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RICE UNIVERSITY

Objectifying the Objective List

by

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ABSTRACT

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The aim of the present paper is to clarify the essential features of the objective list and address consequences of this characterization. The objective list theory is frequently criticized for its rigidity and its inability to accommodate the variety within the human population. However, I argue that the list can be far less rigid than it initially appears; opportunities for variety within the list abound. Further, issues such as having a well-rounded life as opposed to a specialized one are weighed. I argue that one may forego some goods to better achieve or acquire others. Finally, I claim that one need not maximize amounts of goods in one's life to live a good life and that 'satisficing' is an inadequate answer to the maximizing requirement.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Subjectifying' the Objective List</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Balancing</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximizing</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Introduction**

When we refer to what is good for a person, we mean what makes a life good for the person who lives it: what the elements are of a good life, the value of the life to the person who lives it. There are three main competing theories of well-being which advocate what they think are the salient features of a good life. *Mental-state theorists* purport that the good depends on the quality of a person’s mental states. The only thing that has bearing on a person’s good is a positive mental state. Positive mental states may include pleasure, satisfaction, and happiness while negative ones can be pain, distress, etc. On this view, ‘state of the mind’ prevails over ‘state of the world.’ This means that someone’s well-being could be enhanced by a false belief because what matters is his mental state, not the actual state of affairs. A good life has an abundance of positive mental states and few negative.

*Desire-fulfillment* (or preference-satisfaction) *theorists* also have a very subject-dependant view of the good. What is good for a person is to have his desires fulfilled. On this view, the actual state of affairs holds more significance. To have an impact on my life, my desire must be fulfilled; it is not enough that I just think it is. Still, what defines the good for a person centers upon what an individual desires. Many find this idea appealing because this accommodates the great deal of variation between people. What is good for one person may not be good for another. The third main theory is the *objective list account*. The
objective list account is unlike mental state and desire satisfaction theories because it is not entirely subject-dependent. Roughly, an objective list represents a group of things that are good for people and which enhance one’s life. These values have intrinsic worth and enhance a person’s well-being, regardless of his actual desire for them.

As Richard Arneson summarizes the objective list account, “What is intrinsically good for an individual, good for its own sake rather than as a means to some further good, is to get or achieve the items that are specified on a correct and complete list of such goods. The more that one gets or achieves the listed goods over the course of one’s life, the better for oneself is the life that one has lived” (Arneson 118). An objective list is a group of items that increase the value of a life. These items have intrinsic value, independent of the person to whom they are applied. “The thought behind forming them into a standard of well-being would be this: when they appear in a person’s life, then whatever his tastes, attitudes, or interests, his life is better” (Griffin 54). So, an objective list is a compilation of intrinsic goods that do not derive their value from the person to whom they are being applied.

This project discusses the structure and function of an objective list. My main concerns involve the level of subjectivity in an objective list and how the listed goods interact with regard to a well-balanced life or optimal life. In the first
chapter, I explore the hidden subjectivity in an objective list. Objective list theorists are often criticized for their lack of ability to accommodate the variety of people. Critics claim that an objective list cannot adequately describe the good for all. I argue that there is a surprising amount of versatility even within a strict objective list which can in fact accommodate a great deal of variety. There are both the possibility of subjective elements on the objective list and much hidden flexibility within the objective elements. Desire-fulfillment may be an element on the list, for example; it may be part of a person’s good that his desires are fulfilled. Also, most objective elements allow for a range of subjectivity. Take the pursuit of knowledge for instance. Within parameters, what area and kind of knowledge may be primarily left up to the individual. Whether one wants to study philosophy or biology is an open choice.

The second section focuses on the importance of the well-rounded life and balancing. Along with the versatility of the list come concerns of how to distribute the various goods. First, I address questions such as to what extent and how much of the list one needs to fulfill to have lived a good life and whether achieving excellence in one area can compensate for a deficit in another. I give three general principles of balancing, which are permissive and meant to function as safeguards against the negativity of severe imbalance. Next, I discuss issues of maximizing. Though it is often (carelessly) claimed that the rational person seeks to maximize goods, the rational person may seek to achieve an optimal life rather
than maximize amounts of goods. I argue that it is rational and acceptable not to maximize intrinsic goods, though the notion of satisficing may not be the helpful solution it first appears.

Throughout the discussion, I stay as neutral about the content of the list as possible. The very important question of what is actually on the list is not addressed here. However, how coarse-grained or fine-grained the list is affects some claims about the list. As I will mention later, not fulfilling one or several elements on the list may be acceptable and even expected if the list is very specific. If the character of the list is much more broad and its elements are categories such as ‘attainment of knowledge’ or ‘experience of the beautiful,’ ‘fulfilling personal relationships,’ etc., lacking even one of these could spell disaster for well-being. Furthermore, I am not seeking to defend the objective list account as the correct theory, but my arguments about the flexibility of the theory do directly respond to some of its critics.
‘Subjectifying’ the Objective List

An objective list is a summary of values that are objectively good for a person. A person’s life is better in virtue of having the elements on the objective list. While several aspects of what constitutes an objective list are controversial, what is central is that it involves an objective theory of value. As Thomas Scanlon claims, “What is essential is that these are theories according to which an assessment of a person’s well-being involves a substantive judgment about what things make life better, a judgment which may conflict with that of the person whose well-being is in question” (Scanlon 188). Derek Parfit explains, “according to this theory, certain things are good or bad for people whether or not these people would want to have the good things or to avoid the bad things” (Parfit 499). The character of the objective list theory invites attacks of rigidity and inflexibility. It is this discord between people’s desires and facts of the matter that many critics find particularly bothersome.

In the following chapter, I explore the possibility of variation in an objective list to demonstrate that the objective list need not be rigid. There is an apparent tension between the objectivity of an objective list and the substantial variation of views on what constitutes the good. An objective list contains the elements of a good life, but there are indefinitely many kinds of people and lives. How can the objective list propose flexibility and still be objective? At the same time, how could it be objective and still account for the good of everyone? If an
objective list embraces a great deal of flexibility, the objectivity of the list must be questioned. These are concerns of both flexibility and universality. Flexibility is the elasticity to ‘fit’ with a variety of lives and the variation in people. If the objective list cannot accommodate an appropriate degree of flexibility, it is difficult to see how it can adequately function universally as a theory.

To determine how much flexibility the objective list allows, we have to have an understanding of what it means for the objective list theory to be objective. How much variation can the objective list sustain without losing its most important characteristic: its objectivity? This chapter will address the central themes of the objective list as well as addressing two of its major criticisms. I explore how the objective list is defined: what its primary characteristics are and what separates it from competing (subjective) theories.

Even though the objective list is, as its name suggests, objective, I argue that the objective list is not without flexibility. It can include elements of subjectivity without threatening its objective nature. There are two respects in which objectivity is defined in the context of theories of the good (prudential value). First, the value cannot be (entirely) dependent on individual desires. Second, there is a fact of the matter whether something is valuable. Next, I will respond to two main criticisms that attack the flexibility of the list. The first criticism involves the premise that, on an objective list account, something a
person hates can be good for him and better his life. To many, this is a counter-intuitive result and speaks against the plausibility of the objective list as a theory of prudential value—how can something a person dislikes be good for him? I argue that while this objection cannot be entirely dismissed, it is not as worrisome as it appears. The second objection complains that the list cannot accommodate the differences in people and thus too rigid to be universal. In response, I contend that there is much flexibility available to the objective list theorist. Flexibility is present in several respects and rather extensive in its application and the notion that the list is too rigid to be universal is mistaken.

**How Objective is the Objective List?**

Certainly the objective/subjective distinction has been much debated. While settling the objective/subjective distinction is beyond the scope of the present work, the debate itself does have some points of contact with the present discussion: for example what separates the objective character of objective (or ideal) theories from the subjective character of preference satisfaction theories. The line between objective and subjective has been drawn, at least as regards theories of the good, in terms of individual desires. A good is subjective if it is dependent upon individual desires; otherwise, it is objective. Further, in a subjective theory, things have value in virtue of being desired (as opposed to being desired because they have value). In an objective theory, what makes things good
is "independent of whether they are or would be objects of any desire" (Moore 81). Value does not derive from a subjective source.

