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THE ATTRACTIONS AND DELIGHTS OF GOODNESS

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What makes something good for me? Most contemporary philosophers argue that something cannot count as good for me unless I am in some way attracted to it, or take delight in it. However, subjectivist theories of prudential value face difficulties, and there is no consensus about how these difficulties should be resolved. Whether one opts for a hedonist or a desire-satisfaction account of prudential value, certain fundamental assumptions about human well-being must be abandoned. I argue that we should reconsider Plato's objectivist theory of goodness as unity, or the One. This view is both consistent with and explains our most basic views both about goodness in general and human well-being in particular.

If there is anything approaching a consensus in contemporary philosophical discussions, it is that prudential value is at least to a certain extent subjective. Indeed, no matter how objectivist one might be about other sorts of value, when it comes to prudential value, almost no contemporary philosopher can resist the pull of subjectivism.¹ To this extent, contemporary philosophical consensus contrasts quite significantly with the objectivist views of many of the ancients. In this paper I shall diagnose certain ideas which account, at least in part, for the current appeal of subjectivist conceptions of prudential value, and I shall argue that their appeal is best explained by an objectivist account of prudential value like Plato's.

I

Since the terms 'subjectivist' and 'objectivist' are used in so many different ways, it is important to be explicit about how I am using these terms to distinguish different theories of prudential value. There is a trivial sense in

¹ Of course there are always outliers. See, e.g., D. Brink, *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (Cambridge UP, 1989), pp. 217–36; T. Hurka, *Perfectionism* (Oxford UP, 1993); R. Kraut, 'Desire and the Human Good', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association*, 68 (1994), pp. 39–54.

which all theories of prudential value are subjectivist. Prudential value is the value which objects, events, activities or properties have, in virtue of which they are good *for* a particular person, or alternatively, in virtue of which they contribute to a particular person's self-interest, welfare or well-being. Sometimes prudential value is spoken of in terms of its impact on a person's life, in which case a thing has prudential value for a person if and only if it makes that person's life go better for that person. Being prudentially valuable, then, is a relational property, and one of the *relata*, the person, is a being with subjective states. This much is agreed. The dispute between subjectivists and objectivists concerns the question of what makes it true that any given thing stands in the good-for relation to any given person. According to subjectivists, it is a necessary condition for *x*'s being good for some person that some actual or hypothetical person has a positive attitude or feeling towards *x*; according to objectivists, this is not a necessary condition. It is important that this distinction between different theories of prudential value, by itself, has no implications for the sorts of entities that could count as good for some person. As L.W. Sumner observes,

Neither theory makes any claims about the kinds of things which can be sources or ingredients of well-being. A subjectivist is not committed to holding that these ingredients must all be subjective, nor is an objectivist committed to denying this. They may agree completely on a list of the principal components of the good life while disagreeing over the entry criteria for the items on that list.²

The function of a theory of prudential value, then, is to state the necessary and sufficient conditions for being included in a list of items that are good for some person.

According to many contemporary philosophers, a condition of adequacy for theories of prudential value is a thesis that has come to be known as 'internalism'. For example, Peter Railton comments

While I do not find this thesis [internalism] 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.³

Internalism is the thesis that an object with prudential value *must* evoke a sort of 'internal resonance' in the person for whom it is good (Railton, p. 9). The necessity at issue here is conceptual: that is, according to internalists, it

² L.W. Sumner, 'The Subjectivity of Welfare', *Ethics*, 105 (1995), pp. 764–90, at p. 769.

³ P. Railton, 'Facts and Values', *Philosophical Topics*, 14 (1986), pp. 5–31, at p. 9. Railton uses 'intrinsic value' to refer to what I have been calling prudential value.

is part of our very notion of prudential value, i.e., it is 'internal to' our concept of prudential value, that it evokes in us a positive subjective response. On Railton's view, the internal resonance between me and my good which the thesis of internalism is meant to capture is a certain sort of motivational attraction. Since our deepest and most significant motivational commitment is to what we would want ourselves to want, 'were [we] to contemplate [our] present situation from a standpoint fully and vividly informed about [ourselves] and [our] circumstances, and entirely free of cognitive error or lapses of instrumental rationality', Railton concludes (p. 16) that prudential value simply consists in the satisfaction of such hypothetical desires.⁴ For the sake of simplicity, I shall use the phrase 'deepest desires' to refer to those desires that our ideally informed and rational selves would want us to satisfy.

