

Persons, Perspectives, and Full Information Accounts of the Good*

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We often face difficult life decisions in which we must choose between apparently incommensurable paths our lives might follow. To use some rather stark examples, we might have to choose between a secular life and a religious life, between a life in the arts and a life in business, between a life that draws on and enhances our intellectual capacities and one that utilizes and develops our empathic capacities. How are we to compare the desires and aversions, the loves and hates, the pains and pleasures we would have as the different persons we would become were we to choose one way or the other? Whichever choice we make, we will come to value some of those activities and experiences our chosen life makes possible for us, because the choice we make will affect what sort of person we become. For the persons we would become having chosen the religious over the secular life, that life (or least some facets of it) may be better, whereas for the persons we would become having chosen the secular over the religious life, that choice may be better. We wonder, though, whether there is some way to evaluate our options other than from within the standpoints of the lives with which they present us. For it seems that only such an evaluation could determine our real good.¹

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1. For a discussion of the difficulties such cases present for preference-satisfaction accounts of the good, see Allan Gibbard, "Interpersonal Comparisons: Preferences, Good, and the Intrinsic Rewards of a Life," in *Foundations of Social Choice Theory*, ed. John Elster and Aanund Hylland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). Gibbard here defends the nineteenth-century view, citing Sidgwick as one of its proponents, that the problem of "interpersonal" comparisons of utility arises as much in the intraper-

We often think that we could effectively evaluate our options, if only we had simultaneously enough information about what our possible lives would hold for us, about what it would be like to live those lives. We have an ideal of a “birds-eye point of view”—a standpoint fully informed about our possible lives that we as individuals might occupy but that would encompass all the distinct points of view we would have as the persons leading these different lives. It would encompass, for instance, the point of view of an individual as the person she would be having chosen the religious life, together with her points of view as the persons she would be having chosen various secular lives. The individual herself, having access to all these points of view, would be able to compare and choose between the different trajectories her life might follow.

The common idea of a bird's-eye point of view has informed numerous attempts to construct accounts of a person's nonmoral good. In *The Methods of Ethics*, Sidgwick considers the idea that “a man's future good on the whole” consists in “what he would now desire and seek on the whole if all the consequences of all the different lines of conduct open to him were accurately foreseen and adequately realized in imagination at the present point of time.”² John Rawls, following Sidgwick's idea, identifies a person's good with his “rational plan of life,” the plan among those plans consistent with principles of rational choice “that would be decided upon as the outcome of careful reflection in which the agent reviewed, in the light of all the relevant facts, what it would be like to carry out these plans and thereby ascertained the course of action that would best realize his more fundamental desires.”³ Richard Brandt has suggested that we identify what is good with what a person would “rationally desire,” or desire after maximal confrontation with facts and logic.⁴ And most recently, Peter Railton

sonal case as it does between persons, and so the latter cases present no special problem. See Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981), bk. 2, chap. 3, and bk. 4, chap. 1, sec. 2.

2. Sidgwick, pp. 111–12. Sidgwick considers the idea but does not go on to develop it. David Velleman has suggested that Mill's test for the qualitatively better pleasures, which appeals to the reactions of those who have experienced both higher and lower pleasures, might be seen as a precursor of this idea, though Sidgwick appears to provide the first clear statement of it. See J. David Velleman, *Practical Reflection* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989), p. 287, n. 20.

3. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), pp. 417 ff. I refer here to Rawls's “thin theory of the good” rather than his “full theory.”

