

Subjectivism and Idealization*

David Sobel

Subjective accounts of well-being maintain that one's rationally contingent nontruth assessable proattitudes ground true claims about what is good for one. Subjectivists tend to acknowledge that the agent's actual proattitudes can fail to point her toward that which would benefit her. For example, a woman may desperately want to marry her high school sweetheart, but unbeknownst to her they are not compatible, and the marriage would be doomed and unsatisfying.¹ The moral is that getting what we actually want can fail to benefit us. Further, suppose that I would love the taste of pineapple if I were to taste it but now have no desire to do so. My current lack of desire for pineapple does not entail that I would not be benefited by eating it. The satisfaction of actual desires does not seem to correlate with what is good for one. Informed desires seem to have a better claim to do so. But is there a subjectivist-friendly rationale for looking to informed desires beyond merely getting the right answer? This article will argue that there is.

What defines an account of well-being as subjective is the thesis that an agent's desires ground what makes something good for her. On such an account, it is understood that the set of desires that plays this

* I am grateful to Justin D'Arms, Janice Dowell, John Deigh, David Enoch, Errol Lord, Tim Loughlin, Joe Mendola, Michael Smith, Mark van Roojen, and two anonymous referees for *Ethics* for help with this article. I presented this paper at the 2007 Central Division of the American Philosophical Association, in a graduate course at the University of Nebraska, at the Syracuse Philosophy Annual Workshop and Network 2007 conference on practical reason (where Michael Smith was my helpful commentator), at the University of Stirling, the University of Leeds, the University of St. Andrews, and the University of Birmingham. I am grateful to all these audiences for thoughtful feedback. I am also grateful for a visiting fellowship at the Centre for Ethics, Philosophy, and Public Affairs at the University of St. Andrews which helped me complete this article.

1. While my focus here is with the case of subjective accounts of well-being, what I say can, I believe, be unproblematically extended to speak to similar issues concerning subjective accounts of reasons for action.

Ethics 119 (January 2009): 336–352

© 2009 by The University of Chicago. All rights reserved. 0014-1704/2009/11902-0002\$10.00

role is a function of the agent's contingent conative set. Accordingly, subjective accounts of well-being do not merely claim that an agent's desires covary with what is good for her or that her having a desire for something is a necessary or sufficient condition of its being good for her. Subjectivists claim that the relevant sort of desire grounds, not merely tracks, the truth of claims about what is good for a person. Something is good for a person, according to subjective accounts of well-being, because she has a desire of the right sort for it.

The most influential subjective accounts of well-being have maintained that our good is determined not by what we in fact want but by what we would want if we were idealized in certain ways, such as being informed about the various options one is choosing between. More specifically, influential subjective accounts of well-being have gravitated toward a full information account. The full information account takes an actual agent as she is and constructs a privileged epistemic standpoint for her by idealizing the information available to her about the way the world is and what options that might be a part of her life would be like. The preferences of this idealized agent (or, typically, a subset of them) are alleged to determine the value of options to the nonidealized agent. Mill helped inspire this project by rejecting the Benthamite identification of an agent's good with the sensation of pleasure (or any other substantive end) and replacing this account with his competent judges test. The root idea behind this test is that if a person intrinsically prefers x to y , independent of moral considerations, while fully acquainted with both options, then x is more conducive to the agent's well-being than y , no matter what other properties x and y have.² Such accounts have been usefully elaborated on or endorsed by an impressive group of philosophers, including Henry Sidgwick, Richard Brandt, John Harsanyi, John Rawls, Richard Hare, Peter Railton, David Gauthier, James Griffin, Shelly Kagan, and others.³

2. Traditionally such accounts have allowed, as Mill did, that some of an agent's desires, even informed desires, need not be connected to the agent's good. This helps make conceptual room for informed self-sacrifice. But the issue of exactly what subset of one's desires is connected with one's well-being has proved difficult. For discussion of this topic, see my "Well-Being as the Object of Moral Consideration," *Economics and Philosophy* 14 (1998): 249–81. A natural view is that an agent's own well-being provides a significant source of an agent's practical reasons but still only a subset of such reasons. Subjectivist accounts of reasons have typically not felt the need to circumscribe the (informed) concerns which are connected to reasons for action. Thus the combination of subjectivist accounts of well-being and reasons for action accurately reflect the thought that not all of our reasons need be self-serving but that our well-being, at least in ordinary agents, provides a powerful source of our reasons for action.

3. Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981), 111–12; Richard Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and the Right* (New York: Prometheus, 1979), 10, 113, 329; John Harsanyi, "Morality and the Theory of Rational Behavior," in *Utilitarianism and*

Several philosophers have recently argued that subjective accounts of well-being lack a rationale for their appeal to idealized desires.⁴ They claim that the only good rationales for such idealization are incompatible with the animating spirit of subjectivism. The only legitimate rationales for idealizing the desires that are granted authority, it is claimed, are rationales that presuppose a nonsubjectivist grounding of values. These critics maintain that the traditional subjectivist focus on idealized desires is best explained by an (perhaps unconscious) attempt to rig the account to line up with nonsubjectively grounded assumptions about what is good for her. These critics claim that it is hard to see how to vindicate idealized accounts over nonidealized accounts, or one idealization over another, without presupposing that there are already facts about what is the right answer for the idealization to hit. Thus, these critics conclude, the idealization procedure is at best an attempt to gain extensional adequacy by rigging the account so as to get plausible, non-subjectively grounded answers.⁵

Although these critics have focused on idealized desire accounts, their aim seems to be to undermine support for all subjectivist accounts, be they informed desire accounts or not and be they of well-being,

Beyond, ed. Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 55; John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1971), 407–24; Richard Hare, *Moral Thinking* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), 101–5 and 214–16. See also Douglas Senor, N. Fotion, and Richard Hare, eds., *Hare and Critics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 217–18; Peter Railton, “Facts and Values,” *Philosophical Topics* 14 (1986): 5–29; David Gauthier, *Morals by Agreement* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), chap. 2; James Griffin, *Well-Being* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 11–17; and Shelly Kagan, *The Limits of Morality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 283–91. Comparable accounts of practical reasons have been influentially championed by (albeit sometimes in a Kantian rather than Humean spirit) Bernard Williams, “Internal and External Reasons,” in his *Moral Luck* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 101–13; Stephen Darwall, *Impartial Reason* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), pt. 2; David Lewis, “Dispositional Theories of Value,” suppl. ser., *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 63 (1989): 113–37; Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994).

4. David Enoch, “Why Idealize?” *Ethics* 115 (2005): 759–87; Arthur Ripstein, “Preference,” in *Value, Welfare, and Morality*, ed. Raymond Gillespie Frey and Christopher W. Morris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 93–111, and reprinted, with a new conclusion, in *Practical Rationality and Preference*, ed. Christopher W. Morris and Arthur Ripstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 37–55; H. L. Lillehammer, “Revisionary Dispositionalism and Practical Reason,” *Journal of Ethics* 4 (2000): 173–90; Elijah Millgram, “Mill’s Proof of the Principle of Utility,” *Ethics* 110 (2000): 282–310, esp. 304–6; and, in explicit agreement with Enoch, Derek Parfit, “On What Matters” (unpublished manuscript, Department of Philosophy, University of Oxford, April 2008), 79 and n. 82. Some of these critics focus on the case of reasons for action, but their complaints, if accepted, would undermine subjective accounts of well-being as well. Further, if my reply in the case of well-being is persuasive, this would undermine their criticisms as well.

5. Smith, *Moral Problem*, 144–47, in a similar vein, argues that Humean accounts of practical reason have no rationale for appealing to second order desires rather than whatever desire is stronger.

reasons for action, or morality. It is treated as obvious that subjectivist accounts that give normative authority to actual desires will be extensionally inadequate.

David Enoch's "Why Idealize?" is the most recent and most fully developed critique along these lines. He works the hardest to find rationales for the idealization on behalf of subjectivism. Yet he comes to the strongest conclusion among these critics. He concludes that not only do subjectivists have no rationale for focusing on one idealization rather than another; they actually have no rationale for moving away from actual, nonidealized desires at all.⁶ Enoch maintains that the subjectivists face a dilemma. They have a natural rationale for privileging actual desires, but such accounts are extensionally hopeless. Idealized desire accounts are more adequate extensionally, but the only good rationales for appealing to such desires force one to abandon subjectivism.

This article offers a subjectivist's reply to Enoch.⁷ My main goal will be to argue that subjectivist accounts do have a rationale for the idealizations that they employ and that this rationale is compatible with the ambitions of subjectivism. I aim to show that Enoch's arguments to the contrary are unpersuasive.⁸ Defending subjectivism more broadly will yet again have to wait for another day.

Enoch's target is the entire class of idealized desire accounts, including such accounts of well-being, reasons for action, morality, and elsewhere. He claims that all such accounts "fall prey to a single objection" (760). Here I restrict my focus to his arguments as they apply to subjectivist accounts of well-being. If I can show that Enoch's critique fails on this front, that will be sufficient to show that the general critique is mistaken.

Enoch makes two central claims. First, he argues that subjective accounts have a default rationale for privileging actual desires and would need a special rationale for granting normative significance to some other sort of desires. Second, he argues that there is no such special rationale for privileging idealized desires which is compatible with the animating spirit of subjectivism. I will dispute both these claims. I start with the latter. This discussion takes up the bulk of this article. I then address Enoch's arguments for the former claim.

