



QUIRKY DESIRES AND WELL-BEING

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A DESIRE-SATISFACTION THEORY OF WELL-BEING claims that the satisfaction of one's desires is what makes one's life go well. Against this it is frequently objected that some desires – such as the desire to count blades of grass or to collect a giant heap of lint – cannot be relevant to one's well-being. I argue that the satisfaction of such desires – I call them “quirky” desires – does indeed contribute to well-being, provided (and only provided) that the desirer satisfies a minimal accountability condition, a condition that is satisfied if and only if the desirer would be able, if called upon, to provide an Anscombian desirability characterization of the object of the desire. To make the case, I argue that the satisfaction of any run-of-the mill desire contributes to one's well-being if and only if one meets the minimal accountability condition. I argue by analogy with run-of-the mill desires that the satisfaction of a quirky desire contributes to one's well-being, just in case the same condition is met. After sketching this solution to the problem of quirky desires, I show that this response is better than other responses that have been given by desire theorists and further develop this solution by responding to several objections.

1. The Desire Theory of Well-Being

A theory of well-being provides an account of what is good for one – that is, what contributes to one's welfare. The desire-satisfaction theory of well-being claims that the satisfaction of one's desires is what contributes to one's welfare. This account has intuitive appeal. If I desire a cool glass of water on a hot summer day, I am better off if I get that glass of water than if I do not. If I desire the bucolic life but I have to live in a congested city, then the frustration of that desire is bad for me.

The aim of this paper is to defend the desire-satisfaction theory against an objection widely thought to be devastating to the theory. Although this paper does not aim at a full development and justification of the desire theory, it is important to note one of the chief motivations and advantages of the desire theory. The desire theory satisfies the desideratum that whatever is claimed to be good for an agent by a theory of well-being must resonate with that agent. What is good for one must not be alienating to the one for whom it is good. What is good for one must not leave one cold or indifferent to the prospect of its coming about. Rather, one must positively care about, be engaged or compelled by, or have a pro-attitude toward what will enhance one's

well-being. I will accept this resonance condition, leaving it largely undefended.¹ To give it a label, call this condition the *necessity of resonance*.

In addition to the necessity of resonance, a desire theory is committed to a second condition. A completely unrestricted desire theory claims that resonance with something is sufficient for it to be good for one: if one has a pro-attitude toward something, then getting that thing is good for one. A more cautious version of the desire theory will say that having a pro-attitude toward a thing merely creates a presumption in favor of that thing being good for one. I will be defending a version of the desire theory that makes this weaker claim, that resonance with something creates a defeasible presumption in favor of its goodness for one. To give it a label, call this the *resonance presumption*.

As a final piece of stage setting, it will be useful to clarify the scope of a desire theory. A desire theory of welfare is about what is good for one, or what is often described as one's prudential or personal good. It is not about what is morally good. So if one desires to push unsuspecting pedestrians into the paths of oncoming buses, then it is better for one if one satisfies that desire than if one does not. It is no objection – from the perspective of what the theory aims to accomplish – that the theory implies that the perpetration of some moral wrong could be good for one. As well, the theory is about what is intrinsically good for one, as opposed to what is good instrumentally. Suppose one desires to do something that could get one fired from one's job, say insulting the owner of the company. As far as that desire goes, one does better with it satisfied, never mind that satisfying it is instrumentally inconsistent with, say, remaining employed in order to purchase necessities. So the desire theory is a theory about intrinsic value, not about instrumental rationality or instrumental value. Finally, and now hopefully clearly enough, the desire theory is not about what is good for others, it is not about what is aesthetically good, good from the standpoint of a meaningful life or good from any other perspective. It is about what is intrinsically good for one, full stop.

2. The Problem of Quirky Desires

A problem arises for the desire theory upon consideration of quirky desires. A quirky desire is one that is difficult to understand or appears downright inscrutable, extremely strange, unusual or maximally idiosyncratic. Rawls' fel-

¹ The classic statement of the resonance condition is Railton (1986a: 9). Rosati (1996) offers an extended defense of resonance. Dorsey (2012: 432-38) claims that this condition does not support the desire theory in particular, but only subjectivism in general. I resist discussing Dorsey's important contribution here since my focus is on defending the desire theory against an objection that arises on the assumption that the theory is true. The view I develop of welfare-relevant desires is in some ways similar to Dorsey's "judgment subjectivism," according to which "persons value what they *believe is good for them*" (415). One reservation I have about Dorsey's view is whether he succeeds in answering the charge of circularity (438-39), which I do not believe arises for my view.

low who desires to count the blades of grass in park squares and well-trimmed lawns (1971: 434) is the classic example, and Anscombe's desire for a saucer of mud (1963: 70) runs a close second. Susan Wolf mentions the desire to make handwritten copies of *War and Peace* (2010: 16), while others cite the desire to make a giant ball of string by tying together small lengths of string.²

It is difficult to believe that the satisfaction of any of these quirky desires could contribute to the well-being of those who hold them. What makes the desire to count blades of grass appear inscrutable is that it is difficult to see what the grass counter sees in the activity. That is, the object of the desire is baffling and seems unworthy of pursuit. Contrast this with the desire to go outside and watch the sunset from the deck. It is easy to believe that the satisfaction of this desire could contribute to the desirer's well-being. For this sort of desire is not at all strange or unusual. Perhaps we ourselves have had this desire or similar ones. The object of the desire seems perfectly sensible and worthy of pursuit. Counting blades of grass, by contrast, seems worthless, and essentially so. It seems like a pointless waste of time.

This is the problem of quirky desires.³ Whatever the desire theory has going for it, the problem of quirky desires, some allege, shows something deeply wrong with the desire theory. What it shows to be wrong is that having a desire for a thing does not even create a presumption in favor of the goodness of getting that thing, for it is implausible to suppose that counting blades of grass or having a saucer of mud could be welfare-enhancing. David Brink, for instance, presents the case of "someone devoted to collecting lint" as an illustration of the problem for the desire theory – namely that "it attaches significance to satisfying desire without in any way constraining the content of desire" (2008: 24). Similarly, Richard Kraut complains that the "main deficiency" of the desire theory is that "it is too accepting of desires as they stand" (1994: 40). Kraut considers a person with "the project of knocking down as many icicles as he can before they melt" and asserts that we "fail to see why it is worth his while to undertake this project" (1994: 42). Brink, Kraut and others⁴ take the problem of quirky desires as an insurmountable objection against the desire theory, for they take it as obvious that the satis-

² See Taylor (1999: 14), Koethe (2010: 67) and Wolf (2010: 104).

³ The problem of quirky desires is an instance of the more general "too-many-desires" or "defective-desires" objection, which is that many people have desires that do not seem relevant to their well-being. What stands out about quirky desires is that their objects seem inscrutable. Other desires are suspected to be irrelevant to well-being for other reasons, such as a lack of awareness of whether they are satisfied (see Parfit's stranger on the train (1984: 151, 494)) or that the desires disappoint when they are satisfied (see Lauinger (2011) on Dead Sea apples). So the reasons that the different desires are (allegedly) defective and irrelevant to well-being differ from one class to another. As a result, I believe that the solutions to the problems raised by different classes of (allegedly) defective desires will differ from one class to another. Therefore, I do not address the more general defective-desires problem here.

⁴ See also, for example, Arneson (2006: 17) and Kauppinen (2015: 205).

faction of desires with such objects as collecting lint or knocking down icicles does not and could not contribute to well-being. So they take these as obvious counterexamples to what I have stated as the resonance presumption. If the resonance presumption were true, then there would be a presumption in favor of the goodness of collecting dryer lint and of knocking down icicles for the ones who desire those things. Those things are so obviously irrelevant to well-being that there is no presumption that they are good for those who desire them. So the resonance presumption is not true.

There is an internal debate among desire theorists about how to respond to the problem of quirky desires. Some desire theorists seem to agree that quirky desires show that the resonance presumption is false. They respond by appealing to a modified desire theory that includes conditions on desires in order for their satisfaction genuinely to contribute to one's well-being, conditions on desires for them to be welfare-relevant, as I will often say.⁵ In other words, some desire theorists think that there is not a presumption in favor of the goodness of satisfying just any desire. Only desires that first pass through an appropriate filter are welfare-relevant. For an example of such a filter, consider Brandt's theory, according to which the desires that count are the ones that would survive critical reflection through exposure to relevant information, a process he calls *cognitive psychotherapy* (1979: 11, 113, 126-29). As well, Railton advances a theory according to which "an individual's good consists in what he would want himself to want ... were he to contemplate his present situation from a standpoint fully and vividly informed about himself and his circumstances, and entirely free of cognitive error or lapses of instrumental rationality" (1986a: 16; see also 1986b).⁶ Quirky desires seem to be ruled out by the tests proposed by Brandt and Railton – for, one is tempted to think, if the grass counter had full information about himself and his capacities, all of his alternative activities, and the costs and dearth of positive aspects of grass counting, his desire to count blades of grass would not survive critical reflection and he would not want himself to want to count blades of grass after getting such information. Only desires that would pass such a test or tests contribute to one's well-being. So the satisfaction of quirky desires does not contribute to one's well-being on these views.

Other desire theorists are much less willing to give up any ground. Such theorists insist on a more or less unrestricted desire theory without any – or

⁵ I set aside hybrid desire/objectivist theories of well-being that accept the necessity of resonance but require that objects of welfare-relevant desires be objectively valuable. Although such a theory would solve the problem of quirky desires, my interest here is in developing a response to the problem while remaining as close as possible to a pure desire theory, and certainly without inserting any objectivist elements. For a recent and well-developed hybrid theory of well-being that appeals explicitly to resonance, see Lauinger (2013). Wolf (2010) provides an interestingly parallel hybrid theory of meaning in life according to which "meaning arises when subjective attraction meets objective attractiveness" (9).

