

Structuring Ends¹

1. Theories of Well-Being

There is a fault line that distinguishes two leading approaches to the theory of human well-being. On one hand are what (following T. M. Scanlon²) I call “substantive good” views, according to which the most important elements of a human person’s well-being are given by her nature as a human, rational, and/or sentient being.³ Many of these theories are broadly Aristotelian in understanding human well-being as *flourishing* as a human, although these Aristotelians disagree about whether the exercise of virtue, the development of our capabilities, or a potpourri of features that can be assembled into an “objective list” is the best way to understand what human flourishing consists in. Other substantive good views are hedonistic, claiming that a person’s well-being consists in the balance of pleasure over pain she experiences.⁴ These substantive good theories, if they

¹ [citation omitted for anonymity].

² Scanlon (1998), 113. Scanlon’s taxonomy is adapted from Derek Parfit’s; see Parfit (1984), 2, and see note 4 below for Parfit’s classification of hedonism as a third approach. In this essay I make no distinction among the terms “a person’s well-being”, “the good for a person”, “a person’s good”, and “how well a person’s life goes”. For a discussion of the variety of uses of the term “good”, see Richard Kraut (2007); also relevant is Kraut (1989), especially Chapter Two. Gavin Lawrence maintains that these locutions should be distinguished; see Lawrence (1993).

³For a paradigm of this sort of view, see Kraut (2007). Scanlon uses “substantive good” very broadly, to pick out any account of the good – his own included – that does not reduce all claims about a person’s good to claims about his actual desires or preferences. I use the term slightly less broadly, counting as non-substantive (and hence as agent-constituted, to use a term I gloss shortly) views like that of John Rawls (1971) which reduce claims about a person’s good to claims about what it would be rational for him to desire; I do this in order to underscore features these views share with desire-fulfillment and preference-fulfillment theories.

⁴ Here I follow Scanlon in assimilating hedonism to substantive good theory; see Scanlon (1998), 100-103. Parfit, by contrast, distinguishes hedonism from both hedonism and (to use a term I gloss in the following paragraph) agent-constituted theories; see Parfit (1984), 493-502. I think hedonism can be assimilated in either direction, depending on whether it understands the value of

are plausible, can explain the importance of pursuing aims such as relationships, careers, and hobbies. They downplay, however, the significance to a person's well-being of the specific aims he happens to actually pursue, such as his relationship with his mother, his career as an attorney, and so forth. On this view, fulfillment of a person's actual aims is valuable for him only because, and only if, fulfillment of these aims is valuable for him independent of his adoption of them. To think otherwise is to maintain that in adopting an aim, a person imbues it – “magically”, in the words of one advocate of the substantive good approach⁵ – with value it would not otherwise have.

On the other hand are what I call “agent-constituted” theories of well-being. These views contend that a person's well-being is largely or entirely constituted by his specific features as an agent, rather than by the general features of humanity, rationality, and sentience that substantive good theorists emphasize. As with the substantive good approach, there are many agent-constituted theories of well-being; agent-constituted theorists have maintained variously that well-being is constituted by an agent's practical identity or by the fulfillment of her aims, desires, and/or preferences.⁶ These views are often motivated in part by a perceived failure of substantive good theories. Typically they contend both that Aristotelian theories of well-being deploy a conception of human nature too robust to be plausible and that hedonistic theories of well-being are unable to

pleasure purely experientially or as consisting in part in the objects a subject takes pleasure in. If the former, then hedonism is a substantive thesis about human well-being, according to which a person fares better the more pleasure he experiences. If the latter, then hedonism is an agent-constituted theory, since what a person takes pleasure in affects what is good for him. This latter sort of view is these days more aptly labeled “preference-satisfaction” theory, which is why I stipulate that hedonism is a substantive good theory. But however we understand hedonism, I believe it fails to mark out a “third way” distinct from both substantive good theory and agent-constituted theory.

⁵ [citation omitted for anonymity].

⁶ For an example of this approach, see Rawls (1971), especially Chapter VII.

encompass the diversity of human goods. They typically contend further that substantive good views fail to appreciate how the possession of rational capacities both makes human well-being differently constituted from that of other sentient animals and makes the well-being of one person differently constituted from the well-being of another.

I believe each of these approaches captures important features of human well-being, and in the second half of this essay I articulate an account of well-being which seeks to capture the virtues of both. But first I consider the vices of caricatured versions of these approaches, to make clear what my view attempts to avoid; and then I present the virtues of each approach, to make clear what the view I offer attempts to capture.

A caricatured agent-constituted theory maintains that fulfillment of a person's actual aims or desires wholly constitutes his well-being, and maintains that any claim about what is good for him that is independent of these aims or desires is unfounded. In my view such a theory lacks resources to account for the normativity of claims about well-being, for it reduces all claims about well-being to facts about aims or desires whose fulfillment is not independently asserted to be valuable. Perhaps a person aims or desires to count blades of grass, visit another solar system, or campaign to prevent Virginians from being eligible for the U.S. Presidency; I have difficulty seeing how the mere fact that these are her aims or desires affects what she should do.⁷ I thus assume that aims and desires generate reasons only when their fulfillment has value independent of the fact that this fulfillment is desired. Hence I assume also that accounts of well-being which assert the brute intrinsic normativity of aims or desires, and so make appeal to aim- or desire-based reasons which are in no way backed by desire-independent reasons, are too

⁷ The aim of grass-counting is (notoriously) discussed in Rawls (1971), 432-433.

deflationary to be correct. A theory of well-being must make sense of the idea that a person's aims help constitute her well-being, but it also must explain why fulfillment of her aims is valuable.

The vice of a caricatured substantive good theory is different. There is no danger of objectionable deflationism, since the theory's normativity is supplied by its substantive general claims about what is good for persons. The trouble is that when we restrict our focus to these general claims we cannot account for why and how a person's actual adoption of aims affects the reasons he should take into account when he acts. I have reason to publish papers in philosophical journals and to learn seven-letter words, for example, because I have adopted the aims of being a philosophy professor and Scrabble player; I would have needed to take different reasons into account had I instead adopted the aims of being a politician and chess player. In addition to articulating and defending substantive general claims about a person's well-being, a theory must also account for *how* her adoption of aims mediates between these general claims and the reasons she should take into account in action.

Thus we need an account agent-constituted enough to vindicate the claim that a person's well-being is shaped by his actually adopted aims yet substantive enough to supply the normativity of its claims about well-being. In the second half of this essay I attempt to present such an account, making use of an agential feature I call a "structuring end". As I explain below in Section 7, a structuring end is an end whose achievement can constitute the achievement of an actually valuable final end, but which can succeed in doing so only if the agent also treats the structuring end as valuable for its own sake. The thesis of this essay is that structuring ends are hugely significant to the theory of human

well-being and that deployment of these structuring ends enables a theory to capture the virtues of both aim-constituted and substantive theories of well-being. While the account I offer no doubt contradicts elements of leading examples of these approaches, my primary goal is not to criticize these views. My goal is to capture what is right about each of them in a hybrid position that seeks to equal them in systematicity of explanation but to surpass them in both completeness of explanation and coherence with ordinary judgments about what well-being consists in.