Enoch argues that "idealizing views are not likely to be able to

6. Enoch, "Why Idealize?" 780.

7. Otherwise unattributed references in the rest of the article will be to Enoch's article. Enoch critiques "idealized response" theories generally but tends to focus on idealized desire accounts as these are the most widely defended version of the former. I follow suit.

8. Although I am focused on Enoch's arguments here, I believe my arguments also tell against the arguments of Ripstein, Lillehammer, Millgram, and Parfit.

motivate the very idealization they employ" (760). He grants for the sake of argument that idealized accounts may be extensionally adequate, but he argues that there is no good rationale for thinking that the idealized desires determine rather than merely track facts about what the agent has reason to do.

Enoch considers and rejects several possible attempts at providing a rationale for idealization. He argues by exhaustion, suggesting that the rationales he considers are the only ones to be found in the literature. He ends by challenging defenders of idealization to provide a rationale other than those he considers and rejects. He is skeptical that this challenge can be met. While I will take issue with some of what Enoch says against the rationales he considers, my main goal is to answer his challenge and provide a rationale that he does not consider.

I will start by quickly summarizing the four main rationales that Enoch offers on the subjectivist's behalf together with Enoch's critique of each. I then briefly critique Enoch's arguments against these rationales. I then offer my own favored rationale for idealizing the desires that the subjectivist grants normative authority.

The first rationale Enoch considers is what he calls the "natural answer" to the question of why idealizing might seem justified. Enoch suggests an analogy. Consider trying to learn what time it is by looking at your watch. This is a sensible procedure, but we clearly can imagine ways of making it more reliable. We can make sure the batteries in the watch are charged, perhaps have the mechanism cleaned, and so on. In short we can think of ways of improving the watch so as to make looking at the watch a more reliable way of learning what time it is. However, Enoch claims, the rationale for the sorts of idealization in this and other cases where idealization seems justified stems from the thought that there is a right answer that is independent of the procedure. He writes:

Had the time depended on the reading of my watch, had the reading of my watch made certain time-facts true, there would have been no reason (not this reason, anyway) to idealize my watch and see to it that the batteries are fully charged. In such a case, whatever the reading would be, that would be the right reading, because that this is the reading would make it right. . . . The natural rationale for idealization, the one exemplified by the time [example] thus only applies to cases where the relevant procedure or response is thought of as tracking a truth independent of it. (764)

His point is that the idealization such accounts employ looks ad hoc and unmotivated unless we see the account as an epistemic tool for discovering preexisting facts. So, he concludes, idealized desire theorists must either admit that their account merely tracks correct nor-

mative conclusions rather than grounding them or abandon the “natural” rationale for idealizing.

The second rationale Enoch considers is that idealized accounts are extensionally adequate. The move away from actual desire accounts and toward idealized desire accounts is, Enoch allows, a big step forward in terms of extensional adequacy. Remember that Enoch is granting for the sake of argument that idealized desire accounts are extensionally adequate. If this concession were correct, perhaps that could provide a good rationale for idealizing. However, Enoch says that a theory needs more going for it than mere extensional adequacy. There are a great many different but extensionally adequate theories that in principle, if not in practice, we could generate. Thus, “What is needed for a theory to be attractive is some rationale distinct from its purported extensional adequacy” (767). Enoch seems to be saying that the simplicity of the idealized desire account is insufficient to provide this distinct rationale.

Third, Enoch wonders whether our actual justificatory practices vindicate idealizing. It is suggested that perhaps our ordinary practices of justifying beliefs about reasons mimic the idealization procedure. David Lewis had suggested this as a rationale for idealizing.⁹ Often when we are unsure whether something is good for us, we try to gain fuller imaginative acquaintance with the option and assume that by doing so we are improving our beliefs about what we have reason to do. The cases in which we have the most confidence that our desires carry normative authority are cases in which we are most confident we have excellent access to the relevant information about the options. Matters of mere taste (where desires are generally allowed to carry authority) tend to be cases where we have uncommon access to the relevantly informed vantage point.¹⁰ As the circumstances of our desire formation more closely approximate the idealized perspective, we tend to grant such desires more authority.

Enoch argues that even if all this is true, it cannot vindicate idealized desire accounts. He argues that, for better or worse, our commonsense assumptions and practices relating to value are enmeshed in a primitive normative realism about value. Given this, the best interpretation of our justificatory practices must be that such desires provide epistemic access to value but do not constitute value. “What best explains our justificatory practice is not that an idealized response is what the relevant normative fact consists in. What best explains our justificatory practice is rather

9. Lewis, “Dispositional Theories of Value.”

10. Some dispute that even in this context desires have authority. I have argued that such authors have provided no plausible alternative to granting authority to desires in matters of mere taste in “Pain for Objectivists: The Case of Matters of Mere Taste,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 8 (2005): 437–57.

our (perhaps implicit) belief, false though it may be, that, say, conditions of full imaginative acquaintance are conducive to the reliable tracking of an independent order of value-facts" (774).

