Shape of a Life, Relationality, and the Additivity of Welfare

Some theorists have claimed that, if how well a person's entire life goes depends not merely on how well off that person is at each moment but also on the *shape* of the life (e.g., whether it gets better or worse over time), then a person's lifetime amount of welfare cannot be additively calculated.[1] Others have claimed that, if the kind of value that is conceptually connected to welfare is *relational* (in that it is goodness or badness for a particular person), then because goodness or badness for one person is different from goodness or badness for another, one person's welfare cannot be added to another's.[2] In this paper, I argue that these are not good reasons for denying that welfare (or, equivalently, well-being) can be added intrapersonally and interpersonally. I begin by defending a natural and attractive view about the kind of value, *prudential value*, that is conceptually tied to welfare. I then explain why, on this view, a person's lifetime amount of welfare can be additively calculated even if the shape of a life matters to how well an entire life goes. I also explain why, on this view, multiple people's welfare can be added even if prudential value is relational. Although I offer only a presumptive defense of this view, its plausibility shows that the intrapersonal and interpersonal additivity of welfare aren't threatened by the evaluative significance of the shapes of lives or by the relationality of prudential value. For even if there turn out to be reasons to doubt this view, none arise from considerations of shape or relationality.

1. A View of Prudential Value

One of the many senses of 'good for' and 'bad for' concerns the kind of value that is conceptually connected to welfare: prudential value.[3] At a first pass, these connections can be stated as follows (with 'good for' and 'bad for' used in that sense, as I will be doing throughout this paper):

Temporal* A person's amount of welfare at *t* is how good for her at *t* the world is on balance. It is determined by how good or bad for her at *t* everything is.

[1] Velleman (1991); Temkin (2009); Glasgow (2013); Dorsey (2015); Bramble (2018).
[2] Regan (2004); Stroud (2013); Hurka (2021).
[3] Hurka (2021, pp. 805-08) argues that this sense isn't found in ordinary language. Lin (2025a, pp. 144-45) disagrees. For our purposes, all that matters is that there is such a sense—even if, as Hurka claims, it's employed only by philosophers.

Lifetime* A person's lifetime amount of welfare is how good for her the world in its entirety is on balance. It is determined by how good or bad for her everything ever is.

These claims are formulated in terms of worlds instead of lives to ensure that they are appropriately neutral about the possibility of posthumous benefits or harms. On some views, posthumous events (e.g., the posthumous success of a project) can affect a person's lifetime welfare even though they don't occur within the temporal boundaries of her life.[4] Lifetime* doesn't rule that out: because the world in its entirety extends beyond the person's life in both temporal directions, it's clear that such events can affect how good on balance the world in its entirety is for the person even if it's unclear that they can affect how good on balance the person's entire life is for her. Moreover, notice that "how good or bad for her at *t* everything is" doesn't mean "how good or bad for her everything at *t* is." Temporal* is not the substantive and controversial claim that a person's amount of welfare at *t* is determined by how good or bad for her everything that obtains or is happening at *t* is—a view that forbids a person's welfare at one time from being directly determined, in part, by how good or bad for her something that obtains or is happening at a different time is.[5] It claims only that a person's amount of welfare at *t* is determined by how much goodness or badness for her everything, at any time, has for her at *t*. It is compatible, for example, with the view that a person's amount of welfare at *t* is, in part, directly determined by whether desires that she has at *t* are satisfied or frustrated at times other than *t*, since this view can hold that *t* is the time at which the satisfaction or frustration of those desires (at times other than *t*) is good or bad for her.[6] Thus, Temporal* is neutral between theories of welfare, as a conceptual truth should be.

