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WHAT IS GROUP WELL-BEING?

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In ordinary life, we strive to benefit various groups of people. We worry about what is best for our families. Coaches aim to help their teams. Chairs hope to strengthen their departments. Those seeking reparations presuppose some notion of what is good and bad for oppressed groups of people. In *The Republic*, Socrates aims to establish the well-being of the entire *polis*, not the well-being of any individual. In her recent American Philosophical Association presidential address, Valerie Tiberius considers what is good not for individual philosophers but for the discipline of philosophy.[1]

We can wisely determine how to benefit our families, teams, departments, cities, and disciplines, however, only if we understand what it is for a group to do well. And it is quite unclear how we should understand the well-being of a group. Economists, of course, have had various ideas about the notion of a social welfare function.[2] However, they tend to simply presume that the welfare of a society is some mathematical function of the welfare of the individuals in that society. Political scientists tend to be more imaginative—they understand that the common good may be distinct both from aggregative utility and from what economists call "public goods"—but they fail to spell out how the good of a group *does* relate to the welfare of the individuals who constitute the group in question.

We are not only benefactors, but also beneficiaries. If, as I will argue, your individual well-being depends upon the well-being of the groups to which you belong, this would be good for you to know, both for the purpose of deciding which groups to join and for the purpose of prioritizing their flourishing. In a world in which group identities are not fixed (Should you quit your book club? Should you leave your department? Should you move to/from Canada?), you would do well to know whether and how the quality of your own life depends upon the well-being of the groups you partially constitute.

A philosophical account of group well-being is thus needed, and forging one

1 Tiberius, "The Well-Being of Philosophy."

2 For example, Arrow, *Social Choice and Individual Values*.

is what I begin to do here. One might expect that philosophers who explicitly work on the topic of well-being would already have developed views about the well-being of groups. There is, after all, a vast literature devoted to understanding the well-being of *individuals*, focusing upon whether the well-being of an individual is grounded in experiences, in the satisfaction of desires, in the fulfillment of values, in achievements, or in whether one's life bears objectively valuable features. But individuals are (or might be) only one thing that can be well or ill, and, unfortunately, philosophers who work extensively on well-being have been largely silent about the well-being of groups.

Given recent trends in philosophy more generally, this is very surprising. During the past decade philosophers have produced a tremendous amount of work about groups: there is now a cascade of exciting work on group agency, group ontology, group duties, group assertion, group attitudes, group responsibility, and group reasoning.[3] These various debates zero in on what it takes for a group to harm (or to benefit) another, to have a duty not to harm (or to benefit) another, and to be responsible for so acting. But what is it for a group *itself* to be harmed or benefited? That is, what is group well-being?

Unfortunately, I will not have any grand conclusions about what constitutes group well-being; here I attempt to sketch some of the logical space of possible answers (or forms of possible answers), and nudge us to seriously consider certain widely overlooked options. More specifically, I will describe several importantly different ways the well-being of a group may be related to the well-being of the individuals who constitute the group. This, I hope, will be eye opening.

In section I, I describe the kinds of groups whose well-being I am investigating. In section II, I briefly introduce and taxonomize four competing conceptions of group well-being. In sections III and IV, I distinguish two different ways group well-being and individual well-being might be related to each other: bottom-up dependence and top-down dependence. In sections V and VI, I argue that top-down dependence might obtain: your individual well-being might be partially constituted by the well-being of the groups to which you belong. In section VII, I consider whether *both* forms of dependence could obtain at once.

3 On group agency see List and Pettit, *Group Agency*; Tollefsen, *Groups as Agents*. On group ontology see Epstein, *The Ant Trap*. On group duties see Collins, *Group Duties*. On group assertion see Lackey, "Group Assertion." On group attitudes see List, "Three Kinds of Collective Attitudes." On group responsibility see Bazargan-Forward and Tollefsen, *The Routledge Handbook of Collective Responsibility*. And on group reasoning see Karpus and Gold, "Team Reasoning."

I

Before discussing well-being, I will make three quick points about groups themselves. First, I assume groups exist. If groups *do not* exist, then nothing makes groups better or worse off—exploring the well-being of groups would then be no more important than exploring the well-being of ghosts. But even Margaret Thatcher, who famously said "There's no such thing as society," went on to concede that "There are families." So here I will just assume that there are indeed *some* kinds of groups.

Second, I am thinking only about groups that are entirely constituted by individual people. So, if your household has a dog as one of its members, I am not considering the well-being of your household so understood for present purposes. Nor am I considering here groups of groups: the Association of American Universities or the European Union might be viewed as a meta group. The well-being of these groups is especially complex. So, for now, I am interested only in groups of individual human beings.

Third, and most importantly, there are likely different types of groups of human beings, and what constitutes the well-being of these groups might vary by type. Some groups are highly organized around a particular mission, a mission the fulfillment of which may have something to do with the group's well-being. Other groups are constituted by individuals who share some important features, e.g., the physically disabled. Still others seem to be little more than mathematical sets of individuals. So, even if we figure out what constitutes the well-being of, say, a nation, we might not yet understand what constitutes the well-being of a particular friendship, or of the group of residents that lives in a particular apartment building. Thus, we should beware of overgeneralizing our results: even if we make progress in understanding the well-being of some types of groups, we might not thereby understand the nature of the well-being of other types of groups any better. This will prove relevant shortly.