Fourth, Enoch considers an amendment to the appeal to justificatory practices. The idealizer might offer a revisionary account of the current justificatory practices, maintaining that the current understanding and practices associated with value are confused but that a tolerably revisionary understanding of value which vindicates central aspects of the discourse can be developed which jettisons aspects that cannot be vindicated. Subjectivist friends of idealization have typically offered their accounts in this spirit.¹¹ Enoch concedes that his arguments make no trouble for such a rationale for idealization. Enoch does not conclude that the revisionary account is home free, but he concedes that the advocate of such a view "is in better shape regarding the possibility of motivating the idealization by referring to the characteristics of our justificatory practices" (786). Thus officially Enoch's conclusion is merely that "the only kind of ideal-response-dependence theory that is likely to be able to support the idealization it incorporates in a way that is not objectionably ad hoc is the revisionary kind" (787). Given that many prominent champions of such views have offered their accounts in just such a spirit, this does diminish the strength of Enoch's conclusion.

Let me now briefly respond to Enoch's criticism of the above rationales. I limit my remarks to the first two rationales as, in essence, Enoch allows that the fourth rationale is undamaged by his critique, and the response I would offer to his third rationale would be to point out the availability of the sort of story offered in his fourth rationale.

One issue we might expect Enoch to speak to is to help us understand how idealizers could have falsely thought that idealization had a rationale. We might therefore suspect that in offering purported rationales for idealized subjective accounts, he is pointing out thoughts that wrongly tempted subjectivists toward idealization. It is a striking feature of philosophical thinking about value that there has been broad convergence around informed desire accounts. What could explain this? If there truly is no subjectivist-friendly rationale for such idealizing views, the pressure to explain how many excellent philosophers could have thought that there was is increased.

But Enoch's first and second rationale, the "natural" rationale and the story about mere extensional adequacy, cannot adequately explain what might have seemed attractive about idealizing. It is a surprising

11. Lewis, "Dispositional Theories of Value"; Brandt, *Theory of the Good and the Right*; Williams, "Internal and External Reasons"; Railton, "Facts and Values," and "Naturalism and Prescriptivity," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 7 (1989): 151–74.

suggestion that friends of full information accounts are attracted to such an idealization because the idealization will arrive at independently wanted answers. The suggestion is surprising because a common complaint against such accounts is that it would be impossible to know much about what a highly idealized agent would want. Someone whose goal was to rig an idealization so as to get answers that they are convinced were correct would hardly pick such an epistemically problematic idealization for this purpose. Thus I think Enoch's first and second rationales for idealizing do not offer a plausible account of what explains the subjectivist's temptation to idealize.

My main concern, however, is to try to show that Enoch overlooks the best rationale for the idealization. The rationale I find most persuasive is right on the surface, and it is what I have always assumed motivated and guided various idealization proposals.¹² The rationale for granting the idealized agent information and experience is to provide her with a more accurate understanding of what the option she is considering would really be like. Such views grant authority to desires which are shaped in light of an accurate understanding of what the option truly would be like. This explains the shape that the idealization proposals take and provides a clear rationale for idealization.

Consider an analogy. Think about a careful test of which flavor of ice cream one likes best. One might, and experts no doubt do, devise a raft of idealizing procedures to help in this task. One might hold that a person's palate should be cleansed between each flavor being assessed. Or one might hold that the person should be comparably hungry when tasting each flavor or that the order of presentation of flavors be changed to make sure that things such as that the lingering effect of toothpaste on one's palate is not affecting the flavor of the first taste and so on. All of this is designed to give the agents more accurate information about what it would be like for them to eat this or that ice cream. Clearly such authoritative procedures for determining someone's favorite flavor of ice cream can be, and no doubt are, implemented in double-blind conditions where no one, including the designer of the procedure, is peeking at the answer they want the procedure to hit. The shape of the idealization process is explained by the attempt to produce an accurate forecast of what an experience of a certain flavor would be like. This rationale can sensibly guide choices between various possible

12. Bernard Williams, "Internal Reasons and the Obscurity of Blame," in his *Making Sense of Humanity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 37, offers a rationale for the idealization (in the case of reasons) which differs from any urged here. He claims the idealization is justified because "any rational deliberative agent has in his S a general interest in being factually informed." I criticize this justification in my "Explanation, Internalism, and Reasons for Action," *Social Theory and Practice* 18 (2001): 218–35.

idealizations without presupposing a procedure-independent account of what the agent's favorite flavor of ice cream is or should be. This example is not offered as support for any subjectivist theory of well-being. It is offered only to illustrate the possibility of a plausible procedural account of what taste one most likes that is not rigged to yield some answer whose truth is known independently of the account.¹³

This idealization is driven by the thought that there is already a fact of the matter to get clear about, and the idealization is an attempt to get those facts clearly and accurately into view. But that fact is what the option would be like to be a part of one's life. The idealization is driven by the attempt to accurately capture this. It is important for my purposes that the notion of facts here includes an accurate phenomenological impression of what an option would be like for one. But thinking of this as a preexisting fact does not justify the thought that either this procedure is just tracking desire-independent facts about what the taster likes best or the idealization has no rationale.

