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Lopsided Lives

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1. Pluralism about well-being

If you are at all like me, lots of things are good for you: pleasure, desire satisfaction, knowledge, friendship, love, rationality, freedom, moral virtue, health, sunshine, money, gothic architecture, and mint chocolate chip ice cream. Acquiring things that are good for you contributes positively to the *overall well-being score* of your life (that is, it increases how well off you are overall).[1] By contrast, acquiring things that are bad for you contributes negatively the overall well-being score of your life.

Some things are *non-derivatively* good for you: their presence in your life makes a positive contribution to the overall well-being score of your life independently of their contribution to the presence of other things in your life. Plausibly pleasure is non-derivatively good for you. Some things are *derivatively* good for you: their presence in your life contributes to the presence of other things in your life that are in turn non-derivatively good for you. Plausibly mint chocolate chip ice cream is at most *merely* derivatively good for you: it is derivatively good for you insofar as it contributes to the presence of things in your life that are non-derivatively good for you (like pleasure), but it is not itself non-derivatively good for you.

This chapter is about what is non-derivatively good for individuals. Intuitively there are many different types of things non-derivatively good for individuals: pleasure, desire satisfaction, knowledge, friendship, love, rationality, freedom, moral virtue, and appreciation of true beauty. According to *pluralism* about well-being, there are at least two different types of things non-derivatively good for individuals (most pluralists believe there are more than two).[2] Pluralism opposes *monism*, according

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[1] For introductions to well-being, see Crisp (2015) and Bradley (2015).

[2] *Objective List Views* are pluralist views (assuming there are at least two items on the list); see Parfit (1984), Fletcher (2016), Lin (2016a), and Arneson (2016).

to which there is only one type of thing non-derivatively good for individuals. *Hedonism* is the monistic view according to which pleasure is the only thing non-derivatively good for individuals, and pain is the only thing non-derivatively bad for individuals.[3]

Most pluralists accept that pleasure is non-derivatively good for individuals. I assume they are correct in doing so. Thus, pluralists disagree with hedonists not over whether pleasure is non-derivatively good for individuals, but whether it is the *only* such thing. In this chapter, I present a new challenge for pluralism, which functions equally as a new argument for hedonism.

2. Hedonic lopsidedness

Let us say that the amount of *hedonic goodness* a life contains is a function of the pleasure and pain it contains, and that the amount of *nonhedonic goodness* a life contains is a function of the things of a nonhedonic variety putatively non-derivatively good for individuals it contains (e.g., desire satisfaction, knowledge, friendship, love, rationality, etc.).[4] That a life contains X amount of hedonic goodness or Y amount of nonhedonic goodness does not automatically tell us how, if at all, these factors contribute to the life's overall well-being score. That is a substantive question.

As all philosophy undergraduates learn, hedonism has intuitively incorrect implications about *the experience machine*.[5] Consider an improved version of this famous example. Life A contains a lot of desire satisfaction, knowledge, friendship, love, rationality, and appreciation of true beauty. In other words, life A contains a lot of nonhedonic goodness. But life A *also* contains a lot of pleasure, and little if any pain. Life B is phenomenologically indistinguishable from life A, owing to a supercomputer's flawless simulation of the phenomenology of life A. So life B contains exactly as much pleasure and pain as life A.[6] But, since the entirety of life B is spent plugged in to this super-duper simulation, plausibly it contains little if any desire

[3] Contemporary defenders of hedonism include Crisp (2006), Bradley (2009), and Singer and de Lazari-Radek (2014).

[4] I am not assuming that these functions must be *additive*.

[5] This is Crisp's (2006: 118) improved version of Nozick's (1974: 42–3) famous thought-experiment. One of the respects in which Crisp's version of the example is an improvement over Nozick's is that it better avoids status quo bias issues of the sort discussed in De Brigard (2010). Also see Lin (2016b).

[6] I am sympathetic to a qualia-based view of the metaphysics of pleasure and pain, as opposed to an attitude-based view; see Crisp (2006).

satisfaction, knowledge, friendship, and so on. While they have the same amounts of hedonic goodness, life A has much more nonhedonic goodness than life B. Hedonism implies that these lives have the same overall well-being score, but, intuitively, life A has a higher overall well-being score. Pluralism can capture this intuitive claim with ease.

Lopsided lives score very low in terms of some types of goodness, but very high in terms of other types of goodness. Life B plausibly is a lopsided life, exhibiting a kind of hedonic lopsidedness. In this chapter I will focus on lopsided lives that suffer from a different kind of hedonic lopsidedness: they score very low in terms of hedonic goodness, but very high in terms of nonhedonic goodness. For example, such a life might contain very little pleasure, a lot of pain, and a lot of desire satisfaction, knowledge, friendship, and rationality. Contemplating a range of such hedonically lopsided lives might lead us to claim that any plausible theory of well-being must accommodate one or both of the following constraints.

> ***No Pleasure, No Well-Being*** (NPNW):   Any life that contains no pleasure cannot have a positive overall well-being score, no matter how much nonhedonic goodness it contains.

There is disagreement about the plausibility of NPNW.[7] Whether or not NPNW is plausible, the following constraint seems more plausible:

> ***Enough Pain, Limited Well-Being*** (EPLW):   Any life that contains no pleasure and at least finite amount of pain P cannot have an overall well-being score that exceeds finite limit L, no matter how much nonhedonic goodness it contains.