⁶ I appeal to Railton for familiarity and quotability, but I (along with many others quoting this passage) may be guilty of co-opting him against his intention here, for he says in a footnote that "this notion is not the same as an individual's welfare" (1986a, n. 9).

at least very few – modifications or compromises. Chris Heathwood (2005) considers (though ultimately does not endorse) a largely unrestricted version of the desire theory against the usual litany of “defective” desires. Mark Lukas (2010) argues for a *completely* unrestricted version of the desire theory, claiming that the satisfaction of *all* of an agent’s desires indeed contributes to the agent’s well-being. Lukas bites the bullet and tries to explain away our common intuition that some desires play no role in our well-being.⁷

I also claim that the problem presented by quirky desires does not present an instant “gotcha” against the desire theory, so that, contrary to what critics such as Brink and Kraut would have us believe, quirky-desire satisfaction is fully capable of contributing to the desirer’s well-being. The theory I defend against the quirky-desire objection will not be entirely unrestricted, but it will be closest to the pure and unmodified desire theory and furthest from the very impure and highly modified accounts of the sort advanced by Brandt and Railton. Having now glossed the desire theory, identified the problem of quirky desires and located the discussion in the context of the ongoing debate among theorists of well-being, we can begin developing the promised defense.

3. Minimal Accountability

Suppose an agent *S* has the desire *D* that *p*. My thesis in this section is that satisfaction of *D* contributes to *S*’s well-being if and only if *S* could, if called upon, offer a reason for *D*. The relevant sense of a reason for a desire here is that a consideration is a reason for *D* for *S* if that consideration provides what Anscombe called a desirability characterization of *p*.⁸ *S* provides a desirability characterization of *p* when *S* describes *p* in such a way that makes it comprehensible to others what *S* sees in *p* as positive, worthy of pursuit.

I will refer to this condition, that the desirer be able to provide a reason for her desire, as the *minimal accountability condition*. The desirer is accountable to others in that she satisfies a normative expectation that she be able to justify herself to others. As well, she is able to provide an account of her desire

⁷In a similar vein, Sharon Street (2009) points out that cases of individuals with quirky desires – she calls them “ideally coherent eccentrics” – are often presented as knockdown arguments against an attitude-dependent conception of *reasons*. She argues that when we try to fill in the details of any particular case, we see either that the quirky desires actually do provide normative reasons or that a person with such a quirky desire cannot be conceived, in which case no harm is done to an attitude-dependent conception of reasons. I do not treat Street in the text since the terrain between her topic (reasons) and mine (well-being) is, I believe, treacherous and not of central concern here. But as will be clear from the account I develop, I agree with Street on one of her central theses, that “one is under a strict obligation to make sure one is imagining these characters [with quirky desires] in full and accurate depth, otherwise one’s intuitions regarding them are of no philosophical relevance” (2009: 281).

⁸ See Anscombe (1963: 70-76, et passim).

in the Socratic sense of “account” (*Logos*) in which one provides a reason or justification.

Consider an example. Suppose *S* desires to sit on the deck and watch the sunset. To determine whether the satisfaction of that desire would contribute to *S*'s well-being, we ask *S* her reason for the desire. If her reply is something that makes it clear to us what appeals to *S* about watching the sunset – maybe she says, “The colors are gorgeous” or “It’s a pleasant way to end a hectic day” – then this is enough for us to be assured that watching the sunset would contribute to her well-being. She has shown us the object of her desire in the positive light in which she sees it. She has characterized the object of her desire in such a way that makes it clear to us what she sees in it. Thus it appears – and I shall continue to try to make this plausible in what follows – that *S*'s provision of the desirability characterization is sufficient to show that the object of her desire is good for her.

If, on the other hand, she is unable to provide any reason, then we would have to say either that she is confused about what she wants or that getting what she wants in this case really would not contribute to her well-being. For example, if when asked for a reason for her desire to watch the sunset she were to pause and say, “I don’t know. It’s just what I always do. I was brought up to watch the sunset and now it’s a force of habit, I guess,” then we would want to press her further. Is there something about watching the sunset that can be shown plausibly appealing to her, or is her sunset watching just a purposeless and valueless habit like always tying one’s left shoe before one’s right shoe? If she really cannot offer any reason, if she is completely unable to say what she finds desirable about watching the sunset, then it would seem reasonable to conclude that there really is nothing good for *S* about watching the sunset, so satisfying this desire really would not contribute to *S*'s well-being. Again, I shall continue to try to make this plausible, but this sort of example indicates that the ability to provide a desirability characterization of the object of one’s desire is necessary for the satisfaction of that desire to contribute to one’s well-being.

Notice a few things about this idea of minimal accountability.

First, I am claiming that the ability to provide a reason for a desire is necessary and sufficient for the satisfaction of that desire to contribute to the desirer’s well-being. The relevant sort of reason is not a mere causal reason that explains the genesis of the desire (e.g., “I was brought up that way”). What we need from the desirer is an explanation of the desire in a non-causal sense of “explain.” This is an explanation, an account, of what the desirer sees in the object of the desire that makes the desire comprehensible or intelligible to others. This account need not – and typically, will not – have anything to do with the genesis of the desire. The provision of such a reason justifies the desire in the sense that it gives a characterization of the object of the desire that supports the claim that there is something positive for the

agent in it. She justifies the desire, then, by providing good reasons for her to retain her desire and pursue its object.⁹

Second, the condition for a desire to be determined relevant to an agent's well-being is a subjunctive condition. It says that D is relevant to S 's well-being just in case *if S were called upon, then she would be able to offer a desirability characterization of the object of her desire.* This allows for the obvious fact that many – perhaps most – of the desires we have that are clearly relevant to our well-being are not desires that we actually reflect on or scrutinize, or for which we seek to provide reasons. Even though I have never before reflected on my desire, for example, to wear a coat on a cold day, I would be able to give a desirability characterization of wearing a coat if called upon, so satisfying that desire contributes to my well-being.

Third, this account is faithful to the general presuppositions about the nature of well-being shared by most desire theorists – namely that well-being is relative and subjective. Suppose S_1 desires to be an automobile mechanic. S_1 likes working with his hands and enjoys solving mechanical problems. S_2 is terribly clumsy and therefore frustrated while working with his hands, and is severely aggravated by mechanical problems for which he has no aptitude. Even S_2 will be able to accept that the life of an automobile mechanic is *good for S_1* , provided that S_1 would be able, if called upon, to offer the sort of reason for his desire just rehearsed. Satisfaction of desires typical of a mechanic is good for S_1 , but not for S_2 . So value is relative on the present account. As well, value is subjective because whether it is valuable for S that p is determined by S 's attitude toward p .

This point leads to a fourth – namely, that although well-being is subjective on the present account, the condition that one be able to provide a desirability characterization of the object of one's desire is a publicity condition. One gives a successful desirability characterization when one makes it clear *to others* what one sees in the object of one's desire. It makes that desire comprehensible to others; it explains (in a non-causal sense) one's attraction to others. A key point is that those others might not share one's attraction. The cult member does not satisfy the minimal accountability condition if he is only able to explain his attraction to drinking the cyanide-laced Kool-Aid to fellow cult members in terms that will make the desire comprehensible *to them* (e.g., "Jim said so"). Rather, for the object of a desire to be good for one, one has to be able to make the desire comprehensible to others who do not share the desire. The desirability characterization might not, of course, make the object of desire attractive to others.

⁹ Some authors would object to my use of Anscombe's desirability characterizations for my purposes. Setiya (2010: 89), for example, thinks that the answer to her "Why?" question is an explanation rather than a justification, which is inconsistent with what I just said. Anscombe's discussion is well-known, however, so I use it as motivation. It is an interpretive question whether or to what extent my notion of a desirability characterization differs from Anscombe's, and I hope no confusion will result.

Finally, compare the notion of accountability on offer here with Frankfurt's notion (developed for different purposes) of all-in, highest-order, wholehearted caring about the object of one's desire manifested by a lack of questioning one's devotion to that thing.¹⁰ Our notions may appear similar. They are quite different, however, on two scores. First, one can satisfy Frankfurt's condition of wholehearted caring in a purely passive way by refraining from questioning one's devotion to a thing. One need not be prepared to mount an active defense of the object of one's desire. Yet that is exactly what is needed on my account: a capacity to offer positive reasons in support of the object of one's desire. So that is the first difference: passive non-questioning as opposed to a capacity for active reason-giving. The second difference is that Frankfurt's identification condition is purely intrapersonal. There is no need to consider, engage with or defend against external perspectives other than one's own. The sense of accountability in play here, however, is interpersonal, as it requires the capacity to provide reasons *to others* who might not share one's desire.¹¹

4. Solution to the Problem of Quirky Desires

4.1 The Solution

I have just offered an account of minimal accountability, according to which an agent's ability to offer a reason in the form of a desirability characterization of the object of a desire shows that the desire is relevant to her welfare. I will argue that just as everyday sunset-watching desires are shown to be welfare-relevant by meeting the minimal accountability condition, so too can quirky desires be shown to be relevant.

Watching a sunset can be shown to be good for an agent because we can understand what the agent sees as positive in it. But watching a sunset is not all that different from counting blades of grass: as we saw above, if the agent *cannot* offer a desirability characterization of watching the sunset, then – however common and usual the desire may be – watching the sunset really is not good for the agent. Similarly for the grass counter. If, however, the grass counter *can* offer a desirability characterization of counting the blades of grass – “It's soothing, like walking on the beach” or “You would think all the blades of grass were the same, but when you set your mind to counting them, you have the wonderful aesthetic experience of appreciating their individual differences!” – then doing it is good for the agent. Similarly for all kinds of quirky desires that I want to claim are very plausibly good for the desirers to

¹⁰ See the essays in Frankfurt (1988), especially “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person” and “Identification and Wholeheartedness.”

