

Subjectivism without Desire[†]

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For the purposes of this paper, subjectivism about well-being holds that ϕ is intrinsically good for x if and only if, and to the extent that, ϕ is *valued* by x . The natural contrast view, objectivism, holds that there are facts about any given person's well-being that are independent of that person's evaluative perspective. For subjectivism, unlike objectivism, a person's evaluative perspective *determines* that which is good for her, and how good it is for her.

Given this statement of the view, there is room for intramural dissent among subjectivists.¹ Importantly, much will hang on what counts as “valuing.” Though there has been some disagreement,² most hold that valuing is best characterized as—in some form or other—*desiring*. Call this view “desiderative subjectivism” (DS). Desiderative subjectivists about well-being will hold that ϕ is good for x if and only if and to the extent that x desires ϕ . Thus desiderative subjectivism yields one form of a classical desire-satisfaction theory of well-being.³ In this paper, I want to argue that sub-

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¹Intramural disputes I will not discuss here include whether, and to what extent, goods should be time-relativized; whether all goods are goods at a time, or whether x 's valuing of ϕ at t entails that ϕ is good for x *simpliciter*, in an absolute fashion. Other controversies in the formulation of subjectivism exist; I focus instead on the proper account of what it means “to value”.

²Cf. Wayne Sumner, *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

³Though not all desire-satisfaction theories of well-being will count as desiderative subjectivism. Some will hold that, as a matter independent of someone's evaluative perspective, ϕ is good for them, where ϕ is the state of affairs in which they desire ψ and ψ . This would not, given my taxonomy, be a subjectivist view. Other desiderative views exist, so it is helpful to distinguish between “desire-satisfaction” views, which have sub-

jectivists have erred in casting desire as that which determines prudential value. Instead, I argue that subjectivism is well-advised to replace the desire with *belief* or *judgment*.⁴ Instead of suggesting—very roughly—that ϕ is good for x to the extent that x desires ϕ , we should say—very roughly—that ϕ is good for x to the extent that x believes, or judges, that ϕ is good for x . For lack of a better moniker, call this view “judgment subjectivism” (JS).

A brief roadmap. In the first section, I argue that DS cannot adequately characterize a person’s evaluative perspective. In the second section, I present and refine a judgment-based alternative. Next, I argue that this alternative can avoid several structural problems that have plagued desiderative theories of well-being, including the so-called “paradox of desire”, and the problem of welfare-relevant desires. In sections four and five I consider two potential problems for JS, notably the suggestion that JS cannot adequately accommodate “existence internalism” about prudential value, and the claim that JS cannot give an adequate, i.e., non-circular, account of the contents of evaluative beliefs. Section six concludes.

One further point merits mention before I begin. I define subjectivism about welfare as holding that a person’s evaluative perspective fully determines a person’s well-being. Many views that call themselves subjectivist, however, will insist on a weaker relationship between values and the good, e.g., that the valuing of ϕ is necessary, but perhaps not sufficient, for ϕ ’s value, or that other facts about well-being or prudential value might be established in ways that are independent of an individual’s own subjective rank-ordering. For the sake of simplicity, I focus on the stronger view here. Nevertheless, I maintain that the merits of JS should be clear whether one’s subjectivism is strong or weak.

1. *Desire and Value*

In this paper, I do not seek to argue for subjectivism about well-being. However, in order to motivate an alternative to desiderative subjectivism, it is important to rehearse one of the primary advantages of subjectivism versus non-subjectivist alternatives. The spirit of subjectivism about well-being appears to be well captured by the claim that there is an important constitutive connection between that which is good for a person and that person’s evaluative perspective. Subjectivism is able to explain the seemingly plausi-

jective and objective incarnations, and “desiderative subjectivism” which encompasses all subjective incarnations of a desire-satisfaction view.

⁴For the purposes of this paper, I use “belief” and “judgment” interchangeably.

ble connection between what the person values for its own sake and what is *valuable for* the person for its own sake. As noted by Richard Arneson, subjectivism is characterized, and in part motivated, by the plausible thought that a person should be *sovereign* over her good—her evaluative perspective should *determine* her well-being.⁵ That subjectivism links a person’s well-being with that person’s values is a source of its intuitive strength. To say that ϕ is good for x even though x fails to value ϕ would be, in the words of Peter Railton, “intolerably alienating”. Furthermore, what could possibly be required to declare that ϕ is good for x beyond the fact that x genuinely values ϕ ?

But a serious question arises: what does it mean for x to genuinely value ϕ ? What, when characterizing a theory of well-being, should count as the authoritative evaluative perspective? The most natural candidate for a person’s evaluative perspective would appear to be the person’s *desires*. This view is reflected in classic desire-satisfaction theories of well-being, from Hobbes,⁶ to Sidgwick,⁷ Rawls,⁸ Brandt,⁹ and many others. However, that valuing is distinct from desiring appears to be approaching the status of philosophical dogma. Cleavage between value and desire is standardly motivated by appeal to addicts, obsessives, and various others that seem “alienated” from their desires.¹⁰ Consider the following argument from David Lewis:

[W]e’d better not say that valuing something is just the same as desiring it. That may do for some of us: those who manage, by strength of will or by good luck, to desire exactly as they desire to desire. But not all of us are so fortunate. The thoughtful addict may desire his euphoric daze, but not value it. Even apart from all the costs and risks, he may hate himself for desiring something he values not at all. It is a desire he wants very much to be rid

⁵Richard Arneson, “Human Flourishing versus Desire Satisfaction” in *Social Philosophy and Policy* 16 (1999), 116.

⁶Cf. *Leviathan*, Part I, chapter 11.

⁷Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 7th ed., 1981 [1907]), 111-15.

⁸John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971) §64.

⁹R. B. Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and the Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 132.

¹⁰See Harry Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person” in *The Importance of What We Care About* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 11-25.

of.¹¹

Examples of this type abound, and thus it seems quite plausible to say that desire is an inappropriate foundation for a genuine evaluative perspective. It would seem that we can desire any number of things without valuing them. Furthermore, it would seem that we can value any number of things without desiring them. Consider, for instance, Stan:

Stan: Stan is a successful lawyer practicing in Big City, who has an opportunity to move to Small Town, which is close to his family and friends. But, perhaps as a product of exhausting work at his law office, Stan simply lacks a desire for either option. When asked whether he desires to remain in Big City or move to Small Town, he replies that he has no real desires either way. When asked which option he wants, he replies, exhausted, numb: “I dunno. I guess I don’t really want either.”

Stan clearly lacks a desire to either remain in Small Town or Big City. But a desiderative characterization of valuing would seem to entail that Stan values neither option. But this inference is too quick. We know, of course, that Stan fails to desire either option. He has, after all, a serious case of “desiderative exhaustion”, or, in more common parlance, *burn-out*. But in such cases we do not ordinarily conclude that the subject in question fails to value merely because he is burnt-out.

