

Well-Being, Time, and Dementia*

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Philosophers concerned with what would be good for a person sometimes consider a person's past desires. Indeed, some theorists have argued by appeal to past desires that it is in the best interests of certain dementia patients to die. I reject this conclusion. I consider three different ways one might appeal to a person's past desires in arguing for conclusions about the good of such patients, finding flaws with each. Of the views I reject, the most interesting one is the view that prudential value is, at least partly, concerned with the shape of a life as a whole.

Philosophers concerned with what would be good for a person sometimes consider elements of that person's past, in particular, her past desires. There are various reasons for this, but the most influential and interesting reason is the thought that prudential value is, at least partly, concerned with the shape of a life as a whole. I argue, however, that these ways of thinking about prudential value are misguided. While we have a number of loosely related ways of talking about the value of a life, not all of them track genuine prudential value. By 'prudential value', I mean the type of value a theory of well-being is about. It is the type of value that is normative for practical reason concerned with self-interest, as well as for practical reason concerned with beneficence toward others. It is what we speak of when we speak of what is good for an individual. We typically assume that what is 'good for A' is reason-giving for A, insofar

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as A is concerned with his own interest. We also assume it is reason-giving for those who care about A and wish to benefit him or keep him from harm.¹

My doubts that past desires are really relevant to well-being emerge from reflection on the following type of case:

Rupina wrote an advance directive stipulating that if she should ever develop Alzheimer's,² she should not receive treatment for any potentially fatal condition. Rupina was well informed about Alzheimer's dementia. She understood that it progresses slowly, so that honoring her request might substantially shorten her life. She also understood that the experience of dementia is variable and that some dementia patients seem quite happy and content. By making her request, she was not simply trying to avoid either the final vegetative stages of the illness or the objectless confusion and distress that some patients experience throughout. She just did not like the thought that the final stage of her life should be a demented phase. Unfortunately, Rupina developed Alzheimer's. Luckily for her, she has turned out to be happy and content most of the time, as opposed to anxious, distraught, or sad. She is now in the middle phase of Alzheimer's, which means that she still has certain cognitive capacities, as well as many things she cares about.³ Overall, she appears to be enjoying her life. And she has expressed to her caregivers a fear of dying. Suppose she were to develop a case of pneumonia. It is often fatal if not treated but responds well to antibiotics. What would be best for Rupina?

1. Throughout this article I will talk about goodness for a person. Occasionally, for ease of exposition, I may refer to 'a person's good' or just 'the good', but unless otherwise indicated the topic is always prudential value. I also use 'well-being', 'welfare', and in a few cases 'best interests' to refer to prudential value.

2. Alzheimer's is an extremely common form of progressive dementia, and it is precisely because it can progress so slowly and last for so long that cases like Rupina's are possible. However, it is important to note that Alzheimer's is merely one form of dementia and not all forms behave this way.

3. Which capacities does she retain? It is enough to note that my Rupina is in a similar stage and so has similar capacities as the individuals discussed by Ronald Dworkin, *Life's Dominion* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 218–41; Agnieszka Jaworska, "Respecting the Margins of Agency: Alzheimer's Patients and the Capacity to Value," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 28 (1999): 105–38; and Jeff McMahan, *The Ethics of Killing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 496–503. She has lost a lot of memory and no longer has a sense of herself as someone with "a whole life, a past joined to a future, that could be the object of any evaluation or concern as a whole" (Dworkin, *Life's Dominion*, 230). She does, however, still care deeply about certain things in a more than merely experiential way; i.e., she retains the capacity to value, even if she no longer generates new values (Jaworska, "Respecting the Margins," 112–16).

Ronald Dworkin and Jeff McMahan both argue that it would be best for Rupina to let her die.⁴ Moreover, their arguments assume that Rupina's past desires are still relevant for determining her good now. It strikes me, however, that what is best for Rupina is to receive antibiotics.

In this article, I argue for several related conclusions. I first argue that it is not good for Rupina to die (and by extension, not good for other dementia patients in her situation).⁵ It is in Rupina's best interest to keep living. Along the way to this more specific conclusion, I also argue that a common way of thinking about lives—what I call the “life-object approach”—does not in fact track prudential value. That some action would improve a person's life considered as a whole (in a sense to be specified more fully below) is never, simply by itself, a reason to take that action out of beneficence. I also consider several other routes to the conclusion that it is best for Rupina to die—what I call the “autonomous agent response” and the “self-conflict response”—and explain why they fail. But the life-object approach to prudential value will receive the bulk of attention, since it is a widely held view that has not, to my knowledge, received the sustained critical attention it deserves.

It is important not to confuse the question of what is ‘good for Rupina’ with the question of what should be done all things considered in her case. It may be that considerations of respect dictate adhering to her advance directive against the urgings of beneficence. The traditional way of framing these cases views them as cases in which two values—respect for autonomy and beneficence—pull in opposite directions. By contrast, Dworkin and McMahan frame them as free of that particular conflict.⁶ If I am successful here, my argument will simply reestablish the traditional view about the nature of Rupina's case. I take no stand in this article on whether respect for autonomy should trump beneficence. I

4. Dworkin, *Life's Dominion*, 232; McMahan, *The Ethics of Killing*, 502. Significantly, Dworkin says (219) that he will discuss only end-stage cases of Alzheimer's. However, the actual examples he uses resemble Rupina's case and so seem more like midstage cases.

5. The qualification is extremely important. Although philosophers have been fascinated by cases in which the demented person appears to be enjoying her life, and while such cases do occur, this is not the common experience of Alzheimer's patients. Many patients experience frequent fear, anxiety, etc. I do not claim that it is always in the best interests of Alzheimer's patients to live on but only that it is in the best interests of someone like Rupina, who appears to be getting so much from her life. For an excellent layperson's introduction to the typical course of Alzheimer's disease, see Muriel R. Gillick, *Tangled Minds: Understanding Alzheimer's Disease and Other Dementias* (New York: Plume, 1999).

6. By which I mean that neither author sees a conflict here between the moral demands of respect for autonomy and the moral demands of beneficence. Each describes other types of conflicts that must be resolved as part of determining what is in the person's overall best interests. I describe these conflicts below.

am simply interested in what beneficence, considered by itself, recommends.⁷

It is really not possible to emphasize this last point enough. I say nothing here about the moral force of advance directives. Instead, this is an article entirely about well-being. Moreover, given that many people think that multiple values are in play in decisions for individuals like Rupina, my conclusions here, taken alone, support no particular course of action. I don't think this is a problem. Sometimes reflection in one area of philosophy offers inspiration for a different area. In this case, it seems to me that reflection on a kind of case discussed at length by bioethicists can teach us something important about the nature of well-being and time.

I. DWORKIN'S ORIGINAL ARGUMENT

I begin by considering the steps that lead Dworkin to think it is best for someone like Rupina to die. Importantly, Dworkin doesn't presuppose any particular theory of well-being. Rather, he builds his argument on assumptions about well-being that he thinks many—perhaps even most—theorists of well-being accept. He first distinguishes between what he calls 'critical interests' and 'experiential interests'. Critical interests are subjective in the sense that they reflect "critical judgments" of the person about "what makes a life good."⁸ Desires sometimes arise from such judgments. For example, a young man might desire to be a teacher on the basis of his judgment that teaching is a noble profession and that it temperamentally fits him. I refer to these as 'critical desires'. A person also has experiential interests insofar as she desires pleasant experiences or would appreciate those experiences were they to occur. Rupina's di-

7. There is another approach to such cases that I ignore here. Some theorists argue that the demented Rupina is not numerically identical with the Rupina who wrote the directive. Since it is obvious that we do not typically consider the wishes of one individual in order to determine (a) what would be best for another individual or (b) the all-things-considered best way to treat another individual, such a view would discount the directive both as a guide to best interests (which seems right to me) and as a guide to what to do (the question I remain agnostic about). See, e.g., Rebecca Dresser, "Life, Death, and Incompetent Patients: Conceptual Infirmities and Hidden Values in the Law," *Arizona Law Review* 28 (1986): 379–81. For a rejection of the idea that lack of identity undermines the role of advance directives as guides for what to do, see Allen Buchanan and Dan Brock, *Deciding for Others: The Ethics of Surrogate Decision Making* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 152–89. I set these issues aside since I believe (and my argument assumes) that identity holds. Many current approaches to identity support this conclusion. See, e.g., McMahan, *The Ethics of Killing*; Eric T. Olson, *The Human Animal: Personal Identity without Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); and David DeGrazia, *Human Identity and Bioethics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). McMahan and DeGrazia explicitly relate their views about identity to dementia cases.

8. Dworkin, *Life's Dominion*, 201–2.

rective expresses a desire that Dworkin assumes is grounded in her critical value judgments. As such it represents a critical interest. He also assumes that Alzheimer's patients at her stage of deterioration have only experiential interests.⁹ And finally he assumes that a person's critical interests matter more than her experiential interests from the standpoint of overall well-being. A number of these assumptions have been challenged, but I ignore those challenges for the time being since my aim here is to lay bare the basic structure of his argument about best interests.

Although Dworkin is not explicit on this next point, I assume that the judgments he wishes to privilege—the judgments of a competent person like Rupina at the time she writes her advance directive—are reasonably informed or, at any rate, that they lack the most serious kinds of judgmental flaws. A little reflection is all it takes to see that desires and the judgments they flow from can be flawed in numerous ways: they might be based on ignorance or be the result of an irrational thought process or be the product of an extreme but transitory emotional reaction. Hence, some sort of corrective is necessary to make any theory that incorporates such subjective states even minimally plausible. Probably Dworkin assumes that the word 'critical' in 'critical interests' covers this point sufficiently, but I wish to be even more explicit. In real life, of course, there no doubt exist advance directives that express judgments flawed in these obvious ways, and then the link between the desires expressed and the future welfare of the subject would be easy to challenge. But our question is about the link between a person's critical judgments and her welfare in the case in which the obvious sorts of judgmental flaws are not present.