¹¹ I am indebted here to Andrea Westlund's (2003) discussion of Frankfurt. It is beyond the scope here to explore the parallels between Westlund's dialogical reflectiveness condition for autonomy and my minimal accountability condition for welfare-relevant preferences, but I have clearly been influenced by her discussion.

satisfy: “Why do you want to knock down as many icicles as possible before they melt?” “Because I love hearing them crash to the ground” or “Because I see the pursuit as challenging, as bowlers see it as challenging to knock down as many pins as possible with the fewest possible throws.” “Why do you want a saucer of mud?” “Because I get satisfaction from beholding the contours in the mud plopped onto the saucer, as others get satisfaction from beholding the features of a landscape carved by glaciers.” “Why do you want a giant heap of lint?” “Its sheer enormity will delight me.”

I am backing into the argument here in the sense that I am arguing that very common (sunset) desires are not that different from quirky desires in that desirability characterizations are also needed for common desires. What separates the cases is that we usually do not challenge the common desires of others because we can easily supply a desirability characterization or it just does not occur to us to request one because we ourselves share the desires. If we abstract from the banal content of a common desire and the striking and unusual content of a quirky desire, we can see that what is needed in both cases in order to show that the desire is welfare-relevant is a desirability characterization by the agent of the desire’s object. Absent that, neither desire is relevant. But *just as* common desires are shown to be welfare-relevant when the agent can offer an appropriate reason for the desire, *so too* can a quirky desire be shown to be relevant.

Throughout, I will use various language to describe what goes on when a desirer makes a desire comprehensible to others by providing a desirability characterization. I will say that he justifies the desire or provides a (justificatory) reason for it. I will say he endorses it upon reflection or that he stands willing to answer to internal and external criticism of the desire and engage in justificatory dialogue. Since what is at issue with quirky desires is their claimed irrelevance to well-being in light of their incomprehensibility,¹² the

¹² A referee objects: “But surely that is *not* what is at issue. The objection isn’t that it’s incomprehensible why someone would want to count blades of grass; it is that it’s a pointless activity, in itself a waste of time in spite of being desired by the subject. Of course, it may be instrumentally good, if it, say, gives pleasure to the subject. (That’s why it may be comprehensible why someone does it.)” I take the charge of incomprehensibility just to *be* the charge of pointlessness. One successfully answers the charge of incomprehensibility with a desirability characterization if and only if one shows that the object of one’s desire is *not pointless*, that it is *not a waste of time*. The grass counter, just above, appeals to aesthetic experience. Counting the grass has that point, so it is not a waste of time. The lint collector appeals to the delight in beholding the sheer enormity of the mass of lint. It is not pointless if the point of it is delight. So are these activities merely instrumentally good for obtaining beauty and delight? No, as I explain in section 5.3.

After making these claims about what the objection is *not*, the referee continues: “The objection is just that it is not intrinsically good for the subject to satisfy such a desire for a worthless object – even if we can see why they want it.” If we start with the assumption that counting blades of grass is worthless, then of course nothing the desire theorist can say could show that it is good for the subject. But for the objectivist to insist flat-footedly that we already know that counting blades of grass is worthless would be like a hedonist arguing against the objectivist’s view of the welfare-relevance of virtuous actions on the grounds that

idea of making a desire comprehensible through the provision of a desirability characterization is primary, and these other expressions are intended to provide complementary ways of describing what goes on when a desirer does this.

4.2 The Dialectic

It may be useful to review and clarify the dialectic. We began with the desire theory of well-being. A central motivating thought behind the desire theory is that resonance with an end is necessary for its welfare-relevance for an agent. More importantly for our purposes here, there is a presumption that an end that resonates with one is relevant to one's well-being. Critics objected to this resonance presumption, saying that resonance with an end does not even create a presumption in favor of that end being good for one. Witness quirky desires. It is beyond the pale to suppose that collecting dryer lint or knocking down icicles could be good for one. Desires for those things are too far out there. They are beyond comprehending as good, according to this common line of thought.

My reply can be seen as admitting that the objectors are right to point out that there is something unusual and standing in need of justification about quirky desires. Where the objectors and I disagree is that they say that quirky desires show that there is no resonance presumption because those desires are so obviously irrelevant to well-being. I say that a quirky desire indeed calls the presumption into question in an individual case and that more needs to be said before we conclude that its satisfaction is good for the agent holding it. In an individual case, I have argued, the presumption can be restored if the agent satisfies the minimal accountability condition for that desire. This minimal accountability condition is one that has to be satisfied for any desire to be shown relevant to an agent's welfare, not just quirky desires. Of course, if the presumption is called into question in an individual case and the desirer does not satisfy the accountability condition, then the presumption is defeated, though in that case only, and not generally.

4.3 Competing Solutions

With my solution to the problem of quirky desires in place, let us consider it vis-à-vis responses to the problem by others also sympathetic to the desire theory. I mentioned two sorts of desire theories that seem able to respond to the problem. One sort, championed by Lukas (2010), puts no restrictions on desires that are relevant to welfare. He bites the bullet and explains away the

those actions are not pleasurable. If the hedonist starts with the assumption that non-pleasurable things cannot be welfare-relevant, then of course nothing the objectivist can say could show that virtue is good for the subject who does not take pleasure in it. Such a move does not advance the debate, but instead blocks the road to further inquiry.

common intuition that certain desires are irrelevant to well-being. Consider Lukas' desire that the number of atoms in the universe be prime. Lukas explains away the intuition of irrelevance by noting that such a desire is "just one measly desire" (2010: 22) among his desires, which are vast in number. Although we should bite the bullet to save the theory, he thinks the bullet is not that unpalatable, for given the comparative insignificance of such a desire, we are forced to admit merely that it has "negligible relevance to [his] overall well-being" (2010: 23).

While Lukas' solution succeeds for the desires he considers, some of which are quirky, it will not work for slightly souped-up examples, where the quirky desires in question are not insignificant idiosyncrasies but central projects. Suppose that we have a grass counter or a lint collector who centers his life and all of its activities on grass counting or lint collection.¹³ Then the response that it is "just one measly desire" among a vast multitude will not do.

There is a second problem for Lukas' solution. By leaving welfare-relevant desires completely unrestricted, the quirkiest desires, such as for a beaker of barn swallow bile, would count as welfare-relevant even if the desirers were not able to articulate to the slightest degree what they saw in the objects of those desires. Yet, as I explained earlier, even a banal desire, such as to watch the sunset, is not welfare-relevant if the desirer cannot articulate what she sees in the object of her desire as worthwhile pursuing. If that applies to run-of-the-mill desires, then it applies a fortiori to quirky desires.

We can maintain the necessity of resonance without having to bite the bullet on the sufficiency of resonance, as Lukas does. Instead, we can back off of the sufficiency of resonance to the resonance presumption, along with the principled account I have given for when that presumption is either restored or defeated in an individual case when called into question, such as by a quirky desire. There are no bullets to bite, and the problem is solved. So this is why my slightly restricted desire theory is preferable to Lukas' completely unrestricted theory.

I also mentioned another sort of desire theory, a considerably restricted theory that may seem able to respond to the problem of quirky desires. On a so-called full-information account, an agent's good is determined by what she would want (or want herself to want) if she were fully and vividly informed about herself and her alternatives and she did not suffer from any cognitive errors or lapses in instrumental rationality. Sobel (1994) and Rosati (1995) argue convincingly that this version of the desire theory faces insurmountable problems. This is a good reason not to move to a full-information account in order to address the problem of quirky desires. This is especially true since on offer here is a solution that remains more loyal to the spirit of the unmodified desire theory without the attendant difficulties of a full-information view.

¹³ Indeed, this is how Rawls conceives of the grass counter. See section 4.4.

Assume, however, that all of the Rosati/Sobel problems for a full-information account could be solved. Those problems are really only secondary to a larger difficulty. When I presented the full-information account as a solution to the quirky-desire problem, my presentation assumed that, when a quirky desire was scrutinized and the desirer had full exposure to the facts and did not suffer from any reasoning mistakes or cognitive errors, the desire would not survive such critical reflection. Yet if my subsequent discussion is on track and many desirers could provide desirability characterizations for their quirky desires, it is not clear that such desires would not also survive exposure to the facts and unerring reasoning.

To see why, notice that holders of quirky desires are usually conceived not as people who are missing facts or making mistakes in reasoning. They are presented as people who value something deemed valueless by wielders of the objection. If such a desirer meets the standard I have proposed of minimal accountability for a given quirky desire, then having more facts and better reasoning ability will not change her desire, since it is not missing facts or a deficiency in reasoning that led her to have or is leading her to retain the quirky desire. So that desire will be ruled in as welfare-relevant by both my standard and the full-information standard.

On the other hand, if such a desirer does not meet my standard of minimal accountability for a given quirky desire, then more facts and perfect reasoning will not change her mind since, again, missing facts or bad reasoning is not the cause of the quirky desire. In that case, my account gives the right answer and says the desire is not welfare-relevant while the full-information account would have to admit it as relevant, since it would be retained after exposure to the facts and perfect reasoning.¹⁴

So the full-information account, even if it is not defeated by the Rosati/Sobel critiques, does not seem to offer any advantage over my account for quirky desires that my account rules in as welfare-relevant, and seems to issue the wrong answer for quirky desires that my account rules out as welfare-irrelevant. So it is unnecessary and counterproductive to go beyond minimal accountability and impose additional restrictions on desires with the idealizations that a full-information account requires.