If desire does not form the foundation of a person’s evaluative perspective, what does? Two possibilities come to mind. First, one might reject the claim that desiring *tout court* counts as valuing, but try to try to characterize the proper evaluative perspective in desiderative terms, viz., by constraining the desires that count as a person’s genuine evaluative perspective, or by giving some set of counterfactual conditions that must obtain such that an individual’s desires count as genuine evaluations. Second, one might try to characterize the proper evaluative perspective in non-desiderative terms. One obvious possibility is to claim that a person’s genuine evaluative perspective does not involve that person’s desiderative perspective, but rather the person’s evaluative judgments or beliefs.

If desiderative subjectivism is going to survive, valuing must be characterized in desiderative terms. One immediate thought that has attracted some desiderative subjectivists is not to construct a person’s evaluative perspective out of his bare or unfiltered desires, but rather to suggest that a

¹¹David Lewis, “Dispositional Theories of Value” in *Papers in Ethics and Social Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 70.

person's evaluative perspective should be understood as what that person *would* desire under certain counterfactual or idealized conditions. One popular option is an appeal to the condition of full information.¹² One might hold, then, that someone's genuine evaluative perspective is not what they actually desire, but what they might come to desire under conditions of full information, full experience, full imaginative acquaintance with all possibilities, etc.

This proposal, however, is not plausible. Indeed, it seems to say little about the case of Stan: there is no guarantee that with full information Stan will desire either option—whether he would surely depends on the depth of his burn-out. But we should not say that Stan's *values* depend on the depth of his burn-out. It seems right to suggest that Stan could value one of the options presented to him, whether or not he possesses full information, or whether or not he displays a case of “desiderative exhaustion”. But leaving aside Stan, this proposal also fails in the case of the drug addict. Assuming that his addiction is strong enough, there is no guarantee that his desire for a “euphoric daze” will fail to survive confrontation with full information. Yet it would be implausible to declare that, merely because this desire is the product of an extremely strong addiction, he values the daze.¹³

The classic response on behalf of a desiderative subjectivist is to reject the appeal to so-called “first-order” desires (whether fully-informed or not), and instead to claim that a genuine evaluative perspective is best captured by a person's “second-order” desires, or that which the person desires to desire. One might think that though the drug addict desires the drug's effects, he doesn't *desire to desire it*, and hence does not genuinely *value* the euphoric daze. Indeed, David Lewis addresses the matter in precisely this way:

He desires his high, but he does not desire to desire it, and in fact he desires not to desire it. He does not desire an unaltered, mundane state of consciousness, but he does desire to desire it. We conclude that he does not value what he desires, but rather

¹²This strategy is pursued by a number of desiderative theorists, in various incarnations, including Sidgwick, 111-15; Rawls, §64; Brandt, 132; Peter Railton, “Facts and Values” in *Facts, Values, and Norms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); David Lewis, “Dispositional Theories of Value” in *Essays in Ethics and Social Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹³Further problems with the full-information account are noted in Arneson, 126-135; Allen Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 18-22; David Velleman, “Brandt's Definition of ‘Good’” in *The Philosophica Review* 97 (1988).

he values what he desires to desire.¹⁴

A similar account is offered by Railton:

Let us say that one *embraces* a desire, or accepts it as *goal setting*, when one desires that it be effective in regulating one's life. This is not to say one desires that it be overriding; rather one desires that it influence the course of one's life—insofar as this is within one's power—in rough proportion to its strength. . . The proposal I would make, then, is the following: an individual's good consists in what he would want himself to want, or to pursue, were he to contemplate his present situation from a standpoint fully and vividly informed about himself and his circumstances, and entirely free of cognitive error and lapses of instrumental rationality.¹⁵

Of course, immediate problems arise. One is tempted to point out that there is no reason to believe that, e.g., Stan has any “second-order” desires, any more than he has any “first-order” desires when it comes to the choice between Small Town and Big City. After all, he is exhausted, burnt-out. It doesn't seem impossible, or even implausible, to describe his mental states as simply failing to want to want either such option. Again, whether he does would appear to depend on the depth of his burn-out.

Furthermore, as Lewis mentions, just as one can be alienated from one's first-order desires (as in the case of the drug addict), one can be alienated from one's second-order desires.¹⁶ For instance, assume that I desire to eat an ice cream cone, and furthermore desire to desire to eat it. But assume now that I fail to desire to desire to desire to eat the ice cream cone, and in fact have a third-order *aversion* to the ice cream cone. What principled reason could there be for selecting second-order desires as the proper evaluative perspective rather than, say, third-order desires, or some further order of desire?

I propose to leave these worries aside here. Let's assume they can be solved. There is a deeper problem for second-order desiderative accounts of valuing.¹⁷ Take the following case:

¹⁴Lewis, 70-71.

¹⁵Cf. “Facts and Values”, 54.

¹⁶Lewis, 71.

¹⁷The following argument is made in more detail in Dale Dorsey, “Preferences, Welfare, and the Status-Quo Bias” forthcoming in the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*.

Julie: Julie is stuck in a marriage to a man for whom she feels no love. She desperately desires to leave her marriage and begin anew. Unfortunately, given her financial circumstances and the fact that she and her husband care for two very young children who would be severely disadvantaged by a divorce, she is forced to remain married. However, because she is forced to remain married, she strongly *wants to want* to remain married. Indeed, she has made attempts, in the form of psychological therapy, to get herself to desire to remain with her husband, but to no avail.

Here it would appear that Julie desires to leave her marriage, but because of circumstances beyond her control, she cannot. Given that this is the case, Julie might, quite rationally (even from the standpoint of ideal circumstances), come to *desire to desire* to remain in her marriage. Indeed, were she able to alter her desires in this way, she would surely live a better life; less frustration, regret, acrimony, etc. But it is surely a mistake to say that Julie values her marriage. In fact, she appears to disvalue it in the extreme.

Furthermore, it is surely wrong to say that, merely because she desires to desire her marriage, her marriage is thereby *good* for her. If second-order desires are the proper account of valuing, it would thus appear that subjectivism is a poor theory of well-being: a person's values appear to lack any serious relevance to that which is good for her.

A further case is worth considering here:

Jack: Jack maintains the goal of being a great architect. He has worked his life to become one, has spent many years in training and apprenticeship, and yet has no talent whatever for architecture. Indeed, his pursuit of architecture has caused more harm than good; more-or-less constant feelings of failure, ruined relationships with friends and loved ones, etc. Jack desperately wants to be an architect. But he does not *want to want* to be an architect: Jack is sufficiently self-aware to realize that this desire causes him nothing but frustration and regret.