II

What, then, *is* group well-being? One contemporary philosopher of well-being who *has* explicitly considered this question, if only briefly, is Ben Bradley. Bradley describes several different ways one might think of the "well-being of a group of people."[4] He writes, "If we can compare well-being levels between people, we

4 Bradley, *Well-Being*, 70.

can attempt to figure out how well off a population is on the basis of how well its members are."[5]

One strategy is to *add up* the well-being of each member of the group in order to calculate the well-being of the group itself. The well-being of a group, then, would just be equal to the sum of the well-being of each of its members. But Bradley correctly notes that this proposal implausibly implies that a group of a billion extremely well-off individuals is not as well off as a much larger group of individuals, each of whom is barely well off. Intuitively, the well-being of a group does not (always?) depend solely upon how much well-being its members experience *in toto*. This first strategy inappropriately favors large groups. Summing the well-being of individual members to determine group well-being seems to be too crude.[6]

A better approach, one in line with what social psychologists do, is to average the well-being of the individuals in the group.[7] This would avoid the unintuitive result that a group comprising an infinite number of barely well-off people is itself infinitely well off. But Bradley rightly worries about this view too:

> Suppose that population P3 has 100 moderately well-off people. P4 has 99 unhappy people plus George, who is extraordinarily well-off. George is so well-off that when you calculate the average well-being levels of P3 and P4, P4's average is higher even though everyone in P3 is better-off than all the non-George members of P4. You might wonder whether that really means that P4 is better-off than P3.[8]

The fact that George is extremely well off surely counts for something, but it does not seem that it swamps all other facts about individual well-being in determining what the well-being of P4 is. Although averaging individual well-being seems better than adding individual well-being, neither yields a satisfying answer to our investigation. The well-being of a group surely depends upon other factors too.

Nevertheless, Bradley eventually concludes that since the average well-being approach is superior to the other approaches he considers, it is the "most plausi-

5 Bradley, *Well-Being*, 78. He switches from talking about a "group" to a "population." I will postpone worries about this.

6 Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*.

7 Di Tella and MacCulloch write that "a large fraction of the happiness literature in economics is based on comparing average happiness scores for large numbers of people" ("Some Uses of Happiness Data in Economics," 29). This passage is approvingly cited by Angner, "Well-Being and Economics."

8 Bradley, *Well-Being*, 78.

ble view about the well-being of a population."[9] I instead suggest that we need to survey more options before embracing that—or any—conclusion. The options Bradley *does* consider are all alike insofar as they treat the well-being of a group as depending solely upon the well-being of the individuals in the group. In each case, one is to determine how well off a group of people is by first determining how well off each individual in the group is, and then somehow calculate the well-being of the group from these determinations. The well-being of a group is thus assumed to be some mathematical function of the well-being of the individuals constituting the group. Suppose group G1 has three individuals: I1, I2, I3. If we know the relevant function, then, once we know the well-being of I1, I2, and I3, we can calculate the well-being of G1. Nothing else matters. Call this a *reductive* conception of group well-being.[10]

We should not be quick to assume, however, that *any* reductive account of group well-being is correct. Even if every individual in some group is doing well, it seems possible that the group itself is not doing well. After all, some wholes do not have properties that all their proper parts have: to assume otherwise is to commit the fallacy of composition. So, if we do accept a reductive view, it would be nice to have an argument for it. Or, at a minimum, we should note and rule out the alternatives.

What, then, *are* the alternatives? Here is one. According to what I will call the *independent view* of group well-being, the well-being of a group of individuals and the well-being of the individuals in the group have nothing directly to do with one another. The fact that all the individuals in some group are doing well entails nothing about the well-being of the group itself, and whatever makes a group well off has nothing essentially to do with whether the individuals in the group are well off. What makes a group well off is something other than the well-being of its members.

We have to be careful about how to articulate this view. Even if the independent view is true, the well-being of a group and the well-being of the individuals in a group may often *happen* to depend upon the same thing, even though they do not *essentially* depend upon the same thing (or each other). To illustrate this possibility, suppose that some objective list theory of individual well-being is true, according to which an individual is well off to the extent they have three

9 Bradley, *Well-Being*, 90. Along the way, he also considers and wisely rejects the view that the well-being of a group is determined by the *median* level of well-being in the group (79).

10 In the philosophy of groups more generally, reductive or summative views are often one popular theoretical option. For discussion, see Tollefsen, *Groups as Agents*. For an instance of a reductive or summative conception of group intention, see Searle, "Collective Intentions and Actions."

traits: pleasure, knowledge, and health. An individual who learns a lot during their pleasant, healthy life, then, is well off. Suppose also that the well-being of some particular group of individuals (say, a manufacturing firm) essentially depends only upon whether the group produces a lot of widgets: the more widgets it produces, the better off the group is. The well-being of the individuals and the well-being of this group, then, would not *essentially* depend upon each other, nor upon some common factor. But this is compatible with the fact that some of the things that are good or bad for each of the individuals will also *happen* to be things that are good or bad for the group. For example, if a viral plague strikes the land, then this will be bad for many of the individuals (the plague is painful, it damages health, etc.), and this will also be bad for the group (fewer widgets are produced when many individuals are sick). If a new vaccine makes many individuals' lives more pleasant (such that they are better off), this may *cause* them to work more productively, thereby making more widgets (such that the group is better off). So even if the independent view of group well-being is correct, there may be some *merely causal* links between the two. We thus should not confuse *constitutive* dependence with mere causal dependence. The proponent of the independent view denies that the well-being of the group constitutively depends upon the well-being of the individuals who make up the group.