4. Richard B. Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and the Right* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979), pp. 1, 126–29. Brandt's account is not quite a full information account of a person's good, since he requires that a person be informed only about available information. But it has the structure of such accounts, and the move to full information is a natural development of his position in response to fairly obvious objections which this informational restriction invites.

has defined a person's nonmoral good as consisting in "what he would want himself to want, or to pursue, were he to contemplate his present situation from a standpoint fully and vividly informed about himself and his circumstances, and entirely free of cognitive error or lapses of instrumental rationality."⁵

Naturalistic, dispositional accounts of a person's good such as these incorporate an idealization that seeks (counterfactually) to lift us out of our particular and limited perspectives into the unlimited bird's-eye perspective. With full information about what it would be like to live our different possible lives, our fully informed selves will come to desire that our actual selves pursue one life—or any of several lives that may tie for best—over the others. The accounts thus provide a standard of our good that apparently solves the problem of comparing incommensurable life paths, even if we cannot employ that standard in making our choices. I shall refer to naturalistic, full information views of the kind suggested by Sidgwick and advanced by Rawls, Brandt, and Railton as "Ideal Advisor" accounts of a person's nonmoral good.⁶

5. Peter Railton, "Facts and Values," *Philosophical Topics* 14 (1986): 5–31, p. 16. Also see his "Moral Realism," *Philosophical Review* 95 (1986): 163–207, pp. 173–74. Of course, these views need further refinement, since not everything that a person might want herself to want if fully informed is part of her good or well-being; her good can be given only by some suitably constrained subset of her fully informed desires. I ignore this complication here, since it does not affect my arguments.

6. I attach this label because of the structural similarity of these views to earlier Ideal Observer analyses of ethical concepts. See Roderick Firth, "Ethical Absolutism and the Ideal Observer," in *Readings in Ethical Theory*, ed. Wilfrid Sellars and John Hospers, 2d ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970). Richard Brandt himself notes the similarity in his "Rational Desires," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association* 43 (1969–70): 43–64, pp. 46–47. Yet the fully informed person does not function as a mere observer. Rather, her role is that of (hypothetical) advisor to her actual self. The wants a person who is fully informed acquires for her actual self would, if known to the latter, advise her of what to want or to seek. Ideal Advisor views are "naturalistic" because they hold that normative force can be preserved by a purely descriptive analysis of a person's good, one which does not incorporate any substantive evaluative judgments and which does not contain evaluative vocabulary that cannot itself be analyzed in descriptive terms. By a "substantive evaluative judgment," I mean a judgment about what sort of person to be or what to value or a judgment about features or dispositions of an ideal advisor that would logically entail such judgments. In addition to those listed in the text, Stephen L. Darwall has adopted an Ideal Advisor view, endorsing Rawls's account, in *Impartial Reason* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983), pt. 2; and R. M. Hare adopts an informed preference view akin to Brandt's, endorsing the latter's definition of 'rational', in *Moral Thinking* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), sec. 5.6, pp. 101–6, 214–16. For an earlier account of a person's utility that ties it to her fully informed preferences, see John C. Harsanyi, "Morality and the Theory of Rational Behaviour," in *Utilitarianism and Beyond*, ed. Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 55. For related informed-desire views that reject the notion of full information, see David Gauthier, *Morals by*

Ideal Advisor views have strong intuitive appeal. But the notion of a person being fully informed is more problematic than it may seem, given the widespread use philosophers have made of it. My aim is to expose some of its inherent difficulties. Since Brandt and Railton provide the most developed discussion of what it is for a person to be fully informed, we can best test our ideal of a fully informed standpoint by examining their accounts.⁷ I shall argue that the notion of a person being fully informed faces two fundamental difficulties. First, the “fully informed” person, though purportedly you, may not be someone whose judgments you would recognize as authoritative; thus, Ideal Advisor views lack normative force. Second, because of what it is like to be a person and to have a perspective, it appears that no person can be fully informed. These difficulties suggest that, although our notion of a bird’s-eye standpoint may still serve as a useful regulative ideal in theoretical inquiry about a person’s good, no account that attempts to embody it can be acceptable. In making difficult life choices, we do not face a problem that could be overcome simply by supplying missing information. Rather, we confront limitations that stem from what it is like to be a person and to have a perspective.

