lens of the appealing life analysis and highlight various ways in which this interpretation is informative. First, it speaks against certain moves that some philosophers have made in trying to solve the Timing Puzzle, such as claiming that some things are good or bad for us timelessly, or good or bad for us at times that we do not exist. For, arguably, it makes little sense to talk of being in one's shoes timelessly or of being in one's shoes at times when she is not around. Second, for many of us, the analysis validates our initial conviction that the hard cases have prudential significance in some circumstances, for we recognize various kinds of death, prenatal events, posthumous events, and global features of a life that can, in and of themselves, affect the appeal of having one's life. Third, the analysis provides guidance on how to pursue the third strategy, which may be appreciated through an examination of pleasure and pain.

It may seem obvious that pleasure and pain are good and bad for us only at times when they occur. However, examining a well-known case from Derek Parfit, I suggest

that many people do not (and, in any case, one need not) subscribe to the obvious view. Arguably, being in the shoes of someone who will soon undergo a very painful surgery has far less appeal than being in the shoes of one who has already undergone it, other things being equal. A patient who is about to experience great pain is, at that moment, worse off, as well as more pitiable and unluckier, than a patient who has it behind her. These considerations suggest some methodological lessons for pursuing the third strategy. First, we should not assume that something can only be intrinsically good or bad for a person at times that it occurs. Second, if certain times leap out at us as times at which a given thing has obvious prudential significance, this may only reflect the fact that its prudential significance is greatest at those times. Third, if certain times do not leap out at us as times at which a thing has obvious prudential significance, this may only reflect the fact that it affects us at different moments of our lives more or less uniformly.

Drawing on these methodological lessons, I make some rough proposals as to particular times within a person's life at which the hard cases can affect the appeal of being in one's situation. My goal is not to defend this solution to the Timing Puzzle *via* the third strategy, but I do seek to establish that the third strategy is a potentially promising approach and that the proposed analysis helps us appreciate this fact.

Chapter III offers a preliminary investigation of an ethical theory that I call *prudentialism*. According to this theory, individuals should always act so as to maximize the intrinsic appealworthiness of having their own lives. Different substantive accounts of the appealing life yield different interpretations of the theory. On some interpretations, prudentialism will avoid the charges of being too morally demanding and of being not morally demanding enough. The first parts of the chapter are devoted to explaining the

structure of this theory and a methodology for arriving at an interpretation of prudentialism and testing its intuitive plausibility. I then discuss this theory's relation to egoistic and eudaimonistic ethical theories and sketch a partial substantive account of the appealing life. In the final portions of the chapter, I consider and respond to three objections to prudentialism.

One contribution that this chapter makes to the philosophical literature on prudential value is to highlight the possibility of a *radically pluralistic* account of prudential value, according to which there is a rich diversity of things that, in and of themselves, contribute to or detract from the appeal of being in one's position. The substantive accounts of prudential value that have been most popular among philosophers are either *monistic*, recognizing only one type of thing or dimension of our lives that has prudential value or disvalue, or *modestly pluralistic*, recognizing only a handful of prudentially significant dimensions. The standard hedonistic and desire-fulfillment accounts fall into the first category. The most widely discussed objective list accounts fall into the second category. In my view, all of these conceptions of the appealing life are impoverished. It is a further virtue of the appealing life analysis that it reveals that there is conceptual space for radically pluralistic accounts of prudential value. My hope and expectation is that adoption of the appealing life analysis will inspire exploration of more nuanced views of the appealing life. With the development of such views, prudentialism emerges as a potentially promising theory of how we ought to live.

CHAPTER I

An Analysis of Prudential Value

1. Introduction

What is it for something to be good for you? It is for that thing to contribute to the appeal of being in your position or, more informally, “in your shoes.” To be in one’s position or place in the broadest possible sense is to have that person’s life. Accordingly, something is good or bad for a person in the broadest possible sense if and only if it contributes to, or detracts from, the appeal of having her life. What is a prudentially good life, or a life that goes well for the one living it? It is an *appealing life*. More precisely, it is a life such that having it is worthy of appeal, in and of itself.

My purpose in this chapter is to explain and defend this way of understanding prudential value, which I frame as an analysis of the concept of prudential value. Since conceptual analysis is a controversial enterprise these days,²⁸ two disclaimers should be made. First, there may be alternative, and perhaps better, ways to represent or rework the proposal, perhaps as a linguistic or metaphysical analysis. I am open to this possibility but will not explore it here. Second, my proposed analysis of prudential value is, in all likelihood, revisionist in certain respects. It is only meant to preserve certain core features of our concept of prudential value, not every feature that has been attributed to it.

This chapter is organized as follows. In Section 2, I review a range of features

²⁸ See, for instance, Jackson (1998), DePaul and Ramsey (1998), Block and Stalnaker (1999), Chalmers and Jackson (2001), Laurence and Margolis (2003), Williamson (2007), and Braddon-Mitchell and Nola (2008).

widely associated with the concept of prudential value, which provide desiderata for an analysis. In Section 3, I clarify the concept of an appealing life. In Section 4, I present the appealing life analysis. In Section 5, I argue that the analysis satisfies the identified desiderata. In Section 6, I critique three rival analyses of prudential value. In Sections 7 and 8, I examine what the appealing life analysis implies about the relationship between prudence and morality and the debate between subjectivists and objectivists.

2. Desiderata for an Analysis of Prudential Value

An ideal analysis of prudential value will be intuitive, non-circular, and informative. It will also preserve central features of our concept of prudential value. For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus on five sets of features, which yield desiderata for an analysis.

Terminology and Slogans. Various terms and phrases are standardly employed to talk about prudential value. Something has prudential value for a subject S if and only if it is *good for* S or a *benefit* to S. Something has prudential disvalue for S if and only if it is *bad for* S or a *cost* to S.²⁹ Prudential value is what we are attuned to when we are being *self-interested*, *looking out for ourselves*, wanting to *get something out of* a situation, and concerned to know *what's in it for us*. In prudential deliberation, the goal is to secure *personal gains* and avoid *personal losses*. Advertisers love to tell consumers that a

²⁹ My focus on subjects is not without a point. In ordinary language, we speak of what is “good for” or “bad for” a shockingly wide range of objects: trees, companies, the economy, the ozone layer, hammers, automobiles, one’s health, one’s kidneys, one’s complexion, one’s reputation, etc. I am doubtful that talk of what is good for you or me and what is good for, say, the economy or one’s lawn admits of a unified treatment. For discussion and defense of the view that our “good for” talk is not unified, see Rosati (2009a) and Fletcher (2012), pp. 9-12. It should not be problematic to make use of the “good for” and “bad for” locutions provided that sufficient attention is paid to other features associated with prudential value.

featured product is essential to living *the good life*, and the topic of *the good death* is a perennial concern in the fields of medicine and bioethics. On the most natural interpretation, these phrases refer to the prudentially good life and the prudentially good death—that is, a life that is good for the one living it and a death that is good for the one who dies. An attractive analysis will fit with these ways of talking and help to clarify them.

Conceptual Distinctions. The concept of a prudentially good life, or a life that goes well for the one whose life it is, is distinct from a range of other concepts that might answer to the phrase “good life.” An *impersonally good life* is a life such that its existence contributes to the value *simpliciter* of the world. A *morally good life*, an *aesthetically good life*, and a *religiously good life* are lives that promote or exemplify (respectively) moral, aesthetic, or religious values or virtues. A *beautiful life* is a life that is beautiful or attractive to behold. A *perfectionistically good life* is a life in which one is an ideal specimen of one’s kind or exemplifies the excellences characteristic of one’s nature.³⁰ An *admirable life* is a life in which one’s traits or manner of living merits the admiration of others. A *choiceworthy life* is a life that is worth striving for or worth choosing relative to some set of options. These concepts are all distinct from the concept of a prudentially good life. Suppose that you have the option of spending the remainder of your life hooked up to a virtual reality “experience machine,” which would enable you to have a continuous stream of extraordinarily pleasurable and rewarding, though artificial, experiences.³¹ Suppose that the alternative is to live a more ordinary life in which you

³⁰ I draw this characterization from Sumner (1996), p. 23.

³¹ The famous example of the experience machine comes from Nozick (1974), pp. 42-45.

would be far less happy on average but would also have healthy relationships with real people and would make substantial contributions to humanitarian causes. One can believe, without conceptual confusion, that the experience machine life is the life that would be best for you while also thinking that the ordinary, authentic life is the life that would be impersonally, morally, aesthetically, religiously, and perfectionistically better, as well as more beautiful, admirable, and choiceworthy.

The fact that the above good-life concepts are distinct does not close off the possibility that some of these concepts pick out the same types of lives. It might be true that, given any set of possible lives, the life that is prudentially best is always the life that is, say, most admirable and most choiceworthy. This would be a substantive normative truth, not a conceptual truth. A suitable analysis of prudential value will preserve the distinction between the concept of a prudentially good life and these other good-life concepts.

Associated Attitudes. Prudential value bears a special relationship to certain attitudes. First, there is the attitude of *care* or *concern*. Having concern or caring for someone involves wanting what is good for that person.³² Accordingly, it is commonly remarked that benefactive deliberation, which aims at securing what is good for another, is rooted in “other-concern,” whereas prudential deliberation is rooted in “self-concern.”³³

Care is related to *love*. When you love someone, you care about her. The converse does not hold. One can have concern for others without loving them. Our concern for strangers tends to be fairly restricted, the restrictions being determined by the context of

³² Darwall (2002), p. 14.

³³ See, for example, Darwall (2002); Annas (1992); Annas (1993), Part III; and Kraut (2007), pp. 48-61.

interaction. If an intoxicated stranger passes out beside you on the subway, you might hope that she makes it home safely. This is to have concern for her in a very limited, local way. Concern for ourselves and our loved ones, in contrast, comes closer to complete concern. In the case of love, which involves caring if it is not itself an intense form of caring, it may also be said that insofar as we have this attitude toward an individual, we want what is good for her.

The attitudes of *pity* and *envy* are also bound up with the idea of prudential value. We pity or feel sorry for someone only when we perceive that things are going badly for that individual either in some limited respect or on the whole. We do not pity on the whole those whom we judge to be living the good life, though we might pity them in certain respects. In contrast, envy is a perfectly fitting response to those who are living the good life, provided that one's own life falls short of this. Envy is only appropriately felt toward one who is doing better than oneself, either in some particular respect or on the whole.³⁴ Thus, envy has a comparative element that pity seems to lack, as evidenced by the fact that self-pitying is a common phenomenon whereas the idea of self-envy makes no sense. A successful analysis will preserve these relationships between prudential value and the attitudes of concern, love, pity, and envy.

Well-Being. The concept of prudential value is intimately related to the concept of *well-being* or *welfare*, which pertains to how well an individual is doing or faring. In philosophical circles, it is standardly thought that the connection between well-being and what is good or bad for an individual is straightforward: something is good for you if and

³⁴ Some philosophers believe that envy always involves a malicious wish that the envied party lose the goods in question. I assume that envy need not be malicious envy, though my claims may be revised to accommodate the contrary view.

only if it contributes to your level of well-being, and something is bad for you if and only if it detracts from your level of well-being. Since people can fare well at particular moments or over extended periods of time, a distinction is often drawn between *synchronic well-being* (how well one fares at a time) and *diachronic well-being* (how well one fares over an extended period of time). There are also restricted forms of well-being that pertain to how well a person is faring along one dimension of their lives. These include *mental well-being*, *physical well-being*, *emotional well-being*, *financial well-being*, and *spiritual well-being*. An analysis of prudential value should provide a way to characterize the concept of well-being in its various forms.

Other Conceptual Relations. The concept of prudential value is also related to the concepts of luck, selfishness, self-sacrifice, and paternalism. Precisely how these concepts should be analyzed is a controversial matter. In this dissertation, I will adopt the following rough characterizations, recognizing that they are likely in need of some revision and refinement. *Luck* pertains to what is good or bad for an individual due to factors that are not within that individual's control. One has good luck when things beyond her control lead to personal gains for her and bad luck when they lead to losses for her.³⁵ *Selfishness* involves being strongly motivated out of self-concern to secure

³⁵ Three clarifications should be made. First, another sense of the term "luck" applies to the achievement of context-specific goals. If I am passing the time by trying to toss coins into a bucket, I might think "I got lucky" if I have a string of successful throws without thinking that this is good for me. But an important sense of "luck" does pertain to what is good or bad for an individual. This is the relevant sense for present purposes. Second, epistemologists sometimes claim that "knowledge excludes luck" and that, in Gettier cases, beliefs are "true by luck." Unless those who engage in such talk are committed to thinking that it always benefits a person to have beliefs that happen to be true, they are not using the prudential sense of "luck" that concerns me. In the discussion of the Gettier cases, I suspect that "true by luck" could be replaced by "true by chance" or, better, "true, but not due to the agent's skills." Third, it is tempting to think that luck includes another element: a non-negligible objective or subjective probability that the lucky or unlucky event will not occur. Yet, we also talk about luck in cases where there is no indeterminacy or uncertainty at all. I can envy the lives of hawks and count myself unlucky that I am not and could not

personal gains while having insufficient regard for others. *Self-sacrifice* occurs when an individual acts in a way that she correctly believes will be bad for her.³⁶ *Paternalism* involves promoting what is, by one's own lights, good for another against that other's wishes.³⁷ These related concepts point to a final set of desiderata. A successful analysis of prudential value will preserve these conceptual relations and deepen our understanding of judgments about luck, selfishness, self-sacrifice, and paternalism.

Most philosophers who write on the topic of prudential value take themselves to be addressing something that answers to the specified terminology and slogans, is distinct from the range of other good-life concepts highlighted above, and stands in the specified relations to the attitudes of care, love, pity, and envy, as well as the concepts of well-being, luck, selfishness, self-sacrifice, and paternalism. An analysis of prudential value that is intuitive, non-circular, and informative and does justice to these other desiderata is a promising analysis.

3. The Appealing Life

Before introducing and assessing my proposed analysis of prudential value, it is worthwhile to clarify the concept of an *appealing life*—meaning, a life such that having it is worthy of appeal, in and of itself. The purpose of this section is to bring the elements of this idea into sharper focus.

possibly have been a hawk. This is an example of *constitutive luck*, or luck in the kind of person or being one is. Cf. Nagel (1979), p. 28.

³⁶ This is loosely based on Mark Overvold's discussion in Overvold (1980). Connie Rosati defends a series of modifications to his analysis in Rosati (2009b).

³⁷ Paternalism is commonly thought to involve the further condition of restricting or interfering with an individual's liberty or autonomy. It might also be thought that an action qualifies as paternalistic if it promotes what is good for another, by that person's lights, against his or her wishes.

The Attitude of Appeal. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Schlitz Brewing Company ran a series of advertisements with the slogan “Know the Joy of Good Living.” One of these ads portrays a woman and man lounging on a sofa with a majestic, snow-covered mountain landscape in the background. The man is holding up a Schlitz beer, as they both gaze up at it warmly. Their faces communicate a sense of relaxed bliss. Presumably, the couple is not merely observing the beer and enjoying its appearance. They are taking delight in the prospect of drinking it. They like the idea of drinking it. You can see it in their faces that drinking a Schlitz beer *appeals* to them.³⁸

Alternatively, it might be said that the couple *desires* or *wants* to drink a Schlitz beer. It is, however, important to distinguish two senses of the terms “desire,” “want,” and “prefer.” In one sense, what one most desires, wants, and prefers is whatever one is most motivated to bring about. Call this *desire in the motivational sense*. This is, in the words of Philippa Foot, “a use of ‘desire’ which indicates a motivational direction and nothing more.”³⁹ In a second sense, what one most desires, wants, and prefers is whatever most appeals (or is least unappealing) to the person, or whatever the person most likes (or least dislikes). Call this *desire in the attitudinal sense*. Several philosophers have recognized something like this distinction.⁴⁰

³⁸ This example is inspired by Peter Railton, who once gave a talk that has conditioned me to associate the attitude of appeal with beer advertisements.

³⁹ Foot (1978), p. 149.

⁴⁰ L. W. Sumner distinguishes *preference in the behavioral sense*, which “always (trivially) runs with choice,” from *preference in the attitudinal sense*, which involves “finding the prospect of [the preferred object] pleasing or agreeable, or welcoming the opportunity to do it, or looking forward to it with gusto or enthusiasm. Sumner (1996), p. 121. Likewise, Wayne Davis tells us that *volitive desires* are “a more reliable indication of action” whereas *appetitive desires* are “a more reliable indicator of enjoyment.” “Objects of appetitive desire,” Davis writes, “are *appealing*...[and] are *viewed with pleasure*.” Davis (1984), p. 187, 183. What Sumner calls “preference in the behavioural sense” and Davis calls “volitive desire” correspond to desire in the motivational sense. If Sumner and Davis allow that what one most “prefers in the attitudinal sense” and “appetitively desires” can be that which is least unappealing, they are talking about desire in the attitudinal sense. See also Lewis (1988), p. 323; Scanlon (1998), pp. 37-41; and

Desire in the motivational sense and desire in the attitudinal sense often go hand in hand. Consider the case of Geena, who is begrudgingly heading to her dental appointment, all the while wishing that she could go play tennis instead. In the short term, spending the afternoon playing tennis appeals to her much more than spending it at the dentist. However, she also has in mind the long-term consequences that may result if she fails to care properly for her teeth. All things considered, tennis today and serious dental problems in the future is more unappealing to her than minor pain today and no such problems in the future. She chooses and is motivated to do what has greatest net appeal for her. Or consider another case. A friend of mine always turns on every light in his apartment when he comes home at night. I once asked him why he does this, and he replied that he just likes having all the lights on. Whether or not that is the whole story, it is clear that having all of the lights on appeals to my friend more than having only some of them on, and this corresponds to what he is motivated to bring about.

We can imagine desiring something in the motivational sense without desiring it in the attitudinal sense, as illustrated by a popular example from Warren Quinn:

Suppose I am in a strange functional state that disposes me to turn on radios that I see to be turned off. Given the perception that a radio in my vicinity is off, I try, all other things being equal, to get it turned on...[I]n the case I am imagining, this is all there is to the state. I do not turn the radios on in order to hear music or get news. It is not that I have an inordinate appetite for entertainment or information. Indeed, I do not turn them on in order to *hear* anything.⁴¹

In this case, Quinn has a bare motivational impulse to turn on any radio he sees. He cannot give a reason for doing it. And unlike my friend who *likes* having every light on, Quinn has no such attitudes. Neither the act of turning on radios nor the state of affairs of

Heathwood (Unpublished). I am indebted to Chris Heathwood for bringing many of these references to my attention.

⁴¹ Quinn (1994), p. 236. Quinn enlists this example to argue that “No noncognitive, dispositive functional state of the kind under consideration can, by itself,” serve to rationalize actions (p. 241).

radios being turned on appeals to him, nor is the absence of these things something that Quinn finds unappealing. He is simply moved to do it. The case of the “radio man” illustrates one conceivable way in which desire in the motivational sense and desire in the attitudinal sense might come apart.

There is empirical research that supports drawing the distinction between desire in the attitudinal sense and desire in the motivational sense. Based on experiments involving addiction in mice and humans, psychologist Kent Berridge and his colleagues claim to have identified two core processes associated with human and animal motivation, which they call *liking* and *wanting*.⁴² As Peter Railton summarizes the distinction, liking is “a matter of the positive hedonic ‘gloss’ a stimulus can have” whereas wanting is “a matter of its ‘incentive salience’ or power to produce effortful pursuit.”⁴³ Liking and disliking are essential to desire in the attitudinal sense though not desire in the motivational sense. Certain instances of addictive behavior appear to provide real-world examples where liking and wanting, as well as desire in our two senses, come apart, as illustrated by a case of alcohol addiction described by Railton:

Consider someone with a family he loves, a decent job in construction, good friends, and the respect of those who know him. He also has a “drinking problem” that lately has been growing in proportion. He has started missing work, and showing up drunk. He doesn’t make it to his kid’s school play, and isn’t sober enough for his wife to trust him driving them to soccer. He’s fired, and starts borrowing from friends. But since he can’t pay them back, he stops seeing them altogether. And he’s lost to his family most days as well. When he comes home, he’s alternately belligerent and maudlin, showing no interest in what they’re doing. Bars won’t serve him, so he starts buying bottles—whatever’s cheapest. He steals money from his wife, and eventually stops coming home at all, living in his pick-up truck until one day he wrecks it. Is he happy when drunk? No, he’s mostly overwhelmingly sad, often physically sick, and prone to sharp flashes of anger around other people. He realizes what he’s lost, and hates what alcohol has

⁴² See, for instance, Berridge (2004) and (2009).

⁴³ Railton (Unpublished), p. 31. For his own purposes, Railton characterizes liking as “generic positive affect interest” and wanting as “directed, motivated pursuit” (p. 30).

done to him, his family, and everything he's worked for. Sometimes he'll get sober at the shelter, and stay that way for a few days. He dreams of getting back to his family. But even when he's dried out, he need only smell whisky, or see the bottles behind the cashier at the convenience store, and he can't resist doing whatever he can for a drink... This is *wanting*, unquestionably, but not ordinary *desire*. Not even ordinary first-order desire. He hates himself and hates how he is when drunk. His fondest hopes and brightest thoughts are to stay sober and put his life together.⁴⁴

This portrait of addiction illustrates another way in which a person might be driven to pursue something that does not appeal to him the most, all things considered.

The attitude of appeal corresponds to desire in the attitudinal sense. In my usage, something “appeals to S” just in case it is desired in the attitudinal sense by S. I have opted to focus on the language of appeal because there is a tradition among philosophers of using “desire,” “want,” and “preference” in the broader motivational sense. Indeed, G. F. Schueler considers this to be “the philosophers’ sense.”⁴⁵ When I do invoke these ambiguous terms, I will generally use “desire” in its attitudinal sense and “want” and “prefer” in their motivational sense.⁴⁶

Three further clarifications about the attitude of appeal should be made. First, the term “appealing” may sound as if it pertains only to the surface features of a thing, implying that what is appealing will be shiny or showy. These connotations of the term should be ignored in the present context. Owning an ugly, dependable automobile appeals to me much more than owning a shiny, stylish car that breaks down at the drop of a hat. Likewise, a life of modest means and honest toil appeals to some people more than a life

⁴⁴ Railton (Unpublished), p. 32.

⁴⁵ Schueler (1995), p. 1. In the relevant passage, Schueler is focusing on the term “desire.”

⁴⁶ One exception concerns my references to “desire-fulfillment” accounts of prudential value. It is not always clear what sense of “desire” proponents of these accounts have in mind. Chris Heathwood suggests that the general trend has been to associate such accounts with desire in the motivational sense, though he agrees with L.W. Sumner [(1996), pp. 121-22] that welfare is more plausibly associated with desire in the attitudinal sense. Heathwood (Unpublished), p. 19. I agree with Sumner and Heathwood, though for different reasons.

of glamour, luxury, and leisure. The attitude of appeal, or desire in the attitudinal sense, can be responsive to the full nature of a thing and need not fix on what is showy or conventionally attractive.

Second, though it is an essential feature of something's appealing to you that you like or take pleasure in the prospect of it, the object of appeal need not involve your pleasure. This is evident from the fact that we can find appealing states of affairs that do not involve ourselves—such as things that happen well before our births, after our deaths, or in distant parts of the universe. Even when one does take pleasure in the prospect of some occurrence that involves oneself, one's own pleasure need not be involved. Dying heroically for a noble cause, taking up a second job to earn money for one's family, training for the Olympics, having the experience of being in a fist-fight, and watching a horror film are all things that can appeal to people even if they do not anticipate a pleasurable experience and believe that these things will cease to appeal to them at the time they occur.

Lastly, there is a distinction to be drawn between things that appeal to us *intrinsically* and things that appeal to us *instrumentally*. When something is intrinsically appealing or unappealing to a person, it is appealing or unappealing to her “in and of itself,” “as such,” “for its own sake,” or “in its own right.”⁴⁷ In contrast, something appeals to us instrumentally when it appeals to us in virtue of its bringing about something else that is intrinsically appealing to us and/or preventing something else that is intrinsically unappealing to us. For instance, suppose that I receive an electric shock every time a certain button is pushed. Experiencing a shock is very unappealing to me, in

⁴⁷ I draw from Zimmerman (2010). It is controversial how exactly to understand the idea of something's being desired intrinsically. I will not address this issue here, except to clarify that I am not assuming that a thing's intrinsic appeal is solely a matter of its intrinsic properties.

and of itself. The pushing of the button is also very unappealing to me but only because it leads to my being shocked. If this causal connection were severed, I would be indifferent to whether the button is pushed. The concepts of an appealing position and an appealing life pertain to what is worthy of appeal, in and of itself.

Worthiness. The concept of an appealing life pertains not to what in fact appeals to people but what is *worthy* of appeal. The concept of appealworthiness belongs to a family of ϕ -worthiness concepts, where “ ϕ ” represents some attitude, emotion, or response. This family includes the concepts of blameworthiness, praiseworthiness, noteworthiness, trustworthiness, pity-worthiness (“pitiability”), envy-worthiness (“enviability”), admiration-worthiness (“admirability”), quote-worthiness (“quotability”), and choiceworthiness. To say that someone is “admirable” or “worthy of admiration” is to say that she merits admiration and is an appropriate object of admiration. Likewise, to say that something “is worthy of appeal,” “is appealworthy,” “has appeal,” or “is appealing” is to say that it merits appeal and is an appropriate object of appeal. In contrast, to claim that something has appeal, or is appealing, *to some individual* is typically to make a psychological claim, either about what in fact appeals to her or to what she takes to be appealworthy.