The independent view is also compatible with the possibility that the well-being of a group constitutively depends upon *other* features of the individuals in the group. To see this, imagine a theory of group well-being according to which the well-being of the group simply depends upon the *size* of the group: the bigger the group, the better off the group is. (This theory is obviously highly implausible, but it cleanly illustrates the present point.) Suppose Susan joins the group. Now, the group is better off in virtue of Susan's membership. If she were to exit the group, the group would suffer. The well-being of the group constitutively depends upon her membership in the group. This, however, is perfectly consistent with the independent view. The independent view denies only that the well-being of the group constitutively depends upon the *well-being* of the individuals in the group: it does not deny that it so depends upon any *other* feature of the individuals in the group.[11]

Is the independent view plausible? For *some* sort of groups, I think it might be. It may be true that the well-being of a for-profit corporation is in no way constituted by the well-being of the individuals who make up the corporation. It may instead depend exclusively upon things like its profitability, market share, or

11 Compare to a view that whether a collective is morally responsible for some fact in no way depends upon whether any of the individuals in the collective are so responsible. See Copp, "The Collective Moral Autonomy Thesis."

success in achieving its mission. The independent view of well-being will seem especially plausible, then, if we think that the well-being of something substantively depends upon the *kind* of thing it is, and if individuals and (certain kinds of) groups of individuals are very different kinds of things.

So far, I have sketched two views of group well-being: the reductive view and the independent view. These two views starkly oppose each other. The reductive view says that group well-being is a *mathematical function* of the well-being of the individuals in the group. Group well-being depends upon *nothing* else. The independent view, by contrast, says that group well-being in no way constitutively depends upon the well-being of the individuals in the group; it depends *entirely* on something else. But these are not the only options in logical space. Perhaps the well-being of a group *partially* constitutively depends upon the well-being of the individuals in the group. This would be so if the well-being of a group constitutively depends upon both (a) the well-being of the individuals in the group, and, say, (b) its success in achieving its stated mission (which need not concern the well-being of its individuals). Two groups, then, might be equally well off, even though one group's members are individually better off, while the second group better achieves its stated mission.

Intermediate positions such as this, then, *partially* relate the well-being of individuals and that of groups. On these partial conceptions of group well-being, there is *some* constitutive dependence relation between the well-being of the individuals in the group and the well-being of the group, but knowing only the well-being of the individuals does not let you calculate the well-being of the group, because the well-being of groups also partially depends upon factors that do not play the same role in determining the well-being of individuals. Call this view *group well-being partialism*—or, for short, *partialism*. And we can now call both partialism and the independent view *non-reductive* views of group well-being.

Are these all the options? I can think of at least one more: although groups themselves are indeed real, there is no such thing as the well-being of a group, and so we do not need to worry about *how* the well-being of a group relates to that of the individuals in the group. Maybe *only* individuals can be well or ill. Call this view *group well-being eliminativism* (or, for short, *eliminativism*).

While eliminativist views in philosophy sound radical, this one need not be so edgy. Although economists and other social scientists often talk about the well-being of groups or populations, perhaps this is only a *façon de parler*. When we want some way to speak about the well-being of many individuals at once, we will speak as if the group of individuals can be well or ill, but perhaps this is

at least sometimes merely a handy locution.[12] Perhaps groups just *cannot* be the sort of thing that can be well or ill.[13]

While I will not evaluate group well-being eliminativism here, I do find it an initially plausible account of *some* groups. Imagine a group of people waiting in front of Walmart for it to open. I do not think that this *group* could be better or worse off than it is. Each of the individuals in the group could have been better off or worse off, to be sure. And we may want some simple way to talk about this. To talk about this concisely, we might pretend that the group could have been better off or worse off. But perhaps this is not literally true; much seems to depend upon how loose a set of individuals can be related to one another and still constitute a group of some sort. With groups that seem to be *merely* populations, eliminativism can seem plausible.

There are, then, at least four ways to understand the relation between the well-being of a group and the well-being of the individuals in the group. Either (1) eliminativism is true, or the relation between the well-being of a group and the well-being of the individuals in the group is (2) reductive, (3) partial, or (4) independent. Further, it is not immediately obvious which of the four options is superior, and it is plausible that the correct account for some kinds of groups differs from the correct account for groups of other kinds.

III

Suppose that a non-reductive view of group well-being is correct for at least some groups. Here is a further question: What is the *direction* of constitutive dependence? In what way do individual well-being and group well-being depend upon each another?

So far, we have been explicitly wondering only whether the well-being of the group constitutively depends upon the well-being of the individuals in the group. But perhaps the dependence can run the other way, such that the well-being of individuals in some group constitutively depends upon the well-being of the groups they constitute. When a group to which you belong does well, do you yourself ever *thereby* benefit?

12 Sumner brusquely writes that "talk … of the welfare of groups, if it is not merely metaphorical, must be interpreted as referring to the aggregate or collective well-being of their members. Collectivities have no interests to be promoted beyond those of individuals," thereby straddling a reductive view and an eliminativist view of group well-being (Sumner, *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics*, 180).

13 Compare to atomism about collective responsibility the view that only individuals can be morally responsible. See Lewis, "Collective Responsibility"; Sverdlik, "Collective Responsibility"; Narveson, "Collective Responsibility."