NORMATIVITY AND THE BIRD’S-EYE POINT OF VIEW

Our ideal of a bird’s-eye point of view seems to carry normative force: we expect desires or reactions from this standpoint to settle our good in a way that our actual desires do not.⁸ Desires or reactions from this standpoint seem truly informed about all points of view and,

Agreement (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), chap. 2; and James Griffin, *Well-being* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), pp. 13–15. Also see David Lewis, “Dispositional Theories of Value,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 63, suppl. (1989): 113–37. Lewis offers a dispositional account of what it is to be a value and argues that to determine what things are values we need only have “full imaginative acquaintance” with objects, not full information.

7. The differences between Brandt’s and Railton’s accounts (or between either of them and any other Ideal Advisor account) do not affect the generality of my arguments, so I ignore them here. I treat Railton’s position as providing the standard formulation of Ideal Advisor views, since it avoids problems to which other formulations are subject and thus can be regarded as the most fully developed such view. For instance, Railton’s position avoids problems encountered by Brandt’s position because of the latter’s reliance on full available information as opposed to full information, and it avoids problems faced by both Brandt’s and Rawls’s positions that stem from formulating their accounts in terms of first rather than second-order desires. Nevertheless, Brandt provides much useful discussion of what it is to be fully informed, and so I consider his discussion as well as Railton’s.

8. We must formulate the bird’s-eye point of view in terms of reactions, rather than judgments, in order to avoid circularity. On this point, see Firth, p. 207. The reactions which constitute indicators that something is good for a person must presumably be some sort of pro-attitude or affect.

consequently, justified in a way that our ordinary desires and reactions may not be. Moreover, not just any old person occupies this standpoint and determines our good. We ourselves occupy it, and thus reactions from this point of view are those of someone we can and usually do treat as authoritative.⁹

The normative force that our ideal apparently imparts to our fully informed reactions derives from two requirements of normativity which it seems to satisfy, and which Ideal Advisor views seek to satisfy in turn. Call the first requirement of normativity the "internalist requirement." A plausible internalist requirement must be understood to hold not only that an adequate account of a person's good must effect a motivational connection between a person and her good, but that it must satisfy a "double motivational link." The first link effects a motivational connection between the individual and her good under counterfactual or "ideal" conditions.¹⁰ It is implausible to maintain that something can be good for a person only if she actually cares about or desires it; a person's actual desires can diverge from her good. The first link thus holds that something X can be good for a person only if she would care about or desire it for her actual self, at least under ideal conditions.¹¹ These ideal conditions, when properly devised, set necessary and sufficient conditions for when something is a part of a person's good.

The need for a second link to motivation arises because there are many possible sets of "ideal" conditions.¹² What a person cares about for her actual self will depend upon which conditions she is under, but not just any counterfactual conditions are relevant to determining her good. Surely conditions can be relevant only if the actual person

9. Allan Gibbard explores how we treat ourselves, and in some cases others, as authoritative in *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings: A Theory of Normative Judgment* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), chap. 9, esp. pp. 176–79.

10. The internalist requirement thus holds that accounts of what is good for a person must satisfy what Darwall has called "existence internalism": it is a necessary condition on something being good for a person that she be capable of caring about it. The contrast is with what Darwall calls "judgment internalism," which holds that a person cannot sincerely judge something good unless she feels some tendency to care about or be moved by it (see *Impartial Reason*, pp. 54–55). David O. Brink draws a related distinction between what he calls "agent internalism" and "appraiser internalism" in *Moral Realism and the Foundations of Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 40.

11. I say "care about or desire it for her actual self" because we must distinguish between what a fully informed person would care about or want for herself as fully informed and what she would care about or want for her actual self. See Railton, "Moral Realism," p. 174 n. 15; and Griffin, *Well-being*, pp. 11–12.