One sense in which what constitutes a good life for a particular person is believed to be subjective or objective mirrors the distinction between hedonist and preference satisfaction theories on the one hand, and ideal theories on the other. Hedonism and preference satisfaction theories are both subjective in the sense that both hold what is good for a particular person depends on what in fact makes the person happy or what that person in fact desires… Ideal theories are objective, or at least contain objective components, in the sense that they hold a good life for a person is, at least in part, objectively determined. (Brock 97)

Most objective list proponents are willing to allow a liberal amount of subjectivity without fretting about its objective integrity, without fear of abandoning the objectivity of an objective list. It is frequently implied that the sufficient condition for objectivity in an objective list is weak: that it need only have some core objective components, and that the sufficient condition for subjectivity in a subjective theory is strong: that it permits no objective components. An objective list can "allow for variation… They can count various kinds of enjoyment among those things that can make a life better, and can also recognize that different people experience these forms of enjoyment under different circumstances and are capable of experiencing them to different degrees
and at different costs" (Scanlon 189). It is an expansion on the values on the objective list and have their foundation in objective values.

Preference-satisfaction theories and objective list theories still sit on opposite sides of the objective/subjective line. The core of the preference-satisfaction theory is subjectivity; the good rests entirely on individual desires. The appeal of this view is that the good is located within the individual, so what is good for a person derives from that person. Preference-satisfaction theorists argue that what is good for a person is that his desires are fulfilled. So, any introduction of objective standards is contrary to the essential feature of the theory and takes the source of the good away from the individual's desires.

The objective list theory has an opposite foundation from the preference-satisfaction theory; it has objective value as its essential component. What makes a person's life good is that it includes these values. What is important to the objective list theorist is the solid foundation of objective value at its core. The objective list starts with a base of values that are beneficial to everyone. For an objective list theorist, preferences are not a reliable way to define the human good. However, the fact that an objective list may also include subjective considerations does not (by itself) undermine the integrity of its essential component. As long as the objective list maintains the integrity of its essential feature—core objective values—other subjective items might be additionally included. For example, as
long as the core values remain intact, the satisfaction of desires may be taken into account as one aspect of a person's good. The objective list can still accomplish its purpose, even with the addition of subjective elements. It retains the ability to dictate values and criticize preferences. So, while the imposition of objective standards is completely contrary to the purpose of the preference theories, the introduction of subjective elements is an addition rather than a contradiction to the objective list.

There is some discord as to what extent an objective list is compromised by the introduction of subjectivity, but no good reason has been given to suggest that subjectivity must be entirely excluded. Ameson, for example, has no trouble admitting a liberal amount to an objective list as long as it remains within certain constraints. Griffin is a bit more conservative in that he argues that if an objective list takes preferences into account and "even plausibly includes enjoyment on its list...it gets very hard to distinguish it from the informed desire approach"(33) but is still not a matter of 'all or nothing.' Buchanan and Brock agree that subjective concerns play an important role in even an objective theory. "No plausible ideal theory will deny that happiness and preference satisfaction often contribute to a person's well-being. What ideal theories deny is only that happiness and preference satisfaction are all there is to personal well-being"(33-34).
Richard Arneson proposes two minimal constraints of an objective list theory that separate it from subjective theories: the denial of agent sovereignty and objectivity of value. These mirror the two relevant aspects of objectivity mentioned earlier. First, the good cannot be determined entirely by the person’s own perspective; it is not contingent upon the person’s attitude. He calls this ‘the denial of agent sovereignty’...(agent sovereignty being the idea that the good is determined entirely by the person’s own perspective). This criterion coincides with the consensus definition of objective: that the good be (at least in part) independent of individual desires. He borrows the second from Thomas Scanlon but adds his own caveat: that an objective theory involves a judgment about what makes life better, and that there is a fact of the matter as to what is valuable for a person. This separates what is valuable from any personal perspective—objectivity of value. This constraint addresses the source of the value. As discussed earlier, the goods on an objective list derive their value from an objective source rather than individual desire. While the good may not be entirely determined by the agent, it may be partly determined by the agent. If the good is partly determined independently of the agent as opposed to wholly determined by an objective source, there is a gray area as to how much of the good is determined subjectively. Adding the objectivity of value requirement limits the possibilities. So, even if a person partly determines his good, he is still limited by what objectively has value.
Though subjectivity is present and limited, the possibility of relativity is open. The two criteria suggested above do not preclude relativity to the individual: that what is objectively good for one person differs from another. The two requirements Arneson proposes are compatible with numerous lists, specific to types of people or even individuals. It has been suggested that there is the possibility that there is a different list for each type of person, or even a different list for each person as opposed to the same list for all. Peter Railton explores a ‘relative but objective’ line. His ideas are consistent with different lists for different kinds of people as well as the same list for all people insofar as they are people.

We might think of goodness as akin to nutritiveness. All organisms require nutrition, but not the same nutrients. Which nutrients a given organism or type of organism requires will depend upon its nature. Cow’s milk nourishes calves and many humans, but it won’t nourish those organisms, including some humans, who cannot produce the enzymes needed to digest it, and some elements essential to human nutrition are toxic to other organisms. There is, then, no such thing as an absolute nutrient, that is, something that would be nutritious for all possible organisms. (Railton 10) Similarly, something may be good for one person and not another, and this would be a matter of fact about those people. Of course there can be facts that are relative to individuals. For instance, my height and weight are dependent on me specifically but are not subjective in that they do not depend on my individual
desires. So, even if a list of goods is relative, everything on it still needs to be an objective value.

Having a different list for each type of person or even one for each person can be unpacked in (at least) two ways. First, it could mean that the items on the list are different for each type of person or each person. Secondly, it could mean that while the items on the list remain consistent, that the distribution of goods changes from person to person. The existence of different lists with different items for each person is not problematic, but it is unnecessary. As I will discuss in the following sections, there is plenty of flexibility to be had in a universal objective list. Once we see how flexibility obtains in an objective list, then the apparent need for different lists will be shown to be illusory. Also, the existence of many different lists would be inherently relative in a way that threatens the objectivity of the list. If what is good for a person is largely or wholly set by his nature, then the good is variable.

Allowing liberal variation in the distribution of the listed goods avoids the threat of arbitrariness more deftly than the multi-list theory. While there are allowances for people’s differing capabilities and choices, the flexibility discussed below will be within the boundaries of what is objectively good and the balance of those goods. This does not mean that each person, regardless of how abhorrent, has his own acceptable objective list. If each person could have his own objective
list, even though the standard would be objective, the construction of the list
would be highly relative. If the items on the list change too drastically from
person to person, it is doubtful that they are truly valuable elements. Admitting
that one thing is valuable with regard to one person and not another invites an
accusation of subjectivity. This is not the same as admitting (as I will) that one
may concentrate on what suits him to the relative exclusion of other goods. One
person may choose different trade-off options than another, but all of the options
remain objectively good. For example, as I will address in the discussion of
balancing, physics is not the best pursuit for someone who does not have the
ability to grasp it and the enjoyment of fine wines is not a good for someone who
is an alcoholic.

Still, the objective list stands accused of two troubling implications. First,
the denial of agent sovereignty divorces a person’s judgments about his own good
from what is actually good for him. This can leave us with a strange result: that
something a person hates can be inherently or intrinsically good for him, and
better his life. In fact, many see this as a counter-intuitive result and a chief
objection to the objective list theories. A second related objection is that the list
cannot accommodate the differences between people. It is common to think that
what is good for me may not be good for someone else. The vast variation
between people is the foundation upon which the preference satisfaction theorists
have built their view. They accommodate this variation by making the good
depend on a person; they locate the good subjectively. In a desire satisfaction theory, for example, something is good for a person because it satisfies a desire. For the objective list proponent, the good is (at least partly) independent of the person; it is good whether the person recognizes it or not. It is not person-perspective-variable.