Jack does not desire to desire to be an architect. But it would be quite wrong to say that Jack does not *value* being an architect. In fact, he values it quite highly. Not only does he value being an architect, it would surely be churlish to declare, merely because he has no talent for it, that being an architect would not be good for him, were he able to achieve it. Second-order desires thus appear to poorly capture a genuine evaluative perspective, and hence

appear unable to plausibly constitute a subjectivist theory of prudential value. Jack may fail to value the *state* of desiring to be an architect. But he surely does value *being* an architect.

One response is worth considering. Desiderative theorists are at pains to suggest that a person's good is composed of that which he or she desires (or desire to desire) *for its own sake*. Railton writes: "Let us then say that an individual's *intrinsic* good consists in attainment of what he would in idealized circumstances want to want for its own sake. . . were he to assume the place of his actual self."¹⁸ I may desire ϕ , and indeed may desire to desire ϕ ; but I may do so, for instance, simply because a desire for ϕ is derived from a more fundamental desire for something else, ψ , to which ϕ is a means.

This point is important and should not be overlooked when considering DS or desiderative accounts of a person's genuine evaluative perspective. But it is insufficient to solve the case at hand. Indeed, it might be plausible to say, right now, that Julie *desires* the marriage as an instrument, i.e., as a means to assist in the raising of her children, as a means to her own financial security. But that which causes Julie the most pain is the fact that she is averse to the marriage *for its own sake*. So it would be rational for Julie, even from the standpoint of ideal circumstances, to want to want the marriage *for its own sake*: only in so doing could she avoid the frustration, regret, and acrimony that comes along with desiring her marriage only instrumentally or derivatively. Furthermore, these considerations appear to have little to offer in response to the case of Jack. Jack does not want to want to be an architect either for its own sake or as an instrument. Furthermore, it is plausible to say that it would not want to want it under any specifiable ideal conditions; after all, it is perfectly rational for him not to want to want to be an architect, given his lack of talent. But this does not mean he fails to value being an architect for its own sake, though he does *fail to desire to desire it for its own sake*.

There are perhaps additional desiderative accounts of a person's genuine evaluative perspective that might be considered. Given the serious problems noted so far, however, it seems best to consider other options. In the next section, I consider the possibility that a person's genuine evaluative perspective, and hence the source of that which is good for him, should be his set of beliefs about that which is good for him.

2. Judgment, Value, and Judgment Subjectivism

¹⁸Railton, 54-5.

I have so far characterized a judgment-based subjectivism only in vague terms. But even stated vaguely it displays substantial advantages over a desiderative view. Take, for instance, the drug addict. It would appear that if anything is true of the drug addict, he surely believes that taking his drug, or experiencing his euphoric daze is not good for him; indeed, such a belief would appear to *explain* his second-order desire to avoid the drug. Furthermore, Stan may be seriously burnt-out, but it seems right to say that in the midst of his “desiderative exhaustion”, he can still maintain a judgment that one or more of his options is valuable or good in itself for him or that one alternative is better than the other; hence treating a person’s beliefs about what is good for her as her evaluative perspective is compatible with the intuition that a mere case of burn-out does not entail that Stan takes no evaluative stance toward moving Small Town or remaining in Big City. Finally, though Julie may desire to remain in her marriage, she surely does not *believe* that her well-being is served by so remaining. A similar thought appears plausible in the case of Jack. Were one to ask Jack what he *believed* about that which would be good for him, he would certainly reply that, *were he able* to become an architect, his life would be improved—being an architect is good for Jack for its own sake. Nevertheless, his lack of talent is what leads him to fail to want to be an architect. But surely his lack of talent would not, ordinarily, alter his *belief* that it is good for him.

But what if conditions are different? Imagine now that the drug addict, though he does not want to want the euphoric daze, *believes* that his euphoric daze is good for him, for its own sake. This case might be difficult to imagine in the abstract in part because we often think of second-order desires as *responsive* to judgments about value or that which would be good for us. But one might imagine that this second-order aversion to the drug might develop, for instance, if he comes to realize that a desire for the daze is somehow getting in the way of other things he desires. In this case, it seems to me plausible to say that the addict values the drug; his second-order desires are simply a product of a rational preference not to lose other things he desires. A similar conclusion holds for Julie. Though she may desire to leave the marriage, if she *judges* or *believes* that the marriage is good for her, her first-order desire (*viz.*, to leave her marriage) would appear much more like the first-order desire of the drug addict; a desire that is simply alienated from that which she genuinely values. Precisely the same should be said, it seems to me, in the case of Jack.

Thus it would appear that offering a judgment-based account of a per-

son's evaluative perspective might go some distance toward solving problems that plagued desiderative subjectivism. Hence given the important connection between a person's evaluative perspective and their well-being, for subjectivism, it would appear that replacing DS with JS is well-motivated. Before we can evaluate a full-blown JS, however, we need a more detailed understanding of it. What does it mean to say that a person's evaluative judgments form the basis of her well-being?¹⁹

The immediate problem that arises for JS is that sometimes our judgments are inconsistent or incoherent. Imagine, for instance, that I believe that being a philosopher is good for me, for its own sake. Imagine also, however, that I do not believe that the various constitutive activities of the life of a philosopher are good for me; in other words, I have a belief in the value of ϕ , the value of which also implies the value of ψ , but that I do not believe that ψ is good for me. In this case, which is good for me? Do I value ψ (or ϕ) or don't I? Is ψ (or ϕ) good for me, or isn't it?

The most plausible response to this worry is to put the same constraints on a welfare-determining evaluative perspective as one would put on any other web of belief. Whatever else one claims about the nature of a person's evaluative perspective—whether it should be determined under ideal counterfactual conditions, or under any other constraints—one should hold that a person's well-being is determined by that which a person would believe is valuable for her were her evaluative beliefs rendered *coherent*. Thus JS imposes a coherence constraint on an acceptable evaluative perspective. Above, were it the case that I more strongly believe in the disvalue of the constitutive activities of philosophical life than I do in the value of being a philosopher, one should say that I do not value being a philosopher; my belief in its value would be revised were my evaluative perspective rendered coherent.

