



# Can desire-satisfaction alienate our good?

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## 1 Desire and resonance

One of the key motivations for subjective theories of wellbeing – of which desire-satisfactionism is the most prominent – is that they seem to fit very well with the resonance constraint: the idea that nothing can be of ultimate value to a person that that person does not herself find appealing or attractive (Dorsey 2013; cf. Sarch 2011; Bramble 2016). The following description from Peter Railton is commonly used to express this constraint:

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 (Railton 1986, 9).

More precisely, the resonance constraint (henceforth RC) states that theories of wellbeing should not ascribe wellbeing value of particular individuals to objects, events, or states of affairs, that they do not themselves find attractive (perhaps under some idealization conditions), as doing so would alienate the good from them.

This constraint is significant for the defense of subjective theories of wellbeing. As a recent defender of the constraint puts it:

“Indeed, it is a little hard to see what might motivate subjectivism were one to jettison The Constraint. After all, there appear to be a litany of counterexamples to subjectivism (...). The subjectivist's trump card in these cases is The Constraint and its appeal.” (Dorsey 2017, 688)

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Moreover, the constraint is also something that is particularly central to the defense of subjective theories of wellbeing over others. As Guy Fletcher writes before introducing Railton's quote above:

I take it that at least a large part of what attracts people to the desire-fulfilment theory is the idea that these theories have the requisite sensitivity to a person's attitudes (and that enumerative theories do not). There will of course be other things that explain why people have been attracted to desire-fulfilment views – such views are often favoured by those attracted to metaphysical naturalism for example. But given that one can be a naturalist and a hedonist, or objective-list theorist, I think that this alienation or resonance point is the best such rationale for the desire-fulfilment theory. (Fletcher 2013, 215)<sup>1</sup>

The resonance constraint is generally considered to be an argument in favor of desire-satisfactionism vis-à-vis objective theories. Whether a theory of wellbeing is subjective or objective depends on whether it maintains that one's attitude towards a good is necessary for a good to benefit a person: yes for subjective theories, no for objective theories. While hedonism is generally not taken to meet the constraint, because it maintains that pleasure is good regardless of one's attitude towards it, subjective versions of hedonism maintain that pleasure itself is attitude-dependent: a pleasurable feeling or experience is a feeling or experience that one has a positive attitude towards (Heathwood 2006). Such subjective versions of hedonism may also meet the constraint, as can be seen as a version of desire-satisfactionism with additional constraints. However, objective versions of hedonism do not. As Dorsey writes: "In going objective, the hedonist is barred from the natural appeal to resonance" (2011, 184).

While the support for this constraint has been a topic of scrutiny in recent debates (e.g. Sarch 2011; Dorsey 2017), it is widely accepted as a consideration that, if correct, counts in favor of subjective theories of wellbeing, and of desire-satisfaction in particular (e.g. Arneson 1999; Dorsey 2013; 2017; Heathwood 2014). We may call this consideration the resonance defense of desire-satisfactionism. In this article, I argue that the resonance constraint does not in fact support desire-satisfactionism. While *prima facie* appealing, the support the resonance constraint offers subjectivism hinges on a crucial ambiguity, namely, *when* exactly the attraction is required to take place. On one possible view, a narrow view, the attraction just needs to take place at the moment a person is benefitted – for example, at the time a person has a desire (Dorsey 2013; Hawkins 2019). On an alternative view, a broad view, RC requires an attraction during a more extended period of time, including the moment at which we deliberate about our prudential good and choose a course of action with the purpose of benefitting from it. I argue that RC, even if it is correct, does not in fact support subjectivism, because subjectivism fails to comply to this constraint if we understand the constraint in a broad way, or, if we understand the constraint

<sup>1</sup> See also Heathwood in a handbook article on desire-satisfactionism, before introducing the same Railton quote: "...there is at least one interesting such argument for the subjectivist approach to well-being, one that provides at least indirect support for the desire-fulfilment theory." (Heathwood 2015)

narrowly, it fails to avoid significant levels of alienation, and alternative accounts of wellbeing, such as (at least) objective forms of hedonism, can meet the constraint too.<sup>2</sup>