It is possible that evaluative concepts are open to further analysis. In recent years, many philosophers have thought that evaluative concepts or properties, particularly those of the ϕ -worthiness form, can be analyzed in terms of reasons. A standard version of this analysis implies that S is admirable if and only if there is reason (of the right kind) to

admire S.⁴⁸ I wish to remain neutral as to whether this general style of analysis is promising. If it is, the analysis that I am proposing has the virtue of being amenable to it.

I have been talking of what is worthy of appeal without specifying whose attitude of appeal is under discussion. It might be wondered: if something is appealworthy, is it worthy of appealing to everyone, or only some people? Evaluative concepts appear to have a *subject-neutral* character.⁴⁹ For the sake of contrast, consider the concept of a reason, which is widely understood to be subject-relative. When Ali fought Frazier, he had reason to knock out Frazier. But Frazier did not have reason to knock out Frazier; he had reason to knock out Ali. Arguably, agents sometimes have different reasons that do not simply derive from some shared, overarching reason. The concept of a reason allows for this possibility. The reason relation may be helpfully thought of as a triadic relation between a fact or consideration, an agent for whom the consideration is a reason, and the attitude or action that there is reason to have or perform.⁵⁰ Most evaluative concepts seem to be different. As Jussi Suikkanen writes, “Evaluative properties such as goodness are ‘monadic’, non-relational properties. They can be ascribed to objects merely in virtue of the objects themselves.”⁵¹ One typically calls a performance excellent, a painting beautiful, a meal delicious, a joke hilarious, a person despicable, and a vacation appealing without relativizing these claims to individuals. When we do explicitly relativize such

⁴⁸ The parenthetical clause is inserted to avoid the so-called *wrong kind of reasons problem*. Without the clause, the analysis may be problematic. Suppose that an evil demon will torture you if you do not admire S. Some people consider this fact to be a reason for you to admire S, though it clearly has no bearing on whether S is worthy of admiration. For an introduction to this problem, see Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen (2004).

⁴⁹ For a discussion and critique of the idea of agent-relative value, see Schroeder (2007a).

⁵⁰ Cf. Schroeder (2007b), Section 1.4.

⁵¹ Suikkanen (2009), p. 773. There appear to be exceptions to the general rule. The concept of enviability seems to be implicitly subject- or perspective-relative. If A is better off than B, and B is better off than C, then it may be true that B is enviable relative to C, though B is not enviable relative to B or A. Allan Gibbard has pointed out to me that trustworthiness may provide another such case. To use his example, if someone is a spy in war and not a double-agent, she might be trustworthy with respect to the people she is spying for, though not with respect to the people she is spying on.

claims, they seem to lose their evaluative meaning. Thus, if one states that a joke is “hilarious to Andy,” this seems to indicate either that Andy is greatly amused by the joke or that Andy believes the joke to be hilarious (in the evaluative sense of being an appropriate source of amusement). These are psychological matters.

Still, perhaps sense can be made of the idea of something’s being worthy of appealing to one individual to some degree while being worthy of appealing to another individual to a greater or lesser degree. If so, this still leaves open the substantive normative possibility that there is a single ranking on possible lives that represents their comparative appealworthiness with respect to all subjects—or, at least, all subjects capable of having the attitude of appeal toward a life. Plausibly, some lives in this ranking would be worthy of appealing to us to a greater or lesser extent, while others would be worthy of being unappealing to us to a greater or lesser extent. Perhaps some would be, on balance, worthy of neither appealing to us nor being unappealing to us.

In this dissertation, I will work under the assumption that there is, in principle, a single ranking on possible lives—and, more broadly, on possible positions—that represents their comparative appealworthiness with respect to anyone capable of having the attitude of appeal toward them. The motivation for this assumption comes more from the concept of prudential value than the concept of appealworthiness. Our concept of prudential value is clearly subject-relative in one sense. We talk of what is good or lucky *for you* or *for me*. This subject-relativity is captured by the analysis insofar as it addresses the appeal of being in *your* position or *my* position. But our concept of prudential value does not appear to have a further layer of subject-relativity. If it did, it should make sense to think that something is good for Mary relative to Joe, that an event is lucky for Mary

relative to Joe, that Mary made a self-sacrifice relative to Joe, and that Mary is pitiable or pitiful relative to Joe. Because these thoughts all seem quite strange, it is *prima facie* plausible that our concept of prudential value lacks this further layer of subject-relativity. It is the concept of what is good or bad for an individual *simpliciter*, rather than the concept of what is good or bad for an individual relative to an individual. If the appealing life analysis is plausible under my working assumption, this is evidence that ordinary thinking about prudential value presupposes the existence of a single ranking on positions that captures their appealworthiness and that applies uniformly to all relevant subjects. This is one of many ways in which the appealing life analysis, if correct, is illuminating.

That said, the appealing life analysis has an attractive degree of flexibility. Suppose that, contrary to initial appearances, our concept of prudential value has a deeper layer of subject-relativity. In that case, we may abandon my working assumption and allow that, in some circumstances, being in one's shoes has greater or lesser appeal relative to one subject than it does relative to another. Alternatively, suppose that the concept of prudential value lacks a further layer of subject-relativity but that we identify compelling reasons to reject my working assumption—say, on metaphysical grounds. The ordinary concept of prudential value would then seem inapplicable to the real world and could be abandoned for some other concept—perhaps the concept of what is good or bad for a subject relative to a subject. In either of these scenarios, the appealing life analysis could be adapted to suit our purposes.

One final clarification about appealworthiness pertains to things that *contribute to* or *detract from* the appeal of a thing. Presumably, something's being worthy of being appealing to us, or unappealing to us, to a greater or lesser extent is determined (in a non-

causal way) by certain features or properties of the thing.⁵² Some of these features contribute to its appealworthiness, and some features detract from its appealworthiness. Together, the contributing and detracting features of a thing determine the overall level of its appealworthiness and can figure in an explanation of why the thing is appealworthy to that extent. When a thing is worthy of being very unappealing, this is presumably because the detracting features in some way dominate the contributing features. When a thing is worthy of great appeal, it is just the other way around. Whenever a thing is worthy of being neither appealing nor unappealing, neither the detracting features nor the contributing features dominate. There is certainly more work to be done in clarifying how to understand these features, but that is not work that I will undertake in this dissertation.

Lives and Positions. To have one's life, I have said, is to be in that individual's position or shoes in the broadest possible sense. It is to fully occupy her place in the world. To illustrate my meaning, consider Aristotle of the actual world. What is involved in having Aristotle's life, as I am conceiving of it? Existing at all of the times that he existed and no others, having his ancestors, having his precise physical and mental constitution from birth to death, having all of the potential and opportunities that he had, thinking everything he thought, observing everything he observed, doing everything he did, inspiring everyone he inspired and will inspire in the future, and so on. All of these things have a place in a complete account of Aristotle and his place in our world. To have

⁵² I assume that the feature of x's being worthy of appeal to the extent that it is plays no role in determining the extent to which x is worthy of appeal.

Aristotle's life is to be Aristotle and have all that is true of Aristotle be true of oneself.⁵³

Or, we might say, it is to have all of his properties and no others.

Lives in this very broad sense must be our focus if we are to do justice to the range of prudential concerns and views of the good life that people are able to have. This point may be illustrated with an extreme case. Imagine a very quirky mathematician who is obsessed with large prime numbers and yearns to live in a universe where the total number of atoms is a prime.⁵⁴ If she comes to believe that she is indeed living in such a universe, she could be excited about this and count herself lucky. It might make her less disposed to complain about how crappy her life is. She might even be moved to proclaim the good tidings to others since they too have the good fortune of living in such a universe. Needless to say, this is an incredibly bizarre thing to view as a benefit, so much so that it may strike us as *psychologically* unintelligible that a person could hold this view. But there are less bizarre examples of the same general form. People can judge themselves lucky or fortunate to live in a world where justice is possible or beauty exists, even if they encounter little justice or beauty in their own experience. They can think that we are unlucky and pitiable for living in a world in which genocides will continue to occur, there is no supernatural order to the universe, or the human species will eventually go extinct. I am not insinuating that these are plausible substantive views about prudential

⁵³ To be clear, I am not claiming that it is possible in any sense for someone other than Aristotle to have Aristotle's life. This is not necessary, I take it, for one to think that being in his shoes has appeal, to fancifully wish to be him, or to desire that one's own life resemble his as far as possible.

⁵⁴ I adapt this example from Shelly Kagan (1998), p. 37, who asserts that this fact about prime numbers has "nothing to do with me or my life." Kagan is invoking some more restrictive sense of "life." If I say that I want you "out of my life" or "to be a part of my life," the relevant sense of "life" might exclude states of affairs that fall beyond the scope of (i) my awareness, (ii) my day-to-day awareness, (iii) what I care about, (iv) what I care about most centrally, (v) what causally impacts me to a significant extent, or (vi) the story that might naturally be told about me and my life. These notions of a life are too restrictive for our purposes. (These uses of "life" resemble talk of "one's world," as when Gladys Knight sings, "I'd rather live in his world / Than live without him in mine.")

value, but they do seem intelligible. The lesson to be drawn from these examples, I believe, is that virtually any fact about a person, including facts involving seemingly remote features of the world one occupies, may be intelligibly viewed as having prudential value or disvalue.⁵⁵ We require a life concept that permits this.

One can talk of being in another's shoes or place or position in more limited respects. I judge that it is extremely unappealing to be in Oedipus' shoes in the moments following his discovery of his acts of patricide and incest. I also consider it less appealing to be in his shoes in the years following this discovery than the years leading up to it. These are judgments about the appeal of being in his shoes at particular moments and over extended time periods. Likewise, we seem able to talk of being in one's shoes in particular respects that do not encompass one's total situation at a moment or time period. Upon learning that Mary's spouse is cheating on her, I might think, "I'd hate to be in her shoes" or "I'm so glad that I'm not in her position." This might mean only that I would hate to be in her position in the sense of having my partner cheat on me—not that I would hate to be fully in Mary's shoes at this moment or to have Mary's life as a whole. After all, it is possible that both Mary's overall situation at this time and Mary's life as a whole are quite appealing, in spite of the spousal infidelities. In sum, talk of being in one's position or shoes may pick out more limited aspects of a person's life. It is often clear from the context which aspects those are.

4. The Analysis

I propose that the concepts of prudential value and disvalue may be fruitfully

⁵⁵ Granted, it is not intelligible to think that it is intrinsically good for a person that nothing is intrinsically good for her. There are many exceptions.

analyzed as follows:

Prudential Value. x is good for $S = x$ contributes to the intrinsic appealworthiness of being in S 's position.

Prudential Disvalue. x is bad for $S = x$ detracts from the intrinsic appealworthiness of being in S 's position.

Drawing on this analysis, intrinsic and instrumental prudential value may be distinguished as follows:

Intrinsic Prudential Value. x is intrinsically good for $S = x$, in and of itself, contributes to the intrinsic appealworthiness of being in S 's position.

Instrumental Prudential Value. x is instrumentally good for $S = x$, in virtue of bringing about something else that is intrinsically good for S and/or preventing something else that is intrinsically bad for S , contributes to the intrinsic appealworthiness of being in S 's position.

In addition, we may distinguish what is prudentially valuable for an individual in the broadest possible sense—on the whole, I will say—and what is prudentially valuable for an individual at a time:

Prudential Value on the Whole. x is good for S on the whole = x contributes to the intrinsic appealworthiness of having S 's life.

Prudential Value at a Time. x is good for S at $t = x$ contributes to the intrinsic appealworthiness of being in S 's position at t .

These distinctions give rise to interesting questions about prudential value. For instance, is it the case that something is good for a person only if it is good for that person at one or more times? As we will see in Chapter II, this issue is relevant to solving the Timing Puzzle. These distinctions also provide a way to sharpen our focus for theoretical purposes. Substantive accounts of prudential value are often offered as proposals of things that have intrinsic prudential value and disvalue for individuals on the whole. Ben Bradley has recently suggested that an adequate account of prudential value should also

account for facts about well-being and intrinsic prudential value and disvalue at a time.⁵⁶ These distinctions enable us to make these claims.

For ease of reference, I will refer to the above cluster of analyses and distinctions somewhat loosely as the *appealing life analysis of prudential value*. Our next task is to assess the plausibility of this proposal.

5. Desiderata Revisited

The appealing life analysis has many virtues. In this section, I offer reasons for thinking that it satisfies the desiderata that were laid out in Section 2. Further virtues of the analysis are presented in my later discussion of its rivals (Section 6), its implications for the relationship between prudence and morality (Section 7), and the Timing Puzzle (Chapter II).

Terminology and Slogans. The appealing life analysis fits quite well with our ways of talking about prudential value. To illustrate this, imagine a person whose primary motivation is to make her life as appealing as possible. In all situations, she is attuned to the ways in which circumstances might conspire to render her life more or less appealing to have and consciously aims to promote the appeal of her own life. Such a person, it seems natural to say, is always seeking *personal gain* and *benefits*, is always *looking out for herself*, and perpetually wants to know *what's in it for her* and *what she can get out of* the situation. This person seems *self-interested*.⁵⁷ At the other extreme, imagine a person who loves someone else and is constantly acting in ways that, by her

⁵⁶ Bradley (2009), pp. 18-30.

⁵⁷ We should not attribute *selfishness* to this individual without knowing more about her conception of the appealing life. After all, one can believe that serving others, in and of itself, contributes to the appeal of having a life.

own lights, make absolutely no contribution to the appeal of her own life but do render that other person's life more appealing to have. It is difficult to see how this person could be construed as aiming to secure personal gains, trying to avoid losses to herself, looking out for herself, or seeking out what's in it for her.

The analysis also accommodates our talk of "the good life" and "the good death." Advertisers who invoke the former phrase wish to convince consumers that their product will enhance the appeal of their lives in some way, that life with this product is worthy of greater appeal than life without it. Discussions in the medical and bioethics literature about "the good death" address various aspects of death and dying, such as where patients spend their final days, how much pain they experience, what they know about their medical condition, what attitudes they have toward their impending death, and how much autonomy they exercise in determining their medical treatment and the circumstances of their death. The appealing life analysis accommodates the thought that these features may be prudentially relevant. They are all features of one's life that can be intelligibly thought to impact the appeal of being in one's position during her final days.

Conceptual Distinctions. The appealing life analysis preserves the conceptual distinctions outlined in Section 2. First, there is an important difference between the degree to which *having a life* is worthy of appeal and the degree to which *a life's existing* is either good *simpliciter* or appealworthy. The former concept, which is our subject, pertains to how appealing it is to be the bearer of a life and thereby occupy a certain position in the world, whereas the latter pertains to how appealing or good *simpliciter* the world is in virtue of including such a life. These are distinct topics, and our assessments of them can diverge. One may think the world is better or more appealing because it contains moral saints and

martyrs without thinking that it is appealing to *be* one of them. And one can think that having a life hooked up to an experience machine is worthy of greater appeal than a more ordinary life without thinking that the world would be more appealing or valuable on account of people opting for virtual reality. Thus, the appealing life concept is distinct from the concepts of an *impersonally good life* and a *life such that its existence is appealworthy*.

The concept of an appealing life is distinct from the concepts of a *morally good life*, an *aesthetically good life*, a *religiously good life*, a *perfectionistically good life*, and an *admirable life*. Imagine a great artist and spiritual leader who struggles with severe depression throughout her life. It might be true that such a person is admirable, represents a kind of moral, aesthetic, and religious ideal, and exemplifies human excellences to an extraordinary degree. Even so, one could intelligibly think that her life is less appealing to have than a more conventional, happier life. The concept of an appealing life is also distinct from that of a *beautiful life*. Arguably, a tragic life, like that of Goethe's young Werther, is beautiful to behold though hardly appealing to have.

Finally, the concept of an appealing life is distinct from the concept of a *choiceworthy life*. In the real world, one never has the opportunity to choose a life in its entirety—at least, not a life in the broad sense that I am invoking. But we may choose a type of life as an ideal to strive for, and we certainly make practical choices that rule out our having certain lives. As it happens, people often think that a certain kind of life is the most choiceworthy ideal, or that some action is choiceworthy, without thinking that pursuing that sort of life or performing that action will maximize the appeal of being in

one's own shoes. Indeed, most of us believe that choosing the choiceworthy sometimes puts a person in a less appealing position.⁵⁸

Love and Concern, Pity and Envy. The appealing life analysis preserves the relationship between prudential value and the attitudes of care, love, pity, and envy. Let us begin with concern and love. Insofar as you love or care for someone, you want what is good for her. On the appealing life analysis, this truism is interpreted as follows: insofar as you love or care for someone, you want things that contribute to the appeal of being in her position. This latter claim needs to be true if the appealing life analysis is to preserve the relationship between care, love, and prudential value.

There appears to be an intimate connection between concern for someone and a preference for the appeal of being in that person's position. It seems impossible that a person—call her A—who loves or cares deeply about someone, B, could be indifferent to what A believes will make it more or less appealing to be in B's shoes and, more broadly, to have B's life. Even if A's love is intermingled with feelings of jealousy, hatred, ill will, and the like, we would expect to find ambivalence rather than indifference. Furthermore, there is a certain proportionality between the degree of concern for an individual and the strength of one's preference for the appeal of being in her position. If A cares deeply about B and has only mild concern for C, we will expect A to be more motivated to promote the appeal of B's life than C's life—at least where the potential alterations to

⁵⁸ Presumably, choiceworthiness bears an intimate relation to either desirability in the motivational sense or desirability in the attitudinal sense. Which it is will depend on what is meant by "choice" and, perhaps also, on certain facts about human psychology. If we understand choice in terms of desire in the motivational sense, the appealing life concept is distinct from the concept of a choiceworthy life. If we understand choice in terms of desire in the attitudinal sense, they are still distinct. Suppose it is the case that, in facing a choice, human beings always or typically choose whatever appeals to them the most. This is perfectly compatible with the possibility that what appeals most to people is not always what they believe will maximize the appeal of being in their own shoes.

their lives are sufficiently similar. These points apply even where A and B are the same person. As it happens, people tend to have strong preferences regarding things that positively or negatively impact the appeal of their own lives, and this is presumably explained by the fact that people typically have a robust sense of self-concern or self-love. Whenever people are indifferent to what they think makes their lives less appealing to have, the most natural explanation of this fact is that they do not care about themselves. And where their preferences are very weak, we will conclude that they must not care about themselves very much.

In contrast, it is not at all surprising when one who has no love or concern for another (including basic moral concern) is entirely indifferent to what makes that individual's life less appealing to have. It might, however, be surprising if such a person *did* have preferences about this. Suppose that you encounter a person who is passionately opposed to modern industrialized factory farming because she wants farm animals to lead appealing animal lives. She clarifies that she wants this for its own sake, and not merely as a means to some other end. She then adds that she does not have any concern for animals. This story becomes puzzling at the final step. In the absence of this final comment, it would have been quite natural to assume that this woman cares deeply for animals. Once it is clarified that she does not care about them, it is far from obvious what could explain her preference that they have appealing lives.

This last insight suggests another way of testing whether the appealing life analysis preserves the relationship between care, love, and prudential value. Given the fact that people tend to care deeply about themselves, we may examine what intrinsic preferences people have regarding their own lives and see whether this lines up with their

views about the appealing life. Many of the items standardly proposed as components of the good life are both things that many people take to be appeal-enhancing features of lives and things they intrinsically want to secure for themselves. These items include pleasure and the absence of pain, a sense of satisfaction with their life, certain forms of achievement, autonomy, knowledge, and healthy relationships. Barring an alternative explanation of why people have these preferences, this provides further evidence that the appealing life analysis accommodates the relation between care and prudential value.

The appealing life analysis appears to preserve the connection between pity, envy, and prudential value. Pity is an emotional response to the perception that an individual is doing poorly, whereas envy is an emotional response to the perception that someone else is doing better than oneself. Accordingly, an individual is pitiable, in the sense of being worthy of pity, if and only if that individual is in fact doing poorly on the whole or in some limited respect. One is envious from the vantage point of another individual, S, if and only if that individual is in fact doing better than S, on the whole or in some limited respect. These relationships hold between pitiability, enviousness, and the appeal of one's position. Consider Willy Loman, the lead character in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, whose life is characterized by broken dreams, dysfunctional relationships, and self-deception. Few would deny that, in virtue of these features, Willy's life is a very unappealing one. It is also very plausible that Willy Loman, were he to exist, would be a pitiable soul in virtue of those same features. Likewise, it would be only natural to envy someone whose life is, by your lights, more appealing to have than your own life. The very features of this person's life that render it more appealing to have than your own will be the features that make envy an intelligible response and vindicate a judgment of

enviability from your standpoint. These observations suggest that the relationship between pity, envy, and prudential value are preserved by the appealing life analysis.

Well-Being. The appealing life analysis provides a way to characterize the notion of well-being. One's level of well-being is the degree to which that individual is doing or faring well. On the appealing life analysis, this is the degree to which being in that individual's position is worthy of appeal, in and of itself. Drawing on this characterization, we may distinguish between well-being at a time and well-being at a time period as follows:

Well-Being at a Time. S is doing or faring well at t = S is in a position at t such that it is intrinsically appealworthy to be in that position.

Well-Being at a Time Period. S is doing or faring well at time period $t_1 - t_n$ = S is in a position at $t_1 - t_n$ such that it is intrinsically appealworthy to be in that position.

Likewise, the appealing life analysis is compatible with distinguishing narrower forms of well-being. For instance, emotional and financial well-being may be characterized as follows:

Emotional Well-Being. S is doing or faring well emotionally = S is in a position (with respect to S's emotional condition) such that it is intrinsically appealworthy to be in that position.

Financial Well-Being. S is doing or faring well financially = S is in a position (with respect to S's financial condition) such that it is intrinsically appealworthy to be in that position.

The appealing life analysis accommodates our various ways of talking about well-being.

Luck, Selfishness, Self-Sacrifice, Paternalism. A final set of desiderata for an analysis of prudential value pertains to the concepts of luck, selfishness, self-sacrifice, and paternalism. Drawing upon the rough proposals offered in Section 2, these concepts may be analyzed as follows:

- *Luckiness (Good Luck)*. S is lucky, or has good luck, in virtue of $x = x$ is due to factors beyond S's control and contributes to the appeal of being in S's position.
- *Selfishness*. S is selfish = S is strongly motivated out of self-concern to promote (what S takes to be) the appeal of being in S's position and S has insufficient regard for others.
- *Self-Sacrifice*. S engages in self-sacrifice or makes a sacrifice = S voluntarily acts in a way that S correctly believes will detract from the appeal of being in S's position.
- *Paternalistic Action*. S acts paternalistically toward T = S acts with the aim of contributing to (what S takes to be) the appeal of being in T's position against T's wishes.

The pertinent question is whether these characterizations are as plausible as my initial characterizations in Section 2, which employed the standard prudential value terminology. This may be tested at an abstract level by questioning the truth of each analysis in both directions. For example, suppose that some event has rendered me lucky. Without knowing more, may we safely conclude that this event contributes to the appeal of being in my position? In the other direction, suppose that some event, which occurs due to factors beyond your control, contributes to the appeal of being in your position. Are you thereby lucky in virtue of this event? I believe that both questions may be answered affirmatively. For it is hard to see how one could be lucky on account of something that does not contribute to the appeal of being in one's position, or even detracts from its appeal. It is equally difficult to see how it could fail to be good luck for a person that factors beyond her control bring about something that contributes to the appeal of being in her position. Similar tests may be applied for the other analyses.

Less abstractly, we may examine situations in which we are inclined to make a judgment about luck, selfishness, self-sacrifice, or paternalism and then see whether the

judgment squares with the relevant party's views about the appealing life.⁵⁹ Imagine that you are driving through a neighborhood late at night when a dog suddenly runs out in front of your car before you have time to brake or swerve. You hit it and, in a matter of moments, it dies. In this scenario, it is uncontroversial that the dog is very unlucky. But are you yourself unlucky? I can attest, both from my own experience and from speaking with others, that people sometimes deem themselves unlucky on account of inadvertently killing an animal on the road. What bothers them is not merely the fact that the whole ordeal was distressing. After all, part of the explanation of *why* it was distressing for them lies in their realization of the role they played in bringing about the animal's death. This fact, in and of itself, bothers them. They are not indifferent to being entangled in a causal process that leads to calamity, even if they consider themselves entirely blameless. If the proposed analysis of luck is on target, these people believe that playing this role in the death of an animal is something that detracts from the appeal of being in their position. Others will deny this, insisting that inadvertently killing an animal does not, in and of itself, have any negative effect on the appeal of being in one's own position. Presumably, such people will also reject the suggestion that doing so, in and of itself, renders one unlucky. That is just what the appealing life analysis predicts.

The considerations reviewed in this section provide evidence that the appealing life analysis satisfies the desiderata for an analysis of prudential value. It appears to fit well with the standard prudential terminology, to yield a natural way of analyzing the concept

⁵⁹ With judgments about luckiness and unluckiness, the relevant party is the one making the judgment. With selfishness and paternalism, it is the agent's views about the appealing life that matter. In the case of self-sacrifice, both the agent's and evaluator's views about the appealing life are relevant.

of well-being and related notions, and to preserve the relationships of prudential value with various attitudes and other concepts.

6. Three Rivals

There are competing ways of analyzing the idea of prudential value. In this section, I introduce three rivals and explain why they fail to meet these desiderata and why the appealing life analysis does not fail in the same ways.

The Perfectionist Analysis. One rival to the appealing life analysis analyzes the prudentially good life as the *perfectionistically good life*, a life in which the bearer of that life is a good instance or specimen of its kind or exemplifies the excellences characteristic of its particular nature. This yields the following analysis of prudential value:

Perfectionist Analysis. x is good for $S = x$ contributes to the degree to which S exemplifies excellences characteristic of S 's nature.

