An Analysis of Prudential Value

STEPHEN M. CAMPBELL
Coe College

This essay introduces and defends a new analysis of prudential value. According to this analysis, what it is for something to be good for you is for that thing to contribute to the appeal or desirability of being in your position. I argue that this proposal fits well with our ways of talking about prudential value and well-being; enables promising analyses of luck, selfishness, self-sacrifice and paternalism; preserves the relationship between prudential value and the attitudes of concern, love, pity and envy; and satisfies various other desiderata. I also highlight two ways in which the analysis is informative and can lead to progress in our substantive theorizing about the good life.

What is it for something to be good for you? It is for that thing to contribute to the appeal of being in your position or, more informally, in your shoes. To be in one's position or shoes in the broadest possible sense is to have that individual's life. Accordingly, something is good or bad for a subject in the broadest possible sense if and only if it contributes to or detracts from the appeal of having her life. What, then, is a prudentially good life, or a life that goes well for the one living it? It is an appealing life. More precisely, it is a life such that having it is worthy of appealing to us, in and of itself.

The purpose of this essay is to explain and defend this way of understanding prudential value. I frame this proposal as an analysis of the concept of prudential value.[1] The *appealing life analysis*, as I call it, is not a first-order, substantive account that purports to tell us what things are good or bad for individuals in the most direct and fundamental way. It is therefore not in competition with hedonistic, desire-fulfilment and objective list accounts of prudential value.[2] Rather, the analysis is intended to clarify what these substantive

[1] Since conceptual analysis is a controversial enterprise these days, two disclaimers should be made. First, there may be alternative ways to represent or rework the proposal, perhaps as a linguistic or metaphysical analysis. I will not explore this possibility here. Second, my proposed analysis of prudential value is, in all likelihood, revisionist in at least some respects. It is only intended to preserve certain core features of our concept of prudential value – not every feature that has been associated with it.

[2] According to *hedonistic accounts*, the only things that are good or bad for individuals in the most direct and fundamental way are states of pleasure and pain. According to *desire-fulfilment accounts*, it is the fulfilment or frustration of one's desires, or the desires she would have if she were in ideal conditions. According to *objective list accounts*, it is a plurality of things (e.g. pleasure and pain, the success and failure of one's relationships with others, knowledge and false or unjustified belief, achievements and failures), some of which are good or bad for individuals whether or not they have a favourable or unfavourable attitude towards them.

© Cambridge University Press 2013
Utilitas Vol. 25, No. 3, September 2013
doi:10.1017/S0953820812000581

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820812000581 Published online by Cambridge University Press

accounts are accounts of. In what follows, I present desiderata for an analysis of prudential value, clarify the concept of an appealing life, present the appealing life analysis, and offer evidence that it satisfies the identified desiderata.

I. DESIDERATA

Ideally, an analysis of prudential value will be intuitive, non-circular and informative. It will also preserve central features of our concept of prudential value. For the purposes of this essay, I will focus on five sets of features that yield desiderata for an analysis.

Terminology and slogans

Certain terms and phrases are standardly employed to talk about prudential value. Something has prudential value for a subject S if and only if it is *good for* S or a *benefit* to S. Something has prudential disvalue for S if and only if it is *bad for* S or a *cost* to S.[3] Prudential value is what we are attuned to when we are being *self-interested*, *looking out for ourselves*, wanting to *get something out of* a situation, and concerned to know *what's in it for us*. In prudential deliberation, the goal is to secure *personal gains* and avoid *personal losses*. Advertisers love to tell consumers that a featured product is essential to living *the good life*, and the topic of *the good death* is a perennial concern in the fields of medicine and bioethics. On the most natural interpretation, these phrases refer to the prudentially good life and the prudentially good death – that is, a life that goes well for the one living it and a death that goes well for the one who dies. An attractive analysis will fit with these ways of talking and help to clarify them.

Conceptual distinctions

It is widely agreed that the concept of a prudentially good life, or a life that goes well for the one whose life it is, should be distinguished from a range of other concepts that might answer to the phrase 'good life'. An *impersonally good life* is a life such that its existence contributes to the value *simpliciter* of the world. A *morally good life*,

[3] My focus on subjects is not without a point. In ordinary language, we speak of what is 'good for' or 'bad for' a shockingly wide range of things: trees, companies, the environment, the ozone layer, hammers, automobiles, one's health, one's kidneys, one's complexion, one's reputation, etc. I doubt that talk of what is good for you or me and what is good for, say, the economy or one's lawn admits of a unified treatment. For discussion and defence of the view that our 'good for' talk is not unified, see Connie Rosati, 'Relational Good and the Multiplicity Problem', *Philosophical Issues* 19 (2009), pp. 205–34, and Guy Fletcher, 'The Locative Analysis of *Good For* Formulated and Defended', *Journal of Ethics & Social Philosophy* 6 (2012), pp. 1–26, at 9–12. It should not be problematic to make use of the 'good for' and 'bad for' locutions provided that sufficient attention is paid to other features associated with prudential value.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820812000581 Published online by Cambridge University Press

an *aesthetically good life* and a *religiously good life* are lives that promote or exemplify, respectively, moral, aesthetic or religious values or virtues. A *beautiful life* is a life that is beautiful or attractive to behold. A *perfectionistically good life* is a life in which one is an ideal specimen of one's kind or exemplifies the excellences characteristic of one's nature.[4] An *admirable life* is a life in which one's traits or manner of living merit the admiration of others. A *choiceworthy life* is a life that is worth striving for or worth choosing relative to some set of options.