Although this way of conceiving the relation between individual well-being and group well-being is completely at odds with the way it is commonly theoretically conceived, I believe it has some merit.[14] Perhaps you are better off simply in virtue of the fact that your department is thriving; perhaps you are worse off simply in virtue of the fact that your nation is deteriorating. We can label these as two ways that individual well-being and group well-being might constitutively depend upon each other: if the well-being of a group depends upon the well-being of the individuals who constitute the group, then we have a case of *bottom-up* dependence; if, however, the well-being of some individual constitutively depends upon the well-being of the group or groups to which she belongs, we have a case of *top-down* dependence. If top-down dependence about well-being obtains, then when a group is doing well, its individual members thereby do better than they otherwise would be doing—a phenomenon we would miss if instead we calculated the well-being of each individual in isolation from the ways group well-being might partially determine it.

I suspect, however, that most philosophers and social scientists assume, if only implicitly, that *only* bottom-up dependence obtains. Philosophers who embrace standard hedonistic or desire-satisfaction views of individual well-being will probably be inclined to reject top-down dependence. They are already hostile to the thought that an individual's well-being could directly depend upon something so apparently external. Others, however, might be interested in thinking more about top-down dependence.

Although I am ultimately friendly to the idea of top-down dependence, and will try to argue for it, I first will discuss some methodological *obstacles* toward establishing it. For if we think about this issue wrongly, it can look too *easy* to establish top-down dependence. When I talk to some nonphilosophers about this topic, they think it is just obvious that an individual's well-being depends upon the well-being of the groups to which she belongs. But we have to be careful here. Top-down dependence is actually more radical than it might initially appear. So, I will first show why it is *not* so easy to establish top-down dependence before ultimately arguing that in some cases it is plausible.

Let us think about the relation between an individual's well-being and the well-being of an academic department that person partially constitutes. One might concede that the well-being of your department affects your well-being,

14 Note, however, that the analogous question about group and individual responsibility has been widely discussed. Philosophers differ over whether the fact that a group is responsible for some wrongdoing entails or implies that its members are individually responsible for that wrongdoing. See, for instance, French, *Individual and Collective Responsibility*; May, *Sharing Responsibility*; Raikka, "On Disassociating Oneself from Collective Responsibility"; and Bazargan-Forward and Tollefsen, *The Routledge Handbook of Collective Responsibility*.

but insist that it does so *entirely through* some individual feature about yourself. For example, suppose Pat is a member of your department. Suppose some fact improves your department: perhaps a toxic administrator leaves.[15] The fact that the department is now better off could then enhance Pat's well-being, but entirely because of some individual feature of Pat. For example, if Pat's well-being improves simply in virtue of the fact that Pat *cares about* her department, then this would not really be a case where Pat's well-being *constitutively* depends upon the well-being of her department. It would not be a genuine case of top-down dependence. It would instead run entirely through her *caring*, a feature of her as an individual. Pat would indeed be better off, because the thing that she cares about is doing well, and her personal well-being depends (on this internalist view) only on things in this way.

To see this point more clearly, compare the above case to a case where Pat cares about something that involves neither any group to which she belongs nor to her at all: suppose, for example, she cares deeply about whether most scientists deem Pluto to be a planet. Whether most scientists deem Pluto to be a planet, then, could plausibly affect Pat's well-being—if they do, it would satisfy a desire of hers—but that is no way shows that Pat's well-being constitutively depends upon whether Pluto *is* deemed to be a planet. Rather, it so depends upon whether some particular attitude of hers is satisfied, an attitude that *happens* to be about Pluto and planets. What matters to her well-being is not the way the world is, but whether the world is the way she wants it to be. Likewise, if the *only* way that the well-being of her department affects Pat's well-being is in virtue of the fact that Pat *cares* about her department, then her personal well-being does not *directly* depend upon the well-being of her department. It just so happens that the thing she cares about (viz., her department) *happens to be* a group of which she is a member. But this is not importantly different from the way that some fact completely external to her (e.g., whether scientists deem Pluto to be a planet) can affect her individual well-being. In both cases, her well-being is affected simply because she cares about or wants something, and the world lines up aptly with the content of her desires.

Because human beings are social creatures, it is obvious that individual well-being positively co-varies with the well-being of the groups to which they belong. But this fact alone does not show that there is top-down dependence about well-being. If individuals are better off only in virtue of the fact that they *care about* these groups, or have *better experiences* when their groups thrive, then there is no top-down dependence. Genuine top-down dependence obtains only

15 All names, characters, and incidents portrayed in this example are fictitious. No identification with actual persons (living or deceased) or places is intended or should be inferred.

if an individual like Pat is better off in virtue of some improvement in a group to which she belongs, such as her department, where this is *not* merely mediated by her experiences, desires, values, or any other *individual* feature of hers. Thus, it is far from obvious that top-down dependence about group well-being obtains.

IV

Perhaps we can vindicate top-down dependence by showing that individual well-being is in fact rooted in something *irreducibly* social. Larry May is after something like this idea in his discussion of what he calls group-based harm. He says that harms "are group-based when there is something about the structure, or perceived structure, of a given group that makes all of the members of the group at least indirectly or vicariously harmed whenever one of the members is directly harmed."[16] For some groups, then, "harm of some members also harms all group members."[17] Group-based harm, then, is "not reducible to the aggregate harms and claims of the individual members of these groups."[18]

How does this happen? May describes several possibilities. First, all members of a group can be harmed when there is "strong empathy by other members for those who are directly harmed."[19] If another member of my department is harmed, and I strongly empathize with her, then I too am harmed.[20]

This sounds correct, but one need not be a member of the relevant group in order to strongly empathize with people who are directly harmed. Someone who is not a member of my department might empathize with the person directly harmed just as strongly as I do, and thus be harmed in the same way I am. You do not need to share membership in a group in order to fully empathize with another. So, empathy alone does not explain what if anything is special about group-based harms.