12. The notion of "ideal" conditions should be understood in Firth's sense. The adjective "ideal" is not intended to carry moral or other evaluative connotations but merely to indicate that those conditions realize certain characteristics "to an extreme degree" (Firth, p. 203).

would care about the fact that something would prompt her concern under those conditions. Thus, a second link to motivation must be satisfied, one that effects a motivational connection between an individual and information about her counterfactual desires or concerns. This link provides a necessary condition on ideal conditions. Notice that the second link does not unrealistically require that a given thing X itself actually motivate a person or prompt her concern. But it would be just as unrealistic to require that information about her counterfactual desires motivate a person under her present conditions, whatever they might be. The second link must thus be understood to require only that such information motivate a person under “ordinary optimal conditions”—whatever normally attainable conditions we ordinarily regard as optimal for reflecting on judgments about our good. Such conditions include that a person be paying attention, that she be free from emotional distress or neurotic worries, and that she not be overlooking readily available information.¹³ According to the second link, then, a person must be capable of caring under ordinary optimal conditions about the fact that she would care about X for her actual self under a specified set of ideal conditions.

Many considerations support construing a plausible internalist requirement in this way. Let me here briefly offer just two. First, the intuitive idea behind internalism about the good is that a person’s good cannot be completely alien to her.¹⁴ But a thing can be alien to a person in either of two ways. It may be something that she is incapable of caring about under any conditions whatsoever; or it may be something she would care about only under conditions that are irrelevant to the concerns persons typically have when they wonder whether something is good for them. Imagine, for instance, an account of a person’s good according to which her good consists in what she would want were she under conditions of complete sensory deprivation. If an account of a person’s good is to satisfy the intuitive idea behind internalism, it must incorporate only counterfactual conditions that bear a reasonable relationship to the concerns that animate inquiry into our good—at least those concerns we have under ordinary optimal conditions. It must, that is to say, effect a double link to motivation.

13. Ordinary optimal conditions are simply whatever minimal conditions we already think need to be met in order for a person sensibly to contemplate questions or judgments about her good. What counts as ordinary optimal conditions is, I believe, a linguistic question, one about what is presupposed in ordinary discourse about a person’s good. My arguments do not presuppose a definitive answer as to what all of these conditions are, however, and so I shall not try to specify them further. They do presuppose, though, that such conditions include that a person understand what counterfactual conditions actually involve. For related discussion, see James Drier, “Internalism and Speaker Relativism,” *Ethics* 101 (1990): 6–26, pp. 12–14.

14. See Railton, “Facts and Value,” p. 9.

Second, it is widely accepted that judgments about a person's good carry recommending force, whether one holds that this is a conceptual or merely a contingent feature of such judgments. Unless a person would care, at least under ordinary optimal conditions, about the fact that she would want something under a certain set of counterfactual conditions, an account of a person's good will be hard-pressed to explain how it is that judgments about her good normally have recommending force.¹⁵

Of course, it is not enough that counterfactual conditions forge a link to motivation. In addition to their recommending force, judgments about our good have a critical character. We know that our actual desires and aversions can be ill informed, based on mistakes in reasoning, or due, for instance, to traumatic or atypical experiences.¹⁶ Something that we desire can be good for us, we think, only if that desire is in some sense justified or defensible. If an account of a person's good is to capture this critical character, it must satisfy a "justificatory requirement": something can be good for a person only if it meets certain epistemic standards or standards of rational consideration.

Ideal Advisor views appear to do well at meeting these two requirements of normativity. Proponents of these views hold that persons have two general epistemic concerns, at least under ordinary optimal conditions, when they wonder whether what they desire is good for them: Do I know enough? Am I being sufficiently rational?¹⁷

