

# Preferences and Prudential Reasons

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Preference-based theories of prudential value seem to generate an absurd result when combined with commonplace platitudes about prudential rationality: it would seem that if the satisfaction of our preferences is the source (or even a source) of prudential value, then prudential rationality must be neutral (in, at least, a troubling range of cases) between taking steps to achieve the objects of one's preferences and merely engineering one's preferences to take as their object(s) that which obtains. Either way, one seems to conform to the prudential demand to promote one's well-being. But this is widely held to be counterintuitive. In this article, I argue that this verdict arises only given eminently controvertible interpretations of a preference-based axiology and of the constitution of prudential reasons.

A common platitude about prudential rationality holds that we ought always to promote, to the greatest extent possible, our well-being. And while there are certainly some controversial details,<sup>1</sup> this principle seems broadly ingrained in our thinking about prudence and prudential rationality. After all, if it's clear that one option produces a better life for me than a second, surely it's imprudent to choose the latter, rather than the former.

However, this platitude yields counterintuitive results for broadly *preference-based* theories of the prudential good. The problem goes like this. It would seem that if satisfaction of our preferences is the source (or even a source) of prudential value, then (holding all else equal) prudential rationality must be neutral between taking steps to achieve the objects of one's preferences and merely engineering one's preferences to take as their object(s) that which obtains. Either way, one's well-being is promoted to the same extent. But this is counterintuitive. Surely prudential rationality is not neutral between a person who simply engineers herself to desire everything she already has, and a person who is successful at achieving that which she antecedently desires.

<sup>1</sup> Most importantly, these issues include whether prudential reasons are temporally sensitive. See, for instance, Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 165–6; David O. Brink, 'Prospects for Temporal Neutrality', *Oxford Handbook of the Philosophy of Time*, ed. Craig Callendar (Oxford, 2011), pp. 353–81; Chris Heathwood, 'Fitting Attitudes and Welfare', *Oxford Studies in Metaethics*, vol. 3, ed. Russ Shafer-Landau (Oxford, 2008), pp. 47–73; Tom Dougherty, 'Future-Bias and Practical Reason', *Philosopher's Imprint* 15 (2015), pp. 1–16; Preston Greene and Meghan Sullivan, 'Against Time Bias', *Ethics* 125 (2015), pp. 947–70; Dale Dorsey, 'Prudence and Past Selves', *Philosophical Studies* 175 (2018), pp. 1901–25.

This article is an attempt to do two things in light of this puzzle. First, it attempts to show that this result is not forced upon a preference-based theory of the good. To say that we have just as much reason to conform our desires to the world as vice versa requires particular interpretations of the nature of preference-based views and of the constitution of prudential reasons. Second, it attempts to argue that these interpretations are controvertible, and that their denial can be defended from objections.

The plan of this article runs as follows. In [section I](#), I introduce some preliminary terminology and the general conceptual landscape upon which this inquiry is to be conducted. In [section II](#), I discuss the general problem faced by a preference-based theory of prudential value when combined with the standard picture of prudential rationality. [Section III](#) introduces two ambiguities, one in a preference-based picture of the personal good, a second in the nature of prudential reasons. With these ambiguities in mind, I argue in [section IV](#) that the problem for preference-based views can be avoided. [Sections V–VII](#) discuss objections, and [section VIII](#) concludes.

## I. SOME PRELIMINARIES

First, some terminological and conceptual clarification. This article is concerned with what we have strongest *prudential* reason to do, assuming we accept a preference-based theory of the good. But what does ‘prudential’ add here? By ‘prudence’ I mean the domain of *action-evaluation* (akin to, e.g., morality, etiquette, professional and legal norms, etc.) specifically concerned with the agent herself, in particular, with the agent’s own well-being. I will remain neutral concerning whether prudential reasons are or entail practical reasons for action. The investigation here is internal to the domain of prudence, just as you might investigate the internal nature of morality or aesthetics without committing to any particular practical upshot of those domains.

Typically, prudence is understood to command agents to maximize their own good. And while this command is subject to further investigation (conducted here) it is worth noting that on this standard understanding, prudence issues requirements – actions can be prudent, imprudent, and so forth. These categories are, or so I will presume here, explained by the presence of prudential *reasons* in favour of particular actions. I will also assume that prudence is *maximizing*: one is prudentially required to perform the action for which there is strongest (balance of) prudential reason(s). Notice also that prudential reasons, like reasons in many other domains, can be construed subjectively or objectively. Subjective reasons, very roughly,

are those that count in favour of action given facts of uncertainty. Objective reasons are abstracted from such conditions. It may be uncertain, for instance, whether I will actually get a large future benefit from undergoing a smaller welfare sacrifice now. The fact that this is uncertain may render it the case that my subjective prudential reasons tell most strongly in favour of refraining from undergoing this sacrifice. But if I *will* actually get the benefit, *objective* prudential reasons will tell most strongly in favour of undertaking the sacrifice. In this article I will be concerned solely with objective prudential reasons (and, by extension, objective prudential obligations), abstracting from conditions of uncertainty.

Two bits of terminology. First, note that any theory of well-being will (or ought to) provide us with a list of things that, were they to obtain, would benefit a person at particular times (or sets of times, or across times), and the relative value of these things. This list will be the list of intrinsic goods for a person at that (those) times. Call the *list* of such goods that applies to a person at a time (times) a 'prudential ordering'. I mean this terminology to be fully ecumenical. If, for instance, a hedonist axiology is true, the prudential ordering for any time  $t_n$  will simply consist of pleasurable experiences, and those pleasurable experiences will be rank-ordered by their *amount* (or, perhaps, their amount and *quality*, say, depending on one's underlying hedonist axiology). Pluralist axiologies may have various goods that benefit individuals at particular times or over the course of individual times to various degrees. An objective list view might say, for instance, that pleasure and knowledge are both individual goods, but that they need not be of equivalent welfare value – the former is much better for the person in question than the latter (or vice versa depending on the view). Furthermore, prudential orderings will behave very differently given the underlying axiology; some could be intransitive, incomplete, display broad forms of incommensurability, and so forth. But all theories will issue – *in my sense* – a prudential ordering: a rank-ordered – *to the extent possible* – list of goods that would benefit a person  $p$  at a time  $t$  were these particular goods to obtain.