9. Jaworska, "Respecting the Margins," forcefully and, I think, successfully challenges this claim. However, Jaworska does not undermine Dworkin's overall conclusion about best interests in the way I wish to. She does not challenge Dworkin's assumption that past critical desires—desires that are not currently held by the subject—might count in the determination of best interests. Her adjustment thus leaves in place the idea that Rupina's case is one in which desires conflict, with the best option to be determined by deciding which desire is more important from the standpoint of prudential value. Instead of a conflict between a critical desire and an experiential desire, her modification yields a conflict between two critical desires. This is, admittedly, a more complex type of conflict. But as long as we conceptualize it as a conflict, it is possible for someone to argue that the earlier desire trumps. Whether this would be Jaworska's own view about someone like Rupina is unclear. Toward the end of her article she seems to suggest that current critical interests of a demented person should take precedence over earlier ones.

However, even if Jaworska were to decide in favor of current critical desires for someone like Rupina, her ultimate conclusion remains quite different from my own. For she remains committed to the idea that, at some point in the progress of dementia, it makes sense to determine best interests by considering past desires and values. Her disagreement with Dworkin is about when in the progress of dementia this occurs. But one of my targets in this article is precisely the view that past desires and values are ever relevant to determination of best interests.

Dworkin also rejects what has come to be known as the “experience requirement.”¹⁰ Theorists who reject such a requirement maintain that when a desire has been satisfied, there is no need for the individual to feel satisfied—indeed, no need for her even to know that her desire has been satisfied—in order for this event to count as good for her. This sets the stage for Dworkin’s claim that it can still be good for Rupina if her old critical desire to avoid dementia is satisfied, even though she is now incapable of appreciating the fact that an old critical desire of hers is being honored.

It is important to be clear that Rupina’s case is quite unlike the cases philosophers typically discuss in connection with the rejection of the experience requirement—cases in which the subject remains entirely ignorant of the event that constitutes the satisfaction of her desire. Rupina is cognitively impaired, but she is not lacking all awareness of her world. If she is seriously ill and her caretakers refuse to treat her, she will be aware of this. How well she will understand the details of the situation or any rationales given to her is unclear but also beside the point. She will understand that she is in danger of dying. Moreover, in this case, we know that the demented Rupina is afraid of dying and enjoys her life. Thus, her reaction to anticipated death will almost certainly be negative. However, if, as many theorists who reject the experience requirement claim, it is not a person’s reaction to the satisfaction of a desire (or the anticipated satisfaction of it) that matters but simply the fact of its having been satisfied, then we may be justified in viewing the demented Rupina’s reactions as being overridden. This, at any rate, is how Dworkin thinks we should view the case. Although Dworkin allows that Rupina’s current attitudes and dispositions as a demented person have some weight—including her distress at the thought of death—he thinks these reactions need not undermine the claim that what is really best for her is to satisfy her old critical desire.

These are the materials for Dworkin’s argument. He sees the case as a conflict between two types of interests, or as a conflict between two desires: Rupina’s old critical desire to avoid dementia and her new desire to live. His question is about which desire (if either) is the best guide to Rupina’s good. Since he thinks critical interests matter more, and the old desire is critical, Dworkin concludes that we do the best for Rupina by satisfying that older desire, and this is so even though it will not satisfy the current Rupina. The particular claim I wish to focus on is one that

10. See Dworkin’s discussion of the possibility of harming even those who are permanently unconscious (*Life’s Dominion*, 196–97) and his parallel point about dementia (231). The term “experience requirement” originates with James Griffin, *Well-Being: Its Meaning, Measurement, and Moral Importance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 13.

has not generally been challenged, and this is the claim that Rupina's past desires still count in the determination of her welfare, even though she no longer holds them.

II. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF PAST DESIRES

What might be said in favor of the idea that past critical desires count? Why is this idea appealing? Over the course of this article, I consider three possible responses (two in this section). First is what I call the "autonomous agent" response. The second is the "self-conflict" response, and the third (exemplified by Dworkin and possibly McMahan) is the "life-object response."

Let us begin with the "autonomous agent" response. It goes something like this: Rupina's previous critical desires matter because, unlike any of her current desires, these desires were formed by a competent adult—an autonomous agent. Surely, it may be thought, the satisfaction of such desires is good for her in virtue of this fact alone.

It is important to be careful here. There is a real argument for welfare in the vicinity but also a real confusion lurking nearby. We should not suppose that the moral authority to act for oneself that we typically grant to individuals really settles the question of what is good for them. The authority demanded by respect for autonomy tells us to honor individuals' choices about their own lives. While we may have excellent moral reasons for granting such authority, it is still an open question whether, in fact, the satisfaction of autonomous desires is good for the individual.¹¹ We cannot equate the two until we have some positive reason for doing so.

So why think that the satisfaction of autonomously formed critical desires is good for us? One might be drawn to the view (similar to some forms of desire theory) that an individual's good is intimately connected with his or her values and concerns and that while mere desire can go prudentially astray, more reflectively held attitudes (which autonomously formed attitudes presumably are) are much less likely to do so. However, the idea that the satisfaction of autonomously formed critical desires is

11. Theorists differ in their opinions about what kinds of reasons support the granting of this moral authority. Some theorists, most famously John Stuart Mill, support this idea by appeal to the thought that individuals are the ones best placed to make judgments about their own good. However, even this type of defense is one that tries to defend a general policy on the basis of what is usually true, arguing that things will go better overall if we simply leave such decisions to individuals. Only rarely (because it is so implausible) is it claimed that the judgments of individuals about their own good are constitutive of that good. For a nice laying out of different types of defenses of an antipaternalistic principle, see Joel Feinberg, *Harm to Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 60–61.

always good for us is extremely implausible for reasons that resemble the reasons for rejecting desire theories that rely on anything less than fully rational, fully informed desires.¹² It is quite possible for a person to act so as to realize her autonomously held values, only to discover later that, by her own lights, she is no better and maybe even worse off for having succeeded. Autonomy can be understood in various ways, but even when it is construed as a robust form of self-reflection it still falls short of full information and full rationality, and so it seems that there is room for even autonomously formed desires to have as their objects states of affairs that, intuitively, are not good for the person. Reflection does not always lead to the right answer, even though it improves the odds.

A more plausible view is that autonomously formed desires have a kind of presumptive epistemic authority in virtue of the fact that they are often intimately related to a person's good. However, while more plausible, such a view leaves room for the two to come apart. Moreover, in any case in which intuitions are divided—when we have some reasons for identifying a person's good with her critical desires and some for not doing so—we will need more in the way of an argument before we can simply treat the previous desires as authoritative. Rupina's case is like this. Many people—indeed, even many people who strongly believe that respect for autonomy demands that we honor her previous wishes—nonetheless think that beneficence considered alone in this case would dictate allowing her to live. It strikes many as extremely bizarre to say that it is best for a person to die when that same individual is enjoying her life and claims not to want to die. Such intuitions are not decisive alone, but then, in such a case, neither is the fact that in the past she formed an autonomous desire to avoid dementia. Before deciding it is good for her to die, we need a further argument.

I say more later (in Sec. VII) about why I think no such argument can be made in Rupina's case. Now I wish to consider what I call the "self-conflict" response. Like the "autonomous agent" response, it is a way of trying to explain why we should sometimes consider (for the purposes of welfare determination) the past desires of an individual.

Temporally extended individuals like us have *temporal parts*. The distinctive claim of the self-conflict view is that these parts have independent welfare interests which can sometimes conflict with one another. In such cases, would-be benefactors must take sides—selecting a temporal part to benefit. The question then becomes which set of interests has greater moral weight. On this approach, even if it is not good for the current demented Rupina to die, it is still good for a different part of Rupina,

12. This problem for desire theories is discussed again in more depth in Sec. V.

namely, the Rupina who used to exist. She is better off if her desire not to have a life with a demented ending is satisfied.

This way of thinking about cases like Rupina's is, I believe, riddled with problems. First, it requires us to accept that temporal parts of individuals can have welfare interests that make a moral claim on us. Second, the view tries to use ordinary intuitions about adjudicating conflicts between individuals to tell us how to adjudicate conflicts among parts of selves. But as I will argue, this doesn't work for several reasons. Finally, there is a deep tension within the view between the significance it assigns to the interests of parts and its ultimate aim of giving us a way of making overall welfare decisions for individuals. In other words, even if we can resolve the conflict in favor of one temporal part, it is not clear why the interests of that part are the interests of Rupina, the woman we originally wanted to benefit.

Consider first the claim that temporal parts of persons can have independent interests on a par with the kinds of interests we typically ascribe to persons. If that were so, we would certainly expect to see evidence of this in more than just dementia cases, for surely there would be many instances when the interests of past selves would have some claim. Moreover, ordinary accounts of why such interests don't matter seem to have no hold here. Suppose we say (as many people do) that when I autonomously change my mind about some aspect of my good then, other things being equal, that thing is no longer good for me.¹³ Suppose that at time T_1 I want X, but later I autonomously change my mind so that at T_2 I don't want X. The self-conflict theorist can use this fact to explain why X is no longer good for me at T_2 , but on this view that doesn't entail that it is no longer good for me at all. It is still good for my old self, the self at T_1 . Thus, on the self-conflict view, many old desires would still have a fair degree of moral claim on us.

Someone might try to explain the apparent absence of such cases by pointing out that there is a kind of implicit limitation built into many desires, as when I want to get X tomorrow but only because I assume I will still want X tomorrow. If most desires were like that, then most of the desires of our past selves would not make claims on us now. But while this may be a partial explanation, it cannot be a full one. Not all desire has such limitations built in. We should still expect to see a number of nondementia cases in which the desires of past selves make real moral claims.

