

Monism and Pluralism

Monism about well-being is the view that there is exactly one basic (prudential) good and exactly one basic (prudential) bad. *Pluralism* about well-being is the view that there is either more than one basic good or more than one basic bad.¹ We can illustrate this distinction by contrasting hedonism and desire satisfactionism, on the one hand, with objective list theories, on the other. Hedonism and desire satisfactionism disagree about *what* the basic goods and bads are, but they agree about their *number*: they both say that there is a single basic good and a single basic bad. By contrast, objective list theories—or at least the paradigmatic ones—posit either a plurality of basic goods or a plurality of basic bads. Parfit, for example, considers an objective list theory on which “moral goodness, rational activity, ... and the awareness of true beauty” are all basic goods (Parfit 1984: 499).

In the first section of this chapter, I clarify the distinction between monism and pluralism. In the second, I consider some arguments for monism. In the final section, I consider some arguments for pluralism.

1. Clarifying the Distinction

I will begin with some preliminary distinctions. I will then consider a puzzle that clarifies what is at issue between monists and pluralists.

Our topic is monism and pluralism about *well-being* or *prudential value*, not monism and pluralism about other types of value, such as value *simpliciter* (i.e., value “from the point of view of the universe”). Monism and pluralism about well-being concern the number of things that are good *for us*—or perhaps, more generally, good *for welfare subjects*. By contrast, monism and pluralism about value *simpliciter* concern the number of things that are good, period. Depending on how these two types of value turn out to be connected, it might be coherent to endorse both monism about well-being and pluralism about value *simpliciter*: one might hold, for example, that while only pleasure is

¹ One could instead distinguish monism and pluralism about the *basic goods* from monism and pluralism about the *basic bads*, and say that a theory on which there are a plurality of basic goods but only one basic bad is pluralistic with respect to the basic goods but monistic with respect to the basic bads. In this chapter, I will stick with the coarse-grained definitions that I give above.

basically good for us, many things are basically good from the point of view of the universe. It might also turn out to be coherent to endorse both pluralism about well-being and monism about value *simpliciter*.

Monism and pluralism are views about the number of *basic* goods and bads, not the number of *derivative* goods and bads. Some things are merely derivatively good for us: they are good for us solely because they are appropriately related to other things that are good for us—by being means to them, by being composed of them, or perhaps in some other way. Theories of welfare attempt to identify the things that are basically (i.e., not merely derivatively) good or bad for us—or, as some say, *non-instrumentally* or *intrinsically* good or bad for us. A hedonist would agree that many things besides pleasure are derivatively good for us in virtue of being appropriately related to pleasure, but she would say that only pleasure has basic prudential value. It is about the number of *basic* goods and bads that monists and pluralists disagree.

Although most pluralistic theories of welfare are objective list theories, these two categories should not be conflated. Objective list theories are committed to *objectivism*, the view (roughly speaking) that something can be basically good for you even if you lack favorable attitudes toward it and even if it doesn't consist in your having a favorable attitude toward something. But pluralism doesn't entail objectivism. One can be a pluralist while endorsing *subjectivism*, the view (roughly) that nothing is basically good for you unless you have a favorable attitude toward it, or unless it consists in your having a favorable attitude toward something. One could hold, for example, that there are exactly two basic goods: desire satisfaction and the getting of things that you believe to be good for you. Since desire and evaluative belief are both favorable attitudes, this is a subjectivist view. But since desire satisfaction is a different good from the getting of things that you believe to be good for you, this is a pluralistic view. Notice, too, that objectivism doesn't entail pluralism and that monism doesn't entail subjectivism: perfectionism is a monistic, objectivist view.

Monism and pluralism are not views about how many senses there are of the expressions “good for” and “bad for.” Obviously, there is more than one sense of those expressions: “good for” means something different in “pleasure is good for people” than it does in “arsenic is good for poisoning.” As this example shows, some senses of “good for” are not about welfare: something can be good for poisoning, but the activity of poisoning is not capable of well-being (Rosati 2009). It has been

tentatively suggested that there might be more than one *welfare-involving* sense of “good for” and “bad for.” For example, there might be a basic sense of these expressions that applies to all welfare subjects (including many non-human animals) and a different sense that applies only to persons (Rosati 2009: 227-28). But monism and pluralism are not views about how many welfare-involving senses of “good for” and “bad for” there are, either. Rather, the debate between these views arises for *each* welfare-involving sense of those expressions. If there is a single welfare-involving sense of “good for” and “bad for,” as most believe (and as I shall assume), then the debate between monism and pluralism is about the number of things that are basically good or bad for us *in that sense*. If there is more than one such sense, then for each sense, the question arises: how many things are basically good or bad for us in that sense?