2. Hybrid Theories

In suggesting that the correct approach to the theory of well-being is a hybrid between substantive and agent-constituted theories, I follow the lead of Joseph Raz and T. M. Scanlon.⁸ Raz commits himself to the agent-constituted approach, for example, with his claims that “success and failure in the pursuit of our goals is in itself the major determinant of our well-being”⁹ and that “it is generally the case that the value of various situations for a particular person depends to a large extent on his actual goals”.¹⁰ He qualifies the latter claim, however, allowing that “exceptions to this rule are biologically determined needs and desires”,¹¹ and he is careful to note that “a person’s well-being depends on the value of his goals and pursuits”,¹² not simply on the fact that they are his goals and pursuits.

⁸ See especially Chapter 12 of Raz (1986) and Chapter 3 of Scanlon (1998).

⁹ Raz (1986), 297.

¹⁰ Raz (1986), 290.

¹¹ Raz (1986), 290.

¹² Raz (1986), 298. Raz continues with what I regard as an implausible claim: “What if the value of one person’s goals and pursuits is less than that on another’s, but neither of them is guilty of any mistake about their true value? If it turns out that each spent his life in activities which were

Raz also emphasizes that the adoption of goals is a rational process responsive to the value these goals have independent of their adoption. He writes, for example, that “when a person chooses a goal and when he surveys the ones he has, he regards himself as looking for reasons for choosing one goal rather than another, and he holds himself to have the goals he has for a reason”,¹³ further that “person has [a] goal on condition that his reason [for having it] is a valid, valuable one”,¹⁴ and finally that “satisfaction of goals based on false reasons does not contribute to one’s well-being”.¹⁵

Similarly, Scanlon adopts the agent-constituted approach with his claim that “well-being depends, at least in part, on success in one’s rational aims”,¹⁶ but qualifies this with the rider that this is true only “provided that these [aims] are worth pursuing”.¹⁷ He further marks himself as a substantive good theorist by insisting that “[s]uccess in one’s rational aims is not ... a complete account of well-being”.¹⁸

Raz and Scanlon also both make the important observation that our aims are hierarchically structured, with less comprehensive aims subsumed underneath more comprehensive aims.¹⁹ In my view they underdescribe, however, the role played by these structures. I believe that a fuller accounting of these structures can enhance the appeal of hybrid approaches to the theory of well-being; and that is the project I undertake in this

are valuable as anything he could have done then, other things being equal, their lives are equally successful.” See Raz (1986), 299. I do not present a detailed account of what I believe should be saved and what I believe should be abandoned in Raz’s view, but I would note my dissent from this Razian commitment.

¹³ Raz (1986), 300.

¹⁴ Raz (1986), 301.

¹⁵ Raz (1986), 302.

¹⁶ Scanlon (1998), 120.

¹⁷ Scanlon (1998), 124.

¹⁸ Scanlon (1998), 123.

¹⁹ Raz (1986), 292-293 and Scanlon (1998), 122-123.

essay. The proposals I make constitute a view of well-being in the same family as the views of Raz and Scanlon, and I owe much to them in both substance and inspiration.²⁰ I do not proceed, however, by explaining their accounts and detailing how my proposals cohere, or fail to cohere, with theirs. I instead present a more specific account of how and why a person's well-being is significantly constituted by success in her aims. No doubt the account I offer departs in some respects from those of Raz and Scanlon, but I hope those who are congenial to their approach find useful resources here. In particular I seek to show how the fulfillment of more specific aims can be valuable by virtue of these aims' relationship to more general aims without being valuable merely because it enables the achievement of these more general aims.²¹

3. Ends

Before I present my account of how through the adoption of aims a person helps constitute his own well-being, I first need to argue that persons *can* in fact do this. I do

²⁰ Scanlon's discussion focuses on the extent to which overarching, all-things-considered claims about well-being are significant in the theory of well-being or to individual's deliberations, and his view is that they are rarely significant. See Scanlon (1998), 127-133. While it follows from my view that a person can deliberate with respect to overarching claims about her well-being, I leave open how frequently this deliberation is significant. My focus is on a different issue: how aims constitute and organize – "structure", in a technical sense I explain below in Section 7 – a person's well-being. Scanlon has relatively little to say about this; it is not clear whether he thinks the achievement of rational aims is another good that could be placed alongside health and freedom from pain on an objective list, or whether the adoption and pursuit of aims plays a more significant organizing role. I should flag also another respect in which my account differs, in emphasis at least, from Scanlon's. Since Scanlon argues against a significant role for overarching claims about well-being, he does not emphasize how general features like rationality, humanity, and sentience help constitute well-being. But no theory of well-being would be complete without an account of how the lifespan and emotional constitution of humans, for example, helps explain the value for us of projects with scope and duration of careers and the value for us of receiving emotional support from friends. The value of careers and friendships is not brute; substantive considerations more general than these aims help explain their value.

²¹ [citation omitted for anonymity].

not proceed, however, by rehearsing existing arguments from major proponents of the agent-constituted approach. Many of these arguments are illuminating, but in my view they tend to be too sweeping;²² instead I present a novel argument for this approach.²³ I argue in particular for an “aim-constituted” approach to the theory of well-being, since I believe this is the most promising agent-constituted approach. But before I present my argument that an agent’s well-being is significantly constituted by her actual adoption of aims, I must first explicate the notion of an *end*, since this notion plays an important role in the argument.

As I use the term, an end is anything a person treats as valuable; and to treat a thing as valuable is, on my understanding, to accept it as a volitional constraint. Ends are volitional because they are chosen or tacitly accepted, and they are constraints because treating something as valuable involves limiting one’s actions in response to its supposed

²² Many decision theorists, for example, are attracted to the view that well-being consists in the fulfillment of preferences, since this claim putatively obviates the need to make controversial claims about what is objectively good and since ordinarily ranked preferences lend themselves to mathematical manipulation. Another variety of agent-constituted theorist follows David Hume in proceeding (too quickly, in my view) from an internalist premise about the connection between reasons and motivations to the claim that only intrinsically motivating entities like desires could be sources of value. See Hume (1739), especially Part III of Book II; and for a heroic effort to vindicate Humeanism of this sort, see Valerie Tiberius (2000). Finally, followers of Immanuel Kant sometimes conclude from the shortcomings of ancient metaphysical systems that value is constructed by agents, and hence generated from nothing, when persons exercise their rational capacities by adopting aims. The most interesting and important example of this is the work of Christine Korsgaard, who writes that “reason ... isn’t in the world, but is something we impose upon it”. See Korsgaard (1996), 5. Korsgaard is guilty of hyperbole here, but that does not entail that her core claim – that a person’s particular aims help constitute his good because their value is in part sustained by the exercise of his rational capacities – is mistaken; I defend that view in this essay. I do believe, however, that some features of Korsgaard’s account should be amended. The account of value I offer differs from hers in at least three ways: it incorporates agent-independent substantive values, it makes no important use of agents’ practical self-conceptions, and it is not supported by an argument that is addressed to morally skeptical egoists.

²³ I should note, however, that the argument I give in this section owes much in inspiration to an argument articulated by Korsgaard (1996). Korsgaard’s argument is itself inspired by an argument found in Immanuel Kant (1785), 34-36.

value.²⁴ Aims, goals, plans, projects, and pursuits are all species of ends, and I use “aim” as an umbrella term to denote these sorts of ends. Other ends may have less to do with a person’s plan of life: insofar as a person’s regard for them can structure and delimit his actions, other persons and their aims can be among a person’s ends, as can sentient animals. There are also ends whose value independent of persons is controversial: works of art, for example, or plants and ecosystems. Means that enable the achievement of ends are also themselves ends, since they too structure and delimit deliberation about action; this is reflected in the fact that they are sometimes called “instrumental ends”.²⁵ I count all these things as ends, so the notion of “end” I deploy is broad.

