

Asymmetrism about Desire Satisfactionism and Time

According to desire satisfactionism about welfare, what benefits you is the satisfaction of your desires. But given that the object of one of your desires can obtain at a different time from the time at which you have the desire, desire satisfactionists face a crucial question: *when* do you benefit from the satisfaction of one of your desires? Suppose that I now desire that I was charming while I was drunk last night, and suppose that, although I had no such desire at the time, I was charming last night.¹ Do I benefit from the satisfaction of my desire now? Did I benefit last night? Or is there no time at which I benefit, since there is no temporal overlap between my desire and its object?

There are three views about this in the literature. On the *Time of Desire* view, you benefit from the satisfaction of a desire at just those times when you have the desire. On the *Time of Object* view, you benefit at just those times when the object of your desire obtains. On *Concurrentism*, you benefit at just those times when you have the desire *and* its object obtains.² In this paper, I introduce a new view, *Asymmetrism*, and I argue that it is superior to the Time of Desire and Time of Object views. The latter two views assume, contrary to Concurrentism, that you can benefit at a time from the satisfaction of one of your desires even if there’s no temporal overlap between the desire and its object. I argue that if this assumption is true, then we should prefer Asymmetrism to those two views. Thus, the debate from now on should be between Asymmetrism and Concurrentism, rather than between Concurrentism, the Time of Desire view, and the Time of Object view.

Roughly speaking, Asymmetrism says that the Time of Desire view is true of *past*-directed desires, while the Time of Object view is true of *future*-directed desires. It says that if the object of your desire obtains *later* than the time at which you have the desire, then you benefit when the object of your desire obtains. By contrast, it says that if you have a desire *later* than the time at which its object

¹ It would be more natural to say that I *hope* that I was charming last night, but this doesn’t suggest that I don’t desire that I was: to hope that something occurred is, essentially, to desire that it occurred while not knowing whether it did. Although Sumner (1996, pp. 128-30) suggests otherwise, it is widely agreed that there can be past-directed desires: see, e.g., Feldman (2004), p. 62 and Parfit (1984), pp. 170-72.

² These views are discussed in ch. 1 of Bradley (2009). Concurrentism is defended in Heathwood (2005). The Time of Desire view is defended in Dorsey (2013), and a version of it that is restricted to future-directed desires is defended in Bruckner (2013). This view also appears to be assumed by Bigelow, Campbell, and Pargetter (1990). It is unclear to me that anyone has defended the Time of Object view, though it is frequently discussed (e.g., by Dorsey and Bradley). It *appears* to be endorsed in Baber (2010), but I think this appearance is misleading.

obtains, then you benefit when you have the desire. Like the Time of Desire view, Asymmetrism says that now is the time at which I benefit from the satisfaction of my present desire to have been charming last night. However, like the Time of Object view, it says that if I now desire to climb Mount Everest before I die, and I eventually climb it at a time at which I no longer desire to do so, I benefit from the satisfaction of my desire at those future times when I climb Mount Everest.

I will give three arguments for Asymmetrism. The first is that it gets the intuitively right results about particular cases. The second and third appeal to plausible principles that Asymmetrism can accommodate but that the Time of Desire and Time of Object views cannot. I will end by making some refinements to the view and responding to a few objections.

1. Desire Satisfactionism and Time

Before I get to the arguments, let me clarify what desire satisfactionism says and distinguish the issue that I will be addressing from two closely related ones.

Desire satisfactionism concerns the events or states of affairs that are *basically* good for you, rather than the ones that are instrumentally or *derivatively* good for you. It says that only the satisfaction of one of your desires can be basically good for you, but it leaves open the possibility that other things are derivatively good for you. Henceforth, when I speak of a particular thing’s benefiting (or being good for) you, I will always have basic goodness in mind.³

A desire is *satisfied* just if its object obtains.⁴ Since the object of one of your desires can obtain unbeknownst to you, the satisfaction of one of your desires needn’t be attended by any *feelings* of satisfaction. On desire satisfactionism, what matters is whether the objects of your desires obtain—regardless of whether you know this or feel any satisfaction.

Desire satisfactionists usually claim that only *some* of your desires benefit you if satisfied, but they disagree about what the correct restriction on desires is. The most natural restriction is to *intrinsic* or

³ In this paper, I will pretend that desire satisfactionism is true. But see Lin (2014), (2016b), and (forthcoming).

⁴ For simplicity, I set aside the view that desires can have *conditions* whose falsity results in their being neither satisfied nor frustrated: see McDaniel and Bradley (2008).

final desires—ones that aren’t merely instrumental.⁵ But there are other views about which desires count.⁶ Since the issue that I will address arises no matter which restriction you accept, I will remain neutral between these proposals. Whenever I speak of a desire, you should read me as referring to a desire of the kind that is directly relevant to welfare—whatever that turns out to be.

