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Fitting It In

-A Reply to Krister Bykvist's Article *No Good Fit*

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Table of contents

Introduction	2
The objection.....	3
The solitary goods problem.....	3
Does taking pleasure in p entail that p is the case?	5
Does taking pleasure in p entail that you believe that p?	6
Other attitudes	8
Wishing	9
Taking-pleasure-in revisited.....	9
Objections to possible attitudes.....	10
Is it a pro-attitude?.....	10
Is it fitting?	11
Imagined and real pleasures	11
The plurality of attitudes	12
Denial and reasons	13
Concluding thoughts	18
The distance problem	18
The problem	18
The solution.....	19
Objections to the solution.....	21
Relativizing as a response to the objection	23
The distance problem and the WKR-objection	24

Introduction

The "buck-passing", or the "fitting attitudes", account of value has recently become a popular topic of discussion in value theory. The fitting-attitudes account (or the FA-account for short) claims that what is valuable is what it is fitting to have a pro-attitude towards. I.e. what is good is what is fitting to favour. In the same sense, what is bad is what it is fitting to disfavour. Furthermore what is better is what is fitting to favour more.

This format of value analysis can be traced back to the nineteenth century, when both Henry Sidgwick and Franz Brentano adopted a view similar to the FA-account stated above. Different versions of the FA-account have been discussed on and off during the years, with one of the most recent contributions being Thomas Scanlon's "buck-passing" account.¹ According to the buck-passing account something is valuable if it has properties that give us reasons for favouring it.² In 2004 the discussion was revitalised by Wlodek Rabinowicz and Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen's article *The Strike of the Demon: On Fitting Pro-Attitudes and Value*. At first, the discussions that followed mostly concerned the so called "wrong kind of reasons" objection (or the WKR-objection for short). The WKR-objection claims that it can be fitting to have a pro-attitude towards an object which lacks value and therefore the FA-analysis seems to fall short. But there are other objections to the FA-analysis, and lately other discussions have emerged. One being the objection that the FA-analysis is circular: if the fitting pro-attitudes are understood as evaluative judgments, then the understanding of pro-attitudes is dependent on a concept of value.³

This thesis will focus on another objection presented by Krister Bykvist in his article *No Good Fit: Why the Fitting Attitude Analysis of Value Fails*. Krister Bykvist argues that it is hard to find a non-circular account of fitting attitudes, since the non-evaluative understandings of fitting attitudes will either imply that there are certain (solitary) good states of affairs that are not fitting to have a pro-attitude towards, or we will run into problems similar to those put forward in the WKR-objection but this time it is the degree of favouring and the degree of goodness that do not seem to match. His argument is built upon two different problems: the "solitary goods problem" and the "distance problem". Since Bykvist argument is two folded, this thesis will also be two folded. At first I will discuss the "solitary good problem". I will

¹ For a more generous report of the history of the FA-analysis see Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen 2004.

² Scanlon 1998 p. 11

³ It is argued though that this circularity might not be vicious. See Wiggins 1987 p. 189

mention several possible solutions to this problem. But we are still left with Bykvist second argument: the “distance problem”. In the last part of my thesis I will try to give an adequate solution to this problem.

The objection

According to Bykvist, the FA-analysis gives the following account of what is good:

“ p is good =_{df.} p is such that it would be fitting to favour p , if one were to contemplate p ”.⁴

It should also be stated that it is intrinsic or final value that is the value being discussed.

Bykvist argues that this FA-account will fail since all possible understandings of favouring, that avoid the circularity problem, will be problematic. That is; either favouring will be understood as an evaluative judgement, or it will lead to the “solitary goods problem”, or it will lead to the “distance problem”. To prove this Bykvist starts by looking closely at three understandings of favouring: pursuit (as in successful and mere), desire and pleasure.

The solitary goods problem

The “solitary goods problem” consists of the fact that there are good states of affairs that are logically impossible to favour or simply not fitting to favour. Here is an example of a solitary good state:

There being happy egrets but no past, present or future agents

This seems to be a good state of affairs, i.e. it might seem fitting to favour this state of affairs. But according to Bykvist it is, in many senses of favouring, logically impossible to favour the state of affairs mentioned above. Let us have a closer look at the example of a solitary good and the understanding of favouring as successful pursuit:

“there being happy egrets but no past, present or future agents (i.e. beings who intentionally bring something about)”⁵

⁴ Bykvist 2009 p. 4, Bykvist adds: “if one were to contemplate p ” to include those p that are good but not actually considered.

⁵ Bykvist 2009 p. 5

It is logically impossible to successfully pursue this state of affairs since a successful pursuit involves intentionally bringing something about. Bringing about that there are no past, present or future agents who intentionally bring something about is logically impossible. And therefore it cannot be fitting to bring it about.

Similarly there are senses of favouring that make a good state of affairs unfitting to favour not because it is logically impossible to favour it, but because it is simply unfitting to do so.

Consider favour as mere pursuit (trying to bring about) and the solitary good state of affairs:

there being happy egrets but no past, present or future agents (i.e. beings who try to bring something about)

Trying to bring about that “there being no past, present or future agents who try to bring something about” is not logically impossible. But according to Bykvist it does not seem to be fitting, because such pursuit cannot possibly succeed. He argues that “[p]ursuit cannot be the appropriate response to the unachievable”.⁶ And if we understand favouring as desire (in the sense of the disposition to bring something about), we will end up with the same problem.⁷ Pursuit and desire seem not to be possible understandings of favouring. And similar problems await favouring understood as taking (non-bodily) pleasure in something. According to Bykvist it might well be that taking propositional pleasure in p entails that p is the case.⁸ And if so, it will be logically impossible to take pleasure in the following good state of affairs:

“there being happy egrets but no one who takes pleasure in anything”⁹

If taking pleasure in p does not entail that p is the case, it at least entails belief in p . That is, if we take pleasure in p then we believe that p is the case.¹⁰ But this also leads to a problem.