To make these conceptual connections more precise, we must distinguish two types of prudential value—or, strictly speaking, two sub-senses of the prudential-value sense of 'good for' and 'bad for'. There are two things we might mean when we say that a particular thing, x, is good for a person, S. First, we might mean that x is appropriately related to something else that is good or bad for S (e.g., by causing, having the power to cause, evidencing, partly constituting, or being partly constituted by

[4] See, e.g., Boonin (2019). Some might worry that *life*time welfare must, by definition, be due only to things that occur or obtain during one's life—in which case we must distinguish lifetime welfare from a broader kind of welfare that isn't by definition unable to be affected by posthumous events. I don't think we should read too much into the word 'lifetime', and I will continue to use 'lifetime welfare' to refer to this broader kind of welfare. If you prefer, you can use a different name for it—perhaps 'comprehensive welfare'.
[5] Bradley (2009, p. 18) endorses this substantive and controversial claim.
[6] Dorsey (2013).

something else that is good for S, or by preventing or having the power to prevent something else that is bad for S). We can say that things that are good for S in this extended or derivative sense have *derivative prudential value* for S (i.e., are *derivatively good* for S). Second, we might mean that x is good for S, and not just in that extended or derivative sense. We can say that things that are good for S in this primary or basic sense have *basic prudential value* for S (i.e., are *basically good* for S). Similarly, we can distinguish two senses in which x might be bad for S: it might be *derivatively bad* for S, or it might be *basically bad* for S.[7]

Drawing these distinctions allows us to avoid double-counting when calculating a person's welfare. Things that are merely derivatively good or bad for S have no value or disvalue for S over and above those of other things that are good or bad for S. For example, if the only sense in which x is good for S is that it causes something else, y, that is good for S, then the contribution that x makes to S's welfare is wholly accounted for in the value of y for S, and it would be double-counting to assign to x an amount of value for S that must be taken into account, over and above y's value for S, when determining S's amount of welfare. A person's amount of welfare is determined by how *basically* good or bad for her everything is. Thus, with the concept of basic prudential value in hand, we can more precisely state the conceptual connections between welfare and prudential value as follows:

Temporal A person's amount of welfare at *t* is how good for her at *t* the world is on balance. It is determined by how basically good or bad for her at *t* everything is, in such a way that, other things being equal, the more basically good (bad) for her at *t* things are, the higher (lower) it is.

Lifetime A person's lifetime amount of welfare is how good for her the world in its entirety is on balance. It is determined by how basically good or bad for her everything ever is, in such a way that, other things being equal, the more basically good (bad) things ever are for her, the higher (lower) it is.

[7] Notice that this definition of basic prudential value and disvalue doesn't imply that x's basic goodness or badness for S is *intrinsic* in the sense of being wholly grounded in x's intrinsic properties: it leaves open the possibility that x is basically good or bad for S in virtue of its extrinsic or relational properties (e.g., its being the object of a desire or aversion of S's). While theorists such as Bradley (2009, pp. 3-5) focus on basic prudential value and disvalue that is intrinsic in the sense just described, it isn't a conceptual truth that such value and disvalue is intrinsic in that sense.

Notice that the last component in each of these claims—the one stating that increases in goodness increase welfare while increases in badness decrease it, other things equal—would be false if it were not just about basic prudential value but about prudential value in general. For example, it is false that the greater the degree to which things are good for you in the sense of evidencing other things that are good for you, the higher your welfare, other things equal. If hedonism is true, then any two scenarios in which you feel equal amounts of pleasure and no displeasure are scenarios in which you are equally well off—even if, in one of these scenarios, there is more and better evidence (e.g., in the form of testimony or brain imaging) that you are feeling pleasure. This is why neither Temporal* nor Lifetime* said that the more good (bad) for a person things are, the higher (lower) her welfare, other things being equal. The fact that this platitude is true of basic prudential value but not of derivative prudential value is further evidence of the need to distinguish the two.

Temporal and Lifetime, which concern the relationships between basic prudential value and welfare, constitute the first half of the natural and attractive view of prudential value that I want to defend. The second half of this view is a claim about the structure of basic prudential value: that it always comes in amounts that stand in ratios to each other. More precisely, the claim is this (where S and S* are welfare subjects that may be identical or distinct):

Ratios For any particulars, x and y, that are basically good or bad for S and S*, respectively: x has an amount, A_x, of basic goodness (badness) for S, and y has an amount, A_y, of basic goodness (badness) for S*, and there is a number, n, such that $A_x = n(A_y)$.

