Darwall on Rational Care

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Stephen Darwall's understanding of what kind of life is a good life, good for the person whose life it is,[1] belongs in the same family as, among others, Scanlon's[2] and mine.[3] It is a family of views about well-being which descends from Aristotle, and Darwall has much of interest to say about the good life, and particularly about Aristotle's views on the subject. Many of the observations central to his position seem to me cogent, and are shared by other writers. These include three important propositions:

First, that a good life, one which is good for those whose life it is, is not necessarily the same as a life which they think is good for them, nor does it necessarily consist in their desires being satisfied, nor in the satisfaction of any subset of their desires (e.g. their considered desires, or those not based on any false assumptions).
Second, that people aim or intend to do what is worth doing, to have relationships worth having, and engage in goals worth pursuing, and so on, and that all of these, and their combination, are distinct from having a good life (and this explains how people can knowingly sacrifice their own good), and
Third, that what makes the well-being of people worth pursuing, to the extent that it is, what provides reasons for those same people and for others to protect or promote it, is that people are valuable in themselves.

I stated the three propositions as I tend to see them. Darwall's statement of them is somewhat different and is probably more nuanced and accurate than mine, but we agree on the importance of the propositions, and Darwall is right to think that much that is written about well-being is flawed by contradicting them.

This article was written for a seminar organized by Roger Crisp about Darwall's account of welfare. With minimal revisions I have left it as it was.

[1] S. Darwall, *Welfare and Rational Care* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), ch. 4. Unless otherwise indicated all references are to this book.

[2] *What We Owe To Each Other* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1998), ch. 3.

[3] Cf. *The Morality of Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), ch. 12; *Ethics in the Public Domain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, paperback edn, 1995), ch. 1; *Engaging Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), ch. 13; and 'The Role of Well Being', *Philosophical Perspectives* 18 Ethics (2004), p. 269.

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Initially, therefore, I thought that my fundamental disagreement with Darwall concerns issues in theoretical ethics only. There is no doubt that we do disagree on matters of theoretical ethics, not least about the relationship between what Darwall calls metaethics and normative ethics.[4] But on reflection it seems that the disagreement spills over into disagreement about the concept of well-being.[5] Still the disagreement begins with and is focused on his basic approach to understanding well-being.

RATIONAL CARE THESIS AS AN ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT OF WELL-BEING

Darwall develops his own account in contrast to, and through a powerful and effective criticism of, informed desire accounts of well-being. He is propounding an account of the concept of well-being[6] which, roughly speaking, takes it to be what one ought to care about when one cares about a person, oneself or another, for his or her own sake. It seems a simple and clear thesis. But on reflection I found it difficult to make out what the account is. I will chart briefly the difficulties and my solutions. One thing is clear. Darwall maintains that:

> NET: 'What is for someone's good or welfare is what one ought to desire and promote in so far as one cares for him' (7) (The necessary equivalence thesis)

Given that this is meant as a philosophical point we can take it for granted that he takes the connection between what is good for a person (what serves his well-being) and what one ought to want for him to the

[4] Including on issues not discussed here. For example, Darwall says that 'questions of normative ethics are logically independent of metaethical issues' (73), though he rather mysteriously adds that 'metaethical and normative ethical views frequently cluster together, offering mutual support' (ibid.). Not knowing what sort of support he has in mind I am not sure if we disagree, but I believe that there are non-contingent relationships of mutual support between issues of theoretical and normative ethics and we probably disagree on that. Another disagreement not taken up here relates to Darwall's understanding of the relationships among so-called thick and thin normative concepts.

[5] There is no single term in English which captures naturally the idea moral philosophers discuss when they discuss the nature of well-being. The closest we come to expressing the idea is to say that it is the concept of a life which is good for the person whose life it is. Darwall, acknowledging the lack of terminological consensus, and accepting the rough interchangeability of the different concepts in use, prefers 'welfare'. I find 'welfare' too closely associated with the material and social conditions of well-being, and use 'well-being' primarily because it is not frequently used in non-philosophical discourse and its ordinary meaning is less liable to be confused with, or to tilt or colour our understanding of, its philosophical use.