Second, we often talk about how *well* a person is doing at a time or across times – sometimes a person's welfare level is 'high' rather than 'low', for instance – and we make comparisons between persons and times on this basis. In referring to this concept, I designate the term 'welfare score'.<sup>2</sup> A person's welfare score will, presumably, be determined by the presence or absence of welfare goods for the person at

<sup>2</sup> Like the previous bit of terminology, this one is also a touch misleading because it may imply a *cardinal* welfare value, when it could be that the underlying axiology in question is merely ordinal. I don't mean to make such an assumption; welfare 'scores'

the relevant times. (Note: as my emphasis here is on preference-based theories of the good, it is worth noting that there are a number of conceptual questions concerning how to measure welfare scores between people, and perhaps among individuals at different times, in terms of preferences. I'm not going to try to settle any of this here, but will instead make use of intuitive judgements along these lines that should – or so I humbly submit – be borne out by any more precise view.)

## II. A PROBLEMATIC INDIFFERENCE

With the terminological and conceptual landscape (such as it is) in place, consider the following claim about a *preference*<sup>3</sup>-based theory of the prudential good. According to Richard Arneson (speaking specifically about a desire-satisfaction view):

A straightforward implication of a desire satisfaction view of human good is that one can increase a person's well-being by bringing it about that her present basic desires are satisfied to a greater extent or by bringing it about that she acquires different basic desires that are easier to satisfy and that are satisfied to a greater extent than her initial desires would have been. In principle the one strategy is as good as the other. Either one can achieve the same effect: the person's basic desires are satisfied to a greater extent. If I desire drinking expensive wine and attaining Olympic-quality sports achievements, you can improve my well-being by increasing my means for obtaining the wine and the sports excellence, or you can achieve the same end by inducing me to switch my basic desires toward cheap beer and easy-to-satisfy minimal competence at shuffleboard.<sup>4</sup>

Arneson notes that, on a preference-based approach, those concerned to make others better-off can either help them achieve their difficult-to-satisfy preferences, or change their preferences such that they prefer states that are easy to satisfy. This seems, to put it bluntly, counterintuitive.

Note, however, that the ease or difficulty of achieving the objects of resulting preferences is a bit of a red herring. The same conclusion

could simply refer to 'higher' scores – that is, for ordinal axiologies, welfare scores could be measured in purely ordinal terms.

<sup>3</sup> Note that I use the term 'preferences' as – with one important exception, see note 23 – a placeholder here. It could be interpreted to mean valuing states, desires, whether these preferences are comparative ('prefer  $\phi$  to  $\psi$ ') or merely impute value to single objects ('prefer  $\phi$ '). Furthermore, it is commonplace to assume that preferences come in both prudentially relevant varieties and prudentially irrelevant varieties. Prudentially irrelevant preferences might include those that are ill-informed, the consequence of irrational mental states, or perhaps are not at all self-involving (a preference for my daughter's sake rather than for my sake). Obviously the focus here is on *prudentially relevant preferences*, whatever the correct account happens to be.

<sup>4</sup> Richard Arneson, 'Desire Formation and Human Good', *Preferences and Well-Being*, ed. Serena Olsaretti (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 9–32, at 12.

seems to hold (as suggested here) if both results are *equally* easy to achieve. Take, for instance, the following case:

*Faith*: Faith is a highly regarded Air Force pilot who has long desired to become an astronaut. She has the physical skill, the appropriate training, and has been looked on as a potential candidate. At time *t*, she has the choice to undergo the last remaining set of tests to become an astronaut *or* take a very powerful psychotropic pill that would have the result of radically, and permanently, changing her desires. Instead of preferring to be an astronaut, she could instead prefer to be a highly regarded, but Earth-bound, Air Force pilot.

Here Faith *could* become an astronaut. She wants to, and were she to take the final test, she would succeed and become an astronaut. This would be a prudential benefit to her, as she currently prefers to be an astronaut and her preference to be an astronaut is psychologically stable. However, it is *also* the case that she could rid herself of this preference. She could instead simply take the pill, and prefer to remain Earth-bound. But the latter course, plausibly, is comparatively imprudent. Surely as a matter of what she ought to do as concerns her own self-interest – what Faith, if I may say so, *owes to herself* – she ought to become an astronaut.

But if this is the right verdict in Faith's case, preference-based views are in a bit of a pickle. In Faith's case there is no difference in the resulting welfare *score* of the relevant time periods were she actually to become the astronaut she wants to be, or were she simply to take the pill and end up preferring the state she currently occupies. But if this is correct, and prudential reasons tell in favour of maximizing one's welfare, then prudential reasons seem to tell no more strongly in favour of becoming an astronaut in comparison to taking the pill. Call this the 'preferentist's prudential neutrality'.<sup>5</sup>

My judgement is that this is a deeply problematic verdict. But why? Arneson suggests one possibility. He writes:

This implication of the desire satisfaction view might strike some of us as counterintuitive, but this sense of unease arises from the belief that the satisfaction of some basic desires is inherently less valuable than the

<sup>5</sup> Of course, there may be pragmatic problems in simply changing one's preferences. Generally, changing one's preferences is hard, and so we may have a general bias against the prudential efficacy of changing one's preferences rather than, for instance, simply achieving the content of whatever one's preferences currently are. And while this may be good reason to believe that our *subjective* prudential obligations typically shy away from programmes of preference change (given the uncertainty of success), it's unclear that this tells us anything about *objective* prudential obligations. As the case is stated, changing one's preferences couldn't be easier: it simply involves taking a pill, and is guaranteed to work.

satisfaction of others. This way of thinking presupposes that some things we might desire to do or get are objectively more valuable than others. This just asserts what subjectivism denies, so the subjectivist should not attempt to tinker with the desire satisfaction view in order to render the view less counterintuitive in this respect.<sup>6</sup>

For Arneson, the preferentist's prudential neutrality is an essential feature of a 'subjectivist' or preference-based approach, and hence if you are worried about that verdict, this simply entails that you ought to prefer a view that allows the existence of 'objective' values, undermining the preferentist's axiology.