13. I argued earlier that we could not simply equate the satisfaction of autonomous desires with personal good, but this is consistent with thinking (as many theorists do) that autonomous rejection of something is usually sufficient to rule it out as a candidate good.

Consider, for example, Fariya who originally wants to be a poet.¹⁴ She devotes a number of years to writing poetry and perfecting her craft. During this time, her greatest desire is that her poetry be published. But after a number of years, she decides that she wants instead to pursue a career as a literary critic. We need not concern ourselves with the reasons for the change. Let us just stipulate that her desires during both phases are entirely genuine, and neither is implicitly limited in the way described above.

Now suppose that I take her old poems and arrange for them to be published through a good publishing house. At this point in her life, Fariya couldn't care less about those old poems. Moreover, let us suppose there is a widespread belief among literary critics that good critics cannot be artists themselves. Thus, individuals who are published authors are not taken seriously as critics. Fariya is extremely ambitious for her new career and now counts it lucky that she never published her old poems. Against this backdrop it seems intuitively correct to say that I harm Fariya if I arrange for her old poems to be published, even though a previous self deeply wanted this. The self-conflict theorist can, of course, try to explain this. He might, for example, claim that while the desires of the old self have some weight, in this particular case (unlike Rupina's) the desires of the current self have still greater weight. But what is the basis for that decision, and why is this case different from Rupina's?

One should also be struck by how odd the conflict theorist's description of the case is. In arriving at the conclusion that I should not publish those old poems, I did not consider the interests of the past self and decide they were weak. I didn't consider them at all, for they simply weren't relevant. So the self-conflict view gives the wrong account of how we approach such cases. It makes ordinary cases in which interests change over time far more complex than they really are.

The self-conflict theorist also has problems explaining how we are to properly adjudicate conflicts between parts of selves. He wants to import intuitions we have about how to adjudicate conflicts between ordinary individuals, but these intuitions won't produce the results the conflict theorist wants for a number of reasons. To begin with, the conflict is not strictly analogous to a conflict between living individuals, since we are dealing with temporal parts, and the old Rupina no longer exists. So the parallel, if there is one to be drawn, would have to consider how we adjudicate conflicts between the interests of a dead person and the interests of a living one. But then, to get the result the conflict the-

14. This is an elaboration—for my own philosophical purposes—of an example of Derek Parfit's. Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 157.

orist wants, he would have to assign much more weight to the interests of a past entity than we typically do.

Many philosophers believe that past persons have welfare interests that make moral claims on us. This is, of course, hotly contested, but for the moment let's assume it is true.¹⁵ Even so, the interests of the dead when weighed against those of the living are not particularly weighty. Some may protest that we allow people to write wills and to make requests that will be carried out only after they have died. Moreover, we take the obligations stemming from these documents quite seriously. However, what I find striking about such practices is actually just how narrow a scope they give to the interests of the dead. Wills, for example, take a few key rights that individuals have while alive and modify and extend those rights beyond death: the right to dispose of one's property as one sees fit, the right to decide what happens to one's body (now the right to decide what happens to one's dead body), and the right to make decisions for dependents (now the right to decide, within limits, who will assume care for dependents who are left behind). Sometimes other kinds of requests or desires of the dead are taken seriously by family members and acted on. But even if we suppose that such actions further the interests of those dead individuals, it should be clear that those desires don't make a general demand on all moral agents in the way that genuine interests of a living person would.

My point becomes clearer if we compare two cases in which rights, special obligations, and personal feelings of attachment are absent, since these all provide reasons for the asymmetrical treatment of individuals, and our question right now is about how the interests of the dead generally weigh in comparison with the interests of the living. Suppose you have been given a generous sum of money by the charitable foundation you work for and tasked with using that money to benefit a single individual. You are told you must choose between A and B. Although A and B will no doubt use the money in different ways, let us stipulate that A and B are currently on a similar welfare level and that the money represents an equal welfare benefit to each. Neither has any preexisting claim on this money, and you have never met either. In such a case, it seems that there are no strong moral reasons for preferring either candidate.

15. Some defenders of the idea that the dead can be harmed include Thomas Nagel, "Death," *Noûs* 4 (1970): 73–80; Joel Feinberg, *Harm to Others* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 79–95; George Pitcher, "The Misfortunes of the Dead," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 21 (1984): 183–88; Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 151; Barbara Baum Levenbook, "Harming Someone after His Death," *Ethics* 94 (1984): 407–19; Steven Luper, "Posthumous Harm," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 41 (2004): 63–72. A few examples of those who oppose the idea are L. W. Sumner, *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 127; Ernest Partridge, "Posthumous Interests and Posthumous Respect," *Ethics* 91 (1981): 243–64.

But suppose we now change just one detail of the case: we add that A, unlike B, is dead. Now if A is chosen, someone will have to act on A's behalf, using the money to satisfy posthumous desires, but let us suppose this is not a problem. The posthumous benefit A would receive is still equivalent in degree to the benefit B would receive. Surely it would be preposterous to think that the two claims are still morally on a par. It seems obvious that B's claim is not just a little greater but hugely so. This doesn't mean that the dead have no interests. It only means that if they do, these are generally much weaker than the interests of the living. But if that is so, it is hard to see how a proponent of the self-conflict view could—by emphasizing an analogy with the interests of the dead—argue that the interests of a past person part are weightier than the interests of a current, living part.

Some may wonder whether the fact that the current temporal part is demented might not tip the balance, explaining why in a case like Rupina's the interests of the past have more weight. But this will not work if one is trying to use our ordinary intuitions about conflicts between individuals. For we do not typically think that the life of a demented person counts less simply because she is demented, and we would not ordinarily allow her to be harmed so as to benefit someone else. So if the self-conflict view is to be made to work, we must be given a set of norms for adjudicating conflicts between parts—a set of norms quite different from those we typically use in adjudicating between individuals—and a set of arguments to support the use of those norms over the more ordinary ones.

Finally, even if these other problems can be overcome, it is worth noting that the self-conflict theory has a hard time holding on to the very notion it was introduced to help explain, the notion of what is good for an individual. The self-conflict theory was supposed to give us a way of thinking about what is best overall for someone like Rupina, albeit a way that explained the relevance of her past desires to this question. It tells us that we are supposed to weigh the different interests of different temporal parts to arrive at some single conclusion about what would be best for the individual overall. But once we take seriously the idea that temporal parts have distinct interests we lose our sense of what it would mean for something to be good for her overall. There seems to be no prudentially authoritative perspective that is plausibly viewed as Rupina's perspective, from which such conflicts can be resolved. There is only a series of different Rupinas with different interests and different perspectives. What we need if we are to take seriously the idea that past desires matter is something the self-conflict view seems unable to give us—namely, some way of establishing the prudential relevance of past desires to Rupina as she is now. This is something the life-object view

tries to do, which is why I consider it the more promising approach. It is to it that I now turn.

III. THE VALUE OF A LIFE CONSIDERED AS A WHOLE

Dworkin's own discussion of cases like Rupina's suggests a very different reason for paying attention to past critical desires, what I call the "life-object" approach. Dworkin maintains that when we think about prudential value we must think about a life as a whole. When we do this in the way he intends, past desires have a significant role to play.

Significantly, a life can be viewed as a whole in two different senses. In one unproblematic sense, a life is a collection of events that occur over time. The "whole" life is simply the sum of these events. And if we limit ourselves to this perspective when thinking about the value of the life, we will naturally think of the value of the whole as the sum of the values of the parts. However, we can also look at a life in a way that pays close attention to properties of the whole such as shape, trajectory, narrative structure, or thematic unity.¹⁶ If we allow that such properties add value to a life, then we may be tempted to say that the value of the life as a whole is not simply the sum of the value of the parts—since this further kind of value is not 'contained in' or 'associated with' any single part but is rather a property of the whole.

When philosophers adopt this kind of perspective on a life, analogies with aesthetic value are often employed, although importantly they are intended merely as analogies. For example, many philosophers have found it helpful to talk about the *narrative* dimensions of a life. Dworkin appears to focus more on *thematic unity*—on the idea that the parts of a life should harmonize with one another as opposed to the idea that a life should have a certain kind of plot. But whether one thinks in terms of narrative or theme, the approach assumes that early parts of a life can affect what counts as a good choice later on in the life. That is why, on this view, past desires matter.