Actual- and informed-desire-satisfaction accounts of prudential value like Railton's have been criticized on the ground that they are unable to distinguish between those desires the satisfaction of which contributes to my *own* good, and those desires the satisfaction of which contributes to something I value, but not necessarily as part of my own good. It seems perfectly intelligible for me to value someone else's good,⁵ or performing my moral duty,⁶ or even self-punishment,⁷ more than I value my own good; yet if my own good *consists* simply in the satisfaction of my deepest desires, then the idea of sacrificing my own good for the sake of something that I also deeply desire becomes unintelligible.⁸ Those sympathetic to desire-satisfaction accounts have proposed various value-neutral strategies for restricting the scope of the desires relevant to prudential value,⁹ but these restrictions have seemed inadequate to the task of capturing all and only those desires whose satisfaction contributes to our own good.¹⁰

Because our deepest desires could have as their objects things that would not count as good for us, what makes something good for us cannot simply consist in an object's ability to evoke in us the internal resonance that we feel towards whatever would satisfy our deepest desires. Perhaps, then,

⁴ Railton's account of prudential value is a variation on the informed-desire accounts of prudential value endorsed by R.B. Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and the Right* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), and J. Griffin, *Well-Being* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

⁵ M. Overvold, 'Self-Interest and the Concept of Self-Sacrifice', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 10 (1980), pp. 105–18, at p. 108.

⁶ S. Darwall, 'Self-Interest and Self-Concern', in E.F. Paul *et al.* (eds), *Self-Interest* (Cambridge UP, 1997), pp. 158–78, at p. 158.

⁷ Kraut, 'Desire and the Human Good', pp. 40–1.

⁸ Overvold, 'Self-Interest and the Concept of Self-Sacrifice', pp. 115–18.

⁹ See, for example, Overvold, 'Self-Interest and Getting What You Want', in H. Miller and W. Williams (eds), *The Limits of Utilitarianism* (Minnesota UP, 1982), pp. 186–93.

¹⁰ See, e.g., Darwall, 'Self-Interest and Self-Concern', pp. 164–5.

desire-satisfaction accounts have simply picked out the wrong sort of internal resonance that exists between me and my good. To test this suggestion, I shall consider the typical sort of case that seems to count against desire-satisfaction accounts.

Suppose I have successfully lived my life out of an absolute and complete devotion to what I regard as my moral duty. Not only are all of my desires subordinate to this single over-arching end, but also, by any moral standards that we might adopt, I have succeeded in living my life in accordance with this end. Further, it is easy to imagine circumstances in which the choices that I have made in pursuit of this over-arching goal are not due to misinformation, lack of information, or failure in instrumental rationality. Were I fully informed and perfectly instrumentally rational, I would still want myself to have pursued this sort of life. But suppose also that I take no pleasure in the actual performance of my moral duty. I am like Kant's shopkeeper who acts morally out of a sense of duty, but who has no immediate inclination towards, nor takes any delight in, the performance of his duty.¹¹ For, according to Kant, '[moral] actions ... need no recommendation from any subjective disposition or taste so as to meet with immediate favour and delight; there is no need of any immediate propensity or feeling towards them'.¹² In that case, I would have the sort of internal resonance towards my life and its contents that Railton suggests is constitutive of their being good for me: I have a significant internal motivation to pursue the life that I have lived. In fact, according to Railton's account, it is hard to see how my life could be going better for me: none of my deepest desires has gone unsatisfied. However, when we are considering the case of a person who has so much of what is good for him that he would count, by anyone's standards, as well off, it seems that a different sort of internal resonance between him and his good life must be in play besides a motivational commitment to satisfying his deepest desires. Whatever sort of value my life might have, aesthetic, perfectionistic or moral, if I do not *enjoy* the life that I am living, my life does not appear to be sufficiently good *for me* to establish me as well off.¹³ Enjoyment or delight, then, seems to be a sort of internal resonance that one feels towards one's life and its contents when one is well off.

¹¹ Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), in Kant, *Ethical Philosophy*, 2nd edn, tr. J.W. Ellington (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), p. 9 (397). Numbers in parentheses indicate the page numbers in the fourth volume of the *Prüssische Akademie der Wissenschaften* edition of Kant's works.