The idealization involved in traditional desire accounts is motivated by much the same sort of consideration as the above procedure.¹⁴ The idealization is an attempt to get already existing facts into better focus; this much is true. But the facts it attempts to get into better focus are the nonnormative facts about what it would be like to have various ways one's life might go be actual. There is a fact of the matter about this. The idealization is an attempt to get us to see such facts clearly. As Sidgwick put it over 100 years ago, "It would seem then, that if we interpret the notion 'good' in relation to 'desire,' we must identify it not with the actually desired, but rather with the desirable:—meaning by 'desirable' not necessarily 'what ought to be desired' but what would be desired, with strength proportioned to the degree of desirability if it were judged attainable by voluntary action, supposing the desirer to

13. Contrast Ripstein, in "Preference" (2001), 50, who writes, "Given the multiplicity of possible constraints, there is no way to choose between them [the different possible idealizations] without taking into account the results they issue. To do so, though, involves an independent standard of practical reason." Additionally, I deny the general thought that to take into account the results that a theory issues in this manner need involve an independent standard of practical reason. However, I cannot make this case adequately in this space and will not rely on this thought in what follows. I am grateful to Chris Heathwood and Jamie Dreier for very helpful discussion on this issue.

14. One might worry that the ice cream example provides little support for subjectivism generally because as we leave matters of mere taste it becomes far more contentious if a subjectivist analysis of various values is persuasive. This latter point is fair enough. But Enoch is offering an internal critique of subjectivism. His point is not that subjectivism cannot capture, for example, moral values but rather that even if we assess subjectivism on its own terms it fails. He claims that from the subjectivist point of view there is no good rationale for privileging idealized desires.

possess a perfect forecast, emotional as well as intellectual, of the state of attainment or fruition.”¹⁵

And what rationale does the subjectivist have to idealize so as to give the agent this perfect forecast? The answer is just that desires that do not involve this perfect forecast are, in a sense, not actually for the option as it is but rather for the option as it is falsely imagined to be. Only desires formed in light of an accurate understanding, phenomenological and otherwise, of what an option would be like are responsive to the true nature of the option under consideration. No independent account is needed to explain why the procedure must involve an accurate understanding of what the various options would be like—this requirement is continuous with the subjectivist thought, not independent of that thought. The point of the idealization is to give an accurate understanding of what the option that one is assessing is like. The best rationale for the idealization is that it promises this perfect forecast. To the extent that an idealization cannot promise this, it loses this strong and intuitive rationale.¹⁶

There is another way the idealizer could respond to Enoch’s challenge. The idealizer might say, in the spirit of Hume, that it is reason’s job to discover what is true and false. Desires themselves, however, not being attempts to describe the way the world is, cannot be true or false. Thus desires that are formed in light of complete and accurate factual information are nonarbitrary because they are influenced by reason as

15. Sidgwick, *Methods of Ethics*, 110–11.

16. Indeed, many critics of informed desire accounts of well-being have presupposed that the point of the idealization was to provide a “perfect forecast” of what options would be like. A set of articles by David Velleman, Connie Rosati, Don Loeb, and myself criticized full information accounts of well-being on the grounds that we did not see how it would be possible to provide a perfect forecast of all the various options that might be part of a person’s life. David Velleman, “Brandt’s Definition of ‘Good,’” *Philosophical Review* 97 (1988): 353–71; David Sobel, “Full Information Accounts of Well-Being,” *Ethics* 104 (1994): 784–810; Connie Rosati, “Persons, Perspectives, and Full Information Accounts of the Good,” *Ethics* 105 (1995): 296–325; and Don Loeb, “Full-Information Theories of Individual Good,” *Social Theory and Practice* 21 (1995): 1–30. For example, I argued that it is hard to see how to provide this perfect forecast of all of one’s possible first kisses. After having experienced many, one would not be in a position to experience further such kisses such as one would have been had one never kissed anyone before. I think it fair to say that all these articles assumed that if there were no intelligible way of idealizing agents such that they have this perfect forecast of all available options, this would damage the full information account. This example highlights that there are numerous serious criticisms of idealized desire accounts, and this article does not aspire to respond to them all. While I think informed desire accounts of well-being remain the most plausible account on the table, removing all the legitimate concerns that have been raised against such theories is beyond the scope of this article. If I can disarm the concern that Enoch and others have articulated, however, that would be a significant step toward an ultimate vindication of such views.