Because JS holds that *all* facts about well-being are set by a person's set of evaluative judgments, JS must provide a basis for rank-ordering among associated goods. Thus, a person's coherent set of evaluative beliefs will also necessarily include not just absolute evaluations of particular goods (i.e., " ϕ is good"), but will also include relative evaluations (" ϕ is better than ψ "), sufficient to produce *at least* an ordinal ranking (or as much of an ordinal ranking as is possible; JS does not rule out incommensurability). This, however, can give rise to further sources of incoherence. My judgment of the relative evaluative merits of particular goods might produce an *intransitive*

¹⁹I offer a more detailed account of a judgment-based genuine evaluative perspective in Dale Dorsey, "Preferences, Welfare, and the Status-Quo Bias".

ordinal ranking. Thus it seems to me that, for the purposes of this paper, a coherent set of evaluative beliefs will contain, or at least imply, a transitive ordinal rank of prudential goods. Given that very few people have sets of evaluative beliefs that conform to these requirements, JS holds that a person's welfare-determining evaluative perspective is to some degree idealized. Nevertheless, because the idealization required is only the greatest coherence with beliefs already held, any person's genuine evaluative perspective is likely to bear a strong resemblance to their actual beliefs about that which makes their lives go best.

I will not go into deep detail about how to render an incoherent set of evaluative beliefs coherent here; I have done so in detail elsewhere.²⁰ Suffice it to say, for the purposes of this paper I propose to treat x 's genuine evaluative perspective as x 's *coherent* set of beliefs about that which would be good for x . For the sake of brevity, call any given person's coherent set of evaluative beliefs a *conception of the good*. Judgment subjectivism thus holds that ϕ is good for x if and only if, and to the extent that, x believes that ϕ contributes to x 's well-being.

3. Two Structural Advantages of JS

JS is well-motivated. JS can give a plausible account of a person's genuine evaluative perspective, which DS seems unable to accomplish. But there are two further advantages of JS over DS I would like to present here. Neither is knock-down. But together these arguments should lend considerable support to the prudential authority of judgment rather than desire.

3.1. Welfare-Relevant Attitudes

The first advantage I wish to press here involves a persistent worry for DS. Imagine that on an otherwise unremarkable subway ride, I happen to spy a overburdened mother, call her Beatrice, with a broken leg. I form a desire that Beatrice's leg heal. This is a genuine desire: if I could do something to further her leg's healing, I would. Suppose now, three months after the train ride, her leg is completely healed. My desire is satisfied. Intuitively, however, my life goes no better as a result of this fact.²¹

This example illustrates the problem of welfare-relevant desires. A desider-

²⁰Cf. Dale Dorsey, "A Coherence Theory of Truth in Ethics" in *Philosophical Studies* 127 (2006); Dale Dorsey, "Preferences, Welfare, and the Status-Quo Bias".

²¹There are many examples of this kind; mine is slightly adapted from Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), app. I.

ative view must explain how to partition welfare-relevant desires and non-welfare-relevant desires (whether first- or second-order). But it is not obvious that there is a plausible way to do this. One could limit the desires to those that are, in some sense, “about me”. But getting clear on precisely what this means is difficult. Mark Overvold has claimed that welfare-relevant desires are those whose objects depend, necessarily, on my existence.²² But this solution appears to be both over-inclusive and under-inclusive. First, Overvold’s proposal would have the effect of ruling out all desires that could only be satisfied posthumously as being welfare-relevant. To be fair, this is precisely what Overvold wishes to rule out. But it is not clear to me that we should. If I value being recognized posthumously as a master of the Hammond Organ, and work tirelessly to achieve this goal, it strikes me as too strong to say that my life doesn’t go any better if that goal is actually achieved. Second, and more importantly, imagine that I form the desire that Beatrice’s leg be healed *during my lifetime*. If this desire is satisfied, necessarily, I exist; it can only be satisfied during my lifetime. But this desire seems no more welfare-relevant simply for this fact. In surveying the problem of welfare-relevant desires, Arneson has declared, bluntly, that no solution can be found.²³

I do not wish to canvass all attempts to corral welfare-relevant desires and welfare-irrelevant desires. Arneson’s blunt declaration may yet prove too strong. But it is worth noting that JS is in need of no such solution. For JS, the proper evaluative perspective just is a conception of *my own good*. It is a conception of what will improve *my welfare*. Hence the only welfare-relevant judgments are judgments whose content includes the person’s own well-being. (How the content of such beliefs is to be precisely specified *is* a serious problem for JS, which I will discuss in section 5.) JS can give content to something’s being “about me” in a way that desiderative subjectivism struggles to: for judgmentism, something is good for me if and only if I coherently believe it is good *for me*. The “for me” clause is an essential element in any belief that helps to determine a person’s well-being.

JS seems to do the trick. I might desire that Beatrice’s leg heal. But, in all but the most rare cases, I do not believe it would be better *for me* were her leg to heal. Of course, I might for some reason come to believe that her leg’s healing is good for me. In this case, JS might still come to the verdict that the healing of Beatrice’s improves my well-being. But, it seems to me,

²²Mark Overvold, “Self-Interest and Getting What You Want” in *The Limits of Utilitarianism*, ed. Miller and Williams (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

²³Arneson, 125.

it is much more plausible to say that her leg's healing would be good for me on the assumption that I coherently *believe* it would be good for me, rather than on the simple fact that I desire it (or desire to desire it, or whatever). Alternatively, one might be tempted to claim that under no conditions is the healing of Beatrice's leg good for me. Though this would be a serious problem for JS, it is not be a problem for JS as opposed to DS, but is rather a problem for subjectivism on the wholesale. However, when it comes to choosing between subjectivisms, JS presents a clear structural advantage.

3.2. *The Paradox of Desire*

The following is a well-known problem for DS. Fortunately, JS has a particularly natural solution. The problem runs like this. Imagine that I desire to be worse-off. In other words, perhaps as a result of a lack of self-worth or as a result of some indoctrination that results in my own self-loathing, I come to desire strongly that I have a bad life. Assume that I am at a negative welfare level, and that because of the importance and intensity of this desire, having it satisfied would entail that I have a non-negative welfare level.²⁴ In that case, it would appear that if my welfare level is negative, it is positive (given the satisfaction of the desire that it be negative), and if it is positive, it is negative (given the strength of the desire that my welfare be negative). Hence, a paradox arises.²⁵

I want to remain neutral about whether a desiderative view could avoid a strict paradox. However, even if it does, it still remains puzzling why the fulfillment of my desire to be worse-off would make me better-off, an implication which remains for DS even leaving aside strict paradox. It seems wrong to suggest, no matter how strongly it is desired, that one could be doing better merely by doing worse. Having a low level of welfare, or indeed a *high* level of welfare, should not *in itself* be a determinant of how high one's level of welfare is. A desire to be worse-off (or, for that matter, better-off) appears to be a welfare-*irrelevant* desire.

JS can solve this problem in a natural way. For JS, it never improves the quality of my life to be worse-off. Why? Because *I cannot coherently believe that it is good for me to be worse-off*. Assume that the realization of some state of affairs ϕ would make my life worse. On a judgmentist view, I cannot believe that it would make my life better, because in order for ϕ to

²⁴For a nice discussion of this objection, and one proposed solution to the problem, see Brad Skow, "Preferentism and the Paradox of Desire", MS.