[6] See for example: 'it is a position in the metaethics of welfare concerning the concept of a person's good' (12).

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extent that one cares about him for his own sake to be a necessary one. The thesis asserts that necessarily the property of serving a person's well-being is instantiated in those cases where the property of acting as one ought in so far as one cares about that person[7] is also instantiated, and only in them. The necessary equivalence thesis leaves open the possibility that the two properties are distinct. Darwall may doubt that any real property is involved in either case, but presumably would agree that the thesis says that the two concepts which he uses necessarily apply to the same situations, so that if it is correct, or true, to apply one of them it is also correct or true to apply the other. Again, so put the thesis allows that the concepts may well be distinct, and therefore that the expressions used to express them are not synonymous.

Is this all that Darwall's account maintains? Clearly not. After all his first formulation of his main thesis is

> *RCT (Rational Care Thesis) constitution version*: 'a person's good is constituted. . . by what one (perhaps she) should want *in so far as one cares about her*' (4).

A little later he formulates the thesis thus:

> *RCT identity version*: 'What it is for something to be good for someone *just is* for it to be something one should desire for him for his sake' (8).

This statement is, according to Darwall, a tautology (10). I will refer to this claim as *the tautology version of the RCT*.

Two points suggest themselves. First, all three versions entail, but also go further than, the necessary equivalence thesis. Second, they are three different theses, and the constitution version is inconsistent with the others. My difficulty in understanding Darwall's view derives from the second point with which I will start.

If a sentence of the form 'A is B' is tautological this is normally because either the expressions 'A' and 'B' have the same meaning, or the meaning of A makes being A conditional on being B. Hence 'brother is a male sibling' and 'brothers are male' are both tautologies. The tautology version implies that 'serves X's welfare' and 'is something one ought to do in so far as one cares about X' have the same meaning. In philosophy of language 'concept' is commonly used to refer to what expressions with the same meaning express, or have in common. In English, and in its more general philosophical use, however, this is not so. The concept of law, whose elucidation is an elusive goal of legal philosophy, is not to be

[7] For brevity's sake I will take it as read that the care referred to is caring for the person for his own sake, and will not mention this additional condition separately.

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confused with the meaning of the word 'law', nor with what is expressed whenever the word is used (with the same meaning). Nor can I believe that Darwall is trying to explain the meaning of the word 'welfare'. As we noted, he explains that his 'book concerns what we variously call a person's good, interest, well-being, or welfare: the good of a person in the sense of what benefits her' (1), which clearly are not synonymous.[8] He thus indicates that he does not take his account to be an explanation of the meaning of the word 'welfare'. I will therefore dismiss as implausible the tautology version with its implication that Darwall is interested in the meaning of words.

One problem regarding the other two versions is that they are inconsistent with each other. The identity version can be taken to state that the expressions 'serves X's welfare' and 'being something which one ought to do in so far as one cares about X' express the same concept or that they refer to the same property. Given Darwall's declared aim to explain the concept of welfare it would seem that he is concerned with the identity of the concepts. Either way the identity version is inconsistent with the constitution version. The relationship of constitution holds only among non-identical items. Nothing is constituted by itself. Chairs are not constituted by chairs. They are constituted by legs, a seat and a back. Moreover, the relationship is asymmetric. If A is constituted by B, then B is not constituted by A. Legs, a seat and a back are not constituted by a chair. According to some dualists people are constituted by a body and a mind, but if so then minds and bodies are not constituted by people. Macro objects may be constituted by subatomic particles, but not the other way round, etc. While constitution is a non-reflexive and asymmetric relation, identity is reflexive and symmetric.