Consider the following state of affairs:

⁶ Bykvist 2009 p. 6

⁷ Doubts can be raised whether desire is best understood as the disposition to bring something about. And also if we assume that this is the correct understanding of desire it might be possible to question why it is unfitting to desire that which is logically impossible. The discussions that would follow if one took this path will resemble, I believe, those that are discussed later in this thesis, regarding the attitude of wishing. And therefore I choose to not take this path.

⁸ To be more precise Bykvist writes: “Things are even worse, if we assume with Gordon (1974) and Davis (1981) that pleasure-taking is also truth-entailing (if you take pleasure in p , p is the case)” Bykvist 2009 p. 8

⁹ Bykvist 2009 p. 9

¹⁰ Bykvist 2009 p. 7

there being happy egrets but no (past, present or future) believers

The state of affairs mentioned seems to be a good state, and according to the FA-analysis that identifies favouring with taking-pleasure-in, this means that it is fitting to take pleasure in the state of affairs in question. But this is problematic, since necessarily, if a person believes that there are happy egrets but no believers then his belief is false. What is problematic is that this would mean that it is fitting to have an attitude that is self-undermining. Bykvist argues that it cannot be fitting to “undermine oneself in this way”.¹¹

I agree with Bykvist in his critique that some understandings of favouring will imply that there are good states of affairs that are logically impossible to favour. And therefore these understandings of favouring are inappropriate. But I do not believe that all attitudes are of this kind. I shall therefore make some suggestions concerning attitudes that might not be problematic in this way.

Does taking pleasure in p entail that p is the case?

I believe that Bykvist discards the attitude of taking-pleasure-in too easily. I will argue that taking pleasure in the problematic solitary good state of affairs is fitting.

I believe that it is possible to deny that taking pleasure in p entails that it is the case that p . I can think of several arguments that to that effect. And others, like Chisholm and Feldman, have also provided such arguments. Here is one of Feldman’s:

“Suppose I mistakenly think that I will be meeting G. E. Moore soon. Suppose I am delighted about this. Clearly, I am pleased about *something*. It seems wrong to say that what I am pleased about is the fact that *I think I will meet Moore*. It seems better to say that I am pleased that *I am going to meet him* (even though I am not going to meet him)”.¹²

¹¹ Bykvist 2009 p. 8. Just as Bykvist I will use the shorthand “undermine oneself” when referring to “have an attitude that involves a belief that is self-undermining”.

¹² Feldman 2004a p. 60 and 2004b p. 72

I find this argument convincing; that an attitude can entail something factive seems to be a too strong claim. Here is another argument that makes this more explicit: is the fact that Pope Benedict XVI takes pleasure in God's existence a proof of the existence of God? I believe most people would deny this.

Does taking pleasure in p entail that you believe that p ?

Let us have a look at the weaker claim that taking pleasure in p entails that you believe that p . I do not find this claim convincing.¹³ Consider the following argument.

I am told that there is a Bergman movie on TV. I turn on the TV but happen to have the wrong channel on. I am in fact watching a Fellini movie. I am taking pleasure in watching a Fellini movie but I do not believe that I am watching a Fellini movie. I believe that I am watching a Bergman movie. Taking pleasure in watching a Fellini movie does not entail that I believe that I am watching a Fellini movie.

An expected response to this argument is that I am just mistaken in what I am taking pleasure in. I am not taking pleasure in watching a Fellini movie but I am taking pleasure in watching a movie. And I do believe that I am watching a movie. I.e. taking pleasure in watching a movie entails that I believe that I am watching a movie.

My reply to this is that I am not taking pleasure in watching a movie. I am taking pleasure in watching a *Fellini* movie. It could be that I am constituted in such a way that I only take pleasure in watching movies by Fellini and not any random movie. It is still the case that I believe that I am watching a Bergman movie.¹⁴

A more serious objection is that this argument fails to show that taking pleasure in a *state of affairs* does not entail belief in a *state of affairs*. I.e. it could be that I am taking pleasure in watching a Fellini movie, but I am not taking pleasure in the state of affairs: I am watching a

¹³ Others have also expressed doubt about this. For example Zimmerman 2007 p. 426

¹⁴ A possible response to this would be that if I only take pleasure in watching Fellini movies I should start to believe that the movie that I am watching is really a Fellini movie based on the fact that I take pleasure in watching it. This might not be so, I might not be aware of the fact that I only take pleasure in watching Fellini movies. I might instead construct the belief that I am taking pleasure in watching Bergman movies. Which would then be a false belief.

Fellini movie. Let me therefore try to construct an argument that shows that taking pleasure in a state of affairs does not entail belief in a state of affairs.

Revengeful John masters the skill of lucid dreaming. He can control his dreams and their content. Thereby John is able to make his dreams more pleasurable. When John is in the dream he is aware of the fact that it is a dream but is still being able to take pleasure in the illusions of the dream. John has been insulted by Jane. John would therefore take pleasure in the state of affairs: “John takes physical revenge on Jane”. The problem is that John is fully paralysed and therefore the state of affairs may never obtain. But John can have lucid dreams where the state of affairs obtains. He may then take pleasure in the state of affairs “John takes physical revenge on Jane” without believing in the state of affairs.