We can motivate this claim by noticing that basic prudential value and disvalue at least *often* come in amounts that stand in ratios to each other—even if we would be hard pressed to say what the ratios are in all but the most artificially simple cases. Suppose, for example, that pleasures and displeasures are basically good and bad, respectively, for the people who experience them, and that how basically good (bad) a pleasure (displeasure) is is just how much pleasure (displeasure) it contains. Then since pleasure and displeasure at least often come in amounts that stand in ratios to each other (e.g., when one pleasure contains twice as much pleasure as another one does, or twice as much pleasure as a particular displeasure contains displeasure)[8], the same is true of basic prudential value and disvalue.

[8] I'm inclined to think that pleasures and displeasures *always* come in amounts that stand in ratios to each other, but I needn't insist on this here.

Even if how basically good pleasures are is determined not only by how much pleasure they contain but by facts about their objects[9], it will often be true that one pleasure is n times as basically good as another, or n times as basically good as a given displeasure is basically bad, for some number n. For example, even if the basic prudential value for you of the pleasure that you experienced while at the symphony is partly determined by how excellent or worthy of pleasure the symphony was, there is surely still some number n such that this pleasure was n times as basically good for you as was the pleasure that you got from eating dinner before the symphony, and some number n* such that this pleasure was n* times as basically good for you as my latest headache was basically bad for me.

The claim that basic prudential value and disvalue often come in amounts that stand in ratios to each other is equally well supported by other plausible candidates for basic goods. If achievements are basically good, for example, then there is surely some n—though not necessarily 2—such that the achievement of completing a marathon is n times as basically good for me as that of completing a half-marathon. Moreover, if a pluralistic theory of well-being is true, then instances of distinct basic goods often have amounts of basic goodness that stand in ratios to each other: the achievement of completing the marathon can be n times as basically good for me as the pleasure of the symphony was basically good for you. Likewise, assuming again that a pluralistic theory is true, it's often true that an instance of a basic good has n times as much basic prudential value as an instance of a basic bad has basic prudential disvalue—even if the basic bad doesn't correspond to the basic good in the way that displeasure corresponds to pleasure: my achievement of completing the marathon is surely n times as basically good for me as the displeasure that you felt when you most recently had the flu was basically bad for you, for some number n.

The claim that basic prudential value and disvalue at least often come in amounts that stand in ratios to each other is compatible with our typically being able to give only wide estimates of what these ratios are. For example, we might be in a position to know that my achievement of completing the marathon is at least twice, but no more than ten times, as basically good for me as your pleasure at the symphony was basically good for you, but we might be unable to know anything more precise than that. Indeed, that claim is compatible even with metaphysical indeterminacy about the relevant ratios. Perhaps the structure of basic prudential value is sufficiently fuzzy that there is no precise number n such that my achievement is n times as basically good for me as your pleasure is for you,

[9] Feldman (2004), ch. 5; Kagan (2009).

only a somewhat indeterminate such number. But if there is such an indeterminate number, then there is a ratio, albeit a somewhat indeterminate one.

My presumptive case for Ratios is that, since basic prudential value and disvalue at least often come in amounts that stand in ratios to each other, it is reasonable to think—in the absence of compelling reasons to think otherwise—that they always come in such amounts. To my mind, the only obvious motivation for thinking otherwise comes from the view that some things are *lexically superior* in value to others, in the sense that no amount of the latter things, however large, could have as much value as does a sufficient amount of the former things.[10] A qualitative hedonist might think, for example, that no amount of low-quality pleasure, however large, can have as much basic prudential value as a sufficient amount of high-quality pleasure. A pluralist might maintain that no amount of pleasure, however large, can have as much basic prudential value as a sufficient amount of friendship. Those who accept such a view might deny Ratios because they assume that, if it were true, then no good could be lexically superior to another.