I dispute this diagnosis. Even if we supplemented our preferentism with an account of the objective value of preferred objects, one could easily imagine a choice between  $\phi$  and  $\psi$ , both of which are of equivalent objective value. The person in question prefers  $\phi$  to  $\psi$  and could achieve it, but currently maintains  $\psi$  and could take a pill instead to prefer  $\psi$  to  $\phi$ . But it's hard to see how prudential rationality should simply be neutral between these two options. Indeed, even if the satisfaction of preferences is simply one good among many others – say, as an element of an objective list view – this result would continue to hold (holding fixed the objective value of the objects of one's preferences). And if this is correct, it cannot be that the source of the problem is to be found in our commitment that some objects are more worth wanting.<sup>7</sup> (For the purposes of this article, I will continue to focus on fully preference-based views, with the acknowledgement that the problem appears to apply to any view that grants preferences axiological significance.)

Phillip Bricker diagnoses the problem differently. He writes (contemplating a 'complacency pill' that would make one prefer whatever state of affairs one happens to find oneself in):

In my own case, I think that the reason I would have doubts about taking such a pill, even knowing that it would result in the satisfaction of preferences, is that I would have doubts as to whether the ever-complacent person that resulted from my taking the pill would be me, and as to whether it would be my preferences that were being satisfied. A sharp enough break in the continuity

<sup>6</sup> Arneson, 'Desire Formation and Human Good', p. 12.

<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, the retreat to an idealized preference-based account – according to which the authoritative preferences must be idealized given some set of potentially counterfactual circumstances (such as full information, rationality, awareness, and so forth) – appears to have no effect here, either; one would simply need to imagine that the pill in question alters not just one's occurrent preferences, but one's idealized ones, too. (Alternatively, we could simply imagine that the person is or would maintain all relevant idealized conditions both prior to and after administration of the preference-altering drug; in such a case I continue to judge that prudence is not neutral between achieving what one prefers and preferring what one achieves.)

of one's preferences is tantamount to death; taking the pill, then, can be viewed as an act of suicide.<sup>8</sup>

However, I also find this response implausible. While taking a full complacency pill that has the effect of immediately and radically changing my preferences and mental states *may* yield a break in psychological continuity sufficient to constitute a break in the relation of personal identity, it's hard to see how a change like Faith's would constitute anything resembling a loss of personal identity. Folks change their preferences all the time, sometimes radically, sometimes on a dime (take, for instance, the radical set of preference changes one experiences at the moment of becoming a parent). No plausible analysis of personal identity, however, would entail that such changes constitute one's *death* or, more mildly, a break in the personal identity relation sufficient to render specifically prudential concern inapplicable.

For my money, the implausibility of the preferentist's prudential neutrality is far more certain than any particular attempt to explain it. But one possible explanation goes like this. Preference-based axiologies seem to draw part of their attraction by accepting people *as they are* – respecting their mental states as good-determining (as a necessary or sufficient condition). But this seems to run counter to the thought that as a matter of prudence we should simply change our preferences. Merely changing one's *preferences* to fit the world seems a 'win on a technicality', a *cheat*, and certainly doesn't seem to satisfy at least one intuition that stands in favour of preference-based proposals. Now, whether or not any of these considered judgements can actually be borne out by a preferentist theory of the good is another thing altogether. But it seems right to say that something like this is driving our – or, at least, my – intuitions when it comes to the preferentist's prudential neutrality.

Of course, the preferentist's prudential neutrality is not a result of a preference-based theory of the good *on its own*. To generate this verdict one must conjoin a preference-based axiology with standard assumptions about prudential rationality: that one has strongest prudential reason to maximize one's good, or, as with a preference-based theory, maximize preference satisfaction. In light of this, one might try tinkering with the underlying account of prudential rationality, especially with regard to the significance of temporally located preferences. One might, for instance, hold that a person's *past* preferences ought to have just as much prudential significance

<sup>8</sup> Phillip Bricker, 'Prudence', *The Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1980), pp. 381–401, at 400.



as present and future preferences.<sup>9</sup> But even if this proposal has independent merit it cannot adequately solve the problem. Stipulate that Faith, up to this point anyway, is simply indifferent between becoming an astronaut and remaining an Earth-bound Air Force pilot. Previously, and during her training, she was never really committed to either; she took the relevant training for the sake of keeping her options open but was genuinely indifferent to the possibility of becoming an astronaut. However, at this point the possibility of becoming an astronaut has grown on her, and she *now* has a preference to become one. At this point she faces a choice – take the pill, or become an astronaut. I continue to judge that prudential rationality is not neutral between these possibilities, even if there were no *past* preferences involved.

Rather than holding that past preferences are prudentially significant, one might instead hold that the most relevant preferences in prudential decision-making are one's current preferences. And given that Faith currently prefers to be an astronaut, this would entail that she has strongest prudential reason to do so. But this cure strikes me as worse than the disease. While there are some substantial controversies concerning the extent to which one should take seriously *past* preferences, there appears to be little controversy when it comes to the prudential significance of *future* preferences.<sup>10</sup> Key is that we're discussing prudence, not *practical rationality*. It might be that as a matter of rationality one is commanded to conform to current preferences. But if so this is evidence that rationality does not require conforming to prudential obligations: intuitively speaking, prudence seems to require us (abstracting from uncertainty) to treat our current well-being as of no greater significance than our future well-being. Hence it strikes me that reinterpreting the significance of temporally located preferences is unlikely to prove helpful here.

### III. TWO AMBIGUITIES

I think the preferentist's prudential neutrality is a serious problem. As noted above, it arises when a preference-based theory of the good is combined with standard assumptions about prudential rationality.

<sup>9</sup> Why might this be? One possibility is that the satisfaction of past preferences yields past benefits. See, e.g., Dorsey, 'Desire-Satisfaction and Welfare as Temporal', *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 16 (2013), pp. 151–71; Donald Bruckner, 'Present Desire-Satisfaction and Past Well-Being', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 91 (2013), pp. 15–29; H. E. Baber, 'Ex Ante Desire and Post Hoc Satisfaction', *Time and Identity*, ed. Joe Campbell, Michael O'Rourke and J. M. Silverstein (Cambridge, MA, 2010), pp. 249–68.

<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, Greene and Sullivan, 'Against Time Bias'; Brink, 'Prospects for Temporal Neutrality'; Dale Dorsey, 'A Near-Term Bias Reconsidered', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (forthcoming).



However, there are crucial ambiguities in both the understanding of a preference-based axiology *and* prudential normativity that give rise to this problem. But it is possible to resolve these ambiguities in a way that can avoid the toxic suggestion that Faith has just as strong a prudential reason to take the pill as she has to become an astronaut.

In this section, I discuss these ambiguities, and in the next section illustrate how the preferentist's prudential neutrality can be avoided.