One could then argue that John is not taking pleasure in the state of affairs but taking pleasure in dreaming about the state of affairs. But that does not convince me. To me, it does not seem like John is taking pleasure in dreaming but he is in fact taking pleasure in actually experiencing the state of affairs. This, the fact that one really experiences the state of affairs, is in fact an incitement for learning how to lucidly dream.¹⁵

If we allow science fiction examples it is possible to avoid the objection. Perhaps it is possible, by stimulating various nerves with electrodes, that John can experience the state of affairs and take pleasure in it. Then it is not possible to reply that John is not taking pleasure in the state of affairs but taking pleasure in dreaming, but it is possible to reply that John is not taking pleasure in the state of affairs but taking pleasure in experiencing the state of affairs. But can a state of affairs be pleasurable as it is? Is it not always the experiencing of the state of affairs that is pleasurable?

If a state of affairs is not pleasurable as it is, then, if the FA-analysis is to be correct, the corresponding claim should be true regarding the value of a state of affairs. So can a state of affairs be a bearer of value? I find it odd that state of affairs are bearers of value and I find Ramon M. Lemos suggestion more appealing: “[...] rather than saying of a given state of

¹⁵ It is possible to argue that we really do not know what is going on in lucid dreaming. And when more research has been done on the subject, it might turn out that my argument is wrong. But for now I am not aware of any scientific research that is not coherent with my argument.

affairs that obtains that it is good, bad, or indifferent, we shall say instead that it is good, bad, or neither good nor bad that some given state of affairs that obtains does in fact obtain”¹⁶

I take this to mean that non-obtaining states of affairs are not bearers of value but the *obtaining* of the state of affairs is.¹⁷ If this is correct then it makes sense that John is not taking pleasure in the state of affairs but in the *experiencing* of the state of affair. Just as it is not the state of affairs as such that is bearer of the value but the *obtaining* of the state of affairs.

Other attitudes

If you are not convinced that the solitary good problem is not problematic, with favouring interpreted as taking-pleasure-in, you might be open to the suggestion that there are other readings of “favour” that do not lead to that problem. I believe that Bykvist has not ruled out all kinds of pro-attitudes. There are possibly several that might survive his scrutiny. Even though I am not fully convinced that the solitary good problem is as problematic as Bykvist claims, there might be other possible attitudes that avoid the problem. Bykvist himself consider this:

“Arguably, the category of emotions is not exhausted by evaluative, factive or belief-entailing emotions, so there might still be a suitable candidate around. What we are looking for is an emotional feeling that involves ‘thinking of with a feeling’ (Goldie 2000, p. 19), where ‘thinking of’ does not imply belief or the truth of what is thought of. Perhaps the emotional reactions involved in day-dreaming and reading fiction would fit the bill, since in these cases we seem to emotionally respond to objects and situations that we know do not exist.”¹⁸

This seems like a good idea. So what sorts of emotions are there that are not belief or truth entailing? Bykvist suggestion that the emotion should be similar to those involved in daydreaming seems to be a good start. In other words the pro-attitude should have an optative character. Let us therefore examine an attitude that seems to fit the bill.

¹⁶ Lemos R. M. p. 22

¹⁷ For a more developed analysis of this see Lemos Noah M. 2005 pp. 181-186 in which he argues that only obtaining states of affairs are bearers of value.

¹⁸ Bykvist 2009 p. 14

Wishing

Wishing seems to be a fitting candidate for a pro-attitude. That p is good would then be understood as it being fitting to wish that p obtains. So let us investigate the attitude of wishing. Wishing does not seem to be an evaluative attitude and thus it does not make the FA-analysis circular.

At a first glance wishing seems to be closely related to desire and thus it might suffer the same problems as desire and other teleological terms. But wishing does not seem to be a factive emotion. I.e. wishing that p does not entail that p is the case. It is more common that we wish for things that for the moment are not the case. And hence it will not have the problems that follow with factive emotions.

But could it be that wishing entails belief? That is, does the fact that you wish that p entail that you believe p ? Sometimes your wish might be related to a belief in the negation of the wish. E.g. if you wish you were not so overweight then you probably also believe that you are overweight. This should be seen as a coincidence rather than entailment of any kind. There are several examples when there is no entailment at all. For example you may wish that you will win the lottery, but this does not mean that you believe that you will win the lottery (nor the negation: that you will not win the lottery). And you may wish that you were some centimetres taller but this does not mean that you believe that you are or even could be some centimetres taller.

Taking-pleasure-in revisited

I believe that there are more attitudes that will be just as successful as wishing. The colloquial use of wish makes it appealing but there might be possible to find more complex attitudes that will escape Bykvist problems. Let me give you an example. Taking pleasure in p might entail belief in p if p is a state of affairs but if the attitude of taking pleasure in is a conditional attitude this might not be the case. Consider the following attitude that has been suggested to me by Wlodek Rabinowicz: taking pleasure in p on a hypothetical assumption that p is the case.

Let us examine this attitude closely to see if it avoids the problems of entailing truth and entailing belief. Taking pleasure in p on a hypothetical assumption that p is the case can hardly entail that p is in fact the case. Therefore it seems to avoid the problems that come with factive emotions. And in the same manner the attitude does not seem to entail a belief. It is possible for you not to believe in p while taking pleasure in p on a hypothetical assumption that p .

Objections to possible attitudes

Just as I believe that there are many possible attitudes that could fit the bill there are also several objections that can be made towards these possible attitudes. Some are rather serious, others less so.

Is it a pro-attitude?