Many philosophers reject this analysis. For instance, in providing a taxonomy of substantive accounts of prudential value, Daniel Haybron includes *eudaimonistic* (*'nature-fulfillment'*) theories, which "all share the same fundamental motivation: the idea that well-being consists in nature-fulfillment."⁶⁰ By treating these as substantive accounts, Haybron implicitly rejects the perfectionist analysis of prudential value. The implication is this: if the prudentially good life and the perfectionistically good life are one and the same, this is a substantive normative truth, not a conceptual one. Likewise, in his influential book on perfectionism, Thomas Hurka insists that perfectionist moral

⁶⁰ Haybron (2008), pp. 34-36.

theories should not be understood in terms of prudential value; rather, these theories pertain to the “good human life” or the “intrinsically desirable life.”⁶¹

Still, it is not uncommon for the terms “*eudaimonia*” and “flourishing” to be used interchangeably with terminology standardly associated with prudential value (e.g. “the good life,” “what is good for a person,” “well-being,” “self-interest,” “one’s good”), and the former terms are often associated with the perfectionistically good life.⁶² Thus, in his recent book on prudential value, Richard Kraut maintains that, when S is a living thing, “S is doing well” entails and is entailed by “S is flourishing.”⁶³ In Kraut’s usage, a “life of flourishing” refers, more or less, to a perfectionistically good life.⁶⁴ This invites the question: might prudential value be effectively analyzed as that which contributes to one’s having a perfectionistically good life?

The answer is no. To see the problem with the perfectionist analysis of prudential value, consider a scenario described by L. W. Sumner:

[Y]ou can easily imagine yourself at the end of your life, taking pride in your high level of self-development but none the less wishing that you had got more out of your life, that it had been more rewarding or fulfilling, and thinking that it might have gone better for you had you devoted less energy to perfecting your talents and more to just hanging out and diversifying your interests. Whatever we are to count as excellences for creatures of our nature, they will raise the perfectionist value of our lives regardless of the extent of their payoff for us. There is therefore no logical guarantee that the best human specimens will also be the best off, or that their underdeveloped rivals will not be faring better.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Hurka (1993), pp. 17-18. Based on Hurka’s discussion elsewhere, I believe that he has in mind either the objectively good life, the choiceworthy life, or the life that is desirable in the motivational sense.

⁶² Granted, philosophers use the term “flourishing” in a variety of ways. This is nicely illustrated by a recent anthology titled *Human Flourishing*, wherein the term is used to refer to a life high in well-being (by Richard Arneson), a perfectionistically good life (by Thomas Hill and Stephen Darwall), a life that is most worth living (by Lester Hunt), and a comprehensively good or worthwhile life (by Thomas Pogge). See Paul, Miller, and Paul (1999).

⁶³ Kraut (2007), p. 132.

⁶⁴ This is evident at Kraut (2007), p. 136n4, where he clarifies his reasons for favoring the term “developmentalism” over “perfectionism.”

⁶⁵ Sumner (1996), p. 24.

This imagined example nicely illustrates the fact that, from the standpoint of self-concern and wanting to get something out of one's own life, one can wish that one's life had been different though it would have involved less perfectionist value. We can wish the same for our loved ones. Likewise, it seems perfectly intelligible to judge that an individual who is closer to an ideal specimen is worse off on the whole than someone else who leads a more ordinary life. This reveals that the perfectionist analysis is too restrictive to characterize prudential value, for it rules out intelligible substantive possibilities.

Another problem for the perfectionist analysis of prudential value is that it cannot make sense of certain inter-kind comparisons of prudential value. Recall Mill's famous assertion: "It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied."⁶⁶ Suppose that we are comparing a pig that is an exemplary representative of its kind with a human who is but a mediocre specimen of her kind. Would it be incoherent for one to claim that the run-of-the-mill human is better off than the ideal pig, or that the human gets more out of her life than the pig does out of its life? Clearly not. And yet, if to claim that one is better off than another just is to make a claim about the degree to which these individuals are fulfilling their respective natures, little sense can be made of the claim. Consider another type of judgment. It appears to be a popular sentiment among enthusiasts of the so-called "transhumanism" movement that it will be good for individual people if enhancements enable them to transcend their human nature in certain respects. If to think that something's being good for a human is to think that the thing promotes the degree to which that human is fulfilling its human nature or instantiating excellences characteristic of human nature, transhumanists would be thinking the following incoherent thought: one's transcending her humanity will promote the degree to which she is an exemplar of

⁶⁶ Mill (1998), p. 57.

human excellence. Clearly, this is not what they are thinking. The perfectionist analysis has trouble making sense of certain ordinary judgments about prudential value.

In contrast, the appealing life analysis handles these cases easily. To judge that the mediocre human gains more from life than the exemplary pig does is to judge that having the human's life is worthy of greater appeal than having the pig's life. To think that it would be good for us to transcend our humanity in various ways is to think that doing so would contribute to the appeal of being in our position. Furthermore, the appealing life analysis seems to fare much better in terms of Sumner's thought experiment. For it is difficult to imagine someone looking back on her life, wishing that she had gotten something more out of her life by opting for a life that would have been less appealing to have, just as it is hard to imagine wishing, out of love for someone else, that his or her life might have been less worthy of appeal.

The Locative Analysis. Another rival seeks to analyze prudential value in terms of value *simpliciter*. G. E. Moore is the pioneer of this approach. Famously, Moore could only find two interpretations of the "good for me" locution that struck him as sensible:

In what sense can a thing be good *for me*? It is obvious, if we reflect, that the only thing which can belong to me, which can be *mine*, is something which is good, and not the fact that it is good. When, therefore, I talk of anything I get as "my own good," I must mean either that the thing I get is good, or that my possessing it is good.⁶⁷

Moore's proposals may be characterized as follows:

Locative Analysis (1). x is good for S = x is good *simpliciter* and possessed by S.

Locative Analysis (2). x is good for S = S's possessing x is good *simpliciter*.

⁶⁷ Moore (1903), pp. 98-99.

On the face of it, these are unpromising analyses of prudential value inasmuch as each implies that the only things that are good for us are things that may be possessed by us. We commonly judge events or states of affairs to be good or bad for individuals, and these are not the types of things to be *received* and *possessed* by individuals, at least not in the ordinary sense of these terms.

There is a nearby analysis that avoids this problem. Following Moore's lead, Donald Regan and Talbot Brewer have proposed that the only clear sense in which something could be "good for you" is by being an impersonally or objectively valuable occurrence arising in your life, as opposed to the lives of others.⁶⁸ This suggests a modification of Locative Analysis (1):

Locative Analysis (1'). x is good for S = x is good *simpliciter* and occurs in S's life.

This version of the locative analysis looks more promising. The restriction that x is possessed by S is replaced by the restriction that x is something that occurs in S's life. Presumably, this analysis does not invoke the same sense of "life" that figures in the appealing life analysis. To see why, take any aspect of the world, G, that is good *simpliciter*. It is true of each life-bearer in the world that she occupies a world including G. This is a fact about her and is thereby part of her life in the inclusive sense that interests me. If this is sufficient for G to qualify as occurring in one's life, the result is that anything in the world that is good *simpliciter* will be good for everyone in the world. Thus, it would turn out that what is good for one individual is good for all individuals. If the same story is told for what is bad *simpliciter*, the result would be that everyone in the world is equally well or badly off. Needless to say, this is an unacceptable result for an

⁶⁸ See Brewer (2009), Chapter 8, and Regan (2004). For a more complex locative analysis, see Fletcher (2012b).

analysis of prudential value. Either a more restrictive notion of a life or more restrictive standards for occurrence within a life are required.

Fortunately, it is not necessary to work out these details of the analysis to see that any version of the locative analysis will be flawed. The problem on which I will focus is that, in judging that something is good or bad for an individual, we are not committed to thinking that there is, respectively, any goodness *simpliciter* or badness *simpliciter* in the mix.⁶⁹ Consider three examples of what appear to be intelligible views. (i) It is possible to think that pleasure as such is good *simpliciter* wherever it exists,⁷⁰ but some people believe that pleasure taken in an act of cruelty is an exception to the general rule. Thus, Mark Lance and Margaret Little write: “Pleasure always counts in favor of a situation—well, except when it’s the sadist’s delight in her victim’s agony, where her pleasure is precisely part of what is wrong with the situation.”⁷¹ Presumably, Lance and Little reject the view that pleasure is always good *simpliciter*. This view may be intelligibly coupled with the view that pleasure is nonetheless always good for the one who is experiencing it. That is, one can intelligibly believe that the sadist’s pleasure is good for the sadist though not a good thing. (ii) Retributivism supplies another example. As Shelly Kagan describes this view,

Retributivists...hold that some people deserve to suffer. If one is sufficiently evil and morally blameworthy, then it may in fact be a good thing if one undergoes a loss of well-being. When it comes to morally evil people, an increase in well-being is of no positive intrinsic value at all; it is, instead, an intrinsically bad thing: increasing the well-being of evil individuals decreases the overall goodness

⁶⁹ Guy Fletcher suggests that the locative analysis might be revised to apply to what is *pro tanto* good *simpliciter* (i.e. good *simpliciter* in some respect), rather than good *simpliciter*. Fletcher (2012b), pp. 19-20. But even this weakened form of the locative analysis does not escape the objection I am raising.

⁷⁰ Jeremy Bentham held something like this view, claiming that it is only upon the *principle of asceticism*, a principle Bentham vehemently rejected, “that the most abominable pleasure which the vilest of malefactors ever reaped from his crime would be to be reprobated, if it stood alone.” Bentham (1789), II.4.

⁷¹ Lance and Little (2006), p. 307.

of an outcome.⁷²

A retributivist can believe that deserved punishment is bad for the punished party though it is not in any way bad *simpliciter*, and that an individual's receiving undeserved rewards can be good for the rewarded party but not in any way good *simpliciter*. (iii) Throughout human history, there have been individuals who consider members of some other group to be inferior and who have virtually no regard for them. Such individuals can think that there is nothing bad *simpliciter* about the suffering or death of members of this group and, at the same time, grant that their suffering or death is bad for them. In sum, there are relatively straightforward problem cases for the locative analysis. My purpose is not to suggest that the aforementioned substantive views are plausible. But they are intelligible. The locative analysis cannot accommodate these views about prudential value.

Another means of illustrating the inadequacy of the locative analysis is to replicate the method used by Sumner to highlight the difference between perfectionist and prudential value. Imagine an aged artist and philanthropist reflecting on his past, convinced that all of the achievement and meaningfulness in his life came at too high a cost. Had he been less driven to excel in his art and aid his fellow humans, he might have devoted more time to the pursuit of casual hobbies and the development of intimate relationships. He regrets his choices. This man could intelligibly think that he would have been better off living the less extraordinary life though it would have contained less that is good *simpliciter* and would have been less valuable on the whole. Those who care about him might also wish that he had lived the less driven life.⁷³

⁷² Kagan (1998), p. 56.

⁷³ I have been criticizing the locative analysis as a conceptual analysis. It deserves mention that the locative analysis often appears to be endorsed in the spirit of finding the closest thing in reality that corresponds to our ways of talking about what is "good for" individuals. See, for instance, Fletcher (2012b), p. 5.

As it happens, the cases that prove troubling for the locative analysis are not problems for the appealing life analysis. The latter analysis allows for the full gamut of judgments that I have considered. One may intelligibly judge that the sadist's pleasure contributes to the appeal of having the sadist's life without making the world a better place. The retributivist or the bigot can intelligibly think that some individual's suffering or death detracts from the appeal of having that individual's life and that this is a bad or neutral thing from the perspective of the universe. The appealing life analysis makes space for these views.

The Rational Care Analysis. A third noteworthy rival comes from Stephen Darwall, who seeks to analyze prudential value as follows:

Rational Care Analysis. x is good for S = if S is worthy of care or concern, then there is reason to want x out of concern for S .⁷⁴

Unlike the previous two rivals, Darwall's analysis seems to provide a conceptual truth, or something close to it.⁷⁵ Let us focus on the biconditional implicit in the analysis:

Rational Care Biconditional (1). x is good for S \leftrightarrow if S is worthy of care or concern, then there is reason to want x out of concern for S .

Moving first from left to right, suppose that having knowledge of whether or not supernatural beings exist is good for me. Then, the following seems correct: if I am a person who is worthy of concern, there is reason to want, out of concern for me, that I have this knowledge. This conditional is plausibly true because, as noted in Section 2,

⁷⁴ This formulation is adapted from Darwall (2006), p. 642, where Darwall clarifies his analysis in response to Fred Feldman (2006). I have made some minor adjustments to save the analysis from counterexamples. Darwall reports that his analysis was inspired by a conversation with Elizabeth Anderson and by remarks made in Anderson (1993).

⁷⁵ I hedge on this claim because, as stated in Section 3, I wish to remain neutral on the issue of whether evaluative concepts may be analyzed in terms of the concept of a reason. If they cannot, Darwall's analysis may be revised accordingly. For instance, "there is reason to want x out of concern for S " might be replaced with " x is worth wanting out of concern for S ." Having made this clarification, I will simply ignore this issue in what follows.

caring for someone involves wanting for what is good for that person, and (by supposition) having knowledge of whether supernatural entities exist is good for me. Moving in the other direction, suppose the following is true: if Nelson is worthy of anyone having concern for him, then there is reason for anyone to want him to be famous, out of concern for him. Given that, it seems plausible that being famous is good for Nelson. Again, having care or concern for someone involves wanting what is good for the person. Assuming that there is nothing else that we are led to want for a person out of concern, it is difficult to see how the conclusion that being famous is good for Nelson can be avoided. I conclude that Rational Care Biconditional (1), or something close to it, is a conceptual truth. We cannot expect that it will rule out intelligible judgments about prudential value.

Yet, even if the biconditional implicit in the rational care analysis is true, the question remains whether the analysis is an illuminating explication of our concept of prudential value. Like certain other critics of the rational care analysis, I believe that it is not.⁷⁶ To illustrate my own worry, notice that my explanation of why Rational Care Biconditional (1), or something close to it, is plausibly a conceptual truth appealed to the fact that caring involves wanting what is good for a person (and does not involve wanting anything else). Care may involve more than this. Darwall suggests that it “involves a whole complex of emotions, sensitivities, and dispositions to attend in ways that a simple desire that another be benefited need not.”⁷⁷ That is surely correct, but the other aspects

⁷⁶ See, for instance, the symposia on the rational care analysis in *Philosophical Studies* 130 (2006) and *Utilitas* 18 (2006), as well as Fletcher (2012a), pp. 86-90.

⁷⁷ Darwall (2002), p. 2. Cf. Jaworska (2007).

of the attitude do not appear to be playing any crucial role in securing the truth of Rational Care Biconditional (1). Consider this modification of the biconditional:

Rational Care Biconditional (2). x is good for $S \leftrightarrow$ if S is worthy of an attitude that involves wanting what is good for S (and does not involve wanting anything else), then there is reason to want x out of this attitude directed toward S .

Rational Care Biconditional (2) drops explicit mention of care but preserves the crucial elements of Rational Care Biconditional (1) that enabled us to see that it is true. It also does nothing to deepen our understanding of what prudential value is, for it only instantiates a more general conceptual truth:

Rational Care Biconditional (3). x bears relation R to $S \leftrightarrow$ if S is worthy of attitude A that involves having attitude B toward things that bear R to S (and does not involve having attitude B toward anything else), then there is reason to have attitude B toward x out of attitude A directed toward S .

Rational Care Biconditional (2) is true in virtue of instantiating this more general form. It provides no special insight into the nature of the good-for relation, just as

x is upsetting to $S \leftrightarrow$ if S is worthy of an attitude that involves wanting what is upsetting to S (and does not involve wanting anything else), then there is reason to want x out of this attitude directed toward S .

provides no insight into the upsetting-to relation.

The worry is this: even if Rational Care Biconditional (1) is a conceptual truth about the relationship between prudential value and careworthiness, it does nothing to deepen our understanding of what it is for something to be good for us. We perceive that Rational Care Biconditional (1) is true because we perceive its connection to Rational Care Biconditional (3), which is a general conceptual truth that tells us nothing about the distinctive nature of prudential value or the attitude of care. Of course, we perceive this connection because we already believe that care involves wanting what is good for a

person and does not involve wanting anything else. But one can believe this, and thereby know enough to see that Rational Care Biconditional (1) is true, without understanding what prudential value is. Thus, the rational care analysis fails to deepen our understanding of prudential value.

I find this line of objection to the rational care analysis compelling, but I also believe that Darwall has made an important discovery. The discovery is a method for examining and critically reflecting on our substantive views about prudential value that does not depend upon our having a clear grasp of the concept of prudential value. Prudential value is related to concern as well as various other attitudes—love, malice, envy, pity, etc. True enough, our understanding of what these attitudes are is bound up with, and in some cases analyzable in terms of, our concept of prudential value. But there are alternative ways of engaging with these attitudes. It is often possible for us to pick out those whom we pity, envy, love, and are concerned about, and to identify when we have these attitudes, without any explicit thought of what is good or bad for the individuals in question. From there, one may observe what one is led to want out of these attitudes and question the appropriateness of wanting those things. Plausibly, this process will sometimes prove useful for the purpose of discerning and critically examining our views about the prudentially good life. This is the lesson that Darwall has taught us about care.

The value of analyzing prudential value is largely instrumental. We seek an analysis of prudential value, not so much for its own sake, but because having this clearer grasp of the concept of prudential value will help us figure out what is, in fact, good or bad for us and what constitutes the good life. In my view, what Darwall frames as an analysis is better characterized as an alternative means of reaching this ultimate goal. It is

not a rival analysis but a *rival to analysis*—a way of reaping indirectly the benefits that an effective analysis might bring more directly. By drawing our attention to the attitude of concern and what we are led to want out of it, and prodding us to think about who is worthy of concern and what we should want out of concern, Darwall has highlighted an alternative means of gaining insight into the topic of the good life. There are other such means of achieving this. For example, we may explore and question our views about prudential value by examining our views about pitiability and enviability, about rational ill will and rational hatred, and about luck, selfishness, self-sacrifice, and paternalism. None of these indirect methods for thinking about the good life is a rival to the appealing life analysis. They are allies in the cause of investigating the topic of prudential value. Indeed, I have even relied upon them to test the adequacy of the appealing life analysis of prudential value.

The appealing life analysis avoids the charge of circularity or un informativeness. The attitude of appeal is not a “welfare-regarding” attitude in the way that care, ill will, pity, and envy are. States of the world can appeal to us though they have no bearing on what is good for us or anyone else. Imagine two possible planets, neither of which would ever be perceived. The first is filled with objects that are cobalt blue, the second with objects that are neon orange with lime green spots. The existence of the unperceived, neon-orange-with-lime-green-spots world appeals to me far less than the existence of the unperceived, cobalt blue world. This has nothing to do with prudential value. By explicating the concept of prudential value in terms of the attitude of appeal, we break free from the network of distinctively “prudential” attitudes and concepts. Since the other key elements of the appealing life analysis (life, worthiness) are clearly not to be

analyzed in terms of prudential value, there is no reason to suspect this analysis of being circular or uninformative. In the next section and Chapter II, we will see various ways in which this analysis is informative.

7. Prudence and Morality

The appealing life analysis has implications for the relationship between prudence and morality that might seem to conflict with a view that has been very popular among philosophers. According to this view, acting and being moral in paradigmatic ways is not, in and of itself, good or bad for a person. My purpose in this section is to present this view, provide some evidence of its popularity, distinguish two interpretations of it, and challenge the interpretation that conflicts with the appealing life analysis.

First, a qualification. I will not address the relationship between prudence and *morality* since it is controversial what morality is. Fortunately, it is far less controversial that certain actions, dispositions, and traits qualify as paradigmatically “moral.” These include keeping one’s promises in cases where it is only a mild inconvenience to do so, refraining from causing pain to others for the sake of one’s own amusement or curiosity, showing respect to others, being disposed to help strangers in need, being disposed to tell the truth, being kind, and being fair. I will use the phrase *being moral* to refer to one’s performing such actions or possessing such dispositions or traits.

The Morality-Excluding View. Virtually everyone agrees that being moral often affords a range of *instrumental* benefits—causing one to feel good, fostering one’s ability to have healthy relationships with others, helping one to avoid legal and social sanctions, and so on. But many philosophers have thought that being moral is not good or bad for the agent

in the most direct and fundamental way. They endorse what I will call the *morality-excluding view of prudential value*:

Morality-Excluding View. Being moral is not, in and of itself, good or bad for the one who is moral.⁷⁸

In the present context, I intend for the phrase “in and of itself” to screen off certain ways of thinking that being moral can be non-instrumentally good for us. Some views of prudential value allow that instances of being moral can non-instrumentally benefit a person provided that they instantiate some other non-moral feature of a life. For example, proponents of desire-fulfillment accounts of prudential value typically hold that helping a stranger in need is non-instrumentally good for you provided that it is something you or your idealized self want for its own sake. Likewise, achievementists, who believe that achieving things has non-instrumental prudential value, will allow that helping a stranger in need is non-instrumentally good for you, though only insofar as it constitutes an achievement. In my terminology, this is not to allow that helping a stranger in need is, in and of itself, good for a person. For, on these views, what ultimately has prudential value is desire-fulfillment (for the desire-fulfillment theorist) and achievement (for the achievementist). These things have prudential value even if they align with being amoral or being immoral. Likewise, subjectivists hold that being moral in some way benefits the person who is moral only if that individual or her idealized self holds the right kind of favorable attitude toward the action. This is not to allow that being moral benefits a person in the most direct and fundamental way. To think that being moral is, in and of itself, good for a person is to think that being moral, on its own, benefits a person irrespective of what else it brings about and irrespective of whether it instantiates or is

⁷⁸ For brevity’s sake, I will give less attention to the possibility that being moral might be non-instrumentally *bad* for us.

conjoined with some other feature of one's life.

Brad Hooker draws the same distinction in different words. After presenting an argument that the attainment of moral virtue is one kind of achievement, he continues:

We might wonder whether we could not have reached a more cheering conclusion. More specifically, while not forgetting that being morally virtuous is a kind of achievement, we might wonder whether moral virtue has a less subordinate, less attenuated place on the list. We might ask whether it also has a place on the list at the same level as knowledge, friendship, pleasure, and achievement. Does moral virtue stand shoulder to shoulder with these other values? Let me mark the status on the list that knowledge, friendship, pleasure, achievement, and perhaps the appreciation of beauty have by referring to them as *fundamental categories of prudential value*.⁷⁹

Phrased in Hooker's language, the morality-excluding view states that being moral is not a *fundamental category of prudential value*. This is another way of saying that being moral is not, in and of itself, good or bad for a person.

Indications of the morality-excluding view's popularity are plentiful. I will mention three. First, the figure of the egoist, understood to be one who always seeks to maximize the prudential value of her own life, has loomed large in philosophical ethics as an imagined critic of morality who requires convincing as to why she ought to buy into the moral way of life. Sumner considers egoism and amorality to be so tightly linked that he doubts that there are many pure egoists in the real world: "The pure egoist...seems to be exclusively the creature of textbooks in ethics or economics; with the possible exception of psychopaths, the type is virtually non-existent in real life."⁸⁰ In addressing the "egoistic challenge to morality," philosophers rarely bracket off from discussion those egoists who think that being moral is a fundamental category of prudential value.

⁷⁹ Hooker (1996), pp. 148-49. I have benefited from Hooker's discussion of these issues.

⁸⁰ Sumner (1996), p. 2.

Relatedly, responses to the question “Why be moral?” that appeal to prudential value tend to emphasize the instrumental benefits of being moral.

Another indication of the popularity of the morality-excluding view is the way in which philosophers standardly categorize considerations as *moral reasons* or *prudential reasons*. If volunteering at a soup kitchen would bring you joy, the standard way of assessing the situation is this: the fact that volunteering would bring you joy is a prudential reason to do it, the fact that you would help others is a moral reason to do it. The implication is that the fact that you would help others is not also a prudential reason to do it.

A final indication of the popularity of the morality-excluding view is the fact that many philosophers endorse subjectivism about prudential value.⁸¹ According to subjectivism, something is intrinsically good for you only if you have, or under specified ideal conditions would have, a favorable attitude toward it; something is intrinsically bad for you only if you do or would have an unfavorable attitude toward it. This gives rise to the distinction between subjective and objective accounts of prudential value. In Sumner’s words,

Subjective theories make our well-being logically dependent on our attitudes of favour and disfavour. Objective theories deny this dependency. On an objective theory, therefore, something can be (directly and immediately) good for me though I do not regard it favourably, and my life can be going well despite my failing to have any positive attitude toward it.⁸²

Objective accounts are often rejected as a class precisely because they posit such “objective goods,” things that supposedly benefit an individual whether or not that

⁸¹ See, e.g., Railton (1986b) (though see my qualification at note 8); Sumner (1996); Rosati (1996); Feldman (2004), p. 19; Crisp (2006), p. 122; and Dorsey (Forthcoming), Section 3. Further references appear in Rosati (1996), p. 298n2.