¹² Kant, p. 41 (435). For further argument that satisfaction of desire need not be accompanied by pleasure, see J. Feinberg, 'Psychological Egoism', in J. Feinberg and R. Shafer-Landau (eds), *Reason and Responsibility*, 11th edn (Boston: Wadsworth, 2001), pp. 547–59, at p. 549.

¹³ Sumner, 'Subjectivity', pp. 771–2, 773, 790.

Hedonistic accounts that *define* prudential value in terms of the amount of pleasure or enjoyment a person experiences are ready-made to capture this sort of internal resonance. Unfortunately, hedonism has its own difficulties. Suppose we are faced with a choice between (1) a life of pure pleasure attached to a machine that, in addition to stimulating in us a maximum amount of pleasure, gives us the illusion of being wise, accomplished, well respected and well loved, and (2) a life with somewhat less pleasure, in which we are *actually* wise, accomplished, well respected and well loved.¹⁴ Far from feeling an unmediated attraction towards the first life, many people feel a strong aversion to the idea of being fed a series of illusions by a pleasure-stimulating machine, and not only, it seems, because we would fail to appreciate how really pleasurable our lives would be. Such a life lacks the sort of internal resonance with us that the actual and informed desire-satisfaction accounts of prudential value capture so well: it fails to satisfy our deep desires for a grip on reality, personal accomplishment and significant relationships with others (see Griffin, *Well-Being*, p. 9).

We might think that a hybrid subjectivist account is the easiest solution to the difficulties of both hedonism and desire-satisfaction accounts. In order to count as good for me, we might conclude, an object must evoke in me both sorts of internal resonance: it must be the object of my deepest desire, and when acquired, it must give me pleasure, at least in the long run. But an alternative suggestion which I believe is worth exploring is that what is driving our dissatisfaction with various subjectivist accounts is some prior objectivist notion of the human good. Our dissatisfaction is *correlated* with the observation that certain sorts of internal resonance are lacking between me and something that fails to count as good for me; but, the objectivist would claim, subjectivists put the cart before the horse. Something counts as good for me not because it evokes in me the right sort of internal resonance; rather, something evokes in me various sorts of internal resonances because it is good. The relation between prudential value and our subjective attitudes towards it, then, is external rather than internal.

Against this suggestion, however, Sumner has argued that objectivist accounts of prudential value cannot account for the thinking that seems to support subjectivism. For, according to him, it follows from the very nature of objectivist theories that they cannot reliably capture any sort of internal resonance between me and my good:

Subjective theories make our well-being logically dependent on our attitudes of favour and disfavour. Objective theories deny this dependency. On an objective theory,

¹⁴ This, of course, is a variation on Robert Nozick's famous 'experience machine' thought-experiment: *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), pp. 43–5. For criticisms of Nozick's argument, see M. Silverstein, 'In Defense of Happiness: a Response to the Experience Machine', *Social Theory and Practice*, 26 (2000), pp. 279–300.

therefore, ... my life can be going well despite my failing to have any positive attitude towards it.¹⁵

Yet Sumner is mistaken. Whether a given objectivist theory has this implication will depend very much on the details of the theory. As I shall show below, an objectivist account of prudential value like Plato's implies that a human life which is going well is attractive and delightful to the person who is living that life. Such a theory, then, is compatible with those ideas which seem to favour subjectivism, and further, as I shall argue, provides a better explanation of the cogency of these ideas than its main subjectivist rivals can.

II

In *Eudemian Ethics* Aristotle reports, somewhat derisively, that Plato identified the Good with the One (τὸ ἓν, 1218a 20; see also *Meta.* 988a 8–16, 998b 10–15).¹⁶ The modern reader's initial response to this suggestion is likely to be similar to the response which Aristotle is said to have attributed to those who attended Plato's lecture on the Good: 'it seemed to them ... something completely paradoxical. The result was that some of them sneered at the lecture, and others were full of reproaches.'¹⁷ But while the identification of the Good with the One might initially strike us as the product of a mind overheated by an infatuation with mathematics, it turns out, on reflection, to be a reasonable suggestion.