There is a final issue from which our topic should be distinguished. There are a wide variety of welfare subjects, and perhaps the correct theory of welfare for some of them differs from the correct theory for others. For example, maybe hedonism is true of pigs, while an objective list theory is true of humans. But pluralism is not the view that the correct theory for one kind of subject can differ from the correct theory for another kind, and monism is not the denial of this view. The debate between monism and pluralism arises in the search for each correct theory of welfare—however many of these there are. If hedonism is true of pigs while an objective list theory is true of humans, then monism is true of pigs while pluralism is true of humans. I will henceforth assume, as most do, that the same theory is true of all of *us*—i.e., normal human adults. The arguments that I will consider concern whether the correct theory for normal human adults is monistic or pluralistic.

Having identified our topic, we are now in a position to consider a puzzle. I said earlier that hedonism and desire satisfactionism are monistic theories. But there are different kinds of pleasure: gustatory, olfactory, and so on. Since hedonism says that all pleasures are basically good for us, why doesn't it count as a pluralistic view? Similarly, we desire many different things: happiness, pleasure, friendship, and so on. Why doesn't desire satisfactionism count as a pluralistic theory on the grounds that it says that all of these things are basically good for us when we get them? The puzzle also arises in the opposite direction. I said that paradigmatic objective list theories, such as one on which rational activity and knowledge are basic goods, are pluralistic. But why shouldn't we think of such a theory as a monistic theory on which there is a single *disjunctive* basic good?

Without a solution to this puzzle, it would seem that we are mistaken to think that some theories really are monistic while others really are pluralistic. Rather, it would seem equally acceptable to place any theory in either category, and it would therefore appear unimportant whether monism or pluralism is true. I believe, however, that this puzzle can be solved, and that the solution will clarify what is at issue between the two views.

First, notice that monism and pluralism don't concern how many *token* things are basically good or bad. Any monist would acknowledge that, in a typical person's life, a plurality of token things are basically good for her: a hedonist would claim, for example, that all of a person's many pleasures are basically good. Monism and pluralism concern how many *kinds* are basically good or bad. This was implicit in our initial characterization of these views as concerning the number of basic *goods* and *bads*: for a basic good or bad is a *kind* of thing that is basically good or bad. My proposal is that the most plausible account of what makes something a basically good or bad kind will yield the solution to our puzzle.

What conditions must some kind *K* satisfy to be a basically good kind? It's not enough that *some* members of *K* are basically good, since that would imply that each basic good generates a plurality of ever-more inclusive basic goods: the basic goodness of *pleasure* would imply the basic goodness of *experiences*, *events*, and so on. Nor is it enough that *all* members of *K* are basically good, since that would imply that each basic good generates a plurality of increasingly narrow basic goods: the basic goodness of *pleasure* would imply the basic goodness of *olfactory pleasure*, *olfactory pleasure due to a rose*, and so on. Rather, *K* is a basic good just if all of its members are basically good *because they are Ks*. Why does the hedonist think that pleasure is a basic good even though she denies that status to olfactory pleasure? Because she thinks that all pleasures are basically good *because they are pleasures*, but she denies that all olfactory pleasures are basically good because they are olfactory pleasures (rather than simply because they are pleasures). Similarly, a desire satisfactionist thinks that desire satisfaction is the only basic good because she thinks that there is only one explanation of any particular thing's basic goodness for you: it satisfies, or is the satisfaction of, one of your desires.

This account is only approximately correct, though. For consider what a desire satisfactionist might say about a musician who desires admiration and wealth, and who receives a large sum of a money and a standing ovation after a performance. Why is it basically good for him to receive the money?