⁸² Sumner (1996), p. 38.

individual, or her idealized self, would have a favorable attitude toward it. As Shelly Kagan puts the complaint,

friends of an objective account of well-being seem forced to accept the unappealing claim that I could be extremely well off, provided that I have the right objective goods in my life, even though these things hold no appeal for me, and I am, in fact, utterly miserable. Understandably enough, the desire to avoid this implausible implication is enough to leave many running back to hedonism...⁸³

The popularity of subjective accounts of prudential value is another indication of the popularity of the morality-excluding view. Subjectivists think that *nothing at all*, including being moral, is intrinsically good or bad for a person unless the person, or an idealized version of the person, has the relevant favorable or unfavorable attitude toward the thing. Insofar as it is possible to be moral without endorsing or appreciating this for its own sake, the subjectivist is committed to denying that being moral in these ways can, in and of itself, benefit the one who is moral.⁸⁴

There are at least two ways of accepting the morality-excluding view. One is to think that the morality-excluding view is a conceptual truth and that those who deny it must be conceptually confused in some way. The other is to think that the morality-excluding view is a substantive normative truth, which can be intelligibly denied. It is not always obvious whether a given proponent of the morality-excluding view endorses it in

⁸³ Kagan (2009), p. 254. As I have characterized objective accounts, Kagan's reasoning only applies to some objective accounts. An objective account that gives a central place to happiness need not imply that it is possible for a person to be miserable and extremely well off. In any case, Kagan's line of response is one instance of the standard way of critiquing objective accounts.

⁸⁴ There probably are some paradigmatic instances of being moral that involve one's appreciating or endorsing the action, disposition, or trait in question. Perhaps this is true of the act of apologizing. But, plausibly, it is not true for many other ways of being moral. Refraining from torturing someone for the sake of one's own curiosity, for instance, is plausibly the moral thing to do, whether or not one is alienated from this omission, just as torturing someone for the sake of one's own curiosity is morally wrong even if one is alienated from this action. Likewise, it is plausible that kindness and fairness qualify as moral traits even in cases where the kind or fair individual fails to appreciate these qualities or feels alienated from them. The upshot is that a commitment to subjectivism about prudential value requires a commitment to the morality-excluding view with respect to many ways of "being moral."

the first or the second way. In any case, the appealing life analysis is only incompatible with the first way of endorsing the view. It implies that one can intelligibly think that keeping promises, being kind, being disposed to help one's neighbor, and the like are intrinsic benefits to the one who is moral in these ways. This is an implication of the appealing life analysis because one can intelligibly think that being moral is something that, in and of itself, contributes to the intrinsic appealworthiness of a life. Since the morality-excluding view's being a conceptual truth would be at odds with the appealing life analysis, let us consider some reasons for thinking that it is not a conceptual truth.

The Morality-Excluding View As a Conceptual Truth. The morality-excluding view states that being moral is not intrinsically good or bad for us. There is good reason to believe that this view is not a conceptual truth and that one can intelligibly think that being moral is intrinsically good for us. Some evidence for this is provided in Section 4, but this may also be appreciated without appealing to the appealing life analysis.

Consider first some paradigmatic cases of prudential thinking: the child dreaming about what she will be when she grows up, the student deciding whether to pursue a particular major or career, the bachelor deliberating about whether he wishes to marry one day, the woman deliberating about whether to have children in the future.⁸⁵ These are situations in which people will often take up the prudential standpoint, motivated by self-concern, attuned to "what's in it for them" and wanting to "get something out of" their lives. There are exceptions, of course. Individuals in the described scenarios sometimes

⁸⁵ "Prudential thinking" is meant to encompass a broader range of activities than just prudential deliberation, which is essentially tied to choice and action. It is possible to engage in *prudential wishing* (wishing for things that are good for you or wishing to be in the shoes of someone who is better off than you) and *prudential lamenting* (regretting or lamenting things that are bad for you). Correspondingly, benefactive thinking includes benefactive deliberation, benefactive wishing, and benefactive lamenting. Thanks to Elizabeth Anderson for helpful discussion of this issue.

feel constrained by concern for others or a sense of obligation to promote some cause or to act on behalf of others.⁸⁶ A child or student might be concerned to make money or develop skills to support ailing loved ones. A bachelor-philanthropist might be concerned that marriage would interfere with his charity projects. A woman contemplating having children might be worried about overpopulation. Each of these individuals might be unable to do what they think is best for themselves. Let us set aside such cases and focus our attention on individuals in such scenarios who indulge in self-concern, seeking what is best for themselves.

Prudential thinking in these situations need not exclude moral considerations. A child can revere Gandhi, Ida B. Wells, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Paul Farmer, or some other moral hero and dream of one day following in his or her footsteps. She can dream of performing similar noble actions and having the hero's moral qualities. As Robert Nozick once observed, "we want to *do* certain things" and "we want to *be* a certain way, to be a certain sort of person."⁸⁷ People often hope for themselves and their loved ones that they develop into admirable individuals, and being moral is one common ground for admiration. Accordingly, people often give weight to being moral when looking out for themselves in important, life-shaping decisions. For instance, the student who is considering a career in philosophy might believe that perks or benefits of the job include having constant intellectual stimulation, acquiring knowledge, helping students to become better thinkers, and publishing work that will make a contribution to the betterment of society. These last two items have a fairly moral cast but need not be taken

⁸⁶ This qualification does not imply that the prudential standpoint necessarily excludes being moral. To the extent that self-concern calls for fulfilling obligations or acting out of love for others, acting in these ways will not constrain it.

⁸⁷ Nozick (1974), p. 43.

into account with any reluctance or out of feelings of obligation. They need not be seen as costs or as involving sacrifice. Being moral, on its own, can be and often is valued from a prudential perspective.

The attitudes of pity and envy provide further evidence that being moral may be viewed as intrinsically good for us, for it is apparent that these are not morality-excluding attitudes. A person can be pitied or judged pitiable for having poor moral character or being unable to have concern or respect for their fellow human beings. Granted, it is sometimes difficult or impossible to feel pity for the person who is a scoundrel or has committed morally heinous acts. Hostile attitudes like resentment, anger, and hatred can dominate. And, as noted in Section 2, we often fail to pity people whom we believe to be responsible for what is bad for them. People say things like “Don’t pity him—he brought it upon himself.” Still, when one reflects on the origins of the immoral person’s character, the naturing and nurturing beyond her control that led her to her current state, it is often possible to feel pity for even the most wretched of villains. And even if one does not *feel* pity, one will sometimes judge such a person pitiable.⁸⁸ As for envy, moral actions, traits, and dispositions may be coveted as easily as anything else. Since being moral is something that people often value when engaged in prudential thinking, it should come as no surprise that people may envy others who possess the moral character traits or have done good deeds that they wish were a part of their own lives.

Consider next a special case of selfishness. I once posed the question to some friends in the public health field: would you rather it be the case that you contribute to

⁸⁸ Brad Hooker discusses the pity test (he calls it the “sympathy test”) as applied to being moral. See Hooker (1996), pp. 149-55. Hooker is confident that many people would not feel sorry for an unscrupulous person on account of her lacking moral virtue. I suspect that most morally decent people, once they focus on the origins of the unscrupulous person’s behavior, would either pity her or consider her pitiable on account of her immorality.

improving the health conditions of people living in some developing country, or that someone else does a somewhat better job of it and you contribute nothing to helping others? One of them preferred the first option. She preferred not merely that certain humanitarian causes would be advanced but that *she* would contribute to their advancement, even if this meant that another's life would lack this feature and that the causes would suffer slightly. I suspect—and, for the sake of argument, let us suppose—that my friend's preference would have persisted even if she believed that the humanitarian life would be worse for her than the non-humanitarian life, taking into account her degree of life-satisfaction, her happiness, the authenticity and depth of her relationships, her achievements, the extent to which her desires are fulfilled throughout her life, etc. In other words, let us suppose that my friend preferred to have the humanitarian life even on the condition that this life would be worse for her, on balance, along the non-moral dimensions commonly associated with prudential value. (We may suppose that, on the non-humanitarian option, she would predictably come to readjust her goals, desires, and values.) This seems like a preference one could have, but what are we to make of it? It is not what impartial Morality would prescribe, for the humanitarian cause would suffer if she were to live the humanitarian life. Nor could it be a selfishly or prudentially motivated preference if the morality-excluding view is true, for we have supposed that the non-humanitarian life contains a greater balance of non-moral prudential goods. Yet, there clearly was something selfish about my friend's preference. It was evident that she thought she stood to gain something by serving others, and she wanted this for herself though the very problems that she wished to address would be better served if she chose the non-humanitarian life. I submit that this is a kind of

“otherish” selfishness—*altruistic selfishness*, we might call it—that can be accommodated once it is allowed that being moral, in and of itself, may be intelligibly viewed as an intrinsic benefit.

Rejecting the morality-excluding view as a conceptual truth allows us to make sense of corresponding judgments about luck, self-sacrifice, and paternalism. Imagine that my friend finds herself in the scenario of choosing between the humanitarian life and the non-humanitarian life. She might deem herself *unlucky* if factors beyond her control suddenly cut her off from the humanitarian life. Alternatively, if she herself decided to pass up the humanitarian life, she could believe this to be a *self-sacrifice*. But suppose that, upon deciding to make this sacrifice, a friend who tends to view the world much as she does takes steps, against her wishes, to prevent her from making this sacrifice and does so out of love for her. This seems *paternalistic*. Recognizing that being moral can be intelligibly viewed as a benefit, in and of itself, allows us to make sense of these judgments. Thus, there are reasons, independent of the appealing life analysis, to deny that the morality-excluding view is a conceptual truth.

The Morality-Excluding View as a Substantive Truth. The perennial philosophical question “Why be moral?” is open to different interpretations, at least one of which is “What does being moral do for *me*?” Put differently, the question is “In what ways, if any, is being moral good for me?” We are well positioned to see what a response to this question might include. Being moral might be (i) instrumentally good for us, (ii) non-instrumentally though not in and of itself good for us, or (iii) good for us, in and of itself. These are all substantive normative possibilities.

The third possibility, which would provide the most direct reconciliation of

prudence and morality, has not been taken very seriously by most philosophers.⁸⁹ Indeed, it often goes unmentioned. In some cases, the failure to address this possibility might be explained by the fact that one (mistakenly) endorses the morality-excluding view as a conceptual truth. In other cases, the explanation may be that one accepts the morality-excluding view as a substantive normative truth. The appealing life analysis makes conceptual space for this commitment and sheds light on what it really amounts to. To accept the morality-excluding view as a substantive normative truth is to think that it is intelligible but incorrect to hold that being moral, in and of itself, contributes to or detracts from the appeal of being in one's situation or of having one's life.

In addition to providing insight into the matters above, the appealing life analysis may reveal that the morality-excluding view, understood as a substantive normative view, is less popular than the philosophical literature might lead one to accept. Imagine a possible life in which, on some occasion, you seriously injure another person for the sole purpose of satisfying your own curiosity. Does acting in this way, in and of itself, detract from the appeal of having that life? Many people will think so. Or imagine two lives: in the first, you are a kind person; in the second, you are not. All else being equal, is one life more appealing to have than the other? Questioning of this sort will reveal that many of us believe that the presence and absence of moral traits, dispositions, and behaviors are things that can, in and of themselves, contribute to or detract from the appeal of being in one's position. If that is correct, and if the appealing life analysis is correct, the view that being moral is sometimes an intrinsic benefit to the one who is moral is not merely an

⁸⁹ There are exceptions, of course. Most prominently, scholars of ancient ethical theory and ethicists influenced by the ancient ethical tradition often treat the possession of other-regarding virtues, such as benevolence, justice, loyalty, fidelity, and sensitivity, as possible components of the good life. Accordingly, Aristotle is sometimes interpreted as a kind of egoist. See, for example, Gottlieb (1996), and Irwin (2007), Chapters 6-9.

intelligible view. It appears to be a somewhat popular view.

8. Subjectivism and Objectivism

The appealing life analysis may provide insight into the debate between subjectivists and objectivists. In the Introduction, it was asked whether this is a conceptual or a substantive normative disagreement. If the appealing life analysis of prudential value successfully captures the topic that subjectivists and objectivists have been debating, we have our answer: it is a substantive disagreement. For it is intelligible to think that being moral contributes to the appeal of being in one's shoes only if it resonates with the individual in some specified way. Likewise, it is intelligible to deny this. This point generalizes. For any feature of a life, it is intelligible to believe or deny that it contributes to or detracts from the appeal of being in one's position or of having one's life only if the person in question does or could have the specified favorable or unfavorable attitudes toward it. The subjectivist will believe this. The objectivist will deny it.

Understood in this way, I suspect that most people reject subjectivism. Recall the example of a possible life in which, on some occasion, you seriously injure another person for curiosity's sake. I suggested that many people will view this as something that, in and of itself, detracts from the appeal of having this life. But what if seriously injuring the person for curiosity's sake *resonates* with you, or your idealized self, in whatever way the subjectivist requires? And what if you and your idealized self have an *unfavorable* attitude toward refraining from injuring the person? Speaking for myself, this added feature does nothing at all to weaken my initial conviction that being immoral in this way

detracts from the appeal of having this life. If anything, it only reveals to me a *further* feature of the life that detracts from its appeal. If many or most people share this assessment, the appealing life analysis reveals that both the morality-excluding view and subjectivism are less popular and, arguably, less plausible than a review of the recent philosophical literature on prudential value might lead one to think.⁹⁰

If all of that is correct, why has subjectivism enjoyed such popularity in philosophical circles? That is a very large question and will not admit of any simple, unified answer. But, in the spirit of moving toward an answer, it deserves mention that there are rather striking parallels between the appealing life analysis and desire-fulfillment accounts, which are generally taken to be the quintessential subjectivist accounts. First, the appealing life analysis and desire-fulfillment accounts both incorporate an attitude that answers to the name “desire.” The attitude of appeal, I have suggested, just is desire in the attitudinal sense. Something appeals to you just in case you have a desire, in the attitudinal sense, for that thing. It is not always clear whether proponents of desire-fulfillment accounts have been focused on desire in the motivational sense or desire in the attitudinal sense. In any case, they have not been far off from the attitude of appeal.

Second, the appealing life analysis and certain popular desire-fulfillment accounts both achieve a certain distance from our actual desires. The appealing life analysis pertains to *appealworthiness* rather than what actually appeals to people. Similarly, the most popular desire-fulfillment accounts pertain not to the fulfillment of one’s actual desires, but to the fulfillment of desires that an individual *would* have if she were in

⁹⁰ Granted, subjectivism is a strong thesis. Even if full-blown subjectivism is false, it may still be true that what resonates with an individual has prudential significance in many cases.

specified ideal conditions. Some philosophers have thought that evaluative concepts or properties may be reduced to or understood in terms of the affective responses of idealized subjects.⁹¹ If that is correct, this brings idealized desire-fulfillment accounts closer to the idea of appealworthiness.

Finally, the way that some philosophers have sought to restrict desire-fulfillment accounts has brought them even closer to the appealing life analysis. To see the motivation for restriction, notice the range of things that one can desire. I might desire that Venice never be destroyed, or I could hope that a stranger I meet on a train will eventually succeed in life, though we will never cross paths again.⁹² Barring special circumstances, the fulfillment of these desires does not seem as if it would be good for me. If a desire-fulfillment account implies that the fulfillment of *any* of our desires is good for us, it will have implausible results. So, the class of desires needs to be restricted in a way that will generate results that fit closer to our intuitions about prudential value. Derek Parfit discusses a restricted desire-fulfillment account that “appeals only to desires about our own lives.”⁹³ Peter Railton, in his discussion of an idealized desire-fulfillment account of one’s good, suggests that it is not any desire of A+ (that is, A’s idealized self) that is relevant to one’s good but “what he would want to want were he to step into A’s shoes”—that is, “were he to find himself in the actual condition and circumstances of A.”⁹⁴ Compare these restrictions with the appealing life analysis. According to this analysis, prudential value is not to be understood in terms of what is appealworthy in general. Nor does it pertain to the appealworthiness of a life’s existing. It has to do with

⁹¹ See, for instance, Firth (1952), Lewis (1989), and Smith (1989).

⁹² I draw both of these examples from Parfit (1984), p. 151.

⁹³ Parfit (1984), p. 494.

⁹⁴ Railton (1986a), p. 174. See note 8.

the appealworthiness of being in one's shoes and, most broadly, of having one's life. While there are certainly differences between the appealing life analysis and the proposed restrictions on the desire-fulfillment account, there are also striking similarities. Given the three parallels that I have highlighted, it would not be all that surprising if some philosophers have been drawn to desire-fulfillment accounts, at least in part, because they are not so far from an attractive analysis of prudential value.

I began this section with the claim that the appealing life analysis *may* provide insight into the debate between subjectivists and objectivists about prudential value. It is quite possible that the appealing life analysis does not capture the idea that has interested some or most philosophers who have written about prudential value. Indeed, if it is correct that the appealing life analysis reveals objectivism to be an intelligible and even popular substantive normative view and reveals subjectivism to be rather unpopular, one might think that it explicates the topic that has interested some or all objectivists while failing to capture what subjectivists have had in mind. (Recall from the Introduction that some philosophers already suspect that objectivists and subjectivists are talking about different subjects.) This may be so. I must leave it to those who favor subjectivism—as well as those who favor objectivism—to say whether or not the appealing life analysis is an explication of the concept that has interested them.

In any case, the desiderata for an analysis of prudential value presented in Section 2 are grounded in features that are widely associated with the concept of prudential value by objectivists and subjectivists alike. If the appealing life analysis successfully satisfies these desiderata, it is likely that whatever topics objectivists and subjectivists have had in mind will bear an intimate relationship to the concept of the appealing life. The appealing

life analysis of prudential value does not close off the possibility that there are other interesting, if not more interesting, normative notions in the vicinity. In fact, it may even help us articulate what they are.

9. Conclusion

Prudential value, I have argued, may be understood in terms of the appealing position and the appealing life. The appealing life analysis fits well with various terms and slogans that are commonly associated with prudential value, preserves the conceptual distinction between the prudentially good life and other types of good lives, provides a way to analyze the concepts of well-being, luck, selfishness, self-sacrifice, and paternalism, and preserves the connection between prudential value and related attitudes. It is also non-circular and informative. In addition to illuminating the relationship between prudential value and the attitude of appeal, it teaches us something about the divide between prudence and morality and the disagreement between subjectivists and objectivists. In short, it is a very promising analysis. In the next chapter, I employ this analysis to interpret and examine the Timing Puzzle.

CHAPTER II

Solving the Timing Puzzle

1. Introduction

There is a puzzle about prudential value that arises from three sources. First: certain kinds of things—which, arguably, includes death, prenatal events, posthumous events, and global features of a life—seem intrinsically good or bad for us in some circumstances. Death also seems instrumentally good or bad for us in some circumstances.⁹⁵ Second: it seems plausible that something is good or bad for an individual only if it is good or bad for her at some particular time. Third: there appears to be no plausible story as to particular times when the above items—call them *hard cases*—are good or bad for us in the specified ways. Taken together, these facts are puzzling. For we cannot coherently believe that the hard cases can be good or bad for us, that there are no times at which they can be good or bad for us, *and* that nothing is good or bad for us unless it is so at one or more times. At least one of these beliefs must be rejected, but which one? This is the *Timing Puzzle*. Solving it involves finding an acceptable way to avoid this inconsistency.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Something is *intrinsically good or bad* for a person just in case it is good or bad for her, in and of itself, independently of what else it might bring about or prevent. Something is *instrumentally good* for a person just in case it is good for her in virtue of bringing about something that is intrinsically good for her and/or preventing something that is intrinsically bad for her. Likewise, something is *instrumentally bad* for a person just in case it is bad for her in virtue of bringing about something that is intrinsically bad for her and/or preventing something that is intrinsically good for her.

⁹⁶ An alternative framing recognizes multiple *timing puzzles*, one for each hard case. I will just talk of one puzzle that applies to these hard cases, with the understanding that there is room for substantive disagreement about whether all of these are hard cases and whether other hard cases exist.

Corresponding to the three sources of this puzzle are three pure strategies for solving it. The *first strategy* involves denying that the hard cases have prudential value or disvalue after all. The *second strategy* involves claiming that some things are good or bad for us though not at any particular times, and that the hard cases fall into this category. The *third strategy* involves identifying one or more times at which the hard cases can be good or bad for us. It is also possible to pursue a mixture of these strategies.⁹⁷

This chapter introduces another virtue of the appealing life analysis of prudential value: it provides an interpretation of the Timing Puzzle that is illuminating in various ways and moves us closer to finding an effective solution to the puzzle. As we will see, this analysis speaks against certain moves that philosophers have made in trying to solve the puzzle and sheds light on new possibilities for pursuing the third strategy. My purpose is not to defend a particular solution to the Timing Puzzle as much as it is to provide arguments concerning the form that an adequate solution should take.

In the first portions of the chapter, I will explicate and discuss the Timing Puzzle without drawing upon the appealing life analysis. Sections 2-4 review some possible motivations for the three sources of the Timing Puzzle, and Sections 5 and 6 critique some attempted employments of the first and second strategies. In Section 7, I reinterpret the Timing Puzzle in light of the appealing life analysis. I then revisit and assess the prospects of the three strategies in light of this new interpretation in Sections 8-10.

⁹⁷ For example, one might argue that prenatal and posthumous events cannot be good or bad for us at all (first strategy), that death can be good or bad for us though not at times (second strategy), and that there are times at which global features can be good or bad for us (third strategy).

2. Motivation for the First Source

To appreciate the motivation for the first source of the Timing Puzzle, only a rough grasp of the concept of prudential value is required. Recall some of the core features that were reviewed in Section 2 of the previous chapter. Prudence is concerned with personal gains and losses. A thing has prudential value for you or is good for you just in case it is a benefit or personal gain for you. It has prudential disvalue for you or is bad for you just in case it constitutes a loss or cost to you. Prudential value is what we attend to if we are “looking out for” ourselves, wanting to “get something out of” a situation, and concerned to know “what’s in it for us.” Things that are good or bad for a person are things that contribute to or detract from her well-being, or how well she is doing or faring. Prudential value is what we want for ourselves out of self-concern or self-love and what we want for others out of love or concern for them. It is also related to the attitudes of pity and envy and to the concepts of luck, selfishness, self-sacrifice, and paternalism.

Given these features, it is evident that there is an impressive range of things that people take to have prudential value or disvalue. Consider four examples.

Death. While sending a text message to his friend, Philip accidentally swerves out of his lane and dies in a head-on collision. Had he not died, he would have lived fully and happily for many years to come.

Prenatal events. A year before Ann was born, her grandfather committed an unspeakably heinous act.⁹⁸

Posthumous events. After her death, Johnson’s reputation is slandered.

Global features of a life. Josie’s childhood is filled with happy moments and intimate family bonds. But over the course of her life, the quality of her relationships, her level of happiness, and her general engagement with life steadily decline.

⁹⁸ To keep things simple, assume that this event made no difference to Ann’s being born.

Each of these examples involves something that many of us consider to be intrinsically bad for those involved. We will have such thoughts as “I’d hate to be in that person’s situation” or “I hope that my life isn’t like that.” We hope that it is not the case that we ourselves will die needlessly because of our own negligence,⁹⁹ that our own grandparent did something abominable, that our good name will be smeared once we are gone, or that our life is getting progressively worse along prudentially significant dimensions. We are bothered by the prospect of these things, in and of themselves, irrespective of what else they might lead to. We would count ourselves unlucky if we came to discover that these things have or will come to pass—at least, to the extent that they depend on factors beyond our control. And insofar as it is in our power to do so, we are motivated, out of self-concern, to avoid being caught in such situations. Furthermore, since most of us judge that having more years of full and happy life is a serious benefit, we consider death to be instrumentally bad for a person whenever it deprives her of this.

Not everyone will be moved by each of the examples above.¹⁰⁰ It may be that one is simply unmoved by a particular example that I have provided but would find some other example in the same category compelling. Or one might not find anything in that category to be good or bad for a person in the specified way. Readers who fall into the

⁹⁹ Here, I am not treating the event of death, on its own, as having intrinsic prudential disvalue for Philip. Rather, what is bad for him is the compound event consisting of his death and certain events leading up to it. In contrast, it is more plausible that the event of death alone is instrumentally bad for Philip. The case of Philip is doing double-duty insofar as it accommodates two ways in which one might think death is bad for a person.

¹⁰⁰ I expect that proponents of desire-fulfillment accounts of prudential value will not be moved by any of these examples. On that sort of view, the cases I have selected involve things that may be bad for a person insofar as the person or her idealized self can desire that they not occur. In other words, they can be prudentially significant *qua* objects of one’s desire. But, as I understand it, this is not to allow that these things may be good or bad for a person, in and of themselves. My suggestion is that the examples involve things that are bad for Philip, Ann, Johnson, and Josie even if these individuals and their idealized selves lack the relevant desires.

first camp should feel free to identify hard cases that are more compelling to them.¹⁰¹ Readers who fall into second camp with respect to a given category should simply ignore that category in what follows. The Timing Puzzle can arise for those who recognize only a single hard case.

3. Motivation for the Second Source

The second source of the Timing Puzzle is the thought that it seems plausible that something can be good or bad for us only if it is good or bad for us at some particular time.¹⁰² To appreciate the allure of the second source, consider this conversation:

A: “If X occurred, that would be really bad for you.”

B: “When would it be bad for me?”

A: “Well, it wouldn’t be bad for you at any moment.”

B’s question seems like a natural follow-up to A’s original claim, and A’s response to B seems quite bizarre. How can something be good or bad for a person if it is not good or bad for her at any moment? Consider two ways that A might continue. First, A might say, “X would be bad for you over the next few years, though not at any moment during those years.” Alternatively, A might say, “X would be bad for you timelessly.” The first response is rather odd. Ordinarily, when we think that something is good or bad for us at some period of time, we think that it is good or bad for us at some or all of the moments of that time period. For instance, if having a migraine is bad for me all afternoon, it is presumably bad for me at the moments of that afternoon. Likewise, if achieving certain goals is good for you this year, surely it is good for you at some or all moments of this

¹⁰¹ I am calling these “hard cases” for two reasons: they appear to be prudentially significant and there appears to be no plausible story as to particular moments when these things can be good or bad for us. Good cases will exhibit both features.