Second, May notes that every member of a group is harmed when "directly harmful treatment of some members could just as easily have been directed at those who were not directly affected."[21] According to this thought, you are harmed when someone else in your group was harmed on the basis of being a member of a group, and that harm could instead have befallen a different member of the group, such as yourself. A full explanation of the harm that befalls

16 May, *The Morality of Groups*, 116.

17 May, *The Morality of Groups*, 115.

18 May, *The Morality of Groups*, 116.

19 May, *The Morality of Groups*, 115.

20 Simon ("Group Harm") also argues along these lines.

21 May, *The Morality of Groups*, 115.

every member, then, cannot be made without some reference to a social group or to one of its features, such as its structure.

It is unclear to me, however, how my being counterfactually harmed entails that I am actually harmed. Suppose some tourist is murdered simply because she was an American. Since I too am an American who sometimes travels overseas, I could have been murdered instead. But I *have not* been murdered, and, indeed, it sounds strange to say I have been harmed at all. Rather, I merely could have been harmed. Perhaps if murdering Americans is sufficiently common and systematic, I would somehow be harmed by these murders vicariously. But as a general statement, mere counterfactual possibility is not enough to ground actual harm.

There is a deeper problem, however, with employing May's notion of a group-based harm (which might be fine as it stands) as a solution to *our* task of understanding group well-being and the possibility of top-down dependence. Let us grant that an individual's well-being can essentially depend upon *socially constituted* features of herself, such as group membership. For example, as May soundly argues, there is no way to understand the nature of the harms suffered by many people in South Africa in the 1980s without referring to the groups to which they belong. Does that fact establish that individuals are harmed because the groups to which they belong are harmed—that there is top-down dependence? No.

To see why not, let us examine a toy example: suppose that an individual's well-being (partially) depends upon whether she plays baseball. Whether she plays baseball is, in a way, a fact about her as an individual. Nevertheless, whether her various bodily movements add up to instances of *playing baseball* depend upon whether she is a member of a baseball team.[22] You cannot understand what it is for her to play baseball (a team sport) without reference to the group to which she belongs (a team). Whether an individual person is stealing a base depends upon facts beyond what is going on with the person psychologically. It depends also upon whether the person is a part of (participating in) the practice

22 See Rawls, "Two Concepts of Rules": "Many of the actions one performs in a game of baseball one can do by oneself or with others whether there is the game or not. For example, one can throw a ball, run, or swing a peculiarly shaped piece of wood. But one cannot steal base, or strike out, or draw a walk, or make an error, or balk; although one can do certain things which appear to resemble these actions such as sliding into a bag, missing a grounder and so on. Striking out, stealing a base, balking, etc., are all actions which can only happen in a game. No matter what a person did, what he did would not be described as stealing a base or striking out or drawing a walk unless he could also be described as playing baseball, and for him to be doing this presupposes the rule-like practice which constitutes the game. The practice is logically prior to particular cases: unless there is the practice the terms referring to actions specified by it lack a sense" (25).

of baseball. So, *we* cannot tell whether her various movements constitute playing baseball without considering the wider context. Even to describe her acts accurately, then, we need to look not only inside her head, or at what her body is doing, but at the bigger picture.

Now, *if* an individual's well-being were to essentially depend upon whether she is playing baseball, then to characterize her well-being we would need to know some social facts. These facts might include group-level facts about baseball teams. To know whether Pat played baseball, struck out, or made an error (as opposed to fiddled with some pieces of wood and spheres), we *do* need to know whether she was indeed on a baseball team, a group. That is a fact *about* a group. But this would not vindicate top-down dependence about well-being, for nothing said so far implies that we must know anything about group *well-being*. To know that she plays baseball, we do not need to know anything about *how well off* her team is. According to the toy view we are now exploring, it matters not to Pat's well-being whether her baseball team thrives or wilts, only *that* she plays baseball.

What does this all mean? It is very plausible that *some* determinants of individual well-being concern group-level facts—probably not facts about whether one plays baseball in particular, but perhaps facts about whether one participates in some civic organization or other, or, now thinking of May's concerns, facts about whether it is a socially dominant or oppressed group. But *even if* we establish that all this is so, we would not have thereby established top-down dependence about group well-being. For top-down dependence of this sort obtains only if facts about group *well-being* determine facts about individual well-being. And in the toy baseball example, although some facts about *groups* determine facts about individual well-being, it is not facts about *group well-being* that do so. We should not confuse this weaker kind of phenomenon with genuine top-down dependence about group well-being.

Distinguishing top-down dependence about group well-being from things it merely resembles, then, reveals the difficulty in arguing that the well-being of individuals indeed directly depends upon the well-being of the groups to which individuals belong. The skeptic about top-down dependence can concede that people are better off when they are in social groups of various sorts: when they have friends and family and colleagues and are members of labor unions, and so on. The need for some sociality is completely compatible with the absence of top-down dependence.

V

To establish top-down dependence about group well-being, we need to show that an individual can be better off *directly* in virtue of the fact that a group to which she belongs is better off. How can we do that?