### III.1. Object-based and state-based preferentism

To begin, consider Arneson's summation of the preferentist's prudential neutrality:

if human good or well-being is the satisfaction of desire, then a person's lifetime well-being can be raised either by changing the world so that it conforms to her desires or by changing her desires so that they conform to the way the world is. By either route, desire satisfaction increases, and thus well-being rises. Developing cheap, easy-to-satisfy tastes is a way of changing one's desires so that they more readily and easily conform to the way the world is.<sup>11</sup>

But this statement of the problem features a term that could do with a little analysis: 'satisfaction of desire'. Assuming that a preference-based theory holds that the satisfaction of preferences bears intrinsic value for a person, how do we understand this notion? In effect, this is simply asking the more basic question: what *bears intrinsic value* according to a preference-based theory? There are, as I understand it, two potential answers.<sup>12</sup> The first is:

*Object-Based Preferentism*: the bearer of intrinsic prudential value according to an object-based preferentist theory of prudential value is the preferred object; the value of that object is explained (in part) by the fact that this object is preferred.<sup>13</sup>

Take Faith's case. At time *t*, Faith prefers for its own sake to be an astronaut. According to object-based preferentism, the bearer of intrinsic value for Faith is the state in which she is an astronaut. Her

<sup>11</sup> Arneson, 'Desire Formation and Human Good', p. 13.

<sup>12</sup> For a sustained study of this distinction, see Wlodek Rabinowicz and Jan Osterberg, 'Value Based on Preferences', *Economics and Philosophy* 12 (1996), pp. 1–27.

<sup>13</sup> One might say that this construal of a preferentist view cannot be correct because it violates a conceptual presumption regarding intrinsic value, viz. that intrinsic value supervenes on the intrinsic properties of the valuable object, event or state. I think this can and should be disputed, but even if we accept it, we can simply introduce a conceptual distinction between intrinsic value, on the one hand (object-and-preference), and *final* value on the other, holding that the normatively significant notion is final value, rather than intrinsic value. (See, for instance, Christine Korsgaard, 'Two Distinctions in Goodness', *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 249–74.) I'll continue to use the 'intrinsic' language, though it could be substituted for the suggested alternative with no loss to the argument here.

preferences help to make it the case that being an astronaut bears intrinsic value.

The alternative account is:

*State-Based Preferentism*: the bearer of intrinsic prudential value according to a state-based preferentist theory of prudential value is the conjunctive state of affairs containing the preference and the preferred object.

Again, take Faith's case. Faith prefers for its own sake to be an astronaut. Assume she becomes one. According to state-based preferentism, the bearer of intrinsic value for Faith is not the state in which she is an astronaut, but rather a state that encompasses not only the object, but also the preference: the state in which Faith prefers to be an astronaut and is an astronaut. Put more generally, when  $x$  prefers  $\phi$ , the bearer of intrinsic value for  $x$  is the state [ $x$  prefers  $\phi$  and  $\phi$ ].

This ambiguity in preferentist axiology is reflected in the literature. Some philosophers explicitly accept object-based preferentism. This includes, for instance, Hobbes, Sidgwick, Perry, Railton, and Lewis.<sup>14</sup> However, the state-based approach also has proponents. According to Ben Bradley, '[t]he good (bad) value atoms are desire satisfactions (frustrations). A desire satisfaction (frustration) is a state consisting of a person desiring to D at a time t that P, and P (not-P).'<sup>15</sup>

The differences here may seem merely notational, but this is not correct. These views treat the relationship between bearers of intrinsic value and the preferences that give rise to these bearers very differently. According to the object-based view, the fact that  $\phi$  is preferred by  $x$  helps to explain why  $\phi$  is of intrinsic prudential value for  $x$ . But it is not part of the state that *is* intrinsically valuable for  $x$ . The state (or object, or event, or whatever) that is of intrinsic value is whatever it is that  $x$  prefers (i.e.  $\phi$ ). A state-based view, on the other hand, does not (indeed, cannot) hold that the preference itself is explanatory, in so far as the intrinsic value bearer is explicitly not the object of the preference, but rather the conjoined state in which one has the preference for the object *and* the object. Rather, the value of the particular intrinsic goods (i.e. the states in which  $x$  prefers  $\phi$  and  $\phi$ ) is

<sup>14</sup> See Hobbes, *Leviathan* I.6; Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics* (Indianapolis, IN, 1981 [1907]), pp. 111–12; R. B. Perry, *The General Theory of Value* (Cambridge, MA, 1952); Peter Railton, 'Facts and Values', *Philosophical Topics* 14 (1986), pp. 5–31; David Lewis, 'Dispositional Theories of Value', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 63 (1989), pp. 113–37.

<sup>15</sup> Ben Bradley, *Well-Being and Death* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 14–15. See also Chris Heathwood, 'The Problem of Defective Desires', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 83 (2005), pp. 487–504, at 490.

explained independently of  $x$ 's preferences (presumably merely given the fact that these states *are preference satisfactions*<sup>16</sup>).

There is a further difference between object-based and state-based preferentisms that is especially important for my purposes. These views will come up with very different *prudential orderings* for any person at any time in their lives. For object-based preferentisms, the prudential ordering of a person at time  $t$  is determined by that person's preferences at time  $t$  – what they prefer at  $t$ . This is because the intrinsic value of these states is explained by the fact that one prefers them. For the state-based view, however, the prudential ordering for  $x$  at  $t$  will not be a product of  $x$ 's preferences at  $t$ , because the intrinsic value of particular goods on a state-based account is *not explained by  $x$ 's preferences*. On a state-based view, a prudential ordering will consist – for all persons at all times – of an infinitely long list of preference-and-satisfaction pairs, appropriately rank-ordered.

### *III.2. Score-based and goods-based reasons*

The next ambiguity concerns the construction of prudential *reasons*. Generally, prudential reasons are facts that count in favour of actions from a prudential perspective. But what, we might ask, *are* these facts?