¹⁰² This thought applies to non-instrumental and instrumental prudential value alike.

year. If A's first response is odd, the second response is even odder. What does it even mean to say that something is good or bad for a person "timelessly"? How might something that is good or bad for a being that exists at times be good or bad for that individual outside of time? Many people will be drawn to the second source of the Timing Puzzle because it fits well with ordinary thinking about prudential value and because the obvious alternatives seem odd.

To see another, more theoretical motivation for the second source, we must shift our focus to the notion of well-being. An individual's level of well-being is the degree to which that individual is doing or faring well. Things that are good for you contribute to your level of well-being, things that are bad for you detract from it. It is standardly thought that something is good or bad for an individual if and only if it contributes to or detracts from that individual's level of well-being.

Well-being is widely recognized to be, in part, a momentary phenomenon. The standard picture is this. At any given moment, an existing individual of the relevant kind has a level of well-being. This level is comprehensive because it represents the degree to which that individual is doing well or poorly at that moment, all things taken into consideration. Put differently, one's well-being level at a time captures all of the ways that things are good or bad for the individual at that time.¹⁰³ Well-being levels are also intertemporally variable. How well an individual is doing tends to vary over time, being higher at some moments and lower at others, depending on various features of the world and how these relate to the individual.

¹⁰³ As noted in Chapter I, people sometimes talk of restricted forms of well-being (e.g. psychological well-being, spiritual well-being, financial well-being). However, philosophers' unqualified talk of "well-being" generally concerns net overall well-being.

But well-being is not exclusively a momentary phenomenon. As David Velleman notes, an individual can be doing well at a period of time:

A person can fare well either over an extended period or at a particular moment. We evaluate how well a person fares over an extended period when we speak of him as having a good day, a good year, or a good life, or when we speak of such a period as going well for him. We evaluate how a person fares at a particular moment when we say that he is doing well just then.¹⁰⁴

This is the distinction between *synchronic well-being* from *diachronic well-being*. Synchronic well-being is a matter of how well one is doing or faring at particular moments. Diachronic well-being is a matter of how well one fares over some time period.

What is the relationship between synchronic well-being and diachronic well-being? Consider two simple views:

Average. An individual's diachronic well-being level for a given period is the average of her synchronic well-being levels during that period.

Sum. An individual's diachronic well-being level for a given period is the sum of her synchronic well-being levels during that period.

Suppose that either Average or Sum is true. It follows that

Something contributes to or detracts from one's synchronic or diachronic well-being level only if it contributes to or detracts from that individual's synchronic well-being level at some particular time.

Now suppose that something is good or bad for a person if and only if it contributes to or detracts from that person's well-being, and that synchronic and diachronic well-being exhaust the types of well-being. It follows that

Something is good or bad for an individual only if it is good or bad for that individual at some particular time.

¹⁰⁴ Velleman (1993), p. 329.

This just is the claim underlying the second source of the Timing Puzzle. Thus, a certain conception of prudential value and well-being, coupled with Average or Sum, provides another possible motivation for the second source.¹⁰⁵

The second source of the Timing Puzzle gives rise to what I will call the *Timing Challenge*:

Timing Challenge. For any putative prudential value or disvalue, identify times at which this thing could be good or bad for an individual.

If the second source is legitimate, the Timing Challenge is a test that any genuine prudential value and disvalue should be able to pass, in principle at least. Lacking a credible story as to particular times at which something can be good or bad for us, we have grounds to doubt that it can be good or bad for us.

4. Motivation for the Third Source

The third source of the Timing Puzzle is the thought that there appears to be no plausible way to answer the Timing Challenge with respect to death (on either the intrinsic or instrumental front), prenatal events, posthumous events, or global features, despite the fact that these things strike many people as having prudential significance. This is why they are hard cases.

Pleasure and pain appear to be easy cases. Consider Ben Bradley's discussion of a painful toe-stubbing:

¹⁰⁵ There is reason to think that Sum has been the leading default view. This would explain why some philosophers who pursue the second strategy have targeted it for criticism, often giving little or no discussion of Average. See, for instance, Bigelow, Campbell, and Pargetter (1990) and Velleman (1993). In any case, whatever the motivation, many philosophers have felt the pull of the second source. This is part of the reason why the Timing Puzzle, particularly as it applies to death, has received so much attention in the philosophical literature.

In the summer of 2006 I badly stubbed my left pinky toe while walking in the dark. It hurt a lot for a little while. It hurt a fair bit for several days afterwards. After about a week, it pretty much stopped hurting. At what times was the toe-stubbing bad for me? This question seems to have an obvious answer. It was worst for me for a little while after it happened. It was bad for me, but somewhat less bad, for the ensuing week. It is not bad for me now at all.¹⁰⁶

While Bradley is explicitly focused on the times at which the toe-stubbing is instrumentally bad for him, his comments reflect the most common view about the times at which pain is intrinsically bad for a person—namely, all and only those moments at which the person is in pain. The greater the pain, the worse it is. This seems to be the obvious way to answer to the Timing Challenge with respect to pain. The same goes with pleasure. The case of pleasure and pain seems to provide the gold standard for answering the Timing Challenge: just ask yourself which times are prudentially significant and see which times jump out at you as being prudentially significant.

Things are not so straightforward when it comes to the hard cases. In these cases, either no moments leap out at us as being prudentially significant or the ones that do seem problematic. For instance, Philip's death seems instrumentally bad for him insofar as it deprives him of years of happy life, but when is it bad for him? As Shelly Kagan observes, it is not obvious when that could be:

*When is death bad for me? It doesn't seem plausible to answer by saying that it's bad for me now. Death isn't bad for me now. I'm not dead now! Maybe, then, death is bad for me when I'm dead? But that seems very hard to believe as well. I mean, when I'm dead, I won't even exist. How could anything be bad for me then? Surely you've got to exist for something to be bad for you. So, there's a puzzle about dating the badness of death.*¹⁰⁷

A similar line of thought applies to posthumous events. When is it bad for Johnson that his reputation is slandered after his death? It seems odd that it could affect how well he is

¹⁰⁶ Bradley (2009), p. 74.

¹⁰⁷ Kagan (2012), p. 213.

doing before it happens, but it seems even more odd that it could affect him once he is dead. As for prenatal events, if it is bad for Ann that her grandfather committed some atrocious deed before she was born, when is it bad for her? The only times that seem to jump out as having special significance in this case are the times at which Ann's grandfather acted. But Ann did not even exist at those times. As it was with death and posthumous events, it is not clear how something can be bad for Ann at times when she is not around. Next, when is it bad for Josie that her happiness, relationships, and engagement with life are on a steady path of decline? The deterioration of these aspects of her life is not something that occurs at a single moment. It is something that happens *over* time, not at a time. It is difficult to see how this long-term pattern affects her well-being at any particular moment. Finally, when is it bad for Philip that it was his own negligence that brought about his death? Is it bad for him while he is texting just before death, or only at the moment of death, or at some other times? It is not clear.

At first blush, it can seem that there is no satisfactory way to answer the Timing Challenge with respect to these hard cases. Combine this fact with the first and second sources and we face the Timing Puzzle. How should it be solved? Before turning to the appealing life analysis, I will review and critique some attempts that have been made to solve the puzzle *via* the first and second strategies.

5. The First Strategy: Dismissing Hard Cases

Some philosophers have endorsed the first strategy with respect to one or more of the hard cases. They implicitly or explicitly accept the legitimacy of the Timing Challenge, claim that it cannot be met with respect to certain hard cases, and conclude

that those things cannot be good or bad for us in the specified ways. Famously, Epicurus took this line regarding death. Death, he argued, cannot be bad for us at times when we are alive because death has not yet occurred, and it cannot be bad for us at times after we are dead because we are no more. Taking this argument to establish that the Timing Challenge with respect to death cannot be met, Epicurus concluded: “Death...the most awful of evils, is nothing to us.”¹⁰⁸ His reasoning also implies that posthumous events are “nothing to us.”

More recently, Ben Bradley has employed something close to the first strategy as a means of attacking hedonism’s prominent rivals.¹⁰⁹ Hedonism about prudential value is the view that states of pleasure and pain are the only things that are intrinsically good or bad for us. Its leading rivals imply that other things are intrinsically good or bad for us, such as having our desires fulfilled, achieving things, or having true beliefs. Bradley argues that there are no moments at which these compound states of affairs are plausibly good or bad for us, which implies that we cannot answer the Timing Challenge with respect to these things.¹¹⁰ Thus, Bradley endorses the third source of the Timing Puzzle with respect to these compound states of affairs. He does not explicitly endorse the second source of the Timing Puzzle in his argument. Instead, he claims that a complete account of well-being must “account for temporal facts about welfare” and that an account should tell a unified story about what determines the prudential value of moments, larger portions of a life, and lives as a whole.¹¹¹ This functions much like an

¹⁰⁸ Epicurus (1940), p. 31.

¹⁰⁹ The argument is found in Bradley (2009), pp. 18-30.

¹¹⁰ His consideration of candidate moments is constrained by an “internalist” principle that he defends, according to which the intrinsic value of a time for a person is determined entirely by the prudential value atoms obtaining at that time. See Bradley (2009), pp 18-21. For critiques of Bradley’s defense of this principle, see Johansson (Forthcoming) and Dorsey (Forthcoming).

¹¹¹ Bradley (2009), pp. 18, 28-30.

endorsement of the second source.¹¹² Based on the aforementioned considerations, and the view that we can answer the Timing Challenge with respect to pleasures and pains, Bradley concludes that hedonism outdoes its rivals.

Without delving into the details of Epicurus' and Bradley's arguments, it is evident that there is reason to be leery of the first strategy inasmuch as it leads to what many of us consider to be deeply counterintuitive conclusions. *Death and posthumous events are not, in any circumstance, good or bad for the person who dies. You gain nothing at all by having true beliefs and achieving things unless doing so leads to, or instantiates, some other type of gain.* For those who face the Timing Puzzle and are thereby inclined to affirm the prudential significance of the hard cases, these claims are hard to swallow. And if an unbridled pursuit of the first strategy leads to hedonism, the situation is even worse. Hedonism implies that there is little better that we could wish for, out of concern for ourselves, than to be immediately drugged, kidnapped, and plugged into a virtual reality "experience machine" where we will undergo extraordinarily pleasant, simulated experiences for the rest of our days.¹¹³ The sooner this happens, the better for us. Indeed, the apparent dystopia portrayed in the film *The Matrix*, in which most humans are unwittingly hooked up to experience machines for the entirety of their lives, is not far from a hedonistic utopia. If the machine-induced experiences were maximally pleasant, this could be the prudentially best of all possible worlds. The counterintuitivity of these conclusions invites serious consideration of the second and third strategies.

¹¹² Bradley seems to reject the second source as a general principle. In his later discussion of the Timing Puzzle with respect to death, he allows that there may be some timeless goods and evils. Bradley (2009), pp. 74-78.

¹¹³ Those who would find it distressing to be on an experience machine can be tricked into thinking that they are living their ordinary lives.

6. The Second Strategy: The Appeal to Lifetime Well-Being

The second strategy for solving the Timing Puzzle involves claiming that the hard cases can be good or bad for us though not at any particular moment. Some philosophers who favor this strategy appeal to the notion of *lifetime well-being*, or how well a person's life goes for her. This is generally understood to be the most comprehensive measure of how well a person is doing, capturing all of the ways in which something is good or bad for her over the course of her life.¹¹⁴ These philosophers claim that certain hard cases can contribute to, or detract from, one's level of lifetime well-being without contributing to, or detracting from, one's synchronic well-being level with respect to any time. (For convenience, I will often state this claim as follows: some things can affect lifetime well-being without affecting synchronic well-being.) In this section, I discuss and critique two ways in which philosophers have tried to employ the second strategy.

Lifetime Well-Being and the Shape of a Life. A popular line of argument for the possibility that some things can affect lifetime well-being without affecting synchronic well-being contrasts two lives with different "shapes." Here is David Velleman's presentation of the argument:

Consider two different lives that you might live. One life begins in the depths but takes an upward trend: a childhood of deprivation, a troubled youth, struggles and setbacks in early adulthood, followed finally by success and satisfaction in middle age and a peaceful retirement. Another life begins at the heights but slides downhill: a blissful childhood and youth, precocious triumphs and rewards in early adulthood, followed by a midlife strewn with disasters that lead to misery in old age. Surely, we can imagine two such lives as containing equal sums of momentary well-being. Your retirement is as blessed in one life as your childhood is in the other; your nonage is as blighted in one life as your dotage is in the other.

¹¹⁴ The most prominent examples are Bigelow, Campbell, and Pargetter (1990) and Velleman (1993). For criticisms of this view, see McMahan (2002), p. 180 and Bradley (2009), pp. 28-30.

Yet even if we were to map each moment in one's life onto a moment of equal well-being in the other, we would not have shown these lives to be equally good. For after the tally of good times and bad times had been rung up, the fact would remain that one life gets progressively better while the other gets progressively worse; one is a story of improvement while the other is a story of deterioration. To most people, I think, the former story would seem like a better life-story—not, of course, in the sense that it makes for a better story in the telling or the hearing, but rather in the sense that it is the story of a better life.¹¹⁵

Velleman claims that one may intelligibly and reasonably hold that the uphill life is prudentially better than the downhill life. This implies that certain global features of a life may be intelligibly and reasonably thought to affect lifetime well-being without affecting synchronic well-being. It also implies that calculating lifetime well-being by summing or averaging an individual's synchronic well-being levels is a mistake, for this would rule out substantive normative possibilities.¹¹⁶

This argument is problematic. Velleman's initial description of the two lives leads one to focus on such things as happiness and misery, achievements and setbacks, and fulfilled and frustrated desires. Along these dimensions, one might naturally suppose, the first life starts poorly but gets progressively better, whereas the second life begins on a high but gets progressively worse. In reaction to this initial description, many of us will think that an upward trend along these dimensions is prudentially better for a person than a downward trend. If we are inclined to think that something can be good or bad for a person only if it is good or bad for her at some moment, we will assume that these global features affect these individuals' synchronic well-being levels. Thus, if we imagine these individuals as having *equal* amounts of happiness, achievement, and desire-fulfillment over the course of their lives, we will not think that their synchronic well-being levels are equal. (Recall that synchronic well-being levels are understood to be comprehensive,

¹¹⁵ Velleman (1993), p. 331. Cf. Slote (1983), pp. 23-24.

¹¹⁶ Velleman (1993), p. 331.

capturing *all* of the ways in which things are good or bad for a person at a time.) Instead, we will think that the person with the downhill progression has a lower average and sum of synchronic well-being than the person with the uphill progression.

After providing the initial description, Velleman suggests that we can surely imagine these lives as having equal amounts of synchronic well-being. Now, are we also being asked to imagine that these two individuals have equal amounts of happiness, achievement, and desire-fulfillment? If so, then those who are inclined to think that all prudential values or disvalues affect synchronic well-being will presumably deny that they can imagine this. After all, if the two individuals have an equal level of happiness, achievement, and desire-fulfillment, and if the uphill or downhill progression of these goods is prudentially significant, and if anything that is prudentially significant impacts an individual at one or more moments, then it simply could not be the case that these individuals have equal amounts of synchronic well-being. If not, then those who are not inclined to accept Velleman's conclusion may grant that the individuals have equal synchronic well-being levels but also think that the one with the uphill life has less happiness, achievement, and desire-fulfillment. Either way, the argument does nothing at all to threaten the view that things can affect lifetime well-being only if they affect synchronic well-being.

There are at least two ways that Velleman might respond to this critique. First, he might draw upon his view, which he mentions just before giving the two lives argument, that

Intuitively speaking, the reason why well-being is not additive is that how a person is faring at a particular moment is a temporally local matter, whereas the

welfare value of a period in his life depends on the global features of that period.¹¹⁷

If how well one is faring at a time were a temporally local matter, it could not be the case that the upward or downward shape of one's happiness, achievement, and desire-fulfillment affect synchronic well-being, for these things are not temporally local. This would mean that the third strategy for solving the Timing Puzzle with regard to these global features of a life is hopeless. In that case, we must either deny that these global features have prudential significance (the first strategy) or allow that things can be good or bad for us though not at moments (the second strategy). Since the view that global features have prudential significance seems both intelligible and sensible, Velleman could insist that the second strategy provides the most plausible way of solving the Timing Puzzle with respect to these global features. In Section 10, I respond to this line of thought. In particular, I suggest that, as far as ordinary thinking about prudential value goes, how well a person is faring is *not* merely a temporally local matter, and I propose particular times at which it is bad for Ann that her happiness, engagement with life, and the quality of her relationships have a downhill shape. So, we will return to this issue.

A second response that Velleman might make is to challenge my assumption that the references to happiness, achievement, and desire-fulfillment play an important role in the argument. He could insist that these aspects of his description are not essential to the argument and are even a distraction. "Just imagine two lives with equal amounts of synchronic well-being, the first with an uphill shape, the other with a downhill shape. Described at this abstract level, surely one can reasonably, or at least intelligibly, think that it is worse for a person to have the second, downhill life. This shows that it is

¹¹⁷ Velleman (1993), p. 331. He reaffirms the view at p. 339-40.

intelligible to think that something can affect lifetime well-being without affecting synchronic well-being.” He might add: “Since the view that it is worse for a person to have a downhill rather than an uphill synchronic well-being curve *appears* to be an intelligible substantive view about prudential value, and since we have no reason to doubt that it is, we should assume that it is.” As I now wish to show, there is reason to doubt that this view is an intelligible, substantive normative position.

Consider Zack, who is an avid Charlie Chaplin fan and believes that it benefits a person to have a life resembling Chaplin’s in various ways. For example, he believes that having the same exact synchronic well-being curve that Chaplin had substantially benefits a person. Zack’s substantive view is relevantly similar to the view in Velleman’s case. Both views imply that having a synchronic well-being curve with a certain shape can be good or bad for a person, and both views seem *prima facie* intelligible. However, if Zack’s view is true, and if it is also true that something is good or bad for a person only if it affects her synchronic well-being, we run into trouble. Suppose that Jane has Chaplin’s exact synchronic well-being curve, that this is a substantial benefit to Jane (as Zack believes), and that this benefit must show up somewhere in Jane’s synchronic well-being curve. Question: Is the benefit already factored into her synchronic well-being curve or not? If it is factored in, this implies that Jane was mysteriously bootstrapped into having Chaplin’s exact synchronic well-being curve with the aid of the benefit of having Chaplin’s exact synchronic well-being curve. This is a very bizarre result. If, instead, the benefit is not factored in, this generates a contradiction. For if Jane has Chaplin’s exact synchronic well-being curve, this results in a benefit that shows up somewhere in her curve, and she thereby does not have Chaplin’s exact curve.

To avoid these absurdities, we have two options. On the one hand, we might deny that Zack's view is an intelligible substantive view after all. On the other hand, we might conclude that some things can be good or bad for a person without affecting her synchronic well-being levels. Echoing the reasoning offered above, it might be said: "Since the view that it is good for a person have Chaplin's exact synchronic well-being curve *appears* to be an intelligible substantive view about prudential value, and since we have no reason to doubt that it is, we should assume that it is an intelligible view and thereby favor the second option." I do not deny that Zack's view appears to be intelligible, but I think there is reason to doubt that it is intelligible.

As it happens, Zack also thinks that having Chaplin's exact lifetime well-being level substantially benefits a person. Suppose that Fred has Chaplin's exact lifetime well-being level, that this is a benefit to Fred (as Zack believes), and that this benefit must affect Fred's lifetime well-being level. We are in familiar territory. Question: Is the benefit already factored into Fred's lifetime well-being level or not? If it is factored in, this implies that Fred was mysteriously bootstrapped into having Chaplin's exact lifetime well-being level with the aid of the benefit of having Chaplin's exact lifetime well-being level. Again, a very bizarre result. If, instead, the benefit is not factored in, this generates a contradiction. For if Fred has Chaplin's exact lifetime well-being level, this results in a benefit that affects his lifetime well-being level, and he thereby does not have Chaplin's exact level. Once again, to avoid these absurdities, we have two options. On the one hand, we might deny that Zack's view is an intelligible substantive view about prudential value after all. On the other hand, we might conclude that some things are good or bad for a person without affecting her lifetime well-being level. Notice, however, that the

second option is not a viable option here, for lifetime well-being is a measure that is supposed to capture *all* of the ways in which things go well or poorly for us.¹¹⁸ For this reason, we should not take the second option, nor should we allow for bootstrapping or contradiction. We should take the first option and simply deny that Zack's view is intelligible after all, though it initially appeared to be.

This conclusion entails that there are some views that appear, on a first impression, to be intelligible, substantive normative views about prudential value though they are not. Zack's view about the benefit of having Chaplin's lifetime well-being level is one of them, and it bears strong resemblance to Zack's view about the benefit of having Chaplin's exact synchronic well-being curve. If the first view is not intelligible, there is reason to doubt the intelligibility of the second view. This, in turn, gives us reason to doubt the intelligibility of the shape-based views that figure in Velleman's argument. Granted, this is not a conclusive proof that views about the benefit of having a certain shape to one's synchronic well-being curve are unintelligible. But it at least shows that more argument is needed to convince us that they are not.

Lifetime Well-Being and Death. Death is another hard case that is sometimes thought to fall into the category of things that can affect lifetime well-being without affecting synchronic well-being.¹¹⁹ To illustrate this, suppose that a girl who has a high level of synchronic well-being dies unexpectedly and painlessly at the age of 10. Had she not died at this time, she would have maintained a high level of synchronic well-being and died at

¹¹⁸ Even if we did posit some further dimension of well-being, the Chaplin problem would rear its ugly head there as well.

¹¹⁹ To my knowledge, the most explicit statement of this view is found in Bigelow, Campbell, and Pargetter (1990), Section 3. These authors allow that death can also affect synchronic well-being in some cases, though only in cases where the individual has the relevant psychological attitudes about death (see Section 5).

age 70. Intuitively, the girl's death is instrumentally bad for her inasmuch as it *deprives* her of longer life involving things that would have been intrinsically good for her. This is the popular "deprivation view" of how death can be bad for us.¹²⁰ But at what times is her death bad for her? Epicurus denied that there is any particular time. Some philosophers have agreed with Epicurus on this point, but they insist that death is nonetheless bad for the girl. It affects her lifetime well-being without affecting her synchronic well-being. The level of lifetime well-being associated with her actual ten-year life, they claim, is much lower than the lifetime well-being level associated with the longer seventy-year life. Death is instrumentally bad for her because it detracts from her level of lifetime well-being; had she not died, this level would have been much higher. But death does not affect her synchronic well-being at any particular time. This view can seem attractive because it appears to solve the Timing Puzzle with regard to death without implying that death cannot be good or bad for us at all and without implying that there is some fact about how well or poorly one is doing at times after death.¹²¹

This attempt to solve the Timing Puzzle with respect to death faces a dilemma. Recall the distinction between synchronic well-being (how well one does or fares at a time) and diachronic well-being (how well one does or fares over a period of time). Is lifetime well-being simply diachronic well-being for the period of one's life, or is it something else? The dilemma is this. If lifetime well-being is just a special case of diachronic well-being, then it cannot plausibly account for the instrumental badness of death. If it is not, then it is mysterious what "lifetime well-being" refers to.

¹²⁰ An early defense of this view appears in Nagel (1979), Chapter 1.

¹²¹ Granted, there are other views that may prove attractive for the same reason. *Concurrentists* that death can affect one's synchronic well-being level only at the very moment of death. *Priorists* claim that it can affect our synchronic well-being levels at various moments while we are alive. Luper (2009), Chapter 6. I will suggest a priorist solution in Section 10.

To illustrate the first horn, recall the story about the instrumental badness of death. A girl dies at age 10 but would have lived until age 70 had she not died. For simplicity, assume that she enjoyed a constant high level of synchronic well-being until age 10 and that, had she not died, she would have had the same high level of synchronic well-being throughout the remainder of her life. The lifetime well-being level associated with the seventy-year life that she would have lived, it is thought, is much higher than the lifetime well-being level associated with the ten-year life that she actually lived. Death is instrumentally bad for her because it is responsible for her lifetime well-being level being much lower than it otherwise would have been.

This story is problematic if lifetime well-being is merely a special case of diachronic well-being. For, in that case, it should be generally true that, given two time periods of differing length with equal, positive synchronic well-being levels, the diachronic well-being level associated with the longer time period is higher than the diachronic well-being level associated with the shorter time period. This is not generally true. Imagine an eighty-year-old man who enjoyed a consistently high level of synchronic well-being throughout his life. During the first ten-year period of his life, he did wonderfully, moment to moment. During the next seventy-year period, he did equally wonderfully from moment to moment. Is it true that he fared much better during the seventy-year period than he did during the ten-year period? Did the longer period go better for him than the shorter period? Is the longer period a better part of his life? On all counts, clearly not. He fared just as well in the ten-year period as he did during the seventy-year period. Lifetime well-being, if it is a special case of diachronic well-being, would not help us explain the intuition that the young girl's ten-year life is worse for her

than the seventy-year life that she would have had. Thus, if lifetime well-being is an instance of diachronic well-being, it cannot plausibly account for the instrumental badness of death in the way that some philosophers have thought.

Onto the second horn of the dilemma. It is natural to interpret the phrase “lifetime well-being” as referring to how well one does or fares over the course of one’s entire life. But if lifetime well-being is not a species of diachronic well-being, it is something of a mystery what it is. One might complain, as Bradley does, that the philosophers who claim that some things affect lifetime well-being without affecting synchronic well-being have simply made a theoretical posit for the sole purpose of escaping the Timing Puzzle.¹²² Of course, without some clearer understanding of what lifetime well-being is and how it relates to diachronic well-being with respect to one’s entire life, we should not be very confident that the puzzle *has* been escaped. What these philosophers owe us is an explanation of what “lifetime well-being” means, an explanation that should illuminate how the hard cases can be good or bad for us in some circumstances without being good or bad for us at particular times.