The first objection claims that something a person dislikes can be good for him—and this is, prima facie, a rather counter-intuitive result. In one sense, it does not seem odd that something we dislike would be good for us. We do not see the discord between preference and benefit as such an odd result when we are talking about instrumental goods. Eating spinach may be good for us whether we like it or not, but this is because it produces a value we are interested in: good health. The goods on the objective list, though, are not merely instrumental. The value of the objective goods is inherent. So, while it is easy to see why the disliked spinach may be an instrumental good, it is not as easily explained how something a person hates could be inherently good for him. While it is easy to sympathize with the dislike of spinach, the dislike of good health is more difficult to understand.

Some have tried to remedy this problem by altering the structure of the list and building in safeguards that would prevent this somewhat paradoxical result from happening. For example, some have advocated mixed accounts or
composite theories, which combine an objective list with preference satisfaction constraints. On these accounts, something is good for the person if and only if it is both objectively good and desired by the individual. This puts what is typically called an ‘endorsement constraint’ on the objective list, meaning that any items on the objective list that are endorsed by me are good for me, but those I am indifferent to or dislike do me no good. This means to prevent the undesirable result or discord between benefit and personal desire.

There are several versions of endorsement constraints. Derek Parfit and Ronald Dworkin offer very similar composite accounts that demand agent endorsement for the objective good to be realized. Dworkin claims that nothing can intrinsically improve a person’s life if that person does not endorse it. Similarly, Parfit says that “if they are entirely devoid of pleasure, there is no value in knowledge, rational activity, love or the awareness of beauty” (502). For Parfit, even objective goods lose their value if they lack a component of personal enjoyment. In fact, Parfit’s claim seems divorced from a truly objective theory in that the value derives from an individual perspective. These attempts to fix the worry about the lack of subjectivity in an objective list merely assert or inject the authority of subjectivity and are not as concerned with preserving objectivity.

The point of the objection is that something can be good for a person without his wanting it. The family of endorsement constraints does not answer the
objection, but simply ignores it by changing the 'without his wanting it' condition; the whole thrust of the objection is derived from the person's dislike of the alleged value. If we are wondering how something can be good for a person despite his dislike, we are sidestepping (in effect begging) the question to say that only those things he endorses are good for him. Adding an endorsement constraint to an objective list account makes the result a composite account (part preference-satisfaction and part objective list) because it is saying that value is a result of being on the list \textit{and} subjective endorsement—that goods do not have value on their own. This denies the criterion that there is a fact of the matter (as opposed to individual desire) as to whether something has value. One is free to advocate a composite account on its own terms, but this account is then a contender with an objective list theory and not a type of an objective list theory. The point is this: an endorsement constraint can not be the objective list theorist's answer to the objection because the objective list theorist does not have the means to this kind of response. He must be committed to the value of the goods on the list. The composite accounts stand to be evaluated on their own, but cannot come to the aid of an ailing objective list theorist.

Aside from the problem that an endorsement constraint makes it a composite account, there are added concerns of balance and inadequacy. If a person only endorses a small portion of the list, he may have a very impoverished and narrow experience of the good. And, because his endorsement is part of what
makes something a value, we cannot only say that he is missing out on possible goods. Endorsing only a small portion (or even none) of the list conflicts with the spirit of the objective list as well as the balancing principles set forth in the following chapter.

Still, the objection that something can be good for a person even though he hates it stands, though its presence need not be as ominous as it first seems. There are two responses to this objection that disarm it. First, it is simply unlikely that the discord between value and desire would be forced. The accusation that there may be discord between desire and value is true, but not a threatening worry. This situation is primarily a concern if one’s options are dominated by things one dislikes. However, because of the kind of variation that is available within an objective list one is usually able to have goods that are compatible with desires. This is not the same as arguing for an endorsement constraint because desiring the value is not a contributing component to its worth, but a coincidental one. It is the case that with the variation available, there is little reason to worry that the only path to a good life is paved with dislikes. The fact that ‘intellectual pursuit’ could be an element on the list does not specify that someone must pursue eighteenth century British poetry or quantum physics. There are a myriad of choices for the individual to pick what he likes within a wide range of options. This being said, it is not a principled answer to the objection, but only steals some of its thunder.
The logic of how there could be anything that a person hates that is good for him is troubling. However, in a way there may not really be anything that a person hates that is also good for him in the sense that it is not possible to hate things that add value to your life. Just to have opera in one’s life is not enough to add value. An appreciation of opera, on the other hand, can\(^1\). In like manner, if someone dislikes personal relationships, he has probably experienced the wrong kind—and being in a bad relationship is not a value. This does not turn the list subjective because the elements of cultural experience and personal relations have value and do not require the individual’s endorsement. Rather, bad personal relations lack value, as can agonizing so-called cultural experiences.\(^2\)

The second main accusation against the objective list theorist is that the list does not have enough flexibility to be universal. If what is good for a person’s life is an enumerated list of objective goods, there is a concern that the goods on the list is not exhaustive enough to account for a wide variety of lives. Universality is the ability to account for the spectrum of all lives. For instance, if a theory makes athletic achievement a necessary condition of a good life, it is not able to account

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\(^1\) George Sher’s example. Further, appreciation is different from enjoyment. One does not need to enjoy in order to appreciate. I might appreciate the literary worth of ‘Grapes of Wrath’ without enjoying the reading of it.

\(^2\) There still could be abhorrent cases in which even the most flexible interpretation of the list would be unsatisfactory to very unusual individuals. However, if an individual desires to venture outside the boundaries of even a permissive list, we should point out that there most likely is something deficient with the individual, and that it is not by itself a criticism of the objective list.
for a vast number of people: those with (at least somewhat serious) physical
disabilities or no athletic ability or inclination. Total rigidity (as opposed to
flexibility) is not merely a discord between desires and what is good, but the
inability to be relevant to the diversity of people's lives. It is often claimed that
objectivity forces a rigidity/inflexibility within the object list theory—that an
objective list as such cannot accommodate the differences between people. Critics
contend that this rigidity threatens the universality of the theory, insisting that an
objective list is too rigid to apply to all people.

While the worry of how personal preference combines with objective value
to affect a life is a legitimate one, we do not need to be as drastic as developing a
composite account to explore this topic. Though they are often criticized for their
rigidity, objective lists contain the possibility for a great deal of subjective
manipulation. There are two interrelated opportunities for subjectivity on the
objective list. First, the objective elements are subjectively instantiated; people
realize the goods on the list differently. Second, by many accounts objective lists
contain subjective elements: elements that are subject-dependent, that have aspects
influenced by individual desires.

Examples of the two kinds of subjective elements on the objective list are
'the fulfillment of important life goals' or 'desire fulfillment.' These are rather
subjective elements, though they are subjective in different ways. Take the
example of 'fulfillment of important life goals' which is an example of a
subjectively instantiated objective element. Even though the list is objective, just
about anything on the list can be tailored to the individual. So, it may be
important that a person has life goals or projects, but the list does not dictate what
they need to be. For example, someone might be required to eat fruit as part of a
diet, but whether he chooses apples, oranges, or bananas is up to him. These
'subjective elements' are still subordinate to objective evaluation. Whether the
person's well-being is enhanced by the satisfaction of this good at least marginally
depends on the quality of the life goal. On the one hand, a person's choice of a
life goal is subjective, but what determines the quality may be objective. It makes
a big difference if one's life goal is to excel in a noble career or be a fetishist.
However, one's life goal does not need to have inherent nobility to improve a
person's well-being upon its fulfillment. It only has to meet the minimal
requirements of not being detrimental or in violation of other objective principles.
A goal may be "valuable only because they fit under some such heading as
'enjoyment.' All this reasoning about individual differences takes place within the
framework of a set of values that applies to everyone"(Griffin VJ 31)

A life goal neutral in quality serves a worthy purpose as well; the primary
importance may be the fact that one has life goals. Some life goals may not
'count' as good for a person, such as obsessive fetishism, but one does not need to
model Mother Theresa to have the accomplishment of a life goal improve his well-
being. It may be exemplary to achieve a life goal that has value independently of being a life goal: saving lives, helping an environmental cause, etc. However, it is also satisfying to achieve a goal that derives much of its importance from the fact that it is a personal goal. For instance, if someone is an avid birdwatcher and it is one of his important goals to see and identify various rare species of birds, it contributes to that person’s good to fulfill that goal.