far as possible. A person who forms her desires in light of accurate factual information is a more ideally rational person.¹⁷ And there is nothing ad hoc about maintaining that the authoritative desires are the desires the agent would have were she more rational.¹⁸

I should note, however, that this second rationale for idealization seems not to be what subjectivist champions of idealization have had in mind. Recall that Williams did not require the agent to have full information but rather merely to avoid false belief. David Lewis requires only that the idealized agent has completely accurate powers of imagination, not that she has all true propositional information. Presumably this is not because Williams and Lewis doubted that a person is more ideally rational the more she has true beliefs but rather that not all such truths are needed to give a person a completely accurate sense of what an option would be like for her to live. Having noted this alternative rationale, I will set it aside and focus on the previous rationale which seems more continuous with the spirit of actual subjectivist proposals.

Enoch's central claim is that there is no rationale for the idealization which is compatible with the animating spirit of subjectivism. Thus it is part and parcel of his critique to mark a divide between rationales that are available in the subjectivist spirit and those that are not. I have offered a rationale for the idealization that seems to have been at least tacitly understood by those working out the best version of the account and by those criticizing the account. Enoch's only reply must be to say that the rationale I have offered somehow entails a background understanding of what determines our well-being which is nonsubjectivist.

But on the contrary, the most natural way to develop the thought that it is one's desires that determine one's well-being is to hold that it is whether one wants X that determines whether one benefits in getting X. Then we need to distinguish cases where the agent thinks she wants X from cases where it really is X that she wants. How should we mark this distinction? Well, one obvious way is to say that the desire is truly for X when the desire is sustained or created in light of complete and accurate information about what X would be like. When one's desire for X has such a status, we should think that it truly is X that one wants.

Admittedly, even when, in my sense, it is not X that the agent really wants, it will nonetheless be sensible to say that the agent does have a

17. Smith, *Moral Problem*, chap. 5, perhaps thinks of the rationale for the idealization in this way.

18. Lillehammer, "Revisionary Dispositionalism and Practical Reason," seems to assume that either the idealization is justified because it gets procedure-independent answers or it is justified on the basis of this argument. He argues that the justification above relies on normative notions in justifying the idealization and thus cannot completely vindicate the subjectivists' attempt to offer a view with modest metaphysical commitments.

desire for X. I am not denying that X can be the object of my desire despite my misinformation about X. My point is that there is a mismatch between the understanding an agent has of X when she has an intrinsic desire for X that would not be sustained in light of accurate information about X and the true nature of X. In these cases I want to say that the agent's desire for X is not genuinely for X as it in fact is. The desire is not responsive to the true nature of its object, and in that sense, is not really for it. It is this distinction, I take it, that we are after when we say that we did not "really" want something. It was only wanted to the extent that we were ignorant of its true nature. Our informed desires are, in a sense, more genuinely for their object. And such desires are what we ordinarily would have referred to as what we "really want." The objects of our desires have a nature not of our making. Sometimes our desires are responsive to the truth about the nature of their object, and sometimes they are not.

I think this justifies the subjectivist in grouping such desires together and granting them special authority. Such desires form a natural class and have a virtue qua desire which is independent of the contents of such desires matching up with our intuitions about what benefits the agent. Surely if the subjectivist tried to claim that we should grant authority to desires that are less for their object rather than more, the opponent of subjectivism would be warranted in saying that this looks *ad hoc*.

Recall that Enoch claims that the subjectivist has a strong default rationale for privileging actual desires and needs a special rationale for granting authority to idealized desires. I have so far been accepting this for the sake of argument and trying to discharge the burden. But Enoch's arguments for the claim that subjectivists have a strong default rationale for privileging actual desire are problematic. He writes:

Things would have been different had the philosophical concerns underlying response-dependent views been themselves neutral as between actual and ideal responses. If you have reason to tie the relevant normative facts to, say, motivations of whatever sort, be they actual or hypothetical, then the extensional inadequacy of actual-response dependence theories together with the better prospects of idealized response-dependent theories would give you all the reason you need for idealization. But the philosophical concerns typically underlying response-dependence views are not neutral as between actual and idealized responses. For instance, Williams's internalist intuition, according to which, roughly speaking, the reasons that apply to one must be able to explain one's behavior, applies to the actual behavior of actual agents, not their idealized counterparts. Similarly, Railton's intuition that what is good for me must suit me, be made for me, or engage me is, of course, about

a connection between what is good for me and me as I actually am, not my ideal advisor. The point generalizes: if only extensional adequacy could be had on an actual-response-dependent view, it seems no response-dependent theorist would idealize. And this alone suffices to show that typical response-dependent theorists are motivated by considerations that are not initially neutral between actual and idealized responses. . . . Idealizers start off with actual responses, then patching up extensional inadequacies by idealizing. And this is exactly the move characterized above as objectionably ad hoc. (768–69; see also 780 n. 42)

Enoch allows that much hangs on this argument. Indeed he says that if it fails, then subjectivists would have a perfectly acceptable rationale for idealizing. To resist Enoch's argument, all the subjectivist needs to do is make a case that fixing on idealized desires is no less justified by thoughts internal to subjectivism than is fixing on other sorts of desires. Recall that the issue here is merely whether subjectivism has the internal resources to vindicate the idealized view. Other general issues about the viability of subjectivism are not on the table. The question is merely whether, given that one has opted for subjectivism, there is any reason within that framework to privilege other desires over desires that are more attuned to their object. If the answer is no, then, by Enoch's own lights, his complaint against subjectivism is defeated.