Having clarified what desire satisfactionism says, let me distinguish three questions having to do with the temporal relations between desires and their objects. Suppose that during some interval t , you have a desire for p ; and suppose that p obtains during some interval t^* . The first question concerns the proper way to understand the claim that a desire is satisfied just if its object obtains.

The Satisfaction Question How must t and t^* be related in order for your desire to count as *satisfied*?

Heathwood claims that for a desire to be satisfied, “the state of affairs desired must obtain *at the same time* that it is desired to obtain.”⁷ But this view, *concurrentism about satisfaction*, is counterintuitive: if I become famous long after I’ve lost my desire for fame, my desire has in some sense been satisfied *too late*, but it has been satisfied. I will assume *eternalism about satisfaction*: a desire of yours is satisfied just if its object obtains at *any* time.⁸

This answer to the satisfaction question does not commit us to a permissive view about the benefits associated with desire satisfactions. Again, suppose that during t , you have a desire for p , and that p obtains during t^* . Given eternalism about satisfaction, it follows that your desire for p is satisfied. But this does not imply anything about benefits, since it does not imply any answers to the following questions:

The Benefit Question How must t and t^* be related in order for you to *benefit* from the satisfaction of your desire?

⁵ See, e.g., Heathwood (2005), p. 489; Heathwood (2006), pp. 540-41; and Murphy (1999).

⁶ Heathwood (unpublished) focuses on *genuine attraction* desires. Railton (2003) focuses on desires that you would have if you were idealized in certain ways.

⁷ Heathwood (2005), p. 490. Also see Heathwood (2006), p. 542.

⁸ This does not imply that if I want to climb Mount Everest in 2020, my desire is satisfied even if I don’t climb it until 2030. In this case, the time-indexed object of my desire never obtains, so my desire is not satisfied.

The Timing Question At what *time*, if any, do you benefit from the satisfaction of your desire?

To see the difference between these questions, we must distinguish the time at which a beneficial event *occurs* from the time at which it *benefits* you. Your welfare at a time is fixed by how good or bad for you *at that time* everything is. But this doesn't imply that it is fixed by what is *occurring* at that time: perhaps some of what is good or bad for you at that time occurs at a *different* time. We can't assume *a priori* that if an event benefits you, then it benefits you precisely when it occurs. This is the simplest view, but it is not indubitable, and some have denied it.⁹ Indeed, we can't assume *a priori* that if an event benefits you, then there is a time at which it benefits you: perhaps some benefits are *atemporal*, in that there is no time at which they accrue to the beneficiary—even though the beneficial events occur at certain times. Thus, the claim that you benefit from the satisfaction of your desire doesn't imply anything about the time, if any, at which you benefit from it. For this reason, an answer to the benefit question needn't also answer the timing question.

These questions are easily conflated. For example, Heathwood endorses *concurrentism about benefit*: you benefit from the satisfaction of a desire of yours if and only if its object overlaps temporally with it. But this does not imply anything about the timing question: it is compatible with the implausible view that all of your desire satisfactions benefit you atemporally, or (say) at noon on July 1, 2000. Clearly, though, Heathwood thinks that you benefit at just those times when the desire and its object overlap. The fact that he doesn't explicitly say this suggests that he has not distinguished the timing and benefit questions.¹⁰

My aim in this paper is to defend a new answer to the timing question. To do this, however, I need to assume something about the benefit question. According to all three of the views that I will be comparing, you can benefit from the satisfaction of a desire even if there is no temporal overlap between the desire and its object. Thus, for the purposes of this paper, I will reject concurrentism about benefit. Instead, I will assume *eternalism about benefit*: there is no particular way that t and t^* need to be related for you to benefit from the satisfaction of a desire you have during t whose object obtains during t^* .

⁹ Bruckner (2013) and Dorsey (2013).

¹⁰ Sarch (2013, pp. 244-45) also proceeds as though his answer to the benefit question implies an answer to the timing question.

Let me now restate the three existing answers to the timing question. First, there is

Concurrentism about Timing You benefit from the satisfaction of a desire that you have during t whose object obtains during t^* at all and only those times when the desire and its object overlap—i.e., at all and only those times had in common between t and t^* .

Notice that this view is compatible with eternalism about benefit. It says that if there is no temporal overlap between a desire and its object, there is *no time* at which you benefit from the satisfaction of that desire. But it doesn't follow from this that you don't benefit *at all* from that desire's satisfaction: perhaps you benefit from it atemporally. (Of course, this view is also compatible with concurrentism about benefit.)

The other two existing answers to the timing question are the following:

Time of Desire You benefit from the satisfaction of a desire that you have during t whose object obtains during t^* at all and only those times when you have the desire—i.e., at all and only those times in t .

Time of Object You benefit from the satisfaction of a desire that you have during t whose object obtains during t^* at all and only those times when the object obtains—i.e., at all and only those times in t^* .

Like those two views, the view that I propose rejects concurrentism about timing. But unlike those views, it says that whether you benefit at the time of the desire or at the time of the object depends on which of those times comes *later*. More precisely, it says this:

Asymmetrism Suppose you have a desire during t whose object obtains during t^* .