Ratios is compatible with the lexical superiority of certain goods over others, however. Suppose that no amount of pleasure, however large, could have as much basic prudential value as one friendship. This could be true even though, for any instance of pleasure x and any instance of friendship y, there is some number n such that x is n times as basically good as y. For perhaps the following two claims are also true:

(1) Every instance of friendship has at least amount m of basic goodness.
(2) The basic prudential value of additional units of pleasure diminishes in such a way that no amount of pleasure, however large, could have at least m amount of basic goodness.[11]

In graphic terms, (2) says this: if we graph the basic prudential value of pleasure as a function of the total amount of pleasure (with basic prudential value of pleasure on the y-axis and total amount of pleasure on the x-axis), this graph is an upward sloping curve that approaches but never touches the horizontal line y = m. Given (1), this graph entails that friendship is lexically superior to pleasure. But this graph is compatible with the claim that, for any instance of friendship and any instance of

[10] Kraut (2018, pp. 20-24) calls this "incommensurable" or "immeasurable" superiority, and he argues that some types of experience are superior in this way to others. Arrhenius and Rabinowicz (2015, p. 225) call it "weak" superiority.
[11] Pummer (2017) and Lin (2025b) discuss views with this structure.

pleasure, the amounts of basic prudential value had by them stand in some ratio to each other. This reasoning generalizes to any two basic goods, so it shows that some goods can be lexically superior to others even though Ratios is true.

I don't pretend to have shown that no one could plausibly reject Ratios. For example, someone who insists that the basic goodness of additional units of pleasure doesn't diminish (perhaps because she maintains that the basic goodness of each pleasure is fixed solely by its intrinsic properties[12]) would need to reject Ratios to claim that friendship is lexically superior to pleasure. It would be beyond the scope of this paper to determine whether that insistence could be justified. My claim is merely that, like the rest of the picture of prudential value of which it is a part, Ratios is natural and attractive. Since it's unclear that any goods are lexically superior to others, and since I have shown that Ratios is compatible with the hypothesis that some are, this hypothesis doesn't give us a decisive reason to reject Ratios. And since there doesn't appear to be any other reason to doubt Ratios, the fact that basic prudential value and disvalue at least often come in amounts that stand in ratios to each other makes Ratios a natural and attractive view.

I have motivated and made a presumptive argument for the conjunction of Temporal, Lifetime, and Ratios. I believe that many and arguably most philosophers working on well-being implicitly accept this conjunction: my contribution has been to articulate it and argue for it explicitly. I will now argue that, if this conjunction is true, then welfare can be added both intrapersonally and interpersonally even if the shapes of lives are evaluatively significant and prudential value is relational. The success of this argument won't establish that welfare is intrapersonally and interpersonally additive, since it won't rule out the possibility that that conjunction is false. But it will establish that the evaluative significance of the shapes of lives and the relationality of prudential value are not good reasons to deny the intrapersonal or interpersonal additivity of welfare.

2. Shape of a Life and the Intrapersonal Additivity of Welfare

Many philosophers believe that the *shape* of a life—how its subject's welfare is temporally distributed or, more generally, how its parts are interrelated—makes a difference to how well the life goes in its entirety that isn't attributable to other facts about the life, such as how well off its subject is at each

[12] Remember that this view isn't mandated by the concept of basic prudential value: see note 7.

moment in time. Consider two lives that are as similar as possible, except that whereas the first life gets better over time for the person living it, the second gets worse over time for the person living it. Many have the intuition that, even if the lives contain the same total amount of momentary welfare because they are mirror images with respect to it[13], the uphill life goes better in its entirety than the downhill one does: the subject of the first life is higher in lifetime well-being than the subject of the second life is. Because of what they judge about this case and others like it, they conclude that the shapes of lives have an evaluative significance that isn't merely derivative upon, or reflective of, that of other things.[14]

Whether the shapes of lives really are evaluatively significant is controversial: some have argued, for example, that if we judge the uphill life to be better than the downhill one, this is only because we unwittingly imagine that the former contains more momentary welfare than the latter.[15] However, it is uncontroversial that the following claim is false if the shapes of lives are evaluatively significant:

Lifetime Momentary Additivity A person's lifetime amount of welfare is the sum of all of her momentary amounts of welfare.