15. I say "would" care about the information under ordinary optimal conditions because the canonical way to determine whether a person could care about something under certain conditions is to place her in those conditions and find out whether she would care about it. I develop these considerations and offer yet others in support of the need to effect a double link to motivation in "Internalism and the Good for a Person" (unpublished manuscript). Proponents of Ideal Advisor views do not explicitly endorse the need for a double link to motivation. But the arguments they offer in support of their views suggest that they implicitly recognize that their accounts must satisfy the second link in addition to the first. See Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and the Right*, pp. 154–59; Railton, "Moral Realism," pp. 177–78, and "Facts and Values," pp. 13–14, 17. One might think that proponents of full information views can avoid the problems that I shall be raising for Ideal Advisor views by abandoning internalism in favor of externalism about a person's good. Externalist full information views would hold that an individual's good consists in whatever she would *judge* to be valuable for herself if she were fully informed and rational. While we can imagine such views, they would not only face general difficulties for externalist views; they would incorporate a circularity that defeats the point of naturalistic, dispositional accounts of value (see n. 8 above).

16. Brandt discusses these sorts of "mistaken desires and aversions" in his "Rational Desires," as well as in *A Theory of the Good and the Right*, chap. 6. Also see Rawls, pp. 419–20.

17. See Railton, "Moral Realism," p. 177. I have argued elsewhere that these questions do not exhaust our concerns in wondering what to desire and who to be ("Naturalism, Normativity, and the Open Question Argument," *Nous*, in press). Also

We believe that our desires are more defensible to the extent that they are better informed and rationally based. Ideal Advisor views thus identify a person's good with what she would want her actual self to want from a standpoint in which she was fully informed about her nature and circumstances, and fully rational in the sense that she suffers no cognitive defects and makes no instrumental mistakes in reasoning.

It is important to notice that while this ideal standpoint alters a person's epistemic condition, it does not by design alter her personal characteristics. It does not require, for instance, that a person be rendered perfectly benevolent as well as ideally informed. On the contrary, the proposed idealization holds a person's personality constant, permitting only those changes that would result from fully informing her and improving her reasoning. By holding an individual's personality constant in this sense, proponents of Ideal Advisor views seek to do two things. First, they seek to avoid importing any substantive evaluative judgments into their accounts.¹⁸ To substitute for an individual's own personality certain ideal motivations would be to import such judgments. Second, they attempt to isolate with respect to each person what someone like *her* would come to desire with full information, thereby allowing each individual to serve as her own ideal advisor.¹⁹ Since we ordinarily regard our own judgments as authoritative, they thereby seek to insure that we will each regard as authoritative the reactions of our fully informed selves.

Because Ideal Advisor views hold a person's personality constant and constrain counterfactual conditions to meet those epistemic concerns we ordinarily have when we wonder whether something is good for us, their proponents believe that these views capture both the critical character and the recommending force of judgments about our good.²⁰ The information that you would desire X for yourself under the specified conditions will have pull for you, even if X itself still fails to move you.

see J. David Velleman, "Brandt's Definition of 'Good'," *Philosophical Review* 97 (1988): 353–71.

18. Brandt is most explicit about this. He defines 'good' to mean 'rationally desired', and contends that his definition of 'rational' does not "import any substantive value judgments" (see *A Theory of the Good and the Right*, p. 13).

19. Railton appears to have this in mind when he tells us that "the idealization holds fixed the individual's non-belief properties, so that the contribution of these features to desire-formation would remain largely the same" (Facts and Values," p. 20). Again he tells us, "We, in effect, hold this basis as nearly constant as possible when asking what someone like *him* would come to desire—or, more precisely, would come to want that he pursue were he to assume the place of his original self" (p. 23).

20. Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and the Right*, p. 15, and chap. 8, pp. 154–59; Railton, "Facts and Values," p. 16, and "Naturalism and Prescriptivity," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 7 (1990): 151–74, p. 154. Also see Rawls, sec. 62, pp. 404–7.

THE NOTION OF BEING FULLY INFORMED

According to Ideal Advisor views, then, a person's good is revealed by the reactions she would have were she to occupy a fully informed standpoint. But what constitutes being fully informed? It might seem that being fully informed is just a matter of having all information. A person would be fully informed if she were given all information, assuming certain minimal requirements on conditions under which the information is transmitted—she was paying attention, for instance, and was not suffering from abnormally impaired cognitive capacities.²¹ We recognize, however, that a person can be informed in this sense while failing to “appreciate” the facts.