4.4 The Grass Counter's Roots

Before examining some objections to help clarify and round out this defense of quirky desires, consider the very first appearance of the grass counter on the philosophical stage. The debut was in Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*, in the

¹⁴ My point in this paragraph is similar to Velleman's (1988: 357), that Brandt's cognitive psychotherapy ignores non-cognitive sources of therapy for our desires. So it "seems unlikely that the desires rendered uncriticizable by [a full-information account] would be precisely the ones that we have no interest in criticizing" (359, n.). This is just my point here about quirky desires whose desirers cannot provide desirability characterizations but who are in possession of all the facts and reason perfectly.

context, not surprisingly, of Rawls' discussion of a person's good. A person's good, Rawls says, is "determined by the rational plan of life that he would choose with deliberative rationality" (1971: 424). In the course of investigating "what sorts of ends these plans are likely to encourage" (1971: 424), he postulates "a deep psychological fact" (1971: 432) of human motivation, the Aristotelian Principle. According to this principle, "other things equal, human beings enjoy the exercise of their realized capacities (their innate or trained abilities), and this enjoyment increases the more the capacity is realized, or the greater its complexity" (1971: 426). The idea, Rawls explains, "is that human beings take more pleasure in doing something as they become more proficient at it, and of two activities they do equally well, they prefer the one calling on a larger repertoire of more intricate and subtle discriminations" (1971: 426). This explains why, for instance, people generally prefer chess to checkers and algebra to elementary arithmetic.

Rawls maintains that the Aristotelian principle can help to "account for what things are recognized as good for human beings" (1971: 433). After his six-page exploration of the principle, Rawls brings up the grass counter as a counterexample to it, as the grass counter's pursuit clearly does not square with the principle. The upshot of the ensuing discussion is that if the Aristotelian Principle fails in a particular case – as it apparently does in the grass-counter case – or even if it fails altogether, then "the definition of a person's good in terms of the rational plan for him" (1971: 433) would still remain intact. Given the centrality of grass counting to the grass counter, Rawls insists that "the good for this man is indeed counting blades of grass, or more accurately, his good is determined by a plan that gives an especially prominent place to this activity" (1971: 432).

So that is the first major point about Rawls' discussion, that it is introduced in order to argue that even in such a "fanciful case" (1971: 433), an end that has such a prominent place in an agent's life plan is good for the agent to achieve. Not to lay too much stress on it, but *the whole point* of Rawls' introduction of the example is to argue that a desire, such as the grass counter's, that does not satisfy the Aristotelian principle, can be a welfare-relevant desire.

It is surprising that the critics of the desire theory who co-opt Rawls' example ignore this original context and assume without discussion that it is a welfare-irrelevant desire. It is all the more surprising, since the details that Rawls gives in the original discussion serve to make it highly plausible that counting blades of grass contributes to the grass counter's well-being, and serve to fill out the example in such a way that the man is difficult to regard as alien or incomprehensible, contrary to what those who marshal the example often assume about him. Rawls' grass counter is intelligent, "and actually possesses unusual skills, since he manages to solve difficult mathematical problems for a fee" (1971: 432). To be sure, we would be surprised to find such a person existing. "[W]e would try out other hypotheses" (1971: 432) to explain his occupation with grass counting, such as that he is neurotic and

not, presumably, an ordinary-functioning human. Yet, Rawls continues, if we allow that it is his unalterable nature to enjoy this activity and no other, then “[i]t will be for him the end that regulates the schedule of his actions, and this establishes that it is good for him” (1971: 432-33). I have argued that, for it to be good for him, it is additionally necessary that he satisfy the minimal accountability condition. That disagreement with Rawls aside, I am pointing out that Rawls gives good reason to think that grass counting contributes to this agent’s well-being, and that to my knowledge none of the desire theory’s critics who appeal to this example or to similar examples interpret the grass counter in the same charitable light in which Rawls originally presents him.¹⁵

5. Objections

5.1 Infants, Inarticulates, Limited Articulation and Disappearing Desires

There is a cluster of concerns around the issue of the ability to reflect on desires and the result of the reflection. These are related, so I treat them as a group.

i. Infants. First, one might wonder what my account can say about infants, who do not have the capacities needed to reflect upon a desire and to formulate and articulate a desirability characterization. Presumably we want to say that an infant desires food and that satisfying that desire is good for the infant. Yet my account does not apply because an infant can neither reflect on a desire nor provide a desirability characterization of the food.

I agree that my account does not apply to infants, but this does not constitute an objection against it, for what is good for a thing depends on the kind of thing that it is.¹⁶ Normal adult humans are of the sort of thing that reasons, reflects and articulates, so that is why the account of well-being for them appeals to these capacities. Dogs and trees can do well or badly, but they do not have those capacities. It is good for a dog, given the sort of thing it is, to get sufficient exercise and it is bad for a tree, as its sort of thing, to get mangled in a windstorm. Although it makes sense to speak of dogs and trees as doing well or badly, this does not mean that my account of well-being has to apply to *them*. Similarly, there is no reason to think that the account of well-being I have given for normal adult humans will apply to *all* humans, including infants. To be sure, infants can do well or badly, but what it is for them to do well or badly will depend on the kind of thing they are,

¹⁵ Again, see Street (2009) and her explanation of the responsibility to imagine such eccentrics in full imaginative detail before using them to make a point (in her case) about the subjective determinants of reasons and (in my case) about the subjective determinants of well-being.

¹⁶ This Aristotelian thesis is familiar. See Boyle and Lavin (2010) and the references therein. They express it thus: “A certain standard of goodness for a thing follows inevitably from its belonging to a kind characterized by a functionally organized system of powers” (184).

which is relevantly different from the kind of thing that normal adult humans are, with their reflective and expressive abilities. So it is no problem that my account of well-being does not apply to infants.¹⁷

ii. Inarticulates. One might wonder, however, about someone who is otherwise a normal adult human, but who is incompetent at reflection or so inarticulate that she cannot provide a desirability characterization. Suppose first an extreme case: the person is never able to offer a desirability characterization of any desired object, never able to answer the questions “Why do you want that? What’s the good of it?” Then my account does not apply to such a being. A being with such limited reflective and expressive capacities would be like an infant, to whom my account does not, and need not, apply.

¹⁷ A referee suggests that I should make it clear whether I am endorsing an unrestricted desire theory for infant well-being or something else entirely, such as an objective list or perfectionist theory. I am endorsing neither, for I do not have a theory of infant well-being. I hope it is reasonable for me to decline to commit to a theory for infants in light of the limited scope of this paper about normal adult human well-being. I also do not have theories of well-being for humans near the end of life with diminished cognitive capacities or autistic humans who never develop some of the usual human capacities – or theories of well-being for dolphins, chimpanzees or dogs, which have many similarities with humans in marginal cases. Those theories – along with a theory of infant well-being – would be beautiful things to have, because they might allow us to understand much more fully all of those similar sorts of beings and their well-being in relation to each other as well as to normal adult humans. I just do not have any of those theories either.

One might think that my statement that normal adults and infants are different types of beings with different capacities is an insufficient explanation for why my view of welfare does not apply to both equally. So one might think that I am in debt for a better explanation of why my version of the desire theory applies to normal adult humans but not to more primitive welfare subjects. Indeed, Lin (forthcoming) argues that explanations like mine that appeal to a difference in capacities of infants and normal adults are non-starters. He argues further that practically all extant versions of welfare subjectivism are unable plausibly to explain why they apply to normal adult humans but not newborn infants, and that this explanatory inability is a reason to reject them.

I believe my explanation based on capacities is importantly different than those Lin considers, so that my version of subjectivism escapes the reach of his arguments. The reason, briefly, is as follows. The account of well-being closest to mine that he considers in this connection (Same World Judgment Subjectivism) focuses on the capacity to have welfare beliefs. On that account, something is good for you (at a world W) if and only if (at W) you believe it to be good for you. Lin finds it incredible that things that were good for a being before she developed the capacity to have welfare beliefs should suddenly cease being good for her just because she has no welfare beliefs about those things upon development of that capacity. My account of well-being escapes this implausible implication. My account focuses not on the mere possession of the capacities of reason, reflection and articulation, but on the hypothetical exercise of them and the results of that exercise. Suppose X is good for subject S , an immature human. S matures into a normal adult and develops the capacities of reason, reflection and articulation. On the account on offer here, X remains good for S provided that S desires X and if S were called upon to reflect on her desire for X , she would be able to articulate a desirability characterization of it to others. So X does not automatically cease being good for S upon her development of the capacities appealed to by my account. The welfare status of X for S will depend on the outcome of the hypothetical reflection and attempted desirability characterization.

What should we say about someone whose inability to reflect or articulate is more localized? Take someone who wants to go for a walk on the beach but who is able to offer no desirability characterization of the activity. One way to handle such a case would be to apply maximum charity, and make an inference about the sort of desirability characterization that applies, even if she cannot articulate it. If, say, she also walks in parks, on city sidewalks and in the woods and characterizes these sorts of walking as relaxing, then we might infer by analogy that this is what she sees as positive about walking on the beach, and judge that walking on the beach is good for her.