At first, one could question if these attitudes really are pro-attitudes. This may especially concern the attitude of taking-pleasure-in-on-a-hypothetical-assumption. Can pro-attitudes be conditional? If the condition is not satisfied the pro-attitude is, in one sense, no longer a pro-attitude. I believe that the answer to this question in this specific case depends on the nature of hypothetically-assuming and its connection to the pleasure-taking. But unfortunately it is hard to grasp the true nature of the meaning of these terms and their connection. One could argue that the attitude is a pro-attitude if the condition is satisfied. But it must also be stressed that it is important that “on a hypothetical assumption that p is the case” is not just a rewrite for “if p obtains”. If so, taking pleasure in p if p obtains seems to entail belief in p just as much as “taking pleasure in p ” does. And as Bykvist claims: “It cannot be fitting to be such that one would take belief-entailing pleasure in there being happy egrets but no believers, if this state of affairs obtained, for if it obtained, there would be no believers. So, no one can be such that she would take belief-entailing pleasure in it, if it obtained.”¹⁹

¹⁹ Bykvist 2009 p. 9 It should also be noted that the attitude in question does not involve an entailment of the following kind: if x hypothetically assumes that p , then he takes pleasure in p . Because clearly x can hypothetically assume that p without taking pleasure in p . The meaning of hypothetically-assume and its connection to the pleasure-taking is unfortunately vague and therefore mystifies the FA-account.

Is it fitting?

There is one serious objection that can be made to both “wishing” and “the conditional pleasure taking”. This problem regards fittingness.

It seems to be logically possible to wish for there being happy egrets but no past, present or future wishers or wishes, just as it is logically possible to take conditional pleasure in there being happy egrets but no hypothetical assumers. But is it fitting to wish for there being happy egrets but no past, present or future wishers or wishes? And is it fitting for you to take pleasure in (there being happy egrets but no hypothetical assumers) on a hypothetical assumption that (there being happy egrets but no hypothetical assumers) is the case? Clearly you can take pleasure in or wish for the state of affairs but is this really fitting? If this is fitting then what is not fitting?

At least this seems to be more fitting than to take belief-entailing pleasure in there being happy egrets but no believers. And it is certainly more fitting than successfully pursue there being happy egrets but no past, present or future agents (i.e. beings who intentionally bring about), which is unfitting. So it is not unfitting to have these attitudes towards these problematic states of affairs. But it is still the case that if we take “wishing” to be the pro-attitude of our preference, we will end up with a more allowing reading of fitting. This laissez-faire element of wishing can perhaps be explained by the fact that wishing is a comparative attitude. When we wish for something we seem to do it based on a specific backdrop. Compared to a world which does not contain happy egrets and agents, we may wish for “there being happy egrets but no agents”, but compared to a world that does contain both happy egrets and agents we may not wish for “there being happy egrets but no agents”. This in turn makes it fitting to wish for a great deal of things, which would mean that the FA-account would ascribe value to perhaps too a great deal of things. In fact it would make the FA-account of value an account of comparative value. And this would make the FA-account less appealing

Imagined and real pleasures

There is one further objection that applies to many possible attitudes. Bykvist formulates the objection it in the following manner:

“Consider, for instance, the moral difference between taking pleasure in revenge fantasies and taking pleasure in real revenge. Even if it is unfitting to take pleasure in real revenge it does not seem as unfitting to take pleasure in merely imagined revenge”.²⁰

If this is correct then it is a problematic objection that would probably apply to many possible attitudes. But it is not an uncontroversial view. Many people hold the intent to commit a wrongdoing just as bad as the act in itself, or the pleasure taking in imagined infidelity just as bad as the pleasure taking in an actual infidelity. And if the attitude in question just handles imagined scenarios it might not be a problem. It could then be that, the fittingness of an attitude we have towards the imagined scenario does not correspond to the fittingness of a corresponding attitude we have towards a corresponding real scenario, but since the degree of the fittingness of the attitude towards the imagined might correspond to the degree of the fittingness of a corresponding attitude towards the corresponding real scenario. That is: it is more unfitting to take pleasure in revenge fantasies about causing serious traumatising pain than it is unfitting to take pleasure in revenge fantasies about making a sarcastic remark, just as it is more unfitting to take pleasure in causing serious traumatising pain than it is unfitting to take pleasure in making a sarcastic remark.

Even if the attitudes of wishing and taking-conditional-pleasure-in seem to lead to problems there might be other possible attitudes. Some might run into similar problems but if we allow for rather complex and “constructed” attitudes I believe that it is possible to find a satisfying attitude.

The plurality of attitudes

In order to avoid the solitary good problem one can appeal to the possibility of plural attitudes. The idea of the pluralist view is that different kinds of value match different kinds of favouring or in the word of Marcia Baron:

“Value comes in many varieties, even if we limit ourselves [...] to non-instrumental value, and it doesn’t appear that all value calls for the same response. Some are such that the best response is to exemplify or instantiate

²⁰ Bykvist 2009 p. 30

them; other are such that the best response is to promote them; still others call for producing as much of them as possible; others call for honouring them by refraining from doing anything that would violate them.”²¹

If this thought is developed it can explain why the state of affairs consisting in there being happy egrets but no believers is a good state of affairs even if it is not fitting to take belief entailing pleasure in it.

If we are pluralists it might be possible to claim that desire is the corresponding attitude to the value of the state of affairs “there being happy egrets but no believers”. But for this solution to be successful we also have to maintain that desire is not the corresponding attitude to the value of the state of affairs “there being happy egrets but no one who intentionally brings anything about”. But do the two states of affairs differ in value? It is not obvious. The properties that make the state of affairs fitting to have a pro-attitude towards seem to be the same in both states. But this entails that we are ignorant with respect to the last part of the state of affairs. Even if this last part does not change the amount of the value the state of affairs should be credited with, it is still possible that this last part changes the character of the value.

And if this solution is not satisfying, it is possible to argue that the pluralist view should not only be understood as: different kinds of value correspond to different kinds of pro-attitudes. But that different kinds of value correspond to different kinds of pro-attitudes or one kind of value can correspond to different kinds of pro-attitude if one pro-attitude is (for reasons that are not tied to the properties that makes the object, state of affairs or etc a bearer of value) not fitting to have towards the object, state of affairs or etc.