- (1) If t is later than t^* , then you benefit from the satisfaction of this desire at all and only those times in t —i.e., at all and only those times when you have the desire.
- (2) If t^* is later than t , then you benefit from the satisfaction of this desire

at all and only those times in t^* —i.e., at all and only those times when the object obtains.

(3) If t and t^* are the same interval, then you benefit from the satisfaction of this desire at all and only those times in that interval.

This is an incomplete statement of the view: it doesn't cover cases of partial overlap between t and t^* . (As I am using the expression, one interval is *later* than another just if it begins after the other one ends.) Since my arguments will not invoke such cases, I will postpone a full statement of the view until the end of the paper.

In the next section, I will give my first argument for Asymmetrism: that it gets the intuitively right results about cases. Before I proceed, though, a final remark is in order. Although I am focusing on desire satisfactionism, a version of the timing question arises for any view on which what benefits you is the satisfaction of some *favorable attitude* of yours. For example, a view on which what benefits you is the realization of your *values* would also need to specify the times (if any) at which you benefit from this. My arguments would also apply to such views. Thus, you should read me as arguing that Asymmetrism is superior to the Time of Attitude and Time of Object views when it comes to *any* theory of this kind.¹¹

2. The Intuitive Argument

My first argument for Asymmetrism is that it gets the intuitively right results about more cases than the Time of Desire and Time of Object views. Recall the example with which I began. I now desire that I was charming while I was drunk last night. Although I had no such desire at the time, I was charming last night. At what time, if any, do I benefit from the satisfaction of my desire?

On concurrentism about timing, there is no time at which I benefit, since there is no temporal overlap between my desire and its object: the object obtained last night, and I did not acquire the desire until now. There is some plausibility to this verdict about the case, but since my aim is to compare three views that are united in their opposition to concurrentism, I will assume that it is

¹¹ See Dorsey (2013), p. 153. Indeed, my arguments might generalize to all ‘correspondence theories’: see Bradley (2009), p. 17.

false. Our question is: assuming that I can benefit at a time from the satisfaction of a desire even though there is no temporal overlap between the desire and its object, when do I benefit from the satisfaction of my desire to have been charming last night?

The Time of Desire view says that I benefit now, since now is the time at which I have the desire.

The Time of Object view says that I benefited last night, since that was the time at which the object of my desire obtained. Asymmetrism says that I benefit now, since now is the time at which I have the desire, and this is *later* than the time at which its object obtained. It seems to me that the Time of Object view gets this case wrong, while the other two views get it right. It is implausible that last night, I was already benefiting from the satisfaction of a desire that I would not acquire until now. Intuitively, now is the time at which I benefit.

Now consider the other case that I mentioned earlier. I now desire to climb Mount Everest at some point in my life. A few years later, I am forced to climb it at a time at which I no longer desire to do so.¹² Once again, let us set aside the concurrentist judgment that I never benefit from the satisfaction of this desire. Assuming that I can benefit at a time from the satisfaction of my desire even though it never overlaps with its object, when do I benefit?

As before, the Time of Desire view says that I benefit now, since now is the time at which I have the desire. The Time of Object view says that I benefit in the future, when I climb Mount Everest, since that is when the object of my desire obtains. Asymmetrism also says that I benefit during that future time: for that is when the object of my desire obtains, and the object obtains *later* than the time at which I have the desire. Intuitively, the Time of Desire view gets this case wrong, while the other two views get it right. It is implausible that I am already benefiting from the satisfaction of my desire to climb Everest. It will be *years* until I climb it. How can my welfare already be getting a boost now?

The Time of Desire view gets the right results about past-directed desires, but the wrong results about future-directed desires. The Time of Object view gets the right results about future-directed desires, but the wrong results about past-directed desires. But Asymmetrism gets the right results

¹² Doesn't the fact that I am climbing it entail that I desire to climb it? Perhaps. But remember that I am restricting my attention to desires of the kind whose satisfaction is beneficial. Whatever kind that turns out to be, I can climb Mount Everest while lacking a desire *of that kind* to be climbing it. From the fact that I am doing something, it doesn't follow that I *intrinsically* desire to do it, that I am *genuinely attracted* to doing it, etc.

about both kinds of desire. It says that if I now have a satisfied desire regarding some event that occurred in the past (at a time at which I lacked the desire), then the time at which I benefit is now: the time of the desire. However, it says that if I now have a desire whose object will obtain in the future, then the time at which I benefit is that future time: the time of the object. The fact that it correctly handles both kinds of desire is a reason to prefer it over the other two views.

3. The First Theoretical Argument

It might seem strange that past-directed and future-directed desires would differ in the way that I have claimed. Without an explanation of this difference, you might doubt the intuitions I invoked, and you might be suspicious of any view on which the two kinds of desire are treated so differently. My next argument will provide such an explanation.

This argument is premised on the following principle:

First Principle You do not receive a particular benefit at t unless, at t , all of the necessary conditions on your receiving that benefit have been met.