7. A New Interpretation of the Timing Puzzle

Let us now take a fresh look at the Timing Puzzle through the lens of the appealing life analysis. To be caught in the snares of the Timing Puzzle with respect to some putative prudential value, *x*, for a particular subject, *S*, is to be inclined to accept the following inconsistent triad:

1. *x* is good for *S*.
2. Something is good for an individual only if it is good for that individual at some time.

¹²² Bradley (2009), p. 29.

3. There is no time such that x is good for S at that time.

In Chapter I, I proposed the following analysis of prudential value and prudential value at a time:

Prudential Value. x is good for S = x contributes to the degree to which being in S's position is worthy of appeal, in and of itself.

Prudential Value at a Time. x is good for S at t = x contributes to the degree to which being in S's position at t is worthy of appeal, in and of itself.

This yields the following interpretation of the three claims above:

- 1'. x contributes to the appeal of being in S's position.¹²³
- 2'. Something contributes to the appeal of being in an individual's position only if it contributes to the appeal of being in that individual's position at some time.
- 3'. There is no time such that x contributes to the appeal of being in S's position at that time.

With this new interpretation in hand, let us reexamine the three sources and the three corresponding strategies of the Timing Puzzle.

8. The First Strategy Revisited

The first source of the Timing Puzzle is the thought that death, prenatal events, posthumous events, and global features of a life are sometimes intrinsically good or bad for us and that death is sometimes instrumentally good or bad for us. On the appealing life analysis, the underlying claim is this: in some circumstances, the hard cases intrinsically (and also instrumentally in the case of death) contribute to or detract from the appeal of being in a person's position.

It is not clear to me that this new interpretation provides any surprising, new insights about the first source of the Timing Puzzle. But it does seem to validate the

¹²³ By "appeal," I mean non-instrumental appealworthiness. In what follows, I will generally avoid this more cumbersome phrase.

thought that the hard cases may be intelligibly, if not plausibly, viewed as having prudential significance. Recall the cases of Philip, Ann, Johnson, and Josie. Philip dies needlessly because he was texting. Ann's grandfather did something atrocious. Johnson's reputation is slandered after her death. Josie's level of happiness, her engagement with life, and the quality of her relationships steadily diminish over time. I suspect that many will agree that these things, in and of themselves, detract from the appeal of being in these people's shoes. Or, to focus on more positive examples, a life might involve dying in a dignified manner, one's ancestors being admirable, having one's projects flourish after death, achieving meaningful goals that one sets for oneself, or having a variety of worthwhile life experiences. It is intelligible to think that these things, in and of themselves, contribute to the appeal of being in one's position, just as each may be viewed as an intrinsic benefit or gain to the person in question. Likewise, on the appealing life interpretation, the thought that death can be instrumentally good or bad for an individual seems intelligible and, arguably, very plausible. Most people will agree that Philip's death detracts from the appeal of being in his shoes and of having his life inasmuch as it cuts him off from future goods.

It is a notable advantage of the appealing life analysis that it accommodates people's intuitions about the prudential significance of the hard cases. The fear of death, the dream of doing something important that will live on after one's death, the sense of shame associated with disgraceful activity of one's ancestors, the desire to have a well-rounded life—such attitudes are real and powerful elements of human experience. It would be a shame if theorists could not make sense of the thought that such things can be good or bad for us. Fortunately, the appealing life analysis accommodates all of these

thoughts. It is remarkably inclusive. Anything that can be intelligibly thought to contribute to or detract from the appeal of being in an individual's position can be intelligibly thought to be good or bad for that individual.

The first strategy involves denying that the hard cases have prudential significance after all. Should those of us who are inclined to affirm the prudential significance of the hard cases adopt this strategy? Consideration of the first source, on its own, provides no such reason. Whether the first strategy is our best option will depend upon the prospects of the other two strategies.

9. The Second Strategy Revisited

The second source of the Timing Puzzle is the thought that it seems plausible that something can be good or bad for us only if it is good or bad for us at some time. On the appealing life analysis, the underlying claim may be interpreted as follows:

Something contributes to or detracts from the appeal of being in one's position only if it contributes to or detracts from the appeal of being in that individual's position at some time.

Should this claim be accepted or rejected?

As a first step toward answering this question, recall the conversation between A and B presented in Section 3:

A: "If X occurred, that would be really bad for you."

B: "When would it be bad for me?"

A: "Well, it wouldn't be bad for you at any moment."

On the appealing life analysis, this conversation is interpretable as follows:

A: "If X occurred, that would really detract from the appeal of being in your position."

B: "When would it detract from the appeal of being in my position?"

A: “Well, it wouldn’t detract from the appeal of being in your position at any moment.”

As before, B’s question seems like a natural one, and A’s response seems bizarre.

Does A’s response to B’s question even make sense? That depends on whether there is any sense to be made of the idea of being in an individual’s position that is not being in that individual’s position at some particular time. If not, the second strategy is a dead option. In Section 3, I suggested two ways in which A might elaborate on the response:

1. “X would be bad for you over the next few years, though not at any moment during those years.”
2. “X would be bad for you timelessly.”

The appealing life analysis yields these interpretations:

- 1’. “X would detract from the appeal of being in your position over the next few years, though not at any moment during those years.”
- 2’. “X would detract from the appeal of being in your position timelessly.”

These statements suggest two ways of being in an individual’s position that are distinct from being in one’s position at a particular moment: being in one’s position over a period of time, and being in one’s position timelessly.

Starting with the second suggestion, some philosophers have sought to solve the Timing Puzzle (particularly with regard to death) by appealing to atemporal or timeless prudential values and disvalues.¹²⁴ John Bigelow, John Campbell, and Robert Pargetter suggest that judgments about lifetime well-being are “atemporal” and think that death impacts lifetime well-being.¹²⁵ This implies that death is good or bad for us atemporally. Steven Luper claims that death can be “timelessly” good or bad for us: “it can be against

¹²⁴ In addition to those philosophers cited below, John Broome and Ben Bradley acknowledge the possibility of timeless prudential values and disvalues. See Broome (2004), pp. 47, and Bradley (2009), pp. 74-78.

¹²⁵ Bigelow, Campbell, and Pargetter (1990), p. 121.

our interests even if there is *no* time T at which, because of it, we are worse off at T than we would have been otherwise.”¹²⁶ Likewise, Fred Feldman is reported as holding that death is not bad for us at any time within a world but “*from the perspective of eternity*—a point of view that stands outside all possible worlds.”¹²⁷ If the appealing life analysis is correct, thinking that something can be good or bad for a person timelessly requires thinking that that person can be in a position timelessly, or outside of time. It is difficult to know what to make of this view. In Chapter I, I suggested that being in Aristotle’s position or place in the fullest possible sense involves being Aristotle and having all of Aristotle’s properties and no others. But, on the most natural view, individuals exist and have properties at times. It makes perfectly good sense to talk of the appeal of being in someone’s shoes at some particular time, or over some period of time, at which that individual exists. So far as I can tell, it does not make any sense to talk of being in one’s shoes or position “timelessly” or “outside of time.” If this is correct, the appealing life analysis reveals that talk of things being good or bad for us timelessly or atemporally is nonsense.

Regarding the first suggestion, I have just granted that it does make sense to talk about being in one’s position or place over some period of time—at least, provided that the person exists during that period. Having one’s life involves just that. 1’ is not nonsensical in the way that 2’ appears to be. 1’ implies that some things can affect the appeal of being in one’s position over a period of time without affecting the appeal of

¹²⁶ Luper (2009), p. 139. Granted, Luper is not entirely consistent on this score. In discussing the same proposal, he states that something can be “against my interests—period. That means it is against my interests now and at all other times I exist” (p. 124).

¹²⁷ This is reported second-hand in Bradley (2009), p. 84-85n23. In his written work, Feldman appears to endorse an *eternalist* answer to the Timing Challenge with regard to death: when death is good or bad for an individual, it is so at all times. See, for instance, Feldman (1992), p. 154.

being in that individual's position at any moment of that period.¹²⁸ This reveals a way of thinking that something might affect the appeal of being in one's position without affecting the appeal of being in her position at any moment. In other words, it reveals one route by which the second strategy might be pursued.

The second strategy for solving the Timing Puzzle involves claiming, first, that some things affect the appeal of being in one's position without affecting the appeal of being in that individual's position at any particular time and, second, that the hard cases are among them. My discussion in Section 10 pertains to the second claim. If we can successfully identify particular times at which the hard cases can be good or bad for us, we should reject the second claim and the hard cases will supply no reason to accept the first claim. If there is not any other motivation for accepting the first claim (and I am not aware of any), a successful employment of the third strategy will leave us with no reason to endorse the first claim.

Before turning to the third strategy, I wish to highlight why I believe the second strategy is a counterintuitive and unattractive approach to solving the Timing Puzzle. Suppose that the first claim is true. That is, suppose that there are prudential values and disvalues that affect the appeal of being in one's shoes without affecting the appeal of being in one's shoes at any particular time. Call these *non-synchronic benefits and costs*. If such values and disvalues existed, the case could be made that we should care nothing at all about them or, at least, care about them far less than synchronic benefits and costs. To see why, suppose that you come to believe that x is a substantial, non-synchronic

¹²⁸ This is the view that something can affect one's level of diachronic well-being at some time period without affecting her level of synchronic well-being at any moment during that period. For, on the appealing life analysis, one's level of well-being just is the degree to which being in that individual's position is worthy of intrinsic appeal.

benefit to you this year and is thereby greatly contributing to the appeal of being in your shoes this year. Initially, you are thrilled by this news. But then it occurs to you that x is contributing nothing at all to the appeal of being in your shoes *right now*. Nor has it contributed to the appeal of being in your shoes at any previous moment of this year. Nor will it contribute to the appeal of being in your shoes at any future moment of this year. It then occurs to you that there is actually no moment in your entire life at which x benefits you. You are no longer excited, and why should you be? There is not a single moment of your life, from conception to death, at which you can truly think “x is really doing me good right now!”

To my knowledge, people never reason in the way you are imagined to reason about x. Yet, it is quite plausible that some people *would* reason in that way if they came to believe that they were receiving a substantial, non-synchronic benefit. This is one indication that ordinary thinking does not recognize the existence of non-synchronic benefits and costs. Ordinarily, we think that something is good or bad for us only if it is good or bad for us at one or more particular times, and that something is good or bad for us at a time period only if it is good or bad for us at one or more particular times within that period. The fact that the second strategy represents a noticeable departure from our everyday understanding of prudential value is, I believe, one unattractive feature of employing that strategy. Another unattractive feature of the second strategy is that it would only establish that the hard cases are *non-synchronic* benefits or costs. Arguably, such benefits and costs should be taken less seriously than synchronic benefits and costs, if not ignored altogether. If the third strategy holds any promise, it seems preferable to both the first and second strategies.

10. Pursuing the Third Strategy

The third source of the Timing Puzzle is the thought that there appears to be no plausible story as to when death, prenatal events, posthumous events, and global features of a life can be intrinsically good or bad for us, or when death can be instrumentally good or bad for us. On the appealing life analysis, the worry is that there is no particular time such that these hard cases could plausibly affect the appeal of being in an individual's position at that time, in the specified ways. The Timing Challenge may thus be interpreted:

For any putative prudential value or disvalue, identify times at which this thing could contribute to or detract from the appeal of being in an individual's position at those times.

The third strategy involves answering this challenge. A *complete answer* will specify all of the times at which the thing in question can be good or bad for an individual. (More ambitiously, one might even attempt to specify the degree of prudential impact at each of these times.) A *partial answer* will identify at least one time at which the thing in question can be good or bad for individuals.

My purpose in this section is not to defend a complete or partial answer to the Timing Challenge. Settling upon such an answer is a substantive normative matter, and I do not wish to insist upon a particular set of views. However, I will articulate my own views about the timing of the specific hard cases that I have raised, which will illustrate how one might go about pursuing the third strategy. My hope is to establish the third strategy as a potentially promising approach to solving the Timing Puzzle. Before turning to the hard cases, there are some methodological lessons to be gleaned from an examination of pleasures and pains.

Lessons from the Case of Pleasure and Pain. It is important to avoid certain misconceptions about answering the third strategy. Recall the paradigmatically easy cases: pleasures and pains. When is a particular episode of pleasure intrinsically good for you, or a particular episode of pain intrinsically bad for you? The answer may seem obvious: at all and only those times at which these episodes occur. The case of pleasure and pain seems to provide an ideal example of how to determine the time at which something is good or bad for us. Focusing on this case, it can be tempting to assume that the time at which any given prudential value or disvalue affects a person should shine forth as obvious. It can also be tempting to assume that the things that are intrinsically good or bad for us are so only at the time or times that they occur. As I hope to establish, both of these temptations should be resisted. Reexamining the case of pleasures and pains with attention to the appealing life analysis can help us appreciate this.

Consider a thought experiment from Derek Parfit titled *My Past or Future*

Operations:

I am in some hospital, to have some kind of surgery. Since this is completely safe, and always successful, I have no fears about the effects. The surgery may be brief, or it may instead take a long time. Because I have to co-operate with the surgeon, I cannot have anaesthetics. I have had this surgery once before, and I can remember how painful it is. Under a new policy, because the operation is so painful, patients are now afterwards made to forget it. Some drug removes their memories of the last few hours.

I have just woken up. I cannot remember going to sleep. I ask my nurse if it has been decided when my operation is to be, and how long it must take. She says that she knows the facts about both me and another patient, but that she cannot remember which facts apply to whom. She can tell me only that the following is true. I may be the patient who had his operation yesterday. In that case, my operation was the longest ever performed, lasting ten hours. I may instead be the patient who is to have a short operation later today. It is either true that I did suffer for ten hours, or true that I shall suffer for one hour.

I ask the nurse to find out which is true. While she is away, it is clear to me which I prefer to be true. If I learn that the first is true, I shall be greatly relieved.¹²⁹

With regard to pain, Parfit has what he dubs a *bias towards the future*, which involves caring more about his future pains than his past pains. Parfit's bias is strong enough that he has a decisive preference to be the patient who has already undergone ten hours of painful surgery than to be the patient who has one hour of painful surgery ahead of him. It is clear from Parfit's description of the case that being in the shoes of the first patient appeals to him much more than being in the shoes of the second patient. He also thinks he would not find it at all unappealing to be in the position of the first patient, for elsewhere he claims that, barring painful memories or fears about future pain, he would regard a previous month of agony with "*complete indifference*."¹³⁰

Perhaps Parfit thinks that these affective responses to the scenario are appropriate. He does not say so in just these words, but he does assert that his preference in My Past and Future Operations is not irrational and that most people would agree. Regarding two versions of this thought experiment, he writes:

If we imagine ourselves in my place in these two cases, most of us would have my preference. If we did not know whether we have suffered for several hours, or shall later suffer for one hour, most of us would strongly prefer the first to be true. If we could make it true, we would undoubtedly do so. If we are religious we might pray that it be true....

Is this preference irrational? Most of us would answer No.¹³¹

If Parfit is correct, most people would prefer to be in the shoes of the patient with ten hours of painful surgery behind him than in the shoes of the patient with one hour of painful surgery ahead of him, and they would not think this preference is irrational. I

¹²⁹ Parfit (1984), p. 165-66. This is the first of two variations.

¹³⁰ Parfit (1984), p. 173.

¹³¹ Parfit (1984), p. 167.

expect that many would also agree that being in the first patient's position has far greater appeal (that is, intrinsic appealworthiness) than being in the second patient's position. What accounts for this difference is the fact that the first patient has great pain ahead of him, whereas the second has it behind him.

This reveals a different view about the time at which pains can be intrinsically bad for us. Virtually everyone will agree that undergoing a very painful episode detracts from the appeal of being in one's position during that episode. But many will think that, to a lesser degree, it detracts from the appeal of being in one's position *prior* to the time of the episode. I believe this, and many others probably do as well. On this view, the fact that one will undergo a very painful surgery in the near future detracts from the appeal of being in that person's position now.

The naturalness of this view can be seen by the sorts of judgments that could be made about luck, enviability, and pitiability in the case above. Imagine that Parfit and the other patient are sharing a room. Each is clueless as to which of them has a ten-hour surgery behind him and which has a one-hour surgery ahead of him. Each reflects on his strong preference to be the one who has the surgery behind him. The nurse returns and reports that it was the other patient who underwent the longer surgery yesterday. Parfit is not relieved. He takes this to be very bad news—for him, that is. He tells the other patient how lucky he is. Parfit envies him, wishing that he could be in the other patient's shoes right now; he considers this a natural and fitting response. The other patient feels sorry for Parfit and considers him worthy of pity at this moment. These attitudes and judgments do not pertain to their lives as a whole, for surely the other patient is not lucky or

enviable on the whole for undergoing ten hours of painful surgery rather than Parfit's one. Rather, they are focused on their respective positions at the moment.

It might be thought that it is not the painful episode *per se* that detracts from the appeal of being in Parfit's shoes in this case but instead the negative anticipatory emotions that he feels as a result of believing that he will soon suffer. While it is true that anxiety and distress about future pain detract from the appeal of being in one's position, this need not be the only prudentially significant feature at work in this case. Arguably, being in the shoes of someone who justifiably but *falsely* believes that she will undergo great pain in the near future and is very distressed about this is much more appealing than being in the shoes of someone who justifiably and *correctly* believes this and is equally distressed. A person who is in the second position can sensibly hope that she is actually in the first.

Another worry is that our intuition that the pain detracts from being in Parfit's shoes prior to the surgery is illegitimate because we are secretly contemplating the time of Parfit's surgery. This might suggest that we are focusing on and responding to his position during the surgery rather than beforehand. I do not think this is a legitimate worry. Imagine Parfit as a teenager who will undergo an hour of painful surgery many years down the road. Here as well, we are likely to contemplate his position during the surgery, but I doubt that many will be inclined to say that this future pain detracts much, if at all, from the appeal of being in his shoes as a teenager. This suggests that the original intuition that many of us have cannot be explained away by noting that we are contemplating the time of the surgery.

I have been focusing on future pain, but there is also the issue of whether a painful episode detracts from the appeal of a person's position once it is past. As noted above, Parfit claims to view the mere fact that he underwent pain—even agony—with complete indifference. He recognizes that some people feel differently:

I know a few people whose reaction is different. These people claim that, even if they have no painful memories, they find knowledge of their past pains mildly distressing.

It is not entirely clear from this comment whether these people judge that their past pain would be *bad* for them now. I myself am inclined to think that an episode of substantial pain can detract from the appeal of being in one's shoes at times following the event, though not nearly as much as beforehand. The news that I recently experienced ten hours of painful surgery or, worse, a month of agony—even if I were unable to remember it and had no fears of related future pain—would probably lead me to feel some degree of self-pity for what I had recently undergone, just as I would feel this for my loved ones if they had just suffered serious pain. I consider this to be a sensible reaction.

The points that have been made about pain apply to pleasure as well. Anthony Brueckner and John Martin Fischer present a simplified variation on Parfit's case that concerns pleasure:

Imagine that you are in some hospital to test a drug. The drug induces intense pleasure for an hour followed by amnesia. You awaken and ask the nurse about your situation. She says that either you tried the drug yesterday (and had an hour of pleasure) or you will try the drug tomorrow (and will have an hour of pleasure). While she checks on your status, it is clear that you prefer to have the pleasure tomorrow.¹³²

¹³² Brueckner and Fischer (1993), p. 227.

Brueckner and Fischer believe that most people would have this preference.¹³³ This seems quite plausible. It also seems likely that most people would judge that being in the position of having the intense pleasure ahead of you is worthy of greater appeal than being in the position of having it behind you. This suggests that pleasure can also be thought to be good for a person at times other than when it occurs. Likewise, there is room for substantive normative debate about whether an experience of intense pleasure is intrinsically good for a person at times once the pleasure is over. Some may think that pleasure that is over does nothing for you. I am inclined to disagree. Like many people, I rarely recall my dreams. If my partner reports to me that I seemed to be having a very pleasant dream the night before, I might take some pleasure in this news and feel a bit lucky. All else being equal, being in the position of someone who just had hours of pleasurable dreams seems worthy of greater appeal than being in the position of one who just experienced hours of nightmares, even if the psychological effects are now past.

One might object to the idea that something that occurs *in the future* or *in the past* can be intrinsically good or bad for an individual *now*. There are various metaphysical views that could undergird this objection.¹³⁴ Rather than diverting the present discussion into these large and complicated issues, let me simply grant that if there are sound metaphysical arguments establishing that the appeal of being in one's position at a time is solely a function of what is happening at that time, the substantive normative views

¹³³ They write: "There is a temporal asymmetry in our attitudes to 'experienced goods' that is parallel to the asymmetry in our attitudes to experienced bads: we are indifferent to past pleasures and look forward to future pleasures." Brueckner and Fischer (1993), p. 227.

¹³⁴ For instance, one might accept *presentism*, the view that only present objects exist. Given this view, it might be thought that future events cannot affect us now because they do not exist now and that present event cannot retroactively affect one's past self because there is nothing there to affect. Of course, it is sometimes thought that presentists can allow for the truth of statements about the contingent past and future. See, e.g., Torre (2011), pp. 363-64. If so, perhaps the presentist can accommodate the view that past and future events can affect present well-being after all.

mentioned above must be rejected. Indeed, if there are such arguments, I believe that the third strategy for solving the Timing Puzzle is a dead end and that we must turn to the first or second strategy.

That said, it is worth emphasizing that such metaphysical conclusions would run counter to ordinary thinking about prudential value. People have all sorts of beliefs about what has happened and what will happen, and they often take past and future events to be things that, in and of themselves, affect the appeal of being in a given person's situation in the present. Consider some examples involving future events. When a baby is born with an incurable genetic disorder like Tay-Sachs disease, those who care for it can feel great pity for the child, at that moment, on account of the trials and early death that lay before it. One can believe that it is bad for the child now that its future is so bleak, and that the child is pitiable now on account of this future. Likewise, when people come to believe that their own future will fall short of what they had dreamed or expected, they tend to view this as a personal loss in the present. It is possible that one might react to such a belief by shrugging her shoulders and thinking "At least it's not bad for me right now!" But this does not seem to be a common reaction. A further set of examples concerns future events that affect the "meaning" of events occurring at earlier times.¹³⁵ Some people believe that our activities in life are meaningless or absurd because we will all eventually die. This view is often accompanied by the conviction that engaging in meaningless or absurd activity is bad for us when we engage in it. One who is engaged in such activity can be viewed as pathetic and pitiable at those very moments. Or consider

¹³⁵ I borrow this phrase from Velleman (1993), pp. 337 ff. Velleman take the meaning of an event to be "its significance in the story of one's life." I differ from Velleman in that he does not allow for the possibility that the meaning of an event, at least when it is influenced by earlier or later events, affects synchronic well-being.

the related example of wasted effort. Imagine a person who devotes substantial time and energy to solving a problem where the process of trying to solve it is stressful and generally unrewarding. It is natural to think that how good or bad it is for her that she is undergoing this process, at the very time she is undergoing it, partly depends upon whether it will end in success. If it will not, and if there will be no benefits reaped from the eventual failure or the process leading up to it, her effort is wasted effort. Most of us, I think, are not indifferent to engaging in wasted effort.

These considerations suggest that everyday thinking about prudential value allows for the possibility that what occurs in the future is a personal gain or loss in the present. Similar examples may be constructed to establish this point about the prudential significance of past events. Contra Velleman, intuitively speaking, how well one is faring at a particular moment is not just a temporally local matter. If there is something unintelligible or problematic in such thoughts, it is a deficiency in ordinary thought. In the remainder of this section, I will proceed on the undefended, working assumption that there is nothing unintelligible or problematic in thinking that things can be intrinsically good or bad for us at past or future times. If this assumption is false, much of the discussion in the remainder of this section is inapplicable.

We are now in a position to see why the two tempting thoughts mentioned above should be rejected, at least if we wish to accommodate ordinary thinking about prudential value. One of these was the thought that the only times at which something can be intrinsically good or bad for a person are the times at which that thing occurs or obtains. As we have seen, this thought may be rejected even in the case of pleasure and pain. One can intelligibly believe that one's having intense pleasure or pain is something that, in

and of itself, contributes to or detracts from the appeal of being in that person's position at earlier or later times. For present purposes, it does not matter whether these substantive views about pleasure and pain are correct so long as they are intelligible. Generalizing from the cases already considered, I submit that the issue of whether, and to what degree, something affects the appeal of being in one's position at a particular time is a substantive normative issue. If this is correct, one methodological lesson to be drawn is that we should not assume that *the times at which a thing is intrinsically good or bad for a person* correspond perfectly to *the times at which the thing occurs*. To think that these times partly or wholly coincide is to hold a substantive normative view.

The other temptation was to think that the times at which something is intrinsically good for a person should leap out at us as having prudential significance, much as they seemed to do in the case of pleasure and pain. There is no reason to assume this as a general rule. Pleasure and pain are special in that most everyone takes fairly intense pleasures and pains to have prudential value and disvalue at the times that we have them; it does seem obvious that they affect the appeal of being in our position at those times. However, if the appealing life analysis is correct, what might have seemed the obvious view about pleasures and pains does not actually capture many people's full views. For many people appear to think that undergoing substantial pleasure or pain affects the appeal of being in one's position prior to its occurrence. The surgery cases are useful for drawing this out. Presumably, the reason why the times at which pleasure and pain occur leap out at us as prudentially significant in a way that other times do not is that pleasure and pain plausibly have their greatest prudential significance when they are occurring. These considerations suggest two further methodological lessons that should

be heeded when we seek to answer the Timing Challenge with respect to a given putative prudential value or disvalue. First, if some moments leap out at us as being of obvious prudential significance, we should not assume that these are the only moments at which the thing in question has prudential significance. They might simply be the times at which the thing has the greatest prudential effect. Second, if no particular moments seem to be of obvious prudential significance, this need not mean that the thing in question has no significance at particular times. It might only indicate that it contributes to or detracts from the appeal of being in one's position at different times more or less uniformly.