Of course, a person might talk about the unity of a life in a loose sense without assuming that such talk is literally talk about what would be best for the person whose life it is, that is, without assuming such talk tracks prudential value. But Dworkin explicitly links this project of making one's life as a whole good—making one's life into a good life object—with the notion of best interests. For example, when discussing the judgments of surrogate decision makers in cases in which a patient has entirely

16. The contrast between these two approaches to thinking about the value of a life as a whole is elegantly laid out in David Velleman's paper "Well-Being and Time," *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 72 (1991): 48–77.

lost consciousness, he suggests that such judgments are usually based “on [the surrogate’s] sense of what would be most consistent with [the patient’s] personality as a whole.”¹⁷ He notes that this is often represented as an attempt to figure out what the person would have decided for himself were he able. But it can also, Dworkin insists, be viewed instead as an attempt to understand the *best interests* of such a patient. On this construal, the surrogate’s decision is an appeal “to the idea that it is better for someone to live a life that is structured by a theme, even through its end. [Such decisions] argue, for example, that because a patient has been a fighter even against hopeless odds all her life, it is *better for her* that she fight death to the absolute end, even when unconscious.”¹⁸

The mention of thematic unity is important, for it signals that when Dworkin thinks of a life as a whole, he is indeed adopting the life-object view. Later when discussing the best interests of the permanently unconscious, he writes, “When we ask what would be *best for him* [the unconscious patient], we are not judging only his future and ignoring his past. We worry about the effect of his life’s last stage on the character of his life as a whole, as we might worry about the effect of a play’s last scene or a poem’s last stanza on the entire creative work.”¹⁹

While Dworkin would acknowledge that we all, at times, desire and benefit from certain temporally local goods, he appears to think that these are almost never as important for us as is fashioning our lives into good lives, viewed holistically. As self-creators, Dworkin thinks that we strive to give our lives meaning and structure, and this can, in certain cases, lead us to try and impose a particular shape or form on our lives. Rupina’s attempt (while competent) to ensure that her final phase of life is not a demented phase can be viewed as such a move—as an attempt to ensure that her life as a whole will not be marred by the presence, at the end, of an element so thematically at odds with the rest. It is because Dworkin thinks that the most significant interests we have from a welfare standpoint are interests bound up with the good of the whole that he thinks we must attend to Rupina’s past desire. Satisfying it now will not alter the past, nor will it satisfy the current Rupina. But it will ensure that her life ultimately has the thematic unity that the earlier Rupina wanted it to have. In discussing the best interests of dementia patients, Dworkin writes, “whenever we consider how the fate of a demented person can affect the character of his life, we consider the patient’s whole life, not just its sad final stages, and we consider his future in terms of how it affects the character of the whole.”²⁰ If we adopt the

17. Dworkin, *Life’s Dominion*, 191.

18. *Ibid.*, 192; my italics.

19. *Ibid.*, 199.

20. *Ibid.*, 230.

life-object view according to which it is prudentially important that one's life be a good life object, then we can make sense of why past desires matter. They tell us about the type of project that has been undertaken and set the parameters for its success. And if, like Dworkin, we are willing to give great prudential weight to holistic concerns, then such considerations might be able to trump current interests of a demented self.

In more recent work, Jeff McMahan defends the same conclusion about such patients as did Dworkin. Moreover, it is quite clear that McMahan believes there is value in making a life into a good narrative whole. Yet the exact structure of his final argument is less clear. Since I want to be careful not to attribute to McMahan a view that may not be his, I will first lay out what is uncontroversial and then discuss what I call the "McMahan Inspired Argument." Whether or not it is the argument he actually gives, it is the argument I think he should have offered given the materials at hand.

McMahan's views about welfare at a time are not only clear but highly original and require a little background to explain them properly. We first need familiarity with the notion of 'prudential concern', which is the special type of concern an individual has for himself.²¹ McMahan follows Derek Parfit, at least to the extent of denying that personal identity alone grounds prudential concern. On such a view, it becomes reasonable to wonder whether an equal degree of prudential concern must rationally be directed at all temporal parts of a single life. And McMahan thinks not. In his view, the degree of concern it is rational to have can vary quite dramatically.²²

According to McMahan, personal identity is sufficient (although not necessary) for a minimal degree of prudential concern.²³ Prudential concern depends on what he calls "the prudential unity relations." In addition to identity, these include the physical, functional, and organizational relations that hold between an individual's brain at one time and her brain at another.²⁴ When none of these relations other than identity hold between two temporal phases of a single individual, the basis for prudential concern is minute. The degree of concern it is ratio-

21. McMahan calls this "egoistic concern." He cites Marya Schechtman's explanation of the concept, according to which "we all know the difference between fearing for our own pain and fearing for the pain of someone else. The difference here consists not of degree—I may care more about the pain of my beloved than about my own—but in *kind*." Marya Schechtman, *The Constitution of Selves* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996). Cited in McMahan, *The Ethics of Killing*, 41.

22. McMahan, *The Ethics of Killing*, 79.

23. It is not necessary because in imaginary cases of branching (where a self divides) neither continuation is identical to the earlier self, but it may be rational to have prudential concern for each of the two future halves.

24. McMahan, *The Ethics of Killing*, 79.

nal for one temporal phase to have for another varies with the strength of the prudential unity relations, which in turn track the degree of *psychological unity* that exists between temporal phases of an individual.

So consider Rupina. On McMahan's view, dementia represents a case in which a single individual is divided into temporal phases between which the prudential unity relations have been greatly weakened. Because the demented Rupina is still the same individual as her earlier self, the most minimal basis for prudential concern (personal identity) is present. Moreover, since she is only in the middle stages of dementia and has some cognitive capacities intact and retains some values from before, other prudential unity relations are present. But the link is much weaker than normal since dementia directly attacks all of the unity relations other than identity, dramatically altering over time the physical, functional, and organizational aspects of the brain.

McMahan's claims about variable prudential concern lead him to introduce complexities into the ordinary notion of best interests. Ordinarily we think that the determination of best interests requires considering not only the present but the future as well, and the traditional view about prudence is that we ought to be equally concerned with all parts of our future. McMahan allows that this kind of thinking still makes sense in certain cases when, for example, there is great psychological unity over the course of the life.²⁵ But in cases like Rupina's, where the relations between two temporal phases are quite weak, each phase has *time-relative interests* that may differ from one another. Where severe psychological disunity is present, it no longer makes sense, according to McMahan, to assume that the good of all parts of a life should be counted equally. Instead, how the parts of a life are weighed varies depending on the temporal position in the life from which they are viewed.

So, for example, Rupina's time-relative interests as a competent adult would have been determined by adopting the temporally broad perspective on her life, while discounting the interests of those parts of herself for which her prudential concern as a competent adult is weak. Since the prudential unity relations between competent Rupina and demented Rupina are weak, competent Rupina has very little reason to be concerned with what happens to her future demented self.²⁶ Contrary to the traditional view of prudence, it is not irrational for her to heavily discount that part of her future.

But when we inquire about the time-relative interests of the demented Rupina, we get a different picture. Demented Rupina's interests discount those parts of herself to which she, the demented self, is weakly related. Since she is only weakly related to her past, and will be only

25. *Ibid.*, 81.

26. *Ibid.*, 502.

weakly related to her future, she has only a weak basis for prudential concern about anything other than her present and near future. Given this weighting scheme, her current desire to live will trump the interests of any more temporally distant parts of herself. Hence, we arrive at the conclusion that it is in the time-relative interests of the later Rupina to receive antibiotics.²⁷

Because of his time-relative interests framework, McMahan is able to be clearer than Dworkin about the notion of what is good at a time, and so he can say, quite plausibly, that dying is not good now for the demented Rupina. Indeed, if all he relied on was his time-relative interests framework, he would arrive at the opposite conclusion from Dworkin. However, McMahan doesn't want to stop there. He thinks there is another competing dimension of value, and like Dworkin he talks quite a bit about the value of a life as a whole and the way in which death for Rupina would be a better *completion*.

McMahan is clear that he identifies questions about the good of a whole life with questions about best interests. In other words, such talk is indeed intended to be talk about prudential value, albeit a different, competing aspect of such value. Moreover, McMahan says explicitly in an earlier part of his book that considerations about what would make a life as a whole better (in the life-object sense) sometimes trump reasons pertaining to other dimensions of well-being in the determination of best interests. And significantly for our purposes, he mentions dementia as a case in which he thinks this occurs.²⁸

Still, some ambiguities remain in his final discussion. Some of what he says in the chapter on dementia suggests that he is drawn to a version of what I earlier called the self-conflict view. On that account, valuable properties of the life as a whole matter simply because they are valued by the past self and so serve to define the best interests of that self. Interestingly, however, McMahan's time-relative interests framework serves, if anything, to underscore one of the problems with that approach described earlier. For it is difficult for a self-conflict theorist to retain talk about the interests of Rupina, a single individual existing over time. Having once adopted a framework that sees the parts as having conflicting interests, it becomes hard to see how any one set of interests could be legitimately described as hers.²⁹

However, some of what McMahan says in the final chapter is suggestive of a different line of argument. Since I don't wish to attribute to

27. *Ibid.*, 500–501.

28. *Ibid.*, 175.

29. Another way of making the same point is to note that there is a conceptual tension between, on the one hand, the idea that Rupina is a single temporally extended individual and, on the other hand, the idea that Rupina has distinct sets of interests that can make claims on us in the present. In n. 7, above, I noted that some people have wanted to explain

him a view which may not be his, I cautiously call this the “McMahan Inspired Argument.”³⁰ It goes like this. In addition to having interests at a time, an individual has some interests associated with properties of her life as a whole. For example, in certain cases it may be good for an individual to have a life with a certain kind of overall coherence. This kind of value is not contained in or realized at any particular moment of the life (or even some small set of moments). Because of this it is not captured by the time-relative interests framework. This explains why it makes no sense to say that what is good for Rupina now is to die. Yet in holistic life terms it is good for her. The demented Rupina is still a part of this larger whole. And the whole is made better if she dies now. Moreover, although we cannot say that this type of goodness is realized for her at a certain time, we certainly can make sense of the idea that it is good at certain times to act in ways that promote holistic value. So although dying is not good for Rupina right now, dying is a good choice for her to make right now (or in this case a good choice for her caretakers to make for her). Such a choice is overall best because it secures this larger, more inclusive value for her.

On this account, the desires of the past matter because they are guides to how the life has been set up, and they tell us about what kind of life it is and what kinds of endings can therefore still count as good endings. Rupina’s life from birth up to the onset of dementia represents most of her life. Even if she lives out the normal life span of someone

cases like Rupina’s in terms of personal identity, arguing that once dementia has progressed far enough, a numerically distinct individual comes into being. However, McMahan, quite reasonably I think, rejects that claim. Yet our traditional notion of interests holds that a single individual has a single set of interests. These can change over time as individuals change, but we do not normally think there can be more than one set of interests associated with a single individual. If McMahan really were to take seriously something like the self-conflict view, this would tend to push us back toward the claim he earlier rejected, namely, that there are two numerically distinct individuals here.