Denial and reasons

I have until now focused on potential pro-attitudes that might solve the solitary good problem, but this left us with doubts about whether these pro-attitudes were fitting towards certain objects. And the discussion about the plurality of attitudes left us with questions about the value of there being no agents. The former issue raises a suspicion that it is the use of

²¹ Baron 1997 p. 22

“fitting” that causes all the problems. And the latter raises a suspicion that the absence of agents might be something bad.

The second leads us to one obvious possible solution to the solitary good problem that I have not yet mentioned: One could deny that the problematic solitary state of affairs is a good state of affairs and argue that Bykvist’s argument support this claim. I.e. there being happy egrets and no agents is a bad state of affairs and the fact that there also are happy egrets does not make the state of affairs a good state of affairs. The FA-account of value has taught us something we were not aware of. Or maybe we were, perhaps we find it to be valuable that there exists agents. Of course, Bykvist would argue that the state of affairs in which there are happy egrets but no agents is in fact a good state of affairs. Where does that leave us? It is a good state of affairs but it is not fitting to favour it. Is it therefore fitting to disfavour it? It seems not. So this is a state of affairs that it is neither fitting to favour nor to disfavour. Rather it is fitting to be indifferent. Once again it is the notion of fitting that seems to make things confusing.

Perhaps if we adopt some other concept instead of fitting, things will be less cryptic. One obvious candidate that could substitute fitting is “reason”. “Reason” has been more investigated than “fitting”, through the history of philosophy. And it seems to be a fitting candidate since many find it to be the central normative concept.²²

Let us therefore have a closer look at the solitary good problem formulated in terms of reasons. If there are reasons to take pleasure in there being happy egrets but no (past, present, or future) believers then there are reasons to have an attitude that involves a belief that is self-undermining. But can there be reasons to undermine oneself?

At a first glance this does not seem as problematic as the fitting account. After all, there might be reasons to undermine oneself in this way. The question then is what kind of reason this would be. There are several different types of reasons but it is normative reasons that are of interest for us. Some take these reasons to be primitive, while others do not. John Broome, who does not, distinguishes motivating reasons from normative reasons in the following way:

²² One proponent is Joseph Raz, the philosopher behind the by now famous quote: “The normativity of all that is normative consists in the way it is, or provides, or is otherwise related to reasons”. Raz 2001.

“Motivating reasons explain or help to explain what a person does, in a distinctive way that involves the person’s rational faculty. On the other hand, normative reasons explain or help to explain what a person ought to do (or believe, or intend, or something else). ‘The reason Hannibal used elephants was to terrorize the Romans’ describes a motivating reason. ‘A reason to take milk with Indian tea is that it neutralizes the bitterness’ describes a normative reason. Sometimes a person does what she ought to do, and does it for the reasons that explain why she ought to do it. If so, her normative reasons are also her motivating reasons.”²³

Then we are left with the question whether we can explain why we ought to undermine ourselves.²⁴ The fact that the state of affairs in question entails that there are happy egrets may provide us with an explanation of why we ought to favour the state of affairs and thus undermine ourselves. But it also seems like the fact that we do undermine ourselves constitute an explanation of why we ought not to favour the state of affairs. And the fact that the state of affairs entails that there are no agents may provide us with an explanation of why we ought not to favour the state of affairs but rather disfavour it. We seem to have conflicting explanations and thus conflicting reasons. Two reasons against favouring the state and one for favouring it, but it is not likely that we ought to favour the state and ought to not favour the state.

But this is not problematic. According to Broome:

”We often say there is a reason for you to *F*, when it is not the case that you ought to *F*. In these cases, the reason evidently does not explain the fact that you ought to *F*, since there is no such fact.”²⁵ These reasons are not of the conclusive kind but pro tanto reasons. John Broome defines pro tanto reasons in the following manner: “A *pro tanto* reason for *N* to *F* is something that plays the for-*F* role in a weighing explanation of why *N* ought to *F*, or in a weighing

²³ Broome p. 54. Scanlon who has formulated the buck-passing account of value prefers reasons to fitting and also believes that reasons are primitive. He gives the following explanation of reasons “Any attempt to explain what it is to be a reason for something seems to me to lead back to the same idea: a consideration that counts in favour of it. “Counts in favour how?” one might ask. “By providing a reason for it” seems to be the only answer.” Scanlon 1998 p. 17

²⁴ I take it to be the case that if we have reasons to have an attitude that involves a belief that is self-undermining we also have reasons to undermine our belief.

²⁵ Broome p. 58

explanation of why N ought not to F , or in a weighing explanation of why it is not the case that N ought to F and not the case that N ought not to F .”²⁶

This taken under consideration it is possible to have pro tanto reasons that favour the problematic solitary good state of affairs. These reasons would speak in favour of favouring the problematic state of affairs due to the fact that there are happy egrets. But then there is also the pro tanto reason not to favour the state of affairs due to the fact that this would undermine our belief and the pro tanto reason not to favour the state of affairs due to the fact that there are no agents. When these reasons are weighed together they should, according to Bykvist, constitute a reason that explains why you ought not to favour the state of affairs. So let us weigh these reasons to see if Bykvist is correct. There are two reasons that weigh the scale in one direction and one reason that weighs the scale in the other direction. But the number of reasons does not seem to be what determines the outcome but rather the “weight” of the reasons. Let us assume that the “weight” of the reason not to favour the state of affairs (due to the entailment of the existence of no agents) is the same as the “weight” of the reasons to favour the state of affairs (due to the existence of happy egrets).²⁷ If that is so, the scale seems to tip into the not to favour direction (due to the reason not to undermine oneself). But this is expected. If the non-existence of agents is something bad then the state of affairs: “there being happy egrets but no agents” could be a bad state of affairs. Thus there are no reasons to favour it and the solitary goods problem is not a problem for the FA-analysis.