²⁵See also Chris Heathwood, "The Problem of Defective Desires" in the *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 83 (2005).

make me worse-off, I *must* believe that it will make me worse-off, rather than better-off. Because any set of coherent evaluative beliefs will rule out the inconsistent set “ ϕ is intrinsically good” and “ ϕ is not intrinsically good”, judgmentism does not allow that my welfare can be increased by its decrease. To believe that my life goes better as it goes worse is simply incoherent.

This holds even if the state of affairs ϕ just is the state of affairs of my being worse-off. In order to believe that I am worse-off in ϕ , it must be the case that my welfare is ranked lower on an overall rank-ordering of states of affairs than the current state of affairs, call this state of affairs ψ . In other words, I must believe that ψ is better than ϕ . Imagine now that ψ is better than ϕ to the smallest possible degree; ϕ is the state of affairs that is, to the smallest possible degree, worse than ψ . In order to believe that being worse-off improves my well-being, I must believe that my well-being improves by moving from ψ to ϕ . But I cannot coherently believe that my well-being while ϕ obtains is ranked lower than my well-being while ψ obtains (which is required given the essential claim that ϕ is a state of affairs in which I am worse-off), and also believe that my well-being while ϕ obtains is also ranked *higher than or equivalent to* than my well-being while ψ obtains (which would be required were I to believe that ϕ has intrinsic prudential value simply for being worse than ψ , given that ϕ is worse than ψ in the smallest possible degree). To believe that I am better-off by being worse-off, I must believe that ϕ is ranked of *at least* equal value to ψ —otherwise my being worse-off would not make me better-off. But this is incoherent. If I am worse-off in ϕ , given JS, I must *believe* I am worse-off in ϕ . But I cannot believe this and also believe that ϕ and ψ are of at least equivalent value.

The power of judgmentism goes beyond simply removing the paradoxical feature of one’s being better-off merely for being worse-off. It also removes the strange result that the achievement of some specific welfare level is, of itself, intrinsically valuable. I might believe that being at welfare level n improves my well-being. But this belief is incoherent. Assume that at some time t , n characterizes my welfare level. Given my evaluative belief, my well-being at t will be greater than n . Hence it would be straightforwardly incoherent for me to believe that being at welfare level n is better for me by any amount at all; to do so, I would have to believe that it is possible the welfare level I achieve at t is n and $\neg n$.

This result is significant. JS cannot allow that the mere fact that someone is worse-off (or better-off!) of itself increases or decreases their well-being. Though one might believe it, this belief is straightforwardly incoherent, and hence, given the coherence constraints on a person’s conception of the good, ruled out.

Though I wish to allow the possibility that a desiderative subjectivism could respond to this worry, I maintain that the response offered by JS is precisely what the doctor ordered. JS gets to the heart of the matter: one cannot have a better well-being score simply for having a worse well-being score (or vice versa). One's well-being score is determined only by the substantive goods one achieves, and the ordinal ranking to which one is committed, given one's conception of the good.

So far I have argued that JS has several advantages, both intuitive and structural, over DS. But there are two reasons we might hesitate to accept JS rather than DS. The first appeals to one important advantage of DS over JS–DS and not JS, so the argument goes, can accommodate existence internalism about well-being. The second notes a potential structural defect of JS; it would appear that JS cannot provide a non-circular analysis of what it means for x to *believe* that ϕ is good for x . The former will be the topic of the next section, the latter will be discussed in §5.

4. *Objection: Existence Internalism*

A classic rationale for DS is *existence internalism*. To quote Connie Rosati, “the label ‘existence internalism’ . . . refers to the general thesis that there is a necessary connection between motivation and normative status.”²⁶ Existence internalism claims that, necessarily, if ϕ is good for x , x must have some motivation to promote ϕ . x 's motivation to promote ϕ needn't be occurrent or even actual. For instance, existence internalism (at least on Rosati's account) can be satisfied by the presence of a motivation under certain counterfactual conditions—such as full information or full awareness. Existence internalism would cause no problems for JS as opposed to DS *were it not for* a widely accepted position concerning the nature of motivation: only desires motivate.²⁷ If this view is correct (which I simply accept for the purposes of this paper), accepting existence internalism appears to commit one to the authority of desire over “normative status” and hence a person's good (on the uncontroversial assumption that a person's good has “normative status” of some kind or other). Only if our desires (or our desires under the proper counterfactual conditions) determine our good will there be a necessary connection between goodness and motivational status. In this section, I address arguments for existence internalism. My general

²⁶Connie Rosati, “Internalism and the Good for a Person” in *Ethics* 106 (1996), 297.

²⁷See Michael Smith, “The Humean Theory of Motivation” in *Mind* 97 (1987). For a contrary view, see John McDowell, “Virtue and Reason” in *Monist* 62 (1979).

claim will be that purported arguments for existence internalism fail to support existence internalism in a form that would support DS over JS. The most plausible arguments for existence internalism support a form of existence internalism that supports subjectivism more broadly, but that has no power to decide between subjectivisms.

4.1. *The Principal Intuition*

Why should we believe existence internalism? While I will discuss other arguments below, a crucially important one involves a straightforward appeal to intuition. Consider, for instance, the following quote from Peter Railton:

Is it true that all normative judgments must find an internal resonance in those to whom they are applied? While I do not find this thesis convincing as a claim about all species of normative assessment, it does seem to me to capture an important feature of the concept of intrinsic value to say that what is intrinsically valuable for a person must have a connection with what he would find in some degree compelling or attractive, at least if he were rational and aware. It would be an intolerably alienated conception of someone's good to imagine that it might fail in any such way to engage him.²⁸

Rosati, in discussing arguments for existence internalism, refers to sentiments like Railton's as *the principal intuition*:

The principal intuition supporting internalism about a person's good, as aptly expressed by Railton, is that an individual's good must not be something alien—it must be “made for” or “suited to” her. But something can be made or suited to an individual, the thought goes, only if a concern for that thing lies within her motivational capacity: what is good for her must connect with what she would find “in some degree compelling or attractive, at least if [she] were rational and aware.” In this way, there must be a “fit” between an individual and her good.²⁹

I hereby stipulate that internalism of this kind *is* compelling—especially for those already inclined toward a form of subjectivism about the good. How-

²⁸Peter Railton, “Facts and Values” in *Facts, Values, and Norms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 47.

²⁹Rosati, 298-9.

ever, I argue, the “principal intuition” seems to trade not on the appeal of the connection between a person’s good and her *motivations*, but rather on the appeal of subjectivism more broadly, which requires only a connection between a person’s good and her values.