## 2 Terminology

Subjective theories of wellbeing are those theories that deny that something can benefit a person without that person holding a pro-attitude towards that thing, and affirm that, at least under certain conditions, holding a pro-attitude towards an object or states of affairs is sufficient for it to benefit that person. While the argument discussed here has bearing on a wider range of subjective theories, I will focus on the most straightforward subjective theory: simple desire-satisfactionism (henceforth DS) as a representative for subjectivist theories. Alternative subjectivist theories are similar in structure, and consequently, the shift from subjectivism to DS will simplify this discussion, without restricting its implications. According to simple DS, wellbeing is constituted solely by the satisfaction (and frustration) of our desires. We can formulate this more precisely as follows (Barrett 2019; van der Deijl and Brouwer 2021):

***Desire-satisfactionism:*** a person's lifetime wellbeing is constituted by the weighted balance of the satisfaction and frustration of their desires (weighted by their strength)

In the following, I will follow this definition, but the argument does not depend on all particulars. What is essential for the argument is that for DS, what is good for someone is that their desires are satisfied, and that these desires are held at specific points in time, and can (and typically do) change over time. To say that our wellbeing is constituted by the satisfaction of desire is to say that our wellbeing depends on the satisfaction of desires held at particular times.

Many theories of DS limit the desires that count towards wellbeing to the ones we would have under some idealized conditions, such as the ones we would hold would we be fully informed and rational. I focus on the simple, non-idealized, account of DS, but my conclusions do not depend on this.

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<sup>2</sup> The first claim, that RC does not support DS, has also been made by Sarch (2011). He suggests this is so because a person may not desire desire-satisfaction. He bases his case on the possibility of a person existing who has no desires for desire-satisfaction. While the counterexamples I use share some similarity in structure with this example, his case relies on the implausibility of the object-based desire-satisfaction view – the view that it is the objects of desire that have value rather the state of desire-satisfaction. This view, despite its problems, is endorsed by recent defender of subjectivism, and the constraint in particular (see particularly Dorsey 2019). My case, I take it, does not rely on the implausibility of that view.

The second claim, that alternative accounts can meet RC, has been defended by Guy Fletcher (2013), who suggest a list of objective goods that can meet it. However, Fletcher interprets the constraint as requiring our good, in the wellbeing sense, must be “attitude-dependent”. On this view, Fletcher argues, even virtue can meet the constraint. This interpretation of the constraint, however, seems too wide, and deviate too much from its original sentiment.

While formulations differ, RC states that for something to be good for someone, she should find this good attractive in some way (see Railton's formulation), care about (Rosati 1996), have a positive response towards it (Hawkins 2019), or have a valuing attitude (of the right sort) towards it (Dorsey 2017). I will stick with the term attraction to describe what RC requires, but use the alternative formulations to clarify the constraint. When a person is attracted in the required sense, a person is moved by it, and has a positive response towards it. When a person cares about something or desires it, a person has this response. Typically, the same goes for valuing. When a person values something, this typically has affective, as well as cognitive components (Tiberius 2018, 35). As Valerie Tiberius describes, when someone values their job, they do not merely recognize its value, but feel particular emotions when you hear good, or bad, news about your job, and you will want to do well at it. Attraction comes with affective components. A mere judgment, acknowledgment, or recognition that something is valuable does not count as attraction.<sup>3</sup> This is, in fact, of key importance to explain RC's relation to alienation.