Because it’s an instance of wealth, the desire satisfactionist might say. Why is it basically good for him to receive the ovation? Because it’s an instance of admiration. But these are *two* different explanations. So it seems that, on my view, desire satisfactionism considers *admiration* and *wealth* to be distinct basic goods, and thus counts as a pluralistic view.

To avoid this counterintuitive result, we must make an adjustment. The two explanations offered above are both *partial* explanations. If the musician didn’t desire admiration or wealth, the fact that something is an instance of one of those things wouldn’t help explain its basic goodness: a complete explanation of either event’s basic goodness must include the fact that the event satisfies one of his desires. Furthermore, those two explanations are both *dispensable*, in that their only role is to show that the event in question satisfies one of the musician’s desires. A *complete* explanation of the basic goodness of the ovation wouldn’t need to mention that it’s an instance of admiration: what matters is just that it’s something that the musician desires. The desire satisfactionist could offer the same *complete* explanation in both cases: the event satisfies one of the subject’s desires. And she would claim that this is the only complete explanation of *any* event’s basic goodness for a welfare subject. We should therefore amend the foregoing account of basic goods as follows: kind *K* is a basic good just if (i) all of its tokens are basically good, and (ii) the complete explanation of any of its tokens’ basic goodness is that the token is a *K*. This applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to basic bads.

On this view, each basic good or bad corresponds to a potential complete explanation of why a token thing, event, or state of affairs is basically good or bad. In claiming that pleasure is the only basic good, the hedonist is claiming that there is only *one* complete explanation of any particular thing’s basic goodness—namely, that it is a pleasure. By contrast, on an objective list theory that deems rational activity and knowledge to be basic goods, there are (at least) *two* potential complete explanations of a particular thing’s basic goodness: either it’s an instance of rational activity or it’s an instance of knowledge. Thus, monism is the view that there is only one complete explanation of a token’s basic goodness and only one complete explanation of a token’s basic badness. By contrast, pluralism says that there is either more than one potential complete explanation of a token’s basic goodness or more than one potential complete explanation of a token’s basic badness. We can recast this in terms of *good-making* and *bad-making* properties: monists claim that there is exactly one good-

making property and one bad-making property, whereas pluralists claim that there is either more than one good-making property or more than one bad-making property.²

It should now be obvious why hedonism and desire satisfactionism really are monistic views: they agree that there is only one complete explanation of any token’s basic goodness (badness) for us. We can also see why paradigmatic objective list theories really are pluralistic. To say that a particular token of knowledge is basically good because it is an instance of a disjunctive kind (e.g., rational activity or knowledge) is not to give a *complete* explanation of its basic goodness. For the question remains: in virtue of *which* disjunct does the token instantiate basic goodness? The objective list theory introduced above would say that the complete explanation of the basic goodness of a token of knowledge is that it is a token of knowledge, and that the complete explanation of the basic goodness of a token of rational activity is that it is a token of rational activity. It would therefore be positing a plurality of complete explanations of the basic goodness of particular events.

Thinking of monism and pluralism in terms of explanation clarifies what is at stake between the two views. If monism is true, then any two basically good tokens are basically good for the same reason, and the same is true, *mutatis mutandis*, of basically bad tokens. If pluralism is true, then this isn’t so. Thus, whether monism or pluralism is true matters for the same reason that it matters whether there is a single *wrong-making* property or more than one such property. The debate is about the number of complete explanations required to account for all of the phenomena.

2. Arguments for Monism

Assuming that there is at least one basic good and one basic bad, either monism or pluralism must be true, and any argument for one of them is *ipso facto* an argument against the other. Thus, the arguments that I consider in this section are all arguments against pluralism, and the ones that I consider in the next section are all arguments against monism.

There is one obvious way to argue for monism that is beyond the scope of this chapter. If there were a sound argument for a *particular* monistic theory—say, hedonism—then obviously, that would

² For similar accounts of the monism/pluralism distinction, see Heathwood (2015), Hurka (1996), Lin (2014), and Tucker (unpublished).

also be a sound argument for monism. But I will restrict my attention to more general arguments—ones that purport to support monism without supporting any particular monistic theory.