Agreeing that lives with certain hedonic features cannot have overall well-being scores that exceed finite limit L is not by itself committing to *what* limit L is, only that there is some such L.[8]

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[7] Obviously hedonists think that pleasureless lives cannot have positive overall well-being scores. But some nonhedonists, like Adams (1999) and Kagan (2009), agree. Others, including de Marneffe (2003) and Sarch (2012), disagree. Both Feldman (2004) and Crisp (2006) argue that accommodating constraints like NPNW poses problems for pluralists; Lin (2016a) replies.

[8] Moreover, agreeing that lives with certain hedonic features cannot have overall well-being scores that exceed finite limit L is not by itself committing to the view that once these lives contain enough nonhedonic goodness, additional nonhedonic goodness makes no contribution to their overall well-being scores. We could instead say that the finite limit on the overall well-being score of a life is *asymptotically approached* as this life's nonhedonic goodness approaches

Hedonism clearly entails both NPNW and EPLW. To the extent that these constraints are plausible and cannot be accommodated by rival views of well-being, this is to hedonism's advantage. Indeed, EPLW does seem plausible, and arguably pluralism is plausible *only* if it can accommodate it. But it is not necessarily the case that pluralism is plausible *if* it can accommodate EPLW, as it might turn out that pluralism can accommodate EPLW only if it entails claims which are themselves implausible. I will next explore whether pluralism can accommodate EPLW without incurring such further implausibility.

At this point some pluralists might reply that such an exploration is unnecessary, insisting that EPLW is not plausible. First, even if at the end of the day EPLW should be rejected, it does have some intuitive appeal (according to many pluralists). Second, I will in section 8 introduce another constraint that is even harder to deny than EPLW. But since most of the pluralist strategies for accommodating this harder-to-deny constraint are analogous to the pluralist strategies for accommodating EPLW, for ease of presentation I will discuss the latter first.

3. Hypersensitivity

Again, EPLW states that any life that contains no pleasure and at least finite amount of pain P cannot have an overall well-being score that exceeds finite limit L, no matter how much nonhedonic goodness it contains. Pluralists can combine EPLW with:

> **Enough Less Pain, Unlimited Well-Being** (LPUW):   Any life that contains any finite amount of pleasure and less than finite amount of pain P can have an overall well-being score that exceeds any finite limit L, if its nonhedonic goodness were increased sufficiently (while holding fixed the amount of pleasure in the life).

infinity. As the amount of nonhedonic goodness the life contains approaches infinity, the degree to which additional amounts of nonhedonic goodness contribute to overall well-being approaches zero. But for any finite amount of nonhedonic goodness in the life, additional amounts of nonhedonic goodness will make some non-zero contribution to overall well-being.

In other words, if a life contains less than finite amount of pain P, then as this life's amount of nonhedonic goodness approaches infinity (holding fixed the amount of pleasure in the life), so too does its overall well-being score. There is a problem with the pluralist's attempt to accommodate EPLW by embracing LPUW. Consider two more lives, life C and life D. They both contain no pleasure and a lot of pain. However, life C contains just *slightly* less than amount of pain P, whereas life D contains *exactly* amount of pain P. Now suppose we can increase the nonhedonic goodness of either life to whatever degree we like, but whatever nonhedonic boost we provide for life C, we must provide an exactly similar nonhedonic boost for life D. The combination of EPLW and LPUW imply that by giving life C and life D equivalent arbitrarily large nonhedonic boosts, we make life C's overall well-being score arbitrarily greater than life D's. But this seems implausible. Given that life C and life D are exactly similar down to the very last detail, with the only exception being that life D contains an extra tiny drop of pain, it is very hard to believe they could differ so dramatically in terms of overall well-being. To deny this would be to accept *hypersensitivity* to very slight nonevaluative differences—that is, to accept that an arbitrarily large difference in overall well-being scores can supervene wholly on a very slight nonevaluative difference.

It is important to stress that what I am claiming is implausible is that arbitrarily large differences in overall well-being scores can supervene *wholly* on very slight nonevaluative differences. I do not intend to rule out the possibility of very slight nonevaluative differences making *other* nonevaluative differences which are themselves fairly sizable, which in turn very large evaluative differences can supervene on. For example, running slightly faster can affect who will win the big race. Delaying someone by a second can affect which children will be conceived.[9] And so on. Insofar as large evaluative differences supervene on these small nonevaluative differences, plausibly they do not wholly supervene on them, for plausibly they also supervene on the further, larger, nonevaluative differences from which these small initial nonevaluative differences give rise.

The sort of hypersensitivity I am focusing on here, according to which an arbitrarily large difference in overall well-being scores can supervene wholly on a very slight nonevaluative difference, seems implausible. At

[9] See Parfit's (1984) discussion of the Non-Identity Problem (note the Time-Dependence Claim in particular, on p. 351).

least, it seems implausible to me and to many others. I cannot offer much
of an argument against hypersensitivity here. Such an argument might
start from the more widely accepted idea that the evaluative supervenes
on the nonevaluative and move in the direction of *similarity-based* super-
venience constraints, according to which large evaluative differences
cannot supervene wholly on small nonevaluative differences. We might
defend a seemingly modest such constraint: *arbitrarily* large evaluative dif-
ferences cannot supervene wholly on very slight nonevaluative differences.[10]
But again, here is not the place to get into a general level discussion of such
similarity-based supervenience constraints. Claiming that the specific kind of
hypersensitivity identified in this chapter is intuitively problematic need not
commit one to any such general constraint.[11]

4. Indeterminacy

Pluralists can accommodate EPLW (Enough Pain, Limited Well-Being)
by adopting LPUW (Enough Less Pain, Unlimited Well-Being), but the
combination of EPLW and LPUW yields hypersensitivity. One might
respond that the derivation of hypersensitivity from EPLW and LPUW
depends on the implicit assumption that it is *determinate* what the
critical amount of pain P is (again, lives with amount of pain P cannot
have overall well-being scores that exceed finite limit L, no matter how
much nonhedonic goodness they contain).[12] After all, hypersensitivity

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[10] Beckstead (unpublished manuscript) defends a similarity-based supervenience constraint.
For a discussion of similarity-based supervenience more generally, see McLaughlin (1995).