One obvious possibility is that prudential reasons are facts about a person's overall well-being *score*. So, for instance, if  $x$ 's  $\phi$ -ing will lead to an overall welfare score of  $n$  for  $x$ , this is a prudential reason for  $x$  to  $\phi$ . If  $x$ 's  $\psi$ -ing will lead to an overall welfare score of  $m$  for  $x$ , and if  $n > m$ , then one has stronger reason to  $\phi$  than to  $\psi$ . I'm going to call this a 'score-based' account of prudential reasons. Assuming a maximizing account of prudence, if  $\phi$  results in the prudentially relevant times having a welfare score of  $n$ , and  $\psi$  results, for the same temporal duration, in an overall welfare score of  $n + 1$ , then a score-based prudential rationality holds that  $\psi$  is required in comparison to  $\phi$ . After all, it generates a higher overall welfare score (which in turn constitutes stronger prudential reasons) for those times in one's life that are prudentially relevant. A score-based account of prudential reasons is often implicit in our thinking about prudence and prudential obligations. For instance, we sometimes hold that the most prudent action is the one that brings about the highest overall 'level' of well-being, where this 'level' just is identified with the relevant score.

However, there is a second way to understand the construction of prudential reasons. Rather than holding that prudential reasons are constituted by facts about a person's overall (or whatever times

<sup>16</sup> See Eden Lin, 'Enumeration and Explanation in Theories of Welfare', *Analysis* 77 (2017), pp. 65–73.

are relevant) welfare score, one might instead say that prudential reasons are constituted by facts about *prudential intrinsic value* – facts about particular welfare *goods*. For instance, it may be that experiencing a modicum of pleasure is intrinsically good for me. That I will experience this modicum of pleasure, then, is a fact that counts in favour of an action that promotes that state. Call this a ‘goods-based’ account of prudential reasons. On a standard (maximizing) account of prudential rationality, then, one is prudentially required to conform to the strongest (balance of) prudential reasons, and the strength of individual prudential reasons on a goods-based model will be determined by the comparative intrinsic prudential value (as determined by the relevant prudential orderings) of the goods that constitute the reasons in question. The key is that the fact that some particular object is *good* (i.e. appears on a prudential ordering) is an underlying, and essential, explanation of the prudential status of acts that promote this object. Without the object *itself* being good, there would be no reason to promote it.

Importantly, because there is nothing intrinsically good *about a well-being score*, a goods-based prudential rationality will not enjoin a prudentially rational agent to promote the highest *level* of well-being, instead holding that we have prudential reason to promote those *goods* that appear in the prudential orderings of temporally located selves that are prudentially relevant. And like a score-based theory of prudential reasons, a goods-based view is represented in a common-sense understanding of prudence and prudential obligations. We take the fact that actions will bring about good things as prudential reasons to bring them about. We take facts like ‘a career in banking will be better for me than a career as a NASCAR driver’ as prudential reasons to become a banker rather than a NASCAR driver. That something is *good for me*, for instance, seems a clear prudential reason to bring it about.

#### IV. HOW TO AVOID THE PREFERENTIST’S PRUDENTIAL NEUTRALITY

With the above ambiguities under our belt, we now have the tools to interpret the demands of prudential rationality, along with the structure of a preference-based account of the prudential good, that will allow a preference-based axiology to avoid the preferentist’s prudential neutrality.

Two steps. First, one must interpret prudential reasons as *goods-based*. Second, one must interpret preference-based theories of the good as *object-based*.

Take the first step first. Notice that the distinction between score-based and goods-based accounts of prudential reasons is only

significant given the possibility that one might *alter* one's prudential ordering. If the prudential ordering is simply fixed, then the *score* an individual receives at a time just is the extent to which he or she does or does not promote the *goods* in the relevant prudential ordering(s). And hence for, say, an objective list or hedonist theory, there will be no concrete difference between goods-based or score-based accounts of prudential reasons. But the difference arises when one can *now* alter the prudential ordering of a later time. Because the score-based view simply cares about the highest score, if one can alter a later time's prudential ordering for the sake of obtaining a higher score, this will be supported by prudential reasons, in so far as prudential reasons count in favour of whatever action promotes the highest score. But, although a goods-based theory of prudence will offer reasons to promote certain states of affairs that *are good*, it will not offer reasons to *make it the case* that particular states of affairs *are good*. This is because, on a goods-based view, the status of particular states of affairs *qua* good is logically prior to the capacity of these states to generate prudential reasons. To see this more clearly, consider Faith's potential action of taking the pill. To what facts about goodness does this action respond? The answer is: none. In changing one's future prudential orderings, one *necessarily* does not respond to facts about what *is* good, because this action (taking the pill, etc.) simply grants the status of *good* to particular states of affairs. At best, changing one's future prudential ordering is simply *aprudent*: it is not the *sort* of action for which prudential reasons could count in favour of or against.<sup>17</sup>

But to accept a goods-based account of prudential reasons is not enough. This is because, even if we accept a goods-based model, a *state*-based interpretation of a preferentist axiology entails – like, e.g., the objective list view or hedonism – that one's prudential ordering *is* fixed. As noted above, for a state-based account, benefits for *x* at a time just are states in which *x* prefers  $\phi$  and  $\phi$ . This is *for all*  $\phi$ . And hence the prudential ordering for a person at a given time on this view will simply be an ordered set of all iterations of [preference-to- $\phi$ -and- $\phi$ ]. Hence a change in Faith's preferences at  $t_1$  *will* respond to prudential reasons that are explained by particular prudential goods, viz. the state of affairs in which she prefers to be a respected Earth-bound pilot and is such a pilot. Because a state-based preferentism simply accepts that all of these states are intrinsically good for Faith

<sup>17</sup> How could it be *aprudent* rather than *imprudent*? After all, in choosing to take the pill, Faith does not respond to the balance of prudential reasons and become an astronaut. However, we should distinguish between two actions, one *aprudent* and one *imprudent*. The action of taking the pill, I claim, was *aprudent*. *The action of refraining from becoming an astronaut* was *imprudent*.

at  $t_1$  (or any other time), even a goods-based prudential rationality will deliver the verdict that Faith ought to be neutral between becoming an astronaut and taking the pill.

But if one rejects a state-based preferentism, and instead accepts the *object*-based view, it will not be the case that the prudential ordering for Faith at each future time is simply fixed. Rather, the prudential ordering for Faith *at that time* will be set by her preferences *at that time*. This is because it is not a compound state of preference-and-object that is good for her, but instead simply the objects – the objects are *made good* by her preferences. And hence if we accept both an object-based preferentism, and a goods-based prudential rationality, we will avoid having equivalent prudential reason to conform the world to our preferences and to conform our preferences to the world. Because our preferences determine the intrinsic goods for us, and because we are prudentially obligated to promote those goods that benefit us to the greatest degree *given* our prudential orderings, we have no prudential reason to *change* those prudential orderings. Faith has, therefore, strongest prudential reason to become an astronaut. Because that's what she wants to do.