But what is of interest is if we assume, as Bykvist does, that non-existence of agents is something neutral. We would then have reasons to favour the state of affairs since the state of affairs entails the existence of happy egrets. And we would have reasons not to favour the state of affairs since this would cause us to undermine ourselves. But how do we weigh these reasons so that we know how the scale tips? I do not think that it is possible to weigh these reasons. The nature of the two reasons seems to be very different. One reason is related to the

²⁶ Broome p. 61. Unfortunately the meaning of “plays the for- F role” is a bit unclear. But according to Broome: “The for- F role can be identified from the structure of the explanation itself. Take a weighing explanation of why you ought to F . In this explanation, the things that play the role of reasons fall into two opposing groups. The explanation of why you ought to F is that the combined weight of those in one group exceeds the combined weight of those in the other group. Since you ought to F , the reasons that play the for- F role are evidently the ones in the group that has the greater combined weight. In a weighing explanation of why you ought to F , the for- F role is the winning one, and that is how it can be identified”. Broome p. 62

²⁷ My intuition tells me that if we find the non-existence of agents to be something bad it is also really bad. The value making properties seems to have the character of all or nothing. At least it ought to be as bad as it is good that there are happy egrets.

properties of happy egrets and the other reason is related to language, belief and rationality. They seem to be incommensurate. And if so this leaves us with: it is not the case that you ought to favour the state of affairs and it is not the case that you ought not to favour the state of affairs.²⁸ And if we hold reasons to be primitive then we would in a similar manner end up with: there are pro tanto reasons that count in favour of favouring the state of affairs in question and there are pro tanto reasons that count against favouring it.

It seems that the proponent of a FA-account of value may then claim that there are pro tanto reasons to favour the problematic state of affairs and that therefore the state is in one aspect a good state. But there are also incommensurate pro tanto reasons against favouring the state of affairs that make the state of affairs in one aspect not good.

There are several problems with this solution. Let me state three possible problems that the proponent of a FA-analysis has to face:

1. If the proponent of the FA-analysis take the non-existence of agents as something neutral. Then she has to explain why the state of affairs “there being happy egrets” seems to be in some sense a better state of affairs than the state of affairs “there being happy egrets but no believers”
2. If we follow Broome's view about pro-tanto reasons, doubt can be raised whether pro-tanto reasons are as deontic as the FA-account claims that they are. Since in the problematic state of affairs the pro-tanto reasons do not tell us that we ought to favour the state.
3. The FA-analysis will have problems to ascribe unconditional value to complex value bearers. Since in more complex states of affairs we should expect that they might involve pro-tanto reasons that are incommensurate.

²⁸ Similar considerations are discussed in Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen 2004 p. 418. It should also be noted that when it comes to these cases of incommensurate reasons, the process of identifying “the for F-role” seems to fail, since it is not the case that you ought to *F* and not the case that you ought not to *F*. But, according to Broome, with a prior understanding of counting in favour this is not problematic. But in order to separate his line of reasoning from Scanlon's he stresses “But you do not need a prior understanding to identify that role in general. My definition of a pro tanto reason does not assume a prior understanding of counting in favour”. Broome p. 62.

Concluding thoughts

I have now given several suggestions to possible solutions to the “solitary good problem”. These suggestions run into different problems. Some of these problems are serious, others less so. And they are only brief sketches of possible solutions, but I believe they show that there are ways around the “solitary good problem”. But the answer to which way the proponent of the FA-analysis ought to take, I do not dare to give. All in all I hope to have shown that the “solitary good problem” is not a reason to give up on the FA-analysis.

The distance problem

We now enter the second part of my thesis, the part that discusses Bykvist’s second argument the “distance problem”. But let us first recapitulate Bykvist’s overarching argument. He has argued that the attitude relevant for the FA-analysis cannot be an evaluative emotion since that would render the analysis circular; nor can it be a factive emotion such as being glad that *p*, since it is “logically impossible to have a certain factive emotion *E* towards there being happy egrets but no *E* emotions”.²⁹ Nor can the emotion entail belief. Bykvist thinks we should therefore be looking for a feeling resembling the ones accompany day-dreaming: “an emotional feeling that involves ‘thinking of with a feeling’ [...], where ‘thinking of’ does not imply belief or the truth of what is thought of”.³⁰ The FA-analysis would then claim “that the good is that which it is fitting to have a positive emotional feeling towards”.³¹ It is at this point that the “distance problem” kicks in. Bykvist argues that all the proposed attitudes will encounter difficulties due to the “distance problem”. So even if I believe that pleasure taking, wishing and other attitudes will not suffer from the solitary goods problem, they may be vulnerable to the “distance problem”.

The problem

If “the good is that which it is fitting to have a positive emotional feeling towards”, it seems plausible that “what is better is what it is fitting to favour more in the sense of having a stronger or more intense positive emotional feeling about”.³² But then there are cases when the state of affairs *p* is clearly better than the state of affairs *q* but it is not fitting to have a stronger or more intense positive emotional feeling about *p* than about *q*. Our feelings seem to

²⁹ Bykvist 2009 p. 13

³⁰ Bykvist 2009 p. 14

³¹ Where positive is to be understood in a phenomenological way.