These concepts are distinct from the concept of a prudentially good life. Suppose that you have the option of spending the remainder of your life hooked up to a virtual reality 'experience machine', which would enable you to have a continuous stream of extraordinarily pleasurable and rewarding, though artificial, experiences.[5] Suppose that the only alternative is to live an ordinary life in which you would be far less happy on average but would also have healthy relationships with real people and would make substantial contributions to humanitarian causes. A hedonist about prudential value can think, without any conceptual confusion, that the experience machine life is the life that would be best for you (because it is the most pleasurable life) while also thinking that the ordinary, authentic life is the life that would be impersonally, morally, aesthetically, religiously and perfectionistically better, as well as more beautiful, admirable and choiceworthy. This shows that the concept of a prudentially good life is distinct from these other concepts.

The fact that these good-life concepts are distinct does not close off the possibility that some of them pick out the same type of life. Perhaps it is true that, given any set of possible lives, the life that is prudentially best is always the life that is, say, most admirable and most choiceworthy. This would be a substantive normative truth, not a conceptual truth. A suitable analysis of prudential value will preserve the distinction between the concept of a prudentially good life and these other good-life concepts.

Associated attitudes

Prudential value bears a special relationship to certain attitudes. First, there is the attitude of *care* or *concern*. Having concern or caring for someone involves wanting what is good for that person.[6] Accordingly, it is commonly remarked that benefactive deliberation, which aims at

[4] I draw this characterization from L. W. Sumner, *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics* (Oxford, 1996), p. 23.

[5] This famous example comes from Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York, 1974), pp. 42–5.

[6] Stephen Darwall, *Welfare and Rational Care* (Princeton, 2002), p. 14.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820812000581 Published online by Cambridge University Press

securing what is good for another, is rooted in 'other-concern', whereas prudential deliberation is rooted in 'self-concern'.[7]

Care is related to *love*. When you love someone, you care about her. The converse does not hold. One can have concern for others without loving them. If an intoxicated stranger passes out beside you on the subway, you might hope that she makes it home safely. This is to have concern for her in a very limited, local way. Concern for ourselves and our loved ones, in contrast, comes closer to complete concern. In the case of love, which involves caring if it is not itself an intense form of caring, it may also be said that inasmuch as we have this attitude towards an individual, we want what is good for her.

The attitudes of *pity* and *envy* are also bound up with the idea of prudential value. We pity or feel sorry for someone only when we perceive that things are going badly for that individual either in some limited respect or on the whole. We do not pity on the whole those whom we judge to be living the good life, though we might pity them in certain respects. In contrast, envy is a perfectly fitting response to those who are living the good life, provided that one's own life falls short of this. Envy is only appropriately felt towards one who is doing better than oneself, either in some particular respect or on the whole.[8] Thus, envy has a comparative quality that pity seems to lack, as evidenced by the fact that self-pitying is a common phenomenon whereas the idea of self-envy makes no sense. A successful analysis will preserve these relationships between prudential value and the attitudes of concern, love, pity and envy.

Well-being

The concept of prudential value is intimately related to the concept of *well-being* or *welfare*, which pertains to how well an individual is doing or faring. In philosophical circles, it is generally assumed that the connection between well-being and what is good or bad for an individual is straightforward: something is good for you if and only if it contributes to your level of well-being, and something is bad for you if and only if it detracts from your level of well-being. Since people can fare well at particular moments or over extended periods of time, a distinction is often drawn between *synchronic well-being* (how well one fares at a particular time) and *diachronic well-being* (how well one fares over

[7] See, for example, Darwall, *Welfare*; Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford, 1993), pt. III; and Richard Kraut, *What is Good and Why* (Cambridge, Mass., 2007), pp. 48–61.

[8] Some maintain that envy always involves a malicious wish that the envied party lose the goods in question. I will assume that envy need not be malicious, though my claims can be adjusted to accommodate the contrary view.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820812000581 Published online by Cambridge University Press

an extended period of time). There are also restricted forms of well-being that pertain to how well a person is faring along one dimension. These include *mental well-being*, *physical well-being*, *emotional well-being* and *spiritual well-being*. An analysis of prudential value should provide a way to characterize the concept of well-being in its various forms.

Other conceptual relations

The concept of prudential value is also related to the concepts of luck, selfishness, self-sacrifice and paternalism. Precisely how these concepts should be analysed is a controversial matter. For the purposes of this essay, I will adopt the following rough characterizations, recognizing that they are likely to be in need of some revision and refinement. *Luck* pertains to what is good or bad for an individual due to factors that are not within that individual's control. One has good luck when things beyond her control lead to personal gains for her and bad luck when they lead to losses for her.[9] *Selfishness* involves being strongly motivated out of self-concern to secure personal gains while having insufficient regard for others. *Self-sacrifice* occurs when an individual acts in a way that she correctly believes will be bad for her.[10] *Paternalism* involves promoting what is, by one's own lights, good for another against that other's wishes.[11] These related concepts point to a final set of desiderata. A successful analysis of prudential value will preserve these conceptual relations and deepen our understanding of judgements about luck, selfishness, self-sacrifice and paternalism.

[9] Three clarifications should be made. First, another sense of the term 'luck' applies to the achievement of context-specific goals. If I am passing the time by trying to toss coins into a bucket, I might think 'I got lucky' if I have a string of successful throws without thinking that this is good for me. But an important sense of 'luck' does pertain to what is good or bad for an individual. This is the relevant sense for present purposes. Second, epistemologists sometimes claim that 'knowledge excludes luck' and that, in Gettier cases, beliefs are 'true by luck'. Unless those who engage in such talk are committed to thinking that it always benefits a person to have beliefs that happen to be true, they are not using the prudential sense of 'luck' that concerns me. Third, it is tempting to think that luck includes another element: a non-negligible objective or subjective probability that the lucky or unlucky event will not occur. Yet, we also talk about luck in cases where there is no indeterminacy or uncertainty at all. One can admire the lives of hawks and count herself unlucky that she can only lead a human life. This is a belief about *constitutive luck*, luck in the kind of person or being one is. Cf. Thomas Nagel, *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge, 1979), p. 28.

[10] This is loosely based on the analysis in Mark Overvold, 'Self-Interest and the Concept of Self-Sacrifice', *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 10 (1980), pp. 105–18.