Since I have defined having something as an end as treating it as valuable, it is on my understanding a trivial conceptual truth that an agent treats all of her ends as valuable. In order to ensure that this claim is not misunderstood, I want to make clear that *treating a thing as valuable*, by contrast with *actually valuing it*, need not involve endorsing that thing, having a pro-attitude towards it, or being disposed to endorse or have a pro-attitude towards it on reflection. A person can question whether she is right to treat her ends as valuable and can believe it would be better, all things considered, if she were to abandon or revise some of her ends; indeed, a person can judge some of her ends to be neutral or

²⁴ This is a claim about what it is to be an end, not a claim about what we ought to have as an end. It could be that contingent social circumstances obligate us to adopt ends; family relationships are paradigms of this, but are not the only examples, since we reach adulthood in the debt of many persons and groups. Still, even if I am obligated to adopt some of my family relationships as ends, the fact remains that they *are* ends of mine only if I choose them or tacitly accept them.

²⁵ Henry Richardson uses “means” to pick out both instrumental ends and, to use a term I explicate below in Section 6, constitutive ends. Despite the utility of a term that picks out both these ways of having ends, I reserve the label “means” for instrumental ends only, since I believe this is more in keeping with standard use. Structuring ends, which I introduce below in Section 7, are usefully understood as an elaboration of Richardson’s account of the specification of ends within a theory of well-being. See Richardson (1997), especially Chapter IV; and see also note 46 below.

negative in value. But these caveats do not undermine the claim that insofar as an agent has an end she *treats* it as valuable. The criterion of a person's treating something as an end is that she shapes her actions as though it were valuable; an alcoholic thus treats drinking as valuable when she procures and imbibes, since she acts as though drinking were valuable, even if she judges on the whole that it is negatively valuable.

That persons treat all their ends as valuable does not, of course, entail that they *should* treat all their ends as valuable. There is room for rational self-criticism, whereby persons learn that some of their ends are not valuable and that others, while valuable, should be abandoned in favor of more valuable ends. And this rational self-criticism can be self-regarding: sometimes a person should abandon or revise his ends because if he does so his life will go better. If such self-regarding self-criticism is possible, then some considerations external to a person's adoption of an end help determine its value.

These external considerations determine what I call an end's "self-regarding choiceworthiness". An end's overall choiceworthiness incorporates not only these self-regarding considerations, but other-regarding considerations as well. Furthermore, while I do not defend the view here, I believe there are reasons for action which do not derive from the well-being of any individual: there are reasons to respect persons, for example, which do not reduce to reasons to make their lives go better. Since the topic of this essay is well-being, however, I here leave to the side discussion of both other-regarding reasons and reasons not based on well-being, and for ease of exposition I use "choiceworthiness" as short for "self-regarding choiceworthiness".²⁶

²⁶Not all ends are chosen, but "adoption-worthiness" is an awfully cumbersome term. I adapt the notion of choiceworthiness from Scanlon, although he does not develop it in detail; see Scanlon

Some ends are made choiceworthy by the nature of rational agency itself; the end of improving one's ability to make good decisions, for example, is choiceworthy for any person. Other ends are made choiceworthy by human nature; in any but the most unusual conditions, for example, cultivating at least a few friendships and consuming enough food to survive are choiceworthy for everyone. Still other considerations are peculiar to specific features of individuals' circumstances, including most importantly their talents and social milieux. The possession of great arm strength, for example, may make the end of improving one's skills at baseball as opposed to basketball more choiceworthy for an athlete. Similarly, living among many people who value the game may make improving one's skills at baseball more choiceworthy than improving one's skills at chariot-racing, even for a person with more talent for the latter sport.²⁷

I call these considerations "external" to agents, but they are nonetheless often agent-relative. The choiceworthiness of the various ends I might adopt is affected not only by my status as rational and human, but also by my talents and social circumstances.

(1998), 131-133. Scanlon and Raz both regard the distinction between self- and other-regarding considerations as blurry, and hence downplay the significance of self-regarding choiceworthiness in practical deliberation. As I indicated above in note 20, I take no stand on the frequency with which this notion is significant in deliberation, although I do believe it sometimes is.

²⁷ This short account of objective goods is not exhaustive, and I say relatively little here about the extent to which objective – in this context, non-agent-constituted – considerations determine what aims a person should adopt, other than that these considerations are indeterminate enough to allow structuring ends to do significant work. I intend my account of structuring ends to be compatible with a variety of substantive theories of the good, so I seek to the extent this is possible to remain agnostic among them. For examples of substantive theories which purport to organize the various objective goods, see Thomas Hurka (1993), David Brink (2003), and Richard Kraut (2007). I would conjecture that only rational individuals can have structuring ends, however, and further that the values rational individuals realize in pursuit of them are systematically superior to the values (such as brute pleasure and freedom from pain) made possible by the capacity of sentience. Very briefly, this is because we routinely judge it rational to forgo brute pleasures for the sake of choiceworthy projects and relationships, and we equally routinely judge it irrational to sacrifice choiceworthy projects and relationships for the sake of brute pleasures. I would also reiterate that the question of which objectively good aims I should pursue is answered not only by appeal to the nature of the various goods but also by their suitability to my talents and social circumstances.

Though these considerations are agent-relative, they are external to my volitional control in the sense that they are not the product of my other chosen or tacitly accepted ends.

4. The Scrabble Argument

I can now present my argument that the well-being of persons is significantly aim-constituted; I call it the “Scrabble argument”. It begins by noting that while an end’s choiceworthiness for a person entails she has reason to adopt it,²⁸ unless she does adopt the end, its choiceworthiness does not entail she should treat it as valuable when she acts. To illustrate this, consider an avid Scrabble player who aims to achieve expertise in the game. That this expertise consists largely in mental skills with wide application – such as extensive vocabulary, facility recalling information from memory, and quickness in the performance of arithmetic – entails that this end is choiceworthy for almost any English speaker. But having the end of improving one’s memory or arithmetic is not the same as having the end of Scrabble expertise; there are aspects of Scrabble expertise that are not so utile. Barring extremely unusual circumstances, only someone who adopts the end of having Scrabble expertise has reason to know every English word containing a “Q” but no “U”, for example, or to know that “internet” is not found on the official word list used at North American Scrabble clubs and tournaments. Life is short, and so most English-speakers reasonably refrain from adopting the end of having Scrabble expertise and thus have no reason to treat this arcane knowledge as valuable when they act.²⁹

²⁸ The claim I have reason to adopt this end does not entail I should consider adopting it; that issue concerns not only the choiceworthiness of the end but also the opportunity cost of deliberation.

²⁹ Everyone may have an extremely weak reason to treat this arcane knowledge as valuable; the crucial point is that the Scrabble player has a much stronger reason to value this knowledge.

Similarly, if I had chosen a career as an entomologist, then I would have had reason to structure my deliberations about action by treating arcane insect knowledge as valuable, but since I did not choose this career I do not have reason to treat this arcane knowledge as valuable. This is true, moreover, even if entomology is a choiceworthy occupation for me, and indeed even if it is more choiceworthy for me than my actually chosen occupation. I have reason to adopt entomology, if it is choiceworthy for me, but I do not have reason to treat it as valuable in action absent its adoption.