So what is his argument that subjectivists have a default rationale for privileging actual desires? Basically he says that to capture the thoughts that Railton and Williams champion, one would have to privilege actual desires. This is an audacious claim since, in fact, both Railton and Williams privilege informed desires over actual desires. So the form of the claim must be that Railton's and Williams's theories are inadequate to the central thought which motivates their views. They aspired to connect up an agent's good to her nature in a nonalienating way, but according to Enoch, they failed.

Railton is seeking an account of a person's good that is not "intolerably alienating."¹⁹ The thought is explicitly not that anything except what the agent actually wants must be intolerably alienating. Railton's wanted connection to the actual agent is secured so long as it would be the actual agent's conative set that is engaged when presented with a more accurate understanding of the options. The thought that an account of an agent's good is intolerably alienating if it does not defer to the actual desires of the agent is not compelling. We can want that

19. Railton, "Facts and Values." L. W. Sumner, *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), sees subjective accounts of well-being as best positioned to explain the subject relativity of welfare. The appeal of subjectivism is felt even by those who distance themselves from idealized desire accounts, as the example of Sumner shows.

which is not good for us. We hardly need feel alienated from a good that comes our way merely because we did not know that we would like such a thing. The fact that I would like butter pecan ice cream if I were to try it quite plausibly connects me up with butter pecan ice cream in a way that is not alienating. Such a connection shows that butter pecan “suits me” even if I do not now want it. The parent’s plea to “try it, you might like it” offers a nonalienating consideration in favor of trying it, one that acknowledges that if it is to be good for one, it must connect up in a serious way with what happens to please the person in question.

Williams’s account does not maintain that genuine practical reasons must actually motivate nonidealized agents. He maintains, after all, that the internalist view is concerned not merely with explanation but also with the agent’s rationality. He maintains that genuine practical reasons must be capable of explaining or motivating action.²⁰ While only actual desires can actually motivate, idealized desires can be capable of motivating. Indeed, if the idealization adequately captures Williams’s notion of sound deliberation, then idealized desires automatically pass Williams’s test of showing that they could motivate the agent if they deliberated soundly. Notice that if Williams had maintained that reasons must motivate the actual agent, he could have made no room for a person to fail to be motivated by a genuine reason. But a central Williamsian goal was to accommodate the platitude that people can fail to be motivated by their reasons.

Railton and Williams both think the best version of internalism will maintain a connection between the motivations of the idealized agent and the reasons or well-being of the actual agent. Many others have followed suit. Surely Enoch appreciates this fact about their view and is claiming that they are wrong to think that they can secure a plausible version of internalism without deferring to actual desires. But all that Enoch has to say in favor of this approach is contained in the quotation above. The version of internalism that Enoch seems to think Williams and Railton need to capture is not tempting. If we think there can be irrational or imprudent action, we need to allow that agents can be actually motivated in ways contrary to their reasons and their good.

The thought that only what I actually desire connects me up with a good in a nonalienating way is not compelling even from the point of view of the agent whose good is in question. This is why we consult with others expected to be relevantly similar to us, and with better local knowledge, which restaurants in town are good. It would be a genuinely weird person who avoided asking locals such questions on the grounds that the desires they would form in response to such information seem to them threateningly alien.

20. Williams, “Internal and External Reasons.”

At this point it may seem that I have overlooked a more charitable interpretation of Enoch's arguments. Perhaps he should be understood to be claiming that it is one thing to say that idealization is helpful in pointing out the means to one's intrinsic wants, but it is altogether another thing to say that the idealization appropriately should inform the intrinsic wants themselves. In the former case the idealization is merely providing information about the means to the agent's given ends. Obviously in Williams's gin and petrol case the only issue is the agent's mistaken beliefs about the means to a given end. In cases such as this, the role of the information is not to criticize or alter the agent's desires but rather merely to enlighten the agent about the true means to her fixed ends. It might be suggested that in the ice cream case I offered above, the only clear sense in which the information is useful is in similarly providing information about which flavor I will most enjoy, where it is taken for granted that the agent was out for a flavor she would enjoy all along.²¹

Donald Hubin, in just the way suggested above, leans hard on the notion of actual intrinsic desires, avoiding the need to grant authority to counterfactual desires. Cases in which an agent is disappointed in getting what she thought she wanted will signal but not constitute the fact that the agent lacked an actual intrinsic desire for that option all along.²² Adopting Hubin's approach makes the appeal to actual desires much more palatable and perhaps as extensionally adequate as idealized accounts.