The goal itself does not have to be judged as a particularly valuable endeavor for its achievement to be contributory to the person’s good. If I fulfilled someone else’s goal of spotting and identifying a rare bird by chance, it is reasonable to claim that it would not contribute to my good in the same way as it would theirs, since goals derive some or much of their value from the fact that they are goals.

Perhaps some things are valuable only because they are subsumable under some general human interest... But surely some are not; some have weight only in particular persons lives, such as rock climbing or playing the piano well. Some are valuable only from a particular person’s point of view: they are what that person cares about. Call them personal values. But it is doubtful that there are any such things as personal values... A very odd person might care a lot about counting the blades of grass in various lawns, but that does nothing to make it valuable... To see anything as prudentially
valuable, we must see it as an instance of something generally valuable and,
furthermore, as valuable for any (normal) human. (Griffin VJ 27)

The next kind of subjectivity in an objective list involves the subjective
elements, such as ‘desire-fulfillment.’ Desire-fulfillment as a member of an
objective list could function in two ways. It can be likened to the case of the life
goal, meaning that the worth of its satisfaction is partly dependent on the worth of
what is desired. Or, it could mean that desire-fulfillment more broadly construed
is good for a person; that it is good in general that a person gets what he wants.
Not every single desire would need to be evaluated; as a whole, it is better that
someone gets what he desires rather than not.

I have alluded to two main opportunities for subjectivity within an
objective list. First, there is subjectivity in how the objective elements on the list
are instantiated. Second, there is the possibility of having subjective elements on
the list. One or both of these kinds of subjectivity initially could be seen as a
threat the objective character of the objective list—that there are too many liberties
taken with the objective list. And, if there is a problem with the subjectivity of
instantiation of objective elements, a fortiori there is also a problem with having
subjective elements. The subjectivity of instantiation has the advantage of an
objective foundation whereas the subjective elements are wholly subjective. It
may seem that adding ‘desire-fulfillment’ to an objective list is ‘cheating,’ but it is
a possibility that many are willing to endorse (Arneson, Griffin, Kagan, Brock).

As discussed previously, because what is important to the objective list is the
objective core, adding subjective ‘extras’ does not threaten the theory. Though the
option of adding wholly subjective elements is not a desirable as the ‘tailoring’ of
the objective elements, it has the ability to remain consistent with the theory. I
argue that the two kinds of subjectivity I will discuss are in concert with the
identity of the objective list theory, and in much of the way, conservatively so.
Despite all of the variation, objectivity of value and the denial of agent sovereignty
remain intact.

We could of course exclude very ‘bad’ desires as not counting toward a
person’s good. (This is an objective list after all.) Further, the fulfillment of
insignificant desires may not trump the fulfillment of other elements on the list.
The subjectivity of significant elements may detract from the strict objectivity of
the list. For example, a life goal or certain other desires are significant
components of a life. If these were (totally) subjective, without restriction, it
would undeniably detract from the objectivity of the list. Clearly, what kinds of
subjective elements are allowed on the list is important. Also, their realization
must be governed. Not every desire is beneficial when fulfilled, but perhaps many
are. Even though some (objective) principles would have to govern how the
subjective elements function, they would not necessarily be micromanaging.
One possibility is that subjective elements should have less authority and thus be subordinate to the objective values. If a subjective good comes into conflict with or requires the exclusion of an objective good, the objective good should triumph. However, it becomes clear that interference with other values is not a useful constraint by itself and does not always seem correct. Take the case of a religious man whose life goal is to achieve closeness with a deity. Achieving this goal may require the abandonment of some of the objective goods; he may not have many experiences of the beautiful. This kind of scenario may represent an acceptable life as long as it is compatible with whatever balancing principles are appropriate. Just because life goals are subjective does not ipso facto make them less important. In fact, life goals are something that many would rank above many other goods in the rank of importance. What is important is the legitimacy of the life goal. While it may be acceptable for the religious man to abandon portions of the good life to pursue his goal, due to the nature of his goal, the fetishist or grass blade counter may not enjoy the same kind of waiver. Subjective fulfillment of values must be governed if the list is to retain its character and force. It is not the case that the life goal (pursuit, preference, etc.) must be valuable to legitimately contribute to a life. However, it must still be a permissible and acceptable endeavor.

An objective list involves some restriction. It seems wrong, and more importantly inconsistent with the objective list theory, to say that any fulfilled
desire, regardless of its nature, is good for a person. Even most preference-satisfaction theorists are nervous about claiming that the satisfaction of any preference is a good thing. If it is reasonable for the religious man to pursue his goal, but not the fetishist, a more specific regulation is required. The fetishist, in part, would be governed by the same principles as the religious man, balance, e.g., For example, there may be a fetishist who lives an otherwise fulfilled, well-balanced life, and also satisfies his fetishes (by collecting shoes, etc.). On the other hand, another fetishist may let his fetish prevent him from fulfilling other obligations. This contrast (between fetishist) shows that it is not simply the fetishism by itself that is the problem, but its relationship to the other values. As I will discuss in the following section, sometimes we allow one pursuit to crowd out others, but if the pursuit is fetishism, it has less authority to do said crowding. Some pursuits are ruled out from contributing to well-being at all, regardless of their demands on other aspects of a life. Self-mutilation and other self-destructive behaviors, for example, are bad for a person in their own right.

As I mentioned above, subjectivity creeps into an objective list both as straightforward subjective elements and in the variable instantiation of objective elements. This second kind of subjectivity involving the versatility of even the objective elements is more subtle, but just as present. There are a couple of ways objective elements may invite subjectivity. First, there are many ways in which a person can attain a good. Under the heading of 'pursuit and attainment of
knowledge’, for instance, there is an enormous variety of learning one could explore. Second, instances of a good affect a person depending on his life, circumstances, and capabilities. The same thing in two people’s lives can have very different implications and effects. It may be immediately obvious that subjective elements require restrictions. It is less obvious, but I believe also true, that the objective elements are in need of a similar kind of guidance.

To stress the variance within the objective elements themselves, we need only consider the myriad of examples of each kind of good. Consider an example of a possible item from the list: friendship, or deep personal relationships. Friendship may be an objective good. With whom a person develops friendships is his choice. Knowledge may be the objective good, but the field of knowledge one pursues can be the result of individual preference. While the good is objective, the instantiation is very versatile and subjective.

Just as in the case of the life goal, it is important that the achieved good is an appropriate instance of the objective good--that it is in the spirit of the list. ‘Deep personal relationships’ may be a component of a good life, but dysfunctional or abusive ones. The objective good comes with restrictive criteria, much like a life goal. Just as the life goals are subjectively chosen, so are relationships, and thus they require similar regulation. The ‘good’ of relationships may come with a list of criteria as well: that they are of duration and significance
and that they have various attributes that would characterize a positive relationship. Not every life goal is an acceptable or life-enhancing one. In like manner, not every friendship is either, even if a person’s psyche is such that he may pathologically choose friends that abuse him.