[11] I assume that finding hypersensitivity implausible does not require us to have mathematically
precise measures of nonevaluative or evaluative differences. It seems sufficient for my purposes that
some nonevaluative differences are intuitively slight whereas some evaluative differences are
intuitively large. We can understand the relevant nonevaluative and evaluative differences in
relative, rather than absolute, terms (in order to circumvent worries involving "miniature worlds"
that are exactly similar to ours, except dramatically smaller in absolute terms). For example, a
nonevaluative difference between two possible states of affairs is slight when they are N per cent
similar, where N is very close to 100; an evaluative difference between two possible states of affairs is
arbitrarily large when one is M times better than the other, where M is arbitrarily large.

[12] One might object to various other implicit assumptions: that lives can be assigned
numbers as overall well-being *scores*, and similarly that lives can be numerically ranked in
terms of hedonic and nonhedonic goodness. Several philosophers—including Chang (2002),
Temkin (2012), and Parfit (unpublished manuscript)—have provided interesting challenges to
the idea that goodness is measurable along a single number line. I believe that my puzzles about
lopsided lives can be restated without (many of) the numerical assumptions which, largely for
ease of presentation, I help myself to here.

was demonstrated by comparing a life which contains just *slightly* less than amount of pain P (life C) with a life which contains *exactly* amount of pain P (life D). But if it is indeterminate what P is, then perhaps there is no pair of lives that are exactly similar with the exception of a slight difference in pain, such that one determinately sits on one side of P whereas the other determinately sits on the other side of P. Instead, pairs of lives that differ only slightly in the amount of pain they contain either both determinately sit on one side of P, both determinately sit on the other side of P, or are both of indeterminate status with respect to which side of P they each sit. In short, the slight difference in pain between the two lives fails to generate an asymmetry between the lives with respect to the critical amount of pain P, and so fails to generate hypersensitivity.

This response raises complex issues to which I cannot do justice in this chapter. Therefore I will largely just *flag* the appeal to indeterminacy as one possibility for the pluralist, and move on. First, note that whether invoking indeterminacy prevents hypersensitivity depends on which theory of indeterminacy is correct.[13] If epistemicism is correct, then it is determinate but unknowable what the critical amount of pain P is. We could not then prevent hypersensitivity by invoking indeterminacy, as hypersensitivity is generated independently of whether it is knowable what P is. If instead supervaluationism is correct, then while it is indeterminate *what* the critical amount of pain P is, it is determinately true that there is *some* critical amount of pain P. On this picture, while it is indeterminate which pair of lives (exactly similar with the exception of a slight difference in pain) is the pair such that one determinately sits on one side of P whereas the other determinately sits on the other side of P, it is determinately true that there is some such pair of lives. That would be enough to generate hypersensitivity; it is simply indeterminate *where* hypersensitivity is generated. This does not, to my mind, mitigate the implausibility of hypersensitivity. So it appears that the correct theory of indeterminacy must be non-epistemicist and non-supervaluationist for the invocation of indeterminacy to successfully prevent hypersensitivity (which is a nontrivial observation, given that supervaluationism is arguably the default theory). Second, there is a growing literature on indeterminacy and vagueness in ethics that may well interact

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[13] For a useful overview of competing theories of indeterminacy and vagueness, see Keefe (2000).

with invoking indeterminacy in the context of putative hypersensitivity.[14] But I cannot wade into this literature here, nor, obviously enough, can I here resolve which theory of indeterminacy is correct. I will now consider other options for pluralists.

5. Enough less pain *and* enough pleasure

Rather than accommodating EPLW (Enough Pain, Limited Well-Being) by adopting LPUW (Enough Less Pain, Unlimited Well-Being), pluralists might attempt to accommodate EPLW by instead adopting:

> **Enough Less Pain, and Enough Pleasure, Unlimited Well-Being** (PPUW): Any life that contains less than finite amount of pain P and contains at least amount of pleasure Q can have an overall well-being score that exceeds any finite limit L, if its nonhedonic goodness were increased sufficiently (while holding fixed the amount of pleasure in the life). On the other hand, any life that contains at least finite amount of pain P and less than finite amount of pleasure Q cannot have an overall well-being score that exceeds finite limit L, no matter how much nonhedonic goodness it contains.[15]

PPUW is consistent with EPLW, but does it imply hypersensitivity? Recall that the derivation of hypersensitivity from the conjunction of EPLW and LPUW appealed to lives C and D, exactly similar except that C contains just slightly less than amount of pain P, whereas life D contains exactly amount of pain P. The combination of EPLW and LPUW imply that by giving life C and life D equivalent arbitrarily large nonhedonic boosts, we make life C's overall well-being score arbitrarily greater than life D's. There is a similar way of deriving hypersensitivity from PPUW: we can again take two lives, E and F, exactly similar except that E contains just slightly less than amount of pain P and exactly

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[14] For example, see: Tenenbaum and Raffman (2012), Williams (2014), Elson (2015), Schoenfield (2015), Dunaway (2017), and Dougherty (forthcoming).