This emerges from Socrates' remarks in *Republic* (608D–609A) about how he speaks and conceives of 'the good' and 'the bad':

Do you talk about a certain good and bad? – I do. – And do you think about them the same way as I do? – What way is that? – What destroys and harms is in all cases the bad [τὸ μὲν ἀπολλύον καὶ διαφθεῖρον πᾶν τὸ κακὸν εἶναι], and what preserves and benefits is the good [τὸ δὲ σῶζον καὶ ὀφελούν τὸ ἀγαθόν].... – I do. – Do you say that there is a good and a bad for each thing? For example, ophthalmia for the eyes, sickness for the whole body, blight for grain, rot for wood, rust for bronze or

¹⁵ Sumner, 'Subjectivity', p. 768; my italics. Similar arguments are found in his *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

¹⁶ Of course, not everyone accepts Aristotle's testimony on this matter. See, e.g., H. Cherniss, *The Riddle of the Early Academy* (California UP, 1945). For extended and convincing arguments for attributing this conception of the Good to Plato, see K. Gaiser, 'Plato's Enigmatic Lecture "On the Good"', *Phronesis*, 25 (1980), pp. 5–37, and M. Burnyeat, 'Plato on Why Mathematics is Good for the Soul', in T. Smiley (ed.), *Mathematics and Necessity* (Oxford UP, 2000), pp. 1–81.

¹⁷ Aristoxenus, *The Harmonics of Aristoxenus*, ed. H. Macran (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902), 31.1–4.

iron.... – I do. – And when one of these inheres in something, doesn't it make the thing in question defective, and in the end, doesn't it wholly disintegrate and destroy it? – Of course.

Socrates states in this passage that something can be bad for an object not only by 'destroying' it, but also by 'harming' it, and he suggests that at least in the case of the objects that he mentions, 'harm' is such that it brings things closer to destruction. Corresponding to things that are bad for a given object are things that are good for it, and though Socrates does not offer us any examples of these here, it would be natural to conclude that as things which are bad for an object contribute to its destruction, so things which are good for a object contribute to its survival. Following this line of reasoning, we might infer that on Socrates' view, x counts as good for y if and only if x contributes to y 's survival. However, this conclusion would be premature, since Socrates goes on to apply his general observations about things that are bad or good to the particular case of the soul, which he concludes is necessarily indestructible. If x 's being good for y were simply a matter of x 's contributing to y 's survival, then on Socrates' view, nothing could count as good or bad for a soul, because a soul survives necessarily. And yet Socrates clearly believes that different things can count as good for or bad for the soul, even if they do not contribute to its survival or destruction: indeed, on Socrates' view, destruction can sometimes be a blessing if survival brings with it many bad things (*Rp.* 610D; see also 406D–E, 408B).

So far, I suspect, Socrates' views about things that are good conform to our own: we do tend to think of things that contribute to the survival of y as good for y (e.g., vitamins for the body; acid-free paper for the storage of rare manuscripts; sunshine for plants), but we also tend to agree with Socrates' suggestion in *Crito* that 'we should not treat living [τὸ ζῆν] as most important [περὶ πλείστου ποιητέον], but living well [εὖ ζῆν]' (*Cr.* 48B), a suggestion which would be unintelligible if prudential value consisted simply in survival. One possible explanation of these claims is Aristotle's, namely, that 'the good is spoken of in many ways' (*EE* 1217b 25–6). But another possible explanation is that which Aristotle attributes to Plato, namely, that the Good is the One.

To make sense of this suggestion, I shall first consider what is involved in regarding something as 'one' – as a countable unit. While this remains a vexed question, at least counting is always of objects of a particular type: on my two desks, there are fifteen books, four pens and ninety-eight pieces of paper. Plato's suggestion that the Good is the One, then, can be understood as the claim that x counts as good for y *qua* F (e.g., *qua* desk, book, pen or piece of paper) if and only if x contributes to y 's oneness as an F, that is, its unity and completeness as an F.

This initially paradoxical suggestion becomes more plausible when we consider various cases. While some contemporary philosophers have contended that our concepts of benefit and harm are restricted in their application to beings who are capable of having positive attitudes towards the things that benefit them,¹⁸ my usage is closer to Socrates' when he suggests that there is a 'good and a bad for each thing': I speak very easily of what is good for plants, musical manuscripts, novels and paintings, and I do not believe that I am either projecting my own interests onto these objects or speaking metaphorically. When I assert, for example, that moist soil is good for purple loosestrife, I am certainly not speaking of, or committing myself to any views about, its preferences or feelings of pleasure, and I am also not speaking of, or committing myself to any views about, my own preferences for, or delight in, loosestrife. I might prefer that any loosestrife that enters my garden should be destroyed before it destroys the other plants I care about, and I might become deeply distressed whenever it appears. Nor am I imagining (as if this were possible) what I would want or care about or be pleased by, if I were loosestrife. It might be true that what is good for loosestrife is what I would rationally want for it *if* I cared for it,¹⁹ but this is only because I count as caring for loosestrife only if I desire its good. Instead, when I speak of what is good for loosestrife, I am thinking simply of the sorts of things that allow all of its parts to function harmoniously as a unit.