RC is motivated from the idea that theories of wellbeing should not be alienating. RC can simply be put as the condition that alienation should be avoided. However, because avoiding alienation plays the role of motivating the constraint, it is good to clarify what alienation is in this context. Alienation should be understood here as an estrangement – a rational judgment not aligning with your affective self (Railton 1984). As the quote by Railton above illustrates, in the context of wellbeing this occurs when someone judges something to be good for her, without her being affectively attracted to it. If a particular theory of wellbeing is correct, a rational person should consider the objects of that theory – be it pleasure, the satisfaction of desire, or knowledge – good for themselves. Alienation occurs when I may rationally judge something to be good for myself, but I cannot make myself to be affectively engaged by it. For instance, even if I judge that playing the piano is good for me, without an attraction to piano playing, it remains an alienated activity.

A further clarification with respect to the constraint: the constraint is sometimes formulated in hypothetical form – requiring that a person would be able to be attracted to a good, under certain conditions (Rosati 1996). Other formulations require actual attraction (Dorsey 2017). In this article, I focus on the latter type of constraint. I do so, in particular, to connect to Dale Dorsey's recent defense of the The Constraint, and the support it offers for subjectivist theories.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> This exclusion may exclude certain subjectivist theories, such as Dorsey's (2012). However, I take this to be a feature of motivating the constraint by the aim to avoid alienation. As Railton (Railton 1984, 137) writes: "John and Helen both show alienation: there would seem to be an estrangement between their affections and their rational, deliberative selves."

<sup>4</sup> There are also substantive problems with hypothetical formulations of the constraint (see Sarch 2011; Hawkins 2019).

### 3 An example

In this section, I will challenge the idea that RC is even *compatible* with DS, let alone offer support for it. This challenge, we shall see, can be resisted, but only if we alter RC.

Leaving aside the temporal dimension for now, we can state generally that for DS to fail RC it would have to be the case that what contributes to a person's desire-satisfaction is not something they desire or find attractive. While this sounds paradoxical, it is not difficult to conceive of cases where this applies. Consider the following example:

*Homework:* Ben really likes computer games, is good at school, but does not enjoy it. While Ben strongly dislikes preparing for his high school exam, and has no desire to study, work, or live an adult life, he realizes that doing well in school has future benefits. His parents have correctly predicted that the things he finds desirable now will not remain desirable to him forever, and that doing well in school will help him achieve his desires that he is likely to develop, but not yet has.

Ben has two possible courses of actions, each containing different degrees of desire-satisfaction, and consequently different degrees of intrinsic wellbeing value. The first course of action, A, contains computer games now and an adult life without a college-education and college-educated job later, the first of which he finds highly attractive. His second course of action, B, involves studying now and an adult life with a college education and a college educated job. Of these four prospects (two now, two later), he only finds playing computer games, in A, attractive now, but B contains a higher degree of lifetime desire-satisfaction, and consequently, intrinsic wellbeing value. What is best for Ben's wellbeing, on DS, what maximizes his wellbeing, is thus not what he finds attractive when he is making his choice. It seems that what is good for Ben thus fails to resonate with him.

It is important to stress that it is not just the case that the course of action is not attractive to Ben, but neither are the goods that are ultimately obtained in that course of action. Ben does not desire to go to college, nor does he desire to obtain the goods that college will help him obtain – such as a good job and a comfortable, but, in the eyes of young Ben, boring, adult life. At best, he acknowledges that these goods are highly likely to be desired by him in the future.

This example is similar in structure to the example Alexander Sarch (2011), who discusses an ascetic who finds desire-satisfaction itself unattractive. Just like the ascetic, Ben may recognize that a particular course of action – being studious – will maximize his desire-satisfaction, without finding this course of action attractive.

This conclusion – that the course of action that maximizes Ben's desire-satisfaction is something he is by no means attracted to – clearly seems to undermine the defense that RC offers DS: DS does not ensure that what is good – or even best – for us, is also attractive to us. The course of action that is good for Ben – on DS standards – is one that does not attract him at all.