[11] Paternalism is commonly thought to involve the further condition of restricting or interfering with an individual's liberty or autonomy. It might also be thought that an action qualifies as paternalistic if it promotes what is good for another, by that person's lights, against his or her wishes.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820812000581 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Most philosophers who write on the topic of prudential value take themselves to be addressing something that answers to the specified terminology and slogans, is distinct from the range of other good-life concepts highlighted above, and stands in the specified relations to the attitudes of care, love, pity and envy, as well as the concepts of well-being, luck, selfishness, self-sacrifice and paternalism. An analysis of prudential value that is intuitive, non-circular and informative and does justice to these other desiderata is a very promising analysis.

II. THE APPEALING LIFE

Before turning to my proposed analysis, it is worthwhile to clarify the concept of an *appealing life*, or a life such that having it is worthy of appeal, in and of itself. The purpose of this section is to bring the elements of this idea into sharper focus.

The attitude of appeal

In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Schlitz Brewing Company ran a series of advertisements with the slogan 'Know the Joy of Good Living'. One of these ads portrays a woman and man lounging on a sofa with a majestic, snow-covered mountain landscape in the background. The man is holding up a Schlitz beer, as they both gaze up at it warmly. Their faces communicate a feeling of relaxed bliss. Presumably, the couple is not merely observing the beer and enjoying its appearance. They are taking delight in the prospect of drinking it. They like the idea of drinking it. You can see it in their faces that drinking a Schlitz beer *appeals* to them.

Alternatively, it might be said that the couple *desires* or *wants* to drink a Schlitz beer. It is, however, important to distinguish two senses of the terms 'desire', 'want' and 'prefer'. In one sense, what one most desires, wants and prefers is whatever one is most motivated to bring about. Call this *desire in the motivational sense*. This is, in the words of Philippa Foot, 'a use of "desire" which indicates a motivational direction and nothing more'.[12] In a second sense, what one most desires, wants and prefers is whatever most appeals (or is least unappealing) to the person, or whatever the person most likes (or least dislikes). Call this *desire in the attitudinal sense*. Several philosophers have recognized something like this distinction.[13]

[12] Philippa Foot, *Virtues and Vices* (Oxford, 1978), p. 149.

[13] L. W. Sumner distinguishes *preference in the behavioral sense*, which 'always (trivially) runs with choice', from *preference in the attitudinal sense*, which involves 'finding the prospect of [the preferred object] pleasing or agreeable, or welcoming the opportunity to do it, or looking forward to it with gusto or enthusiasm' (Sumner, *Welfare*, p. 121). Likewise, Wayne Davis tells us that *volitive desires* are 'a more reliable indication

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820812000581 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Desire in the motivational sense and desire in the attitudinal sense often go hand in hand. Consider the case of Geena, who is begrudgingly heading to her dental appointment, all the while wishing that she could go to play tennis instead. In the short term, spending the afternoon playing tennis appeals to her much more than spending it at the dentist. However, she also has in mind the long-term consequences that may result if she fails to care properly for her teeth. All things considered, tennis today and serious dental problems in the future are more unappealing to her than minor pain today and no such problems in the future. She chooses and is motivated to do what has greatest net appeal for her.

Yet, we can also imagine desiring something in the motivational sense without desiring it in the attitudinal sense, as illustrated by a well-known example from Warren Quinn.[14] In Quinn's imagined scenario, he has a bare motivational impulse to turn on any radio he sees. He cannot give a reason for doing it. Nor is it the case that his turning on radios or the state of affairs of radios being turned on appeals to him. He is simply moved to do it. The case of the 'radio man' illustrates one conceivable way in which desire in the motivational sense and desire in the attitudinal sense might come apart. Certain instances of addiction appear to provide real-world cases in which there is a divergence between what has greatest net appeal to a person and what that person is most driven to pursue.[15]

of action' whereas *appetitive desires* are 'a more reliable indicator of enjoyment'. 'Objects of appetitive desire', he writes, 'are *appealing* . . . [and] are *viewed with pleasure*' (Wayne Davis, 'The Two Senses of Desire', *Philosophical Studies* 45 (1984), pp. 181–95, at 187 and 183). What Sumner calls 'preference in the behavioural sense' and Davis calls 'volitive desire' correspond to desire in the motivational sense. If Sumner and Davis allow that what one most 'prefers in the attitudinal sense' and 'appetitively desires' can be that which is least unappealing, they are talking about desire in the attitudinal sense. See also David Lewis, 'Desire as Belief', *Mind* 97 (1988), pp. 323–32, at 323; Thomas Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), pp. 37–41; and Chris Heathwood, 'Subjective Desire Satisfactionism' (unpublished). I am indebted to Chris Heathwood for bringing many of these references to my attention.

[14] Warren Quinn, *Morality and Action* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 236.

[15] There is empirical research that supports distinguishing between desire in the attitudinal and motivational senses. Based on experiments involving addiction in mice and humans, psychologist Kent Berridge and his colleagues claim to have identified two core processes associated with human and animal motivation, which they call *liking* and *wanting*. See, for instance, Kent Berridge, 'Motivation Concepts in Behavioral Neuroscience', *Physiology and Behavior* 81 (2004), pp. 179–209, and Kent Berridge, 'Wanting and Liking' *Inquiry* 52 (2009), pp. 378–98. As Peter Railton summarizes the distinction, liking is 'a matter of the positive hedonic "gloss" a stimulus can have' whereas wanting is 'a matter of its "incentive salience" or power to produce effortful pursuit' (Peter Railton, 'Toward a Unified Account of Rationality in Belief, Desire, and Action' (unpublished), p. 31). Liking and disliking are essential to desire in the attitudinal sense, though not to desire in the motivational sense.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820812000581 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The attitude of appeal corresponds to desire in the attitudinal sense. In my usage, something 'appeals to S' just in case it is desired in the attitudinal sense by S. I have opted to focus on the language of appeal because there is a tradition among philosophers of using 'desire', 'want' and 'preference' in the motivational sense. Indeed, G. F. Schueler considers this to be 'the philosophers' sense'.[16] When I invoke these ambiguous terms, I will use 'want' and 'prefer' in their motivational sense and will specify which sense of 'desire' I have in mind.