#### V. OBJECTION: THE PRUDENTIAL NEUTRALITY REINTRODUCED

One of the keys in avoiding the preferentist's prudential neutrality is holding that prudential reasons are goods-based rather than score-based. This leads to the result, or so I claim, that one lacks prudential reason to alter one's prudential ordering. On this combination of views, at any time  $t$ , the prudential reasons that apply to action at that time will be generated by goods that *in point of fact* (assuming an account of objective prudential reasons) appear in the prudential orderings of the times that are prudentially relevant for  $t$ . Because she has no prudential reason to change her prudential ordering, but does have prudential reason to be an astronaut, Faith ought to become an astronaut. That's the simple story, anyway.

But, question: doesn't taking the pill *make it the case* that Faith's future prudential ordering is pro-Earth-bound pilot? But if that's right, then it would seem that if she takes the pill, her prudential ordering explains the goodness of being an Earth-bound pilot, and it is that state of affairs that in turn explains prudential reasons, and if she doesn't take the pill, the pro-astronaut prudential ordering explains the value of becoming an astronaut, in turn explaining prudential reasons. This seems to generate the result that *not* taking the pill at  $t$  entails that there is no reason to take the pill at  $t$ . But *if* Faith takes the pill at  $t$ , or so it would seem, it turns out that she did, in fact, have a reason to

take the pill at *t*. So both choices are equally prudentially rational.<sup>18</sup> This is just the upshot we were trying to avoid.

But on its face this line of reasoning is strained. The key problem is this: it cannot be that a fact *f* counts in favour of an action  $\phi$  if the conditions for *f* to be a reason are dependent on the performance of  $\phi$ . This is not to say that the only reasons that could count in favour of  $\phi$ -ing at *t* must be facts that obtain as of *t*. That would be far too strong. But it should not be that the facts that count in favour of  $\phi$ , whenever these facts occur, lack normative significance at *t*, or, more particularly, that the normative significance of *f* requires the performance of  $\phi$ .<sup>19</sup> And that's clearly the case here. Commonsensically, taking the pill changes Faith's future preferences, and hence changes her future prudential ordering. But given that the state of affairs in which she is an Earth-bound pilot does not possess the necessary features to explain prudential reasons (i.e. it is not featured in her future prudential orderings independent of whether or not she takes the pill), it cannot count in favour of her doing so.

This point is supported by the general supposition that the existence of reasons for action ought to be independent of the acts those reasons support. For instance, Nagel writes, of prudential reasons specifically, 'So if a condition at time *t* will create a reason for A, instead of saying that at *t* there will be a reason for A, we should say that there is, tenselessly, a reason for A to occur at *t*, and derivative reason now to promote its occurrence. To this we need only add that the reason for A to occur at *t* must exist independently of the acts we may undertake now to promote it.'<sup>20</sup> Of course, this principle must be interpreted in ways that do not render it too strong. But it is at least plausible to say that an action cannot be favoured by some fact if the normative (prudential, here) significance of that fact is dependent upon the performance of the action. Rather the relevant facts should be established as reason-giving independently of the act's being performed.

This response seems to match up with considered judgement regarding the preferentist's prudential neutrality. Even if Faith were to take the pill, it is hard to escape the thought that she sold herself short, acted in a manner that was *at best* aprudent. But if this is correct, it must be that prudence is most interested in the way an individual's

<sup>18</sup> Thanks to Ben Bradley for raising this concern.

<sup>19</sup> One might claim that my reasoning here elides the distinction between objective and subjective prudential reasons. It does not. On the view I advocate, it is an objective prudential reason that one's future prudential ordering will be pro-Olympics, whether or not one believes this, because one hasn't (yet) altered one's future prudential ordering.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas Nagel, *The Possibility of Altruism* (Princeton, NJ, 1970), p. 48. My emphasis.



prudential orderings – past, present, and future – are *as of the time of action*; independently, that is, of how they might look were one to act in a manner that changes those prudential orderings.<sup>21</sup>

## VI. OBJECTION(S): GOODS-BASED PRUDENCE

What follows are two substantive objections to a goods-based interpretation of prudential rationality, as opposed to a score-based approach. The first objection holds that a goods-based view, at least as I have understood it, generates an absurd result given the possibility of *future* changes in one's prudential ordering; the second is simply an incredulous stare – though, to be fair, the stare is *really* incredulous.

Prior to discussing these objections, however, I'd like to discuss one – as it were – structural objection. One might wonder whether the selection of a goods-based account of prudence is simply *ad hoc*. Is there independent reason to accept such a proposal, abstracting from the preferentist's prudential neutrality?

In response, it should be open to theorists of prudential rationality, or the personal good, or any other philosophical domain to construct theories that best respond to considered judgements. Hence *even if* there were no further reason to accept a goods-based account of prudence, this doesn't mean we shouldn't accept it. After all, there's reason to accept it: in doing so we can avoid a prudential indifference between Faith's taking a preference-altering pill and becoming an astronaut. Of course, things are different if there is independent reason *not* to accept a goods-based account of prudence. But if this is correct, then whether there is a problem for a goods-based account of prudential reasons in terms of its being *ad hoc* entirely supervenes on whether or not the *other* objections to a goods-based prudential rationality succeed. Of course, they may – but if they do, the view I advocate has bigger problems than simply being *ad hoc*.

Furthermore, I'd like to offer one additional consideration (certainly not knock-down), in favour of a goods-based account rather than a score-based view. To begin, take an analogy. Consider the notion of a *morality score*. A morality score concerns how morally good a person is; this score can be determined at times, or aggregated across times.

<sup>21</sup> I don't wish to gainsay the possibility that there could be cases in which a person has the option to choose a prudential ordering, but that no fact of the matter can be established as to what her future prudential ordering will be. Perhaps the baseline is simply indeterminate; looking forward there is no *particular* set of goods that would make a future time better-off. But this is OK. It would simply be that prudential obligations (in this case) are indeterminate, which seems a sensible account of the phenomenon here.