## 4 DS and the flexibility of RC

DS has a pretty strong reply to this line of thought that appeals to the ambiguity in the constraint with respect to *when* the resonance is supposed to take place, or, namely, whether the constraint applies to goods at the moment of benefit, or realized goods, or also to goods when they have not been realized yet – potential goods (Hawkins 2019). RC can be formulated as a constraint about benefit at the time of benefit, or as a constraint about benefit at the time of benefit *and* practical deliberation:

**Broad resonance constraint (Broad RC):** in order for something to contribute to someone’s wellbeing it should be attractive to them *when* it contributes to their wellbeing and when it enters their practical reasoning.

**Narrow resonance constraint (Narrow RC):** in order for something to contribute to someone’s wellbeing it should be attractive to them *when* it contributes to their wellbeing.

*Homework*, a defender of DS can reply, only shows that the course of action that is best for Ben (the one that maximizes his wellbeing) is not attractive to him *at the time* he is deliberating. In other words, *Homework* only shows that DS clashes with **Broad RC**, but it does not show it clashes with **Narrow RC**. If we interpret the constraint in the narrow sense, DS, in *Homework*, is compatible with it.<sup>5</sup>

In order to see this, consider the three options DS has for accounting for the time desire-satisfaction benefits someone: on a first view, the time-of-desire view, the satisfaction of a desire contributes to someone’s wellbeing at the time the desire is had; on a second view, the time-of-object view, it contributes to someone’s wellbeing when the object of desire obtains (Dorsey 2013; Bruckner 2013); and on a third view, concurrentism, a person is benefited when they hold a desire and the desire is satisfied at the same time.

On all three accounts, the benefit of Ben’s homework efforts will take place in the future, when the goods of studying obtain and when he will desire them. In his adult life, he will actually desire what makes course of action B good – his job and his college education – and consequently, find them attractive. Hence, at the time Ben is benefitted, on any view of when desire-satisfaction benefits someone, Ben *will be* attracted to the goods that obtain in his life. So, *Homework* is only a counterexample to the compatibility of DS with Broad RC, but not with Narrow RC.<sup>6</sup>

Defenders of the constraint, in particular Peter Railton and Connie Rosati, see the constraint as capturing an important link between motivation and the good (see Velleman 1998; Hawkins 2019, who are critical of this in the context of wellbeing). The broad constraint captures the relationship between motivation and the good. After

<sup>5</sup> It is important to note that Sarch (2011) builds on Rosati’s (1996) formulation, which does not specify a timeframe.

<sup>6</sup> In fact, on the time-of-desire view of the benefit of desire-satisfaction, it is necessarily true that a person will be attracted to the wellbeing benefits they receive when they receive them, as the benefit takes place when a person holds a desire for some good or state of affairs.

all, when we are attracted to a good at the time it enters our practical reasoning, it motivates us, or at the very least, is able to do so. But, it is also this feature of the broad constraint that creates a problem in cases such as *Homework*. As Jennifer Hawkins puts this point in a recent article:

“[S]ometimes it can be good for a person to change her circumstances or herself dramatically. It is highly plausible that, at least once in a while, the best path forward through life for an individual will be one of the paths that requires dramatic self-change. But, then our theory will say dramatic change is the best choice. And in these kinds of cases, even if we have great confidence in our theory, we simply cannot guarantee that such facts will have motivational force for the agents.” (2019, 112; see also Rosati 1996, who also makes space for the possibility that what is good for someone is to change one’s concerns)

If the constraint does not ensure that we are, or can be, motivated by potential goods, it can only state that we should have an attraction to goods when they benefit us. In other words, the constraint should be interpreted narrowly.

## 5 The Narrow Constraint and alienation

I have so far argued that that the narrow constraint saves the resonance defense from counterexamples like *Homework*, however, it does so at the cost of making RC narrow, too narrow perhaps. Railton’s concern seems to cohere much better with the broad constraint. After all, the resonance constraint refers to *resonance*, and how can a moment of attraction to something be enough for this good to *resonate* with us. To be attracted to a good momentarily does not seem to capture the gravity of Railton’s demand. Resonance, in the ethically relevant sense, seems to require a more extended, stable attraction, rather than attraction at one specific moment.