Objects need not be functional systems in order to be subject to harm or benefit. The acidic paper in which Bach's original manuscripts have been stored has been bad for them, and precisely for the reason which Plato's analysis suggests: acidic paper has led to their disintegration, that is, to their dissolution into disconnected parts. In many cases, such as the case of loosestrife, if you threaten their unity, you threaten their very survival, which shows why the good and the bad are so often associated with survival and destruction. However, as is evident in the case of Bach's manuscripts, we do not have to believe that disintegration will lead to ultimate destruction in order to believe that disunity is bad for the manuscripts. Even if curators were to find an environment that guaranteed that the manuscripts would never disintegrate to the point of destruction, it would still be the case that the small degree of disunity that they have already suffered has been harmful to them.

¹⁸ See, e.g., Railton, 'Facts and Values', p. 9; J.D. Velleman, 'Is Motivation Internal to Value?', in C. Fehige and U. Wessels (eds), *Preferences* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998), pp. 88–102; A. Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (Harvard UP, 1990), p. 33.

¹⁹ See Darwall, 'Self-Interest and Self-Concern', p. 160.

Further, dissolution or loss of parts is not the only way in which oneness can be threatened. An object can also be harmed by having extraneous parts tacked on: an additional bit of blue in this corner of my painting would be bad for it if it was already complete without that. It might seem odd to speak of things being good for sticks or rocks or pine cones, but the oddness is due to the fact that it is unusual for anyone to worry about the good of such things, rather than to any unintelligibility in the thought that they have a good. Biologists studying rare pine cones know very well what counts as good for them, namely, those factors that contribute to the preservation and unity of all of the functional parts that constitute a pine cone. While Socrates suggests that there is a 'good and a bad for each thing', it might seem that there are some types of things – e.g., a pile of trash, the smallest elementary particle – for which it is impossible to conceive of benefits or harms. But these cases, one might argue, are the very exceptions that prove the rule, since the first is a case of something that fails to count as a genuine thing (because it lacks even minimal unity), and the second is a case of something whose unity is always guaranteed (and so cannot be benefited or harmed). I suspect that our hesitation to agree with Socrates' suggestion that things can be good for wood or bad for iron is due to the fact that the 'stuffs' of wood and iron lack sufficient unity to count as genuine things. Once we have in mind a particular wooden or iron thing, say, a statue, we are no longer at a loss to think of things that might count as good or bad for it.

III

Let 'beneficial value' refer to the sort of value that objects, events, activities or properties have when they are good for some y . According to the analysis of beneficial value that I am attributing to Plato, the relation that holds between x and y in virtue of which x is good for y is perfectly objective, since the analysis makes no reference to y 's (or anyone else's) subjective states: in every case, x is good for y *qua* F if and only if x contributes to y 's oneness as an F (that is, its unity and completeness as an F). I want to suggest that what we have been calling 'prudential value' is a particular type of beneficial value – it is the value x has for a particular sort of y , namely, human beings. Of course, the plausibility of this suggestion will depend on what exactly it would mean for human beings to be unified and complete as human beings. Socrates maintains that the human soul is, at the very least, the most important part of a human being. If someone's soul is well off, then so too is he (*Rp.* 335B–C, 353E). I need not follow the details of Socrates' account of

human nature, but for the sake of illustration it is helpful to consider the implications of his simple model for an account of prudential value.

Socrates speaks of the soul as divided into three parts – a rational part, a spirited part, and an appetitive part – each with its proper function (440D). It is reasonable to suppose that as is the case for other objects with proper functions, the ability to perform its function is essential to each part of the soul (601A–E). If, for example, no part of my soul were able to engage in the distinctive function of the rational part, I would no longer count as having a rational part, and I would no longer count as a ‘whole’ human being. Since the human soul appears to have no function over and above the function of its parts, the well-being of the human soul, and thus the well-being of the human being whose soul it is, would consist, on Plato’s view, in the harmonious functioning of these three parts.