30. Because of certain ambiguities in the final chapter of *The Ethics of Killing*, I am being careful to leave open the possibility that the view I discuss is not the one McMahan would actually endorse. It is the view I initially ascribed to him on the basis of trying to square elements of his final chapter with what he says earlier in the book. However, because I have encountered people who read McMahan my way as well as people who read him as holding something more like the self-conflict view, I think it is important to simply acknowledge a degree of uncertainty about the exact structure of the argument. Even with the ambiguities, however, it is important to discuss McMahan in the context of this debate. His time-relative interests framework has been influential and can be used to arrive at a number of interesting and (to my mind) agreeable conclusions in various contexts other than dementia. As a result, other philosophers have adopted the framework. Yet, interestingly, taken by itself without supplementation, the time-relative interests framework yields the conclusion about Rupina that I favor. So it is philosophically important to consider as I do in this article whether either of the strategies ascribed to McMahan can be combined with the time-relative interests account to yield the kind of answer McMahan wants for a case like Rupina’s.

with her kind of dementia, the demented phase of her life will still be small in comparison to the whole. So this means that the properties of the earlier part of her life have largely determined what can now count as a good ending—one that would make of the whole a good whole. One virtue of this approach is that it does not require us to say that we are letting Rupina die now because this is what would be good for some past entity. Instead, it is straightforwardly good for Rupina, the woman before us. And if we place enough value on holistic properties, then such considerations may be able to trump consideration of what is good for Rupina right now.

IV. ARGUING AGAINST THE LIFE-OBJECT VIEW

The life-object view easily explains a focus on past desires, and it can be used to defend the type of conclusion Dworkin and McMahan embrace. Nonetheless, I think it is mistaken.

In the earlier discussion of the self-conflict view, I pointed out that if the self-conflict view were correct, we should expect to see more cases in ordinary life in which the interests of different temporal parts make divergent moral claims on us. There is no reason to assume such cases are limited to dementia. In a similar vein, one might try to argue that if the life-object view is correct, we should expect to see more cases in which an individual, despite no longer embracing the views of her former self about what makes a life as a whole good, is nonetheless benefited by that which serves to realize her former self's vision. However, this strategy is far less telling against the life-object view than against the self-conflict view for the following reason.

Most of those who adopt the life-object view also hold that a person's good—or at least certain aspects of her good—only changes when she changes her mind. So consider Fariya. Suppose that shortly after her change in ambitions, she develops an incurable and fast progressing brain tumor. It is now clear that the part of her life devoted to criticism will not be long, and she will not accomplish much in it. But she did accomplish quite a bit as a poet, and so one might think that the life-object view would say that publishing her old poems now would be good for her. Publishing the old poems would simultaneously satisfy the desire of her former self and make it true that she is part of a better whole, at least according to her former self's vision of a good whole. If, indeed, a life-object theorist were forced to say that, this would be a mark against it since most people have the intuition that it does Fariya no good to publish her poems now. But life-object theorists aren't forced to say this. They can accommodate this intuition by saying that because Fariya autonomously rejected her former self's vision of a good whole, that vision no longer counts. However, the same does not follow

for Rupina since she never autonomously renounced her desire for a life without dementia. She just gradually forgot her old desire as the dementia progressed. And so, for such a theorist, the old desire remains in force. I thus need a very different type of argument against the life-object view, and it is to that I now turn.

V. INTUITIVELY, GOOD CANNOT BE ALIEN

Here is a brief preview of what is to come. I begin by assuming that if something is good for a person it must be good for her at some time(s) or other. I later revisit this assumption, but for now I simply take it for granted. Against this backdrop, I introduce and explain a principle I call the nonalienness principle (NA) and argue for its intrinsic plausibility. I then show that many (although not all) contemporary theories of welfare either incorporate NA explicitly or are consistent with it and that in the latter case the proponents of such views can be plausibly seen as motivated by a recognition of NA's importance. I conclude that we should accept NA. But if we do, then a number of interesting claims follow that support my take on Rupina's case.

Before launching into details, I want to be clear about the nature of my appeal to multiple theories of well-being. My approach is inspired by Dworkin, who clearly wishes to appeal to principles many theorists accept. He wants to avoid having to defend his view within the narrow confines of a single theory of welfare. My response is offered in a similar spirit. I too wish, for the purposes of this article, to remain neutral about the best theory of welfare. My aim is to demonstrate that Dworkin's conclusions (and those of anyone else who follows a similar path) are in tension with widely held commitments. That being said, however, it is also worth emphasizing that my argument is not intended simply as an argument from authority. It could be that many contemporary theories of welfare are wrong. With respect to their acceptance of NA, I don't believe this is so. I hope that along the way, readers will not only recognize NA as a feature of many familiar theories but come to see it as plausible in its own right.

What then is this principle? NA, as I use the term, refers to the idea that a person's good must enter her experience, if it does, in a positive way.³¹ It is not limited to mental-state theories, that is, theories that (like hedonism) make mental states the primary bearers of welfare value. NA

31. The idea that a person's good should not be alien to her can be found in various places in the philosophical literature, but it's not clear where it originates. However, it is typically used to mean something somewhat different from what I mean here. My own interest in the term traces to a paper by Peter Railton. While discussing the idea that one of the marks of value is that it must "engage" us, he says: "It would be an intolerably alienated conception of someone's good to imagine that it might fail in any such way to engage

is much broader than that. For even non-mental-state theories typically allow that a significant mark of value (although not a sufficient mark) is that we (in some sense) appreciate it when we knowingly encounter it. A deep inability to appreciate X (in any sense) on the part of A is good grounds for doubting that X is really good for A. More formally, NA says it is a necessary condition of X's being intrinsically good for A at T_1 that either (1) A respond positively to X at T_1 if she is aware of X at T_1 or (2) A be such that she would respond positively to X at T_1 if she were aware of X at T_1 .

A number of important clarifications are necessary here. First, I assume for the purposes of this article that if a subject responds favorably to an object, this very same fact can be restated without loss by saying that the object *registers positively* with the subject. Second, I intend the idea of positive response/positive registration to be as broad as possible, to include both positive feelings and positive thoughts. For a hedonist, positive response may require that someone feel pleasure in the presence of X, but for a theorist of a very different type, positive response might require a positive evaluative judgment. I do, however, intend positive response to be *mental*. Minimally, for something to register positively with A, it must enter A's conscious awareness in a way that is positively valenced. Of course, if one were trying to decide on the correct theory of well-being it would matter greatly how one chose to define positive response. But for the time being, since my aim is to highlight a common theme among otherwise disparate theories, the vagueness is both deliberate and useful.

A second key point is that some theorists embrace NA (e.g., hedonists) as both a necessary and sufficient condition of value. But many people will find that implausible (including myself), and so it is important to note that the common thread is simply a commitment to it as a necessary condition. That is the only sense in which I endorse it and the only sense in which it is true of all the theories I canvass.

The intuitive plausibility of NA can easily be missed if certain common misunderstandings are not set aside. To begin with, we must keep in mind that NA is a claim about intrinsic good. Now it is often true that good things enter our lives before we are ready to appreciate them. If properly understood, this claim need not undermine NA. We simply need to recognize an important distinction between what counts as a good choice for a person and what is good for that person. A related and similarly important distinction is the one between instrumental and intrinsic goodness. A good choice can be good either in virtue of a

him." However, I wish to stress that the way I develop the idea of alienness bears no resemblance to the way Railton develops it. See Peter Railton, "Facts and Values," *Philosophical Topics* 14 (1986): 5–31, 9.

direct relationship with intrinsic prudential value or in virtue of an indirect relationship with intrinsic value that is based on a direct relationship with instrumental value. This is important to understand since we are often indifferent to good choices and to instrumental goods even when we 'have' them and are aware of them.

Consider a few examples. Suppose that, like George the Hippo in James Marshall's classic *George and Martha* children's stories, I think dancing is dumb.³² However, let us also suppose that it is true of me that I would love dancing if I tried it and that were I to develop a taste for it, dancing would bring me many benefits for many years. Were I to take a dance class I would soon, like George, be having my own dance recital. Given these facts, it seems plausible to say that right now taking up dancing would be a good choice for me, despite my distaste. But my bad attitude as I take my first few resentful steps does not speak against NA, for while dancing is a good choice for me now, it is not good for me right now. It will only be good for me once I start to respond positively to it in the appropriate way (whatever way that is). NA claims that if no such positive response develops, then dancing (since I am certainly aware of dancing) cannot be good for me.

Or consider the case of a child eating her broccoli, who does not like it at all. It does not help to tell the child that it is bringing her health, hoping that she will at least appreciate the health aspects of broccoli even if she fails to appreciate the taste. Such connections are too abstract. She hates broccoli, and that is that. Is it good for her to eat the broccoli? On my view it is not intrinsically good for her. But it may still be good for her instrumentally, and we should not assume that instrumental goods are unimportant. They are extremely so. The broccoli is one complex element contributing to her health, and her health is what underlies her ability to play soccer, turn cartwheels, and play on the beach. Other things being equal, these activities are intrinsically good for her, and she appreciates them. What seems right is that if I were unable to find any link, direct or indirect, between the broccoli and something she responds to positively, I would begin to doubt that broccoli was really valuable for her at all.

It is also significant that NA does not build in an experience requirement. Because of this it is possible to handle some cases by appealing to facts about how A would respond if she knew about X. Consider Marvin, who is at the height of a thrilling professional tennis career and who, unbeknownst to him, has a large malignant tumor developing on his pancreas. As yet he has no symptoms. Many people would surely want to say that something bad has already happened to Marvin.

32. James Marshall, *George and Martha: The Complete Stories of Two Best Friends* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1997).