³² Bykvist 2009 p. 14

depend on the distance from the state of affairs (where distance is interpreted quite broadly). Bykvist borrows an example from Hurka:

”Imagine that someone has just returned from a tropical holiday marred by unreasonably bad weather. It is certainly reasonable for her to regret the loss of the extra pleasure she would have experienced given normal weather. But the simple account says she should regret even more the greater pleasure she would have enjoyed had a stranger given her million dollars on the beach, or had aliens abducted her and taken her to an intergalactic pleasure palace. Or consider a similar example involving evils. If her child had just missed being struck by a car, she should feel relief that her child did not suffer the pain of serious accident. On the simple account, she should feel even greater relief that her child was not abducted by aliens and taken to an intergalactic torture chamber”³³

Bykvist is a bit unclear on the usage of “regret” and “relief”. I presume these two terms are “stand ins” for: “an emotional feeling that involves ‘thinking of with a feeling’”. And it is this asymmetry between the emotional feeling and the goodness or badness that constitutes the distance problem. According to Bykvist it is absurd that it is fitting to have a stronger positive emotional feeling towards states of affairs that are at such a far distance. But I am not convinced that this asymmetry exists. I will argue that it is fitting to take pleasure in not being tortured by aliens.

The solution

Compare the states of affairs: “Your child not suffering the pain of a serious accident” and “Your child not being abducted by aliens and taken to an intergalactic torture chamber”. If we consider these states of affairs as they are, I believe it is correct to say that it is fitting to favour more, in the sense of having a *stronger or more intense* positive emotional feeling about, that your child was not abducted by aliens and taken to an intergalactic torture chamber. This could be made clear if we substitute “having a positive emotional feeling towards” with some apt attitude. Let us use “wish”. What is better is then what it is fitting to

³³ Bykvist 2009 p. 15

wish for more or to have a stronger wish for. If the FA-account is valid then: it is fitting to wish more for my son's not being abducted by aliens and taken to an intergalactic torture chamber than towards my son's not suffering the pain of a serious car accident, which is more likely to happen. I believe that this could be fitting. We are fooled by the extreme scenarios and the likelihood of them happening. If we wish that something obtains, the likelihood of it obtaining is irrelevant. Let us therefore clarify the example making the scenarios less extreme and the likelihood more explicit. At first we may consider a less extreme scenario. If the FA-account is valid then, it is fitting to wish more for my son's not suffering the pain of a serious car accident than towards my son's not slipping on the rug and getting a small bruise, which is more likely to happen. This is clearly fitting.

But the main reason that Bykvist argument at first seems to be correct is that he does not consider the state of affairs only. The examples are elliptical and we add to the state of affairs the probability of the scenarios. Let us write it out:

The 40% risk of your child suffering the pain of a serious car accident
and

The 0.00...1% risk of your child being abducted by aliens and taken to an
intergalactic torture chamber

When considering these states of affairs it seems fitting to have a stronger negative emotional feeling about your child having the 40 % risk of suffering the pain of a serious car accident but I also believe that it is appropriate to say that this state of affairs is the worse state of affairs.

This is just a solution to one kind of distance: the likelihood distance. Bykvist mentions several kinds of distances but I believe that there are possible solutions to all of them. For example, the distance of personal relations: Consider the two states of affairs

- (a) Jane's being someone who is in pain
- and
- (b) John's being someone who is in pain

Jane is Krister's daughter and John is a complete stranger for Krister. Then, for Krister, it seems fitting to have a stronger negative emotion towards *a* than towards *b*. But they seem to be equally bad states of affairs. There are several possible solutions to this problem. One could solve this distance problem as the former problem claiming that it is not fitting to have a stronger positive emotion towards (a) than towards (b).³⁴ Noah Lemos takes this route:

“Now even if we concede that it is more appropriate to have a more intense feeling of grief of sadness toward the suffering of one's own child than towards the suffering of a total stranger, this concession does not imply that we cannot explicate intrinsic value in terms of required love, hate and preference. This is so simply because grief, sadness, and melancholy are not the same attitudes as love, hate and preference simpliciter. It is not at all obvious that one's contemplation of just the states of affairs my child's suffering and an unknown child's suffering requires that one prefer the latter as such to the former.”³⁵

I can sympathise with this idea because the fact that it is my daughter seems in some sense to be irrelevant. And I believe that this is the general solution to the distance problem; one should consider the state of affairs stripped away from all irrelevant information. After all, our attitude should not be based on the properties of the evaluator but on the properties of what is valuable.

Objections to the solution

Bykvist scouts a similar objection:

“one could claim that the value a thing has in itself should be defined by the attitudes it is fitting to have towards it when we contemplate only its intrinsic features”.³⁶

³⁴ As Noah Lemos quotes Epictetus ” For example, when our neighbour's boy breaks a cup, or the like, we are presently ready to say, "These things will happen." Be assured, then, that when your own cup likewise is broken, you ought to be affected just as when another's cup was broken. Apply this in like manner to greater things.”

³⁵ Lemos 2005 p. 30

³⁶ Bykvist 2009 p. 20

So for example if both John and Jane are in pain and Jane is my daughter while John is a total stranger, then:

“if I contemplate Jane’s being in pain as a state of affairs that involves *my daughter* being in pain, then it seems that I am no longer contemplating this state of affairs as such; I am also contemplating it as a state of affairs that involves my daughter, but Jane’s being my daughter is a relational feature of Jane’s being in pain. The idea would then be to say that when I contemplate both Jane’s being in pain and John’s being in pain *as such*, I should respond with the same degree of favouring towards each state of affairs, but when I contemplate Jane’s being in pain as a state of affairs that involves *my daughter* being in pain and John’s being in pain as a state of affairs that involves *a stranger* being in pain I should (or, at least, I am permitted to) react with greater sadness towards Jane’s being in pain. Since these different reactions are triggered by different relational features of the considered states of affairs, they do not reflect intrinsic value.”³⁷

But unfortunately there seems to be a problem to this solution.