A condition *has been* met at t just if it either *is* met at t or *was* met at some time prior to t . The First Principle says that if, at t , some necessary condition on your receiving a given benefit hasn't yet been met, then you do not receive that benefit at t . In other words: you don't receive a particular benefit until the *earliest* time at which all of the necessary conditions on your receiving it have been met.

This principle favors Asymmetrism over the Time of Desire and Time of Object views. According to desire satisfactionism, there are at least two necessary conditions on your receiving a particular benefit: (i) you desire a particular state of affairs, p , and (ii) p obtains. Given the First Principle, it follows that you do not benefit from the satisfaction of a desire that p until the earliest time at which (i) and (ii) have been met—i.e., the earliest time at which you desire or have desired p , and p obtains or has obtained. Asymmetrism can accommodate these facts, but the Time of Desire and Time of Object views cannot.

In cases involving satisfied *future*-directed desires, (ii) is met later than (i): the object of your desire begins to obtain later than the time at which you begin to have the desire. Our principle implies that in those cases, you do not benefit until the object of your desire begins to obtain, since that is the earliest time at which both (i) and (ii) have been met. But the Time of Desire view implies that you benefit *before* that time, since it says that you benefit at the *earlier* time at which you had the desire. It implies, for example, that I benefit now from the satisfaction of my present desire to climb Mount Everest, even though I haven't yet climbed it. Thus, the Time of Desire view violates our principle.

In cases involving satisfied *past*-directed desires, (i) is met later than (ii): you begin to have the desire later than the time at which its object begins to obtain. Our principle implies that in those cases, you do not benefit until you begin to have the desire, since that is the earliest time at which both (i) and (ii) have been met. But the Time of Object view implies that you benefit *before* that time, since it says that you benefit at the *earlier* time when the object of your desire obtained. It implies, for instance, that I benefited last night from the satisfaction of my present desire to have been charming then, even though I didn't have the desire until now. Thus, the Time of Object view violates our principle.

Asymmetrism accommodates the principle, however. It says that between the time of object and the time of desire, you benefit at whichever time comes *later*. Thus, it implies that you do not begin to benefit until the earliest time at which both (i) and (ii) have been met. We should therefore prefer Asymmetrism to the Time of Desire and Time of Object views.

This theoretical argument complements the intuitive argument that I gave earlier by explaining why past-directed and future-directed desires differ in the way that I claimed. In the case of a satisfied past-directed desire, the time at which you acquire the desire is the earliest time at which both of the necessary conditions on your benefiting from it have been met. Thus, the time at which you acquire the desire is the earliest time at which you benefit. By contrast, in the case of an eventually satisfied future-directed desire, the time at which the object of your desire begins to obtain is the earliest time at which both of the relevant conditions have been met. Thus, the time at which the object begins to obtain is the earliest time at which you benefit. It might initially seem difficult to motivate a view as disjunctive as Asymmetrism. But there is a natural rationale for it: you do not receive a benefit until all of the necessary conditions on your receiving it have been met.

Obviously, the argument depends on the First Principle. Besides its sheer plausibility, there are two main reasons why we should accept it.

First, intuitions about cases support the following generalization of the principle: a particular state of affairs doesn't obtain at t unless, at t , all of the necessary conditions on that state of affairs' obtaining have been met. For example, here are three necessary conditions on your being a grandfather: (i) that you are male, (ii) that you have a child, and (iii) that some child of yours has a child. To be a grandfather at t , it's not enough that each of these conditions be met at *some* time: each of them has to have been met by t . Even if you are male and you have a child, you aren't *yet* a grandfather if no child of yours has *yet* had a child.

The generalization of the principle is supported even by cases that initially seem unfriendly to it. C causes E only if E occurs. It might seem that C can be a cause of E even *before* the occurrence of E . But this conflates the time at which the event that causes E *occurs* with the time at which this event *acquires the status of a cause*: although C can occur long before E , C does not acquire the status of a cause until E occurs. To be a cause of E at t , it's not enough that each of the necessary conditions on C 's being a cause of E be met at *some* time: they must have been met by t . Thus, the generalized version of the First Principle is plausible, and so is the principle itself.

The second reason to accept the principle is this. It is uncontroversial that you receive a particular benefit at t only if, for each of the necessary conditions on your receiving that benefit, there is *some* time at which that condition is met. But surely, there is a *stronger* true principle in the vicinity of this one. After all, it is highly implausible that I benefited *on my first birthday* from the satisfaction of my present desire to have been charming last night. More generally, it is highly implausible that you can benefit from the satisfaction of a desire at a time at which you haven't yet acquired the desire *and* its object hasn't yet obtained. What is the stronger principle that we seek? It cannot just be this: you receive a particular benefit at t only if, at t , *one* of the necessary conditions on your receiving the benefit has been met. For any benefit whatsoever, a necessary condition on my receiving that benefit is that *something exists*. But this condition was met on my first birthday—a time at which I couldn't have benefited from the satisfaction of the desires mentioned above. There is a true principle in the vicinity that is stronger still, and I submit that the most natural candidate is the First Principle: you

do not receive a particular benefit until the earliest time at which *all* of the necessary conditions on your receiving it have been met.