According to the *Analysis Argument*, monism has an advantage over pluralism because the latter entails that basic goodness must be analyzed disjunctively. If F is the sole basic good, the argument goes, then for something to be basically good is just for it to be an F . But if F and G are the only two basic goods, then for something to be basically good is just for it to be either an F or a G .³ Insofar as it is implausible that basic goodness is to be analyzed disjunctively, pluralism is implausible.

Against this argument, it might be replied that the question ‘What are the basic goods?’ must be distinguished from the question ‘What is it for something to be basically good?’ and that an answer to the former doesn’t imply an answer to the latter. After all, Moore famously claimed that goodness is unanalyzable, but he nonetheless named many goods (Moore 1988). Suppose that what it is for something to be good for you is just for it to be such that one should want it for your sake (Darwall 2002: 7). Perhaps there is more than one potential complete explanation of any particular thing’s instantiating this *analyzans*: maybe we should want some things for your sake because they are your pleasures, while we should want other things for your sake because you desire them. If such a view is coherent, then pluralism is compatible with a non-disjunctive analysis of basic goodness.

The *Arbitrariness Argument* says that whatever list of basic goods a pluralistic theory provides, it will seem arbitrary that those things, and no others, are the basic goods. As Bradley puts it:

[P]luralism seems objectionably arbitrary. Whatever the composition of the list, we can always ask: why should these things be on the list? What do they have in common? What is the rational principle that yields the result that these things, and no others, are the things that are good? (Bradley 2009: 16)

Indeed, given the understanding of pluralism that I have argued for, it seems guaranteed that the pluralist can provide no answers to these questions. For if a pluralist claimed that the reason F and

³ Richard Arneson appears to assume this when he writes that “the objective-list theory is not merely the provision of a list of putative goods” but is also the view that “what it is to be intrinsically valuable for a person... is to be an item that belongs on such a list” (Arneson 1999: 119).

G (but no other kinds) are basic goods is that all and only F s and G s are members of some other kind H , he would thereby be committing himself to the monistic view that H is the sole basic good: for he would be claiming that the only complete explanation of any particular thing’s basic goodness is that it is a member of H . Thus, pluralism appears unavoidably committed to there being no further explanation of why the kinds that are basic goods (and no others) are basic goods.

It might be replied that the charge of arbitrariness is no more of a problem for pluralism than it is for monism. If the monist lists F as the sole basic good, we can ask: What rational principle yields the result that, among all the kinds there are, *this* kind, and no others, is basically good? Indeed, one might argue, the understanding of monism that I have proposed guarantees that if F is the sole basic good, there is no further explanation of why this is so. For if F were the sole basic good because all and only F s are G s, then G , not F , would be the sole basic good. Explanations must run out on a monistic view for the same reason that they must run out on a pluralistic one.

The advocate of the Arbitrariness Argument might reply that a monist who claims that F is the sole basic good *does* have a way of explaining why this is so: she could claim that for something to be basically good for you *just is* for it to be an F .⁴ A hedonist, for instance, could claim that the fact that pleasure is the sole basic good is explained by the fact that for something to be basically good for you *just is* for it to be one of your pleasures. By contrast, a pluralist couldn’t make the same move without endorsing a disjunctive analysis of basic goodness, which (as we saw earlier) would be implausible. Thus, monistic theories are at least *potentially* less arbitrary than pluralistic ones.

A pluralist might reply that F ’s being the sole basic good is *incompatible* with the claim that for something to be basically good just is for it to be an F . If analyzing one property in terms of another involves *identifying* the former property with the latter, as many philosophers assume, the claim that basic goodness is analyzable in terms of F -ness appears to imply that nothing is basically good *because* it is an F . After all, since nothing can explain itself, nothing is an F because it is an F . Thus, if basic goodness is *identical* with F -ness, it would seem that nothing is basically good *because* it is an F . But if nothing is basically good *because* it is an F , then F is not a basic good: for a basic good is a kind all of whose members are basically good *because* they belong to that kind. Thus, a pluralist could argue that

⁴ This does not contravene the earlier claim that the view that F is the sole basic good doesn’t *entail* an analysis of basic goodness in terms of F . Such an analysis can be *compatible* with that view without being entailed by it.

it can't be claimed both that *F* is a basic good and that being basically good just is being an *F*. If this is right, then a monist can't claim an advantage on the issue of arbitrariness by analyzing basic goodness in terms of the sole basic good that she identifies. Whether this reply on behalf of the pluralist succeeds turns on subtle questions about analysis, however. The monist might reject the assumption that analyses imply property identities, or she might attempt to show that the alleged incompatibility needn't arise (see, e.g., Rosen 2010).