These specifications and criteria may be applied to individual lives as well. Depending on the view we want to advocate, it may be important that the token of the good is an appropriate one for a specific person. Drastic underachieving, not developing one’s talents, for instance, may be objectionable as a characteristic of a life goal. If one has the mind of a genius or is at least extremely bright, a thirty-year career as a janitor may not qualify as a life goal whose fulfillment helps one attain the good life. It is not janitorial work in itself that cannot represent a worthy life goal, it is the relationship between the relative capabilities of the person and the life goal (or form of pursuit of knowledge, etc.) that they select\(^1\). So, having subjective elements is not problematic as such because the objective elements are subjectively realized also. In fact they most likely share similar problems and virtues especially if there is a uniform mechanism to govern both the objective and subjective elements.

\(^1\) This is an ‘all-things considered’ example. If a genius’ life as a janitor allows him the time to think, the flexibility to explore other pursuits and hobbies, and the allowance to develop other areas of his life, the career itself is not necessarily objectionable. However, if something is a life goal, it is not unreasonable to claim that it should at least be a true goal. Even a life goal neutral in objective value may take time, effort, and focus to achieve.
An objective list invites subjectivity in two respects. First, many accounts of objective lists contain subjective elements. Second, even the objective elements accommodate quite a bit of variation—so much so that it severely weakens the case of the critic who complains about its rigidity. The objective list maintains objectivity and flexibility and shows itself not to mutually exclude these two ideals.
Balancing

There are a variety and multitude of elements on an objective list. Here I am concerned with the breadth and depth of these elements one must have to have a good life—i.e. the role of balance in a good life. Balancing is an important consideration for two reasons. First, if an objective list claims that a good life is one that has certain elements, it is important to consider how much one has to achieve and what distribution of these goods one must have to have a good life. To achieve a good life according to an objective list theory, to what extent and how many of the values need to be fulfilled? By hypothesis, any item on the list is good for a person. The question of balance asks how these elements should combine in a life—whether an excess of one good can compensate for deficiency in another and how well-rounded a good life should be and how balance relates to specialization and diversification. Next, there are two factors that add to the complexity of balancing. People's capacities vastly differ in regard to their ability to achieve in various areas. Second, the goods themselves are not equally valuable—some goods may be more significant than others. Though these factors complicate balancing, they also afford an additional opportunity for flexibility within the objective list. Different balancing choices for different people allow for more customized variations of the list. Lives with the same goods can be very different if the distribution of those goods is varied.

A person need not experience the goods to the same high degree. After all,
often there are trade-offs between goods. One cannot achieve every potential
good to the fullest. It may be acceptable to settle for a lesser degree of one value
to enjoy a greater success in another. For instance, if a mother decides to stay at
home with her children for ten years to be a good parent and foster her relationship
with her children, she may sacrifice a certain amount of career success. This is not
to say she will have none, just less than if she had not taken time out of the work
force. The quality of her life has not deteriorated because of this trade-off of
goods; she has decided to forego maximal achievement in one area to foster
another.

There is no clear-cut, canonical principle of distribution among goods.
However, I suggest that there is a range of acceptable options of balancing; as long
as a life falls within that range, the balance is adequate. My account is rather
permissive, with only loosely limiting guidelines because we are looking at the
structure of an objective list. The general concern is what constitutes an
acceptable balance of goods, rather than demanding an optimal balance. The two
regulative guidelines I will advocate are: 1. the achievement profile: significant
achievement in one or few areas with minimal accomplishments in others; 2. the
renaissance profile: well-balanced distribution of values at a higher average level.
The caveat is that neither 1 nor 2 may have a poverty of any major category of
value. These allow for either a life of diversification or a specialized life, provided
that the perils (with regard to quality of life) of each can be avoided.
The general tension is between specialization and diversification; too much or too little of either can have a deleterious effect. There are clearly dangers in either an excess of specialization or diversification. There are many adages which forewarn of the latter: spreading oneself too thin. "The man who does everything does nothing well," etc. On the other hand, there are what Hurka discusses as the 'costs of concentration.' "People who devote themselves to one activity can easily become fatigued or bored. They can miss the invigorating effect of variety, as well as the chance to enrich themselves in one area with experiences gained in another. Their very narrowness can produce stultification. What is more, some perfections are subject to a law of diminishing returns" (Hurka 92). Worse than stultification may be the obsessive quest of one goal which not only deprives a person of 'the invigorating effect of variety,' but also prevents him from enjoying any other goods or living a life that can be valued as good.

Thomas Hurka makes well-roundedness itself an ideal, advocating the "greatest balance consistent with significant achievement," a sort of pareto-optimal point when it comes to balance and achievement. My account allows for two paths to the well-rounded life (achievement and renaissance). It may be more plausible to have sympathy for the genius who lacks balance than the thinly-spread underachiever who has only a cheap balance. But, since balance is conducive to a harmonious life, we can allow that this person lives a satisfactory life even if he
has more modest levels of individual goods.

While it is prudent to be liberal about the distribution of value fulfillment, gross imbalances and absences detract from the quality of a life. The caveat is intended to preclude a deleterious imbalance. There are plenty of examples of lives which are high in achievement, but seem not to be good lives overall (for the people who live them), which reinforces that there is more to the quality of a life than specialized achievement. Consider the classic example of a tortured artist or troubled genius who excels in only one area—a person who pursues excellence in one discipline at the cost of all else. Gauguin, for instance, let his pursuit of beauty interfere with all other obligations, enjoying no fulfilling personal relationships. A cruel tyrant may leave behind things of beauty and advances of civilization, made possible by means of forced labor. He may have lived a life of constant suspicion and a lack of trust even though he was an enormously prolific leader. Nash, a brilliant mathematician and Nobel Prize winner, suffered from schizophrenia and resulting hardships throughout the course of his life. In each of these cases, specialization, combined with a lack of other goods, led to valuable lives, but lives that were not of adequate value to those that lived them.

These kinds of cases are poignant for two reasons. One may use them to argue against our standard of balancing by claiming that requiring balance would preempt this kind of genius and/or excellence. The apparently exclusive choice
between excellence and a good life is not a desirable conclusion for the objective list theorist. However, it is not at all clear that minimal balancing would have such an impact on the pursuit of genius. One may also employ cases such as these to demonstrate that excellence in one area compensates for impoverishment in others and that balance is unnecessary. Several intuitions drive our thought that genius and this kind of extreme achievement and excellence are overwhelmingly valuable, despite the costs the others parts of a life. For one thing, their lives have increased value it brings to others. Many reap the benefits of the work of geniuses. Our world is enriched because people like Gauguin lived the lives they did. We also tend to think this kind of achievement is good for the person as well as the society. All things being equal, it is good that a person achieves greatness. However, we cannot immediately conclude the genius himself has lived a good life just because he has produced much for other people to benefit from or enjoy or just because he has achieved much.

If the person has excelled in only one area and at the expense of the rest of his life being impoverished, we must still ask if he has led a good life, a life that is good for him. On the one hand, it may be attractive to say that his life is justified by this excellence, that the superlative success is enough to outweigh all of the negative aspects. Alternatively though, it is more plausible to claim that the person has not led a good life. Rather he has led a miserable life excepting excellence in one area. "On any view, the best lives strive vigorously after
excellence” (Hurka 90), but in judging the value of a life for the person who lives it, we must evaluate the sacrifices at the expense of other goods.

While one is permitted to choose the achievement profile, one is not committed to choose it. Some species of objective list theorist, such as Perfectionists, do have different or more specific goals from the generic objective list theorist. There are a few noteworthy differences between goods and excellences, generic objective list theorists and perfectionists. Objective lists contain items that are facets of a good life; Perfectionists identify and strive for the achievement of excellences. “The good life according to perfectionist theory is the life in which the individual develops the excellences of the species to a high degree. Perfectionism takes a narrow view of the human good. The excellences it takes to be valuable do seem valuable, but it denies value to much that seems worthwhile” (Arneson 220).