What then is Darwall's thesis? Perhaps the most plausible interpretation is that he had in mind the identity version. The emphatic '*just is*' cited above is offered as part of his rejection of *one* argument for the necessary equivalence thesis. According to it, whenever we do what we ought to do in so far as we care for a person we do what serves his well-being because what we ought to do in so far as we care for a person is to serve his well-being, a notion independent of that of caring about

[8] Does Darwall realize this? In an unpublished paper called 'The Concept of Welfare' (sent me by Darwall to help in preparing for the seminar) he says: 'I take "X is for S's welfare" to be equivalent in meaning to "X will enhance S's well-being", "is in S's interest", "will benefit S", or "is for S's good". We may use one or another, or even all, of these expressions differently, of course. But the idea I shall be concerned with is often referred to by each of them'. Does he take 'equivalent in meaning' to mean 'having the same meaning'? I suppose that the context explains that that is not his meaning. Rather he means that the differences in their meanings are immaterial to his purpose.

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people and giving specific content to the duty of care (9–10). Darwall's rejection of this view suggests that he has in mind the identity thesis, either the identity of the relevant concepts or that of the properties that they refer to, for the identity thesis preserves the symmetrical relationship between welfare and what we ought to care about.

Concluding that Darwall endorses the identity version of RCT leaves a further issue that remains to be resolved. The question arises: Assume someone intends to pursue the well-being of himself or another. What determines what he should do, that is what determines what actions would satisfy his intention, what would constitute realizing it? We may expect the answer to start with the concept of well-being. It consists in part of standards or rules for the correct use of 'well-being', and they determine what counts as a correct application of the concept, and thereby also what would serve well-being and what would not. That means that acts which promote or serve well-being are those which promote or serve whatever it is that he ought to care about in so far as he cares about that person. What someone who cares about the person concerned ought to care about is what he should promote. But what determines what one ought so to care about?

I do not know what Darwall's answer to this question is. Nor am I sure that he thinks that it is part of an account of the concept of well-being to provide the answer. On the opening page of Darwall's own discussion of what constitutes a good life he says:

> In this final chapter, we turn to the normative question of what kind of life is best for human beings in the sense of . . . providing them the greatest welfare.

> Strictly speaking, questions of normative ethics are logically independent of metaethical issues, and this is no less true when it comes to welfare. Virtually any combination of metaethical and normative ethical positions on welfare is logically possible, although it would be impossible, for example, for nonsentient beings to be harmed if welfare consisted (metaethically) in the satisfaction of desires. Despite strict logical independence, however, metaethical and normative ethical views frequently cluster together, offering mutual support. . . . the normative ethical position for which I argue in this chapter can be seen as supporting a rational care theory of welfare, and vice versa.

> My normative claim will be that the best life for human beings is one of significant engagement in activities through which we come into appreciative rapport with agent-neutral values, such as aesthetic beauty, knowledge and understanding, and the worth of living beings. An important aspect of a rational care metaethics of welfare is its thesis that welfare's normativity is not agent-relative, but rather agent-neutral, from the perspective of one caring. But if what is good for someone is what it makes sense to want for her for her sake, from the agent-neutral perspective of one caring, then it should not be surprising that whether an activity makes a contribution to her welfare can partly depend on its relation to agent-neutral values. If, therefore, the latter

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normative claim about human welfare is independently plausible, as I shall argue in this chapter, then that will support, in turn, a rational care metaethics of welfare. (73–4)

I quote at length for we have to consider the on-the-one-hand and the on-the-other-hand points made here. What is Darwall telling us here about the concept of well-being?

(1) I assume that he is not merely saying that: For every person X, and every view about the concept of well-being C, and every normative view, O, about what one ought to care about in so far as one cares about someone, it is possible that X professes to believe C and he also professes to believe O. That is certainly true, but has little to do with the relations between metaethical and normative propositions. It is entirely due to people's ability to have or profess to have contradictory beliefs.
(2) Similarly, I assume that Darwall does not merely mean to say that one can apply the concept of well-being to any life, whatever it is like, without committing a category mistake (of the kind one would commit if one said (non-metaphorically) that the number seven enjoys well-being). That too has nothing to do with the relations of metaethics to normative views.
(3) Therefore, the basic claim in the passage, the claim that virtually any combination of metaethical and normative views on welfare is logically possible, should be taken to imply that Darwall's RCT is consistent with any proposition about what constitutes well-being, what life is a good life, and therefore that one can consistently apply the concept of well-being to any life, whatever it is like.