More precisely, recall that the normative force of RC comes from the idea that violating it will imply a type of alienation that is troubling. In particular, it will imply that what benefits a person leaves them cold – the object of state of affairs is not attractive to them. Narrow RC, as we saw, is compatible with ascribing the highest wellbeing value to actions that are constituted by goods that leave someone cold at the moment she undertakes the action. This opens the door for significant levels of alienation at any moment in time before the benefit. In order to see more clearly how alienating this may get, consider the following example:

*Fortuneteller*: an extremely reliable fortuneteller tells Sophie that her new relationship, which has been going extremely well since its recent beginning, will lead to an extremely unhappy marriage, that Sophie and her boyfriend will both regret strongly. Everyone will be happier – and have much more desires satisfied – if she would get together with her ex-boyfriend, who wants to get back with her. At this point, this is something that she finds an extremely unattractive prospect. One of her best friends has told her that he thought her character was much more compatible with her ex than with her current boyfriend.

Sophie cannot bring herself to see this, and is heavily surprised by the fortune-teller's insight.

Two things are significant about this example. Firstly, on DS, Sophie's wellbeing will be higher when she will go back to her ex. This example is thus similar in structure to *Homework*, and it similarly illustrates DS is incompatible with broad RC, but compatible with narrow RC.

Secondly, this seems to be a very strong example of alienation in Railton's sense: our good failing to engage us. What is best for Sophie, according to DS, will involve significant alienation in a substantial time frame. Moreover, it will be alienating during the time she is making the prudential choice. This tells us something significant about the relevant notion of alienation at play. Alienation, in the ethically relevant sense, is not (only) relative to the time of benefit, but can occur when we deliberate about our good. The fact that Sophie will be attracted again to her ex, does not seem to make a life with her ex less alienating to her now. If that is right, the narrow constraint only avoids a particular conception of alienation. But, this type of alienation that is excluded by the narrow constraint is simply too thin a conception of alienation. If our conception of alienation tells us that breaking up with someone you love to go back to someone you are out of love with is not alienating, our conception of alienation must be incorrect.

What is important to keep in mind here, is that alienation may come in degrees. We need to ask ourselves whether these levels of alienation that are compatible with the narrow constraint are, as Railton puts it, "intolerabl[e]". On the one hand, it seems that the levels of alienation in this example are very high, intolerably high, perhaps. On the other hand, what is not at stake is that going back to her ex is indeed what is best for her on a desire-satisfactionist account of wellbeing. Consequently, what is best for us according to DS, may be alienating to us, at least in significant time frames before we actually benefit from it.

The narrow constraint may be attractive. But, as the narrow constraint allows for high levels of alienation, the justification for the constraint, it seems, cannot be the general concern of avoiding high degrees of alienation itself. A possible reply to this charge is that while the narrow constraint allows for significant forms of alienation, it avoids a *type* of particularly bad alienation, namely the type of alienation in which something that is good for someone is not even attractive to her the moment it benefits her.

While I am sympathetic to the view that the narrow constraint *is* attractive as a constraint on wellbeing, it is not clear why avoiding this particular type of alienation can justify the constraint, RC. After all, it is not the case that the type of alienation that the narrow constraint avoids is always more alienating than alienation before benefit. Consider the piano example we have discussed before: an objective wellbeing theory may state that playing the piano is good for someone (when they are playing), independently of their attitudes towards it. That person has positive attitudes towards playing the piano, and looks forward to their first lesson, but, it turns out, the moment the actual piano playing starts, she finds it boring, and loses her interest in playing the piano. On this case, the narrow constraint is clear and plausible: the ascription of wellbeing value to playing the piano for this person is excluded by



the narrow constraint, and it is also alienating. But, it is not clear that the alienation involved in this case, is in any way worse than the alienation in Sophie's example.

That being said, we should acknowledge that the narrow constraint is still attractive in its own right. However, it is not clear how the constraint is motivated from the concern of alienation: it does not uniquely avoid alienation, nor is it clear that the type of alienation that it avoids is particularly pernicious.