According to this claim, we can calculate a person's lifetime welfare in the following manner. First, we represent time as a series of moments that are mutually exclusive (to avoid double-counting) and jointly exhaustive (to ensure that no times are excluded from consideration). Then, for each moment at which the subject has an amount—positive, negative, or zero—of well-being, we determine what that amount is. Finally, we add those amounts. The resulting sum is person's lifetime welfare. If the shapes of lives are evaluatively significant, however, then one person (e.g., the subject of the uphill life) can be higher in lifetime welfare than another (e.g., the subject of the downhill life) even though they accrue the same total amount of momentary welfare, so Lifetime Momentary Additivity is false.

[13] In the sense that the subject of the uphill life is as well off at the first moment in that life as the subject of the downhill life is at the last moment in that life, as well off at the second moment in that life as the latter subject is at the second-to-last moment in her life, etc.
[14] Slote (1982); Velleman (2000); Temkin (2009). I will henceforth leave this qualification unstated when I discuss the claim that the shapes of lives are evaluatively significant.
[15] Feldman (2004), pp. 131-35; Dorsey (2015), pp. 315-22, 325-27.

Some theorists seem to take this to mean that, if the shapes of lives are evaluatively significant, then a person's lifetime amount of welfare cannot be additively calculated. For example, Joshua Glasgow proceeds as if "*additive theories*" are those on which "[t]he only thing that determines lifetime well-being is the sum of life's momentary well-being."[16] Ben Bramble writes that "*additivism*" is the view that "one's level of lifetime well-being is equivalent simply to the *sum* of one's levels of momentary well-being throughout one's life."[17] Larry Temkin writes that, on an additive method of aggregating well-being within lives, the best life is "the one with the greatest *sum total* of good contained within the different moments of that life," and after arguing against Lifetime Momentary Additivity, he concludes that the true theory of welfare must "incorporate anti-additive aggregationist elements."[18] Dale Dorsey gives the name "*Intralife Aggregation*" to the thesis that "[t]he welfare of an extended period of time…, including the welfare of a whole life, is determined by an additive function of the welfare of individual times in that period."[19] Since addition requires aggregation, he thereby creates the impression that adding momentary amounts of welfare is the only way to aggregate, and thus to additively calculate, lifetime welfare. And Velleman takes the claim that welfare is "additive" to mean that "the welfare value of a time-period in one's life [is] equivalent to the sum of the momentary well-being that one enjoyed during that period."[20] If the claim that lifetime welfare is additive (i.e., additively calculable) were equivalent to Lifetime Momentary Additivity, as these philosophers seem to assume, then the evaluative significance of the shapes of lives would indeed imply that lifetime welfare isn't additively calculable.

Those claims aren't equivalent, however, and lifetime welfare can be additively calculated even if the shapes of lives are evaluatively significant. If Ratios is true, then we can represent amounts of basic prudential value and disvalue using positive and negative numbers, respectively, and we can plausibly precisify Temporal and Lifetime as follows:

Temporal Value Additivity A person's amount of welfare at *t* is how good for her at *t* the world is on balance. It is the sum of the basic prudential values and disvalues that everything has for her at *t*—i.e., the net amount of basic prudential value that she accrues at *t*.

[16] Glasgow (2013), p. 667.
[17] Bramble (2018), p. 14.
[18] Temkin (2009), pp. 8, 20.
[19] Dorsey (2015), p. 306.
[20] Velleman (2000), p. 57.

Lifetime Value Additivity A person's lifetime amount of welfare is how good for her the world in its entirety is on balance. It is the sum of the basic prudential values and disvalues that everything ever has for her—i.e., the net amount of basic prudential value that she ever accrues.