With these methodological lessons in mind, let us briefly consider how one might respond to the Timing Challenge with respect to our examples of the hard cases.

Prenatal and Posthumous Events. Ann's grandfather committed a heinous act a year before her birth, and Johnson's reputation is slandered after her death. At what times, if any, could these events be intrinsically bad for these individuals? On the appealing life analysis, the question is this: at what times might these events, in and of themselves, detract from the appeal of being in Ann's and Johnson's shoes, respectively?

It might be claimed that these events detract from being in these individuals' positions at the times the events occur. Provided that individuals do not exist prior to their conception or after their death, I believe that this claim is unintelligible. Plausibly, being in a position at some time requires *being* at that time. Given that Aristotle is long gone, it seems nonsensical to claim that something contributes to or detracts from the appeal of being in Aristotle's shoes in 2012. This conclusion suggests a stronger constraint than the one given by the second source of the Timing Puzzle:

Something contributes to or detracts from the appeal of being in one's position only if it contributes to or detracts from the appeal of being in that individual's position *at some time when that individual exists*.

This, in turn, gives rise to a more restrictive Timing Challenge:

For any putative prudential value or disvalue, identify *times when that individual exists* at which this thing could contribute to or detract from the appeal of being in that individual's position at those times.

In pursuing the third strategy, I believe that it is this stronger version of the Timing Challenge that must be answered.

Regarding Ann's case, if the event of Ann's grandfather committing this act, in and of itself, detracts from the appeal of being in her position, at what times during Ann's life does it do so? I suspect that one could fittingly pity Ann at any point during her life on account of her grandfather's act and that Ann could sensibly pity herself or feel some degree of shame or count herself unlucky throughout her life on account of the event. This suggests a view on which this event detracts from the appeal of being in Ann's position at all times that she exists. Perhaps it does so equally at all of these times, or perhaps the degree to which this event detracts from the appeal of Ann's position varies over the course. It might be, for instance, that the extent to which this event, in and of itself, affects the appeal of being in her position gradually diminishes with an increase of temporal distance.¹³⁶

Turning to the case of posthumous events, suppose that the slandering is very bad for Johnson. Suppose that the slanderer was a trusted friend who becomes corrupt and chooses to pin his own misdeeds on Johnson. Suppose that the lies that he tells about

¹³⁶ If this seems strange, we should bear in mind that this sort of gradation arguably exists in the case of pleasures and pains. As already suggested, many would judge Parfit to be pitiable at moments during the hours leading up to his painful operation, but I doubt that many would think him pitiable on account of the surgery twenty or thirty years beforehand.

Johnson represent her as being the very opposite of what she valued and embodied. Finally, suppose that the lies are widely accepted. I suspect that an event like this could be bad enough to resonate prudentially throughout a person's entire life. If, when Johnson was an infant, one could have known that this would eventually happen to her, they might sensibly pity her on account of this fact. Arguably, the fact that one will be betrayed in this way and that the memory of one's work and values will be misrepresented is, in and of itself, something that detracts from the appeal of being in her position at all times that she exists. Perhaps Johnson would become increasingly pitiable on account of this fact as the event draws nearer. In any case, it does not seem implausible that there are times during one's life at which certain types of posthumous events can detract from the appeal of being in one's position.

Global Features. Josie has an active and happy childhood that involves healthy relations with her family members. But over the course of her life, the quality of her relationships, her level of happiness, and her general engagement with life all decline. The fact that Josie's life has this sort of downhill shape along important dimensions, as opposed to more level or even uphill shape, is intrinsically bad for her. But at what times? That is, at what times does the deterioration of Josie's happiness, relationships, and engagement over time, in and of itself, detract from the appeal of being in her position?

I believe that the downward trajectory of various prudentially significant elements of Josie's life detracts from the appeal of being in her position at each moment of her life. If it was known during her childhood that these prudentially significant aspects of Josie's life would only get progressively worse for her, it would be sensible to pity her and judge her unlucky on account of this fact. It would be equally sensible to pity her at moments in

the middle of her life inasmuch as these things have only been going downhill and will continue to do so, or at moments closer to the end of her life on account of the fact that she has had a life of consistently diminishing goods. Of course, these are claims about pitiability in a fairly limited respect. Presumably, Josie is not all-things-considered pitiable during the moments of her childhood, even if she is pitiable in the particular respect that her life will get progressively worse. At moments late in her life, she presumably is all-things-considered pitiable, but this is mostly due to her unhappiness, disengagement, and poor social connections.

Death. Philip dies because he is texting while driving. Had he not died, he would have lived fully and happily for many years to come. Most people will judge that Philip's death instrumentally detracts from the appeal of being in his shoes in virtue of depriving him of further non-instrumental goods that he would have enjoyed. Some will also think that the circumstances of his death and the role of his own negligence in bringing it about in and of itself detracts from the appeal of being in his shoes. At what times during his life might his death have this effect on the appeal of being in his position?

Regarding the intrinsic prudential disvalue of Philip's dying needlessly due to his own negligence, I feel most confident that this, in and of itself, detracts from the appeal of being in Philip's position at moments during the months leading up to his death, though less confident about its effect at earlier times. It is difficult to isolate the precise effect of this feature from the effect of the instrumental badness of death. Yet, thinking at the level of lives, many will judge that, all else being equal, having a life involving a premature death due to one's own negligence has less appeal than having a life involving a premature death that is not due to one's own negligence.

As for the instrumental prudential disvalue of death, it is useful to focus our attention on what is intrinsically bad for Philip—namely, being deprived of further years of full, happy life. Plausibly, the times at which Philip’s death instrumentally detracts from the appeal of being in his shoes are just those times at which being deprived of this extra life detracts from the appeal of being in his shoes. Which times are those? In my view, being deprived of many years of happy life is bad for Philip at all times that he exists. For what moment can be identified at which he is not pitiable and unlucky in virtue of this substantial, future deprivation? Even in his infancy, one who believes that this would be Philip’s fate could sensibly pity him and think that this detracts from the appeal of being in his shoes at that time, just as one might have this view about an infant with Tay-Sachs.

Granted, there is something special about death. For the purpose of contrast, consider an ordinary case of deprivation that does not involve death. At age 20, Anton is in a serious automobile accident that severely restricts his daily activities during the ten years that follow. Had this accident not occurred, there are many enriching experiences that he would have had during his twenties that would have been very good for him. And, in general, being in Anton’s shoes throughout his twenties is far less appealing than it would have been if the accident had never occurred. At what times does Anton’s being deprived of a better experience during his twenties detract from the appeal of being in his shoes? The times that jump out as having obvious prudential significance are the moments during Anton’s twenties at which he might have been doing better at those times. Call these the *times of missed benefits*. Intuitively, these are the times at which the deprivation is worst for Anton. Yet, as the case of pleasure and pain teaches us, we

should not assume that times that strike us as having obvious prudential significance are the only times that have such significance. I submit that Anton's being deprived of better experiences during his twenties is intrinsically bad for him at other times of his life as well, not only the times of missed benefits. If one were in a position to know beforehand that Anton would be in this accident that would involve this deprivation, I think she could reasonably judge him to be pitiable and unlucky at that time on account of it. Since losing out on having a better decade of one's life is a substantial loss, it is plausible that this deprivation detracts from the appeal of being in Anton's shoes at all times that he exists, even if it detracts from the appeal of being in his shoes most of all during his twenties. And if the prudential significance of this event diminishes with temporal distance, Anton's missing out on a better twenties is worse for him at ages 15 and 35 than at age 90.

Back to death. Philip's death deprives him of further years of happy life. At what times does it detract from the appeal of being in Philip's shoes that he is deprived of these further years? Not during the times of missed benefits, for Philip does not exist at those times. This is why death is special. In many other cases of deprivation, one exists at the times of missed benefits and these are the times when the deprivation is worst for the person. In death, we are not around at those times. If deprivations were only bad for us at times of missed benefits, I believe that death could not be bad for us. Epicurus would be vindicated. My proposal is that the deprivation caused by Philip's death is bad for him at times preceding his death, just as the deprivation caused by Anton's accident is bad for him at times prior to his accident. It may be that the badness of death becomes worse for Philip as he moves closer to the period of missed benefits. Of course, death would be

much worse for us than it is if we were around during the times of missed benefits. Fortunately, given the nature of death, this cannot be.

11. Conclusion

There are three pure strategies for solving the Timing Puzzle. The first strategy involves denying that the hard cases can be prudentially significant after all. The second strategy involves claiming that some things are good or bad for us though at no particular times and that the hard cases are among them. The third strategy involves identifying particular times at which the hard cases can be good or bad for us. Drawing upon the appealing life analysis of prudential value, I have highlighted various drawbacks of the first and second strategies and have also tried to establish that the third strategy may prove a promising way of solving this puzzle, provided that the appeal of being in one's shoes at some moment can be affected by past and future events. My proposals regarding times within a person's life at which the hard cases might be good or bad for her are quite sketchy and hardly constitute a rigorous attempt at providing a complete answer to the Timing Challenge. However, it is not clear that it is worthwhile to seek a complete answer to the Timing Challenge. What drives us to think about this challenge is not that we think there are serious practical benefits to knowing precisely when and to what degree certain things are good or bad for us. Perhaps there can be such benefits in special circumstances, but this is not generally the case. Rather, our primary reason for answering the Timing Challenge is that it helps us solve the Timing Puzzle. A complete answer is not necessary for that purpose.

CHAPTER III

Prudentialism

1. Introduction

For most of us, the prospect of being a moral saint is not very appealing. On Susan Wolf's characterization, a moral saint would be one "whose every action is as morally good as possible, a person, that is, who is as morally worthy as can be." The saint would possess "those qualities which are apt to allow him to treat others as justly and kindly as possible."¹³⁷ In a world like ours, with its abundance of injustice and suffering, the moral saint would have her work cut out for her. For the average person, striving to attain moral sainthood would be costly, requiring substantial sacrifices of happiness, time, and energy and dominating all other aspects of one's life. At the same time, most of us also consider the other extreme, moral depravity, to be even less appealing. Exploiting other people or animals might bring us happiness, wealth, leisure, and other goods of life, but such benefits would come at too high a price. Most of us do not want our lives to include such acts. We do not want to be that sort of person. The most appealing life that we might realistically secure for ourselves will fall somewhere between these two extremes. It will involve abiding by the more modest demands of so-called "common-sense morality," steering clear of saintliness and especially depravity.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Wolf (1982), p. 419, 421.

¹³⁸ As Henry Sidgwick remarked: "[The Common-Sense morality] seems to leave a man free to pursue his own happiness under certain definite limits and conditions: whereas Utilitarianism seems to require a more comprehensive and unceasing subordination of self-interest to the common good." Sidgwick (1907), p. 87.

There is an interesting parallel between these views about the appealing life and popular views regarding the moral demandingness of ethical theories—that is, theories of how we ought to live, all things considered.¹³⁹ It is widely thought that it is possible for an ethical theory to be *too morally demanding*, implying that agents ought to make excessive sacrifices on behalf of others. In recent years, the most popular ethical theories—act-consequentialist, rule-consequentialist, Kantian, contractualist, rights-based, and virtue-based—have been accused, or at least suspected, of having this flaw.¹⁴⁰ At the other extreme, many believe that an ethical theory can be *not morally demanding enough*. This is a charge often leveled against egoism (commonly dubbed “rational egoism”), which is commonly characterized as the view that one should always act so as to maximize one’s own self-interest. Egoism is widely thought to flout the demands of common-sense morality. There are, then, two extremes of moral demandingness, and many have thought that a plausible ethical theory will fall somewhere in between.

This parallel in views about the appealing life and about the acceptable level of moral demandingness in an ethical theory suggests an interesting possibility. Perhaps some people’s attitudes toward moral demandingness are tracking their views about the appeal of having a life. This possibility invites consideration of an ethical theory that gives a central place to promoting the appeal of one’s own life. My purpose in this chapter is to undertake a preliminary investigation of such a theory. I will call it

¹³⁹ I follow Bernard Williams in using “ethics” in this broad sense. Williams (1985), p. 6. Some philosophers prefer to call these theories of “rationality” or “practical rationality.” What I call “ethical egoism” they call “rational egoism.” This is only a terminological difference.

¹⁴⁰ Sometimes these theories are understood to be moral theories, concerned with a moral sense of “ought.” Construed in this way, we may reformulate the complaint: these moral theories are too demanding to live by, and the most plausible ethical theories will not require that we meet their demands. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss whether these theories actually fall prey to these problems. For extensive discussion of the demandingness problem as it relates to most of these theories, see Chappell (2009). For a discussion about contractualism and demandingness, see Ashford (2003) and Hills (2010).

prudentialism. According to this ethical theory, one should always act so as to maximize the intrinsic appealworthiness of having one's own life. Given certain accounts of the appealing life, this theory will accommodate the demands of common-sense morality while avoiding the extreme of moral demandingness.

Prudentialism may not be a new theory. If the appealing life analysis is correct, and if we embrace the standard characterization of egoism, prudentialism just is a form of egoism. Prudentialism also bears a strong resemblance to eudaimonism, which centers around the pursuit of *eudaimonia*. If prudentialism is understood to be equivalent to egoism and eudaimonism, I believe that the prudentialist formulation is instructive. For if these theories are equivalent, this reveals that egoism need not prescribe a selfish mode of life and that eudaimonism may be endorsed without thinking that possessing virtues or fulfilling our nature as human beings are central to understanding how we ought to live. That said, I consider prudentialism to be worthy of investigation whether or not it is identical to egoism or eudaimonism and whether or not the appealing life analysis is correct.¹⁴¹

This chapter is structured as follows. In Section 2, I elaborate on the structure of prudentialism and the methodology involved in determining the content of the theory and in assessing its plausibility. Section 3 addresses the relationship between prudentialism, egoism, and eudaimonism. In Section 4, I sketch a partial account of the appealing life. In Sections 5-7, I present three objections to the theory and offer responses on behalf of the prudentialist. In Section 8, I provide some concluding reflections.

¹⁴¹ If the appealing life analysis is not correct, prudentialism does not deserve its name.

2. Structure and Methodology

The structure of prudentialism is a familiar one, as seen by a comparison with a standard characterization of egoism:

Egoism. One should always act so as to maximize one's own self-interest.

Prudentialism. One should always act so as to maximize the appeal of having one's own life.

Both theories prescribe the maximization of some property p . Both theories are agent-relative in the sense of prescribing different ends for different agents; you ought to promote p with regard to yourself, I ought to promote p with regard to myself, etc. Lastly, both theories include an evaluative component for which we require a substantive normative account. In the absence of such an account, we cannot know what actions these theories prescribe. If egoism is to provide practical guidance, one must have an idea of what is in a person's self-interest. We require a substantive account of self-interest. Likewise, prudentialism must be coupled with a substantive account of the appealing life.

As a matter of framing, prudentialism could be construed as either a class of theories or a single theory. On the first approach, one will speak as if there are many different prudentialist theories, one for every intelligible account of the appealing life. This approach is adopted by philosophers who treat hedonistic utilitarianism and preference utilitarianism as distinct ethical theories. On the second approach, one will speak as if prudentialism is a single theory that relates to the correct or best account of the appealing life. On this framing, those who endorse some other account of the appealing life are mistaken both about what makes a life more appealing to have and about what prudentialism implies. I will adopt the second approach, which still allows for talk of different *interpretations* of prudentialism.

A complete account of the appealing life will list all possible features of lives that, in and of themselves, contribute to or detract from the appeal of having lives that possess them, and it will indicate how such features interact to determine the overall appeal of having the life.¹⁴² Monistic accounts identify one type of feature. Such accounts can be attractive for their theoretical simplicity and for raising fewer worries about incommensurability. Pluralistic accounts identify multiple types of features that contribute to the appeal of a life. Borrowing from the standard “objective lists” prominent in discussions of well-being, it might be thought that having a life is appealworthy to the extent that its bearer is happy, has knowledge, enjoys objects of beauty, sets and achieves worthwhile goals, and has healthy and fulfilling personal relationships. Whether or not these particular features have a place in the best account of the appealing life is a substantive normative matter.

Accounts of the appealing life are limitless. For better or worse, I think that our intuitions must play a crucial role in helping us settle upon the correct account. One promising strategy for determining which items belong on the list of prudential goods involves pair-wise comparison of lives. Imagine two lives that differ in select respects and ask whether having one of them is worthy of greater appeal than having the other. Alternatively, see whether having one life appeals more to you, and then investigate whether there are grounds for doubting that your response is tracking appealworthiness.¹⁴³

¹⁴² *Appealing life invariabilism*, let us say, is the substantive normative view that the degree to which some feature, in and of itself, contributes to the appeal of a life is the same for all lives. I do not mean to assume that this view is true. If it is false, then some possible features affect the appeal of different lives differently. This point is inspired by Guy Fletcher’s discussion of well-being invariabilism in Fletcher (2009). Cf. Brännmark (2001) on compositionism, and Bradley (2009), pp. 6-7, on holism.

¹⁴³ If the arguments of Chapter I are successful, there are many other methods at our disposal. We may ask whether we would prefer one of these lives more for ourselves or our loved ones out of concern, or whether

To illustrate this method, consider the case of the radically deceived businessman, as presented by Shelly Kagan:

Imagine a man who dies contented, thinking he has achieved everything he wanted in life: his wife and family love him, he is a respected member of the community, and he has founded a successful business. Or so he thinks. In reality, however, he has been completely deceived: his wife cheated on him, his daughter and son were only nice to him so that they would be able to borrow the car, the other members of the community only pretended to respect him for the sake of the charitable contributions he sometimes made, and his business partner has been embezzling funds from the company which will soon go bankrupt.¹⁴⁴

Next, imagine an equally contented man with the same beliefs and qualitatively identical experiences who is not deceived at all. His life is exactly as he takes it to be. Is one of these lives more appealing to have than the other? Most people have a robust intuition here: the latter life is the more appealing life to have. If the appealing life analysis is correct, we may draw further confirmation from the fact that the deceived man seems pitiable and unlucky in ways that the undeceived man does not. The life of the deceived man is something that most of us probably do not wish for ourselves or our loved ones, whereas the life of the undeceived man seems much more agreeable. Of course, these intuitions require some explanation. Since the two lives diverge along several dimensions, such as the veracity of the men's beliefs, the quality of their relationships, their level of achievement, and the degree to which their desires are fulfilled, considering a range of other simpler cases may be necessary to isolate the factors that we think make a difference to the appeal of a life. Drawing out our intuitions about cases in this fashion should lead us in the direction of an account of the appealing life that we find plausible.

one individual is more or less pitiable, or enviable, than the other on account of the life she leads, or whether one is lucky or unlucky in virtue of their life possessing some feature. Thus, there may be several methods by which our intuitions about the appealing life can be elicited.

¹⁴⁴ Kagan (1994), p. 311. This example is inspired by one presented by Thomas Nagel (1979), p. 4.

How do we determine whether prudentialism is true? Prudentialism is the view that one should always act so as to maximize the appealworthiness of having one's own life. It is possible that one might find this abstract statement of the view compelling on its own, without having the slightest idea of what account of the appealing life is correct. But this would be rather odd. After all, it is a substantive normative possibility that getting tortured or torturing others are components of the appealing life. To be fully committed to the truth of prudentialism irrespective of which account of the appealing life is correct is to be open to the possibility that one ought to seek out torture for oneself or seek to torture others. Most of us cannot endorse the theory in this manner.¹⁴⁵ Once an account of the appealing life is specified, we are better positioned to assess the theory. Its plausibility will depend, in large part, on the extent of convergence between what one ought to do and what will promote the appeal of having the agent's life. From the standpoint of verification, one will want to examine one's ethical intuitions and judgments to see whether these line up with one's judgments about what will maximize the appealworthiness of having one's own life. Where there is divergence, one will want to consider whether some of these judgments are worth revising.

3. Prudentialism, Egoism, and Eudaimonism

Prudentialism bears a strong likeness to both egoism and ancient eudaimonistic theories, which raises the question of whether it is a new ethical theory or an old theory in new garb. This depends on how the latter theories are understood.

¹⁴⁵ This is not to say that the plausibility of the abstract statement will contribute *nothing* to the overall plausibility of the view.

Egoism, or rational egoism, is standardly defined in terms of self-interest or well-being. On a common formulation, it states that one should always act so as to maximize one's own self-interest. In Chapter I, I argued that prudential value, well-being, and related concepts may be effectively analyzed in terms of the appealworthiness of being in one's position and of having one's life. If this analysis is incorrect, prudentialism and egoism are distinct theories. If the analysis is correct, and if the customary characterization of egoism is accepted, prudentialism just is a form of egoism—specifically, a form that prescribes maximizing the prudential value of one's own life. The term “egoism,” however, is a very misleading label for prudentialism, for it seems to imply that the prudentialist agent must be selfish or self-centered. Since this is not true of the prudentialist agent, it makes sense to avoid that term.

Given the long-standing tradition of assuming that egoists are critical of morality and deny that being moral, in and of itself, is in one's own self-interest, some may wish to preserve this picture of the egoist. If the appealing life analysis is correct, there are various ways in which this might be achieved. The most promising possibility, I suspect, is to understand egoism as the conjunction of two views: prudentialism and the morality-excluding view, which states that being moral is not, in and of itself, good or bad for a person.¹⁴⁶ The egoist would then be one who believes that each person ought to maximize the appeal of having her own life and also believes that being moral, in and of itself, does not contribute to the appeal of a life. This will place the egoist in disagreement with non-egoist prudentialists (including the sort that interest me in this chapter) as well as non-prudentialists. This is one of various ways in which egoism might be characterized so as to retain its tension with morality.

¹⁴⁶ For more discussion of this view, see Chapter I, Section 7.

Eudaimonistic ethical theories, as I understand them, are those that prescribe taking *eudaimonia* to be the final end of action, the *summum bonum*, that which we should ultimately aim for in all that we do. For the sake of symmetry, we might characterize eudaimonism along the model of egoism and prudentialism: one should always act so as to maximize one's own *eudaimonia*.¹⁴⁷ But what is *eudaimonia*? This Greek term is often translated "happiness," "well-being," or "flourishing."¹⁴⁸ According to Aristotle, in his day being *eudaimon* was generally taken to be the same as living well or successfully (*eu-zoia*), and doing well or successfully (*eu-praxia*).¹⁴⁹ These translations of *eudaimonia* and associated terminology might suggest that ancient eudaimonism is nothing other than egoism.

Some scholars of ancient ethics accept this. Terence Irwin, for instance, takes Aristotle to be both a psychological egoist ("he believes that every rational agent aims at his own happiness as the ultimate end") and a rational egoist ("he thinks that each rational agent has overriding reason to do what best promotes his own happiness").¹⁵⁰ Richard Kraut also takes eudaimonism, as I have defined it, to qualify as a form of

¹⁴⁷ Julia Annas reminds us that the ancients (with the exception of the Cyrenaics) did not work with a maximizing model of rationality. Annas (1993), p. 38. My invocation of that notion here is, I believe, harmless since maximizing one's own *eudaimonia* might simply require finding the golden mean between vicious extremes.

¹⁴⁸ Translating "*eudaimonia*" as "happiness" can be misleading inasmuch as we moderns tend to think that happiness is largely a matter of psychology. "Well-being" can be misleading given that many philosophers consider the morality-excluding view of prudential value to be plausible. The ancients' concept of *eudaimonia* is clearly not morality-excluding; it allows ample space for "moral" virtues and direct concern for others. To avoid these misleading connotations, some translate "*eudaimonia*" as "flourishing." A potential drawback of this translation is that talk of a "flourishing life" is suggestive of a perfectionistically good life, i.e. a life marked by excellences characteristic of beings of that kind. While this fits well with Aristotle's preferred account of *eudaimonia*, it is possible that this goes beyond the concept of *eudaimonia*. In that case, we require a term that denotes a "thinner" normative or evaluative concept.

¹⁴⁹ Aristotle (1999), I.4.1095a17-20.

¹⁵⁰ Irwin (2007), p. 125.

egoism.¹⁵¹ Julia Annas appears to reject the association of eudaimonism with egoism. She writes:

It has (far too) often been thought that...ancient ethics is egoistic. For if I am concerned to achieve my own final end, improve my own life, am I not simply seeking my own self-interest? The answer to this is clearly no....[T]he fact that I aim at my own final end makes ancient ethics formally agent-centred or self-centred, but does not make it self-centred in content; as the ancient theories plainly are not.¹⁵²

Annas' denial that ancient eudaimonistic theories are egoistic is grounded in the thought that "egoism" (and its associated term "self-interest") cannot make space for a direct concern for others. This suggests that her disagreement with Irwin and Kraut is terminological. So long as "egoism" does not imply an exclusive concern for oneself to the exclusion of caring for others, the above authors all appear to agree that eudaimonism is egoism. If that is correct, it is possible that prudentialism is a reinterpretation of both egoism and eudaimonism. And, of course, if egoism and eudaimonism are distinct, and if prudentialism and egoism are distinct, it might still be the case that prudentialism provides a promising interpretation of eudaimonism given that both views make ample space for being moral.