Perfectionists are not excluded from endorsing a view of balancing that takes into account goods as well as excellences, but Thomas Hurka’s discussion, which I refer to here, is concerned mainly with the balance of excellences. Hurka’s point is analogous to my concern here, but not the same. The balancing issues concern the perils of specialization, the problems of spreading oneself too thin, and the ideal of a well-rounded life. However, for Hurka the balancing is between specific kinds of goods: excellences.
Achievement does not necessarily mean the same thing across categories of goods and excellences. Being excellent at playing a musical instrument is not the same kind 'high-level achievement' as deriving a great deal of good from personal relationships, though they may be equally valuable. In having a high degree of 'success' in personal relationships, one has achieved a great deal of a certain good, but it need not be seen as an excellence in the way that being a piano virtuoso is. A life well-balanced between piano and hockey is different from an overall harmony that incorporates the excellences as well as life goods. The items on the generic objective list have a broader, more inclusive scope. This difference between the objective list theory in general and Perfectionism specifically may also make the way each views trade-offs different: a Perfectionist is concerned with selecting the more valuable option while the objective list theorist is not committed to always making the most valuable choice.

Balance is both a value in its own right and a regulator; whether it functions primarily as a restrictive principle or a positive value depends on whether a person has chosen option (1) or (2). If a person chooses to maximize in certain areas with only minimal achievement in others, balance acts more significantly as a second-order governor, not as a value itself; it is a relationship between goods. If specialized excellence is the pattern of a life, the standard of balance is a safeguard against the possible downfalls of specialization. Because a person who pursues this option chooses high achievement rather than the well-rounded life, balance is
more of a cautionary concern.

This is unlike the case of a person who aims at a renaissance life and thus makes balance a central pursuit. For the proponent of a well-rounded life, balance acts as both a value and an enhancer of other values. Just as a life impoverished in all areas but one is off balance, we would neither be satisfied with a perfectly balanced life of every good functioning at the same very low level. We may value a life of balance and quality, but not a well-rounded but generally impoverished life. This is why higher minimal requirements are necessary for the well-rounded life. Even though balance does not make up for lack of value, it does enhance the value. So, the otherwise moderate amount of worth is enhanced if the life is especially well-rounded. This reflects the sentiment, "Even if our individual accomplishments are not great, their proportion can mirror that of Renaissance lives, and for many of us this proportion is, other things equal, a good" (Hurka 88).

Balance does not always showcase its own value or play the same role independent of what kind of life it regulates. This presents a somewhat asymmetrical view: severe imbalance may be sufficient to sabotage the quality of a life, while balance would not be sufficient to guarantee quality. While its absence can be destructive, its presence is not sufficient to create enough value to compensate for underachieving. Balance exhibits positive value and influence.
Harmony between various goods increases their worth. Still, it is also a 'meta' value insofar as it enhances or detracts from the worth of other values. We require justification for the absence of it; an unbalanced life may be qualified by a life rich in specialized areas.

**Capacities and the Relative Worth of Values**

Two factors complicate the mechanics of balancing. First, not all values are created equal; some are more important and valuable than others. Second, not all people have the same capacity for achievement. Some people may be gifted in some areas, but not in others and some people may not be gifted at all. These two relativistic concerns make the endeavor to strike an objectively good balance more complex.

Some objects on the list may be more valuable than others. It is reasonable to suppose that while all the elements have intrinsic value, some are more worthwhile than others. If so, this makes allowances and complicates balancing. For instance, often intellectual and theoretical pursuits are valued above the physical. If it is the case that some goods may have more worth than others, then this does have implications for balancing concerns. This suggests that some elements may be overridden or minimized more easily than others. A more valuable good may take priority over a less significant one. If \( x \) is more valuable than \( y \), but both are good, one might prima facie be able to ignore \( y \) to pursue \( x \) to
a higher degree.

Some have suggested that one should choose the higher excellence—the physical yielding to the spiritual for instance. According to Hurka, Aristotle and Aquinas both give lexical priority to the intellectual or spiritual goods, such that even a slight amount of them outweighs any physical good (Hurka 85). A moderate position seems more appropriate here. It is perhaps acceptable for the person pursuing spiritual fulfillment or a philosophy degree to make athletic achievement a secondary consideration more so than a person neglecting to go to college so that he may spend more time at the gym. Though this priority may not be so strong as to demand the choosing of the more valuable in every case. It tells us that as a rule one should choose the more valuable over the less, even if one has to sacrifice some achievement in the lower. This is not just a matter of choosing one endeavor over another, but prioritizing the more valuable achievement. Part of what makes the degree priority in this case is that it is the central goal and not merely the fact that it is academic rather than athletic. Alternatively, the person who skips class to go to the gym chooses to neglect the (arguably) more significant good.

To review the principles put forth earlier, 1. If a life is a specialized one and achieves excellence in few areas, the other goods may be achieved only at baseline level. 2. In the case of a well-rounded life, a level of achievement in
most areas is required. A life that has more evenly distributed goods must reach a level of respectable moderation—a level that is reasonably above the baseline mentioned in 1, but not as high as excellence. Either in the case of a well-rounded life or a life of specialization, there are no vast areas of impoverishment. Impoverishment will count as falling below some minimal baseline not here determined. Thus, a choice between specialization and a well-rounded life is not forced. Either is acceptable if these basic conditions are met.

In the following chart, suppose 1, 2, 3, and 4 are values. Further, suppose that the specialization baseline is 5 and the renaissance baseline is 8. A and B both lead acceptable lives on the general model. C, despite his achievement in 4, is bankrupt in too any other areas (even though A, B, and C have equal totals). It may be fair to hold the mediocre balanced member to higher ‘all-around’ standards since he does not achieve in any one area.

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What it means to be below the baseline in a significant way depends on the type of objective list that we advocate. If a list contains broad elements (which may resemble categories), lacking even one may be a troublesome deficit. If a list contains a multitude of items, varying in significance, then it may not be as
problematic if one is ignored. At this point, we want to be as neutral as possible about what is actually on the list. However, the level of specificity on the list has its ramifications. Griffin gives an example of items that might be found on an objective list: accomplishment, components of human agency (such as autonomy, minimal material provision, and liberty), understanding (wisdom), enjoyment, and deep personal relations. (Griffin WB 67-68) This is a good example of a coarse-grained list; each element is broad and significant. It does not provide a great deal of specificity. Lacking even one of these important elements could greatly affect the quality of a life. Alternatively, if one wished to advocate a list of a multitude of specific elements, and the items on his list resembled those in a ‘1000 Things to Be Happy About’ book, the satisfaction of each or even a strong majority would not be as crucial. A life without autonomy is concerning. A life without crunching through fresh-fallen snow or the enjoyment of fine wine is not as troublesome.

Of course there are many ways the elements on the list could relate to one another. One value could be far and away the most important element while others could be grouped together by closeness in value. The importance of each item partly depends on how fine-grained or coarse-grained the items on the list are. It is possible that some items on the list may be fine-grained, while others are coarse grained and as a mixed account, it could be evaluated accordingly. For example, ‘the enjoyment of fine wines’ may be one item and ‘the participation in
deep personal relationships’ may be another. If a life is lacking in the fine wine
domain, this is (arguably) less catastrophic than an absence of relationships. If the
list is fine-grained, one may miss out entirely on some areas and still have led a
good life if he has done well for himself in other areas.

The worth of the element is not relative to the person, although the way we
incorporate balancing into this idea may be subjective. This adds a further
dimension of flexibility. That A is a good swimmer and not a good theoretical
physicist does not make swimming more valuable. Suppose that intellectual
pursuits are of more value than physical and that A is a not very bright athlete. It
seems reasonable to suppose that he may focus his efforts to achievement in the
physical arena above understanding quantum mechanics. Even if intellectual
pursuits are objectively worth more than physical, this may still not prevent us
from allowing the athlete to pursue the physical. Abilities, after all, affect to what
extent people can realize the various goods. Suppose that A achieves a “30” in
theoretical physics (or more simply, knowledge) and a “10” in physical fitness. B,
on the other hand, has a “10” in knowledge and a “30” in physical fitness. Based
on this model, we may want to argue ceteris peribus that A’s life is better/has more
value than B’s. This does not commit us to saying that either life is bad or

4 These numbers are merely arbitrary ‘scores’ to illustrate comparisons in the examples.
deficient. In fact, both lives could be good; both lives could even be the best for A and B.