The Scrabble argument infers from these observations that I am rational to treat my actual aims, such as being a philosophy professor and Scrabble player, as valuable in action, and to refrain from treating other choiceworthy candidate aims, such as being a politician or chess player, as valuable in action. One might object to this claim about why I am rational to attend to my actual aims by appealing to the putative fact that being a philosophy professor is more valuable for me than being a politician or that being a Scrabble player is more valuable for me than being a chess player. Even if true, however, these claims play no role in explaining what I have reason to do, when I deliberate among candidate actions. To see why, suppose I come to suspect I should change my career or hobby. This entails that I have reason to deliberate about a possible change of career or hobby, but it does not entail that my actual aims no longer provide me with reasons for action. It may be rational for me to decide not to deliberate about these matters, or to postpone deliberation. If so, then it is rational for me to continue to treat my actual career and hobby as generating reasons for action – assuming these aims are valuable for me to pursue, even if not necessarily the *most* valuable – just as I did before I came to suspect a change might be in order.

Or suppose I realize I have greater aptitude as a politician than as a philosophy professor, or that I live in a society that values politics more highly than philosophy.³⁰ Even then my actual aims determine what I have reason to do, when I deliberate among actions, provided they are sufficiently valuable. To explain this we need to look beyond these aims' choiceworthiness and advert to a fact about how I exercise my rational agency. To explain why it is rational for me to try to succeed as a philosophy professor, but not to try to succeed as a politician, I must appeal to the facts that I aim to succeed as a philosophy professor and that I do not aim to succeed as a politician.

These considerations show that the reasons I have for performing this or that action are sensitive to the aims I have adopted. They do not yet show, however, that my adoption and pursuit of these aims constitutes my well-being, that this exercise of my rational capacities helps sustain the value of my projects and relationships. The Scrabble argument suggests that this further conclusion is supported by observing that some aims are finally valuable just in case they have been adopted, and then inferring that the best explanation of this is that the final value of these aims is sustained by their adoption.

One might think against this that general features of human agency completely explain the rationality of treating only actually adopted aims as valuable in action. We humans are finite, and so we cannot entertain every consideration that bears on what we should do; nor can we pursue all the aims that are worthwhile for us to pursue. We must organize the exercise of our agency by adopting aims, and we must order our pursuit of these aims temporally and hierarchically. One might think candidate aims have whatever

³⁰ In these circumstances it might be rational for me to abandon my aim of being a philosopher, of course, and adopt the aim of being a politician; but that is a different claim.

value they have, and that it is only because of my human finitude that when I act I am rational to treat some candidate aims as valuable (the choiceworthy ones I have actually adopted) but not others (those I have not adopted or are not choiceworthy).³¹

But this is not right. To see why, we should focus not on features of our aims that make them worthy of choice, but instead on their idiosyncratic features that do not contribute to their choiceworthiness. If the value for me of pursuing Scrabble expertise is exhausted by whatever value this hobby has independent of my adoption of it, then all I should value about it are the features that make it choiceworthy, such as that it enables me to develop and exercise my cognitive capacities. In particular, I should not treat idiosyncrasies of Scrabble as helping constitute the hobby's value. This should in turn give me reason to regret that pursuing Scrabble leads me to develop and exercise my cognitive capacities in ways that are peculiar to Scrabble. Under this hypothesis, I should regard peculiarities of the pursuit of Scrabble as impurities or inefficiencies of the hobby as a project that develops and exercises cognitive capacities.

But this need not be the case. For the enthusiast, the game's idiosyncrasies are, in the context of deliberations about what to do, on a par with the features that make it choiceworthy; *and this does not appear, on reflection, to be a mistake*. The pursuit of Scrabble thus mediates between the enthusiast's actions and the more general values like having a hobby and exercising cognitive capacities that make Scrabble choiceworthy for her. If the activity of Scrabble-playing consisted entirely in deploying arcane knowledge, then Scrabble would be a relatively unchoiceworthy aim. But since Scrabble expertise is, we may stipulate, a choiceworthy aim for the enthusiast, the peculiar Scrabble-reasons

³¹ For more on the organization of aims, see Part III of Rawls (1971) and Michael Bratman (2007).

have no second-class status. There is nothing to be regretted in valuing success in the idiosyncratic features of our choiceworthy aims.

I propose that the best explanation of this is that Scrabble and other choiceworthy aims can have a distinct mode of value that is sustained by their adoption. Scrabble is choiceworthy – there is reason for me to adopt it – because it constitutes the exercise of cognitive capacities and is a means to the improvement of these capacities. Once I adopt Scrabble as a hobby, however, it can also be rational for me to treat success in Scrabble as valuable for its own sake. That is why success in Scrabble’s idiosyncratic features is valuable for me. It is thus rational for enthusiasts to treat playing the game as valuable for its own sake, but it is not rational for others to treat this aim as valuable in that way. Since the only relevant point of difference these two groups of people is that the former have adopted the aim and the latter have not, the best explanation of these facts is that the adoption of an aim can sustain a value – its final value – it would not otherwise have.

Thus far I have used a hobby to illustrate the claim that aims’ final value can be sustained by the exercise of rational capacities. If the preceding considerations motivate the claim that the exercise of rational capacities can sustain the final value of hobbies, however, then they also motivate the claim that the exercise of rational capacities can sustain the final value of other projects. Arcane insect knowledge is finally valuable for the entomologist, not for others. The claim also applies to interpersonal relationships. It is rational to value actual friendships and romantic relationships for their own sake; it is a gross error to value a friendship only as a means to happiness or as constituting a way of having *a* friend. My suggestion is that these facts are explained by the hypothesis that the adoption of the relationship as an aim helps sustain its final value.

To summarize the Scrabble argument: I have proposed that the hypothesis that the exercise of rational capacities can help sustain the final value of aims is the best explanation of the conjunction of (i) the fact that it is rational in action to treat actually adopted choiceworthy aims, but not non-adopted choiceworthy candidate aims, as valuable and (ii) the fact that it is rational to treat idiosyncratic features of choiceworthy aims as valuable even when these features do not contribute to their choiceworthiness. This is the sense in which I claim, despite my commitment to a substantive account of human well-being, that well-being is aim-constituted.

5. Desiderata for a Theory of Well-Being

In the last section I presented a novel argument for the claim that the well-being for persons is significantly aim-constituted; but since I maintain (with Raz and Scanlon) that the substantive choiceworthiness of aims is a condition of their value, this view is much less radical than some agent-constituted theories. The notion of choiceworthiness is indispensable in part because some important constituents of our well-being are *not* constituted by the exercise of our rational capacities. It is good for a person to be healthy and free from pain, for example, and not only because health and painlessness typically conduce to the achievement of his aims. These things are also good for him because he is sentient, and would continue to be good for him were he through massive brain damage to lose his rational capacities. These considerations are not produced by his actual aims, desires, or preferences, and yet they bear on which aims he should adopt. In addition, his deliberations among candidate aims – such as whether to accept a worse career to have more time with friends and family – should turn not only on how compatible these aims

are with each other and with his other aims, but also on how valuable careers are both for humans in general and for those with his specific talents and social circumstances.