Railton argues that, for instance, the good must find an “internal resonance,” that people must find their good “compelling or attractive,” that it would be problematic for an account of a person’s good to be “alienating.” Rosati notes that a person’s good must not be “alien,” that it should be “suited for” the person in question. It is worth wondering, however, whether *any* of these claims require that a person’s good be ratified by means of *pre-existing motivation*. Consider a variant on Stan’s case:

Stanley: Stanley is a successful lawyer practicing in Big City, who has an opportunity to move to Small Town, which is close to his family and friends. He believes, however, that it would be much better for him were he to be closer to his roots in Small Town. He believes that being close to one’s family, no matter what one desires, is good and should be pursued for its own sake. But, perhaps as a product of exhausting work at his law office, Stanley simply lacks a desire for either option. When asked whether he desires to remain in Big City or move to Small Town, he replies that he has no real desires either way. When asked which option he wants, he replies, exhausted, numb: “I dunno. I guess I don’t really want either.” But if asked what he believes is best, Stanley is unequivocal: he believes his life will go better by moving to Small Town.

Stanley’s desire set, and hence motivational set, is indifferent between staying in Big City or moving to Small Town. But it would certainly be implausible to say that Stanley sees nothing “compelling or attractive” in moving to Small Town. After all, he *believes it would be good for him* to so move. There is an important sense in which Stanley would not find the suggestion that moving to Small Town would be good for him “alien”. Indeed, it seems plausible to believe that this claim is ideally “suited for” Stanley. Perhaps he believes that moving to Small Town is better for him on the basis of a wider conception of the good, which includes the belief that desire, at least in this case, is not evaluatively authoritative. As stated, the “principal intuition” appears only to support subjectivism more broadly, rather than DS in particular. It seems straightforward that if a person genuinely values ϕ , even without a desire, ϕ is at the very least “suited” to the person in question.

Perhaps Railton and Rosati wish to define “non-alienation” or “resonance” in such a way that in order for a particular good ϕ to resonate, ϕ must engage, not only a person’s evaluative judgment, but also her motivational set. But even leaving aside the fact that neither argue for this interpretation, there are two problems with simply stipulating this as the proper theory of resonance or non-alienation. First, in so doing, the principal intuition appears to cut little ice for existence internalism. If to care about something simply is to be motivated by it, the principal intuition is little more than table-pounding. Second, Rosati herself *explicitly* rejects a strictly motivational interpretation of existence internalism. Rosati suggests that her internalist constraint requires a “double motivational link” between a person and her good. But Rosati claims that internalism should be linked to motivation “in the broad sense.” She understands the notion of motivation in a “broad sense” as linked to the development of “a proattitude—such as desiring, liking, being glad of, caring about, and so on—an attitude which may *or may not* be a motive to action. To say that something must motivate, in the broad sense, to be a part of a person’s good, is to say that it must be something that can, in a positive way, matter to her or be an object of her concern.”³⁰ Beliefs, however, are attitudes, and x ’s belief that something ϕ is good for x is arguably just as “pro” an attitude as a desire or motivation. It is strongly intuitive to believe that, for Stanley, moving to Small Town is something that is a matter of his concern. After all, it is an aspect of his conception of the good, to which he is committed even in the absence of a corresponding desire. Call the form of existence internalism that requires motivation “in a broad sense,” *weak* existence internalism as opposed to “strong” existence internalism, which requires a genuine motivation, and hence implies DS. Though the principal intuition is a strong argument for weak existence internalism, weak existence internalism, it would appear, cannot distinguish between JS and DS.

4.2. *The Metaphysics of “Good”*

Rosati also notes a further argument for existence internalism. Rosati writes, following R. B. Perry, that “if value can exist only if there are creatures who can be affected by and react to their world, then value, and more specifically, goodness for a person, must be a motivational property. What else, after all, could it be? The only alternative might seem to be that the property of being good for a person is a Moorean, nonnatural property, but

³⁰Rosati, 301; my emphasis.

this alternative introduces special metaphysical and epistemological problems.”³¹ The argument from the metaphysics of “good” has an important place in arguments for DS. Desiderative subjectivism is often defended on grounds of naturalism, i.e., that it is most consonant with our naturalist, scientific worldview.³² Though this argument is important, it again fails to distinguish the plausibility of a desiderative subjectivism from a wider subjectivism that includes JS. The point of the argument is that value has to be centered in persons—*not* found in Moorean nonnatural properties, or properties that cannot be explained given the assumption of naturalism. But this is perfectly consonant with JS: value is centered in persons, just not in a person’s *desires*. Rosati does not believe that this version of Perry’s argument is particularly strong (for starters, it fails to consider a number of possible externalist views). But Rosati’s *reconstruction* of the argument even more clearly cannot support a desiderative subjectivism: “if goodness for a person is not a complex motivational property, then either it is a peculiar nonnatural property, or it is some other kind of property which itself presupposes the truth of internalism. The conclusion would then be not ‘either a strange non-natural property or a motivational property,’ but ‘either a strange nonnatural property or internalism.’”³³ But stated in this way, JS is clearly compatible with the argument from the metaphysics of “good”. Rosati insists that any view that is not committed to Moorean non-natural properties *must* be committed to goodness *qua* motivational property, or goodness *qua* some other property that properly falls under the internalist heading. But because JS is in no way committed to Moorean non-natural properties it *must* be compatible with internalism. It would thus appear that the argument from the metaphysics of “good” supports only weak existence internalism and hence cannot rule out JS.

4.3. Judgment Internalism

A final argument for existence internalism—which, if successful, really *would* be an argument for a strong existence internalism, appeals to the truth of *judgment internalism*, viz., the view that “it is a necessary condition on sincere judgment about a person’s good that the speaker normally have some inclination, not necessarily overriding, to promote or care about that

³¹Rosati, 313-14.

³²This defense is evident in Railton, “Facts and Values” and “Moral Realism” in *Facts, Values, and Norms*, op. cit. Thanks to Connie Rosati for reminding me of this important point.

³³Rosati, 314-15.

thing.”³⁴ The move from judgment internalism to existence internalism is common.³⁵ Rosati states the argument like this:

The truth of judgment internalism might seem to support the claim that a plausible account of the good for a person must satisfy existence internalism. . . An account of the good for a person must permit judgments about a person’s good to serve their characteristic action-guiding functions. It must be able to explain how it is that, at least normally, judgments about a person’s good motivate, and it must also preserve their characteristic recommending and expressive functions or normative force. An account can succeed in this, without embracing noncognitivism and its antirealist implications, only if it satisfies simple internalism. By limiting a person’s good to some subset of those things that can matter to her, an account insures that it will be at least possible for judgments about a person’s good to perform their characteristic functions.³⁶

If we interpret “promote or care about” as requiring a desire sufficient to motivate, judgment internalism claims that in order to have a sincere judgment about one’s own good, it must normally be the case that the person in question have some desire the content of which is the purported good in question. In this way, *strong* existence internalism, and hence DS, is well-placed to explain judgment internalism in a way that non-motivational subjectivisms (including JS) are not.