Socrates never gives an explicit account of the proper function of the three parts of the human soul. However, he does offer us various clues from which we can create at least a sketch of an account. Each of the parts of the soul has its own distinctive sources of motivation and of pleasure (580D). The rational part of the soul is the home to two distinctive desires: the desire to learn the truth (435E, 581B), and the desire to rule the soul (439C–D). It is a challenge to figure out how Socrates conceives of the spirited part of the soul, but for my purposes here it will be safe to rely on the results of John Cooper’s careful analysis of the relevant textual evidence,²⁰ and conclude with him (p. 135) that the spirited part of our soul

is understood by Plato as that wherein one feels (a) the competitive drive to distinguish oneself from the run-of-the-mill person, to do and be something noteworthy within the context provided by one’s society and its scheme of values; (b) pride in oneself and one’s accomplishments, to the extent that one succeeds in this effort; (c) esteem for noteworthy others and (especially) the desire to be esteemed by others and by oneself.

The appetitive part of the soul is (not surprisingly) the home of certain appetites, or impulses, for things like food, drink and sex (436A, 437D, 439D).

While the various desires which Socrates correlates with the different parts of the soul are perhaps their most salient features, they do not themselves define the function of the different parts of the soul. The function of the parts of the soul is not to satisfy these desires; on the contrary, the function of these ‘necessary’ desires is to allow for the proper functioning of the parts (558E–559B). So, for example, the function of the rational part is to learn (436A) and to supervise the functioning of the whole soul (441E, 442C).

²⁰ J. Cooper, ‘Plato on Human Motivation’, *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 1 (1984), pp. 3–21, repr. in his *Reason and Emotion* (Princeton UP, 1999), pp. 118–36. All references will be to the reprint.

The desire to learn the truth and the desire to rule the soul motivate the rational part of the human soul to perform these functions. The function of spirit is to ensure one's status within the community of which one is a part, and the desires that we have to compete, to accomplish something of value to others, and to be well regarded by our fellow human beings, motivate the spirited part of the human soul to perform its function. And finally, the function of the appetitive part of the soul is to ensure one's bodily health and reproductive success, and appetites like hunger, thirst and lust motivate the appetitive part of the human soul to accomplish these goals.

Socrates also states that each of the parts of the soul has its own distinctive pleasures (580D). While it might be tempting to think that the human good consists in having the most and best sorts of pleasure,²¹ Plato's oneness account of beneficial value implies that pleasure plays a different role in contributing to human well-being. Socrates maintains that many human beings experience 'unnecessary' pleasure that has no value at all for them (505C, 560E–561C). On Plato's understanding, this means that the experience of such pleasures does not contribute to the oneness of the soul. In fact, to the extent that they motivate one to pursue objects that threaten psychic harmony, such pleasures are positively bad for human beings (559D–560A, 561E, 573A–577A). In contrast, certain 'necessary' pleasures that we experience when the parts of our soul perform their proper functions do count as good for us, since, together with the 'necessary' desires, they form part of the motivational system that allows for the harmonious functioning of the different parts of our soul. When the soul is in such a state, according to Socrates, it counts as just (441D–E):

[The just person] puts himself in order, is his own friend, and harmonizes the three parts of himself like three limiting notes in a musical scale – high, low and middle. He binds together those parts and any others there may be in between, and from having been many things, he becomes entirely one, moderate, and harmonious (443D).

In contrast, Socrates notes, the soul of the unjust person is characterized by discord: reason pulls in one direction, spirit in another, and the appetites in yet another direction (444B). Whether or not psychic disharmony is inevitably associated with injustice, most readers agree with Glaucon that it is not a good thing for the person who is in such a disunified state (445A–B). Plato's explanation for this agreement would be that when we judge something to be beneficial or harmful to a person, we are working with some notion of what it is for a person to be 'one', both unified and complete, as opposed to

²¹ For a proponent of this view, see J. Butler, 'The Arguments for the Most Pleasant Life in *Republic IX*: a Note Against the Common Interpretation', *Apeiron*, 32 (1999), pp. 37–48, and 'Justice and the Fundamental Question of Plato's *Republic*', *Apeiron*, 35 (2002), pp. 1–18.

a mere bundle of conflicting impulses. To the extent that one is reduced to such an incoherent bundle, one is badly off as a human being.