There is an inversely proportional relationship between achievement and requirement. There may be value constraints on what to pursue beyond the minimal. Do you have a requirement to continue balancing once minimal balancing requirements have been met? We may view balancing as a mathematical function. As the level of an achievement rises, so do the minimal requirements. However, the minimal requirements may increase at a much slower rate than the level of achievement. This kind of continued balancing may be intuitively appealing, but I do not see why it should be required if all previously designated balancing constraints are met. More balancing may be a plus, but not a requirement. It is unclear what would be gained, and being forced to balance even more may detract from the level of achievement.

Regardless of the balancing choice, there is going to be a threshold where one may drop below the minimal requirements of a good life. For an objective list theorist, this minimal requirement would have to be objective. It is admitted that balancing (and maximizing) may be customized according to the individual, so that one may have the opportunity to excel in a field of her choosing. However, the baseline levels need to be somewhat uniform across people. Suppose minimal

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5 Assuming that on this scale “10” is above the previously mentioned baseline.
requirements did vary according to a person's capabilities and likes. Then, a
person utterly deficient in capability could achieve a good life in a trivial sense
because the markers were set according to her ability. On the other hand, if the
minimal requirements do not rest on capability at all, it may very well be the case
that many people are not capable of living a good life. This may be an unfortunate
but unavoidable result. This conclusion may be so distasteful to some that they
would think this a reason for subjectifying the baseline scale. Making the
standards so subject-dependent, though, would diminish the force of the objective
list judgment of a good life.
Maximizing

In this section, I discuss the role that maximizing plays in judging the quality of a life: whether the rational person seeks to maximize the amount of good in his life. In general, an objective list theory claims that some things are good for a person and the more he has of these various objective values in his life, the better his life is. From this, one may infer that one is required to maximize the amount of goods in his life and that if he does maximize, his life will be better than if he did not. Consequently, there has been much argument about whether the only rational option is to maximize and try to attain as much good as one can or, alternatively, if it is rational to accept what is good enough and not strive for better. In the following paragraphs, I discuss and argue for the following four points. First, sometimes we should not maximize intrinsic goods because the increase does not represent a true gain. (More of a good thing is not always better.) Secondly, sometimes maximizing is not required because it comes at a high price. Maximizing a good often has a non-negligible cost (at the expense of another good). Thirdly, these points are not an argument against maximizing in general, only against required maximizing of individual goods. There is a difference between maximizing aggregate amounts of individual goods and the value of a life. Further, maximizing the value of a life is preferable to maximizing individual goods. Finally I contend that this is a better compromise to a simple maximizing position than satisficing. Michael Slote presents satisficing as a competitor to
maximizing. I argue that satisficing does not successfully compete with
maximizing and when scrutinized is revealed as an impotent concept.

Too Much of a Good Thing

If it is the case that the more one has of various intrinsic goods, the better
one’s life is, getting the most possible seems like a good thing. But this claim
presents two interpretations. One is that more of a good thing is better and the
other is that maximizing goods will lead to the best life. If more is not always
better, this is a strong argument against the claim that maximizing goods will lead
to the best life. I will argue that it is not clear that more of a good thing is always
better in a substantive way. Sometimes ‘good enough’ is, well, good enough and
more does not constitute a benefit. More of a good thing does not always mean
better because there may be no substantive gain. In some cases having more does
not make an increase in well-being.

Needs and wants are often met without maximizing. Maximizing with
respect to a particular good may go well beyond a sufficient amount. A sufficient
amount is just that: sufficient, and anything beyond that may be insignificant or in
excess. If this is the case, then ‘the more, the better’ adage is denied because an
increase in a good may make an only marginal or even negligible difference, and
not a true substantive improvement of well-being. Suppose a person had five very
close friendships—lasting, profound, and fulfilling. One could imagine that her
life is saturated in this area, that it is ideal. Adding a sixth friend may not improve her life; gaining another friendship may not do her any good. Or, her life may be so abundant in this area that an added friend only improves her life a very small amount. An initial intuition that may explain this reaction is that friendships have costs and adding another close friend may detract from her other five friendships. Supposing that this is not the situation here, it is still reasonable to imagine a case where another good friend would not add value to her life. The status quo may be beyond improvement in the sense that an increase of goods will not truly raise the qualitative level.

This is not an anti-maximizing example, since by hypothesis, one starts out with ‘enough.’ It depends what ‘enough’ means in a strict sense. If it means that more would be superfluous, then maximizing lacks potency. If it means adequate, then room for improvement remains in the picture. It seems that only in this latter case would we be concerned with having to justify not maximizing. “Someone who rejects what is better for himself may feel that a certain option will give him much more than he needs, and from the standpoint of a genuinely moderate individual that will be a reason to reject the option—at least when there is an alternative that provides him with what he feels he does need”(Slote 32). The general claim states that the more of the goods one has, the better the life is. While in some sense it may be true, balancing and maximizing ideals tell against a constant increase. Even if the cost was not greater than the benefit, we could still
be working with a diminishing margin of utility scenario. In some cases it would not only be a diminishing margin of utility, but no utility at all. Once a person reaches a high level of achievement, only a small amount may be left to gain. This small amount may not be substantial enough to enhance a person’s well-being. If it is the person’s life goal and he pursues even minimal advances, this is acceptable, but not required.

The Cost of Maximizing

It seems to be a platitude that the rational egoist seeks to maximize his good. However, this may be too strong a statement. Many times people are not simple maximizers, and rationally so. Maximizing often has a cost that one is not interested in paying. There are two ways in which the cost of maximizing goods could trump the benefit. First, the effort required to make an improvement may not be worth the results. Often this kind of case involves maximization being self-defeating. In a self-defeating example, the cost outweighs the benefit and so there is no maximization at all. In a sense, it is conceptually impossible for the cost to outweigh the benefit if one is truly maximizing. In a second sense, however, there is certainly a broader spectrum of concern with regard to cost. Even if someone may truly achieve a benefit that outweighs the cost, he may not be obligated to pursue a higher level if his current level is adequate.
First, the self-defeating case claims that maximizing can be self-defeating in that the costs of maximizing may paradoxically end up outweighing the benefit. If achieving just a little more comes at a high cost, for instance it may not be true maximizing to pay the cost to achieve the minimal benefit. One may argue that once a good life is achieved, nothing more is needed, which would dismiss maximizing goods as unimportant or just icing on the cake. It may be burdensome to produce maximal results. Maximizing is a never-ending process; there is usually not a point before death where one has maximized the value in his life. If we are concerned with the quality of a life and claim that maximizing is burdensome, we are really saying that the burden of maximizing detracts from the quality of the life. If the burden of maximizing is so great that it brings the life below the threshold it would be at if one never maximized, it seems clear that maximizing in some cases is self-defeating, or in a sense not maximizing at all. For any time a maximizing effort has a greater cost than benefit, value may not be maximized.

There is a different sense in which the burdens of maximization are relevant. Maximizing often entails a trade-off; maximizing in one area can cost either deficiency or an inability to maximize in another area. Even if a person could achieve the highest aggregate amount by maximizing in one area and falling to minimal levels in all the rest, it may not be the formula for the best life for him. Thus the highest aggregate amount of goods would not be equivalent to the best
life. The life with the highest aggregate amount of goods may be coextensive with
a person's best life in some cases. These two kinds of maximizing are not
exclusive, but neither do they entail one another.