My way of formulating NA gives a theorist of well-being a couple of different options in such a case. She could say that since Marvin would be devastated now if he knew about the tumor now, it is already bad for him now. Alternatively, a theorist could say that the tumor is bad because of what it will eventually cause: symptoms will eventually appear, and when they do Marvin will be crushed by the realization of his impending death. On the first view, an intrinsic bad is already present, whereas on the second view, the intrinsic bad is not yet present, but an instrumental bad is already in place. Theorists will differ about which strategy they prefer, but the main point is that either strategy is available given the way NA has been formulated.

In order to ensure that an experience requirement is not built in, I formulate NA with a hypothetical: A must either respond favorably to X when aware of it, or it must be true that she would respond favorably if she were aware of it. But it is also important to note that this is a very limited hypothetical. I do not appeal, as desire theorists often do, to A's reactions under idealized conditions. My aim is actually the opposite, since I want to capture the idea that our good ultimately has to be capable of engaging us just as we are with all our limitations. Hence, I allow room only for the difference between being aware of something and not being aware. But that is all.

The kind of cases that tend to make people suspicious of NA—cases in which A fails to respond positively to something we intuitively feel is good for her—are most likely cases in which the thing in question is currently a good choice for her, but, lacking familiarity with it, she does not yet respond to it positively. These are cases in which it seems plausible both that X ranks highly among the possible goods open to A at a given time and that A is capable of responding well to X under certain circumstances and is likely to encounter those circumstances. These are reasons for thinking X is a good choice. But if for some reason those conditions never materialize and A never has that response, then while it may be true (in some sense defined by one's preferred theory of well-being) that it would have been better for A if she had encountered X under those conditions, it is still true that in A's life as it is actually unfolding, X has brought no intrinsic value to A's life.

Of course, sometimes individuals are temporarily unable to appreciate things that are intuitively good. If someone is temporarily unable to appreciate things she is nonetheless aware of, then the hypothetical part of NA (the part that says she would appreciate if she knew) will not help. Suppose, for example, that Princess Lovely is drunk and so fails to appreciate Prince Charming's declaration of love (which under ordinary circumstances she would welcome). We can certainly imagine a case in which the problem is not lack of awareness (she knows what he said) but rather the fact (resulting from her drunkenness) that she can-

not stop laughing at his upside-down reflection in her glass. Has something good happened to her nonetheless? Despite what some people would want to say, I think we should resist saying that something good has already happened to her. Rather, we should say that something good is in the making. If she doesn't spoil it, it will likely be realized (most true loves will repeat such declarations under better circumstances). But it is not good for her right then.

If, on the other hand, we imagine someone whose cognitive impairments are permanent—as, for example, in the case of someone born with severe cognitive impairments—then the story changes dramatically. Such a person may (sadly) not ever be capable of responding positively to declarations of love from those close to her, for she may not understand them. Unless she can experience love in other ways (comforting hugs, loving glances), the good of love may never enter her life. But that seems like the right thing to say in such a case. Indeed, viewed merely as a necessary condition, I find NA extremely plausible. It is flexible enough to allow different theorists of well-being to combine it with quite different sufficiency conditions to yield very different accounts of personal good.³³

Significantly for my purposes, many theories of welfare incorporate NA. The simplest example is, of course, hedonism. Much of the plausibility of hedonism comes from the fact that pleasure is not just any old feeling but one which we like. In other words, on one natural way of understanding pleasure, positive response is actually built into it. This means that the hedonist can ensure that value registers positively with us

33. Some readers may notice a degree of resemblance between my NA principle and certain formulations of value internalism. NA is, indeed, a form of what Stephen Darwall calls "existence internalism" (EI), which claims that a necessary condition of something's having a certain normative status (being morally right, being a normative reason, etc.) is that it be able to motivate or engage people in some way (Stephen Darwall, *Impartial Reason* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983], 54). In the case of prudential value, it amounts to the idea that something can only be good for a person if she is able to care about it (where 'care' is being used in a broad sense comparable to my wide notion of positive registration; Connie Rosati, "Internalism and the Good for a Person," *Ethics* 106 [1996]: 297–326, 301). In and of itself, however, EI says nothing about whether the person must be capable of caring for the good at the time when it is good, and this is why I say that NA is merely a form of EI.

For my purposes here, there is no need to engage the extensive literature on value internalism, for those debates don't bear on this project. It is clearly true in a sense that NA is a form of EI, but I did not formulate it in an attempt to capture the particular intuition that most value internalists take themselves to be trying to capture. Moreover, it is true that NA differs significantly from some of the more common ways of understanding the special constraints that EI places on prudential value. The important point for my purposes, however, is that it is perfectly possible that more than one formulation of EI captures a necessary truth about prudential value. Hence, acceptance or rejection of NA need not settle one's position about the proper formulation of EI for prudential value.

because the very thing of value (pleasure) is one to which we are never entirely indifferent. Moreover, it should be clear that hedonism satisfies the temporal constraints that are part of NA. For we like pleasure when we are aware of feeling it, and it is only good for us (according to the hedonist) when we are feeling it. It thus neatly follows that whenever something is good for a person she responds positively to it at that very time.

Things may seem more complicated when we turn from hedonism to a theory like the desire-fulfillment theory. In what sense (if any) is desire theory committed to NA? Desire theories are typically divided into actual desire theories and informed desire theories.³⁴ Actual desire theories, which claim that what is good for a person is the satisfaction of her actual desires, face all sorts of problems because our desires can reflect lack of information, irrationality, or temporary emotional upheavals. For that reason, most philosophers these days embrace some type of informed desire theory, and I simply assume that the only plausible version of desire theory is some version of an informed desire view.³⁵ These days, more often than not, philosophers mention the actual desire view only to discuss its flaws, preparatory to defending the version of informed desire theory they actually prefer.

Although it is not immediately obvious that informed desire theorists are committed to NA, a little reflection on the reasons that lead theorists to move from actual desire views to informed desire views makes this more plausible. Informed desire theorists think very carefully about how to describe the hypothetical conditions under which the subject's desires define her good. Moreover, it is plausible to suppose that this task—of trying to arrive at the right, properly authoritative description of these hypothetical conditions—is motivated, at least in part, by the thought that hypothetical desire must predict the subject's capacity for actual positive response.

The best argument for this interpretation comes from looking at the kinds of counterexamples to the actual desire theory that have been viewed as problematic. For example, L. W. Sumner describes a person who chooses an academic career only to discover years into it that it is not for him. Despite having investigated the details of such a career at the outset, he finds in the living of it that it just does not fit him.³⁶ Russ Shafer-Landau points to a passage in John McEnroe's biography where

34. A few of the many examples include Griffin, *Well-Being*, 10–11; Sumner, *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics*, 113–23; Shelly Kagan, *Normative Ethics* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1998), 38–39; Russ Shafer-Landau, *Fundamentals of Ethics*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 42–58.

35. Of course there are always exceptions. See, e.g., Mark C. Murphy, "The Simple Desire-Fulfillment Theory," *Noûs* 33 (1999): 247–72.

36. Sumner, *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics*, 129.

McEnroe describes feeling empty and unfulfilled despite achieving the highest levels of tennis excellence—what he has always wanted.³⁷ And Peter Railton describes Beth, the happy accountant who wants most of all to become a writer and yet who, once she pursues this path, learns that she is not cut out for life as a writer.³⁸ In each case, the person is unmoved or unappreciative or unfulfilled when she gets what she wants, and this is taken as evidence that what she wanted was not actually good for her.

It is important to be clear about the problem these examples present. It is not that when the subject gets what she wants she is unhappy, although some of the cases take that form. After all, desire theorists pride themselves on leaving room for cases in which people desire, and their lives are made better by, things other than happiness. The problem is deeper. It is that even in cases in which happiness is not the criterion of success, the individual presumably has some sense of what makes a life valuable, some criteria that she will use to judge life as it unfolds. And it seems that whatever these criteria may be, it is possible for ordinary people—even well-informed people—to think that something will meet those criteria when, in fact, it won't. When the thing arrives, they find no value in it. And this fact—that they find no value in the satisfaction of their desires—is taken by theorists on both sides of the debate as evidence that the desire theory (at least in its simple form) fails. In short, the problem seems to be that the very things picked out by the theory as good (the things wanted) do not satisfy NA. The problem is an alienness problem.

Because they recognized the many ways that ordinary desires can reflect ignorance, philosophers moved from the actual desire theory to the informed desire theory. Then, the further recognition that even very well-informed people can be mistaken about the objects of their desires led philosophers to move beyond the requirement that desire be informed to the requirement that it be fully informed, and fully rational.³⁹ Some philosophers are skeptical about whether even this version of the

37. Shafer-Landau, *Fundamentals of Ethics*, 52.

38. Railton, "Facts and Values," 12–13.

39. An example of an intermediate theory is the one put forward by Richard Brandt in *A Theory of the Good and the Right*, rev. ed. (1979; repr., New York: Prometheus, 1998). Brandt defends what he calls a reforming definition of 'good' in terms of rational desire. Rational desires, in turn, are those that a person would have (a) after being informed to a certain degree and (b) after undergoing "cognitive psychotherapy." It is Brandt's refusal to require full information that I wish to emphasize here. He requires that an individual confront the relevant available information, which includes "all the propositions accepted by the science of the agent's day plus factual propositions justified by publicly accessible evidence (including testimony of others about themselves) and the principles of logic" (10–13). Yet despite the extensive nature of this information requirement, it has still proven possible to produce counterexamples to Brandt's theory—examples in which some piece of infor-

theory can avoid such counterexamples entirely, but the important point for our purposes is that there is some room for dispute on that point. It is not my purpose to settle that dispute here. What matters is that, in general, those who continue to defend the full information desire theory are not rejecting NA. They have not simply decided to bite the bullet and ignore such counterexamples. They remain advocates of the approach because, unlike some of their critics who believe otherwise, they continue to think that the full information version of desire theory solves the alienness problem.