It is helpful to think of aim-constituted and substantive good approaches to the theory of well-being as each identifying a set of desiderata that a satisfactory account of the good for persons must satisfy. The aim-constituted approach provides “bottom-up” desiderata: we have to account for how our actual aims help constitute what is good for us. The substantive good approach provides a set of “top-down” desiderata: we have to account for how general features like rationality, humanity, and sentience help constitute what is good for us, and in particular we have to account for how these general features affect which aims we should adopt. I now pause to state these desiderata:

A Person’s Good Is Aim-Constituted

1. So long as her aims are choiceworthy, a person’s good is partly constituted by the fulfillment of those aims she actually adopts: my good, for example, consists in part in success as a philosophy professor and as a Scrabble player.
2. Since what a person’s good consists in turns in part on the aims he adopts, what it consists in is contingent: my good would have consisted in part in success as a politician and chess player, had I adopted those aims instead.
3. Since what a person’s good consists in turns in part on the aims she adopts, what it consists in is agent-relative: my good is differently constituted from that of a person who aims to succeed as a politician and chess player.
4. Since a person’s aims often concern matters spatially and/or temporally distant from him, a person’s good can be dependent on spatially and temporally distant events: my good depends in part on my impact on other philosophers, including some whom I will never meet.³²

³² I believe this entails that posthumous events can be good or bad for a person in the same way as other events; here I follow Thomas Nagel (1970) and George Pitcher (1984). This position may appear too controversial to be entailed by desiderata on a theory of well-being. In my view it is strongly supported, however, by two claims that are difficult to deny with plausibility: (i) that a person’s well-being is partly constituted by success in his aims, and (ii) that it is rational to value awareness of success because it is rational to value the fact of success, not the other way around. These claims support the possibility of harmful or beneficial posthumous events because aims’

5. Since a person's aims often concern matters outside his subjective experiences, what his good consists in is significantly independent of these experiences: if I aim to publish a book then my good depends on the outcome of deliberations at academic publishers, for example, even before I learn of these outcomes.

6. The choiceworthiness of a person's candidate aims is determined in part by her other aims: that I am a philosophy professor counts in favor of adopting Scrabble as a hobby, for example, since some skills that help constitute Scrabble expertise also contribute to success as a philosophy professor.

A Person's Good Is Substantive

7. A person's good is in part constituted by facts apart from her aims, desires, and preferences: health and freedom from pain, for example, are constituents of a person's good independent of the fact that they conduce to the achievement of her aims and even though she may not aim to achieve them.

8. Since the fact that a person has an aim, desire, or preference fails to entail that fulfillment of that aim, desire, or preference would be (pro tanto) good for him, all of a person's aims are subject to critical evaluation: both the adoption of ends and the continued treatment of ends as valuable are reasons-responsive.

9. The reasons relevant to a person's critical evaluation of his aims are in part independent of his aims, desires, and preferences: if my papers are persistently rejected at journals and conferences, for example, then I should reconsider my career choice regardless of how much I want to be a philosophy professor.

10. Comparative judgments about a person's overall good can be significant to her deliberations about which aims to adopt; my decision to pursue philosophy instead of politics, for example, can be informed by consideration of how well my life would go given each choice.

11. Success in the achievement of a person's actual aims is good for him only if his aim is choiceworthy: if I campaign to deny Virginians eligibility for the U.S. Presidency, for example, the mere fact I have adopted this aim does not suffice to make its pursuit or achievement good for me.

12. The choiceworthiness of a person's aims depends on general facts like her humanity, rationality, and sentience: the fact that being a philosophy professor exercises cognitive faculties counts in favor of this aim, for example, while the fact that it involves working in isolation from other people counts against it.

contents can extend beyond the duration of an agent's life; an aim to publish a book or to provide for children, for example, need not be premised on being achieved while the agent is alive.

In the remainder of the essay I attempt to show how a theory of well-being can satisfy these twelve claims without a sacrifice in coherence or systematicity.

6. A Taxonomy of Ends

In order to explain how these twelve claims can be mutually satisfied, I introduce a notion that has received insufficient attention in the philosophical literature. I call it the notion of a “structuring end”. Clarifying what these ends are is an essential preliminary to the account of well-being I propose, since the existence and importance of structuring ends entails that the well-being of persons is both aim-constituted and substantive.

A standard taxonomy of ends distinguishes final ends, instrumental ends (or means), and constitutive ends.³³ Final ends are those things that we treat as valuable for their own sake; they do not require, in other words, any further explanation of why we treat them as valuable. Happiness is typically regarded as a final end, since it is obscure what further account one could give of happiness that would explain its value. Other putatively paradigmatic final ends include pleasure, virtue, knowledge, health, beauty, self-respect, and recognition of one’s merit by others. More specific things can also be final ends: a project or interpersonal relationship, for example, can be valued for its own sake. Having a final end is a two-place relation between an agent and the final end.

Instrumental ends are treated as valuable because they enable the achievement of another end. Having an instrumental end is thus a two-place relation that is grounded in a further three-place relation among an agent, the instrumental end, and the end to which it

³³ In explicating the standard taxonomy of ends, I draw on Chapter 16 of Terence Irwin (1988), Scott MacDonald (1991, 1999), David Schmitz (1994, 1995), and Henry Richardson (1997).

is a means. This further end may itself be a final end, an instrumental end, or (to use a notion that will be explicated in the following paragraph) a constitutive end. Money and power are paradigmatically instrumental in value, for while they enable us to achieve all sorts of other goods, it is typically regarded a mistake to treat them as valuable for their own sake.³⁴

Perhaps less familiar are constitutive ends. A constitutive end is treated as valuable because it constitutes another end or (equivalently) because it is what some other end consists in. I may value running because it constitutes exercise, for example, without valuing running as such; if there is nothing about running in particular that appeals to me, then another form of exercise would do as well.³⁵ Similarly, I may value the continued functioning of my brain because it constitutes my continued existence as a person without valuing the continued functioning of my brain as such. In these examples it is likely that the constituted end could be constituted in other ways: running is not the only way to get exercise, and it is at least doubtful that the continued functioning of my brain is necessary for my continued existence as a person, since it may be possible for my mental states to be otherwise supported.³⁶ There are also ends that must be constituted in a particular way: it may be the case, for example, that being embodied is the only way to be sentient.³⁷ If so, then if I value my sentience I should also value my embodiment as helping constitute my sentience. In these cases having a constitutive end, like having an

³⁴ All-purpose means like money and power are not counterexamples to the claim that the two-place relation of having an instrumental end is grounded in a further three-place relation. It may be rational to value these things instrumentally without knowing which final ends they can or will be used to realize.

³⁵ I take this example from Schmitz (1994).

³⁶ Bernard Williams and Thomas Nagel, however, both deny that this is possible. See Chapters 1, 2, 4, and 5 of Williams (1973), and see Nagel (1986), 37-43.

³⁷ For a defense of this view, see Nagel (1998).

instrumental end, is a two-place relation that is grounded in a further three-place relation among an agent, the constitutive end, and the end it constitutes; and as with instrumental ends, the constituted end may be final, instrumental, or constitutive.

The same end can be instrumental with respect to one end and constitutive with respect to another. I value running, for example, because it constitutes exercise *and* because it enables me to experience the pleasure of an endorphin rush. Similarly, the same end can be both final and instrumental: I value knowledge and self-respect for their own sake and because they help me realize other things of value. In addition, the same end can be both final and constitutive: I value being honest both for its own sake and because it helps constitute good character. Nor is there any bar to an end being at once final, instrumental, and constitutive: I value being a poker player as an undertaking that is valuable for its own sake, as a means to acquiring more money, and also as constituting a worthwhile hobby.