[15] There are different possible views to take about lives that contain at least finite amount of pain P but also contain at least finite amount of pleasure Q (or that contain less pain than P but also contain less pleasure than Q). According to one view, whether such lives fall on one side or the other of the critical hedonic threshold is a function of the (absolute or proportional) *difference* in the amounts of pleasure and pain they contain.

amount of pleasure Q, whereas life F contains exactly amount of pain P and just slightly less than amount of pleasure Q. PPUW implies that by giving life E and life F equivalent arbitrarily large nonhedonic boosts, we make life E's overall well-being score arbitrarily greater than life F's. But the collection of the two slight nonevaluative differences between E and F itself constitutes a slight nonevaluative difference. Hypersensitivity persists. Rather than PPUW, a pluralist might adopt:

> ***Enough Less Pain, and Enough Overlapping Pleasure, Unlimited Well-Being*** (PPUW*):   Any life that contains less than finite amount of pain P and is such that its individual nonhedonic goods each overlap appropriately with pleasures each of at least finite amount R can have an overall well-being score that exceeds any finite limit L, if its nonhedonic goodness were increased sufficiently. On the other hand, any life that contains at least finite amount of pain P and fails to meet the above overlap requirement cannot have an overall well-being score that exceeds finite limit L, no matter how much nonhedonic goodness it contains.[16]

There are different possible accounts of what constitutes *appropriate overlap* between pleasure and individual nonhedonic goods: temporal overlap, causal overlap (e.g., the pleasure is caused by the nonhedonic goods), or psychological overlap (e.g., the pleasure is in some sense *about* the nonhedonic goods). PPUW* is consistent with EPLW, but does it imply hypersensitivity?

 Consider lives G and H, exactly similar except that G contains just slightly less than amount of pain P and is such that its individual nonhedonic goods each overlap appropriately with pleasures each of exactly finite amount R, whereas H contains exactly amount of pain P and is such that its individual nonhedonic goods each overlap appropriately with pleasures each just slightly less than finite amount R. PPUW* implies that by giving life G and life H equivalent arbitrarily large nonhedonic boosts, we make life G's overall well-being score arbitrarily greater than life H's. But for any arbitrarily large finite number of additional nonhedonic goods N, there is a very slight nonevaluative difference

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[16] As with PPUW, there are different possible views to take about lives that contain at least finite amount of pain P but also meet the overlap requirement (or that contain less than P but also fail to meet the overlap requirement).

corresponding to the difference between amount of pleasure R and an amount very slightly less than R such that the collection of N of these very slight nonevaluative differences itself constitutes a slight nonevaluative difference.[17] We can tailor the example so that this is the slight nonevaluative difference between lives G and H. So hypersensitivity persists.[18]

Let us take stock. Pluralists can accommodate EPLW (Enough Pain, Limited Well-Being) by adopting LPUW (Enough Less Pain, Unlimited Well-Being). But the conjunction of EPLW and LPUW yields hypersensitivity (section 3). Appealing to indeterminacy may be of no help (section 4). PPUW and PPUW* are each consistent with EPLW, but they each yield hypersensitivity. In general, the problem seems to be with claiming both (1) that lives below a certain hedonic threshold cannot have overall well-being scores that exceed finite limit L, no matter how much nonhedonic goodness they contain, and (2) that lives above the critical hedonic threshold can have overall well-being scores that exceed any finite limit L, as long as they contain enough nonhedonic goodness. These claims together yield hypersensitivity.

EPLW is a version of (1). I will now consider views which accommodate EPLW—and thus (1)—while rejecting (2).

6. Limits on nonhedonic goodness

It could be that EPLW is true because there are various limits on nonhedonic goodness. First, consider:

> ***Absolute Limits***:   For any given life, there is a finite limit on how much desire satisfaction, knowledge, friendship, love, rationality, freedom, moral virtue, appreciation of true beauty, etc., it could contain. No life could contain an amount of nonhedonic goodness that exceeds finite limit M.

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[17] Note that this move supposes that amounts of pleasure can vary continuously.

[18] Some might find hypersensitivity less implausible when the slight nonevaluative differences in question are collections of *many very* slight nonevaluative differences. It is important to keep in mind that here we *first* fix the number of very slight nonevaluative differences N and *second* adjust the size of these very slight nonevaluative differences so they are each sufficiently slight, so that N of them is itself slight. On the other hand, if we were to first fix the size of the very slight nonevaluative differences and *second* adjust their number N, then we could get it to be the case that N of them is itself a non-slight nonevaluative difference (by making N sufficiently large).

Thus, assuming that a finite amount of nonhedonic goodness can contribute merely finitely to a life's overall well-being score, for any given life that contains no pleasure, there is a finite limit L on its overall well-being score. So, EPLW is true.

For my purposes here, it is irrelevant that, within the lives of limited beings like us, nonhedonic goodness cannot be increased beyond some finite limit. What is instead relevant is whether there are metaphysically possible beings within the lives of which nonhedonic goodness can be increased beyond any finite limit. Such beings do seem metaphysically possible. For it is plausibly metaphysically possible that for any life of finite length, there are beings with longer lives. But then presumably lives can contain arbitrarily large amounts of nonhedonic goodness— desire satisfaction, knowledge, friendship, etc.—by containing them in their earthly amounts per time, for arbitrarily *un*earthly amounts of time.[19] It may also be metaphysically possible for lives to contain arbitrarily large amounts of nonhedonic goodness in earthly amounts of time, by containing them in unearthly amounts per time. Could an omnipotent being not bring about as much knowledge, friendship, etc. in a one-second-long life as it wants? Could this being not speed up all of the relevant processes accordingly?[20] The metaphysical possibilities of living nonhedonically well over an arbitrarily long period and living nonhedonically well arbitrarily fast would each appear sufficient to put Absolute Limits to rest. Next, consider:

> **Relative Limits**:   For any life containing finite amount of pain X and finite amount of pleasure Y, there is a particular finite limit M corresponding to X and Y such that this life cannot score higher than M in terms of nonhedonic goodness. The amount of nonhedonic goodness a life can contain (M) depends on the amounts of pain (X) and pleasure (Y) the life contains.