A morality score will be determined by the moral quality of one's actions or character at the times in question. Indeed, we sometimes refer to morality scores in making interpersonal and intrapersonal moral comparisons: morally speaking, I'm better than I used to be for instance. But it would seem entirely odd to suggest that we are morally enjoined – except in an entirely derivative way – to maximize our morality score. Rather, it seems much more plausible to hold that moral duties, rules, reasons, and so forth are determined by facts like, e.g., harm, benefit, respect, autonomy, and so on. The same holds here. I find it quite strange to think that the fundamental prudential normative facts concern an individual's welfare score, rather than that which *determines* that welfare score – intrinsic prudential value.

One might find this unconvincing. But, as I said, this is OK: a goods-based account of prudential rationality still succeeds at avoiding the preferentist's prudential neutrality. This is reason enough to accept it, *pace* objections to be considered now.

### VI.1. Future pills

Imagine that I now ( $t_1$ ) face a decision to enter graduate school for the sake of becoming a professional philosopher. I prefer to do so; I now hold that a career in professional philosophy is of substantial intrinsic value. And this feature of my prudential ordering will persist until  $t_{10}$ . However, it is the case that at  $t_{10}$ , I will take a prudential-ordering-altering pill, and as a result come to prefer not a career in professional philosophy but rather a career as a bohemian surfer. Were I not to have taken the pill at  $t_{10}$ , I would have continued to prefer being a philosopher. What do I have reason at  $t_1$  to promote for the sake of the times *after*  $t_{10}$  ( $t_{11} - t_n$ )? It would seem strange as a matter of prudential rationality to promote a career as a philosopher *for the sake of* times of my life in which I *will not* have that prudential ordering. It just is the case that, as of  $t_{11}$  I will not prefer to be a philosopher, but will instead prefer being a bohemian surfer (given that I will take the pill at  $t_{10}$ ). How could it be prudentially rational to promote the state of affairs of being a philosopher *for the sake of* times during which it will be the case that I do not prefer it?

However, this is not a result of the current view. The key is that the goods one has prudential reason to promote are fixed by what one's prudential ordering will be independent of the action *under consideration* – in this case, the  $t_1$  action for the sake of  $t_{11} - t_n$ . But if it's the case that, in ten years, one *will in fact* alter one's prudential ordering (or if one's prudential ordering will be altered by someone else, or in some much more humdrum way), then the prudential ordering that is relevant for prudential reasons now is the prudential

ordering that actually, in fact, applies to those future temporal stages. Some changes in one's future prudential orderings will, from the current perspective, be reason-generating, given that they are changes that *will* occur (independently of current action) in one's future.

Of course, this generates something of an odd result. On my view, for all times *prior* to  $t_{10}$ , I face bohemian surfer-type reasons (for the sake of  $t_{11} - t_n$ ), but that *at*  $t_{10}$ , I face professional philosopher-type reasons (for the sake of  $t_{11} - t_n$ ). This is because, *independently of my action at*  $t_{10}$ , I prefer (later) to be a professional philosopher. But how could that be? I agree that this verdict is somewhat odd at first glance, but looking closer I don't think it's something that should worry us. The fact that I, *aprudently*, decide at  $t_{10}$  to alter my prudential ordering is something that seems prudentially relevant from the perspective of  $t_1$ . It's something, in other words, that influences whether my action at  $t_1$  is prudent or imprudent. But this fact should not influence the prudential status of that  $t_{10}$  choice. In other words, it seems correct to describe my  $t_1$  planning for bohemian surfing as prudent, but my  $t_{10}$  choice to take the pill as *aprudent*. But this combination of claims is only possible if I lack bohemian surfer reasons at  $t_{10}$ , and maintain them at  $t_1$ , precisely as predicted by a goods-based account of prudential reasons.

### VI.2. *How can it be prudent to choose a worse life?*

'This view', it may be claimed, 'holds that one has strongest prudential reason to promote the *goods* that appear in prudentially relevant prudential orderings. But on this view it is possible that a person could be perfectly prudentially rational in passing up the opportunity to promote a much higher level of well-being by altering his prudential ordering. Isn't that absurd?'

To take a concrete case, imagine that were I to attempt to become an Olympic athlete, I would do so, but I would at best eke out a meagre fourth-place finish in the 100-metre sprint. I *much* prefer to medal as opposed to finishing in fourth place. However, I prefer *any* finish in an Olympic race as preferable to easy-to-achieve minimal competence at shuffleboard. But I *could* take a pill, and make it the case that I come to prefer easy-to-achieve minimal competence at shuffleboard to the same degree I would otherwise prefer an Olympic medal. Because my preferences given the pill would be satisfied to a greater extent, it would appear that taking the pill would result in my living a better life than not taking the pill. How could prudential rationality command anything else?

Two responses. One possible view, compatible with my main aims, is to hold that prudential reasons are not constituted *simply* by

intrinsically good states or objects, but *also* by welfare scores. Depending on how one weighted these various sets of prudential reasons, one could avoid the preferentist's prudential *neutrality* and still allow that one has strongest prudential reason to choose the *higher* welfare score (when one has the option to do so). For instance, one might hold that score-based reasons trump goods-based reasons. This would avoid cases like Faith's, and also hold that one will never have *strongest* reason to choose a worse life.

And while I will leave this possibility open, I find it both unsatisfying and unnecessary. Indeed, reflection on the case presented in this section seems to tell in favour of *refusing* to grant welfare scores the power to constitute or explain prudential normativity. To my ears, it does not seem *at all* plausible to hold that the prudentially right action, what one owes to oneself, is to alter one's preferences in the manner stated. It would seem a terrible *tragedy* for me simply to be content with minimal competence at shuffleboard; not because there is something 'objectively' valuable about being an Olympian, though perhaps there is, but given my preferences as they are and, as of now, will be. The extent to which changing my preferences is a poor 'second-best' does not seem to vary depending on whether taking the pill would, in fact, result in a higher welfare score.

Let me amplify this slightly. Notice that one either accepts a prudential axiology according to which the prudential ordering is alterable, or one does not. For the latter set of views, it makes literally *no difference* whether one chooses a goods-based or score-based approach to prudential rationality. Because the prudential ordering is held fixed, the only way to run up one's welfare score is simply to promote those goods that appear on the relevant prudential orderings; to do, in other words, what a goods-based prudential rationality commands. The *only* accounts of the prudential good according to which there is a difference between goods-based and score-based theories of prudential rationality (i.e. a view according to which one might be prudentially required to choose a life that is worse in the aggregate) are those according to which the prudential ordering can be altered (such as an object-based preferentist account of prudential value). But it seems quite clear in reflecting on *just those sorts of views* that the primary concern in prudential decision-making *should not be the welfare score* – this is *why* the preferentist's prudential neutrality is so strikingly counterintuitive. But if that's right, then we should in fact allow the possibility that prudence can diverge from the commandment to generate the highest welfare score – the only cases in which it does so diverge are cases in which it seems precisely the right answer to do so.