Even if the pluralist's responses to the Arbitrariness Argument succeed, it might seem that the argument has not fully been answered. Contrast hedonism with a pluralistic theory on which there are, say, exactly seventeen basic goods. Even if it is granted that the hedonist cannot explain why pleasure is the only basic good, the pluralistic theory still seems more arbitrary. Perhaps what's doing the work here is just monism's greater *simplicity*, which surely counts in its favor to *some* extent. Pluralists, of course, would claim that the greater simplicity of monistic views is outweighed by the virtues of the correct pluralistic theory.

A third argument for monism starts with the observation that we make judgments not only about *how* well off people are, but about whether or not they are well off. When we judge that someone is well off, we are not merely judging that her level of welfare is above zero: we are judging that it is *high enough* for her to count as well off. Now, certain things appear *indispensable* to your being well off, in the sense that unless you have enough of them, you are not well off—no matter what else you have. Happiness appears to be such a thing: if you are below a certain minimal level of happiness, it seems that you cannot be well off, no matter what else you have. It might be argued that a pluralistic theory on which there is more than one basic good cannot accommodate the indispensability of happiness, even if it grants that happiness is *one* of the basic goods. For if there is at least one basic good distinct from happiness, as any such theory must maintain, it would appear to be possible for you to be well off in virtue of having a sufficient quantity of this other basic good. If happiness and achievement are both basic goods, for example, then it seems that you could be well off even if you were completely unhappy, as long as you had enough achievements. But this implies, contrary to our initial assumption, that happiness is *not* indispensable to your being well off. Thus, pluralistic views appear to have the implausible implication that no basic good is indispensable to your being well off. Call this the *Indispensability Argument*.

Fred Feldman gives a version of this argument when he writes that a pluralistic theory that counts knowledge and virtue as basic goods would be implausible because “a man might have lots of knowledge and virtue and yet have a life that is not good in itself for him.” His thought is that pleasure is indispensable to your being well off, and that no pluralistic theory that includes basic goods besides pleasure can accommodate this (Feldman 2004: 19-20). Shelly Kagan also states a version of this argument when he writes that proponents of objective list theories “seem forced to accept the unappealing claim that I could be extremely well off, provided that I have the right objective goods in my life, even though these things hold no appeal for me, and I am, in fact, utterly miserable” (Kagan 2009: 254). The thought is that objective list theories are implausible because pleasure (or at least not being miserable) is indispensable to your being extremely well-off. Kagan uses this objection to motivate the monistic view that the sole basic good is pleasure taken in objective goods: one virtue of this view, he argues, is that it evades this objection (Kagan 2009: 255).

The Indispensability Argument assumes that the *basic prudential value* of a token of a basic good—i.e., *how* basically good that token is—does not depend on how much of another basic good the subject has. A pluralist could reject this assumption. She could claim that if happiness is indispensable, then if you are below the minimal level of happiness that is required for being well off, each additional token of achievement increases your welfare, but in a way that approaches a limit that is lower than the level of welfare necessary for you to count as well off. In this way, she could maintain both that achievement is a basic good and that happiness is indispensable to your being well off.

A monist might grant the logical possibility of this picture but argue that it is baroque and *ad hoc*. Why would the basic prudential values of the tokens of one basic good depend on how much of another basic good the subject has acquired? Why think that someone could amass an arbitrarily large quantity of a basic good without reaching the level of welfare necessary to count as well off? But pluralists could reply that on the assumption that at least one good is indispensable, any reasons to accept pluralism are also reasons to accept these claims.