Temporal Value Additivity says that, to calculate someone's welfare at *t*, we should (i) identify all of the particular things that are basically good or bad for her at *t* (regardless of when these things occur or obtain), (ii) determine how basically good or bad for her at *t* each of these things is (representing a quantity of basic goodness with a positive number and a quantity of basic badness with a negative number), and (iii) add these numbers. Lifetime Value Additivity says that, to calculate someone's lifetime welfare, we should (i) identify all of the particular things that are ever basically good or bad for her, (ii) determine how basically good or bad for her each of these things is (again representing a quantity of basic goodness with a positive number and a quantity of basic badness with a negative number), and (iii) add these numbers. Temporal Value Additivity implies that welfare at a time is intrapersonally additively calculable: we can calculate how well off a person is at a time using nothing more than addition. More relevantly for our purposes, Lifetime Value Additivity implies that lifetime welfare is intrapersonally additively calculable: we can calculate how well a person's entire life goes using nothing more than addition.

Unlike Lifetime Momentary Additivity, Lifetime Value Additivity is compatible with the evaluative significance of the shapes of lives. Even if the uphill life and the downhill life contain equal amounts of momentary welfare, it could be that the former contains a greater net amount of basic prudential value. For perhaps the fact that the uphill life has an uphill trajectory is basically good for its subject, whereas the fact that the downhill life has a downhill trajectory is basically bad for its subject. More generally, whenever it is claimed that two lives that are equal in total momentary welfare differ in lifetime welfare because of some fact about their shapes, we can accommodate this judgment in a manner consistent with Lifetime Value Additivity by assigning basic prudential value or disvalue to the relevant shapes.[21] Since Lifetime Value Additivity enjoins us to add amounts of basic prudential

[21] Notice, though, that in order to accommodate that judgment, we must say that at least some of the shapes' basic value or disvalue does not accrue to their subjects at any moments. Otherwise, we would be committed to the view that all of the shapes' basic value or disvalue is already factored into the subjects' total amounts of momentary welfare, which are by stipulation equal. For a similar point, see Campbell (2015), p. 573.

value and disvalue rather than amounts of momentary welfare, and since the evaluative significance of the shapes of lives can be reflected in amounts of basic prudential value and disvalue, it allows us to additively calculate lifetime welfare while recognizing that significance.

Those who believe that the shapes of lives are evaluatively significant should welcome this result. If Lifetime Momentary Additivity were the only sense in which lifetime welfare could be additive (or additively calculable), then it might seem that we can reject it only at the cost of conceding that there is no simple mathematical operation that can be used to calculate lifetime welfare. Someone who is under this impression might want to hang on to Lifetime Momentary Additivity and to deny that the shapes of lives are evaluatively significant on the grounds that any other view about how to calculate lifetime welfare would be intolerably mysterious or complicated. But Lifetime Value Additivity uses nothing more than addition to calculate lifetime welfare, so its compatibility with the claim that the shapes of lives are evaluatively significant undermines this reason for resisting that claim.

3. Relationality and the Interpersonal Additivity of Welfare

Unlike simple or impersonal value—the kind of value that things have *simpliciter* or "from the point of view of the universe"—prudential value is relational: it is value *for* someone. Some philosophers suggest that, for this reason, welfare cannot be compared or added across people. If A's welfare is determined by how basically good or bad *for A* everything is, and B's welfare is determined by how basically good or bad *for B* everything is, then comparing or adding their welfare would appear to require comparing or adding net amounts of two kinds of value: basic-value-for-A and basic-value-for-B. But just as it's unclear how we could compare or add a quantity of moral value to a quantity of aesthetic value, it's unclear how we could compare or add quantities of those two kinds of value.

Donald Regan makes this suggestion in the course of arguing that, unless there is the right kind of necessary connection between prudential value and impersonal value (e.g., because whenever a person gets something that is good for her, this is impersonally good), it's unclear why the fact that something would be good for one person gives another person a reason to promote it. "The need for good *simpliciter* seems even clearer when we consider the problem of how to balance the (reasons created by the) good for Abel and the good for Seth," he writes. "Balance we must, and that seems

to require a 'good' (explicit or implicit) which is not a 'good for'."[22] His thought seems to be that, if x is good for Abel and y is good for Seth, then since goodness-for-Abel is different from goodness-for-Seth, we can't compare how good x is for Abel to how good y is for Seth (or add x's amount of goodness for Abel to y's amount of goodness for Seth) unless we convert these amounts of these two kinds of value into the common currency of impersonal value.