Relative Limits, if correct, would accommodate EPLW in roughly the same way as Absolute Limits, if correct. When considering most non-hedonic goods—at least: desire satisfaction, knowledge, rationality,

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[19] There is a lot of literature on the desirability in principle of living forever, much of it stemming from Williams (1978); I cannot do justice to it here, but arguably some of it interacts with my question of whether there are limits on nonhedonic goodness.

[20] See the literature on supertasks, e.g., Manchak and Roberts (2016).

freedom—Relative Limits seems hard to believe. Suppose we have a very (arbitrarily) long life within which to allocate pain, pleasure, and these nonhedonic goods. Suppose we reserve one half of the life for all the pain and pleasure, and the other half for the nonhedonic stuff. Whatever finite amounts of pain and pleasure go into the first half, it seems metaphysically possible to put any finite quantity of these nonhedonic goods into the painless and pleasureless half.

Perhaps matters are different for other nonhedonic goods, like love and appreciation of true beauty. One might plausibly argue that the presence of such things does depend on the presence of pleasure (and pain). Perhaps it is metaphysically impossible to have love or appreciation of true beauty without having any pleasure whatsoever. Or consider *taking pleasure in* true beauty—or, taking pleasure in knowledge, rationality, and so on. Clearly it is metaphysically impossible to take pleasure in these things without having pleasure. Indeed, this is conceptually impossible. We might say that things like taking pleasure in true beauty, knowledge, rationality, etc.—for which pleasure is conceptually necessary—are *composite goods*. These things are neither wholly hedonic nor wholly nonhedonic, but composites of the two. On some accounts of composite goods, it is plausible that if the amount of pleasure in a given life is fixed, then so too is the quantity of these composite goods it could contain. That is, Relative Limits seems plausible for these composite goods. Nonetheless, this will not help the pluralist who believes in composite goods escape the above worries about accommodating EPLW without hypersensitivity. Without ruling out composite goods, it seems that for any putative composite good we can relevantly factor it into pleasure and its *wholly* nonhedonic features. Consider, for example, taking pleasure in true beauty. There is a possible spectrum of cases where the amount of pleasure taken in true beauty in each case is slightly less than the previous one, and where in the final case we are left with the wholly nonhedonic good of pleasureless consciousness of true beauty. Our broad question, then, is whether and when lives with particular fixed hedonic goods can have overall well-being scores that exceed any finite limit in virtue of containing a sufficient quantity of such wholly nonhedonic goods. Since it seems that Relative Limits for such wholly nonhedonic goods is hard to believe, we are dialectically back where we were just before this long paragraph began.

7. Contributory limits

Rather than accommodating EPLW (Enough Pain, Limited Well-Being) by espousing limits on nonhedonic goodness per se, we might instead espouse limits on the extent to which nonhedonic goodness can *contribute* to overall well-being, independently of critical hedonic thresholds of the sort recognized by PPUW, PPUW*, and the conjunction of EPLW and LPUW. First, consider:

> **Absolute Contributory Limits**: For any given life, there is a finite limit K on how much its nonhedonic goodness can contribute to its overall well-being score, even if there is no finite limit on the amount of nonhedonic goodness it can contain.

Thus, for any given life that contains no pleasure, there is a finite limit L on its overall well-being score. So, EPLW is true. Second, consider:

> **Relative Contributory Limits**: For any life containing finite amount of pain X and finite amount of pleasure Y, there is a particular finite limit K corresponding to X and Y such that the nonhedonic goodness of this life cannot contribute more than K to its overall well-being score, even if there is no finite limit on the amount of nonhedonic goodness it can contain. The amount by which a life's nonhedonic goodness can contribute to its overall well-being score (K) depends on the amounts of pain (X) and pleasure (Y) the life contains.

Relative Contributory Limits, if correct, would accommodate EPLW in roughly the same way as Absolute Contributory Limits, if correct.[21]

There is a feature of the pluralist's appeal to such contributory limits—whether Absolute Contributory Limits or Relative Contributory Limits—to which it is worth paying close attention. To illustrate this feature somewhat more concretely, I will first sketch somewhat more concrete specifications of Absolute Contributory Limits and Relative Contributory Limits.

According to one specification of Absolute Contributory Limits, the finite limit on how much any life's nonhedonic goodness can contribute

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[21] Compare these contributory limits with Temkin's Capped Model for Ideals (2012: section 10.6).

to its overall well-being score is 1,000. Suppose this limit is approached asymptotically. That is, as the amount of nonhedonic goodness in any life approaches infinity, the degree to which additional amounts of nonhedonic goodness contribute to its overall well-being score approaches zero. Suppose that any life with at least 200 units of nonhedonic goodness is intuitively very close to this limit (the nonhedonic goodness in a life with exactly 200 units of nonhedonic goodness contributes 999 to its overall well-being score). Next, according to one specification of Relative Contributory Limits, once the amount of nonhedonic goodness of any painless life reaches about *twice* the amount of pleasure it contains, further increasing its nonhedonic goodness makes very little difference to the life's overall well-being score. In particular, suppose that any painless life with 100 units of pleasure has a finite limit of 1,000 on how much its nonhedonic goodness can contribute to its overall well-being score. Thus, painless lives with 100 units of pleasure with about 200 units of nonhedonic goodness are intuitively very close to this limit, which is, again, approached asymptotically. (Obviously the point I am about to make could be made using different numbers, different specifications of these contributory limits views.)