The charitable inference might be justified if we were unable to engage in dialogue with the subject and merely observed her. Supposing, however, that we are engaged in dialogue with her and she is reflectively incompetent or inarticulate with regard to walking on the beach, we should not make this inference and we should instead judge that walking on the beach really is not good for her. We ask: “Does the same thing go for walking on the beach as for walking in parks and other places? Do you see the same positive aspect in all of these sorts of walking?” If she is not only unable to supply the desirability characterization but even unable to confirm or deny the desirability characterizations we offer to attribute to her, then the bets are off and we have to conclude that walking on the beach is not good for her. Again, this is as it should be. A subject needs to be able to offer an account of her desires. If she cannot do that and cannot even confirm an account we conjecture, then satisfaction of those desires is not good for her. So unlike the cases of the infant and extreme incompetent, my account applies here and says the activity in question is not good for the person when this inability is localized.

iii. Limited articulation. Consider a similar case of inarticulateness, this time of someone who is just a bit more articulate than our completely inarticulate (second) beach walker. Imagine a heavy metal fan who desires to listen to heavy metal but is just able to say “I like it” in response to a request for a desirability characterization of the music. If “I like it” is not sufficient as a desirability characterization, then the view will produce false negatives in this and similar cases since listening to heavy metal is clearly good for the metalhead. If, on the other hand, “I like it” suffices as a desirability characterization, then my view will get the right result here, but also produce many false positives, since most any minimally articulate adult will be able to say “I like it” of the object of any desire at all.¹⁸

In response, I want to claim that in some contexts “I like it” does suffice, but in others it does not. First, take a case similar to the metalhead. We are at an ice cream stand that serves only chocolate and vanilla. You say you desire chocolate, and order it. I ask why. You say, “I like it.” It seems that should be enough to conclude that it is good for you in this case. Why? Because a primary meaning of “like” is “to take pleasure in.” “I like it” in this

¹⁸ Thanks to an anonymous referee for pressing me on the issue and example in this paragraph.

ice cream context means “I take gustatory pleasure in it” or perhaps “Chocolate gives me more gustatory pleasure than vanilla.” Citing the pleasure from the object of a desire can suffice to make the desire comprehensible, and it does suffice here.

The same analysis applies to the metalhead. We ask why he wants to listen to Iron Maiden rather than Karen Carpenter, and he says, “I like it.” It seems reasonable to interpret him as meaning that listening to Iron Maiden gives him more of the sort of pleasure that comes from listening to music than does listening to Karen Carpenter. That makes the desire comprehensible and its satisfaction good for him. Given that that makes it comprehensible, there is no reason to demand, further, deep musical analysis or even the citation of some specific feature he finds pleasurable, such as the screeching guitar or pounding rhythm. The difference between the metal fan and the inarticulate beach walker is that the beach walker could not offer any justification of her desire at all. So, “I like it,” in the context of our conversation with the metalhead, might very well suffice as a desirability characterization.

In other contexts, “I like it” can indicate the presence of some characteristic other than pleasure that is common knowledge in the context and that makes one’s desire comprehensible. Suppose Mary is a physics major known by her academic advisor to be intellectually challenged by classes that are theoretical rather than applied. She has an elective spot to fill, and her schedule has a free timeslot that would allow her to take either a math course or a sociology course. She explains to her advisor that since she likes math more than social sciences, she has decided to take the math class. In this context, her liking statement serves to indicate the presence of a feature – intellectual challenge from theory over application – that makes her desire for one over the other comprehensible. As when “I like it” indicated pleasure in the context of our conversation with the heavy metal fan, “I like it” suffices to make the desire comprehensible in this context where it indicates intellectual challenge.

In other contexts, “I like it” surely will not suffice as a desirability characterization, even if it means “It gives me pleasure.” This is similar to Anscombe’s case of wanting a pin “[b]ecause of the pleasure of it” (1963: 73). It is not at all clear how having a pin is pleasurable, so that desirability characterization fails and getting the pin is not good for the desirer. This seems to be the right result. In section 5.4.ii I expand upon this point, that it must be made clear why or how the object has the property attributed to it in a desirability characterization.

Finally, if (in another sort of context) “I like it” is supposed to indicate a brute attraction independent of pleasure or any other characteristic (such as intellectual challenge) explaining or justifying that attraction, then the desirability characterization fails. If I say I “just like” cutting my arms, or counting blades of grass, or collecting goat hooves, and I say no more, then I have not succeeded in explaining to someone what I see as positive in these things, so they are not good for me. This also seems to be the right result.

iv. Disappearing desires. Consider someone with a desire that disappears upon reflecting on it. Suppose I desire to dine on Rocky Mountain oysters but that my desire lasts only as long as I refrain from reflecting on the desire or its object. If I am asked for a desirability characterization, or spontaneously reflect on the desire, I cannot help but to think about what they are (bull testicles), I am disgusted and my desire evaporates. If I am able to refrain from reflecting, I enjoy them immensely. It may seem odd that my account interferes in this way with our desires as we find them.

On the contrary, a little reflection should show that my account gives the right answer. A central motivation for the account is that agents should be able to stand behind desires – if their satisfaction is good for them – by answering to external and internal scrutiny. When they cannot, the object of the desire is not good for them. So if I have a desire that, upon reflection, I cannot support but repudiate instead because the positive taste is outweighed by disgust, then I have made progress by getting rid of a desire the satisfaction of which would have been bad for me. So it is no problem that this account messes up the data given by desire, as it were. It is actually a side benefit of the account that the reflection needed to provide a desirability characterization can cause a desire that would have been bad to satisfy to go away.

5.2 Are Common Values Presupposed?

I have claimed that the satisfaction of a desire contributes to an agent's well-being if and only if the desirer is able to make the desire comprehensible to others through the provision of a desirability characterization of the object of the desire. Yet one might object that those to whom the desirability characterization is given would have to share common values with the desirer in order for the desirability characterization to make the desire comprehensible. And once common values are presupposed, the claimed subjectivity of my account of value goes by the wayside.

Consider an individual who desires to marry his boyfriend. On my account, satisfaction of this desire would be good for him if and only if he could characterize marrying his boyfriend in a way that makes it comprehensible to others. Now if the relevant others are 21st century American gays with whom he shares common values, providing the characterization will be a straightforward task. If the relevant others include 12th century Muslims, then perhaps the task will be impossible, for the values of 12th century Muslims would seem to preclude their comprehension of gay marriage as something conceivably good. So my story seems to offer no account of value at all. Rather, it seems to presuppose a common set of values among the desirer's interlocutors. One implication of the presupposition of common values is that what is good for one will be culturally relative. For one may be able to make one's desire comprehensible at one time and place to one group of interlocutors but not at another time and place to another group of interlocutors.

In response, I deny that common values must be presupposed among interlocutors in order for desires to be made comprehensible. To see why, recall Anscombe's discussion of the Nazi who is caught in a trap and about to be killed and who desires to set up a mortar in order to kill some nearby Jewish people. When asked, "Why set up the mortar?" the Nazi replies, "It befits a Nazi, if he must die, to spend his last hour exterminating Jews" (1963: 72). Anscombe claims that "we have arrived at a desirability characterization which makes an end of the questions 'What for?'" (1963: 72). The reader's values are as much at odds with the Nazi's values as the 21st century American gay man's values are at odds with the 12th century Muslim's values. Anscombe says she chose the example because Nazis are "pretty well universally execrated" (1963: 72). Nevertheless, the reader has no trouble comprehending what the Nazi sees in exterminating Jews in his final hour, even though there is not a common valuing of exterminating Jews between the reader and the Nazi. Similarly, there is no reason to think that a 12th century Muslim could not comprehend the 21st century person's desire to marry his boyfriend and understand what he sees in it. Thus, no common base of values needs to be presupposed in my account of making a desire comprehensible. A fortunate implication of this defense is that it does not follow from my view that what is good for one is culturally relative.

The objector may persist: But surely we share a metaphysical worldview and much cultural baggage with the Nazi, as the 21st century gay man shares with the 12th century Muslim. So I have to admit that, although killing Jewish people and having gay marriage relationships are not common values among the interlocutors in question, at a broader or more coarse-grained level of analysis, there are nevertheless many common values presupposed. This is true but does not undermine my account. It is commonly recognized that even the ability to communicate through language requires common values or norms to regulate the linguistic practices and that at a certain level of analysis, facts are values all the way down. A being with whom we did not share values at this level of analysis would be from an alien form of life. I certainly do not include such aliens among those to whom we should stand ready to justify our desires. The important point is that one can satisfy the minimal accountability condition even when one's interlocutors do not share one's desires, such as for gay relationships or killing Jewish people. That is sufficient to answer the objection that common values in that sense are required.

5.3 Can All Desires Be Justified?

Suppose I desire to watch *Groundhog Day*, and I desire this for its own sake, that is, intrinsically. On the version of the desire theory I aim to defend, the satisfaction of this desire is good for me provided I can articulate a desirability characterization of watching *Groundhog Day*. Since merely saying, "Well, it's *Groundhog Day*!" will not render my desire comprehensible, my desirability characterization will have to advert to some feature of the object of my de-

sire – say, that it is entertaining – in order to make it comprehensible. Yet advertent to this feature would seem to show that my desire is non-intrinsic. Indeed, any attempt to make a desire comprehensible that points to something *else* would seem to render the desire non-intrinsic. So it appears that intrinsic desires cannot be given desirability characterizations. Then on the view developed here, no intrinsic desires are welfare-relevant, which is a very unusual sort of desire theory. For while there may be room for debate about whether *some* or *all* non-intrinsic desires are welfare-relevant, I am aware of no desire theorists who claim that *only* non-intrinsic desires are welfare-relevant. Indeed, the orthodox view among desire theorists is that *only intrinsic* desires are welfare-relevant (see Heathwood 2005: 489). So if my theory actually does imply that *no* intrinsic desires are welfare-relevant, I am really going against orthodoxy and need a very good explanation.