Sarah Stroud makes the same suggestion in response to Richard Kraut's argument[23], the substance of which needn't concern us here, that the concept of impersonal value shouldn't be used in ethics. Using his expression "absolute goodness" synonymously with "impersonal value," she writes:

> The proponent of absolute goodness might well reply that there is a job which is essential in ethics but which "good for" … cannot perform for us, namely that of *aggregating* what is good or bad *for* different individuals into an overall judgment which can guide ethical decision. If all we can say, or think, is that outcome O would be good for Ann but bad for Beth and Charles, how are we to figure out whether we ought to try to bring about O?[24]

Thomas Hurka echoes this line of thought in a recent paper:

> If one act will promote *A*'s well-being while another will promote *B*'s, we can only determine which act is right by determining which outcome is in some sense better. But this can't be a relativized sense of 'better'. The first outcome is better for *A* and the second for *B*, and we need a judgement that's neutral between the two, which we can't make using only 'good for'…. An acceptable ethical view must be able to compare the goods of different people; it's hard to see how it can do this using just… 'good for'.[25]

[22] Regan (2004), p. 213 n25. I take it that he is concerned not only with how to balance the reasons created by the two people's welfare but also how to balance the two people's welfare. This is evidenced not only by his use of parentheses around "reasons created by the" but by the fact that he takes reasons and value to be closely linked in such a way that, if there is a puzzle about how to balance the former, there is a puzzle about how to balance the latter: see, e.g., p. 211.
[23] Kraut (2011).
[24] Stroud (2013), p. 463.
[25] Hurka (2021), pp. 820-21.

A natural thought, of course, is that we ought to prefer or promote the outcome that contains the greater *total* amount of well-being. This thought doesn't presuppose anything about impersonal value (e.g., that outcomes are impersonally good in proportion to how much total welfare they contain), so it might seem that we can accept it even if, like Kraut, we reject the concept of impersonal value and employ only that of prudential value. Stroud and Hurka seem to be thinking that the relationality of prudential value prevents us from accepting this thought by making it impossible to aggregate or add welfare across people. If A's welfare is a matter of what's basically good or bad for A and B's welfare is a matter of what's basically good or bad for B, then how can A's welfare be added to B's welfare?

We could avoid this problem if we were to accept the view, often attributed to G. E. Moore, that basic prudential value can be analyzed in terms of basic impersonal value as follows:

Mooreanism x is basically good (bad) for S $=_{df}$ x is had by S, and x is basically impersonally good (bad).

For, on this view, quantities of basic value for A would just be quantities of basic impersonal value instantiated by things had by A, and quantities of basic value for B would just be quantities of basic impersonal value instantiated by things had by B. And it is no mystery how we could add quantities of the same kind of value. However, because I side with the majority of welfare theorists who reject Mooreanism and who maintain that prudential value is relational in a deeper sense than it allows, I want to show that the problem can be solved even if it is false.[26]

The key to solving the problem is understanding what the relationality of prudential value does and doesn't imply. Regan, Stroud, and Hurka seem to assume that it implies that there are as many kinds of prudential value as there are subjects for whom things can be prudentially valuable: prudential-value-for-A, prudential-value-for-B, and so on. But the claim that prudential value is relational is just the claim that it is value *for* some subject or other, and this claim doesn't have that implication. As is suggested by the word "relationality," we can more naturally and plausibly understand it as saying that for something to have prudential value or disvalue for someone is for it to stand in the first place of one of these two two-place relations:

[26] Lin (2025a) gives an argument against Mooreanism.