Suppose that these specifications of Absolute Contributory Limits and Relative Contributory Limits would yield the following implications about four painless lives.

	Pleasure Units	Nonhedonic Units	Nonhedonic Contribution
Life P	100	200	999
Life Q	100	5	300
Life V	100	20,000,000	999.999
Life W	100	500	999.99

The far-right column refers to the amount by which a life's nonhedonic goodness (measured by nonhedonic units) contributes to its overall well-being score.

According to pluralists, differences in nonhedonic units at least sometimes make a difference to overall well-being scores. The sizable difference in the overall well-being scores of lives P and Q is responsive to the sizable difference in their nonhedonic units, while the difference in the overall well-being scores of lives V and W is *virtually zero*, despite the fact that the difference in their nonhedonic units is *much greater* than

that between lives P and Q. Far from hypersensitivity, this arguably constitutes an implausible form of *comparative insensitivity* to (arbitrarily) large differences—it seems to me and others implausible that (arbitrarily) large differences in nonhedonic units would virtually not matter at all in the comparison between lives V and W, *assuming* that these sorts of differences do matter substantially in other comparisons.

The sort of comparative insensitivity exhibited by pluralism taken in conjunction with contributory limits is more implausible than can be explained in this chapter. Given reasonable assumptions about the metaphysics of persons and lives, this comparative insensitivity gives rise to a further kind of hypersensitivity problem, which I call *life individuation hypersensitivity*. Unfortunately, I cannot explain or defend this claim here.[22]

8. Another constraint

Pluralists can accommodate EPLW (Enough Pain, Limited Well-Being). However, it appears that to do so they must either accept hypersensitivity or else accept a (contributory) limit on nonhedonic goodness. Neither broad route appears very plausible, upon reflection. Alternatively, as noted early on, a pluralist could simply deny EPLW. We might next consider another constraint:

> **Enough Pain at Each Time, Limited Well-Being** (EPTLW): Any life that contains no pleasure and at least finite amount of pain P *at each time* cannot have an overall well-being score that exceeds finite limit L, no matter how much nonhedonic goodness it contains.

This seems even harder to deny than EPLW. Can pluralists accommodate it? First, pluralists could try moves analogous to LPUW, PPUW, and PPUW*, which specify critical thresholds of pain and pleasure at each time. Lives that fall below the critical thresholds cannot have overall well-being scores that exceed finite limit L no matter how much nonhedonic goodness they contain, whereas lives that rise above the critical thresholds can have overall well-being scores that exceed any finite limit L as long as they contain enough nonhedonic goodness. But would the

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[22] I discuss the problem of life individuation hypersensitivity in Pummer (unpublished manuscript), and I discuss a related hypersensitivity issue in Pummer (2017).

invocation of such critical thresholds not yield hypersensitivity as it did before? Consider the relevant analogue of LPUW:

> ***Enough Less Pain at Each Time, Unlimited Well-Being*** (LPTUW): Any life that contains any finite amount of pleasure and less than finite amount of pain P *at each time* can have an overall well-being score that exceeds any finite limit L, if its nonhedonic goodness were increased sufficiently (while holding fixed the amount of pleasure in the life).

But the conjunction of EPTLW and LPTUW seems to yield hypersensitivity in *roughly* the same way as PPUW*. Consider lives R and S, exactly similar except that R contains slightly less than amount of pain P at each time, whereas S contains exactly amount of pain P at each time. The conjunction of EPTLW and LPTUW imply that by giving life R and life S equivalent arbitrarily large nonhedonic boosts, we make life R's overall well-being score arbitrarily greater than life S's. But for any finite duration D of lives R and S, there is a very slight nonevaluative difference corresponding to the difference between amount of pain P at any given time and an amount very slightly less than P such that the very slight nonevaluative difference stretched out over duration D itself consti-tutes a slight nonevaluative difference.[23] We can tailor the example so that this is the slight nonevaluative difference between lives R and S. So hyper-sensitivity persists. It appears that hypersensitivity would persist if the pluralist tried other such threshold moves to accommodate EPTLW.

 The other main strategy for accommodating EPTLW is to adopt (contributory) limits on nonhedonic goodness. The appeals to Absolute Limits and Absolute Contributory Limits are no different in this context than in the context of EPLW, so I will not say anything further about them here. Next consider the relevant analogue of Relative Contributory Limits:

> ***Temporal Relative Contributory Limits***:   For any life containing finite amount of pain X at each time and finite amount of pleasure Y at each time, there is a particular finite limit K corresponding to X and Y such that the nonhedonic goodness of this life cannot contribute more than K to its overall well-being score, even if there

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[23] Similarly, for any rectangle of any finite length, its area approaches zero as its width approaches zero.

is no finite limit on the amount of nonhedonic goodness it can contain. The amount by which a life's nonhedonic goodness can contribute to its overall well-being score (K) depends on the amounts of pain (X) at each time and pleasure (Y) at each time the life contains.