Three further clarifications about the attitude of appeal should be made. First, the term 'appealing' may sound as if it pertains only to the surface features of a thing and implies that the thing is shiny or showy. These connotations of the term should be ignored in the present context. Owning an ugly, dependable automobile appeals to me much more than owning a shiny, stylish car that breaks down at the drop of a hat. Likewise, a life of modest means and honest toil appeals to some people more than a life of glamour, luxury and leisure. The attitude of appeal, or desire in the attitudinal sense, can be responsive to the full nature of a thing and need not be directed towards what is showy or conventionally attractive.

Second, though it is an essential feature of something's appealing to you that you like or take pleasure in the prospect of it, the object of appeal need not involve your pleasure. This is evident from the fact that states of affairs that do not involve ourselves can appeal to us. Examples include things that happen well before our births, after our deaths, or in distant parts of the universe. Even when one does take pleasure in the prospect of some occurrence that involves oneself, one's own pleasure need not be involved. Dying heroically for a noble cause, taking up a second job to earn money for one's family, training for the Olympics, having the experience of being in a fist-fight, and watching a horror film are all things that can appeal to people even if they do not anticipate a pleasurable experience and believe that these things will cease to appeal to them at the time of occurrence.

Lastly, there is a distinction to be drawn between things that appeal to us *intrinsically* and things that appeal to us *instrumentally*. When something appeals to intrinsically, it appeals to us 'in and of itself', 'for its own sake' or 'as such'.[17] In contrast, something appeals to us instrumentally when it appeals to us in virtue of its bringing about something else that is intrinsically appealing to us and/or preventing

[16] G. F. Schueler, *Desire* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), p. 1. Schueler is focusing on the term 'desire'.

[17] It is controversial how exactly to understand the idea of something's being desired intrinsically. I will not address this issue here, except to clarify that I am not assuming that a thing's intrinsic appeal is solely a matter of its intrinsic properties.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820812000581 Published online by Cambridge University Press

something else that is intrinsically unappealing to us. For instance, imagine that I receive an electric shock every time a certain button is pushed. Experiencing a shock is very unappealing to me, in and of itself. The pushing of the button is also very unappealing to me but only because it leads to my being shocked. If this causal connection is severed, I will be indifferent to whether the button is pushed. The concepts of an appealing position and an appealing life pertain to what is worthy of appeal, in and of itself.

Worthiness

The concept of an appealing life pertains not to what in fact appeals to people but what is *worthy* of appeal. The concept of appealworthiness belongs to a family of ϕ-worthiness concepts, where 'ϕ' represents some attitude, emotion or response. This family includes the concepts of blameworthiness, praiseworthiness, noteworthiness, trustworthiness, pity-worthiness ('pitiability'), envy-worthiness ('enviability'), admiration-worthiness ('admirability'), quote-worthiness ('quotability') and choiceworthiness. To say that someone is 'admirable' or 'worthy of admiration' is to say that she merits admiration and is an appropriate object of admiration. Likewise, to say that something 'is worthy of appeal', 'is appealworthy', 'has appeal' or 'is appealing' is to say that it merits appeal and is an appropriate object of appeal. In contrast, to claim that something has appeal, or is appealing, *to some individual* is typically to make a psychological claim concerning either what in fact appeals to her or what she takes to be appealworthy.

It is possible that evaluative concepts are open to further analysis. In recent years, many philosophers have thought that evaluative concepts or properties, particularly those of the ϕ-worthiness form, can be analysed in terms of reasons. One version of this analysis implies that S is admirable if and only if there is reason (of the right kind) to admire S.[18] I wish to remain neutral as to whether this general style of analysis is promising. If it is, the analysis that I am proposing has the virtue of being amenable to it.

Lives and positions

To have one's life, I have said, is to be in that individual's position or shoes in the broadest possible sense. It is to occupy her place in the world fully. To illustrate my meaning, consider Aristotle of the actual world. What is involved in having Aristotle's life, as I am conceiving of

[18] The parenthetical clause is inserted to avoid the so-called *wrong kind of reasons problem*. For an introduction to this problem, see Wlodek Rabinowicz and Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen, 'The Strike of the Demon: On Fitting Pro-Attitudes and Value', *Ethics* 114 (2004), pp. 391–423.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820812000581 Published online by Cambridge University Press

it? Existing at all of the times that he existed and no others, having his ancestors, having his precise physical and mental constitution from birth to death, having all the potential and opportunities that he had, thinking everything he thought, observing everything he observed, doing everything he did, inspiring everyone he inspired and will inspire in the future, and so on. All of these things have a place in a complete account of Aristotle and his place in our world. To have Aristotle's life is to be Aristotle and have all that is true of Aristotle be true of oneself. Or, we might say, it is to have all of his properties and no others.[19]

Lives in this very broad sense must be our focus if we are to do justice to the range of prudential concerns and views of the good life that people are able to have. This point may be illustrated with an extreme case. Imagine a very quirky mathematician who is obsessed with large prime numbers and yearns to live in a universe where the total number of atoms is a prime.[20] If she comes to believe that she is indeed living in such a universe, she could be excited about this and count herself lucky. It might make her less disposed to complain about her life. She might even be moved to proclaim the good tidings to others since they too have the good fortune of living in such a universe. Needless to say, this is an incredibly bizarre thing to view as a benefit, so much so that it may strike us as *psychologically* unintelligible that a person could hold this view. But there are less bizarre examples of the same general form. People can judge themselves lucky or fortunate to live in a world where justice is possible or beauty exists, even if they encounter little justice or beauty in their own experience. They can think that we are unlucky to live in a world in which genocides will continue to occur, there is no supernatural order to the universe, or the human species will eventually go extinct. I am not insinuating that these are plausible substantive views about prudential value, but they do seem intelligible. The lesson to be drawn from these examples is that virtually any fact about a person, including facts involving seemingly remote features

[19] To be clear, I am not claiming that it is possible in any sense for someone other than Aristotle to have Aristotle's life. That is not necessary, I take it, for one to think that being in his shoes has appeal, to wish fancifully to be him, or to desire that one's own life resemble his as far as possible.