To summarize: the First Principle rules out the Time of Desire and Time of Object views, but not Asymmetrism. Indeed, it nicely explains why a view like Asymmetrism might be true. We should therefore prefer Asymmetrism over the Time of Desire and Time of Object views.

It might be objected that since the First Principle is *obviously* incompatible with the Time of Desire and Time of Object views, my argument begs the question. But this objection relies on a criterion that would classify *any* obviously valid argument as question-begging, since the premises of any such argument are obviously incompatible with the negation of its conclusion.¹³ What matters is whether the principle is more plausible than those views are. It seems to me that it is.

4. The Second Theoretical Argument

My final argument for Asymmetrism assumes that the future is open in the following sense: for the most part, if something *might* happen at a future time t , then presently, the objective *chance* that it will happen at t is between 0 and 1. To think that the future is open with respect to whether Mars will be colonized in the 24th century is to think that, at present, the chance that this will occur is between 0 and 1. To think that the future as a whole is open is to think that, generally speaking, the present chance of a future event is between 0 and 1.¹⁴ Plausibly, the future is open in this sense.

If the future is open, then the following principle favors Asymmetrism over the Time of Desire and Time of Object views:

Second Principle You do not receive a particular benefit at t unless, for each of the necessary conditions on your receiving that benefit, the chance at t that this condition will have been met by some time is 1.

¹³ For a related discussion, see Lin (2016a), pp. 324-37.

¹⁴ There are other conceptions of the openness of the future, but this is the one that I will be assuming. Note that the future can be open even if *some* future events—say, the heat death of the universe—already have a chance of 1.

Consider my desire to climb Mount Everest. One necessary condition of my benefiting from the satisfaction of this desire is that I climb Mount Everest. If this condition is met at a particular future time, then it will have been met by that time, and by every later time. What, at present, is the chance that this condition will have been met by some time? If the answer is anything less than 1, then our principle implies that I haven't yet benefited from the satisfaction of this desire.

The principle is supported by the following argument. Suppose that I am receiving a particular benefit now. It follows that the chance, at present, that I am now receiving that benefit is 1. But from this, it follows that for any necessary condition on my receiving the benefit, the chance, at present, that this condition will have been met by some time is 1. After all, if there is presently *some chance* that one of these necessary conditions will *never* have been met, then there is presently *some chance* that I do not receive the benefit *at all* (and thus am not receiving it *now*). Thus, I receive a particular benefit now only if, for each of the necessary conditions on my receiving that benefit, the chance, at present, that this condition will have been met by some time is 1.

To make this more concrete, suppose that I am now benefiting from the satisfaction of my desire to climb Mount Everest. It follows that currently, the chance that I am now benefiting from this is 1. But this cannot be the case if there is currently any chance that one of the necessary conditions on my receiving this benefit will never have been met. If, at present, there is some chance that I will never climb Mount Everest, then there must, at present, be some chance that I am not benefiting from the satisfaction of my desire. Thus, if I am currently benefiting from the satisfaction of this desire, then the chance, at present, that I will climb Mount Everest is 1. The same goes for any other necessary condition on my benefiting from the satisfaction of this desire.

Assuming that the future is open, the Second Principle rules out the Time of Desire and Time of Object views. If the future is open, then it is surely open with respect to whether I will ever climb Mount Everest. That means that, at present, the chance that I will have climbed it by some time is less than 1. It follows that, at present, the chance that I am currently benefiting from the satisfaction of my desire to climb Mount Everest is less than 1. Thus, contrary to what the Time of Desire view implies, I am not currently benefiting from this. Likewise, if the future is open, then last night, it was surely open with respect to whether I would eventually acquire a desire to have been charming last night. This means that, at the time, the chance that I would ever have this desire was less than 1.

Thus, at the time, the chance that I was benefiting from the satisfaction of this desire was less than 1. It follows that, contrary to what the Time of Object view implies, I was not already benefiting from the satisfaction of this desire last night.

Note that this argument doesn't assume, of *each* future-directed desire that anyone currently has, that there is a chance of less than 1 that its object will obtain. Nor does it assume, of *each* past-directed desire that anyone currently has, that at the time at which its object obtained, there was a chance of less than 1 that the person would ever acquire this desire. As long as *some* desires and *some* objects fit the bill, the Time of Desire and Time of Object views are ruled out.