However, Enoch clearly rejects both Hubin's approach and the suggestion above about allowing in information when it merely supplies the means to given ends. Enoch briefly considers Hubin's (and Noggle's) view, and what he says in reply is telling.²³ He writes:

Hubin privileges intrinsic motivation and what is actually conducive to their satisfaction over all other motivations. Noggle privileges desires with which I identify more strongly. Now, these restrictions do not, of course, constitute idealization, but like idealization they demand some philosophical rationale. Why, we can ask Hubin and Noggle, do some desires but not all count? . . . Perhaps Hubin or Noggle (or both) can after all motivate their restriction to privileged desires. But what should be clear is that—despite their views not being exactly idealizing views—they are *prima facie* subject to a challenge exactly analogous to the one that idealizers face. (784 n. 48)

This passage shows that Enoch is not pressing the point suggested above about the difference between allowing information in to alter

21. An anonymous referee pointed out this interpretation.

22. Donald Hubin, "Hypothetical Motivation," *Noûs* 30 (1996): 31–54.

23. Robert Noggle, "Integrity, the Self, and Desire-Based Accounts of the Good," *Philosophical Studies* 96 (1996): 303–31.

privileged desires versus letting it in merely to determine the means to given ends. He tells us that his complaint against allowing in information about the means to one's ends is "exactly analogous" to his complaint against idealized desire views.

But the above passage also shows us what Enoch's view about what the default position is for desire-based accounts and what it would take for such views to capture the form of internalism Williams and Railton are striving to capture. Enoch's view is that the default position for subjectivism would have us grant normative authority to all actual desires whether intrinsic or instrumental, endorsed or not, informed or not. And, Enoch is saying, the reason for this is that doing so is the only way to provide an account of a person's good that is not alienating to the actual agent.²⁴ That is, he is insisting that this is the only path to connecting up a person and her good in the way internalists want. The resulting view is that to connect up an agent's good with her in a non-alienating way we must grant authority to all of her desires, even the desires that she herself is alienated from. I think this shows an internal incoherence in the rationale Enoch offers for his "default" subjectivist view. Actual agents are typically not alienated from the desires they would have if they were more informed. Thus, deferring to the agent's actual desires is not a good way, let alone the only good way, to secure the connection between the agent and what is valuable for her that internalists sought.

Enoch maintains that the only way to capture the kind of internalism that so many subjectivists and neo-Kantians have been trying to capture is to grant undifferentiated normative authority to whatever an agent actually wants, even if the want is self-consciously instrumental, uninformed, or found to be alien.²⁵ But this view's lone touted attraction—that it connects an agent to her good in a nonalienated way—cannot be sustained.²⁶

24. I think it fair to say that Enoch does not tell us enough about what he sees as the fundamental thought behind internalism such that we can see why he thinks the only way to capture this thought is in a radically different way than the way that champions of the view have found attractive.

25. Robert Johnson and I argued against more traditional and popular conceptions of existence internalism on the grounds that they looked to be too strong. See Robert Johnson, "Internal Reasons and the Conditional Fallacy," *Philosophical Quarterly* 49 (1999): 53–71; and my "Explanation, Internalism, and Reasons for Action." Enoch approvingly cites my concerns in this article as helping to vindicate his approach. But I am not aware of anyone who previously suggested that the best path for internalism to take in response to such worries is to grant authority to all actual desires.

26. Enoch sees Connie Rosati's "two-tier internalism" offered in "Internalism and the Good for a Person," *Ethics* 106 (1996): 297–326, as similarly motivated by the thought that a proper form of internalism must connect up an agent's good all the way to the actual agent, not merely with the idealized version of the agent. Yet it is important to see that

In sum, we have not been given good reason to think that subjectivists can only justify looking to idealized desires by abandoning subjectivism. Rather, the rationale for such idealizations is simple, at least tacitly assumed in the literature, and continuous with the animating spirit of subjectivism. The point of the idealization is to make sure that when we are forming the authoritative kind of desire for an option, we have that option squarely and accurately in mind.

the resulting two-tier view does not defer to all and only actual desires. Rather it looks to the idealized desires we would have under conditions that we find authoritative, at least when we are sober and aware. Enoch does not explain why we should prefer his way of connecting an agent's good to the actual agent to Rosati's and thus does not make a case that the default version of subjectivism should advert to the agent's actual desires rather than idealized desires even if we accept his (very) strong version of internalism. Although I would resist Rosati's proposal, I do think it clearly better able than Enoch's own proposal to ensure that a person's good is not alienating to the actual agent.