It is important not to be confused by one of the common ways desire theories are articulated. My claim is that desire theorists are typically sensitive to the need to preserve NA. In other words, most advocates of desire theories would agree that it is problematic if the hypothetical desires of the fully informed self designate something as intrinsically good for a person at a time, even though that person does not respond positively to that thing at that time.

However, one common way of formulating a desire theory is in terms of advice about what to do at a given time.⁴⁰ On this account, the hypothetical idealized self is cast in the role of advisor. What she wants her nonidealized self to do defines what counts as a good choice for that self in the situation. But precisely because the idealized self is concerned with choice, her advice will sometimes be indicative of intrinsic value and sometimes indicative of instrumental value. This doesn't undermine the claim that desire theorists are sensitive to the need to preserve NA, since NA only requires positive response to intrinsic value. We still need to be fairly confident that the idealized advisor is being guided by NA insofar as she identifies certain goods as intrinsic goods.

Moreover, it remains true that confidence in the theory would be undermined if we thought that the advisor was recommending something without any link—direct or indirect—to the actual self's capacities for positive response. If, for example, the advisor recommends dancing, then even if we can predict that the actual self will not immediately take to dancing, we may not see this as a problem. But if we are fairly certain that the actual self will never take to it, we will view this as a problem. Trust in such theories depends in part on our sense of whether they can avoid alienness problems.

Not only do hedonists and desire theorists seem to accept NA but so do some hybrid objective theorists. The views I have in mind are not 'pure' objective theories as that category has traditionally been under-

mation not included in his account turns out to be crucially important for good prudential judgment. These problems with Brandt's view helped to inspire the move to full information accounts.

40. Peter Railton, e.g., frames his theory in terms of an ideal *advisor*. See "Facts and Values," and "Moral Realism," *Philosophical Review* 95 (1986): 163–207.

stood. However, the difference lies precisely in the fact that these hybrid theories take seriously, and try to solve, what many have seen as the most problematic aspect of objective views. Pure objective theories—what Derek Parfit called “objective list theories”—stipulate that there are certain objective welfare goods which are good for people regardless of how they respond to them or feel about them.⁴¹ It is this idea—that something might be good for a person and yet leave him cold—that has been seen by many as the biggest problem for an objective approach. As Shelly Kagan explains, “friends of an objective account of well-being seem forced to accept the unappealing claim that I could be extremely well off, provided that I have the right objective goods in my life, even though these things hold no appeal for me, and I am, in fact, utterly miserable.”⁴² This problem is an alienness problem.

After laying out the pros and cons of the major traditional approaches to theorizing about well-being, Parfit famously suggested that some form of hybrid view—some combination of hedonism, on the one hand, and an objective theory, on the other—might turn out to be best. Such a hybrid would delimit the class of prudential goods, while still insisting that a person must respond positively to her good.⁴³ And in recent years a number of theorists have explored this idea, including Robert Adams, who defends the idea that well-being is loving the excellent,⁴⁴ Stephen Darwall, who defends the idea that well-being requires the appreciation of valuable activities,⁴⁵ and Shelly Kagan who has explored the question of how best to develop what he sees as a highly promising view, the idea of well-being as enjoying the good.⁴⁶ Although they all emphasize different kinds of response (loving, appreciating, enjoying), they are all concerned that good not be alien in my sense. Although I have not seen an explicit defense of NA in these authors, the language strongly suggests a commitment to it. For these authors focus on cases in which a person “has” or “possesses” a certain good or is engaged in a valuable activity. The having or possessing of the good or the engagement in the activity is clearly intended to correspond to the time when the good or activity is good for the individual. And it is just as clear that the enjoyment or loving or appreciating is supposed

41. Derek Parfit, “What Makes Someone’s Life Go Best,” in *Reasons and Persons*, app. 1, 493–502, 499.

42. Shelly Kagan, “Well-Being as Enjoying the Good,” in “Philosophical Perspectives,” suppl., *Noûs* 23 (2009): 253–72.

43. Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, 501–2.

44. Robert Merrihew Adams, *Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 83–101.

45. Stephen Darwall, *Welfare and Rational Care* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002), 73–104, 95.

46. Kagan, “Well-Being as Enjoying the Good.”

to be a response to, and so to occur at the same time as, the having or possessing or engaging. In short, the problem faced by pure objective theories is an alienness problem, and the solution embraced by the new wave of objectivists is to build in a necessary connection between prudential goodness at a time and positive responses. They build in NA.

VI. TIMELESS GOODS?

So far the argument has relied on the assumption that welfare goods must be good for a person at some time or times. But should we hold onto this idea? If there were timeless goods, NA would not apply to them. Postulating timeless goods and arguing that the completion of a certain life pattern is timelessly good for a person even when she changes over time would allow someone to escape my conclusions. However, apart from offering that escape route, I see no other good reason to postulate the existence of timeless goods and some reason to resist the idea.

To begin with, the notion of a timeless good is really incredibly odd when we start to think about it. A timeless good is not simply the idea of a prudential good that is not restricted to a single time. That idea is unproblematic. A good that extends over time may be good for a person at many points in her life, but it is still true that the good-for relation holds at identifiable times. It holds at many such times. Instead, a timeless good requires that the good-for relation, although it obtains, not obtain at any specific time. If X is timelessly good for me, then it is good for me but not good for me at T_1 or T_2 or T_n for any T in my life. Yet the kinds of things that typically count as welfare goods—whether objects, relationships, or events—are things that exist in time, typically within the scope of our lives. The timeless good theorist would thus have to say that even though some good thing, X, exists during my life and is related to me in various ways at specific times in my life, and even though I benefit from X, this benefit does not accrue to me at any particular time in my life. This strikes me as the kind of claim we should try to resist if at all possible.

Someone might point out that philosophers do sometimes talk about timeless goods and bads, the main example being philosophical debates about the timing of the badness of death.⁴⁷ Most people share the intuition that death is (typically) a bad thing for the person who dies. But if all goods and harms must be realized in time, then a puzzle arises about when death is bad for the person who dies. For any moment one selects during the person's life, it can seem odd to say that death is bad

47. For a detailed overview of this controversy, see Steven Luper, "Death," in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta (Stanford, CA: Stanford University, 2009), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2009/entries/death>.

then. After all, death is not present at that time. The individual is alive. On the other hand, for any moment in time that one selects after the person dies, it can seem odd to say that death is bad for her then, since now it seems generally odd to be ascribing goodness or badness to her at all. After all, she's dead. This puzzle is handled differently by different philosophers. Most defend a particular time at which death is bad. But a few have been drawn to the idea that we should give up the claim that the badness of death is dateable.⁴⁸ Instead, we should say that death is timelessly bad.

My own view is that even with respect to the timing of the badness of death we should not embrace timelessness. However, that is a debate far beyond the scope of this article. A more manageable argument that seems plausible is this. Given how odd the idea of a timeless good really is, we should only postulate timeless goods or bads as a last resort. We should only do so if equally puzzling results confront us when we don't postulate it. But this is not the case with welfare goods.

Death is a special case. Necessarily death falls outside the scope of life. Prudential goods or bads, however, are good or bad for a person during her lifetime. There are, of course, alternatives to this view, and philosophers concerned with puzzles about death may wish to use these to escape the puzzle.⁴⁹ But the main point for our purposes is that the puzzle about death arises because (as Epicurus roughly put it) wherever death is, the person is not and vice versa.⁵⁰ No such problem arises in the case of welfare goods. There is nothing about the nature of such goods that prohibits them from being realized within a life. And so there is no special reason that drives us toward the conclusion that welfare goods

48. The term 'dateable' is Kagan's. See Shelly Kagan's discussion of this problem in *Death* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 205–33, esp. 213–15.

49. I am referring here to the fact that some philosophers think we can be benefited or harmed after our death. (See references in n. 15 above.) For those philosophers it may be easier to say when death is bad while avoiding the claim that death is timelessly bad. For them it will not seem so odd to say that death is bad for a person after he dies. However, as a defender of NA, I do not want to say that because I want to insist that a necessary condition of something's being good (or bad) for a person at a time is that he or she respond positively (or negatively) to that thing at the time or be disposed to respond this way if aware of the thing at that time. But dead people cannot respond, nor do they continue to possess dispositions in any straightforward sense. There are other things that a defender of NA can say in response to the puzzle about the timing of death (without postulating timeless bads), but describing these is far beyond the scope of this article. All that matters here is that there is nothing about the nature of welfare goods that forces a puzzle on us in the way death forces a puzzle on us.

50. The precise quote is: "So long as we exist, death is not with us; but when death comes, then we do not exist." Epicurus, *Letter to Menoeceus*, quoted in *The Oxford Book of Death*, ed. D. J. Enright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 8. Quoted by Kagan in *Death*, 213.

are timelessly good. Things like being in a loving relationship, having a rewarding career, enjoying a particular piece of music, succeeding at baking a cake, becoming aware of the warm smell of a young child's skin, or coming to possess some treasure one has longed for all occur at specific times within a person's life. There is no mystery about how to date the occurrence of these things. So why suppose there must be a mystery about how to date the good-for relation? And if there is no mystery, why postulate a timeless good?