By contrast, Asymmetrism is compatible with our principle even if the future is open. Asymmetrism says that the earliest time at which you benefit from the satisfaction of a desire is the earliest time at which you have had the desire *and* its object has obtained. For any necessary condition on your receiving this benefit, the chance, at that time, that this condition will have been met by some time is 1. For instance, according to Asymmetrism, the time at which I start benefiting from the satisfaction of my desire to have been charming last night is the present—the time at which I acquire the desire. Since I now have the desire, the present chance that I now have it is 1, and so is the present chance that I will have had it by some time. And since the past is *closed* rather than open, the present chance that the object of my desire obtained last night is 1. Thus, the present chance that the object of my desire will have obtained by some time is 1. Similar considerations would apply to the time at which Asymmetrism says I start benefiting from the satisfaction of my desire to climb Mount Everest—namely, the time at which I begin to climb it.¹⁵ At that time, there is a chance of 1 that I will have had the desire at some time, and a chance of 1 that its object will have obtained at some time.

Thus, in light of the openness of the future, the Second Principle eliminates the Time of Desire and Time of Object views, but it leaves Asymmetrism untouched. Thus, we should prefer Asymmetrism to those other views.

What if determinism is true? Wouldn't that imply that the future is *not* open in the sense I have in mind? Not necessarily: many have argued that determinism is compatible with chances between 0

¹⁵ Assuming that what I want is *to be climbing it*. If I want *to reach the summit*, then Asymmetrism says that the earliest time at which I benefit is the moment I reach the summit.

and 1.¹⁶ Besides, the Second Principle favors Asymmetrism even if we don’t assume that the future is open. It is *epistemically possible* that the future is open. Given the Second Principle, the Time of Desire and Time of Object views are hostages to empirical and philosophical fortune: if the future turns out to be open, those views are false. Asymmetrism isn’t held hostage in this way. This is a strong reason to prefer it over its competitors.

5. Objections, Replies, and Refinements

I have argued that Asymmetrism is superior to the Time of Desire and Time of Object views. Let me end by further fleshing out the view and by responding to some objections to it.

5.1 Partial Overlap

The statement of Asymmetrism that I gave earlier doesn’t cover cases in which the interval during which you have the relevant desire and the interval during which its object obtains partially overlap. Suppose that I desire p from Monday through Wednesday, and that p obtains from Tuesday through Friday (Case 1). Obviously, Asymmetrism will say that I don’t *begin* to benefit until Tuesday. But when do I *cease* benefiting? Suppose instead that I desire q from Monday through Friday, and that q obtains from Monday through Thursday (Case 2). Clearly, I begin to benefit on Monday. But when do I stop benefiting?

Case 1

	M	T	W	Th	F	Sa	Su
Desire							
Object							

Case 2

	M	T	W	Th	F	Sa	Su
Desire							
Object							

The arguments that I gave earlier cannot answer these questions, since they relied only on principles about when you can *begin* to benefit. To get a fully general version of Asymmetrism, we must extend

¹⁶ See, e.g., Loewer (2001), Hofer (2007), Glynn (2010), Eagle (2011), and List and Pivato (2015).

the view as plausibly as we can in light of what it says about cases in which the relevant intervals do not partially overlap.

Here is the general statement of Asymmetrism that initially comes to mind:

Generalized

Suppose you have a desire during t whose object obtains during t^* .

Asymmetrism*

(1) If t begins later than t^* does, then you benefit from the satisfaction of this desire at all and only those times in t —i.e., at all and only those times when you have the desire.

(2) If t^* begins later than t does, then you benefit from the satisfaction of this desire at all and only those times in t^* —i.e., at all and only those times when the object obtains.

(3) If t and t^* begin at the same time, then you benefit from the satisfaction of this desire at all and only those times when either you have the desire or its object obtains.

This view implies that if I desire p from Monday through Wednesday, and p obtains from Tuesday through Friday (Case 1), then I benefit from Tuesday through Friday. This is the most plausible verdict about this case. After all, if the interval during which I desired p had occurred *a month ago*, Asymmetrism would say that I benefit exactly when the object of my desire obtains—namely, from Tuesday through Friday. It would be bizarre if, in the case where I have the desire from Monday through Wednesday, I benefit during a different interval (e.g., from Tuesday through *Wednesday*). A similar argument would show that this view delivers the most plausible verdict about a case in which I desire p from Tuesday through Friday, and p obtains from Monday through Wednesday.

This view also implies that if I desire q from Monday through Friday, and q obtains from Monday through Thursday (Case 2), then I benefit from Monday through Friday—not merely from Monday through Thursday. This is the most plausible verdict about this case. After all, as I have just argued, Asymmetrism should say that if q had begun to obtain slightly *earlier* than Monday, I would have benefited from Monday through Friday. It would be bizarre if, in the case in which q obtains from Monday through Thursday, I benefit during a different interval (e.g., Monday through Thursday).

Although Generalized Asymmetrism* delivers the most plausible verdicts about the cases we have considered thus far, it is not the view that I favor. The problem is that it has implausible implications about cases in which one of the relevant intervals begins later than, *but ends earlier than*, the other one. Suppose that I desire r from Monday through Sunday, and that r obtains from Tuesday through Wednesday (Case 3).