But this would imply comparative insensitivity (and, in turn, life individuation hypersensitivity) in the same way as Relative Contributory Limits. So I will not discuss it further. Finally, we come to the most interesting way of attempting to accommodate EPTLW, by adopting the relevant analogue of Relative Limits:

> ***Temporal Relative Limits***:   For any life containing finite amount of pain X at each time and finite amount of pleasure Y at each time, there is a particular finite limit M corresponding to X and Y such that this life cannot score higher than M in terms of nonhedonic goodness. The amount of nonhedonic goodness a life can contain (M) depends on the amounts of pain (X) at each time and pleasure (Y) at each time the life contains.

Recall the response to Relative Limits I offered above: assuming we are focusing on wholly nonhedonic goods (as opposed to composite goods, the invocation of which, I argued, does not particularly help the pluralist here), we can reserve half of a given life for pleasure and pain, and the other half for nonhedonic goods—regardless of whatever finite pleasure and pain quantities go into the first half, it seems metaphysically possible to put any finite quantity of nonhedonic goods into the second half.

This sort of response will obviously not work against Temporal Relative Limits, for in this context we are considering lives that contain pain *at each time*. When X is very large, not only will there be no "pain-free zone" within the life in question—where, perhaps, any quantity of nonhedonic goods could be located—but there will be no second of the life that is not spent in a very large amount of pain. EPTLW is pretty hard to deny. But, the pluralist might argue, Temporal Relative Limits is also pretty hard to deny. If each moment of the life in question is spent in a very large amount of pain, it is very hard to see how it could contain a significant quantity of nonhedonic goodness.

Certainly, for beings like us, experiencing a very large amount of pain at each moment over a period of time would plausibly preclude us from acquiring much if any nonhedonic goodness during this period. But for

my purposes here what matters is whether there are metaphysically possible beings that, for any finite amount of pain at each moment of their pleasureless lives, can acquire any finite quantity of nonhedonic goodness in their lives. It seems to me that, just as "qualia inversions" are metaphysically possible in the case of color qualia,[24] so too are they metaphysically possible in the case of hedonic qualia.[25] So, first take a life which contains no pain, a very large amount of pleasure at each time, and a very large amount of nonhedonic goodness. Next perform a hedonic qualia inversion. We now have a life which contains no pleasure, a very large amount of pain at each time, and a very large amount of nonhedonic goodness.

One might object: to have any sizable amount of nonhedonic goodness—manifested as knowledge, rationality, friendship, etc.—one must devote a sizable proportion of one's attention toward obtaining this nonhedonic goodness, but it is metaphysically impossible to devote any sizable proportion of one's attention toward obtaining nonhedonic goodness if at each moment of one's life one is in a very large amount of pain. Though I cannot defend this claim here, it does seem that there are metaphysically possible beings that, for any amount of pain they are in at each time, can devote sizable proportions of their attention to other things (like nonhedonic goodness). I appreciate that more needs to be said here, and that little of what I said will convince those who are skeptical of the metaphysical possibility of anything as extravagant as qualia inversions. This illustrates yet another way in which debates in ethics are importantly connected to debates in metaphysics.

As with EPLW (Enough Pain, Limited Well-Being), pluralists can accommodate EPTLW (Enough Pain at Each Time, Limited Well-Being). However, it again appears that to accommodate EPTLW they must either accept hypersensitivity or else accept a (contributory) limit on nonhedonic goodness. Again, neither broad route appears very plausible, upon reflection.

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[24] Though see Byrne (2016) for the very large literature on inverted qualia.
[25] As noted in footnote 6, I take a qualia-based view of the metaphysics of pleasure and pain, as opposed to an attitude-based view.

9. The big crunch

Many of us have intuitions recognizing a wide plurality of types of things non-derivatively good for individuals: pleasure, desire satisfaction, knowledge, friendship, love, rationality, freedom, moral virtue, and appreciation of true beauty. If we take these intuitions seriously, we will be drawn toward a wide pluralism. We thus begin with *the big bang*: many different intuitions recognizing many different types of things as non-derivatively good for individuals, resulting in an explosion of ever wider and more complicated versions of pluralism to capture these intuitions. It is possible that our theorizing about well-being is now headed toward *the big crunch*: further intuitions about constraints on the overall well-being scores of lopsided lives (e.g., EPLW or EPTLW) and about hypersensitivity working together as a gravitational force pressuring our theories to get simpler and simpler, until we are back to very simple theories like hedonism.

Indeed, apart from the counterintuitive implications that we all learned as undergraduates, hedonism avoids the main problems I have presented in this chapter. It clearly captures EPLW and EPTLW, and it also avoids hypersensitivity.[26] It seems to me a defensible claim that hedonism is less implausible than the acceptance of hypersensitivity, as well as less implausible than the denial of EPLW (it is at least less implausible than the denial of EPTLW).

Even if this were correct, it would not yet establish that hedonism is the most plausible theory of well-being. After all, in this chapter I have focused only on hedonic lopsidedness. I have not explored various forms of nonhedonic lopsidedness and the corresponding nonhedonic constraints, for instance:

> ***Enough Frustration, Limited Well-Being*** (EFLW):   Any life that contains no desire satisfaction and at least finite amount of desire frustration F cannot have an overall well-being score that exceeds finite limit L, no matter how much nondesiderative goodness it contains.

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[26]   There are separate hypersensitivity issues that arise for versions of hedonism that embrace value superiorities, saying, for example, that there is some duration at high-intensity pleasure that contributes more to overall well-being than any duration at low-intensity pleasure. See Crisp (1997).