I take it that it is not logically possible for the concept of a table to apply to anything other than tables. But if Darwall is right then it is logically possible that the concept of well-being applies to things which are not well-being, for example it is logically possible for it to apply to a life of unmitigated and unredeemed suffering, or to a life spent entirely in sleep. Of course such lives will not be good lives, but it is possible for the concept of well-being to apply to them.

What precisely is problematic about this claim? The difficulty is in understanding what the claim entails regarding the nature of the concept of well-being. In general we identify concepts by what it takes for a person to have them, use them and understand them. In particular having or mastering a concept involves holding oneself accountable to standards for its correct use. That is why, generally, incorrect application of a concept is not logically consistent with the concept, that is with a correct statement of the standards for its correct use (though, of

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course, not every incorrect application shows a defect in understanding the concept: it may be due to some other mistake). What then is Darwall telling us about the concept to the extent that he says that it is logically consistent with every application of it?

First, we have to note that his observations about the way meta-ethical and normative views can mutually support each other (or, presumably, undermine each other), sensible though they are, do not help with our question. It appears that the support he refers to here is epistemic support. What I am trying to understand are not reasons why this or that view may be true, but what the view is.

Similarly, his observation that the concept of well-being does include some conditions for its correct application (an example may be that since the concept is of a good life only creatures who have or at least could have a life can have one which either is or fails to be good) does not dissolve the question. It does not, for example, exclude the possibility that inconsistent applications of the concept (e.g. pairs of applications such that necessarily if one is correct the other is not) are consistent with it.

So how does Darwall understand the concept of well-being? We can rule out the possibility that he takes it to be a concept whose standards for correct use admit of no incorrect use. Perhaps some self-reflexive concepts are like that, but as Darwall argues against some and for other views about what life is good we know that he does not take well-being to be such a concept.

The same consideration also excludes another understanding of his view. An account of a concept includes, as a central element, specification of the standards for its correct use. But, when 'correct use' is understood in one natural way, they need not be standards which specify 'conditions of correct application'. Sometimes the term can be used to refer to 'conditions of correct application', but it can also be used more narrowly. Some concepts are such that their correct use, or their correct use in the *first person*, depends partly or entirely on how things are with the speaker. The notions of how things seem to one or appear to one, or what one likes and prefers at the time of speaking, may be like that. There are standards for the correct use of 'it looks to me as if' but perhaps not for its correct application, and the concept can apply to any situation in the world, provided it looks to me a certain way.[9] But again, Darwall's views about what life is good appear to exclude this understanding of the concept of well-being. If it were subjective, in that sense, there would be nothing to say about what life is good. One would only be able to specify what different people take it to be.

[9] Somewhat different, but related, are the criteria for the correct use of expressive terms which do not contribute to the assertible content of sentences, terms like 'wow'.

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With non-observational concepts the standards for their correct use relate them entirely, or primarily, to the use of other concepts. Is Darwall's point that this is not so regarding well-being? One of his observations is that 'it does seem possible . . . for two people to disagree about whether *X* is good for *S*, even if they are completely agreed on every non-normative fact concerning *X* and *S*' (11). Darwall thinks that that shows that 'welfare must be an explicitly normative concept' (ibid.). I think that this is a mistake. But be that as it may, it tells us something about Darwall's view, namely that he thinks that the criteria for the correct use of 'welfare' do not depend on the use of other non-normative concepts. What about the use of other normative concepts, like having a fulfilling life? Or a life under one's own control and so on? Perhaps 'well-being' is to be explained by reference to such normative notions? So far as I am aware the question is not discussed in the book, but it is addressed in the later paper 'The Concept of Welfare' (see n. 8) where Darwall extends the argument he used in the book about the consistency of disagreements and says:

> We can imagine a coherent rejection of any substantive, non-normative criteria of welfare we can think of. It follows, I believe, that if welfare is an ethical (and normative) notion, it cannot be a 'thick' one. *It must be the thin ethical notion of there being normative reasons for some attitude or other. And if so, the specificity of the concept of welfare must come, not in the substantive criteria on the basis of which we might hold the attitude, but in the specific character of the attitude for which it asserts normative reasons*.