At first glance, it is a little difficult to see why judgment internalism would support DS. After all, if judgment internalism is true, this just provides a modal link between evaluative judgment and desire; necessarily, they co-exist. But this appears compatible with a view that says that ϕ can only be a genuine prudential good for x if x judges (under the right conditions) that ϕ is a genuine prudential good. This view would simply have it that as a matter of metaphysical necessity, whenever persons judge they have a reason, they are motivated to act accordingly. Nothing about judgment internalism is incompatible with JS. Furthermore, the only tool that would allow DS to explain judgment internalism is its peculiar constraint on prudential value: for some claim “ ϕ is good for x ” to be true, ϕ must motivate

³⁴Rosati, 310.

³⁵See also Simon Blackburn, *Ruling Passions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970), 7.

³⁶Connie Rosati, “Internalism and the Good for a Person” in *Ethics* 106 (1996), 310-11.

x (under the right conditions). This will imply that whenever a person *truly* judges that ϕ is good, this person will necessarily be motivated to promote ϕ (under the right conditions). But it says nothing about cases in which someone might *falsely* judge that ϕ is good. It is fully compatible with DS that a person will judge that ϕ is good, and not be motivated by it—this merely implies that the judgment is false. Hence in order to explain judgment internalism, DS must rely on a deeper metaphysical connection, something along the lines of a *de re* necessity between psychological states—such as x 's state of judging that “ ϕ is good for x ” and x 's desire to promote ϕ —to explain judgment internalism.³⁷ But any theory of prudential value—whether compatible with existence internalism or not—can accept judgment internalism if it is explained, not by one's theory of prudential value, but rather by some form of *de re* or *a priori* necessity between mental states.

Even if there are good arguments to regard existence internalism as necessary for the truth of judgment internalism, however, judgment internalism is simply too strong to be believed. If judgment internalism is true, Stanley is simply a conceptually impossible being. Judgment internalism implies that all genuine normative/evaluative judgment requires a corresponding desire. Hence Stanley cannot exist: he cannot both sincerely judge that he has reason to ϕ , and lack a corresponding motivation. But the strength of this implication is judgment internalism's downfall. It is simply not plausible to believe that Stanley could not, as a matter of conceptual possibility, exist. Stanley's case may not defeat DS once and for all, but it does not fail to do so on the grounds that he is conceptually impossible, or that I use terms like “judgment” and “desire” mistakenly.

5. *Objection: Circularity and the Content of Evaluative Beliefs*

We should reject the claim that existence internalism provides a rationale for DS as opposed to JS. The most plausible arguments for existence internalism support only its weaker form, which has no power itself to rule out JS. Hence it would appear that failure to accommodate existence internalism is no barrier to accepting JS. But one substantial hurdle remains.

The argument I consider in this section might be thought of as the desiderative subjectivist's trump card. It is all well and good, it might be claimed, to defend the intuitive authority of one's judgments over one's good. Nevertheless, JS has special problems that a desiderative subjectivism

³⁷Cf. David Lewis, “Desire as Belief II” in *Papers in Ethics and Social Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 57-9.

does not have. In particular, it must adequately specify the *contents* of evaluative belief or judgment. But there appear to be two problems here. First, if we understand beliefs about well-being as beliefs *about well-being*, and we take seriously a form of JS, it would appear that JS is committed to a circular analysis of the contents of evaluative beliefs. Lewis, in evaluating the prospects of a judgment-based theory of valuing, states the circularity worry concisely: “What is ‘valuing’? It is some sort of mental state, directed toward that which is valued. It might be a feeling, or a belief, or a desire. . . . A feeling? – Evidently not, because the feelings we have when we value things are too diverse. A belief? What belief? You might say that one values something just by believing it to be a value. That is circular.”³⁸

One way to understand the circularity worry is by asking the following question. According to JS, when I believe that ϕ is good for me, what am I believing? Because that which makes ϕ good for me is its coherence with my other beliefs about what is good for me, it would appear that I must be believing something about my own beliefs about what is good for me, namely that I believe, coherently, that ϕ is good for me. But this quickly develops into a regress: in believing that ϕ is good for me, I believe that I believe coherently that I believe coherently that. . .

A second problem arises in this neighborhood. JS’s analysis of what I am believing when I believe that ϕ is good for me, whether circular or not, just seems *wrong*. Instead, it seems right to say that when I believe that ϕ is good for me, I am believing *something about ϕ* —beliefs make no appearance whatsoever. But if this is correct, “good for x ” must refer to some belief-independent property. Call this property “property p .” Of course, if this is correct, circularity is avoided: a belief of the form “ ϕ good for x ” is analyzed in terms of a belief-independent property p , rather than in terms of x ’s beliefs about the good. But if “ ϕ good for x ” refers to property p , then it would appear that the question of whether ϕ is genuinely good for x is not settled by x ’s evaluative beliefs, but rather by whether ϕ displays property p (perhaps even the property of “being desired”). In other words, if claims about what is prudentially good do *not* refer to beliefs, we appear to be committed to belief-independent truth conditions. But if this is right, JS would seem to imply an error theory: JS implies that there are no belief-independent properties to which a belief about prudential value might refer. We could avoid an error theory, but only on the assumption that JS fails: only if that which makes ϕ good for x is its instantiation of property p .

³⁸David Lewis, “Dispositional Theories of Value” in *Papers in Ethics and Social Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 69-70.

Thus we appear to have a dilemma brewing for JS. Either JS rejects the error theory, in which case we are committed to a circular analysis of “good for x ”, or we reject a circular semantics, and in so doing embrace an error theory (or reject JS wholesale).

This is a serious problem. It should not be understated. But despite its seriousness, it can be avoided. In particular, to avoid it we must reflect upon just *what sort of theory* JS is. At its heart, a JS is an important form of *idealism* about value. After all, what makes a claim about well-being true, on JS, is that claim’s ratification by beliefs, under certain specifiable conditions. But one point is important to notice. Idealism in any domain requires us to rethink the nature of *truth* in that domain.³⁹ Part of this pressure comes from circularity worries of precisely this kind. For instance, it would be very difficult for any idealist view to have a non-circular semantics under a standard theory of truth: a standard theory of truth would require the contents of one’s “ideas” to make essential reference to the “ideas” themselves. And if this is the case, if “table” must be given an analysis that refers to beliefs about tables, circularity worries arise. Thus for any idealist theory, it is natural to reject a theory of truth that construes truth in terms of a “matching” or “correspondence” (or other similar) relation between semantic content and extra-linguistic reality.