A final argument for monism requires some terminological preliminaries. Call a token of a basic good or bad a *welfare atom*. To *ordinally compare* two atoms, X and Y, with respect to basic prudential value is to claim that they stand in some particular basic, two-place comparative relation with respect to their basic prudential values—as when one claims that X is greater in value than Y, or equal in

value to it. To *cardinally compare* them with respect to basic prudential value is to measure their basic prudential values on a single cardinal scale—as when one claims that X is *m* units greater in value than Y, or *n* times as valuable as Y. The *Comparison Argument* says that unlike monistic views, pluralistic views have trouble comparing welfare atoms. Here is Bradley again:

[P]luralists must tell us, for example, how to compare the effect on well-being of a certain amount of pleasure with the effect of a certain amount of knowledge. This problem has so far proved intractable.... [I]n the absence of a weighing principle, we do not have a theory with any testable implications at all. (Bradley 2009: 16-17)

The problem isn't that the formal apparatus of pluralism rules out comparisons. After all, nothing prevents a pluralist from stating a weighing principle that cardinally (and thus ordinally) compares all welfare atoms. The thought is that, unlike monistic theories, pluralistic theories imply that we often cannot compare atoms *without going beyond what the intuitive evidence warrants*. If there is only one basic good and only one basic bad, then there is always an intuitively correct verdict about how two atoms compare, and we can build a theory that always delivers this verdict. But if pluralism is true, while there are some comparisons with intuitively correct verdicts (e.g., a faint and fleeting pleasure is less good than knowledge of all of mathematics), there many are pairs of atoms about which there is no intuitively correct verdict about how they compare (e.g., a moderately intense pleasure and a particular piece of geographical knowledge). The pluralist faces a dilemma. If she states a weighing principle that delivers a verdict about the comparative values of every pair of atoms, many of these verdicts will seem arbitrary. But if she doesn't, her theory will have a lot of gaps: she will often be unable to tell us exactly how well off a subject is, or whether the subject would be better or worse off if she had different welfare atoms (e.g., if she had a certain amount knowledge instead of a certain pleasure).

The monist could go even further: she could argue that if there were two basic goods, many pairs of atoms would be *incommensurable* and *incomparable*: not only would any cardinal or ordinal comparison of them appear intuitively unwarranted, but any such comparison would be *untrue*.⁵ If this is right, then the first horn of the pluralist's dilemma is even worse: a weighing principle that compared every pair of atoms would deliver verdicts that are not just arbitrary, but untrue.

⁵ For more on incommensurability and incomparability, see Chang (1997) and (forthcoming).

The pluralist could reply that even paradigmatic monistic theories cannot compare every pair of atoms without going beyond the intuitive evidence. Consider two pleasures, the second one of which is slightly more intense, but slightly shorter. Does intuition always deliver a verdict about how the two pleasures compare ordinally? Surely not. Thus, any version of hedonism that ordinally ranks the two pleasures will make claims that seem arbitrary. *A fortiori*, so will any version of it that compares all pleasures cardinally (e.g., one on which the basic prudential value of a pleasure is just the product of its intensity and duration). The lesson here, the pluralist might say, is that *inter*-type comparisons are not more problematic in principle than *intra*-type comparisons. In both cases, because the values of the atoms are determined by more than one factor (e.g., intensity and duration, in the case of pleasures), there is no natural way to generate a linear ordering of the atoms from the values of these factors.⁶ Indeed, since the monist identifies both a basic good and a basic bad, even she must make *inter*-type comparisons. The task of comparing a token of the sole basic good to a token of the sole basic bad could, in principle, be as challenging as that of comparing tokens of two basic goods: even assuming that pleasures and pains can be measured on the same scale of intensity, it is unclear how the value of a pleasure compares to the disvalue of a pain of equal intensity and duration. Thus, the monist faces the same dilemma as the pluralist.

Pluralists could add that if pluralistic views suggest that some pairs of atoms are incomparable, then so do monistic ones. For the monist’s evidence that two heterogeneous atoms (e.g., a particular pleasure and a particular token of knowledge) are incomparable is that there is no intuitively correct verdict about how they compare. The same evidence can be found when we consider certain pairs of homogeneous atoms (e.g., certain pairs of pleasures).

The monist might reply that if pluralism is true, there are *more* cases in which there is no intuitively correct verdict about how two atoms compare, or in which two atoms are incomparable. Thus, even if the monist and the pluralist face the same dilemma, the dilemma is worse for the pluralist. But if the difference between monism and pluralism on this issue is merely one of degree, perhaps pluralism’s disadvantages on this issue are outweighed by its advantages elsewhere.