[20] I adapt this example from Shelly Kagan, *Normative Ethics* (Boulder, 1998), p. 37, who asserts that this fact about prime numbers has 'nothing to do with me or my life'. Kagan is invoking some more restrictive sense of 'life'. If I say that I want you 'out of my life' or 'to be a part of my life', the relevant sense of 'life' might exclude states of affairs that fall beyond the scope of (i) my awareness, (ii) my day-to-day awareness, (iii) what I care about, (iv) what I care about most centrally, (v) what causally impacts me in significant ways, or (vi) the story that might naturally be told about me and my life. These notions of a life are too restrictive for our purposes. (These uses of 'life' resemble talk of 'one's world', as when Gladys Knight sings, 'I'd rather live in his world | Than live without him in mine'.)

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820812000581 Published online by Cambridge University Press

of the world one occupies, may be intelligibly viewed as having prudential value or disvalue.[21] We require a life concept that permits this.

We talk of being in one's shoes or place or position in more limited respects. I judge that it is extremely unappealing to be in Oedipus' shoes in the moments following his discovery of his acts of patricide and incest. I also consider it less appealing to be in his shoes in the years following this discovery than the years leading up to it. These are judgements about the appeal of being in his shoes at particular moments and over extended time periods. Likewise, we seem able to talk of being in one's shoes in particular respects that do not encompass one's total situation at a moment or time period. Upon learning that Mary's spouse is cheating on her, I might think, 'I'd hate to be in her shoes' or 'I'm so glad that I'm not in her position'. This might mean only that I would hate to be in her position in the sense of having my partner cheat on me – not that I would hate to be fully in Mary's shoes at this moment or to have Mary's life as a whole. After all, it is possible that both Mary's overall situation at this time and her life as a whole are quite appealing, in spite of her spouse's infidelity. In sum, talk of being in one's position or shoes may pick out more limited aspects of a person's life. It is often clear from the context which aspects those are.

III. THE ANALYSIS

Having clarified the notion of an appealing life and position, I propose that the concepts of prudential value and disvalue may be fruitfully analysed as follows:

> *Prudential Value*: x is good for S = x contributes to the intrinsic appealworthiness of being in S's position.
>
> *Prudential Disvalue*: x is bad for S = x detracts from the intrinsic appealworthiness of being in S's position.

Drawing on this analysis, we may distinguish intrinsic and instrumental prudential value:

> *Intrinsic Prudential Value*: x is intrinsically good for S = x, in and of itself, contributes to the intrinsic appealworthiness of being in S's position.
>
> *Instrumental Prudential Value*: x is instrumentally good for S = x, in virtue of bringing about something else that is intrinsically good

[21] Granted, there are many exceptions. For instance, it is not intelligible to think that it is intrinsically good for a person that nothing is intrinsically good for her.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820812000581 Published online by Cambridge University Press

for S and/or preventing something else that is intrinsically bad for S, contributes to the intrinsic appealworthiness of being in S's position.

In addition, we may distinguish what is prudentially valuable for an individual in the broadest possible sense – on the whole, I will say – and what is prudentially valuable for an individual at a time:

Prudential Value on the Whole: x is good for S on the whole = x contributes to the intrinsic appealworthiness of having S's life.

Prudential Value at a Time: x is good for S at t = x contributes to the intrinsic appealworthiness of being in S's position at t.

I will refer to this cluster of analyses and distinctions somewhat loosely as the *appealing life analysis of prudential value*. Our next task is to assess the adequacy of this proposal.

IV. DESIDERATA REVISITED

The appealing life analysis has many virtues. First, it is not circular, for the key elements of the analysans are analysable independently of the notion of prudential value. The attitude of appeal is not a 'welfare-regarding' attitude in the way that care, ill will, pity and envy are.[22] States of the world can appeal to us though they have no bearing on what is good or bad for anyone. Imagine two possible planets, neither of which is ever perceived. The surface of one planet is cobalt blue, while the surface of the other is neon orange with lime green spots. The existence of the unperceived, neon-orange-with-lime-green-spots world appeals to me far less than the existence of the unperceived, cobalt blue world. This has nothing to do with prudential value. By explicating the concept of prudential value in terms of the attitude of appeal, we break free from the network of 'prudential' attitudes. Likewise, the concept of worthiness is not an inherently prudential concept. It is the same notion that figures in our concepts of admirability, noteworthiness and choiceworthiness, and these concepts bear no special relationship to prudential value. Nor must we draw upon the concept of prudential value to understand the concepts of a life and a position. Since the appealing life analysis explicates prudential value in terms of independently analysable concepts, there is no reason to suspect the analysis of circularity.

The appealing life analysis is also informative in various ways. By revealing a connection between the concept of prudential value and the attitude of desire in the attitudinal sense, it provides insight into the debate over subjectivism and objectivism about prudential value.