It is worth reiterating that these categories pick out *relations* between agents and ends, not intrinsic features of ends themselves. Accordingly, they are best thought of as different ways an agent might treat something as valuable: he might treat it as valuable in itself, he might value it as a means to something else, or he might value it as constituting something else.

7. Structuring Ends

I can now introduce structuring ends, which are a species of constitutive end. In particular, *a structuring end is an end whose achievement can constitute the achievement of an agent's actually valuable final end, but which can succeed in doing so only if the*

*agent also treats it as valuable for its own sake.*³⁸ As I indicated earlier, the thesis of this essay is that structuring ends are hugely significant to the theory of human well-being and that the deployment of structuring ends enables a theory to capture the virtues of both aim-constituted and substantive theories of well-being. In particular, I contend that the deployment of structuring ends enables a systematic account of well-being which entails claims 1 through 12 from Section 5 above.

I now try to explain how structuring ends can do this. Paradigm structuring ends are, unsurprisingly, just those things aim-constituted theorists of well-being often focus on: careers, hobbies, and relationships with friends and intimates. Consider first career choice. Having a career is an actually valuable final end which, if one has it, stands in need of constitution: one cannot have a career except by having a career as a professor, politician, doctor, attorney, or something else. In order to achieve the value of having a career, a person must treat some particular career as constitutive of her career. This is analogous to the claim that in order to achieve the value of exercise, a person must treat some particular form of exercise as constitutive of her exercise. With exercise, however, this may be the end of the story: once we have explained the constitution relationship between the running and the exercise, there may be nothing left to explain about how the person treats her running as valuable. In particular, she need not treat running as valuable for its own sake in order to achieve the value it has as constituting exercise. When it comes to careers, however, matters are different. It is true that I value being a philosophy

³⁸ The use to which I put structuring ends was inspired by Schmitz's notion of a "maieutic end"; see Schmitz (1994). In Section 8 below I explain my departures from his approach, including in particular why I believe that structuring ends capture the phenomena he theorizes better than his own notion of a maieutic end.

professor as constitutive of the value of having a career. But I contend that achieving the value of being a philosophy professor constitutes achieving the final value of having a career only if I also treat being a philosophy professor as valuable for its own sake. If the only way I treat being a philosophy professor as valuable is by treating it as constitutive of having a career – any career would do just as well, much as any form of exercise might be as good as running – then I am unable to achieve the final value of having a career.

This claim is easily misunderstood. It is of course possible for a person to have a career that is in many ways successful even if she does not treat her particular career as valuable for its own sake. Consider, for example, a defense attorney who chose her line of work solely because of the salary she could earn. The aim of getting money might lead her to the top of her profession, and so in one important sense she has had a career, and a successful one at that, since it has been an effective means to her aim of acquiring money. But there is another important value associated with having a career – the *final* value of having a career – and I claim she has not achieved that. Similarly, consider a defense attorney who chose her line of work solely because she wanted to have a career, but despite reaching the top of her profession never treated being a defense attorney *as such* as valuable, as opposed to any other career she might have pursued. Here too I suggest there is a value associated with having a career, the final value of having a career, which she does not realize; and my diagnosis is that the achievement of an actual career can constitute the final value of having a career only if the person who pursues it also treats it as valuable for its own sake. To achieve the final value of having a career, I must structure my end of having a career by treating a specific career as both constitutive of my career and as valuable for its own sake.

The claim is perhaps clearer in the case of interpersonal relationships. The end of having a friend also needs to be structured. It clearly needs to be constituted: it is only by having a specific friendship that I can achieve the value of having a friend. But if I treat this friendship as merely instrumentally valuable, as a means to my happiness (or to my candidate friend's happiness), or if I treat it as merely constitutively valuable, as a way of having *a* friend (or as a way of being *a* friend), then I do not succeed in having (or being) a friend. It is only if I also treat the friendship as valuable for its own sake that I can constitute the final value of having a friend. The case of romantic relationships is yet clearer on this point; something significant is missing if a person treats his relationship with his spouse or lover as constituting a romantic relationship but not as valuable for its own sake.³⁹

8. “Structuring” Instrumental Ends and Maieutic Ends

In Sections 9 and 10 below I more fully develop the structuring ends model of human well-being. Before I do so, however, I first consider David Schmitz's important rival account of the phenomena the model is intended to capture. I begin by observing that I have stipulated that structuring ends are a species of constitutive end. Why focus on this case, one might wonder, instead of the case of “structuring” instrumental ends? There can be means, after all, which are effective only when the agent who uses them values them also for their own sake. An example of this is found in the methodology of

³⁹ Structuring ends thus provide resources to help explain the so-called “paradox of happiness”, which observes that happiness can typically be achieved only by aiming at other values, rather than by aiming directly to achieve happiness itself. I am grateful to a reviewer for *Philosophia* for calling my attention to this application of the idea of structuring ends.

Alcoholics Anonymous, in which people are encouraged to value a higher power who disapproves of drinking; this attitude presumably forestalls weak-willed drinking for some people more effectively than mere awareness of the instrumental disvalue of weak-willed drinking. A similar example is the activity of a person who values a diet for its own sake, akin to a life-defining project, rather than merely for its instrumental value in promoting health.

As these examples show, however, one could value these means properly without also valuing them for their own sake. In the examples a psychological defect – inability to heed the value of the means without valuing it for its own sake – underlies the need to value the means for their own sake. Another important case also works this way: persons who value religious or cultural practices for their own sake because they would otherwise be unable to keep themselves from wronging others.⁴⁰

The activity of these persons is thus not paradigmatically rational, but is rather a borderline case of rationality. If we stipulate the relevant psychological defect, then these persons may be as rational as they can be. But people are often capable of more than they think: it is difficult to articulate a case where a person could not conform to a policy of sobriety, dieting, or permissible action, without valuing this policy for its own sake, if faced with immediate death for violating it.⁴¹ Valuing an end as a “structuring” means also appears to involve delusion or self-deception, since the attribution of final value to a higher power or dietary lifestyle is undermined when one reflects on the fact that only its instrumental value underlies the rationality of valuing it. These cases are complicated

⁴⁰ I do not suggest that this is the typical reason for participating in religious and cultural practices; those reasons are numerous and various.

⁴¹ Kant famously makes the moral analog to this observation in Kant (1788).

further by the fact that valuing a higher power, dietary lifestyle, or cultural practice may be rational as a structuring constitutive end, and so people who value these ends for their own sake may be rational on grounds independent from their instrumental value.

Even if it can be rational to have “structuring” instrumental ends, then, it is a mistake to assimilate paradigm cases of rationality – such as valuing one’s relationship with a friend for its own sake to achieve the value of friendship, or valuing entomology for its own sake to achieve the value of a career – to cases of borderline rationality, such as valuing a higher power for its own sake solely to achieve the instrumental value of sobriety or valuing a lifestyle for its own sake to achieve the instrumental value of a diet. We are not all alcoholics; valuing choiceworthy aims is typically not like that.