Case 3

	M	T	W	Th	F	Sa	Su
Desire							
Object							

On Generalized Asymmetrism*, I benefit from Tuesday through Wednesday, since this is the interval in which the object of my desire obtains, and this interval begins later than the interval in which I have the desire. But suppose instead that I desire r from *Tuesday* through Sunday, and that r obtains from Tuesday through Wednesday. Then the view says that I benefit from Tuesday through *Sunday*, not merely from Tuesday through Wednesday. It is implausible that the time at which I cease benefiting could be affected in this way by whether I acquired the desire on Monday or Tuesday. We need a version of the view that lacks this implication but also gets the right results about the earlier cases. I propose the following view:

**Generalized
Asymmetrism**

- Suppose you have a desire during t whose object obtains during t^* .
- (1) If t begins later than t^* does, then you benefit from the satisfaction of this desire at all and only those times, no earlier than the first time in t , at which either you have the desire or its object obtains.
 - (2) If t^* begins later than t does, then you benefit from the satisfaction of this desire at all and only those times, no earlier than the first time in t^* , at which either you have the desire or its object obtains.
 - (3) If t and t^* begin at the same time, then you benefit from the satisfaction of this desire at all and only those times when either you have the desire or its object obtains.

This delivers the same verdicts that Generalized Asymmetrism* does about the cases that the latter view gets right. But unlike that view, it implies that if I desire r from Monday through Sunday, and r

obtains from Tuesday through Wednesday (Case 3), then I benefit from Tuesday through *Sunday*—not just from Tuesday through Wednesday. For the interval from Tuesday through Sunday consists of all and only those times such that (i) those times are no earlier than the first time in the interval during which *r* obtains, and (ii) each of those times is a time at which either *r* obtains or I desire *r*.

Generalized Asymmetrism might seem *ad hoc* and disjointed, but it is actually a unified and well-motivated view. Like the partial statement of Asymmetrism that I gave at the outset, it says that you *begin* to benefit from the satisfaction of a desire at the earliest time at which the object of the desire has obtained *and* you have had the desire. The partial statement also implied that, if the desire and its object occupy non-overlapping intervals, or if they occupy the same interval, then the *last* time at which you benefit is the last time at which *either* you have the desire *or* its object obtains. Generalized Asymmetrism simply extends this claim to all cases. We could restate it as follows:

Generalized Asymmetrism You begin to benefit from the satisfaction of a desire at the earliest time at which you have had the desire and its object has obtained. You cease to benefit from the satisfaction of a desire at the latest time at which either you have the desire or its object obtains.¹⁷

This view has all of the features that made the partial statement of Asymmetrism better than the Time of Desire and Time of Object views, and it handles cases of partial overlap in a plausible way.

5.2 *The Synchronic Resonance Constraint*

One of the main motivations for desire satisfactionism is the *resonance constraint*: something doesn't benefit you unless it resonates with you, in the sense that you have a favorable attitude (e.g., desire) toward it.¹⁸ Dorsey has recently invoked a version of this constraint against the Time of Object view. I want to discuss his objection, since it would apply equally to Asymmetrism.

According to the Time of Object view, something can benefit you at a time even though it doesn't resonate with you *at that time*: for example, your climbing Mount Everest can benefit you while it is

¹⁷ As I am using the expression, you *cease* to benefit from something at the last time at which you benefit from it.

¹⁸ The *locus classicus* is Railton (2003), p. 47. The constraint would have to be broadened to account for versions of desire satisfactionism on which what benefits you is the *combination* of your desire and its obtaining object.

occurring, even though you have no desire (or other favorable attitude) for this event at that time. The same is true of Asymmetrism. This runs afoul of a specific version of the resonance constraint that Dorsey thinks should be accepted by anyone who endorses the general version of it:

Synchronic Resonance Constraint You do not benefit from a particular event, e , at time t unless, at t , you have a favorable attitude toward e .

By contrast, the Time of Desire view accommodates this constraint, since it implies that every time at which you benefit from something is a time at which you desire it.¹⁹

My response to Dorsey is simple: while some desire satisfactionists may well accept the synchronic constraint, they needn't all accept it. All desire satisfactionists must agree that in order for something to benefit you, there must be *some* time at which you desire it. But this claim, which is compatible with Asymmetrism and the Time of Object view, doesn't entail the synchronic constraint. Dorsey says that it would be “strange” if the synchronic constraint were false even though the generic version of the resonance constraint is true.²⁰ But this doesn't seem strange to me.

It might help to notice that there is another synchronic resonance constraint that even the Time of Desire view fails to accommodate:

Synchronic Resonance Constraint* You do not benefit at any time from a particular event, e , unless you have a favorable attitude toward e at the time at which e occurs.

Asymmetrism, the Time of Desire view, and the Time of Object view all violate this constraint, since they imply that I benefit at some time from my having been charming last night, even though I had no favorable attitudes toward this event when it occurred. Only Concurrentism accommodates this constraint. If someone were to argue for Concurrentism on these grounds, Dorsey would plausibly deny that all desire satisfactionists must accept this constraint. Likewise, my reply to his objection is that not all desire satisfactionists must accept the Synchronic Resonance Constraint.