[22] I borrow the phrase 'welfare-regarding' from Darwall, *Welfare*, p. 15.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820812000581 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Subjectivists maintain that something is good or bad for a person only if that individual does, or would under ideal conditions,[23] have a specified favourable or unfavourable attitude towards the thing. Objectivists, who reject this constraint, think that there are cases in which something is good or bad for a person irrespective of whether the individual has such attitudes.[24] This dispute is standardly understood to be a substantive normative disagreement rather than a conceptual one. The appealing life analysis preserves the subjectivism/objectivism distinction at the substantive level. Subjectivists will think that something contributes to the intrinsic appealworthiness of being in S's position only if S does, or under ideal conditions would, have some specified favourable attitude towards it. Objectivists will deny this. At the same time, the appealing life analysis gives us reason to wonder whether the disagreement between subjectivists and objectivists over the past few decades has been a purely substantive affair. If the concept of prudential value is properly analysed in terms of the appropriateness of a favourable attitude, it would not be at all surprising if the attitudinal element inherent in the very idea of prudential value has contributed to the intuitive allure of subjectivism. The appealing life analysis reveals that one can be an objectivist about prudential value at the substantive level while still appreciating the connection between prudential value and favourable attitudes at the conceptual level. For some, this may have the effect of showing objectivism to be more palatable than it had previously seemed.

Another way in which the appealing life analysis is informative is that it reveals the impressive range of things that can be intelligibly deemed good or bad for us. Virtually any aspect of a life, broadly construed, can be thought to affect the appeal of being in one's shoes. I suspect that the most popular accounts of prudential value – including hedonistic, desire-fulfilment and modestly pluralistic accounts – do not do justice to the complexity of most people's views about the good life. To offer one example, it is probable that most morally decent people think that seriously injuring another person merely for the sake of satisfying one's own curiosity is something that would, in and of itself, render one's own life less appealing to have – irrespective of whether one has, or under ideal conditions would have, an unfavourable attitude towards doing this. Indeed, if one who harms someone else in this way has a *favourable* attitude towards doing it, does this not render it even less, rather than more, appealworthy to be in her shoes? Many will think so.

[23] It is commonly thought that ideal conditions will include having true beliefs, being vividly aware of the relevant facts, and not committing any logical errors.

[24] This characterization of subjectivism and objectivism is drawn from Sumner, *Welfare*, p. 38. It appears to be the most popular way of making the distinction.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820812000581 Published online by Cambridge University Press

If so, many people favour an objective account of prudential value on which certain forms of immoral action and feeling are intrinsically bad for us. While this sort of view has not received much recognition from philosophers who write about well-being (with the notable exception of those working in the eudaimonist tradition), the appealing life analysis reveals that it is an intelligible and even popular stance. More generally, the analysis allows for and may encourage exploration of more nuanced, pluralistic accounts of the good life.

There remains the question of whether the appealing life analysis is intuitive in the sense of intuitively capturing the content of our concept of prudential value. For my part, the analysis seems very intuitive. To be a subject is, in part, to occupy a certain position in the world, and positions can be more or less appealing to occupy. According to the appealing life analysis, well-being is a matter of how appealworthy it is to occupy a given individual's position, and what is good for a person is what contributes to the appeal of being in her position. This strikes me as an intuitive explication of the concept of prudential value.

Some may not find the view intuitive. One possible reaction to my proposal is to think that it fails as an analysis but is a plausible conceptual truth about the relationship between prudential value and the attitude of appeal. If that is right, the discovery of this conceptual truth is a significant and informative result, one that can lead to progress in our substantive-level theorizing about the good life. What one should not think, however, is that the analysis gets things backwards and that the concept of something's contributing to the appeal of being in one's position may be analysed in terms of the concept of prudential value. The elements of the appealing life concept are understood independently of the concept of prudential value. If there is a plausible analysis here, it is an analysis of prudential value.

The appealing life analysis, then, is non-circular, informative and – for some – intuitive. Let us now consider some evidence that the analysis satisfies the other desiderata outlined in section I.

Terminology and slogans

The appealing life analysis fits quite well with our ways of talking about prudential value. To illustrate this, imagine a person whose primary motivation is to make her life as appealworthy as possible. In all situations, she is attuned to the ways in which circumstances might render her life more or less appealing to have and consciously aims to promote the appeal of her own life. Such a person, it seems natural to say, is always seeking personal gain and benefits, is always looking out for herself, and perpetually wants to know what's in it for her and what she can get out of the situation. This person seems self-interested. (We should not attribute *selfishness* to her without knowing more about her

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820812000581 Published online by Cambridge University Press

conception of the appealing life. After all, one can believe that serving others, in and of itself, contributes to the appeal of a life.) At the other extreme, imagine a person who loves someone else and is constantly acting in ways that, by her own lights, make absolutely no contribution to the appeal of her own life but do render that other person's life more appealing to have. It is difficult to see how this person could be construed as aiming to secure personal gains, trying to avoid losses to herself, looking out for herself, or seeking what's in it for her.

The analysis also accommodates our talk of 'the good life' and 'the good death'. Advertisers who invoke the good life wish to convince consumers that their product will enhance the appeal of their lives in some way and that life with this product is worthy of greater appeal than life without it. Discussions in the medical and bioethics literature about 'the good death' address various aspects of death and dying, such as where patients spend their final days, how much pain they experience, what they know about their medical condition, what attitudes they have towards their impending death, and how much autonomy they exercise in determining the circumstances of their death. The appealing life analysis accommodates the thought that these features may be prudentially relevant. They are all features of a life that can be intelligibly thought to impact the appeal of being in one's position during her final days.

Conceptual distinctions

The appealing life analysis preserves the conceptual distinctions outlined in section I. First, there is an important difference between the degree to which *having a life* is worthy of appeal and the degree to which *a life's existing* is either good *simpliciter* or appealworthy. The first concept, which is our subject, pertains to how appealing it is to be the bearer of a life and thereby occupy a certain position in the world, whereas the second pertains to how appealing or good *simpliciter* the world is in virtue of including such a life. These are distinct matters, and our assessments of them can diverge. One may think the world is better or more appealing because it contains moral saints and martyrs without thinking that it is appealing to *be* one of them. And one can think that having a life hooked up to an experience machine is worthy of greater appeal than having an ordinary life without thinking that the world would be more appealing or valuable on account of people opting for virtual reality. Thus, the appealing life concept is distinct from the concepts of an *impersonally good life* and *a life such that its existence is appealworthy*.