__ is good for __
__ is bad for __

Likewise, for something to have basic prudential value or disvalue for someone is for it to stand in the first place of one of these two determinable, two-place relations:

__ is basically good for __
__ is basically bad for __

And Ratios implies that whenever two things stand in one of the two determinable relations above, they stand in a determinate relation of one of the following two forms (for positive numbers *n*):

__ is basically good to degree *n* for __
__ is basically bad to degree *n* for __

This means that A's welfare and B's welfare are not determined by facts about net amounts of two different kinds of value: basic-prudential-value-for-A and basic-prudential-value-for-B. Instead, they are determined by facts about the instantiation of determinate relations of the very same forms. This makes adding them unproblematic, just as it is unproblematic to add how far one person's house is from him to how far another person's house is from her. If Jack's house is one mile away from him and Jill's house is two miles away from her, it is clear which house is farther from its owner, and we can add the two distances. After all, there aren't two incommensurable things here: distance-from-Jack and distance-from-Jill. There is just one thing: distance.

To illustrate this in the case of welfare, suppose that these are all of the things that are basically good or bad for A or B (and how basically good or bad for A or B they are):

Subject A	Subject B
a has 5 units of basic prudential value for A	*c* has 7 units of basic prudential value for B
b has 1 unit of basic prudential disvalue for A	*d* has 2 units of basic prudential disvalue for B

Given a proper understanding of the relationality of prudential value, the underlying truth is this:

Subject A	Subject B
a is basically good to degree 5 for A	*c* is basically good to degree 7 for B
b is basically bad to degree 1 for A	*d* is basically bad to degree 2 for B

There is no problem with claiming, as the two forms of Value Additivity would imply[27], that A's welfare is 5 – 1 = 4 and that B's welfare is 7 – 2 = 5. And since the facts about A's welfare and the facts about B's welfare are grounded in facts about the instantiation of determinate relations of the very same forms, there is no problem with claiming that the sum of their welfares is 4 + 5 = 9. The relationality of prudential value is no obstacle to the interpersonal additivity of welfare.

Some might worry that, because Ratios says that basic prudential value always comes in amounts that stand in ratios to each other even when it is accrued by distinct subjects, it begs the question against those who believe that the relationality of prudential value prevents welfare from being added across people. But although Ratios entails that welfare can be added across people even if prudential value is relational, this doesn't make it question-begging. The fact that one claim entails the negation of another doesn't suggest that it begs the question against it: otherwise, every valid argument would beg the question against the negation of its conclusion in virtue of the fact that the conjunction of its premises entails its conclusion. Another worry in this vicinity is that the fact that prudential value is relational gives us reason to reject Ratios. But this isn't true either. To say that prudential value is relational is just to say that it is value *for* some subject or other. This is perfectly compatible with—and, indeed, most naturally suggests—the view that to say that something is basically good for S is to say that it and S stand in the first and second places, respectively, of the relation __ is basically good for __, and it gives us no reason to suspect that Ratios is false.

The lesson here is that we must be careful about what the relationality of prudential value involves. It does mean that the claim that something has prudential value is incomplete, since something can have such value only by having it for some subject or other. But it doesn't mean that there are as many kinds of prudential value as there are welfare subjects—a view that would, indeed, make it unclear how we could add different people's welfare. Instead, it leaves open and most naturally

[27] Which of the two forms of Value Additivity is relevant would depend on whether the schematic example above is restricted to a particular time.

suggests the view there is a single relation, __ is good for __, such that for any x and S, to say that x has prudential value for S is to say that x and S occupy the first and second places of that relation, respectively. There is no obstacle, on this view, to adding welfare across people.

4. Conclusion

I have argued that if, as many and perhaps even most philosophers working on well-being assume, the conjunction of Temporal, Lifetime, and Ratios is true, then welfare can be additively calculated both intrapersonally and interpersonally even if the shapes of lives are evaluatively significant and prudential value is relational. Although I have made only a presumptive case for that conjunction, the success of my argument would establish that the intrapersonal and interpersonal additivity of well-being aren't threatened by the evaluative significance of the shapes of lives or the relationality of prudential value. After all, neither that evaluative significance nor that relationality gives us any reason to reject that conjunction. Thus, even if there are good reasons to deny the intrapersonal or interpersonal additivity of welfare[28], no such reasons are provided by considerations of shape or relationality.

[28] Nebel (2023) explores some of the contentious assumptions of the view that welfare is interpersonally additive.

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