⁶ For a related discussion, see Chang (1997), pp. 16-17.

3. Arguments for Pluralism

A sound argument that two kinds, *F* and *G*, are both basic goods or both basic bads would also be a sound argument for pluralism. But as before, I will restrict my attention to general arguments.

Pluralists could give a *Comparison Argument* for their view, just as monists could. They could claim that the alleged disadvantages of pluralism when it comes to comparing welfare atoms are actually advantages. We often have to choose between two options whose prudential value for us we are at a loss to compare. For example, we might have to decide between a career in business and a career in philosophy, and we might have no idea how to compare the effect that these two careers would have on our well-being. The best explanation of this phenomenon, it might be argued, is that there are many pairs of welfare atoms for which there is no intuitively correct verdict about how their values compare—a claim to which pluralism is committed.

It is unclear how forceful this argument can be, given the pluralists’ reply to the *monists’ Comparison Argument*. For according to that reply, monists are also committed to the existence of many pairs of atoms for which there is no intuitively correct verdict about how they compare. If so, then even if we assume that hard choices of the sort just described are best explained by the existence of such pairs of atoms, the monist could avail herself of this explanation too. Furthermore, it is unclear that this *is* the best explanation of the phenomenon. Even assuming that hedonism is true and that all pleasures and pains are commensurable, we would often be at a loss to compare the prudential values of two options available to us simply because we wouldn’t know exactly how much pleasure or pain each option would produce.

The *Rational Regret Argument* begins with the observation that it is often rational to regret having forgone a lesser good in favor of a greater good. Suppose that you must choose between going to a movie and going to a party, and suppose that you know that you would be higher in welfare if you went to the movie. If you go to the movie, it nonetheless seems rational for you to feel some regret about not having gone to the party. For it seems that although the movie was better for you, there is *something* good about the party that you missed out on—something the loss of which isn’t fully *compensated* for by the movie. It might be argued that only a pluralistic theory of welfare can explain this. If pluralism is true, then it could be that there is some basic good that you would have gotten if

you had gone to the party that you didn't get from the movie (e.g., social interaction), and this could explain why the movie didn't fully make up for what you lost by forgoing the party. By contrast, if monism is true, then given that each option is good for you in virtue of instantiating the same basic good, it seems that there is nothing you would have gotten from the party that you didn't get in greater quantities from the movie. Monism appears to imply that since your choice was between a smaller and a greater quantity of the very same good, it makes no sense for you to regret not having gone to the party—just as it would make no sense for you to regret not having picked the smaller of two amounts of money (see Stocker 1990: 271-72).

It is unclear that monists can't explain the rationality of regret in situations like these, however. Suppose that pleasure is the only basic good, and that the reason you would be better off going to the movie is just that you would get more pleasure doing this. The pleasures you would get from the movie are qualitatively very different from those you would get from the party. The monist could argue that there *is* something that you would be foregoing if you went to the movie—namely, the felt quality of the pleasure of convivial conversation—and that this makes it rational for you to feel some regret about not having gone to the party. A pluralist might object that on this proposal, there are *two* basic goods: the pleasure of convivial conversation and that of watching a movie. But the monist could deny this by insisting that pleasures belonging to these two heterogeneous kinds are nonetheless all basically good for the same reason—namely, that they are pleasures (Hurka 1996).

Another argument for pluralism claims that, no matter what the monist identifies as the sole basic good and bad, we must postulate an additional basic good—namely, having a certain *temporal distribution* of the tokens of that good and bad. For it seems that, whatever that basic good and bad are, your lifetime well-being is fixed not merely by how many tokens of them your life contains and how basically good or bad they are, but also by how they are arranged temporally: it's better, for instance, to have an *uphill life*—one that goes from worse to better—than a *downhill life* (Velleman 1991). This suggests that whatever the monist's theory of welfare is, it must be supplemented by at least one additional, higher-order basic good (e.g., accruing more basic goodness, and less basic badness, as one's life progresses), and perhaps also by at least one additional, higher-order basic bad. Call this the *Shape of a Life Argument*.

One response would be to deny that the shape of a life necessarily has any effect on its total welfare.