On Socrates' view, psychic disintegration is a constant threat for humans. Being driven by appetites for food and sex can undermine the ability of the rational and spirited parts to perform their functions (553c–d). But equally, the single-minded pursuit of truth can undermine the ability of the spirited and appetitive parts to perform their functions (410d–e), and a life devoted simply to being honoured and valued by other human beings can, depending on what they value, threaten the proper functioning of the other parts of the soul (549c–550a). Since the complexity of the soul opens the possibility of conflict between the parts (410d–411e, 587a), it might be tempting to achieve harmonious unification through the repression of one or more of the parts (553c–554a). However, this would be a mistake, for two reasons. First, the proper functioning of each of the parts of the soul is crucial to the proper functioning of the other parts. For example, human beings are organisms for whom the proper functioning of their rational faculties is crucial not only to other aspects of their mental lives, but also to that of other parts of the organism. Decisions about what to eat, whether to exercise, whether to commit suicide, and our ability to abide by those decisions, will depend crucially on how well our rational faculties are functioning. Destroying someone's rationality, then, would have repercussions on other aspects of his well-being. And similarly for the rest. As Socrates observes, we have certain desires, which he calls 'necessary' desires, that can never be destroyed or repressed (558d–e); and if one attempts by an act of will to inhibit their activity, in one way or another, they will disrupt the harmony of the whole (554d–e).²² But even if this were not so, even if it were possible to repress the functioning of some of the parts of ourselves without affecting the functioning of the rest, such a strategy for achieving harmonious unification would not contribute to the well-being of a human being. One would not thereby become a psychically unified human being. Instead, one would become a mere part of a human being, and, as a consequence, become worse off.

IV

I claimed above that a Platonic account of prudential value is consistent with the internalist inclinations that tempt many philosophers towards subjectivism. Now it is time to make good that claim.

²² See Velleman, 'Identity and Identification', in S. Buss and L. Overton (eds), *Contours of Agency: Essays on Themes from Harry Frankfurt* (MIT Press, 2002), pp. 100–5, for a similar criticism of Frankfurt's particular strategy for achieving unity of the self.

It seems to me that the strongest consideration in favour of subjectivism is that in the case of human beings, at least, someone who fails to take any pleasure in the life that he leads, or fails to have this sort of life as the object of one of his deepest desires, cannot count as well off. I have remarked above that Socrates maintains that human beings are such that they are motivated to pursue the functioning of the parts of their souls through the mechanisms of desire and pleasure. When the different parts of the soul function harmoniously, the subject experiences pleasure. Moreover, according to Socrates, all human beings have a natural and necessary desire to pursue the functioning of the parts of their souls. Whether or not we follow the details of Socrates' account of human nature, this particular aspect of his view seems absolutely correct. Human beings are such that the functioning of at least some of their parts is under their control, and the mechanisms by which they assert this control involve pleasure and desire. Therefore human beings could not be well off, that is, could not be such that all of their human parts function harmoniously together, without experiencing pleasure or without having this internal harmony as one of their deepest desires.

It is easy to get confused about the role of subjective states in an account of prudential value if we fail to notice that prudential value differs from other beneficial value only in virtue of the nature of the *beneficiary* of this value. Beneficial value is the value that things have when they are good for some x . Prudential value is beneficial value when the x in question is a human being. If we focus too narrowly on our own case, we might think that because humans cannot be well off without feeling some subjective pull towards the lives that they lead, value itself must be defined in terms of subjective states. However, if we begin the investigation of prudential value with Socrates' observation that 'there is a good and bad for each thing', and that it is possible to give a univocal account of beneficial value, then we shall not be tempted towards a subjectivist account of the nature of prudential value: most things that can be benefited are incapable of having any sort of positive attitude towards the things that benefit them. A reference to desires and pleasures enters a theory of prudential value not at the point of explaining the nature of value, but rather at a different level of analysis, namely, when we get down to the relevant details about the nature of the recipient of this value. The human good consists in the oneness of a human being, but the oneness of a human being will necessarily bring with it the experience of pleasure and the satisfaction of desire, since it is distinctive of being a human being (as opposed to a plant, manuscript or painting) that its unity and completeness involve the exercise of the mechanisms of pleasure and desire. Whether Socrates is right to suggest that human 'oneness' is itself a completely objective matter, or whether instead it is to a limited extent a

function of our own creative intentions, is a further question which I cannot address here. But if we are, to a certain extent, our own works of art,²³ then subjectivity can enter a theory of prudential value at yet a different level of analysis, namely, at the level not only of the constituents of human oneness, but also of the *entry criteria* for the constituents of human oneness.