The concept of an appealing life is distinct from the concepts of a *morally good life*, an *aesthetically good life*, a *religiously good life*, a *perfectionistically good life* and an *admirable life*. Imagine an artist

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820812000581 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and spiritual leader who struggles with severe depression throughout her life. Such a person might be admirable, represent a kind of moral, aesthetic and religious ideal, and exemplify human excellences to an extraordinary degree. One could grant all this and still intelligibly think that her life is less appealing to have than a more conventional, happier life. The concept of an appealing life is also distinct from that of a *beautiful life*. Arguably, a tragic life, like that of Goethe's young Werther, is beautiful to behold and unappealing to have.

Finally, the concept of an appealing life is distinct from the concept of a *choiceworthy life*. In the real world, one never has the opportunity to choose a life in its entirety. But we may choose a type of life as an ideal to strive for, and we certainly make practical choices that rule out our having certain lives. As it happens, people often think that a certain kind of life is the most choiceworthy ideal, or that some action is choiceworthy, without thinking that pursuing that sort of life or performing that action will maximize the appeal of being in one's own shoes. Indeed, most of us believe that choosing the choiceworthy sometimes puts a person in a less appealing position.

Love and concern, pity and envy

The appealing life analysis preserves the relationship between prudential value and the attitudes of care, love, pity and envy. Let us begin with love and concern. To the extent that you love or care for someone, you want what is good for her. On the appealing life analysis, this truism is interpreted as follows: to the extent that you love or care for someone, you want things that contribute to the appeal of being in her position. This latter claim needs to be true if the appealing life analysis is to preserve the relationship between care, love and prudential value.

There is an intimate connection between concern for someone and a preference for the appeal of being in that person's position. It seems impossible that a person – call her A – who loves or cares deeply about someone, B, could be indifferent to what A believes will render it more or less appealing to be in B's shoes. Even if A's love is intermingled with other attitudes towards B (such as respect or feelings of jealousy), we would expect to find ambivalence rather than indifference.[25] Furthermore, there is a certain proportionality between the degree of one's concern for an individual and the strength of one's

[25] It would be a mistake to think that what we want for our loved ones corresponds perfectly to what we believe renders their lives more appealworthy. Love and concern for another are often counterbalanced by respect for the person, which often involves appreciating and honouring what the person wants for herself. When a young man is intent on pursuing a career in the military, his parents might actively support him out of respect for him and his wishes. But if they love him and also believe that this career

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820812000581 Published online by Cambridge University Press

preference for the appeal of being in that individual's position. If A cares deeply about B and has only mild concern for C, we will expect A to be more motivated to promote the appeal of B's life than C's life – at least where the potential alterations to their lives are sufficiently similar. These points apply even when A and B are the same person. As it happens, people tend to have strong preferences regarding things that positively or negatively impact the appeal of their own lives, and this is presumably explained by the fact that people typically have a robust sense of self-concern or self-love. Whenever individuals are indifferent to what they think makes their lives less appealing to have, the most natural explanation of this fact is that they do not care about themselves. And when their preferences are very weak, we will conclude that they must not care about themselves very much.

In contrast, it is not at all surprising when one who has no love or concern for another (including basic moral concern) is entirely indifferent to what makes that individual's life less appealing to have. It might be surprising, however, if such a person *did* have preferences about this. Suppose you encounter a person who is passionately opposed to modern industrialized factory farming because she wants farm animals to lead appealing animal lives. She clarifies that she wants this for its own sake and not merely as a means to some other end. She then adds that she does not have any concern for animals. This story becomes puzzling at the final step. In the absence of this final comment, it would have been quite natural to assume that this woman has deep concern for animals. Once it is clarified that she does not, it is far from obvious what could explain her preference that they have appealing lives.

This last example suggests another way of testing whether the appealing life analysis preserves the relationship between care, love, and prudential value. Given the fact that people tend to care deeply about themselves, we may examine what intrinsic preferences people have regarding their own lives and see whether this lines up with their views about the appealing life. Many of the items standardly proposed as components of the good life are both things that many people take to be intrinsically appeal-enhancing features of lives and things they intrinsically want to secure for themselves. These items include pleasure and the absence of pain, a sense of satisfaction with their life, certain forms of achievement, autonomy, knowledge and healthy relationships. Barring an alternative explanation of why people have these preferences, this provides further evidence that the appealing life

choice will detract from the appeal of his life, their support of his decision will not be wholehearted.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820812000581 Published online by Cambridge University Press

analysis does justice to the relationship between care and prudential value.

The appealing life analysis appears to preserve the connection between pity, envy and prudential value as well. Pity is a response to the perception that an individual is doing poorly, whereas envy is a response to the perception that someone else is doing better than oneself. An individual is pitiable, in the sense of being worthy of pity, only if that individual is in fact doing poorly on the whole or in some limited respect. One is enviable from the vantage point of another individual, S, only if that individual is in fact doing better than S, on the whole or in some limited respect. These relationships hold between pitiability, enviability and the appeal of one's position. Consider Willy Loman, the lead character in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, whose life is characterized by broken dreams, dysfunctional relationships and self-deception. Few would deny that, in virtue of these features, Willy's life is a very unappealing one. It is also very plausible that Willy Loman, were he to exist, would be a pitiable soul in virtue of those same features. Likewise, it would be only natural to envy someone whose life is, by your lights, more appealing to have than your own. The very features of this person's life that render it more appealing to have than your own will be the features that make envy an intelligible response and vindicate a judgement of enviability from your standpoint. These observations suggest that the relationships between pity, envy and prudential value are preserved by the appealing life analysis.