To sum up our argument so far: the broad constraint connects closely to the aim of avoiding alienation and connecting wellbeing value to motivation. However, examples like *Homework* and *Fortuneteller* show that DS can meet the narrow, but not the broad constraint. The narrow constraint is compatible with significant degrees of alienation, but may still help us avoid a particular type of alienation, and may be plausible on its own. Lastly, *Fortuneteller* also illustrates that certain goods may both contribute to our wellbeing and also be alienating to us.

## 6 Hedonism and resonance

In response to the argument so far, a defender of DS may still argue that it counts in favor of DS that it can meet the narrow constraint, while rival theories cannot. However, a second problem for the resonance defense of DS is that the narrow constraint is not only compatible with DS, but also with at least one major competing theory: hedonism.<sup>7</sup>

**Hedonism:** a person's lifetime wellbeing is constituted by (the balance of) pleasure and pain.<sup>8</sup>

Why is this so? According to hedonism, pleasurable feelings are good for us when they occur, and, as I argue in this section, on most plausible accounts of pleasure that hedonists would endorse, pleasure implies an attraction towards the pleasurable feeling. Consequently, it also meets the narrow constraint.

This may seem counterintuitive. It is easy to imagine how people can be intuitively alienated from the things that give pleasure to them. A person who has a sadistic pleasure and wishes they did not have them, a vegan who loves the taste of meat, an ascetic who believes pleasure is bad, etc. (e.g. Raibley 2010; Dorsey 2011; Yelle 2014, 79–80). However, in this, I will argue here, it is no different from DS.

As Dorsey (2013) grants, preference hedonism – the view that wellbeing is having those experiences that one wants to have – also meets the constraint. This point is easily extended to hedonism combined with one popular theory about the nature of pleasure: subjectivist accounts of pleasure (Heathwood 2007; see 2006; Parfit

<sup>7</sup> While the perceived plausibility of hedonism has fluctuated much in recent decades, recent convincing defenses include Crisp (2006) and Bramble (2016). Moreover, there has been an upsurge in work about the efficacy of hedonism's most influential counterargument: the experience machine (see for example Weijers 2014; Belshaw 2014; Hewitt 2010; Lin 2016; Hindriks and Douven 2018).

<sup>8</sup> The narrow constraint is plausibly also compatible with life-satisfaction of accounts of wellbeing (Sumner 1996), if, on this view, the wellbeing benefit of a state of affairs benefits someone at the time a person feels satisfied about it.

2011 sect.1:2.6; Feldman 2004).<sup>9</sup> On these accounts, pleasure just is having feelings or experiences that one has a pro-attitude towards. So, the things that are considered to be good for someone, pleasurable feelings, are always things that people like, desire, or value at the moment they are good for us. Consequently, having pleasure, on these accounts, never violates the narrow resonance constraint. In this, it is highly similar to desire-satisfactionism.

However, on rival views, all non-subjectivism about pleasure,<sup>10</sup> pleasures exist independent of our attitudes towards them. On such accounts of pleasure, certain experiences can be pleasurable, even if someone does not desire, or value them. This results in an objective version of hedonism. On one prominent version of that view, pleasures just are those feelings that *feel good* (Crisp 2006; Smuts 2011).

Is pleasure on this objective feels good version of hedonism always attractive to us? It appears that the examples above show that it is not. However, note that the object of value for hedonists is pleasurable feelings. These feelings may be unattractive to people because they causally impact other things we care about in bad ways, as seems to be the case for the vegan, the sadist, and perhaps for the ascetic, or simply because they fit poorly within our value system itself. However, given that pleasurable feelings are those feelings that *feel good*, they must be attractive for individuals *qua* feelings. There is a parallel here with desires and attraction. I may not want to eat a piece of cake if I am dieting, all things considered, but this does not mean that a desire to eat this delicious cake – that is overruled by a desire to diet – fails the resonance constraint. Cake is still attractive to me, even though I do not want it all things considered. Similarly, even if we do not value pleasurable experiences, all things considered, there must still be a positive attraction to a good feeling *qua* feeling: we experience this feeling as a good feeling. Otherwise, it would not be a *good feeling*. Thus, hedonism – paired with the feels good account of pleasure – also meets the narrow constraint.