In reflecting on this argument remember that the first sentence I quoted says more than it is commonly used to say. For Darwall it means not merely that 'anyone can consistently with his other beliefs. . .', but that anyone, even those who have a correct and complete understanding of the concept of welfare, can consistently with all their beliefs, including those involved in the understanding of the concept, reject any proposition claiming that some state or condition described non-normatively contributes to or detracts from people's well-being.

His argument is that since the meaning rules of so-called thick evaluative concepts *do* specify the conditions for their correct use in part by reference to non-normative concepts, those who master thick evaluative concepts cannot consistently deny that they apply to any situation described non-normatively. The concepts which they understand determine that they do apply to some and do not apply to other situations which are described non-normatively. Since those who master 'welfare' can consistently reject its application to any non-normatively described situation, it follows that it is not a thick evaluative concept, and that the rules for its correct standards do not relate to the use of other thick evaluative concepts.

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If the argument is sound do we not end with no concept?[10] Have we not rejected the possibility of rules for the correct use of the concept of well-being? Darwall's own reply is that '*the specificity of the concept of welfare must come, not in the substantive criteria on the basis of which we might hold the attitude, but in the specific character of the attitude for which it asserts normative reasons*'. But that leaves us with no criteria to distinguish correct from incorrect application of the concept. For example, when Darwall tells us 'that the good life consists of excellent (meritorious or worthy) activity' (75) we are entitled to ask whether this is so, that is whether this is a correct rather than an incorrect application of the concept. I actually do think that that is very close to the truth. My doubt is not about the truth of the Aristotelian thesis (as Darwall calls it) but about his RCT, which seems incapable of sustaining that thesis, or any other, for it denies that 'welfare' has any criteria for correct use, thus denying that it is a concept.

In a way this conclusion is no criticism of Darwall's RCT. Possibly we are both right and there is no concept of welfare, or the concept is radically defective. We are not dealing with the meaning of 'welfare', a word which clearly has meaning. We are dealing with a philosophical artefact, a concept developed by philosophers for theoretical purposes. They may have failed. Darwall's analysis of their efforts may be correct and even though he did not intend it so, it may expose the failure. After all, I did no more than point to the consequences of his analysis. I did not impugn his arguments in any way.

But I do think that his arguments are invalid. They are – so far as I can make out – crucially dependent on the argument from the coherence of disagreement:

> It would seem that two people could be agreed about everything else, but simply disagree about whether this pleasant illusory belief is good for *S* or makes some contribution to his welfare, other things being equal. In such a case, it is hard to see what else they could be disagreeing about other than whether *X* is to be (ought to be) desired for *S*'s sake. (14)

I think that it is in fact quite easy to see what else they could be disagreeing about. Very likely they disagree about the concept of welfare. Darwall seems to write throughout as if people who have a concept, that

[10] Am I not missing the point by ignoring Darwall's claim that welfare is a thin normative concept? I think that he and I disagree about thin concepts, as I cannot see how they can be understood without understanding the standards for their correct use. But there is a more limited way of describing the point at issue: the concept of welfare is different from that of being good or valuable or being the right action, and the difference must express itself by having different standards for correct use, standards whose existence Darwall denies.