A hedonist could argue that your life’s having a certain shape makes you better off just if you take pleasure in the fact that it has that shape (Feldman 2004: 131-34). A desire satisfactionist could argue that your life’s having a certain shape makes you better off just if you want it to have that shape. On these proposals, your life’s having a certain shape is no different from its having any other feature: it benefits you only if it occasions a token of the basic good already postulated by the monistic theory. Alternatively, monists could grant that the shape of a life must have an effect on its total welfare, but deny that this implies the existence of an additional basic good. Perhaps the basic prudential values of your welfare atoms are determined in part by how they are temporally arranged. If so, we can accommodate the claim that lives with certain shapes are necessarily better (other things equal) than lives with other shapes without enlarging our list of basic goods and bads.

The final kind of argument for pluralism that I will consider is more piecemeal: it says that only a pluralistic theory can accommodate all of our intuitions about welfare. One such argument focuses on the *times* at which things can be basically good for you. It seems clear that whenever someone feels a pleasure, he accrues some basic goodness. It also seems that something can be basically good for you even at a time when you are not feeling pleasure. Hedonism can’t accommodate both of these intuitions because it can’t accommodate the latter: for if pleasures are basically good, they are basically good only when they are felt. Less obviously, desire satisfactionism can’t accommodate both intuitions because it can’t accommodate the former: even if pleasure is necessarily connected to desire, there is no guarantee that some desire of yours is *satisfied* whenever you feel a pleasure. It might be argued that pluralism is true because only a pluralistic theory can accommodate both of these intuitions (Lin 2014).

But arguments like these are only as convincing as the intuitions that they appeal to. Perhaps it’s merely *usually* true that someone accrues basic goodness when he feels a pleasure. Perhaps it’s impossible for a pleasureless life to be positive in welfare (Crisp 2006: 122-23), in which case it may also be impossible for anything to be basically good for you during a pleasureless interval. If the monist can undermine the intuitions that the pluralist appeals to, she can undermine his argument.⁷

⁷ I thank Ruth Chang and Guy Fletcher for their comments on this chapter.

References

- Arneson, R. (1999) “Human Flourishing versus Desire Satisfaction,” *Social Philosophy & Policy* 16: 113-42.
- Bradley, B. (2009) *Well-Being and Death*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Chang, R. (forthcoming) “Value Incomparability and Incommensurability,” in I. Hirose and J. Olson (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Value Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- _____ (1997) “Introduction” in R. Chang (ed.), *Incommensurability, Incomparability, and Practical Reason* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Crisp, R. (2006) *Reasons and the Good*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Darwall, S. (2002) *Welfare and Rational Care*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Feldman, F. (2004) *Pleasure and the Good Life*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Heathwood, C. (2015) “Monism and Pluralism about Value,” in I. Hirose and J. Olson (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Value Theory*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hurka, T. (1996) “Monism, Pluralism, and Rational Regret,” *Ethics* 106: 555-75.
- Kagan, S. (2009) “Well-Being as Enjoying the Good,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 23: 253-72.
- Lin, E. (2014) “Pluralism about Well-Being,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 28: 127-54.
- Moore, G. E. (1988) *Principia Ethica*, Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Rosati, C. (2009) “Relational Good and the Multiplicity Problem,” *Philosophical Issues* 19: 205-34.
- Rosen, G. (2010) “Metaphysical Dependence: Grounding and Reduction,” in B. Hale and A. Hoffmann (eds.), *Modality: Metaphysics, Logic, and Epistemology*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stocker, M. (1990) *Plural and Conflicting Values*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Tucker, M. (unpublished) “Two Kinds of Value Pluralism”
- Velleman, J. D. (1991) “Well-Being and Time,” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 72: 48-77.

Further Reading

For discussions of monism and pluralism that are not restricted to well-being, see Heathwood (2015), Tucker (unpublished), and R. Chang, “Value Pluralism,” in N. J. Smelser and P. B. Baltes (eds.), *The International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*, vol. 24 (Oxford: Pergamon,

Eden Lin – “Monism and Pluralism” (for the *Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Well-Being*) – January 1, 2015

2012). For a discussion that bears on the Shape of a Life Argument, see D. Dorsey, “The Significance of a Life’s Shape,” forthcoming in *Ethics*.

Biographical Note

Eden Lin is an assistant professor of philosophy at Rutgers University, Newark.