Fortunately, my theory does not imply this. This objection confuses two different relationships of subordination of ends. Suppose I desire a hammer in order to pound a nail, in order to build a house, in order to stay warm in winter. Then each end mentioned is subordinate to the subsequent end as a *means*, and the only intrinsically-desired end is staying warm in winter. Now suppose I desire to take a walk in the park for the sake of pleasure. I do not mean that walking in the park is a *means* to pleasure; I mean that pleasure is a *constituent part* of walking in the park for me. So pleasure is subordinate as a constituent part of walking in the park.¹⁹ I desire walking in the park intrinsically, that is, and satisfaction of this desire is good for me because it is, in itself, pleasurable. Similarly, I do not desire to watch *Groundhog Day* as a means to being entertained; being entertained is a constituent part of watching *Groundhog Day* for me. So the desire to watch *Groundhog Day* remains intrinsic, yet it is made comprehensible by describing the activity as entertaining.

Still, the objector might press: “Okay, I see that you’re able to show that the desire to watch *Groundhog Day* can be intrinsic even though it can be given a desirability characterization. So at least some intrinsic desires are welfare-relevant. But what about an intrinsic desire for pleasure itself, or entertainment, or intellectual challenge, or beauty? You won’t be able to offer a desirability characterization of these things beyond themselves. So you won’t be able so show that pleasure, beauty and so on are relevant to well-being. The result is a very odd combination of views. The intrinsic desire to count blades of grass can be welfare-relevant if the desirer characterizes it as pleasant. Yet the intrinsic desire for pleasure itself is not welfare-relevant because it cannot be given a desirability characterization beyond pleasure itself.”²⁰

In reply, I claim that, while it is true that we cannot offer a desirability characterization of pleasure (for example) *beyond* pleasure itself, it does not follow that the desire for pleasure cannot be made comprehensible and thereby shown relevant to well-being. Suppose I want to drink a beer and I

¹⁹ See MacDonald (1991) on these relationships of subordination.

²⁰ Thanks to an anonymous referee for this objection in terms similar to these.

try to make my desire comprehensible by saying that drinking it will give me pleasure. Now suppose I am asked why I want pleasure itself. I would respond by saying that pleasure is *pleasurable*. Characterizing it as such makes it comprehensible. We do not need a *further* characterization in terms of something *other than pleasure* because, again, it is already comprehensible when described as pleasurable. No one will respond, “Why on Earth would you want *pleasure*? I just can’t see why anyone would regard that as worth going in for.”

Anscombe makes this very point in her discussion of desirability characterizations. She notes that “when a man aims at health or pleasure, then the enquiry ‘What’s the good of it?’ is not a sensible one” (1963: 75). In such cases, in *all* cases that is, the chain of desirability characterizations reaches a stopping point beyond which we “can look no further” (1963: 73). It does not make sense to look further, since pleasure, health, beauty and so on are already comprehensible.²¹ This stopping point is an end that is comprehensible, so the desirability characterization has succeeded. It does not matter that the end is made comprehensible with reference to *itself* and not to some *further* end or feature beyond itself or as a constituent part of itself.

To recapitulate: some intrinsic desires can be given desirability characterizations in terms of a constituent part, such as pleasure, beauty, intellectual challenge or something else that makes them comprehensible. Such intrinsic desires are relevant to well-being. Some intrinsic desires – such as for pleasure itself or joy itself – are already comprehensible and do not need a *further* characterization in terms of *something else* to make them comprehensible. Such intrinsic desires are also relevant to well-being. Other intrinsic desires, of course, are not relevant to well-being, if the desirer cannot make their objects comprehensible. If I am asked why I want a collection of goat hooves and I reply that it is just something that I want for its own sake, this desire fails the minimal accountability condition and has not been shown relevant to well-being.

5.4 Further Objection and Clarifications

In section 5.3, I argued that describing the object of a desire as pleasant, beautiful, intellectually challenging or entertaining (and so on) makes the desire comprehensible. Such a description makes for a successful desirability characterization that implies, on the version of the desire theory defended here, that the object is good for the desirer. Let us consider an objection against this line of thought, then two points of clarification.

i. Comprehensibility as the test for goodness. I claimed that something that is desired intrinsically can be shown to be good for the agent because it is comprehensible how pleasure (or being entertaining, soothing or whatever) is a constituent part of it. One might object by presenting a non-quirky desire, a

²¹ Objection: this makes the view on offer here an objective view, according to which these things have objective value. Reply: see section 5.5.

constituent part of the object of which is pleasure, but the satisfaction of which is claimed not to be good for the agent. To wit, many people desire to smoke cigarettes (or to drink sugary soda, or to eat lots of bacon), and a constituent part of smoking for them is pleasure. My account implies that the satisfaction of the desire to smoke is good for the smoker if she can produce a desirability characterization of smoking, which she can by appealing to pleasure. It may seem clear, however, that the satisfaction of the desire to smoke is not good for a smoker. So, the objection goes, my view is clearly absurd. Note that it is not important that it is pleasure under discussion. It could just as well be soothingness, or intellectual challenge, or any other property serving to make a desire comprehensible to others, and we could reach an alleged absurdity similarly.

On the contrary, smoking *is* good for such a smoker *insofar as* a constituent part of smoking is pleasure and pleasure serves to make the desire for smoking comprehensible. My claim is not that smoking is good for her all things considered. Smoking contributes positively to her well-being for the reason just given. Yet it may also contribute negatively to her well-being, because it frustrates her desire not to be at increased risk for certain illness. It may very well be that, *on balance*, smoking is worse for her than not smoking. Yet smoking is good for her in the intended sense of contributing something positive to her well-being.²²

So my view is not that providing a desirability characterization of something desired makes it good for one overall or without qualification. Providing a desirability characterization only shows that there is *some* good in the object of the desire. This is enough, because it is what the critics of the desire theory deny when they bring out quirky desires.

This is a good opportunity to consider another potential objection. The case just considered was of an intrinsic desire that could be made comprehensible but the satisfaction of which was bad for the agent. Consider a reverse case. *S* offers a desirability characterization of going to the dentist: it would end her toothache. This is why she sees it as worthy of pursuit. Yet *S* does not want to go to the dentist, perhaps because of old trauma. So would it be good for *S* to go to the dentist? Everything points to going the dentist as good for the agent – it would, after all, be readily intelligible why she would go there if she did. Yet she lacks the desire to go. Is this not a problem for a supposed desire theory of well-being?²³

I believe this is a completely symmetrical variant of the smoker case, and can be handled symmetrically, again by appeal to the distinction between intrinsic goodness and all-things-considered goodness. Our smoker desires to smoke, but it is clearly bad for her. *S* does not want to go to the dentist, but it is clearly good for her. I said in response to the smoker puzzle that smok-

²² Heathwood (2005, section IV; 2006, section 1.4) similarly distinguishes between all-things-considered goodness and intrinsic goodness.

²³ Thanks to an anonymous referee for this objection and this description of the case.

ing is intrinsically good for our agent insofar as she desires it and can offer a desirability characterization, but on plausible assumptions about her other desires it is bad for her all things considered. Similarly, going to the dentist is intrinsically bad for *S* insofar as she has an aversion to it (and can offer an *undesirability* characterization, such as that it makes her anxious).²⁴ On plausible assumptions about her other desires – in particular, her desire to be rid of her toothache – it is good for her all things considered.

In sum, it is intrinsically good for the smoker to smoke, but it is bad for her all things considered – that is, considering the balance of desire frustration over satisfaction that will result from smoking versus not smoking. Similarly, it is intrinsically bad for *S* to go to the dentist, but it is good for her all things considered – that is, considering the balance of desire satisfaction over frustration that will result from going to the dentist versus not going.

ii. How or why? Clearly enough, describing something as pleasurable or soothing, beautiful, joyful or whatever will not make that thing comprehensible as the object of a desire if it is not made clear *how* or *why* the object so described can be considered pleasurable or soothing, beautiful, joyful or whatever. So if the grass counter were to say of counting blades of grass that it is sexually gratifying to him, then although the questioner can understand the goodness of sexual gratification, the grass counter has not yet provided a sufficient desirability characterization. For an attempted desirability characterization does not succeed if it fails to make the desire comprehensible, and, without a good deal of further explanation, it is not at all easy to see *how* counting blades of grass could be sexually gratifying.²⁵ If, on the other hand, the grass counter characterizes the activity as relaxing, drawing an analogy with deep breathing or closing one's eyes and counting to 10, then this should be enough and we should admit that counting blades of grass contributes to the agent's well-being. Again, this is not so for someone who desires to operate a jackhammer and who tries to explain the desire by describing *jackhammering* as relaxing. That seems to be a lot like describing counting blades of grass as sexually gratifying. Although things that relax or gratify sexually are good for those who desire them, the agent's attempted desirability characterization has failed, for it has failed the minimal accountability condition. For a desirability characterization to succeed, it must state not merely *that* the object of desire is soothing, or pleasurable, or joyful, or, in general, has some property that could make it comprehensible what the de-

²⁴ If she merely lacks the desire and does not desire *not* to go to the dentist, then it is merely intrinsically non-good rather than bad. In this case, the perfect symmetry with the smoker case is lost but the general point of my reply remains intact that it would be good for her all things considered to go to the dentist, but not good intrinsically.

²⁵ Some readers have responded to this example by saying that sexual gratification from counting blades of grass is not difficult to understand, because sexual gratification works in such a brute way sometimes. If that is true, then we can just change the example to make the same point. We could take instead the example of wanting to lick stamps all day long because it is intellectually challenging or the example in the text of wanting to operate a jackhammer for relaxation.

sirer sees in it. The characterization must also explain, if it is not already clear, *how* or *why* the object is soothing, or pleasurable, or joyful, or, in general, has some property that could make it comprehensible what the desirer sees in it.