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is understand it enough to be able to use it, have a complete understanding of the concept. The very possibility of writing a book like his, a book offering a novel explanation of the concept of welfare, gives the lie to that view. It is not merely that people are not good at articulating what they know so that while they have full understanding of the concept they need Darwall to articulate that understanding. That would not explain why many of the book's readers remain unconvinced. The typical response to someone articulating what we know is a feeling of recognition, sometimes, among philosophers, accompanied by the wistful thought: I wish I had thought of that first. We need books like Darwall's because we do not have a full understanding of the concept, and that is the source of many disputes about its application. There is, that is, a big gap between knowledge of a concept which shows that the speaker is not making a mistake in English in his use of the concept-word, and a full understanding. At least this is so when the concept is a theoretical one, whether or not it is also a normative concept.

Once we allow for the possibility of disagreement about the concept of well-being, which is, given that it is a normative concept, constituted by its relations to other normative concepts (which do – just to remind us – have conceptual connections with observational concepts), we can understand that people who disagree about evaluative and normative issues, in ways which bear on their understanding of the concept of welfare, can agree on all non-normative propositions while disagreeing about what would serve someone's well-being. And we will also maintain that those who agree about the concept of well-being cannot agree about all non-normative propositions and disagree about what serves the welfare of this person or that.

If that is so we can see that Darwall's argument that well-being is not a thick concept also fails for it presupposes the argument I have just criticized. In the book Darwall's failure to recognize the possibility of disagreement about concepts among people with basic command of them goes hand in hand with his being oblivious to the relevance of thick evaluative concepts. His belated recognition of their existence in the later essay is perfunctory, and remains oblivious to their character and significance.

Possibly, though I am not sure of it, the book contains another argument for its analysis of well-being which proceeds from the correct observation that the concept of well-being is a normative one. Put in my own words the argument is that the elucidation of concepts is a meta-ethical task and metaethics is distinct from normative ethics in that it does not advance or entail any normative propositions. Therefore the concept of well-being cannot be a thick concept since the elucidation of thick concepts does, by definition, involve putting forward normative propositions.

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This argument too is invalid. Arguably the analysis of thick concepts does not entail or support any normative propositions. It merely states which normative propositions (true or false) those who use the concepts are committed to. Besides, if the elucidation of concepts, or of some concepts, does imply the truth of some normative propositions then either the elucidation of (those) concepts is not a metaethical task or this way of identifying metaethics is misguided. Some writers, including me, do not use the concept of metaethics because of the mistaken views which have been associated with its use since its fairly recent birth.

NECESSARY EQUIVALENCE THESIS

The RCT is an analysis of the concept of well-being. But, to remind ourselves, it has a more modest cousin, namely the NET which states that what we have to do in so far as we care about a person is what serves his well-being. This thesis allows for a substantive account of the concept of well-being, consisting perhaps of Darwall's Aristotelian thesis, alongside some normative components, for example some variant of the NET. Both in combination may constitute an analysis of the concept of well-being connecting it to engagement with value, on the one hand, and to caring duties, on the other hand.

Is the NET true in its own right and does it (or a variant of it) figure in an explanation of the concept of well-being? I rather doubt it. But as this matter requires extended consideration, all I can do here is pose a few questions.[11] Perhaps the best way of introducing my doubts is to refer to a very important point made by Darwall:

> Neither is caring for a person, in the sense in which we shall be interested, the only way of valuing a person intrinsically, in or for herself. We can speak of doing things for someone's sake or on her behalf, when what we have in mind is respect rather than care. . . .
>
> Insofar as we care for someone, we want what is good for her. Insofar as we respect someone, we regulate our conduct towards him by her [sic] dignity. And whereas the concept of welfare, I am arguing, is that of what we should want for a being for her own sake, the concept of a dignity is that of a nexus of normative constraints on choice and action deriving from someone's (or something's) being the kind of being she (or it) is.
>
> . . . First, respect for persons is a responsiveness to what makes them persons, the capacity for free agency. What we must attend to here is not, primarily anyway, what is for someone's good, but what she holds good and would want from her point of view. We may rightly think that unhealthy habits are

[11] My 'The Role of Well-Being', *Philosophical Perspectives* 18 Ethics 2004, written before I read Darwall's book, is an extended treatment of this question, among others, and its conclusions still seem right to me.