One might think that whereas the kinds of prudential goods just mentioned are easily dateable, certain other kinds of goods—such as the good associated with having a life with a particular narrative structure or the good associated with having a life that exhibits thematic unity—are different. However, I see no reason to think this is so. I can only say so much about this here, but I want to consider very briefly two kinds of cases.⁵¹

First, there are cases in which, given what an individual wants, we can think of narrative or thematic goods as being realized to various degrees. Consider a person who wishes her life to consistently exhibit over time a kind of selfless devotion to family. From her point of view the ideal case would be one in which her life exhibited this concern from the moment she first articulates the ideal to herself until the moment of her death. But although that is her ideal, we can express her desire as the desire that her life exhibit as much of this pattern as possible. And this means that there are other possible ways for the rest of her life to go which, although not meeting her ideal, would still count as good from her point of view. Presumably there is some threshold point—some degree of consistency in her devotion such that she would view a life possessing that degree as positively good for her, even though she might view a life with more of it as even better. In such cases it seems natural to suppose that prudential value begins to enter her life from the point at which her life crosses that threshold. Precisely how good her life is along this dimension will not be settled until she dies. But given that her life has met the threshold and she values that, future reversals will not remove value from her life. A certain amount of prudential value has been realized, and the future merely offers the opportunity for that amount to grow. In a case like this, value enters her life at very specific times, even

51. Right now, for the sake of the current argument, I am simply assuming that there are some cases in which narrative or thematic goods are genuinely good for a person and considering the question of whether there is any mystery about how to date such goods. For the larger purposes of the article, however, it remains an open question whether such putative goods really are good and whether they remain good even once a person (like Rupina) stops caring about them.

though the last dollop of value (so to speak) will not be realized until the moment right before death—the moment at which no further changes to the life story are possible.

A quite different (and probably rare) kind of case is one in which a person desires that her life as a whole exhibit a certain pattern or a certain shape but in which she only values the ideal and places no value on merely approximating the ideal. Imagine, for example, someone who wants her life to be a story of continuous successes. She wants each success to be followed soon after by another and even bigger success so that her life trajectory can be pictured as an ever-rising line. Such a desire could not be fulfilled until the moment right before death because before that it would always be possible that reversals of fortune could cause the rising line to dip. Since the individual in question doesn't value anything short of the full ideal, we cannot say that value enters her life as soon as a pattern of ever greater successes is established. In this case, it is natural to say that the fulfillment of such a desire is good for the individual at the moment right before death. There is nothing mysterious about this. Dating such goods seems perfectly straightforward.

VII. SAVING RUPINA (AND WHAT IT MEANS)

If we give up on timeless welfare goods, then we accept that all prudential value is value at a time. And if we also accept NA, as I think we should, then we accept a necessary condition on something's counting as good for a person at a time. Together these lead to the conclusion I favor, that it is not good to let Rupina die. After all, she will not now respond to such a decision in any sort of positive way. Whatever type of theory of well-being one adopts, and however one construes positive registration, she will not register such a decision positively. It will not bring her pleasure, it will not make her happy, it will not lead her to judge her life in a positive way, and so on. If it were true that letting her die now was necessary in order to save her from suffering later on, then it might be possible to argue that letting her die is a good choice now. But she is enjoying her life, and as far as we know or can predict, she is likely to continue to enjoy her life for some time to come. At some very late stage of her dementia things may change, and it may then make sense to let her die. But not now.

This does not rule out the possibility of narrative or thematic goods *per se*. It merely places certain plausible limits on the idea. The claim that all goodness is goodness at a time doesn't rule out the possibility that something may be good for a person for a long stretch of time. But, in conjunction with NA, it does require that the individual be capable of positive response to that thing all through the time when it is said to be

good for her. For that reason, it is possible for someone to care deeply about certain narrative features of her life, even though in the end no value will come to her from her life having those features. Since it is possible for a person to care about some aspect of her distant future, it may be that when the future arrives she no longer cares. When it becomes possible to satisfy the desire, it is not good for her to do so.

My conclusions do rule out the idea that past desires are determinative of current good. In certain kinds of cases, past desires may be good predictors of current desire or good predictors of current responsiveness. For example, a particular dementia patient may not remember that she used to be a music teacher and that she used to take great pleasure in playing piano. So she may not seek out opportunities to play. But it may still be true of her that if she is presented with a piano and she starts to play, she finds it deeply satisfying. Other things being equal, I think most people would say that playing is good for her. But the truth of this claim depends on the current facts about her relationship to music and piano playing. Her past desires are relevant only as predictors of her present enjoyment.

Because past desires are not determinative of current good, the life-object approach to Rupina's case fails. Importantly, so does the view I earlier called the autonomous agent response. This was the view that we can tell what is good for the demented Rupina now by looking at her past autonomous desires. Earlier I said that we could not simply assume without further argument that it is good to satisfy Rupina's previous desire even if it was autonomous. Now it should be clearer why that is so. Such desires are at best good predictors, but not always. When the person has changed enough that she is no longer capable of responding positively to some putative good, then previous autonomous desire or not, that thing is no longer good for her.

Those who discuss cases like Rupina's often assume that it must, at some point in the progress of dementia, become appropriate to interpret best interests in terms of previous desires and values. They simply disagree about when this point is reached. But if my conclusion is right, then it has implications not only for how we understand the best interests of Rupina as I described her at the beginning but for Rupina at each stage of dementia including the final ones. For even then, although her interests may have changed from what they were when she was in the middle stages, my view entails that her interests will be a function of what she is like at that time.

Indeed, the view we have arrived at is one that takes quite seriously the idea that our good must change as we change because it must, in some sense, fit with our current capacities for positive response. I have left quite a bit of room for different interpretations of what such responses might be, but however one spells it out, it remains true that

the reason why a person changes is irrelevant. It makes no difference whether she autonomously rejects previous views of what is valuable or good. What matters is that her capacities for response have changed enough that she can no longer find value in the thing.

A slightly different problem that some people may have with my arguments concerns the relationship between past desires and the rejection of the experience requirement. Some people maintain that the rejection of the experience requirement naturally (although not, of course, logically) goes along with the rejection of any temporal requirement on the satisfaction of desires, that is, any stipulation that the satisfaction of a desire can only be good if the individual still has the desire when it is satisfied. The thought seems to be that restricting the times when desire satisfaction is valuable makes sense only if one emphasizes experience, for the only thing that could motivate the requirement that the individual still have the desire at the time it is satisfied is the attempt to ensure that he is pleased or made happy by the event when it occurs. But that, I will argue, is not the only motivation.

Theorists who reject the experience requirement reason as follows: the proper measure of the goodness of a life is not what it feels like but how well it instantiates the individual's values and concerns and how successful the life is in terms of the individual's goals. If that is correct, then the assessment of a life is independent of what an individual knows. He may be ignorant of the extent to which his life is actually failing to meet his standards. But this kind of thinking is perfectly compatible with temporal limitations on desire satisfaction. If what matters is not what I know or experience but simply the facts about how well my life is meeting my standards, then, if my standards change, the proper way to measure my life will also change. It seems perfectly natural to assess each phase of a life in terms of the values or concerns that, during that phase, the individual himself saw as essential to its assessment, whether or not he himself was in a position to recognize how well his life was going according to those standards.

VIII. SUMMING UP

It is helpful at this point to summarize the various claims I have argued for and to underscore the relationships between them. I have argued for the following five claims:

- (C1) There is no such thing as timeless prudential value. All prudential value is value at a certain time. Although some goods remain valuable for an individual over long stretches of time, this is simply because the object in question qualifies as good for him or her at each of the relevant times.

- (C2) A necessary requirement of X's being good for A at a time T_1 is that A either respond positively to X at T_1 or it is true of A that she would respond positively right then if she was aware of X.
- (C3) Past desires that a person no longer has are not in any way determinative of current good.
- (C4) Although people often do care about making their lives into good life objects, it is not always prudentially good for these desires to be satisfied. This does not rule out genuine narrative goods, but it does require that if we postulate such goods we limit their goodness to those segments of a life during which the individual in question embraces that narrative vision.
- (C5) It is not good for Rupina as I have described her to die. It is in her best interests to live.

My original goal was to defend C5 (it is not good for Rupina to die). To get there, I initially began by questioning the relevance to well-being of past desires that a person no longer holds and identified several ways a theorist might try to use past desires in an argument against C5: (i) by appeal to the presumptive authority of past autonomous desires, (ii) by appeal to the idea of temporal parts of a single self whose interests make competing claims on us, and (iii) by appeal to what satisfying such a desire would do for a person's life viewed as a whole.

I first rejected (ii) (the self-conflict view) because it required us to think in a number of highly counterintuitive ways about ordinary cases. I then argued against (i) and (iii) by first introducing C2, my interpretation of the idea that a person's good must not be alien to her. This is the nonalienness principle, or NA. I argued for its intrinsic plausibility and pointed out how widely accepted it is among theorists of well-being. I briefly considered and rejected the idea of timeless goods, which might have provided an alternative way for proponents to defend the relevance of past desires. Claims C1 and C2 together support C3: the idea that past desires are not determinative of present good. And this in turn requires us to refine our understanding of narrative goods along the lines of C4.

In conclusion, I want to emphasize that standing back and looking at a life (one's own or someone else's) as a complex whole is a common enough experience. From this perspective there are many ways of assigning value to this life object. We may like the idea of a life with a certain story line or of a life in which great achievements occur early or of a life in which happiness is spread evenly throughout. I maintain that there is nothing wrong per se with applying such standards to one's own life. But I have argued that an individual's view about the best way to eval-

uate her life as a life object lacks prudential authority during times of her life when she does not hold that view.

I also wish to reiterate that in this article I have simply been concerned with understanding best interests or what is 'good for a person'. My argument has no direct bearing on the question of what authority an advance directive might have. I am simply arguing that when an individual undergoes a dramatic change—whether it be voluntary or not—what is good for her changes as well.

To understand what is good for someone like Rupina, we must consider her current state. We must also balance consideration of her current interests with her future ones. In Rupina's case, both considerations favor offering her treatment. Hence, that is what beneficence demands for her.