As noted, Anscombe thinks that describing something as pleasant usually puts an end to the chain of “Why?” questions, provided we can see what is pleasant about it. “No one,” for example, “needs to surround the pleasures of food and drink with [further] explanations” about what is pleasant about them (1963: 73). However, she says, in the case of wanting a pin “[b]ecause of the pleasure of it’ ... [o]ne would be asked to give an account making it at least dimly plausible that there was a pleasure here” (1963: 73). I have argued the same thing here.

iii. Truth. An issue related to but different than the one just discussed is whether the agent’s desirability characterization is *true*. Suppose someone has a desire to drink a potion of rhino-horn powder. When asked why, the desirer provides the desirability characterization that it is a cure for sexual dysfunction. That makes it comprehensible to others why he wants it and sees it as worthy of pursuit. So on the view advanced here, it is apparently good for him. This is absurd, for clearly drinking the potion is not good for the desirer, at least not on the basis that it is a cure for sexual dysfunction, because it is not.²⁶

To make the alleged absurdity even clearer, suppose another agent desires to watch the sunset. When asked why, she characterizes the sunset as loud and appeals to the thrill she gets from loud things. Again, this characterization makes it clear to others what she sees as positive in watching the sunset. So it appears to be a successful desirability characterization, implying that watching the sunset is good for her because it is loud. But that is absurd, since sunsets are loud to the same extent as rhino-horn powder cures sexual dysfunction, which is to say, not at all.²⁷

In response, we just need to see that these desirability characterizations actually fail. They fail because the characterizations are false. They are false because they attribute properties to rhino-horn powder and sunsets that they do not have. We can see this failure by considering the official characterization of a desirability characterization, which has it that “*S* describes *p* in such a way that makes it comprehensible to others what *S* sees in *p* as positive, worthy of pursuit.” We just need to take “*S* describes *p*” as “*S* *correctly* describes *P*.” A description of rhino-horn powder as a cure for sexual dysfunction is not a correct description, nor is a description of sunsets as loud.

²⁶ Thanks to an anonymous referee for this objection and example as well as to Christopher Woodard, who pointed out the same problem.

²⁷ Note that this is a different issue from why or how jackhammering is relaxing to a given agent. It could be. We would need a further explanation. But sunsets just cannot be loud.

5.5 Cleavage Between My View and the Objective-Value View

I have claimed that my view is a subjective view, according to which things are valuable because they are valued, not the other way around. There is no objective value or to-be-pursued-ness in objects themselves or the fabric of the world. Our desire does not respond to value in the world. It is the other way around. We endow things with value through our valuing (desiring) activity.

One might question, however, whether the view developed here is really as subjective as claimed. A key component of this view is that an object of desire is valuable to its desirer if and only if it can be given a desirability characterization by its desirer. The characterizations considered have run in terms of concepts such as the pleasure or relaxation in an activity, the delight of some pursuit, the gratification of a relationship, soothingness, joyfulness, healthfulness, intellectual challenge and so on. One might worry, then, that I have not done much to distinguish my view from an objective view of well-being, according to which certain things, such as pleasure, virtue, health, and intellectual and artistic pursuits are objectively good for humans. It might seem as though I am assuming that things that are pleasurable, or virtuous, or intellectually challenging, for instance, are indeed objectively valuable, independently of our desires for them, for our desires are apparently supported or underwritten by appeal to these things. So am I just spelling out why the objects of subjective desire are valuable in terms of the objectively valuable properties of pleasure, virtue, intellectual challenge and so on? Does it therefore turn out on my view that desires are comprehensible just in case their objects are worthy of desire, independently of being desired?

I certainly hope not. What I hope to be doing instead is sketching an alternative view of well-being that is neither an anything-goes, Lukas-type desire-satisfaction view nor an objective-value view. The worry is that the desirability characterizations used by my view take us right over to the objective side (or at least to a hybrid view according to which what is good for an agent is both desired and has objective value – see Lauinger (2013)). To see why this is not the case, consider that what *makes* something valuable on my view is that it is desired and the desirer can render the object of desire comprehensible. On the objective view, by contrast, what makes something valuable is its being *worthy* of desire, or such as to *warrant* certain subjective attitudes, or to make them *appropriate*. It has some to-be-pursued-ness or objective value. This is in stark contrast with my view, which does not need objects to have *worth* or to be such as to *warrant* certain attitudes.

Still, one might be concerned that a desirability characterization is going to succeed and the desire is going to be made comprehensible precisely when the object of desire is desirable – that is, worthy of desire, independently of being desired. In response, however, notice that the view of value advanced here can get by quite well without there being anything that is desirable independently of being desired. As a result, on my view *anything* that is desired –

microwaving cats, pushing schoolchildren in front of buses, *anything* – contributes to an agent’s well-being if the condition is met.²⁸ Not so on an objective view of value.²⁹ So my view does not reduce to an objective view. It is conceptually distinct in that it starts with desire and ends up with value, rather than the other way around. This conceptual distinctness leads to wildly different implications about what can be good for agents. Put very simply, for many agents *S*, the extension of the predicate “good for *S*” is different on my view than on the objective view. So the views cannot reduce to the same view.

Even with this, the issues regarding the reduction of my view to objectivism are not exhausted. If what makes a desire comprehensible is precisely that its object is worthy of desire, independently of being desired, then prudential value cannot be grounded in comprehensible desire – at least not if the view is to remain subjective. I have just ruled out that account of comprehensibility based on the worth of a desire’s object. The alternative to comprehensibility being grounded in the worth of a desire’s object, however, seems to be that desires cannot be comprehensible tout court but are only comprehensible to some other subject(s). So perhaps we are left with a culturally-relative account of human well-being after all.³⁰

I believe this is a faulty dilemma. There is a non-objectivist alternative under which desires can be comprehensible tout court and not only to this or that subject or group of subjects. Said another way, we can have a standard of comprehensibility that is comprehensibility, full stop, and not just to a certain person or group of persons, and that does not rest on an objective standard of the worth of an object of desire.

To see this, notice that comprehensibility is not a descriptive notion. “Comprehensible” does not mean “is comprehended” on my view any more than “desirable” means “is desired” on an objective view. I presuppose that certain explanations are comprehensible independently of being comprehended (by someone, or everyone, or this or that group) just as the objectivist presupposes that certain things are desirable independently of being desired (by someone, or everyone, or this or that group).

Normative concepts work this way. “Publishable” does not mean “is published.” Things can be publishable without being published, and pub-

²⁸ Could the condition be met? Yes, though the desirability characterizations are stomach turning for those of us lacking these desires: “The unique smell of heated cat flesh is interesting.” Or perhaps simply: “I despise cats.” For the schoolchildren case: “The splat of the children upon collision is delightful, like dropped water balloons, but more dramatic.”

²⁹ As mentioned in a note in section 2, there is a connection here to the literature on practical reason and reasons for action. In particular, Quinn (1993) argues that a subjective conception of reasons grounded in desire cannot possibly succeed, because desires cannot possibly, just by themselves, rationalize action. He seems to argue that the only viable alternative is an objective view. I conjecture that what I am claiming here, and in this section in particular, could be applied to Quinn’s argument *mutatis mutandis* to show that there is a plausible subjectivist conception of reasons between pure subjectivism and objectivism.

³⁰ Thanks to an anonymous referee for making this objection in these terms.

lished without being publishable. Similarly with “justifiable.” *A* attempts to harm *B*. *B* takes a defensive action that harms *A*. Was *B*’s action (morally) justifiable? We do not ask, “Justifiable to whom? Just to this person or group of persons, or to everyone?” We have this normative concept of moral justifiability even though we cannot say, descriptively, exactly how many of which people have to regard the action as justified or be convinced by *B*’s justification in order for it to be justifiable.

So the objective-value theorist claims that desirable things are *rightly* desired. There is (she claims) a standard for desirability independent of being desired. I am claiming that comprehensible things are *rightly* comprehended. There is (I am claiming) a standard for comprehensibility independent of being comprehended. So just as the objectivist can consistently say that there are desirable things that this or that person or group does not desire, I can consistently say that there are comprehensible things that this or that person or group does not comprehend. Neither of us owes a descriptive account of who will desire the desirable or comprehend the comprehensible.

One may be tempted to reply that desirability characterizations are going to be comprehensible independently of being comprehended only if the objects of desire are such as to warrant desire (i.e., are objectively desirable), so we will have the collapse of my view into objectivism after all. In response, I advert again to the above examples of microwaving cats and pushing schoolchildren in front of buses. Those desires are fully candidates for comprehensibility, but no objective view will allow their objects as worthy of desire. So there is no collapse.

The objector may counter that if the defense given here of quirky desires is the best defense that can be given of the desire-satisfaction view, then I have done a great service to the desire theory’s opponents by showing that the desire theory reduces to absurdity. For as I just admitted, my view would include among things valuable to a desirer such things as microwaving cats, molesting children and spending all of one’s time counting blades of grass even if it prevents one from earning a living to purchase necessities. To say that doing such things is good is beyond the pale.

In response, I remind the reader of a caveat I issued at the beginning – namely, that a theory of well-being aims to give an account of what is intrinsically good for one, full stop. This objection gets its purchase by conflating intrinsic goodness for an agent with goodness on other scales of value, such as moral value, instrumental value or aesthetic value. Satisfaction of the sadistic desire to molest children or microwave cats is certainly not morally good, nor is satisfaction of malicious desires, such as the terrorist’s desire to kill people in a concert hall. Counting blades of grass as a pastime is less morally good than working for Habitat for Humanity. Yet moral goodness is not at issue here. Only under discussion is intrinsic goodness for the agent.