There are also non-subjective accounts on which pleasure is just a type of feeling, on which different instances of pleasure have in common that they share a *hedonic tone* (Labukt 2012; Bramble 2013). Similarly, on representationalist accounts, pleasure (or at least pain) is a representation of an event in or near the subject as good (bad) (Boswell 2016), but is not necessarily a feeling that feels good. On these accounts there is nothing necessary about how attractive we perceive the feeling, except that individuals *tend* to find pleasure attractive. But, these accounts have a hard time explaining the intrinsic value of pleasure (Jacobson 2013; Cutter and Tye 2014). If an account of pleasure cannot account for its intrinsic value, it fits poorly (if at all) with hedonism.

So, on accounts of pleasure that are open to hedonism, hedonism implies that what is good for an individual – feelings of pleasure – is attractive to them at the moment it occurs. Because it is *feelings* that are the bearers of wellbeing value on

<sup>9</sup> these views are commonly called externalist views, because they locate the nature of pleasure outside of the feeling, with the external attitude towards that feeling.

<sup>10</sup> most common non-subjectivist views are internalist: they locate the nature of pleasure within the feeling itself.

a hedonistic account of wellbeing, and, as these feelings are attractive to the individual, it will still be the case that we will be attracted to the objects of value on hedonism, and hence, the narrow RC is not violated. To say that some individuals do not see pleasure as attractive and that because of this hedonism violates the constraint is analogous to saying that some individuals do not see desire-satisfaction as attractive, and consequently DS fails the constraint (Sarch 2011). In neither case does the objection seem to get traction at the issue at hand: are individuals attracted to the basic objects of the good when they obtain? Just like in case of DS, hedonism is compatible with the narrow, but not the broad, resonance constraint.

Taking stock: the discussion in this and the former three sections shows two things. Firstly, if narrow RC is correct, then the resonance defense of DS does not go through: DS is not the only theory that can meet this constraint. Second, if understood broadly, DS simply does not meet the constraint. Moreover, while broad RC fits well with the alienation concern, it is too broad as a constraint on wellbeing. As the examples show, it is not plausible to posit that we will always be attracted in one way or other to the things that are good for us at the time we reason about our good. These points together significantly undermine the resonance defense.

## 7 Objections

A first objection the defender of DS can raise is that I have only shown that hedonism and DS are both compatible with RC. It may be that DS is still *better* able to meet narrow RC than objective hedonism, and that this still counts in favor of DS over objective hedonism. Desiring something, a defender of DS may suggest, is more indicative of an attraction towards something than taking pleasure in something. A defender of DS may argue that pleasure only presupposes an attraction towards a feeling, which is a more superficial type of attraction than the attraction towards an object of desire. This may especially be the case if we do not look at simple DS, but only count those desires that are rational and informed.

This objection misses its mark because while the attraction we feel towards some feelings of pleasure may indeed be superficial, some of our desires are superficial too. We may feel the desire to eat lots of candy, sleep with people we have no emotional connection with, or drink like there is no tomorrow. None of these desires are more indicative of a deep attraction than our attraction towards pleasurable feelings, and none will necessarily go away if we would be more informed or rational.

A second objection requires a more elaborate response. As an anonymous referee of this journal pointed out, in both examples that I used in the argument – Homework and Fortuneteller – I made the assumption that the person in question did not find one course of action attractive – going to college, and getting back together with the ex-partner respectively. However, it may be objected that this is implausible. Surely, there must be some things that even a teenager would find attractive about a life of career success, such as the fact that it will include good food, a nice place to live, etc. Similarly, in Fortuneteller, there must be something attractive about living with a loving partner, even if one currently does not see the attraction of being with this particular partner. We must acknowledge that this is true: attraction comes in

degrees, and surely, there must be some things about these options that the subjects find at least a little attractive. If so, it may appear that there is no problem for the resonance argument for DS after all: the option that is best for Ben on DS – doing his homework – is also one that he finds, at least to some extent, attractive. There are two responses to this objection.