Because JS is a form of idealism about value, it has substantial motivation to reject a standard theory of truth. Doing so offers serious advantages. The inference from a non-circular semantics to an error theory (which constitutes the second horn of the dilemma above) only goes through if we accept that evaluative sentences are true if and only if their semantic content “matches” or “corresponds to” the world. Thus, for judgmentism, rejecting a standard theory of truth is not an *ad hoc* maneuver, cooked up to solve a problem of circularity. Rather, it is a straightforward and natural alliance. Indeed, this marriage seems to be foreshadowed by Quine himself:

Disagreements on moral matters can arise at home, and even within oneself. When they do, one regrets the methodological infirmity of ethics as compared with science. The empirical foothold of scientific theory is in the predicted observable event; that of a moral code is in the observable moral act. But whereas

³⁹Ralph C. S. Walker, *The Coherence Theory of Truth: Realism, Anti-Realism, Idealism* (London: Routledge, 1989), 21. As Walker rightly notes, the worries I express here don’t apply to an idealism that constructs reality not out of one’s beliefs, say, but rather out of one’s *perceptions*. However, any idealism that is committed to the dependence of reality on one’s beliefs *is* committed to a coherence theory of truth.

we can test a prediction against the independent course of observable nature, we can judge the morality of an act only by our moral standards themselves. Science, thanks to its links with observation, retains some title to a correspondence theory of truth; but a coherence theory is evidently the lot of ethics.⁴⁰

Though JS could replace a standard theory of truth with many alternatives (a so-called “minimalist” theory of truth is a further possibility⁴¹), I suggest we take Quine’s advice seriously. JS should commit itself to a coherence theory of truth for claims about well-being. Doing so would entail a form of pluralism about truth, of the form defended by Crispin Wright, Michael Lynch, among others.⁴²

But what does this say about the content of beliefs about the good? Though I won’t take any particular stand on the proper semantic analysis of these beliefs, one possibility would simply be to accept the intuitive claim made earlier, viz., that evaluative beliefs make claims about various belief-independent properties. But if we reject a standard theory of truth, the existence or non-existence of these various properties is neither here nor there. What renders sentences of the form “ ϕ is good for x ” true is their coherence with other beliefs of that form. Provisionally, such a view might run as follows: sentences of the form “ ϕ is intrinsically good for x ” are true if and only if “ ϕ is intrinsically good for x ” is part of x ’s set of coherent beliefs of the form “ ϕ is intrinsically good for x ” or (assuming x ’s actual belief set is not coherent), x ’s set of beliefs of the form “ ϕ is intrinsically good for x ” rendered coherent.⁴³ Thus a realist semantics is compatible with subjectivism, as is, frankly, *any* non-circular semantics.

Hence to answer this objection, the proposal—in detail that is no better than simply schematic—is this. (Prudentially) “good for x ” is to be given a semantics that does not refer to beliefs or judgments about what is good for x . But this is not incompatible with a judgment-based subjectivism, on the assumption that JS accepts a truth predicate for claims about well-being for which it appears particularly well-suited, viz., a coherence theory of truth.

Before I move on, it is important to note that my proposal will surely face objections and incredulous stares with, roughly speaking, the following upshot: why would you rearrange something as fundamental as our basic

⁴⁰W. V. Quine, “On the Nature of Moral Values” in *Theories and Things* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 63.

⁴¹Cf. Paul Horwich, *Truth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2nd. ed., 1998).

⁴²Crispin Wright, *Truth and Objectivity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); Michael Lynch, *Truth in Context* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998).

⁴³Cf. Dorsey, “A Coherence Theory”, op. cit.

understanding of truth merely to accommodate a theory of well-being? In particular, why do so in the face of the various complications such a move inevitably entails?⁴⁴ I defend a coherence theory of truth in normative domains elsewhere,⁴⁵ but it seems to me that whether we should accept or reject any particular truth predicate or any other semantic or linguistic maneuver in a domain is totally dependent upon our ability to express the best first-order theory of the domain in question. No principles, no matter how fundamental in our web of belief, are immune to revision assuming that their alteration can allow us to maintain more of our overall commitments. Though DS can accommodate a simple truth predicate, it provides a mistaken analysis of a person's genuine evaluative perspective, and it is subject to serious problems that JS can artfully avoid. Hence it seems to me that though accepting a non-standard truth predicate for the evaluative domain may be a cost of accepting JS, the benefits of JS at a first-order level outweigh these costs in spades. "A pox on both your houses!" might be a reasonable reply—one might think that no form of subjectivism is plausible given the problems of DS and the costs of JS. While this is an open response, I leave its examination for another day.⁴⁶

6. Conclusion

I hope to have done the following things in this paper. I hope to have shown that evaluative judgment provides a better foundation of a person's evaluative perspective than desire. Furthermore, I have shown that a desiderative subjectivism is subject to serious worries that JS escapes. Existence internalism, though a powerful tool in the subjectivist toolkit, has no particular power to decide between versions of subjectivism. In addition, the argument from circularity is plausibly dispatched by noting that a judgment subjectivism is most properly thought of as a form of evaluative idealism, subject

⁴⁴One thing is worth noting, however. The coherence theory of truth in the domain of prudential value can accommodate Tarski's T-sentences. Because these sentences are sentences of the metalanguage, all the T-sentences require for their truth is that the theory of truth for the metalanguage also be coherence, rather than semantics. This leaves open the question of T-sentences in the metametalanguage, but presumably the same answer could be given. What is left unexplained so far is how we divide sentences of the form " ϕ is good for x " into *moral* uses and other uses, including metaphysical uses (when we inquire, for instance, whether the property to which "good for x " refers actually exists). Options, so far as I can see, is to adopt a form of primitivism or, instead, to divide them contextually. I will not take a firm stand either way here.

⁴⁵Cf. "Coherence Theory".

⁴⁶I thank James Dreier for helpfully pressing this objection.

to a coherence theory of truth.

I also wish to mention briefly what I have not done. I have not articulated a judgmentist subjectivism in any substantial detail, but instead gestured at the direction in which it would be best developed. It seems to me that any such view will subscribe to a coherence theory of truth, and will treat the authoritative beliefs as beliefs arrived at through full information and idealized reflection. These appear to be plausible constraints, and appear to assist the case for a judgment subjectivism as opposed to a desiderative subjectivism. Moreover, I have not argued for subjectivism of any kind against *objectivism*. The argument of this paper is addressed to those—like me—who believe that normativity and the personal good must be responsive to a person’s own evaluative perspective. But in arguing for subjectivism, the first step is to find the most plausible articulation of its main themes. I am optimistic that JS fits this bill.