> ***Enough Irrationality, Limited Well-Being*** (IFLW):   Any life that con-
> tains no rationality and at least a finite amount of irrationality, I, cannot
> have an overall well-being score that exceeds finite limit L, no matter
> how much nonrational goodness it contains.

We might then ask whether arguments similar to the one for hedonism
I have given in this chapter would reveal these various constraints
(e.g., EFLW) to be impossible to accommodate without hypersensitivity
or implausible limits on the relevant sorts of goodness (e.g., nondesiderative
goodness), unless one adopts a correspondingly simple theory of well-being
(e.g., *desire satisfaction theory*, according to which desire satisfaction is the
only thing non-derivatively good for individuals and desire frustration is the
only thing non-derivatively bad for individuals). I cannot explore this here,
but it is important to keep in mind the differential plausibility of these
various constraints, and whether accepting the various simple theories would
be defensibly less implausible than accepting hypersensitivity as well as less
implausible than denying the relevant constraints. I suspect that it will be
difficult to build up arguments for simple nonhedonistic theories that similar
in both structure and strength to my argument for hedonism. Such simple
theories would then fail to enjoy a kind of support that hedonism does.

  But perhaps some such arguments will go through, lending support to
various simple theories. If so, the big crunch will effectively support a
disjunction of simple theories: hedonism, *or* desire satisfaction theory, *or*
purebred perfectionism (e.g., according to which rationality is the only thing
non-derivatively good for individuals), *or* etc. Now we might think that if *this*
were the state of the debate about well-being, hedonism would be the most
plausible theory. After all, most people do tend to agree that, *whatever else*
one's theory of well-being says, it must somehow incorporate the thought
that pleasure is non-derivatively good for individuals and pain is non-
derivatively bad for individuals. There is far less agreement about other things
putatively non-derivatively good for individuals. And, out of the simple
theories of well-being out there, hedonism is probably the most popular.

  The big crunch thus may not merely pressure our theories to get
simpler and simpler, until we are back to very simple theories *like*
hedonism. It may well push us toward hedonism itself.[27]

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[27] Lin (unpublished manuscript) offers a good reply to the argument for hedonism I have
presented here. I have a response to his reply; however, since Lin's paper is not yet published,

10. How simple?

But why would the big crunch not push us toward an *even simpler* theory of well-being, for instance, one according to which *pleasure intensity* is the only thing non-derivatively good for individuals? There is a sense in which nearly all hedonists are pluralists—they recognize at least *two* different dimensions of pleasure as non-derivatively relevant to overall well-being: intensity and duration. A far less popular view is *one-dimensional hedonism*, which recognizes pleasure intensity only.[28] One implication of this view is that any life enjoying pleasure intensity level X at each time has a higher overall well-being score than any life enjoying pleasure intensity level X-*e* at each time (for any positive *e*), regardless of how long these lives are.[29] This is *extremely* implausible. It is plainly false that a life lasting for one second at pleasure-intensity level 1,000 at each time has a higher overall well-being score than a life lasting for 10,000 years at pleasure-intensity level 999.99999 at each time.

How might the big crunch pressure us toward one-dimensional hedonism? We might find the following constraint intuitively plausible:

> **Not Enough Pleasure at Each Time, Limited Well-Being** (NPTLW): Any life that contains no pain and the same positive finite amount of pleasure less than P *at each time* cannot have an overall well-being score that exceeds finite limit L, no matter how long this life lasts.

This sort of constraint would enable us to accommodate the intuitively plausible claim that a life containing *very* low-intensity pleasure at each moment cannot have a higher overall well-being score than another life containing 1,000 years of ecstasy at each moment, no matter how long the first life lasts. Perhaps this is sketchy, but the thought is that just as pluralism cannot accommodate EPLW (Enough Pain, Limited

and since my response to him partly hinges on points about life individuation hypersensitivity merely alluded to earlier, I cannot include it here.

[28] Or pleasure *duration* only—though that is an even less plausible view. A version of one-dimensional hedonism according to which intensity matters but duration does not matter may have been held by Epicurus; see Warren (2004).

[29] There are various particular ways of formulating one-dimensional hedonism, for example, it could claim that a life's overall well-being score is a function only of its *average* pleasure intensity, or only of its *lowest*, or *highest*, pleasure intensity, etc., but these details do not matter here—each of these different formulations yields the implication noted in the main text.

Well-Being) or EPTLW (Enough Pain at Each Time, Limited Well-Being) without either adopting hypersensitivity or adopting an implausible limit view, so too will hedonism be unable to accommodate Not Enough Pleasure at Each Time, Limited Well-Being (NPTLW) without either adopting hypersensitivity or adopting an implausible limit view. So, just as the big crunch pressured us away from pluralism and toward simpler theories like hedonism, we might think it pressures us even further, toward *super*-simple theories like one-dimensional hedonism.

I believe a defender of traditional (two-dimensional) hedonism has a defensible response. She could plausibly claim that there is an intuitive asymmetry here. While pluralist intuitions recognizing various nonhedonic goods such as desire satisfaction, knowledge, rationality, etc., as being non-derivatively contributory to overall well-being are strong, they are plausibly not as strong or reliable as the intuitions in favor of EPLW or (at least) EPTLW, nor are they as strong or reliable as the intuition against hypersensitivity. On the other hand, the hedonist intuition recognizing pleasure duration as being non-derivatively contributory to overall well-being *is plausibly much stronger and more reliable than* the intuition in favor of NPTLW. Perhaps more would need to be said to fully develop this response, but I believe it is defensible. Thus, there may be some limits on the power of the big crunch to pressure theories to become simpler and simpler.[30]

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