I have argued that Plato's account can capture the attraction, for many, of a subjectivist account of prudential value. In addition, Plato's account of prudential value is not subject to the sorts of difficulties that beset desire-satisfaction and hedonistic accounts of it. In contrast with desire-satisfaction accounts, on Plato's 'oneness' account of prudential value, it is impossible for us to count as well off without taking pleasure in our lives. Yet in contrast with hedonistic accounts of prudential value, Plato's account of it does justice to our sense that our welfare does not consist merely in the maximum experience of pleasure. Unlike desire-satisfaction accounts of prudential value, Plato's account of prudential value enables us to distinguish plausibly between those desires the satisfaction of which contributes to our own good, and those desires the satisfaction of which contributes to something that we may value independently of our own good. A desire whose satisfaction contributes ultimately to our unity and completeness is one whose satisfaction is good for us, and a desire whose satisfaction ultimately leads to our disunity or incompleteness is one whose satisfaction is bad for us.

Moreover, on Plato's 'oneness' account of prudential value, it is easy to see why human beings have turned out to be the sort of creatures that assess and modify their desires in the light of their beliefs about what is good for them. It is of obvious evolutionary advantage to assess one's desires for their consistency with one's views about what would contribute to the harmonious functioning of all of one's parts. In contrast, it is of unclear evolutionary advantage to assess one's desires for their consistency with whatever one's new and improved (i.e., ideally informed and rational) self would desire one to desire, or with whatever would cause one, or one's new and improved self, to experience pleasure – unless, of course, we articulate the conditions of self-improvement in such a way that such a self would desire or enjoy only what contributed to the harmonious functioning of all of its parts. But in such a context an appeal to what one's new and improved self would desire or enjoy would be explanatorily inert.

None the less we might reasonably wonder whether accounts like Plato's meet insoluble problems of their own. Some philosophers have suggested that objectivist accounts of prudential value cannot do justice to the apparent plurality of value, that is, to our sense that different sorts of things

²³ For a defence of this sort of view, see R. Dworkin, *Life's Dominion* (New York: Knopf, 1993), p. 83.

are valuable to different individuals, a plurality that would be easily explained on subjectivist accounts by the diversity of what different people desire or take pleasure in.²⁴ However, it seems to me that Plato's account can also deal with these objections. Different sorts of things will contribute more or less reliably in different historical and economic contexts to different people's oneness – that is, to the harmonious functioning of all of their parts. Further, since on my view human beings are immensely complex and imperfect systems, complete harmony between the parts is an unrealizable ideal: to my regret, it is simply impossible to achieve the harmony of the muscular-skeletal system of a professional dancer or athlete, the harmony of emotions of an ideal parent, mate, colleague and citizen, or the harmony of intellect of a genius, much less achieve harmony between all of these parts with the many other parts of myself of which I have only the vaguest awareness. Given these natural limits, we must often choose a little disharmony in one aspect of our being for the sake of more harmony elsewhere, and given different natural predispositions towards harmony or disharmony, different people will achieve different sorts of internal harmony more easily than others, and achieve these different sorts of harmony more easily at different points in their lives. Consequently, different ways of life, e.g., a life of contemplation, of political activism, of athletic competition, of musical performance, of childcare, and/or of sexual adventure, will be better sorts of life for different people to lead, and to lead at different stages of their lives. Finally, the account of prudential value that I have described leaves open the question what other sorts of value might exist in this world – moral, aesthetic, sacred – and to what extent it is reasonable for any given individuals to pursue this sort of value at the expense of what is good for them. So for all I have argued in this essay, different sorts of lives, primarily committed to different sorts of value, may be reasonable for different people.²⁵

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²⁴ See, e.g., C. Rosati, 'Internalism and the Good for a Person', *Ethics* 106 (1996), pp. 293–306, at p. 299.

²⁵ Many thanks for helpful criticism are owed to Ernie Alleva, Alexander George, Thomas Kearns, David Levenstein, Joseph Moore and Nishi Shah.