Here is a case to isolate our intuitions. Suppose that some college cross-country running teams are better off than others are. Plausibly, *how* well off they are depends at least in part upon whether they win their competitions. In the United States, teams are typically constituted by seven runners, and a team's score is a function of the times of its fastest five runners in that competition. The times of the sixth and seventh fastest runners do not affect the team's success; in the absence of a tie, these times might as well be infinite.

Imagine Arkansas is competing against BYU in the national championship, and that Arkansas's fastest five runners run more quickly than BYU's fastest five runners. Arkansas thus wins the competition, thereby plausibly making the Arkansas team better off than it would otherwise be, and the BYU team worse off than *it* would otherwise be.

Now imagine further that each team's sixth-fastest runner runs exactly the same time. Individually, then, their achievements are identical. If Arkansas-6 (as I will call her) is indeed better off than BYU-6 (as I will call *her*) is, it is *not* because of the former's individual achievement. After all, their individual achievements are identical. Of course, it is highly plausible that Arkansas-6 is better off than BYU-6 is, because she *wants* her team to win, and she *enjoys* winning, and so on. We do not have to talk about team well-being in order to make some sense of the thought that Arkansas-6 is doing better than BYU-6 is.

Next, let us compare Arkansas-6 to someone I will call Arkansas-Fan. Let us stipulate that Arkansas-6 and Arkansas-Fan equally enjoy the fact that Arkansas won, equally want Arkansas to win, and are alike in all their relevant psychological attitudes toward the event of Arkansas's victory. Even so, it seems plausible that Arkansas-6 benefits in a way that Arkansas-Fan does not. After all, Arkansas-6 achieved something that Arkansas-Fan did not, even though her individual time did not affect the outcome of the race. Even though Arkansas-6's time might have been terrible, it was arguably still *some* sort of achievement. We do not have to talk about team well-being in order to make some sense of the thought that, when the Arkansas team wins, Arkansas-6 is doing better than Arkansas-Fan is.

But let us combine the two scenarios. Suppose BYU-6 just *is* Arkansas-Fan. Perhaps before running for BYU's team, BYU-6 grew up in Arkansas, has followed Arkansas's sports programs for years, is happy when Arkansas wins, etc. More specifically, let us assume that her psychological attitudes toward the Arkansas

team's success are essentially the same as Arkansas-6's, and that her individual achievement in the race is the same as Arkansas-6's. Thus, the relevant individual features of the two people are identical. They are equally pleased, their desires are equally satisfied, their individual achievements are identical, and so on. (If we need to suppose further details to make this plausible—Arkansas-6 grew up in Utah, etc.—let us do so.) And yet Arkansas-6 *is* a member of the team that is doing well, while BYU-6/Arkansas-Fan is a member of the team that is not doing so well.

I find it at least plausible that Arkansas-6 benefits from the fact that the Arkansas team benefits *in a way* that BYU-6/Arkansas-Fan does not. When the Arkansas team thrives, its players thereby do better, and this seems to me not to be wholly explainable by focusing on the psychological states and the achievements of the individuals. The fact that the Arkansas team just *is* Arkansas-6 (and some other individuals) seems to be some grounds for thinking that an individual's well-being can be partially constituted by the well-being of a group that *she herself* partially constitutes.

VI

Of course, this case might strike you differently. So, instead, I will play a little defense. Sometimes, the best way to defend a view is to dispel objections to it. Consider, then, the following thought:

> My welfare must not be alien to me, a value that floats down from some Platonic realm and, remora-like, affixes itself to me with little regard to the particulars of my constitution. . . . What counts toward my well-being must not depend on what any other individual, *or group or class* of individuals—actual or hypothetical—is like. It must be possible to specify the ultimate or fundamental conditions for my well-being without making essential reference to other individuals, or to classes or groups of individuals.[23]

The thought here is that if something is *my* welfare, then this cannot depend upon what anything *other* than me is like. Call this claim the *non-alienation claim*.[24] I think there is something right about the non-alienation claim. My welfare must not be completely alien to me. And I will not take issue with the claim that "it must be possible to specify the ultimate or fundamental conditions for my well-being without making essential reference to *other* individuals,

23 Haybron, *The Pursuit of Unhappiness*, 157, emphasis added.

24 Railton ("Facts and Values") is perhaps the *locus classicus* of this non-alienation claim.

or to [*other*] classes or groups of individuals" (emphasis and brackets added), although May's remarks discussed earlier suggest otherwise.

Instead I want to question whether groups that I partially constitute *are* indeed alien to me. For these groups do *not* exist in a "realm" different from the realm I inhabit. Nor are they different from me in the way that a remora is different from me. And some groups to which I belong *do* have some regard for the particulars of my constitution.

Rather, when I am part of a "We," this "We" is *not* something I am separate from, or other than, or alienated from. Put another way, *both* "We" and "I" are first-person pronouns. Just as my finger is not alien from my hand, nor my hand from my body, so too I am not alien from at least some groups that I partially constitute. (After all, we *do* call fingers and hands our *members*.) And, since I am not alien from groups I partially constitute, it still might be true that I do well in virtue of these groups doing well—at least, we should not reject this claim merely due to worries about alienation. Top-down dependence about group well-being, then, need not violate the spirit of the non-alienation claim. In fact, once you appreciate the fact that you can use a first-personal pronoun ("We") to refer to some such groups, perhaps you can see your way to grasping why your individual well-being can indeed directly depend upon the well-being of groups you partially constitute.