Schmidtz presents an ingenious proposal which addresses this problem with the position that valuing choiceworthy aims for their own sake is ultimately vindicated by their instrumental value.⁴² He introduces a new variety of end, which he calls a “maieutic end”; a maieutic end requires, as instrumental to its achievement, that an agent value another end for its own sake. Maieutic ends are introduced to explain how it is possible to deliberate rationally among candidate final ends: Schmidtz contends that we do this by considering how well these candidates achieve our maieutic ends. These maieutic ends are not identical, however, with ends that call for “structuring” instrumental ends. To avoid the problematical rationality of “structuring” instrumental ends, Schmidtz contends that maieutic ends typically go out of existence when they are achieved; he characterizes them as “midwives” to our final ends. On his account the instrumental value of achieving maieutic ends justifies valuing other things for their own sake, but once a maieutic end is

⁴² See Schmidtz (1994, 1995).

achieved it recedes from the scene. After that point the newly adopted final end is no longer pursued as a means to the achievement of the maieutic end, and Schmitz claims we can then rationally continue to value it for its own sake, unless of course subsequent countervailing considerations call for its revision. His paradigm examples of maieutic ends include having a meaningful life, having a marriage, and having a career.⁴³

I owe a debt to Schmitz for his account of maieutic ends; the structuring ends model is in part inspired by it. Thus although I do not have space here to provide a full discussion of his view, I want briefly to explain why I believe the structuring ends model is superior to it. First, it is unclear why some paradigm maieutic ends – such as having a meaningful life, or having a marriage – should disappear once they are achieved. I would think against this that I continue to have the end of having a meaningful life after I adopt valuable projects, and that I continue to have the end of having a marriage after I adopt the end of having a particular marriage with a specific person. These more remote ends help sustain the value of more specific ends, in my view, and they make intelligible continuing to treat my more specific ends as finally valuable; if the rationality of valuing these specific ends finally is called into question, I can appeal to the value I continue to see in having a meaningful life or having a marriage.

Second, it is not clear that Schmitz's account escapes all the problems with "structuring" instrumental ends that were articulated earlier in this section. It is unclear, that is, whether the adoption of final ends is ever fully rationalized by their instrumental value, even if these final ends are ushered in by maieutic ends. The difficulty is to explain what makes a newly adopted final end normative, once the maieutic end it helps

⁴³ See Schmitz (1994).

achieve has receded. Where the structuring ends model continues to appeal to the more remote final end which a specific final end structures, Schmidtz's model can appeal only to the more specific end itself, which is not claimed to be finally valuable independent of its adoption. This leaves less room in his account to deploy substantive general claims about well-being to guide the adoption and revision of aims, and so it leaves his account more vulnerable to the charge that the adoption of finally valuable aims is either magical or excessively deflationary.

9. To-Be-Structured Ends

In place of maieutic ends, the structuring ends model holds that final ends like having a career and having a friendship are *to-be-structured* ends; and the existence and importance of to-be-structured final ends is entailed by the existence and importance of structuring ends like being a professor and being someone's friend. A to-be-structured final end is a thing that we (veridically) treat as valuable for its own sake but which must be constituted by something else that we also treat as valuable for its own sake. There is a sense in which treating a to-be-structured end as valuable *demands* or *calls for* treating another end as valuable for its own sake, since it is only by doing so that we can achieve the final value of the to-be-structured end. Many categories that would make it onto an objective list of human goods, I maintain, are to-be-structured final ends.⁴⁴

These to-be-structured ends admit of a nesting structure in much the same way as instrumental ends. I aim to succeed as a philosophy professor as a means to acquiring

⁴⁴ Health and freedom from pain are noteworthy exceptions; and it is no coincidence that these are constituents of our good by virtue of our sentience, and not by virtue of our rationality.

money, which is in turn a means to buying food, which is a means to eating, which is a means to pleasure and health; analogously, I aim to succeed as a philosophy professor as a structuring end for the end of having a career, which is in turn a structuring end for having stimulating projects, which is a structuring end for having a good life. Indeed, I suggest that the end of having a good life is a to-be-structured final end encompassing all the constituents of a person's well-being.⁴⁵

This notion of an end that is all-encompassing with respect to one's well-being is remindful of Aristotle's notion of eudaimonia.⁴⁶ Aristotle claimed that the well-being of all human persons has the same constituents, however, and I deny this. On Aristotle's account, it is a necessary fact that the good of all human beings consists in the virtues. Thrasymachus's good consists in the traditional Athenian virtues, according to Aristotle,

⁴⁵ Note that Schmitz makes the analogous claim with respect to his notion of maieutic ends; see Schmitz (1994).

⁴⁶ The term "eudaimonia", widely used in ancient Greek philosophy, has been variously translated as "flourishing", "well-being", and "happiness". Aristotle offers a famous analysis of it in Book I of the *Nicomachean Ethics*; see Aristotle (c.350 B.C.E.). It is worth briefly comparing my claims about the role of the to-be-structured final end of having a good life with Aristotle's claims about the role of eudaimonia. Although the term "structuring ends" is novel, the concept I deploy is not original. It is used by commentators on the *Ethics* who try to reconcile two features of Aristotle's ethical system which appear to stand in tension with one another: his claims that the virtues are to be valued for their own sake and that the virtues jointly constitute eudaimonia. For discussion see, for example, David Wiggins (1980). The problem is not difficult to articulate. If the virtues are valuable in themselves, why posit the notion of eudaimonia? The final value of the virtues should be a complete account of the rationality of pursuing them. And conversely: if the virtues jointly constitute eudaimonia, why do we need to value them for their own sake? It is not clear how this could supplement the fact that they constitute eudaimonia, which is the highest achievable human good. (Aristotle stipulates this; the rider "achievable" is needed to distinguish eudaimonia from the state of godlike contemplation articulated in Book X.) One solution is to claim that the virtues structure the end of eudaimonia; their achievement jointly constitutes the value of eudaimonia, that is, but only if they are valued for their own sake. I depart from Aristotle as standardly interpreted today, however, by denying there is a single value encompassing all the reasons to which I am responsible. My well-being, important though it is to what I should do, is not the only value that provides me with reasons for action. There are other sentient creatures, after all, and their status affects what I should do. I should note finally that the interpretation of Aristotle as an egoist is not uncontroversial. For a prominent example of the standard interpretation see Irwin (1988), and for an important dissent see Kraut (1989), especially Chapter Two.

even though he denies that these virtues are good for him.⁴⁷ If he attempts to constitute his good differently, he will inevitably fail.

On the account I advocate here, the to-be-structured end of having a good life admits of more latitude than this. On this account, persons have considerable freedom to constitute their own well-being. Assuming that they are both sufficiently choiceworthy for me, I can choose whether to be a philosophy professor or a politician; depending on which I choose, my to-be-structured end of having a career will generate very different sorts of reasons. One career may be more choiceworthy than the other, but once I make a choice that fact is no longer significant with respect to the reasons I am responsible to in action, except insofar as I revisit my choice. If I choose to be a philosophy professor, regardless of whether it was more or less choiceworthy for me than being a politician, then as a student it is good for me to adopt the subsidiary aims of procuring applications to graduate schools, taking the GREs, and so forth; if I choose to be a politician, then regardless of whether it was more or less choiceworthy for me than being a philosophy professor, then as a student it is good for me to do different things, such as investigating internships on Capitol Hill and applying to law school.⁴⁸

The same is true of more general to-be-structured ends. Choices about whether to sacrifice a career for the sake of raising children (or vice versa) for example, concern the structuring of our most basic ends, such as having stimulating projects and having a good life. Barring unusual circumstances, it is not necessary for a person to have a career

⁴⁷ In Plato's *Republic* Thrasymachus contends that justice consists merely in the advantage of the strong over the weak. As a consequence, he maintains that having the virtue of justice is not good for the weak. See Book I of Plato (c.360 B.C.E.).