“Consider the states of affairs

- (a) Jane’s being someone who is in pain and who is Krister’s daughter
- and
- (b) John’s being someone who is in pain and who is a stranger to Krister

How should I (Krister) respond to these states when I contemplate them as such? The morally appropriate response seems to be for me to disfavour (a) more than (b) despite the fact that they have the same intrinsic value (assuming the duration and the intensity of the pains are the same). Hence the distance problem is not yet solved.”³⁸

I am not fully convinced that the morally appropriate response is to disfavour (a) more than (b). I believe that if Krister disfavors (a) more than (b) he actually does not contemplate just the states as they are, he also contemplates the fact that he is Krister and that Jane is in fact his

³⁷ Bykvist 2009 p. 21

³⁸ Bykvist 2009 p. 21

daughter. Contemplating the intrinsic features of the two states of affairs unavoidably triggers Krister to contemplate its extrinsic features as well.

Relativizing as a response to the objection

I can understand if my proposed solution seems a bit too stoic and even perhaps counterintuitive. Let us therefore consider another possible solution which will claim that even if it is more fitting to disfavour (a) more than (b) this might not be a problem. This could be explained if we allow for the FA-analysis to handle relative value. We would then find it natural that (a) is a less good state of affairs relative to Krister even though the two states of affairs have arguably the same intrinsic value. The asymmetry is just a case of Jane's wellbeing being valuable relative to Krister.

Bykvist discusses this:

“One could evade the distance problem by *relativizing* value to a perspective consisting of at least a world, a time, and a person. This would allow value to vary from one perspective to another according to how strongly it is fitting to respond to the object from a given perspective. But the FA-account would then no longer be an account of goodness period, but goodness relative to a perspective, and this would of course be bad news for those of us who believe in non-relativized value.”³⁹

I believe that Bykvist might be mistaken. The FA-account may be an account of what is good period and of what is good for *p*. At least this is suggested by Toni Rønnow-Rasmussen who argues that it is not the fitting part that is of interest here but the pro-attitude.⁴⁰ I.e. it is the attitude that distinguishes personal values from what is good period and not its fittingness. This makes it possible “that personal value is recognizable as a value not only by the person for whom it has the personal value, but for everyone else too. We thereby avoid facing two completely different notions of value”⁴¹ It should be made clear that this account of personal value is not to be confused with the idea that something can be valuable according to a

³⁹ Bykvist 2009 p. 16

⁴⁰ Rønnow-Rasmussen 2007

⁴¹ Rønnow-Rasmussen 2007 abstract

person. And that personal value is not only restricted to extrinsic values but applies also to intrinsic values. This account raises a multitude of question for, example how are we to distinguish these different attitudes?⁴² I shall not try to answer these questions. I believe that is sufficient to note that it is not a dead end to let the FA-analysis handle personal value and what is good period.

The distance problem and the WKR-objection

I believe that the general strategy for handling the distance problem is to consider the state of affairs as such and ignore facts that are not explicitly a part of the state. If this is not convincing, I have given suggestions for other possible solutions. It could then be argued that this multitude of solutions is not satisfying.⁴³ But I believe that we could choose to see my solutions not as solutions to the distance problem but as applications of the FA-analysis. The FA-analysis can handle a multitude of different scenarios. But just as there is a multitude of different scenarios involving value of different kinds, we should also expect the application of the FA-analysis to these scenarios to differ to a certain degree.

I am aware that my objections to the distance problem are not as fully convincing as could be wished for. But hopefully I have shown its lack of persuasiveness. In my eyes the distance problem is not a good argument since it comes with a lot of doubt.

Is it possible to formulate a better version of the distance problem? To be able to do this we need to have a closer look on the structure of the argument. The upshot of the distance problem is that we take it to be fitting to favor more the less good state of affairs that is close to us in some sense, than the better state of affairs that is far away. In other words, it looks like we have reasons to favour the former state of affairs and these reasons has nothing to do with the value of the state of affairs. It is now clear that the distance problem in fact is the

⁴² Rønnow-Rasmussen 2007 mentions some problems that must be dealt with.

⁴³ It could also be argued that there are more distance problems than those mentioned by me. Bykvist for instance mentions temporal distance. "For instance, we think it is fitting that the grief of a lost beloved softens with time. More generally, it seems fitting that the extreme horror we once felt towards some terrible massacre softens with time" (Bykvist 2009 p. 16). I am having problem constructing an example with temporal distance. It seems that most examples will resemble the ones presented by Derek Parfit in Reasons and Persons regarding the person Timeless. The problem with these examples is that they are not solely about temporal distance since they are all take on a personal aspect. But the example with a terrible massacre seems to be solely about temporal distance. However this example does not seem to be problematic. It is fitting to disfavour the genocide that took place in Rwanda just as much as it is fitting to disfavour the genocides that took place in Darfur or Former Yugoslavia or Nazi Germany.

WKR-objection. Bykvist describes the WKR-objection in the following way: “it can be fitting to have an attitude towards something for reasons that have nothing to do with the value of the thing itself”.⁴⁴

Bykvist is aware of the fact that the distance problem is a version of the WKR-objection. He writes:

“Whereas the old version of the WKR-objection focused on cases where it is fitting to favour (disfavour) something because of factors that have nothing to do with the goodness (badness) of the thing itself, the new version focuses on cases where the *degree* to which we should favour (disfavour) something does not correspond to the *degree* to which the thing is good (bad) in itself.”⁴⁵

Then what does the distance problem add to the discussion? Not much according to me. I believe that the WKR-objection is the better formulated version than the distance problem. The WKR-objection is more general and more forcefully convincing. So why dabble with another less general objection? There might be some problems that are raised with the distance problem, even though I believe that most of these problems can be handled. But the problem that the WKR-objection leaves us with is a tougher nut to crack.

⁴⁴ Bykvist 2009 p. 2

⁴⁵ Bykvist 2009 p. 2

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