How so? Since the experience of being a member of a baseball team is alien to most of my readers, I will return to the example we all understand better. Imagine again an academic department, a department with various members, one of whom is you. Many things might be good for your department. There are at least two ways your well-being and your department's well-being can be tethered together.

First, some things are good for your department in virtue of the fact that they are good for you, or for some other departmental member. For example, if you publish an article, that is good for you, and plausibly what is good for you is also good for your department. This exhibits bottom-up dependence, and it is not very controversial. Second, something that is good for your department might be good for you simply in virtue of caring about your department and wanting your department to do well. Here what benefits your department benefits you, but only in virtue of the fact that you care that your department does well. That is not very controversial either.

But can you also benefit from your department's success not *simply* because your department is in the content of some attitude of yours (e.g., wanting your department to do well), nor because of any other individualistic feature. It might be tempting to think:

> Were I *not* to care for my department, its benefitting would *not* benefit me. So, what is good for my department benefits me individually *only because* I care about my department, and thus there is no genuine top-down dependence.

But I do not think we should draw this conclusion. We first need to disambiguate two claims that are easy to conflate:

1. What is good for my department is good for me merely *in virtue of the fact that* I care about my department's well-being.
2. What is good for my department is good for me *only on the condition* I care about my department's well-being.

According to the first claim, what is good for my department is good for me simply because my department is one of the things I happen to care about, and so when my department thrives, one of my desires is thus satisfied, which, in turn, improves my life. And that is not genuine top-down dependence about well-being.

According to the second claim, caring about my department is a *necessary condition* for it to be true that what is good for my department is thus good for me. If I were to care *nothing* about my department, then perhaps I would not benefit when my department benefits. Perhaps my caring is a necessary piece of what must obtain in order for the well-being of my department and my personal well-being to be aptly linked up. Even so, this would be no barrier to there being genuine top-down dependence about well-being between my department and me. Even if my caring is a necessary condition for the well-being of me and my department to link up, it is still possible for me to benefit *in virtue of* my department benefitting.

Here is an analogy to see how this could operate. It is plausible that having an excellent espresso machine is good for me only on the condition that I am not being tortured. For if I am being tortured, my excellent espresso machine does me no good. Nevertheless, it is false that having an excellent espresso machine is good for me *in virtue of* the fact that I am not being tortured. Rather, it is good for me in virtue of other facts. Nor is there some instrumental relation between the two facts. So, we should not confuse a thought of the form—*p* only if *q*—with a thought of the form—*p* in virtue of *q*.

So, similarly, perhaps what is good for your department is good for you only on the condition that you care about your department, but it may still be false that what is good for your department is good for you only and entirely in virtue of the fact that you care about your department. Perhaps once you *do* care about

your department, your department's success then benefits you *directly*. The simple fact that caring about your department plays *some enabling role* in explaining why your personal well-being depends on the well-being of your department is no real threat to top-down dependence about group well-being. Top-down dependence about group well-being is thus still possible.

Stepping back, perhaps you can directly benefit by your group's doing well even if you *do not* happen to care about the group to which you belong. You might not happen to care about the welfare of the working class; but if you are a member of the working class, an injury to the working class might thereby be an injury to you. You might not be very interested in politics, but the erosion of the rights of the *demos* might immediately disable your own freedoms and capabilities, even if you never notice that you have thereby been harmed. If there is top-down dependence, then *your* well-being essentially depends upon the well-being of the groups to which you belong. As such, it is in your interest to understand whether and how the ups and downs of the groups to which you belong affect the quality of your own life. Beware not only the company you keep, but also the company you constitute.

VII

So far, we have explored the idea that the well-being of a group at least partially depends upon the well-being of the individuals in the group, viz., bottom-up dependence. We have also explored the idea that the well-being of individuals partially depends upon the well-being of the group(s) to which they constitute, viz., top-down dependence. I now want to ask whether it is possible that *both* forms of dependence obtain in one and the same group. How *could A* constitutively depend upon *B and B* constitutively depend upon *A*? Is this viciously circular?

First, note that each form of dependence is only partial. Your well-being might *partially* depend upon the well-being of, say, your department, but also partially depend upon other things. The well-being of your department might likewise *partially* depend upon the well-being of the members of your department, but also partially depend upon other things. If each of those forms of dependence was total rather than partial, then perhaps what I have described would indeed be incoherent.[25] But partial interdependence does not seem to

25 For an energetic defense of the coherence of their identity, see Ford and Laurence, "The Parts and Whole of Plato's *Republic*": "For he [Socrates] denies that there is any meaningful conception of a happy human being that is not simultaneously a conception of a happy community, or any conception of a happy community that is not a conception of just human beings. In that case, justice and happiness, both individual and communal, enter the scene at once, or else do not enter at all."

be blatantly incoherent. This combination of top-down partial dependence and bottom-up partial dependence I will call *bidirectional dependence*.

Bidirectional dependence is an exciting idea, but it prompts a worry. It is easiest to explain this worry by illustration. Suppose bidirectional dependence obtains between your department and its members. Now, suppose you individually benefit somehow—perhaps you discover something important, and this redounds to your individual well-being. Given partial bottom-up dependence, your department also benefits in virtue of your increased well-being. So far, so good. But if partial top-down dependence also obtains, then when your department thus benefits, that is good for you … again. It would seem that you thus benefit *twice*: once when you discover something important, and then again when your department benefits in virtue of the fact that you benefited upon discovering something important.