⁴⁸ By speaking here of my "choosing" I do not imply that in general we structure our ends through conscious choice. But the end of having a career is likely to be structured in this way.

or to have children in order to have a good life. But it is necessary for a person to have aims of a similar scope and complexity, and at least some of these aims must be valuable for their own sake.⁴⁹

The self-regarding reasons that ought to be in play during deliberation thus vary, on the structuring ends model, depending on the level of generality of ends about which a person is reflecting. A person should treat the issue of how to structure high-level ends (*Career or children?*) as closed for the purpose of lower-level deliberation (*Professor or politician?*); this involves bracketing some reasons relevant to the higher-level question for the duration of the lower-level deliberation. But this is not constraining, for we can and should shift the generality of ends we deliberate about with frequency; indeed, it can happen that while engaged in lower-level deliberation (*School X or School Y for graduate school?*) I encounter considerations (*On reflection, neither sounds that attractive.*) that lead me rationally to move to a higher-level deliberation (*Is graduate school really the right option?*).⁵⁰ None of these observations threatens the view that insofar as I deliberate about how to structure or pursue a lower-level structuring end, I should bracket whether it is better for me to value that particular structuring end as opposed to a different candidate structuring end.⁵¹

⁴⁹ It is worth reiterating that other-regarding reasons and reasons not based on well-being are also relevant in making these choices; but the claim in the text is not threatened by this observation.

⁵⁰ My discussion here follows Richardson's account of an end's "place" within a hierarchy; see Richardson (2004) and Richardson (1997), especially Part Two. He places greater emphasis on reflective endorsement of ends than I do, but my framework is otherwise similar; in particular I endorse his characterization of proximate ends as "specifications" of remote ends. I propose that structuring ends explain how remote ends transfer normativity to proximate ends.

⁵¹ My use of structuring ends in the theory of human well-being dovetails, I believe, with Michael Bratman's deployment of "self-governing policies" in the theory of rational agency. See Bratman (1989, 2000a, 2000b). This is especially true of Bratman's view that self-governing policies arise as a response to underdetermination of value judgments; on that point, see Bratman (2003). That

The claim that we should bracket some reasons for and against higher-level ends while engaged in lower-level deliberations is not to be confused with the stronger claim that some commitments cannot or should not be subject to critical evaluation. This stronger claim is motivated by the worry that critical evaluation of ends is impossible unless anchored by values that are regarded as beyond criticism.⁵² This is no part of the structuring ends model, however, since the adoption of an end is treated as closed only in the context of a lower-level deliberation. It is always possible to ratchet deliberations up in generality, to subject ever-higher ends to critical scrutiny. Indeed, it is a plausible requirement of rationality that we do this at least occasionally.⁵³ So far from denying this requirement, the structuring ends model endorses it; moreover, it provides a plausible error theory – namely, the rationality of bracketing higher-order considerations for the duration of lower-level deliberations – for those who deny the need for the critical evaluation of some ends. The structuring of a person’s well-being is an ongoing and dynamic process, not an effort to permanently anchor her deliberations.

Thus when a person has adopted aims that are choiceworthy but significantly suboptimal, she faces a tension between revisiting her choices and thereby reintroducing into her deliberations the relative choiceworthiness of candidate aims and leaving these

our good is significantly constituted by to-be-structured ends, and hence by structuring ends, helps to explain why we need the sorts of agential structures that Bratman postulates. A few caveats to the synergy I see between Bratman’s account of agency and this essay’s account of well-being: Bratman claims that self-governing policies do not affect what is valuable, while the structuring ends model asserts that the final value of choiceworthy aims can be sustained by their adoption; Bratman emphasizes the agent’s reflective value judgments, while I emphasize the adoption of aims by whatever mechanisms; and Bratman typically does not distinguish between self-governing policies that are justified instrumentally and those that are justified constitutively.

⁵² For two examples of views that endorse the “anchoring” of agency – each very different from the other – see Charles Taylor (1989) and Harry Frankfurt (1999).

⁵³ In addition, it is almost certainly a requirement of rationality that we limit our selection and pursuit of ends by the effect our choices will have on others.

considerations bracketed from her deliberations about what to do. I do not attempt here to explain in general how such tensions are to be resolved, but I regard it as a virtue of the structuring ends model that it helps explain the nature of these tensions.

One particular high-level to-be-structured end – having a good life – admits of little in the way of critical appraisal. This is no weakness of the structuring ends model, however, since the fact that we should value this end is self-evident; in my view, we achieve adequate critical distance on this end simply by reflecting on it. And this self-evidently valuable end suffices, via a nested system of structuring ends together with general facts about our rationality, humanity, and sentience, and specific facts about our talents, abilities, and social circumstances, to produce the entire range of self-regarding reasons to which persons are responsible. Nothing more is needed to rationalize these complex structures of valuing.

The structuring ends model thus simultaneously licenses treating our contingent commitments as reason-providing and recommends maintaining a healthy distance from these commitments. We are the sorts of things that need to constitute our well-being, and so it is rational for us to value our choiceworthy projects and relationships for their own sake. But this valuing is contingent and partly self-generated, and should not be treated as beyond revision or as God-given; on the contrary, we should frequently evaluate and occasionally revise these commitments. *That* we constitute our good is expressive of our nature as rational beings, but *what* we constitute our good as is deeply contingent.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ An important complication here is that, in the case of humans at least, this self-constitution of the good requires help from others; this is because it is constitutive of most of our choiceworthy aims that others cooperate with us in pursuing them.

10. Satisfying the Desiderata

The structuring ends model systematically vindicates the twelve desiderata of a theory of well-being that were laid out in Section 5. The first six desiderata encapsulate the virtues of aim-constituted approaches to well-being: they purport to explain why success in our aims is so significant to our well-being, as stated in claim 1, and they purport to explain the most important implications of claim 1, which are laid out in the next five claims. The structuring ends model achieves this by focusing attention on the role of to-be-structured ends within a general and substantive account of human well-being. We cannot provide a complete account of human well-being without positing to-be-structured ends like having a good life, engaging in stimulating projects, having a friend, and having a career; and since these to-be-structured ends demand that agents specify them by treating structuring ends as valuable for their own sake, human well-being is significantly aim-constituted.

But since structuring ends depend for their normative force on to-be-structured ends, aims themselves are not rock bottom in the theory of well-being.⁵⁵ The model entails instead that the normativity of aims must be explained by a more general and substantive account of well-being, thereby satisfying desiderata 7 through 12. Important as structuring ends are, they are not the only constituents of our well-being. When we deliberate among actions or among aims, we must be sensitive to the non-aim-constituted constituents of our well-being. Of particular note is claim 11, which asserts that aims are valuable once adopted only if also valuable independent their adoption. The structuring

⁵⁵ It is worth reiterating that this is not typically a conscious process, and that a person need not believe she has to-be-structured ends in order to successfully structure them.

ends model vindicates this desideratum, even though it entails that we can sustain the final value of some of our ends. It vindicates claim 11 because it holds that we can sustain this final value only insofar as our aims are choiceworthy. The conception of persons as magically generating value from nothing is rejected; all we can do is take one sort of value and generate another from it. We can accomplish this by exercising our rational capacities through the adoption of aims, which is to say that we accomplish it by engaging in choiceworthy projects and relationships. We accomplish this, in short, by getting a life.

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