Well-being

The appealing life analysis provides a way to characterize the notion of well-being. One's level of well-being is the degree to which that individual is doing or faring well. On the appealing life analysis, this is the degree to which being in that individual's position is worthy of appeal, in and of itself. Drawing on this characterization, we may distinguish between well-being at a time and well-being over a time period as follows:

> *Well-being at a time*: S is doing or faring well at t = S is in a position at t such that it is intrinsically appealworthy to be in that position.
>
> *Well-being at a time period*: S is doing or faring well at time period t_1–t_n = S is in a position at t_1–t_n such that it is intrinsically appealworthy to be in that position.

Likewise, the appealing life analysis is compatible with distinguishing unidimensional forms of well-being. For instance, emotional and spiritual well-being may be characterized as follows:

> *Emotional well-being*: S is doing or faring well emotionally = regarding only the emotional dimension of S's position, S is in a

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820812000581 Published online by Cambridge University Press

position such that it is intrinsically appealworthy to be in that position.

Spiritual well-being: S is doing or faring well spiritually = regarding only the spiritual dimension of S's position, S is in a position such that it is intrinsically appealworthy to be in that position.

Thus, the appealing life analysis appears to accommodate our various ways of talking about well-being.

Luck, selfishness, self-sacrifice, paternalism

A final set of desiderata for an analysis of prudential value pertains to the concepts of luck, selfishness, self-sacrifice and paternalism. Given the appealing life analysis, these concepts may be analysed roughly as follows:

- *Luckiness*: S is lucky in virtue of $x = x$ is due to factors beyond S's control and contributes to the appeal of being in S's position.
- *Selfishness*: S is selfish = S is strongly motivated out of self-concern to promote (what S takes to be) the appeal of being in S's position and S has insufficient regard for others.
- *Self-Sacrifice*: S engages in self-sacrifice = S voluntarily acts in a way that S correctly believes will detract from the appeal of being in S's position.
- *Paternalistic Action*: S acts paternalistically towards T = S acts with the aim of contributing to (what S takes to be) the appeal of being in T's position against T's wishes.

The pertinent question is whether these characterizations are as plausible as the initial characterizations offered in section I. One test involves questioning the truth of each analysis in both directions. For example, suppose that some event has rendered me lucky. Without knowing more, may we safely conclude that this event is due to factors beyond my control and contributes to the appeal of being in my position? In the other direction, suppose that some event, which occurs due to factors beyond your control, contributes to the appeal of being in your position. May we conclude that you are lucky in virtue of this event? I believe that both questions may be answered affirmatively. For it is hard to see how one could be lucky on account of something that does not contribute to the appeal of being in her position, or even detracts from its appeal. It is equally difficult to see how it could fail to be good luck for a person that factors beyond her control bring about something that contributes to the appeal of being in her position. Similar tests may be applied to the other analyses.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820812000581 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Another strategy for testing these analyses involves examining situations in which we are inclined to make a judgement about luck, selfishness, self-sacrifice or paternalism and seeing whether the judgement squares with the relevant party's views about the appealing life.[26] Imagine that you are driving through a neighbourhood late at night when a dog suddenly runs into the street before you have time to brake or swerve. You hit it and, in a matter of moments, it dies. In this scenario, it is uncontroversial that the dog is very unlucky. But are you yourself unlucky? I can attest, both from my own experience and from speaking with others, that people sometimes deem themselves unlucky on account of inadvertently killing an animal on the road. What bothers them is not merely the fact that the whole ordeal was distressing. After all, part of the explanation of why it was distressing for them lies in their realization of the role they played in bringing about the animal's death. This fact, in and of itself, bothers them. They are not indifferent to being entangled in a causal process that leads to calamity, even if they consider themselves entirely blameless. If the proposed analysis of luck is on target, these people believe that playing this role in the death of an animal is something that detracts from the appeal of being in their position. Others will deny this, insisting that inadvertently killing an animal does not, in and of itself, have any negative effect on the appeal of one's own position. Presumably, such people will also reject the suggestion that doing so, in and of itself, renders one unlucky. That is just what the appealing life analysis predicts.

V. CONCLUSION

What it is for something to be good or bad for you, I have suggested, is for that thing to contribute to or detract from the appeal of occupying your position in the world. This analysis satisfies an impressive range of desiderata for an analysis of prudential value. It is non-circular, informative, and, for some of us, intuitive. I have offered evidence that it fits well with the standard prudential terminology, preserves the conceptual distinction between the prudentially good life and other types of good lives, yields a natural way of analysing the concept of well-being in its various forms, and preserves the relation between prudential value and various associated attitudes and concepts. In sum, it appears to be a very promising analysis.

This way of understanding prudential value can lead to progress in our substantive theorizing about the good life. As noted above, it

[26] With judgements about luckiness and unluckiness, the relevant party is the one making the judgement. With selfishness and paternalism, it is the agent's views about the appealing life that matter. In the case of self-sacrifice, both the agent's and evaluator's views about the appealing life are relevant.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820812000581 Published online by Cambridge University Press

yields insight into the debate over subjectivism and objectivism and accommodates a wider range of substantive views of the good life than is standardly recognized in the philosophical literature. In addition, the appealing life analysis provides us with a new tool for assessing the relationship between prudence and morality; claims about luck, paternalism, selfishness and self-sacrifice; puzzles about well-being and time; the viability of various ethical and political theories and principles; and notable works in the history of ethics. If this analysis is correct, its significance is far-reaching.[27]

s.campbell80@gmail.com

[27] For their extensive and insightful comments on earlier versions of this essay, I am especially grateful to Allan Gibbard, Liz Anderson, Peter Railton, Sarah Buss, Sven Nyholm, Jason Konek and Alex Sarch. I would also like to thank Ben Bradley, Johan Brännmark, Dale Dorsey, Billy Dunaway, Guy Fletcher, Chris Heathwood, Dan Jacobson, Shelly Kagan, Sheila Krishnan, Sarah Moss, Tina Rulli, Alex Silk, Dan Singer, Eric Swanson and an anonymous reviewer for their helpful feedback.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820812000581 Published online by Cambridge University Press