That seems weird. Moreover, the weirdness does not end there. For if, as described above, you benefit a second time, then this too would seem to benefit your department a second time, if bidirectional dependence obtains. Not only do *you* benefit twice, but your department benefits twice. And there is no reason to stop there. The benefit keeps bouncing up and down. When you discover something important, *that is* good for you, which is good for your department, which is good for you, which is good for your department, which is good for you, *ad infinitum*.

This looks to be a problem. We intuitively know that your personal well-being does *not* rocket to infinity when you discover something important. (Alas!) But it might seem that if bidirectional dependence were to obtain, your personal well-being *would* rocket to infinity when you discover something important. So, we might understandably conclude that bidirectional dependence does *not* obtain. The implications of bidirectional dependence might seem too counterintuitive to embrace.[26]

Nevertheless, I think this problem can be sidestepped, and we can rescue the notion of bidirectional dependence from absurdity. We get the race to infinity if personal and group well-being depend on each other *heavily*. But let us see what happens if they depend upon each other modestly. Let us hyper-artificially assign some numbers to these notions. Suppose your personal well-being begins at 50, and your department's well-being begins at 500. Suppose that 50 percent of your department's well-being depends on the well-being of its five members (10 percent each), while the other 50 percent depends upon other things. Suppose

26 Winter ("On the Possibilities of Group Injury") voices a similar worry about double counting. But it is not *just* double!

further that 10 percent of your personal well-being depends upon the well-being of your department.

Imagine, then, that when you discover something important, your individual well-being goes from 50 to 60, thus increasing by 20 percent. But this also benefits your department. Indeed, 10 percent of your department's well-being depends upon your personal well-being, and so when your personal well-being increases by 20 percent, the proportion of your department's well-being that depends upon your well-being increases by 20 percent. This pushes your department's total well-being from 500 up to 510, an overall 2 percent increase. But this 2 percent increase in your departmental well-being then benefits you individually. After all, 10 percent of your personal well-being depends upon the well-being of your department. This pushes your personal well-being from 60 up to about 60.1, a 0.2 percent overall increase. This 0.2 percent increase in your personal well-being then benefits your department again. It will push your department's well-being up from 510 to about 510.1. But all further reverberations quickly approach zero. Neither your well-being nor your department's well-being skyrockets to infinity. Rather, your personal well-being approaches a number less than 61, while your department's well-being approaches a number less than 511. Bidirectional dependence means that each measure is a *little* higher than it would be if there instead were no such dependence, but as long as the dependence is not heavy, things do not explode in an absurd fashion.

Moreover, there is something *plausible* about this way of conceptualizing well-being. It does seem better for you (1) to be a member of a department whose well-being is rather sensitive to your own individual well-being than (2) to be a member of a department whose well-being is completely insensitive to your own individual well-being. Are you not better off when your department thrives as a constitutive upshot of your thriving—better off than you would be if your department were to do *no* better when you do better? Does it not matter that you matter to your group?

If bidirectional dependence can obtain, we can make better sense of various odd features of social life. For instance, the motto of the Wobblies is that "an injury to one is an injury to all." If there is genuine bottom-up dependence, then an injury to one worker might really be an injury to the union itself. And if there is *also* genuine top-down dependence, an injury to the union might then really be an injury to each union member. So, if bidirectional dependence obtains, the Wobblies' motto is more plausible than it might have initially seemed. Perhaps for some types of groups—ones that are tightly unified and unionized—what helps or harms one member really does help or harm all.

VIII

Which view of group well-being is correct? I see no reason to quickly rule out *any* of the options canvassed above. Perhaps for some kinds of groups, bidirectional dependence obtains; for other groups, only bottom-up dependence obtains; for still other groups, only top-down dependence obtains; and for yet other groups neither form of dependence obtains (that is, the independent conception holds). Each of these logically possible options may be actual in some cases, given what else we know about human sociality. Stepping back further, I also would not be surprised that for some groups, eliminativism about group well-being is correct—perhaps not all groups can be well or ill. The take-home lesson should be that there are quite a few different ways to think about the well-being of groups, and we should not prejudge which of these ways characterizes any particular group.

Can we say more than this? Yes, but not here. I close merely with a suggestion rather than an argument: the nature of group well-being may depend essentially upon the *aims* of the particular group in question. Philosophers tend to think that highly *organized* groups (e.g., corporations, courts) have richer agency, mentality, and responsibility than loosely organized ones. Collins thinks the same way about group duties: whether a group has duties and, if so, how that duty relates to the duties of its members, depends upon the organizational structure of the group in question.[27] But I *do not* think the nature of group well-being closely tracks how organized a group is; the well-being of both highly organized groups (Apple) *and* highly unorganized groups (the Washington Square Park chess players) seem to be rather independent from the well-being of their members.

By contrast, bidirectional dependence most likely obtains for groups (1) whose *function* it is to look out for the well-being of their members (families, schools, unions, religious bodies) and (2) whose members tend to *identify* with the groups. Call such groups *mirror groups*, for the well-being of the group and of their members partially reflect each other. If there are such groups, it is better *for you* both to join flourishing mirror groups (rather than non-mirror groups that are flourishing, or struggling mirror groups, or no groups) and to benefit the mirror groups to which you belong (rather than the non-mirror groups to which you belong, or groups to which you do not belong). This is what true community looks like.[28]

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27 Collins, *Group Duties*.

28 Many thanks to the members of audiences at the Kansas Workshop on Well-Being, St. Louis

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