Maximizing Simpliciter and the Quality of Life

It is important that we distinguish between different kinds of maximizing.
There seems to be a difference between maximizing simpliciter, which is
achieving the greatest amount of goods and maximizing the quality of life, which
(depending on the case) may depend to a greater or lesser extent on the aggregate
total of good. One could advocate striving for an optimal life without committing
oneself to the attainment of an optimal amount of goods. There are several
reasons not to maximize goods. As recently discussed, there is little motivation to
maximize goods if this maximization either yields no benefit or incurs a cost.
More of a good does not mean an improved quality of life. Further, strictly
maximizing goods may violate balancing principles. If the goal is to maximize the
aggregate level of goods in a life, achieving this may require excelling in those
areas one can most succeed in, even if other (perhaps more important) areas are
left neglected. If it is true, as argued above, that the highest aggregate amount of
goods is not equivalent to the best life, then simple maximizing is not the sure path
to the best life.
Since an objective list theory is a theory of substantive value, it seems that distribution of the values should be of some concern. It is important that the values combine harmoniously in a life instead of a mad attempt to grasp at as much of whatever one can. So, the best possible life may not be the one that has achieved the highest aggregate of goods. Instead, it may be a life that richly combines many of the values. Balancing and maximizing are related issues. Further, balancing and maximizing may work in concert with one another, maximizing must be integrated with balancing. If someone maximizes in a specific area and not in others, balancing principles may be violated. As I have set up the balancing principles to be compatible with and accommodate maximizing concerns, this kind of aggregate maximizing ends up being subordinate to the permissive principles of balancing.

The Role of Satisficing

Satisficing is a notion that, at its core, represents the idea of opting for ‘good enough’\(^6\) rather than best. Slote gives examples, miniature thought experiments, which are meant to demonstrate our own intuitions about moderation, satisficing, and our reluctance to maximize in certain situations. He claims that it is equally rational to choose something good over something better.

\(^6\) In “Two Kinds of Satisficing,” Thomas Hurka points out two interpretations of Slote’s satisficing (that Slote did not recognize as distinct). *Absolute level satisficing* appoints a threshold of goodness. Once reached, the duty to improve vanishes. *Comparative satisficing* claims that the option is good enough if it is reasonably close to the best outcome. I will be referring to the absolute level satisficing in this discussion.
It is important to point out that Slote advocates a version of satisficing that is in competition with maximizing as a way for overcoming problems presented by simple maximizing. I do not think his concept of satisficing is very useful or does much work. While, like Slote, I do not advocate a simple maximizing view, I argue that his notion of satisficing does not hold much water. Most supposed satisficing examples involve a cost-benefit analysis and are not pure cases of maximizing. In cases that do not involve a cost, it ends up being irrational not to maximize. In cases that do involve a cost, it is rational to achieve below even the level of satisficing. However, much of his casuist approach leads to trivial truths and counter-intuitive results. In the next section, though, I will argue that in his version of satisficing, there is a cost-benefit trade-off between goods and costs of maximizing. If one can maximize without cost, it is irrational to do so. In cases that do have a cost, it is rational to fall even below satisficing (perhaps even to minimum levels). In short, Satisficing is superfluous because we can justify our decisions on the basis of maximizing and balancing alone and do not need this extraneous principle.

Consider his example of the satisficing homeowner.

An individual planning to move to a new location and having to sell his house may seek, not to maximize his profit on the house, not to get the best price for it he is likely to receive within some appropriate time period, but simply to obtain what he takes to be a good or satisfactory price. . .
Given some notion of what would be a good or satisfactory price to sell at, he may fix the price of his house at the point, rather than attempting, by setting it somewhat higher, to do better than that or do the best he can. His reason for not setting the price higher will not, in that case, be some sort of anxiety about not being able to sell the house at all or some feeling that trying to do better would likely not be worth the effort of figuring out how to get a better price. Nor is he so rich that any extra money he received for the house would be practically meaningless in terms of marginal utility. Rather, he is a ‘satisficer’ content with good enough and does not seek to maximize his expectations. (Slote 9)

This is a case of a person not seeking to maximize the return on his house by not asking the highest price he could. However, Slote is even willing to change the example into one where the homeowner actually rejects a higher offer. Suppose the homeowner put his house on the market for 140K for the reasons given in the passage above. Two parties simultaneously make offers. A offers him 150K (10K over the asking price) because he wants to be sure of getting the house. B offers 140K, the asking price. While the homeowner only asked 140K for his house, it is difficult to reason why he would turn down the 150K offer. This is assuming all other considerations are held constant. If the homeowner favors B over A for extraneous reasons and thus wishes to give the house to him, he may have made a rational decision, only not on the basis of satisficing. B might be a young family and the homeowner may want them to have his house. The homeowner may know
that A is going to tear down his house and build another in its place. All things
being equal (reasons such as these being absent), however, it would be irrational to
reject A’s offer.

Philip Pettit argues along this line that someone like the homeowner may
have reason to accept A’s offer and reasons to accept B’s offer, but aside from
extraneous reasons, does not have rational reason to accept B’s offer over A’s.
(21) Pettit’s and my objection is that it is not rational to choose lesser well-being
when greater well-being is available at no cost (all things being equal). An
individual may not want millions of dollars, for instance, because he does not
want the burden of managing such a sum of money, lifestyle, and the
complications that this amount of money can bring. But this is an outside reason
why, by his calculation, such a life would not be an improvement to his own.
Without these kinds of outside reasons, it is difficult to justify how the homeowner
could take 10K less for his house.

Slote does address how he thinks it is rational to reject a ‘free bonus,’ but I
do not think adequately. First he points out that the homeowner would have
reason to choose either offer if they were independent of one another. That is, the
homeowner would be rational to accept B’s offer if it stood alone and also rational
to accept A’s offer. Since on their own they would both be rational choices, he
slides into arguing from the claim that they are equally good or self-beneficial.
“When two equally (or incommensurably) good or self-beneficial options present themselves, it need not be irrational to choose one of them, even though one has no reason to prefer it to the other”(Slote 21).

But the two options are not equally good. One offer is better than another. One is 10K more than the other and as the original scenario stipulates, the homeowner is not so wealthy that this would be a pittance to him. While the homeowner did not ask for more money even though he could have, this is not the same as rejecting it once it is put in front of him. Slote has already admitted that something can be a good for a person even if he does not choose it or particularly want it and this money would make a financial difference to the homeowner. I do not think it is rational for someone to choose what is less good for him if there is negligible cost (this cost could refer to either himself or others) and if having the better would increase his well-being in some reasonably substantive way.

Someone may decide he wants to be a good lawyer, but not the best (Slote’s example). Suppose he could in fact maximize—that the cost of working harder would not outweigh the results of his labor. What makes this different from our homeowner? Even though maximization in this case would be possible and available, it comes with a cost the individual would rather not pay, being that he is already satisfied with a certain level of performance. It would cost him other values. Either the time he invested to become a better lawyer may pull him away
from other pursuits or the burden of being a better lawyer may monopolize too much of his life.

In "Satisficing and Optimality," Michael Byron also distinguishes between simple maximizing and maximizing the quality of life, claiming that at a global level, we are all optimizers and calls the satisficer "another kind of optimizer." He claims that satisficing is a local enterprise and that rational satisficing is really optimizing in disguise. We do not insist the lawyer become the best lawyer because maximizing in his career does not guarantee maximizing his well-being. It may cost other goods which could improve his life.

The possible merits of satisficing would come when there is an ability and opportunity to do better, but not compelling reason or desire to do better. Choices that do not need to weigh cost against benefit are more straightforward. It is not true satisficing if there is no real benefit or no cost. If the benefit is not valued above the cost, as long as there is already sufficient amount, it is acceptable to not simply maximize. However, we can reach these tenets without the use of satisficing. Because simple maximizing often has unwarranted costs or sometimes little or no benefit, it is more profitable to focus on an optimal quality of life. An increase in goods does not entail an increase in quality of life. Satisficing tries to capture this ideal, but it is a superfluous concept, especially since when there are costs involved, we find it acceptable to less than satisfice.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