A first is that the resonance constraint is naturally wedded to an idea about degrees of wellbeing and attraction. Dorsey puts this idea (in terms of valuing rather than desiring) as follows. According to him, RC implies that there is a particular “kinship relation” between the potential goods or states of affairs and the subject:

“...for valuers, not only is it necessary and sufficient for the relevant kinship relation that a valuer values the object in question, but the extent to which something bears the relevant kinship relation to me surely varies with the extent to which I value it—the more I value it, the stronger the relation” (Dorsey 2017, 702)

Formulated in terms of attraction, this would imply that it is not only required that what is good for a subject is attractive to that subject, but the better something is for a subject, the more attracted a subject must be to that good or state of affairs. However, for both discussed cases, this relation is reversed, out of the two options that we considered the option that is best for the subject, is the one that they find least attractive. Ben finds the life of studying least attractive, while it is the one that contains most desire-satisfaction.

At this point, someone may object that this not merely builds on the constraint itself, but also on an additional idea about degrees of welfare and attraction. However, we can arrive at a similar conclusion without this additional assumption, by looking in some more detail at states of affairs. States of affairs typically have many features to which we have attitudes of attraction and aversion. So, it is plausible that we find certain features attractive, while not others. For Ben, many features of the not-studying states of affairs are highly attractive to him – getting to play computer games a lot, not having to work very hard at school, etc. – while few features of the studying and career path are attractive to him – e.g. having a house and nice food to eat. So, for Ben, only these features could contribute to his wellbeing, according to RC. However, if only these features of the states of affairs could count towards his wellbeing, it would be highly unlikely that the wellbeing of the option where Ben does not study would outweigh the wellbeing of the option where he does study. However, this is still what DS implies, as this option contains more desire-satisfaction. So, RC and DS still clash.

Moreover, if it comes to the alienation involved in these options, the fact that Ben finds at least some features attractive in the overall unattractive option of a life of career success makes little difference. In order to see this, imagine Abby, who, is in exactly the same position as Ben, but while Ben in fact finds absolutely nothing attractive about a life of studying and making a career, Abby does see the attraction a little. This has little bearing on anything else in their life, and their options, and life courses would be the same. The career option would then be alienating to both in almost equal degree. In both cases the most salient features of this option invoke a strong aversion in both Ben and Abby.

So, even if Ben and Sophie do find some attractive features in the options that have the highest degree of desire-satisfaction overall – studying and going back to the ex – this does not save the resonance defense of DS.

## 8 Conclusion

The main conclusion of this article can be stated very briefly. The resonance constraint can be interpreted in two ways: Understood *broadly*, it is able to exclude alienation to a significant degree, but it is overly demanding as a constraint on wellbeing. It does not support DS, because DS fails to meet it. Understood *narrowly*, the resonance constraint is compatible with significant degrees of alienation. Moreover, it supports DS as well as objective hedonism in equal degree. Consequently, if it fails to support DS, or subjectivism more generally. Given the central role that the constraint plays in the motivation of these theories, this should significantly detract from their plausibility.

Where does this leave the resonance constraint? Meeting the narrow constraint may still be considered an attractive feature of theories. However, because the narrow constraint fails to exclude significant types of alienation, it cannot be said to derive support from an independent notion of alienation. This, however, was the *very motivation* for the constraint. Moreover, because it demands an attraction in such a specific timeframe (the moment of benefit), it is unclear what its general appeal is to anyone who does not already support hedonism or subjectivism.

The constraint has played a significant role in the philosophical debate about theories of wellbeing. However, on closer inspection, it is unclear whether this is right.

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