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harmful for someone, but think as well that respect tells against exerting undue pressure to induce her to change. Second, . . . A person's own values and preferences give *her* reasons to realize and promote them, and *others* reasons to permit her to do so, whether or not the resulting states are good from an agent-neutral point of view.

I think that Darwall is right to emphasize the distinction and its importance. To my mind it is an instance of a more general distinction between engaging with what is valuable (of which caring for a person is an instance) and respecting what is valuable for its value.[12] One significant disagreement between us is that I do not believe that a person's own values and preferences give her reasons to realize and promote them. But there is no need to take up this point here.[13] The question central to our concerns now is whether Darwall is right in thinking that to the extent that caring provides reasons for attitudes or for actions, that is to the extent that one has reasons in so far as one cares, they are reasons to promote the well-being of the person we care about. I proceed here on the assumption that we have already rejected the thesis of the identity between the two concepts (well-being and reasons of care). The question is: given that we know what well-being is, say that it is to be explained by the Aristotelian thesis, is it the case that caring, inasmuch as it provides reasons, provides reasons to promote the well-being of the cared-about one?

Here is one alternative view: while respect for people involves respecting and protecting their right to pursue goals and relationships of their choosing, caring for them involves joining them in those pursuits, the ones they have. I do not wish to endorse either of these propositions. My question is: why does Darwall reject the second one? Common experience provides numerous cases of people expecting their friends to indulge them: health inspectors, financial advisers, and others may tell them that their chosen course is foolish, employers may turn down their proposals as unworthy, but their friends should support them just because they know that they have set their heart on this and that, and friends are there to give unstinting, unqualified support. And we also know of people who instinctively feel that while they would, and do when appropriate, advise friends against this or that ambition of theirs, given that the friends are set on them they should go along, support their friends, perhaps even join in. Possibly all these people, and they include me, up to a point, are wrong. They are certainly wrong

[12] See for example *Value, Respect and Attachment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2001), ch. 4, and as applied to well-being in 'The Role of Well-Being'. I regret that when writing that article I had not yet read Darwall's book, for I would have referred to it.

[13] See my 'The Myth of Instrumental Rationality', *Journal for Ethics and Social Philosophy* 1 (2005), p. 1 (*http://www.jesp.org/articles/*).

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if they think that caring provides reasons for joining in all the time, whatever the circumstances. But for Darwall to be right they need to be wrong in thinking that caring ever provides reasons for joining in, and otherwise supporting, when the venture is detrimental to the well-being of the person they care for. My question, to repeat, is whether Darwall has resources which enable him to defend this view.

There is another related question to do with friends. Because they care about their friends, people want to be with them, to do things together: have dinner together, go on holidays together, and so on. They devise things to do just in order to be and do things together. The success of those doings may well affect their well-being and that of their friends. But they do not want to do these things in order to have a good life. Nor do they have reason to do them in order to have a good life. They may have better reasons to do other things which are more certain to serve their well-being. Their caring about their friends makes them want to do things together even though they involve a risk that they will not serve their well-being as well as some alternatives will. In such cases friendship and feelings of friendship provide reasons other than to serve the well-being of the friend. All this is consistent with Darwall's picture of people's actions and reasons. But to be entirely consistent he has to maintain that while feelings of friendship provide those reasons, they are to be distinguished from caring about the friend. Some may think that such a distinction would be *ad hoc*, and forced. Perhaps they are wrong and Darwall's view can be defended against such examples. Again, I merely wonder what resources he allowed himself to deal with this type of case.