¹⁹ Dorsey (2013), pp. 156-57.

²⁰ Dorsey (2013), p. 156.

5.3 Benefits Received at Posthumous Times

The three views that I have been comparing all imply that you can benefit at *some* time from events that occur after your death or before your conception. The Time of Desire view implies that if you now desire that your mother got presents on her first birthday, and that Mars will be colonized in the 24th century, then you can benefit at some time from the satisfaction of these desires. Although some might balk at this claim, it is not terribly implausible, since the view says that the time at which you benefit from these pre-conceptual and posthumous events is *now*, the time at which you have the relevant desires. While the Time of Desire view is committed to the possibility of beneficial pre-conceptual or posthumous *events*, it isn't committed to the possibility of your receiving benefits at pre-conceptual or posthumous *times*. By contrast, the Time of Object view *is* committed to this possibility. It implies that you benefited *on your mother's first birthday* from the satisfaction of your desire about your mother, and that you will benefit *in the 24th century* from the satisfaction of your desire concerning Mars.²¹ This is hard to believe, since it is implausible that you can be positive or negative in welfare at times at which you do not exist.

Asymmetrism doesn't share the Time of Object view's implications about pre-conceptual benefits: it says that the time at which you benefit from the satisfaction of your desire about your mother is now, the time of the desire. But it does share that view's implications about posthumous benefits: it says that you benefit from the satisfaction of your Mars-related desire in the 24th century. Those who share my inclination to deny that benefits can accrue posthumously should adjust Asymmetrism so that it says that you can benefit only at times at which you exist:

Generalized You begin to benefit from the satisfaction of a desire at the earliest time at
Asymmetrism which (i) you exist, and (ii) you have had the desire and its object has
(Final) obtained. You cease to benefit from the satisfaction of a desire at the latest
time at which (i) you exist and (ii) either you have the desire or its object
obtains.²²

²¹ Bradley (2009), p. 27.

²² Unlike the Time of Desire and Time of Object views, this view implies that there is *no time* at which you benefit from posthumous events. But there are good reasons to accept this implication. You cannot benefit from a posthumous event at a posthumous or pre-conceptual time because you cannot receive a benefit at a time at which you don't exist. You cannot benefit from a posthumous event at a time at which you exist because any such time is a time at which one of the

This last adjustment to Asymmetrism is motivated by the principle that benefits can accrue to you only at times at which you exist, rather than by the principles I invoked in my earlier arguments. But this doesn't make the resulting view implausible. You do not receive a particular benefit until all of the necessary conditions on your receiving it have been met. Nor do you receive a particular benefit until there is a chance of 1 that all of the necessary conditions on your receiving it will have been met by some time. Nor, finally, can you benefit from anything at times at which you do not exist. Generalized Asymmetrism (Final) accommodates all of these principles. The Time of Desire and Time of Object views do not, even if the latter is adjusted to rule out benefits that are received at posthumous times. Thus, Asymmetrism remains more plausible than those views.

6. Conclusion

I have argued that Asymmetrism is superior to the Time of Desire and Time of Object views. Let me conclude with a remark about the answer to the timing question that I have set aside for most of the paper: Concurrentism. I have remained neutral about whether Concurrentism is true. Notice, though, that the two theoretical arguments I gave for Asymmetrism could double as arguments for the superiority of Concurrentism over the Time of Desire and Time of Object views. Concurrentism accommodates the First Principle: you do not receive a benefit until all of the necessary conditions on your receiving it have been met. It also accommodates the Second Principle: you do not receive a benefit until there is a chance of 1 that all of the necessary conditions on your receiving it will have been met by some time.

Desire satisfactionists should reject the Time of Desire and Time of Object views, and they should apply themselves to the task of deciding between Asymmetrism and Concurrentism. I think that Asymmetrism is a plausible contender for the correct answer to the timing question. But perhaps you disagree. Perhaps you think that Asymmetrism is too complex, or that its solution to the problem of posthumously accrued benefits is too *ad hoc*. Or perhaps you endorse one or both of the synchronic resonance constraints, which are incompatible with Asymmetrism but compatible with Concurrentism. If so, you can read me as having given a new argument for Concurrentism: the Time

necessary conditions on your receiving the benefit (viz., the occurrence of the event) has not yet been met. Thus, you cannot benefit from a posthumous event at any time. If you benefit at all from such an event, you benefit *atemporally*.

of Desire and Time of Object views are unacceptable for the reasons I explained, and the remaining, most natural alternative to Concurrentism is unacceptable for other reasons. Either way, we have made progress toward answering the timing question for desire satisfactionism.²³

²³ I thank Donald Bruckner, Chris Heathwood, Adam Lerner, Barry Maguire, Jason Raibley, Alex Sarch, Meghan Sullivan, Jack Woods, and participants at the 2016 Arizona Workshop in Normative Ethics.

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