If prudentialism, egoism, and eudaimonism are different formulations of the same ethical theory, the prudentialist formulation seems illuminating. Discussions of eudaimonism tend to draw heavily on ancient sources and import a host of assumptions and insights from the ancient world, such as the belief that exemplifying excellences characteristic of human nature and possessing and exercising the virtues is essential to

¹⁵¹ Of course, Kraut denies that Aristotle is an egoist or eudaimonist of the maximizing variety. He argues this point in Kraut (1989), Chapter 2.

¹⁵² Annas (1993), p. 223.

human *eudaimonia*.¹⁵³ If eudaimonism is prudentialism, this need not be the case. A proponent of eudaimonism could intelligibly think that exercising the virtues or exemplifying human excellences, in and of themselves, make no difference to the appealworthiness of having a life. In discussions of egoism (outside of eudaimonist circles, at least), it is commonly assumed that egoism will not prescribe having concern for others or being moral. If egoism is prudentialism, this need not be the case. A proponent of egoism could intelligibly think that these things are significant components of an appealing life. Furthermore, a proponent of egoism need not settle for a monistic or modestly pluralistic account of well-being. As I will suggest in the next section, radical pluralism is a possibility worth taking seriously.

4. A Partial Account of the Appealing Life

It is not my purpose to explore prudentialism on any old interpretation. For suppose that the best account of the appealing life is a simple hedonistic account, according to which the only things that, in and of themselves, contribute to and detract from the appeal of a life are pleasure and pain. In that case, prudentialism would imply that one should always act so as to maximize one's hedonic levels. Since I reject hedonism as an account of the appealing life,¹⁵⁴ I do not consider the hedonistic interpretation of prudentialism to be a promising one. The aim of this section is to sketch a partial, pluralistic account of the appealing life that strikes me as plausible, as far as it goes. This moves us a bit closer toward an interpretation of prudentialism that might

¹⁵³ According to Rosalind Hursthouse, most contemporary virtue ethicists maintain that there is a conceptual link between *eudaimonia* and virtue. Hursthouse (2010), Section 2. If so, these scholars will think that prudentialism and eudaimonism are distinct since no such relationship holds between virtue and the appealing life.

¹⁵⁴ I say why in Chapter II, Section 5.

accommodate the demands of common-sense morality without demanding sainthood. It also suggests the possibility of a radically pluralistic account of the appealing life. In the remainder of this chapter, I will sometimes express my own substantive normative views, both about the appealing life and about how we ought to live. My main purpose in invoking them is to illustrate how one might go about endorsing and defending prudentialism.

To arrive at an account of the appealing life, we may begin by addressing this question: what are the components of an appealing human life? In other words, what sorts of features of a human life can, in and of themselves, contribute to the appeal of having that life? In my view, the standard sort of “objective list” proposed in the well-being literature is a promising first step toward formulating a plausible account of the appealing life. Happiness, the appreciation of beauty, certain sorts of knowledge, certain sorts of achievement, and healthy personal relations all seem to contribute to the appeal of having a life, and arguably none of these items is reducible to one of the others or to some further property. For instance, having a healthy, intimate relationship with another person seems to contribute to the appeal of having one’s life irrespective of its making her happy, constituting an achievement, being desired by her or an idealized version of her, etc. Yet, the above items hardly exhaust the range of things that, in and of themselves, contribute to the appeal of having a life. Consider some further features of lives: making effective use of one’s resources and talents, being actively engaged in worthwhile activities (that do not constitute achievements), taking part in projects and activities that fit one’s temperament and values, being in harmony with one’s culture and era, having a variety of life experiences, appreciating various forms of value, having a sense of humor,

having adventures, having true beliefs, having justified beliefs, avoiding self-deception, making amends when you have wronged another, bettering or saving others' lives, opposing unjust or immoral practices, being sensitive to others' needs, being respectful of other people and creatures, being honest, being genuine, being kind, being fair-minded, having integrity, and being original. Arguably, these are all things that, in and of themselves, typically contribute to the appeal of lives that include them.¹⁵⁵ This is not to say that they are necessary in order to have a life that is all-things-considered appealing (though some of them may be), but only that, when they are present in a life, they typically contribute to its appeal. In my view, this list is incomplete, which is why I consider this to be only a partial account of the appealing life.

Thus far, I have only provided a partial list of features that, in and of themselves, contribute to the appeal of a life without speaking to how they interact with each other to determine the overall appeal of a life. The next stage of developing an account of the appealing life involves addressing this issue. Are some features much weightier than others? Are some necessary for a life to qualify as all-things-considered appealing? Do some features have lexical priority over others such that an increase in one type of feature always contributes more appeal than any amount of increase in another type of feature? Might some features be such that, if a certain threshold is not met with respect to that feature, other features will have no impact or less of an impact?¹⁵⁶ A complete account of the appealing life would settle these issues. For present purposes, however, the only issue regarding weight and interaction on which I will stake a claim, thereby adding a bit more detail to the proposed partial account of the appealing life, concerns features that fall

¹⁵⁵ I say “typically” rather than “always” to allow space for the possibility that appealing life invariabilism is false. See note 143.

¹⁵⁶ Hawkins (2010) claims that affect is one such feature.

naturally under the heading “being moral.” Rather than identifying specific features and saying just how they interact, I will simply gesture in the direction of some general patterns that should result from this interaction. Some people, I claim, have the temperament and means to achieve moral sainthood while living well-rounded and happy lives. Their lives are quite appealing. For most of us, however, that sort of life is not an option. Given our circumstances in the world, the price of striving to achieve moral sainthood would be nothing short of impoverishment along various prudentially significant dimensions of our lives, including our happiness, the quality of our personal relationships, our appreciation of various forms of value, and our pursuit of non-moral projects. It is more appealing to have a well-balanced life as a morally decent person than to live an impoverished but saintly life of devotion to others. It is also more appealing to sacrifice well-roundedness or happiness as a morally decent person than to secure these goods through the exploitation of others or other ways of being immoral. Finally, if given the choice between the life of moral depravity or the life of moral sainthood, where both of these are equal in terms of happiness or well-roundedness, the life of moral sainthood is more appealing.

Needless to say, this all too vague sketch of the relationship between being moral and the appeal of having a life is woefully incomplete and requires further development. Among other things, it needs to be clarified what moral decency, moral sainthood, and moral depravity involve, what qualifies as well-roundedness, whether certain kinds of balance contribute more to the appeal of a life than others, and how happiness and well-roundedness (among other things) interact. Still, as far as it goes, this roughly sketched partial account of the appealing life implies that prudentialism does not direct most of us

to pursue moral sainthood or moral depravity. Rather, we should aim for something in between, though we should favor the extreme of sainthood over the extreme of depravity. Given this view, prudentialism could turn out to have a serious advantage as an ethical theory. It may skirt the Scylla of moral stringency and Charybdis of moral laxity.

I have not attempted to provide a complete account of the appealing life. Filling in more details of the present account would only serve to make the discussion more idiosyncratic. My purpose is not to develop or defend a specific interpretation of prudentialism but merely to suggest the possibility that some interpretation of prudentialism may prove to be a plausible ethical theory. In the remainder of this chapter, I will explore how the prudentialist might defend her view against three objections.

5. The Ultimate Aim Objection

Prudentialism implies that agents should always act for the sake of promoting the appeal of their own lives. In other words, the promotion of the appeal of one's own life should be each agent's ultimate practical aim. This, in turn, implies that any other aim (e.g. telling the truth, helping an elderly person across the street) can have only instrumental significance and that these other aims should be pursued only insofar as, and because, they promote the ultimate practical aim. But this is false. We should strive to tell the truth and help elderly people across streets (at least in part) for their own sake, not merely because doing so will contribute to the appeal of our own lives.

The ultimate aim objection stems from a particular way of conceiving of ethical theories and so will not apply to all types of prudentialism. Following Peter Railton, we may distinguish between prudentialism as a *criterion of what ought to be done* and prudentialism as a *prescription of a decision procedure*.¹⁵⁷ Prudentialism of the first sort states what agents ought to be doing without staking any claim on the deliberative process that should lead to such action, the motives that agents should have, and so forth.

¹⁵⁷ Railton (1984).

As a result, a prudentialist (in the criterion sense) may simply deny that agents should act only for the sake of the appeal of their own lives. The sophisticated prudentialist will recognize that she is better able to act as she ought if she cares about and aims for things other than the appeal of her own life. She will try to foster these attitudes.¹⁵⁸ Prudentialism of this first sort, then, does not fall within the scope of the ultimate aim objection, for it does not require agents to have the appeal of their own lives as their ultimate aim.

Prudentialism of the second sort does. It prescribes that one always have the promotion of the appeal of one's own life as an ultimate aim in deliberation.¹⁵⁹ How might a prudentialist (in the decision procedure sense) respond to the objection? I assume that bullet-biting is not a satisfying response, for surely it is not the case that one ought to help an elderly person across the street or spend time with one's loved ones solely for instrumental reasons.

There are at least two lines of response available to the prudentialist. The first involves endorsing a particular interpretation of "ultimate aim." The aim of promoting the appeal of one's own life should be *ultimate* in the sense of being an aim that one always acts on and that "trumps" any conflicting aims. This allows that one might have other intrinsic aims alongside the ultimate aim. Thus, a prudentialist who believes that helping Mr. Jones across the street will contribute to the appeal of her own life might assist him *both* for its own sake *and* for the sake of promoting the appeal of her own life. Such mixed motives are ubiquitous. And, as it happens, those who believe that assisting

¹⁵⁸ This point is inspired by Railton's discussion of the sophisticated hedonist and sophisticated consequentialist. Railton (1984), Sections 4 and 6.

¹⁵⁹ This appears to be the model of ethical theories adopted by Derek Parfit in *Reasons in Persons* (1984), Part I. (What I am calling an "ethical theory" Parfit calls a "theory of rationality.")

elderly people across streets, in and of itself, enhances the appeal of one's own life typically value the activity for its own sake. For this reason, it would be rather difficult to follow prudentialism in most cases if it implied that only the promotion of the appeal of one's own life should be pursued for its own sake.

Some will be unsatisfied with this first line of response. On this picture, prudentialism prescribes always acting with the aim of promoting the appeal of one's own life and allowing this aim to trump any conflicting aims. It may not seem realistic that one could always act on this aim, and some will count that as a mark against the theory. Even if this can be achieved, one might object that the perfect prudentialist agent will be objectionably self-centered, always thinking about what's in it for her.

The prudentialist has responses to these objections. First, it may be true that agents could not successfully act with the aim of promoting the appeal of their own life in each and every instance. But if this is a problem, it is a problem for virtually any ethical theory that is in the business of specifying what aim agents should always have. Surely one cannot, in every instance, act for the sake of doing one's duty or for the sake of promoting the impersonal good. Prudentialism has a decisive advantage over theories that prescribe these goals inasmuch as acting on the ultimate aim prescribed by prudentialism comes more naturally to most people. Next, the objection that the prudentialist agent will be objectionably self-centered simply has no teeth. The account of the appealing life sketched in Section 4 includes many other-regarding and externally focused components (such as engaging in worthwhile activities, appreciating value, being respectful of others, being kind, and opposing unjust practices). It is therefore difficult to see why the prudentialist agent would qualify as objectionably *self*-centered. Even if the perfect

prudentialist agent would always act with the aim of promoting the appeal of her own life, the view we are now considering allows that she may have many other aims that are not merely instrumental to the ultimate aim. Thus, she may aim to contribute to knowledge, to alleviate others' suffering, and to appreciate beauty for their own sake, and not merely as a means to enhancing the appeal of her own life.

There is a second way in which the prudentialist may resist the ultimate aim objection, while endorsing prudentialism as a recommended decision procedure. The objection assumes that if maximizing the appeal of our own lives is our ultimate aim, the aims of telling the truth, helping elderly people across streets, etc. must only have instrumental significance. This need not be the case if the appealworthiness of having a life is a so-called *inclusive good* that is comprised of other goods and is not some independent further good to be obtained.¹⁶⁰ Consider Edward, who thinks that only truth-telling and aiding others in need contribute to the appealworthiness of having a life. If the appeal of a life is an inclusive good comprised of these two goods, his having the intrinsic aim of promoting the appeal of his own life just is his having the intrinsic aims of telling the truth and aiding the needy. On this view, it is a mistake to think that aiming to promote the appeal of one's own life is distinct from aiming to promote those things that, in and of themselves, contribute to the appeal of having a life.

6. The Objection from Value

The partial account of the appealing life sketched above allows that there is value in the world. Given this, it is plausible that there can be circumstances in which an agent has most reason to promote, protect, or appreciate what has value though doing so will not maximize the appeal of her own life. For example, suppose you are uniquely positioned to promote value by saving many famous pieces of art from destruction, though doing so

¹⁶⁰ Scanlon (1998), p. 127, 133. Cf. Mill's discussion of parts of happiness. Mill (1998), Chapter 4.

will render your own life slightly less appealing to have. Under such circumstances, you clearly should save the art, but prudentialism entails that you should not.

This objection implies that prudentialism and value *simpliciter* don't mix. There are at least two ways to interpret the objection. The charge might be that the prudentialist who believes in value is guilty of conceptual confusion. Alternatively, it might be thought that the prudentialist who believes in value has an intelligible but substantively implausible view. I will address these possibilities in order.

To see why the prudentialist who believes in value might be accused of conceptual confusion, consider one view of the relationship between value and reasons:

x is valuable just in case x gives every agent, who is able to do so, reason to value x. The more valuable x is, the more reason agents have to value x.

I will call this the *reason-giving model of value*.¹⁶¹ What counts as an appropriate way of valuing something will depend on the thing in question. Knowledge calls for acquisition, drowning children call for saving, a poem calls for reading or recitation, a symphony calls for listening or performing, and so on. The issue of what type of valuing is appropriate for a given valuable object is presumably a substantive normative matter. On this model, where there is value, any agent with the ability to value it in the appropriate manner has reason to do so. The strength of the reason will be proportional to the amount of value. Next, consider the *additive model of reasons*. On this view, reasons always have some weight, and what one has most reason to do can always, in theory, be calculated by tallying up the weights of the reasons that speak for and against performing each available action. The action with the greatest net weight of reasons supporting it ought to be done.

¹⁶¹ Cf. Scanlon's buck-passing account. Scanlon (1998), pp. 95-100.

We are now in a position to see what might vindicate the charge of conceptual confusion. Suppose that situations can arise in which there is an overwhelming amount of value that gives some agent overwhelmingly strong reason to value it, more so than any countervailing reasons and that responding in the manner that this value warrants will result in the agent's life being less appealing to have on the whole. Lastly, suppose that we accept the reason-giving model of value and the additive model of reasons. Taken together, these suppositions entail that the agent in question has most reason to act in a way that fails to maximize the appeal of her own life. This contradicts prudentialism. It might be thought that the prudentialist fails to see this due to conceptual confusion because she does not recognize that the reason-giving model of value or the additive models accord with our concepts.

Prudentialists have several routes by which they might respond to this charge. I will mention three. First, a prudentialist might insist that responding to value in the appropriate manner never detracts from the appeal of having a life. This, however, does not strike me as a promising response. Imagine a scenario in which an individual forgoes a normal, happy life and submits herself to extensive periods of non-lethal torture in order to save thousands of lives. This would seem to be a fitting response to the value of those others' lives. It might also be the most noble and morally admirable choice. But it is not plausibly the choice that renders her own life as appealing as possible.

A second line of response involves rejecting the reason-giving model of value and insisting that the relationship that holds between value and reasons is a substantive normative matter. To see why one might be attracted to this view, imagine this scenario. Near your home is a lake where, for one reason or another, unattended children who

cannot swim are constantly falling in. In fact, at any given time, there are always some drowning children in this lake. How should you respond to this situation? At one extreme, you might aim to save as many drowning children as possible. Suppose that this would involve a daily regimen of saving children all morning, taking a long lunch break to regain your strength, saving children all afternoon, and then going to an evening job where you could earn enough income to meet your own basic needs. At the other extreme, you might make no effort at all to save any children. You are discussing what you should do with two friends. Both agree that a child's death is an impersonally bad thing. One of your friends is of the opinion that you should do whatever you feel like doing, which might involve ignoring the drowning children altogether. She says, "I recognize that the world would be a better place if you save some of these kids. But it's not your job to do this. If you happen to feel like saving some children, go for it. You'd be an admirable person. But otherwise, you should just ignore them." This view does not seem incoherent. It bears some resemblance to the view that we have no "positive duties" to actively make the world a better place. Your other friend holds a different view. He thinks that you should save a certain number of children each day but that you need not go to the extreme of saving as many as you possibly can. He advocates saving children in the morning and spending the afternoon however it suits you. This also seems to be an intelligible view. It resembles the view that one is only required to meet some reasonable threshold in actively promoting the good.¹⁶²

Rejecting the reason-giving model of value provides us with a story to tell about the intelligibility of these views in a rather straightforward way. The first friend believes that the badness of the children dying does not, in and of itself, give you any reason to

¹⁶² Cf. Slote (1984) and Murphy (1993).

save them; you only have reason to do this only if you happen to feel like doing it. The second friend believes that the badness of the children dying does, in and of itself, give you reason to save them, but only up to a point. Beyond that point, you only have reason to prevent these deaths only if it suits you. The prudentialist of the sort that I am considering can endorse something like this second view. It can be thought that value and disvalue provide reasons for agents to respond in certain ways, but only up to a point. Past that point, the agent has most reason to attend to other aspects of their lives.

A third route for the prudentialist involves rejecting the additive model of reasons and insisting that some reasons have lexical priority over others. Our reason concept does appear to admit of lexical priorities. It might be somewhat interesting to have lunch with George W. Bush. If there were an opportunity to do so, I judge that I would have some reason to take it. But if offered the choice between one lunch with Barack Obama or any number of lunches with Bush (where, let us fancifully suppose, each new lunch with Bush would be as interesting as the first and would generate as much reason to pursue it), I daresay that I would have most reason to dine with Obama. Our concept of a reason seems to allow for lexical priorities. Once this is admitted, the prudentialist may claim that one's reason to pursue the appeal of her own life has lexical priority over all others. There are, then, several means by which the prudentialist can escape the charge of conceptual confusion.

The alternative interpretation of the objection from value accuses the prudentialist stance of being implausible rather than incoherent. The example invoked in the objection is meant to draw this out. You are uniquely positioned to save many valuable works of art from destruction. The only catch is that your own life will be slightly less appealing if

you do this. You should save the art, the objector insists. Since prudentialism prescribes letting the art be destroyed, it is an implausible theory.

This style of objection has great force against prudentialism on many interpretations. Suppose, for instance, that hedonism about the appealing life is true. Prudentialism will imply that one should allow great art to be destroyed rather than accept a slight diminishment of one's own happiness (due, perhaps, to the scratching of one's finger). That is an unwelcome implication. And it appears that any interpretation of prudentialism that does not make ample space for appreciating, promoting, and protecting value will lead to a similarly implausible result.

But the objection has far less force against prudentialism on the interpretation I am considering. Recall that the partial account of the appealing life sketched in Section 4 includes engagement with and appreciation of value as an appeal-enhancing feature of a life. Suppose that such engagement makes a substantial contribution to the appeal of having a life, as many of us believe. In that case, the act of saving the art will detract from the appeal of your life only if it involves costs that are substantial enough to offset the benefits of acting in this way. The cost might be sacrificing your child in order to save the art. Or sacrificing your own life where this deprives you of many more years of full and happy life. Or slavishly devoting yourself to saving this art over a period of many years, though you would be motivated only by feelings of obligation and take no pleasure in your life. Whatever the costs are, they will not be slight. They will have enough prudential significance to outweigh the appeal of saving so many valuable objects from destruction. Once these costs are brought to light, the objection from value will have far less intuitive force against the interpretation of prudentialism under consideration.

7. The Concern-Based Reasons Objection

It seems arbitrary that one should always act so as to promote the appeal of one's own life, when the world is full of similar people leading similar lives. We need a rationale for this. The only adequate rationale available is that we care deeply about ourselves and that our reason to promote the appeal of our own lives is grounded in this concern. But if that is right, prudentialism should be abandoned in favor of a different ethical theory—call it the concern-based theory. According to the concern-based theory, an agent should always act so as to promote the appeal of the lives of those she cares about, in proportion to the extent to which she has concern for those individuals.

There are three lines of response that I will mention. First, the prudentialist can simply deny that it is arbitrary to think that individuals ought to promote the appeal of their own lives as opposed to the lives of similar individuals. People bear a special relationship to their own lives that they do not bear to others' lives. Whatever affects the appeal of having your life affects the appeal of being in your shoes. If the appealing life analysis is correct, the degree to which one is lucky, unlucky, enviable, and pitiable is bound up with the appealworthiness of one's own life. Effects on others' lives have no effect on this unless they also affect the appealworthiness of one's own life. The prudentialist, like most people, sees the distinction between one's relation to one's own life and one's relation to others' lives as normatively significant. If the arbitrariness claim amounts to the claim that this is *not* a normatively significant distinction, the prudentialist can complain that it simply begs the question. Second, the proposed rationale—that we have special reason to promote the appeal of our own lives because we care about ourselves—is actually a non-starter as a rationale for prudentialism. For prudentialism implies that people should maximize the appeal of their own lives irrespective of whether and to what extent they care about themselves. Third, the concern-based theory has unattractive implications. An individual born into an oppressive situation might care deeply about her oppressor and loathe herself. In that case, the concern-based theory

directs this individual to maximize the appeal of her oppressor's life, even if that requires neglecting the appeal of her own. This will strike many of us as an implausible result.¹⁶³ The prudentialist can point out that her theory accommodates what is best in the concern-based theory without taking on board its implausible implications. Presumably, having concern for others, in some circumstances and in certain ways, contributes to the appealworthiness of our lives. Part of what caring for others involves is giving them priority over those whom we do not care about. Prudentialism can allow for this without implying that concern is the sole determinant of our reasons for action.

8. Conclusion

For those who are drawn to the idea that an ethical theory should avoid the extremes of moral demandingness and moral laxity, prudentialism may prove an attractive candidate. This will depend upon one's substantive views about the appealing life. While I have gestured in the direction of an account of the appealing life, I did not attempt to provide a complete account. One reason for this, as already noted, is that doing so would only have made my discussion more idiosyncratic. Another reason is that I do not have anything close to a complete account of the appealing life to offer. If the partial account that I have sketched is on the right track, any remotely plausible account of the appealing life will be radically pluralistic, and I suspect that the task of determining how the features that contribute to and detract from the appeal of a life interact will be a far

¹⁶³ Nor does it help to modify the concern-based theory to state that individuals should maximize the appeal of individuals' lives to the extent that they are *worthy of concern*. It is possible that some individuals are entirely unworthy of concern. But presumably these individuals still have some reason to promote the appeal of their own lives. At least, the prudentialist will think so. Another unpalatable implication of this theory is that one would have more reason to promote the appeal of the lives of one's neighbors' children than one's own children if the neighbors' children are worthy of greater concern.

more complicated affair than the already daunting task of identifying the features. Working out a complete account of the appealing life is a project that might be, and perhaps should be, pursued throughout a lifetime without ever culminating in a finished product.

One consequence of having only a partial account of the appealing life in hand is that, in some situations, it will be unclear what prudentialism prescribes. This means that the theory cannot provide guidance in the way that simpler ethical theories can. It also means that the theory may prove difficult to counterexample and impossible to confirm if we take our intuitions about particular cases at all seriously. Despite these limitations, if the implications of the theory that we are able to work out accord with our intuitions about how we ought to live, prudentialism may warrant tentative endorsement.

CONCLUSION

My primary goal in this dissertation has been to propose and defend a new analysis of the concept of prudential value and to examine some of its implications. What it is for something to be good for you, I have suggested, is for that thing to contribute to the appeal of being in your shoes. This basic thought provides insight into a range of related notions, including well-being, the prudentially good life, luck, paternalism, self-sacrifice, selfishness, pitiability, and enviability. In Chapter I, I defended the appealing life analysis by arguing that it preserves many of the features associated with prudential value, outdoes three rivals, and sheds light on the relationship between prudence and morality as well as the debate between subjectivists and objectivists. In Chapter II, I drew upon this analysis to reinterpret a long-standing puzzle about the relationship between prudential value and time. The appealing life analysis does not force any solution to this puzzle, but it does provide some guidance in working toward a solution. In Chapter III, I explored an ethical theory that prescribes maximizing the appeal of one's own life, that may or may not be equivalent to egoism and eudaimonism, and that holds the promise of striking an attractive balance between the extremes of moral demandingness and moral laxity.

If the central claims and arguments of this dissertation are problematic in ways that have escaped my notice, I am hopeful that my discussion of this topic will at least inspire others to grapple with these issues and succeed where I have failed. If, on the

other hand, the appealing life analysis and my assessment of its implications and significance are more or less on the right track, there is much work to be done. Various components of the analysis are in need of further refinement and clarification, though it is likely that this process can only be taken so far without moving beyond the limits of our concept. It should be asked whether the idea of prudential value picks out anything in the actual world and, if not, whether some nearby concept might serve our practical and theoretical needs. There is work to be done in assessing the implications of the appealing life analysis for historical and contemporary philosophical discussions. What, for instance, might the appealing life analysis tell us about the positions of Aristotle, Butler, Kant, Mill, Rawls, and various other thinkers of the past? What insight does the analysis provide into the history of philosophical theorizing about prudential value and related notions? We will also want to examine how this new understanding of prudential value bears on various debates in contemporary ethical and political theory, both theoretical and applied. Those who seek a unified ethical theory that does not direct us toward moral sainthood or moral depravity may wish to explore the prospects of prudentialism. Because the concept of prudential value occupies such a central place in historical and contemporary philosophical discussions, the significance of arriving at a new understanding of this concept is far-reaching.

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