A third source of doubt regarding Darwall's NET derives from the fact that much of what we do has no effect on our well-being one way or another. This morning I looked at some holiday pictures a friend sent me. My life is not a better life and my well-being was not enhanced by doing so. Nor would my life or my well-being have suffered in any way had I not looked at the photos. Furthermore, my friend's life is neither better nor worse because I looked at the photos, nor would it have been worse if I had not. (We can assume, to simplify matters, that he does not and will not know whether I did or not. The topic will never come up between us.) Yet I feel that I wanted to, and had reason to look at the photos because I care about my friend, and that he wanted me to look at them because he cares about me. Perhaps this is wrong. Perhaps it misidentifies the attitudes involved or their relations to reasons for action. But that will only force one to look for another example. Some people challenge the claim that there can be actions or events in the life of a person regarding which there are reasons for or against, and which are therefore worth caring about, but which do not contribute to or detract from his well-being. This is not an issue to be explored here,

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though it seems plausible to think that if there are such actions or events then NET is wrong. So, again, I wonder what resources Darwall has to show that these putative counter-examples are wrong?

Finally,[14] it has been known for people who care about others to care about their moral character and conduct. I do not think that they need do so because they think that the well-being of the people they care about will be diminished by their immorality, nor is it always the case that it will be so diminished. Darwall makes the point that people may sacrifice their own well-being for various reasons, including for moral reasons. Possibly, caring about another may make one think that he should sacrifice his well-being to do his moral duty. Caring may give the caring person reason to persuade the one he cares about to do his moral duty, as well as reason to facilitate his doing so, and so on. By hypothesis these are reasons for something other than reasons to serve the well-being of those people. So if the NET is right then caring about people cannot be what gives the one who cares the reason to help the person he cares about to act morally when this diminishes his well-being, and again the question is what resources does Darwall have to sustain this view?

As you will have surmised, I tend to think that the NET is mistaken, and that probably all four types of example show it to be wrong. This I cannot argue for here. But the question of the resources available to Darwall to deal with these issues is somewhat independent of the truth of the NET. One would expect the matter to depend on various evaluative propositions, and in particular on the correct analysis of well-being and of caring about a person. I suggested that Darwall has no analysis of well-being. And he denies both the possibility and the need for an analysis of caring about people, or rather he denies the need for a definition of caring about people. He explains: 'It is impossible to define care or concern without already making use of the idea of a person's good or welfare [which he thinks is circular] . . . However, we need not define care . . . if it is something like a psychological natural kind' (50). I am not sure what motivated this observation. The passage continues to say: 'just as we can use a term like "water" without a prior definition' (50). But of course we can use most terms without a prior definition. Tables are not a natural kind but we will all be rather taxed if asked to produce a definition of 'a table' if that involves a statement of necessary and sufficient conditions for something being a table. Perhaps the deeper thought was that 'caring' is a so-called rigid

[14] Finally, for present purposes only. In 'The Role of Well-being' I suggested that well-being is just one of several (mutually exclusive) ambitions people may have for their own lives or for those of others. If that is so it raises a more radical doubt about the cogency of NET than any raised so far.

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designator, christened by ostension, and any analysis of its nature has to be true to the psychological phenomenon it refers to. I doubt that that is true, but whether it is or not, that does not absolve us from the need to provide an analysis of it, any more than science need not explain the nature of water just because it is a natural kind.

Chapter 3 has many interesting things to say, especially about empathy. Regarding care, Darwall's main conclusion is to identify it with concern for a person 'in light of apparent obstacles to her welfare' (69), which involves the thought that she is valuable, someone whose welfare is worthy of concern. I am not clear how this statement is consistent with the RCT.[15] But that is not the issue here. What matters here is that these observations, and others in that chapter, are not even sufficient to distinguish caring about a person from respecting him, let alone to deal with the cases I delineated earlier, or others. It is not clear to me what resources Darwall has to deal with these questions. Could he really mean to say that we need not worry since psychology, studying the natural kind of caring about people, will tell us what it is that one ought to care about in so far as one cares about a person? I wonder. This does not seem consistent with his general separation between normative and factual issues.

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[15] Nor is it clear how some others are compatible with RCT. Consider: 'if a person's welfare is not at stake, then there is nothing to be concerned about on her behalf' (70). According to the RCT this means: if nothing that one ought to care about (in so far as one cares about that person) is at stake then there is nothing to care about (on behalf of that person). That does sound like a tautology and one wonders whether Darwall meant it as a tautology. What was the point of stating a tautology at that point?

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