## VII. OBJECTION: PRUDENT CHANGES IN PRUDENTIAL ORDERING

Finally, one might object to the general story that I'm telling here. So far, I've rested my preferred interpretation of a preferentist theory of value, and of prudential reasons, on the judgement that prudence should not be indifferent towards satisfying one's preferences and changing one's preferences to reflect states of affairs that obtain or will obtain. But it may be that I've gone too far. Surely there are, in fact, prudent changes in one's prudential ordering. Imagine that a person prefers, for all the world, being an NFL linebacker, but that he possesses the physique of Pee-Wee Herman. Pee-Wee has, however, incredible talent for accountancy, but loathes it. According to the view I suggest, it would seem that the only prudential reasons he faces involve bulking up, running, tackling, and so forth. But surely this isn't the case. For his sake, if he can take a pill to come to prefer accountancy, this is exactly the right thing to do.

This initially sounds like a damaging objection, but I think there are things to say in response. First, if we allow that welfare scores can *also* generate prudential reasons (a move to which I'm still not attracted) we can hold – depending on the assigned weights of such reasons – that Pee-Wee has strongest prudential reason to take the pill in this case. Second (ignoring the previous proposal), even if he loathes accountancy, there may still be purely goods-based prudential reasons to take the pill. Most people prefer to be happy rather than miserable, to take pleasure in their lives rather than to be frustrated failures, and so on. If this is, in fact, a part of Pee-Wee's prudential ordering then it seems as though there will be perfectly good prudential reasons to take the pill, even concentrating on the prudential orderings he has independent of taking the pill. Indeed, this response seems to track common-sense reactions to cases like this. When considering Pee-Wee practising for the NFL, seeing his failure, frustration, anger, and so forth, we are tempted to say: 'wouldn't he just be happier if he could prefer being an accountant?', 'he would take much more pleasure in life if he just gave up this goal', and so forth. We seem to make reference to Pee-Wee's present and future (presumed) prudential ordering in advising him to take the pill and become an accountant.

Third, we might wonder about Pee-Wee's own attitude *vis-à-vis* his preference structure. It seems natural, in discussing a case like Pee-Wee's, to consider whether Pee-Wee might *prefer* a state in which he prefers being an accountant and *is* an accountant.<sup>22</sup> In other words, it

<sup>22</sup> Note that, because the view is object-based, these conjunctive states of preference-and-object have value simply because they are preferred.

may very well be that Pee-Wee prefers the state in which he prefers accountancy and is an accountant (though he currently loathes being an accountant) to the state in which he prefers being a linebacker and is consistently and humiliatingly defeated in that pursuit. If that's the case, he has prudential reason to take the pill – not because being an accountant generates prudential reasons (in so far as that does not appear in the relevant prudential orderings) but instead because prudential reasons are generated by his preference to [prefer being an accountant, and to be an accountant] to [being a humiliated NFL reject].

Of course, the second and third responses require stipulation of particular contingent mental states Pee-Wee might or might not have. So let's assume them away. Let's assume that he doesn't have any genuine preference for pleasure, happiness, or any other ancillary benefits he might get as a result of taking the pill. And let's assume that he genuinely does *not* prefer the state in which he prefers being an accountant and is one to the state in which he prefers being a linebacker and is continually frustrated in this pursuit. Under these conditions, is it plausible to say that taking the pill – though it may lead to a higher level of well-being – is what Pee-Wee has prudential reason to undertake? When described in this way, it seems to me quite sensible to say that the answer is 'no'.<sup>23</sup>

## VIII. CONCLUSION

If, like me, you are inclined to accept a preferentist account of prudential value – or, indeed, if you're inclined to grant preferences any axiological authority at all – it may have seemed that the preferentist's

<sup>23</sup> One twist on this objection should be considered. Imagine that I have a preference for an unachievable  $\phi$ , but my preference is not one to which I'm particularly attached – it's more of a whim or flight of fancy. But it's clear that were I to take a pill to prefer  $\psi$ , I could achieve it. If I don't care much about the preference, why not take the pill and live a better life? (Thanks to David Sobel for this suggestion.) Three responses. First, I lack the considered judgement elicited here if we assume, as suggested above, that I prefer – or am even indifferent to – the state in which I frustratedly prefer  $\phi$ , and non-frustratedly prefer  $\psi$ , even if there is no 'higher order' endorsement of the preference. Second, this result is very easy to avoid if we accept that welfare scores can generate reasons – even very weak reasons. Given that such preferences aren't likely to generate very substantial welfare goods, it may be prudentially rational to take the pill under such stipulations. Of course, there will remain a range of cases that involve preferences I seem to care quite a lot about, and hence we require the significance of goods-based prudential reasons as outlined here. Third, and less ecumenically, I resist characterizing such preferences as welfare-authoritative. If one doesn't care whether one satisfies the preference or simply takes a pill, it strikes me that such a preference does not genuinely represent your values in a way that is plausibly required by the most defensible versions of preferentism. (See, for instance, Dale Dorsey, 'Subjectivism without Desire', *The Philosophical Review* 121 (2012), pp. 407–42.)

prudential neutrality is simply a conclusion that you must swallow. But I'm troubled by this result. However, or so I have argued, it is not guaranteed by the acceptance of a preferentist theory of value. One must *interpret* prudential value, and prudential rationality, in particular ways to deliver this result – interpretative choices that are not forced and that can be (quite plausibly) denied.

However, a more general lesson is also warranted. Preference-based theories of the personal good require, as I note here, interpretation. So does the common-sense prudential demand to maximize one's good. Preference-based views, then, cannot avoid making interpretative choices that lead or do not lead to the preferentist's prudential neutrality. At the very least I hope to have shown that there is much to be gained by interpreting these views as I have done here. And while I leave open the possibility that there may be reasons to choose the contrary interpretations, that such choices must be made is itself a result worth taking seriously, whether or not one is ultimately concerned (as I am) about the preferentist's prudential neutrality.<sup>24</sup>

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