

## Ben Davies (KCL) “Desire, judgement, and the borderline paradox”

Theories that have well-being depend on agents’ attitudes face a paradox. This includes the most popular of such theories, desire-satisfaction, which I use as my initial focus. Desire-satisfaction theories say that an agent is made better off by the satisfaction of her desires, and worse off by their frustration. Typically, a desire is worth as much to well-being as its intensity; the stronger the desire, the more it contributes. The ‘borderline paradox’ concerns an agent, S, who has neutral well-being. She forms two desires: one for an object, and a stronger desire that her life go badly overall. A paradox occurs if the agent’s first desire is frustrated. This seemingly makes S’s life go badly overall. But that satisfies the stronger desire, which makes her well-being positive overall, frustrating the very same desire. Bradley claims this paradox troubles *any* theory that makes attitudes relevant to well-being.

I reject some possible responses from desire theorists: that the relevant desire is incoherent; and an appeal to the timing of the desire by claiming that desires can only contribute to well-being if they are held concurrently with their satisfaction or frustration; since S’s problematic desire is about her entire life, goes the criticism, it can only be satisfied by death, and so cannot be held concurrently with its satisfaction. As such, it cannot contribute to well-being. However, the former claim is simply false, while the latter creates significant problems around the frustration of open-ended desires, and cannot avoid the paradox over shorter time periods.

However, I suggest that desire is anyway not a particularly plausible attitude to ground well-being. A more plausible candidate escapes the borderline paradox, undermining Bradley’s general claim about attitude theories. The relevant attitude is that of judging something to be good for you (JGY). Even if you can desire that your life goes badly overall, you cannot coherently judge it good for you that your life goes badly overall.

I end by considering some objections. The first claims that JGY is too cognitively demanding, since animals and infants cannot judge something good for themselves. The second is that the JGY theory is incoherent, since it either makes agents’ judgements about their own good trivially true, or almost always false. The last objection suggests that JGY cannot deal with the borderline paradox on a scale that is less than a lifetime.

I clarify the account by suggesting that the relevant judgement need not be conceptually complex, and so need not be cognitively demanding. This also means that JGY need not entail any tautological or self-defeating judgements. I also suggest a distinction between two senses of JGY, such that instrumental judgements only contribute to well-being derivatively. This avoids the borderline paradox over shorter time periods. This also parallels a defence Bradley offers of his own brand of hedonism, and so is not a move to which he could object. As such, I claim to have outlined a plausible attitude-based theory of well-being that escapes the borderline paradox.