This is neither an uncommon point nor a fine one, but I will again take some support from Rawls here. He points out that his definition of good is morally neutral, so one can have “a good spy, or a good assassin, without

approving [morally] of his skills. ... Whether a spy or assassin is a good person is a separate question altogether” (1971: 403). Similarly, I say, one can correctly judge something *good for* the assassin – a good disguise or good gun (instrumental goods) or successful assassination (an intrinsic good) – without approving morally of the assassin’s motives or deeds and without taking a stand on the moral goodness of his person. Goodness for and moral goodness are conceptually distinct evaluative categories.³¹

Similarly, if counting blades of grass interferes with taking necessary means to other of one’s ends – for instance by preventing one from going to work to earn money to purchase necessities – then the desire to do that scores very low on the scale of instrumental value. Assembling a giant ball of string may score much lower on a scale of aesthetic value than making beautiful pottery. But none of this matters to the question of whether satisfying these desires would contribute to an agent’s well-being.³² As long as he could provide the appropriate desirability characterization if called upon, its satisfaction contributes to his well-being, its lack of worth on many other scales notwithstanding.

5.6 Cleavage Between My View and the Hedonic View

I just considered the objection that my view reduces to the objective-value view. The objection claimed that my view appealed to things that were objectively valuable, so objective value, not desire, was doing the work. Even if I have succeeded in answering that objection as well as the charge of the *reductio* following my answer, a similar objection claims that my view reduces to hedonism. For one might claim that all of the desirability characterizations I have given appeal to pleasure or things that give pleasure, such as beauty, being soothed, challenge, refreshment, sexual gratification and so on. So it might be claimed that pleasure and things that give pleasure account for well-being on my account, not desire.

It is true that there is a significant overlap between the objects, experiences and states of affairs that contribute to well-being on my account and those that contribute to well-being on a hedonist account. It is also true that most of the desirability characterizations I have given advert to pleasure or things that cause pleasure in broad stretches of the human population. The explanation for this is straightforward. Pleasure is widely desired. It is perhaps the most widely desired thing. This is not an embarrassment to me, because I can nevertheless claim that it is desire doing the work on my account rather than pleasure. To see this, we need only consider that there are cases in which the satisfaction of some desire does not cause pleasure, but nevertheless contributes to well-being. If I can supply such cases, I will not have

³¹ Compare Tiberius (2000: 67-68) who allows that grass counting and immoral projects could be rationally valued on her account.

³² Heathwood (2005: 499-500) similarly responds to quirky (what he calls “pointless”) desires by distinguishing types of value other than intrinsic value.

provided a full account in favor of the desire theory and against hedonism, but I will have answered the objection that my view reduces to hedonism by showing that my view and hedonism reach different verdicts in some cases.

Suppose that today I desire to be famous tomorrow. Come tomorrow, I am famous but no longer desire fame. I have argued elsewhere (2013) that the satisfaction of this desire contributes to my well-being. This is true even though no pleasure is caused in me at any time by the satisfaction of this desire. If the present satisfaction of past desires contributes to well-being, then clearly what is doing the work is not pleasure but desire, so the desire theory does not reduce to hedonism. I think it is right, but clearly I cannot rehearse the whole argument for the antecedent in the previous sentence here.³³

As an independent case, consider that we often desire things that can be given desirability characterizations and that seem to increase our well-being, but which do not give us pleasure, or give us pleasure for a short time then stop. Take as an example the desire my spouse and I had as a young couple not to have to wash dishes by hand. This is an intrinsic desire, since we regard washing dishes by hand as toilsome and unpleasant in itself. When we bought a dishwasher and no longer had to wash dishes by hand, we experienced a significant hedonic bump. As time went by, we began to take the dishwasher for granted, and the initial glee we experienced from not having to wash dishes subsided. So we returned back to our prior hedonic level. Yet if you asked us whether we still have the desire not to wash dishes by hand, we would answer emphatically in the affirmative. So that desire continues to be satisfied even though we no longer take the same pleasure as we did initially in not having to wash the dishes. Moreover, and most importantly, *we are better off* not having to wash dishes by hand even though we no longer experience pleasure while the desire remains satisfied. Since the desire satisfaction is present but the pleasure is not, it seems plausible to infer that it is the former that accounts for our being better off.

To sum up: The objection was that my view reduces to hedonism since, it was claimed, desirability characterizations advert to pleasure or things that cause pleasure. I admitted that it is undeniable that most of our desires are for pleasure or pleasurable things. Yet desire and well-being, on the one hand, and pleasure, on the other hand, apparently diverge in the cases I discussed. The examples make it plausible that what is affecting well-being is the satisfaction of desire, not the presence of pleasure. Again, this is not a full

³³ I am not alone in endorsing this unconventional view. Dorsey (2013) and Baber (2010) endorse this view or a similar view about the well-being associated with the present satisfaction of past desires. This gives me hope that the view is true, and provides evidence for the claim that well-being is not constituted by pleasure.

Other examples of satisfied desires that do not give pleasure are the stranger-on-the-train desire and the disappointed desires mentioned in a note in section 2. I believe these desires are also sometimes welfare-relevant. This is also controversial among desire theorists and I do not have fully worked-out arguments for these claims, so I do not explore these other non-pleasurable desire satisfactions in the text.

defense of a desire theory over hedonism but, I hope, makes it plausible that my view does not merely reduce to hedonism.

5.7 Closing the Gap Between Comprehensibility and Welfare-Relevance

Consider a final challenge. When one is able to provide a desirability characterization of the object of his desire, he makes it comprehensible to others what he sees in it. The object of his desire is cast in the positive light in which he sees it. The desirability characterization makes it clear to others why he wants it. Yet there is a gap between it making sense why someone wants something and the conclusion that it is intrinsically good for the subject to get it. Why does it matter for something's being intrinsically good *for S* that *others* can comprehend *S*'s desire? We need a principled explanation of the connection between a person's good and the ability to articulate reasons that other people can understand.³⁴

I have a two-part response to this challenge. First, I conceive of normative theory development as a process of working toward reflective equilibrium. We begin with a candidate theory of well-being, the unrestricted desire theory. The implications of this plausible theory conflict with our pre-theoretic intuitions about seemingly worthless activities such as counting blades of grass. In order to reduce the distance between the implications of our theory of well-being and our intuitions about well-being, I have done two things. First, I have altered the theory with the proviso that the desires relevant to a given individual's well-being must be susceptible to being made comprehensible to others by that individual. This is so that we do not get the wildly counterintuitive implication that *any* object of desire is welfare-relevant. At the same time, I have urged us to adjust our intuitions about the grass counter and similar characters in cases in which the desirer can provide reasons through the provision of a desirability characterization. This is a principled adjustment of our intuitions driven by the plausibility of the theory. So the first part of my response is that formulating the desire theory with the minimal accountability condition helps us move toward reflective equilibrium as we mutually adjust both theory and intuitions.

Just this much, however, might make the connection between comprehensibility and welfare-relevance seem ad hoc. So, second, it is important to note what I stressed in section 3 when introducing the minimal accountability condition. This is that the provision of a desirability characterization is not a mere explanation of one's attraction, but it is a justification. This point connects with the point in section 5.5 about comprehensibility being a normative notion. One does not succeed in giving a desirability characterization – one does not make one's desire comprehensible in the intended sense – when one merely explains the desire's genesis or gets some number of some group

³⁴ Thanks again to an anonymous referee for pressing this objection in terms similar to these.

of people to comprehend it. We could understand why a subject wanted to do something if she explained that the drug she just injected always gives her that desire, but that would not count as making the desire comprehensible. It would not support the claim that the object of her desire was good for her. As I stressed in section 3, one successfully provides a desirability characterization when one *justifies* one's desire to others. One does that when one makes the desire comprehensible to others. Again, the standard of comprehensibility is not a standard of being actually comprehended. It is a standard of providing good reasons, providing a justification, standing behind one's desire, and being held to provide an account to oneself and others in defense of the desire. This is what one does when providing a desirability characterization. It is not a mere explanation, but a defense, a standing behind, a being held to account, an offering of justificatory reasons. Once we see the provision of a desirability characterization as a response to a request for a justification rather than a mere explanation, the gap between providing the desirability characterization and the object being good for the agent closes.

6. Conclusion

My project has been limited to responding to the problem of quirky desires while preserving the best and most central parts of the desire theory. I have tried to present the solution to the problem in such a way as to address the concerns of two audiences. First, there are the external critics who raise the problem of quirky desires as a knockdown objection against a desire theory of well-being. I hope to have answered such critics by arguing for the relevance of quirky desires to welfare when the desirers meet the minimal accountability condition. I have met the external critics partway by agreeing that a quirky desire calls the resonance presumption into question. I have offered the desirer a way to restore the presumption by meeting the minimal accountability condition. When the desirer meets that condition, the satisfaction of the desire contributes to her well-being, despite its idiosyncratic nature and initial appearance of worthlessness.

The second audience has been desire theorists themselves. Some want to stick to their guns and claim that there are no restrictions on welfare-relevant desires, while others are willing to impose considerable restrictions. I have argued that we can preserve the chief appealing aspect of any desire theory, the necessity of resonance, without embracing the absurd consequences that a completely unrestricted theory would have to embrace. We can do this by rejecting the sufficiency of resonance in favor of the resonance presumption. As well, I have argued that too much restriction on welfare-relevant desires sets an inappropriate standard with no evident benefit. I hope my solution employing the minimal accountability condition will, therefore, contribute

positively to the internal debate among desire theorists who wish to answer the external critics who raise the problem of quirky desires.³⁵

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