Etymologically speaking, a consideration can “inform” a person only if it gives form *to* that person in the sense that it “sinks in” or “animates” or “takes hold” of her. To be informed, a person must not merely be given information, but must “receive” or “appreciate” this information; she must have understood it in a way that allows it to exert whatever motivational effect it will. If an account of what it is to be fully informed is to have normative force, it must overcome what I shall call the “problem of appreciation”: the problem of the gap between merely having information and appreciating it.

W. D. Falk has explored the problem of appreciation in “On Learning about Reasons.”²² He there objects to the Humean view that guidance by reason is exhausted by knowing the facts.²³ One can know the facts, he observes, without appreciating their relevance. Indeed, “The obtuse man would not be obtuse if he did not already know the facts.”²⁴ Falk remarks, “There is knowing the story of the reasons; there is also rehearsing this story to oneself at the right time and in the right way. Rationality in conduct owes much to knowing the right story, but it owes just as much to a regimen of telling to oneself the same old story all over again. Without this, one may have cured people's ignorance of the relevant facts, having enlightened and educated them, as much as is humanly possible, and still not have made them ‘see reason.’”²⁵

21. I shall assume that the notion of “full information”—of being informed about “everything”—is sufficiently clear. For considerations that raise serious doubts about this, see Velleman, “Brandt's Definition of ‘Good,’” pp. 364–71.

22. W. D. Falk, “On Learning about Reasons,” in *Ought, Reasons, and Morality: The Collected Papers of W. D. Falk* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986).

23. Falk does not actually believe that Hume himself held what he calls the “Humean” view. See his “Hume on Practical Reason,” in *Ought, Reasons, and Morality*. Also see Stephen Darwall's review of *Ought, Reasons, and Morality* in *Journal of Philosophy* 86 (1989): 208–14.

24. Falk, “On Learning about Reasons,” p. 71. Also see his “Action-Guiding Reasons,” in *Ought, Reasons, and Morality*.

25. Falk, “On Learning about Reasons,” p. 78.

Falk himself draws certain conclusions about how to solve the problem of appreciation, building further requirements of rationality into his own account of guidance by reason. To insure that people have considered information in the way that rationality requires, he claims, they must not only know the facts but consider them at the right time, for the right length of time, and “without mental reservations.”²⁶ Proponents of Ideal Advisor views attempt to address the problem Falk calls to our attention, at least in part, by building into their idealizations the further requirements that he cites.

Richard Brandt tells us in his discussion of “cognitive psychotherapy” that for information to register fully, a person must repeatedly represent all information to herself, at the right time, and in an “ideally vivid way.” By “ideally vivid way,” he means that she “gets the information at the focus of attention, with maximal vividness and detail, and with no hesitation or doubt about its truth.”²⁷ Thus, the smoker cannot merely be taught information about the hazards of smoking. Instead, information must be vividly and repeatedly represented to him at times when reflection on the bad effects of smoking is more likely to impinge on his current desires, such as “just after inhaling, when the reflection may destroy any pleasure he ordinarily takes in the cigarette.”²⁸ Brandt attempts, through the devices employed in cognitive psychotherapy—the requirements that information be will-timed, repeated, and maximally vivid—to plug the gap between mere receipt of information and appreciation of it.

Peter Railton addresses the problem of appreciation while responding to worries about whether there is a determinate answer as to what an individual would want under conditions of full information.²⁹ His solution, like Brandt’s, requires that information be fully vivid. The difficulty, Railton observes, is that vividness depends upon a person’s receptivity. “Receptivity, in turn, will depend upon an individual’s personal history. This gives rise to the observation that it may make a great difference to the motivational effect of a bit of information whether the individual has had some experience that would serve to give it life. . . . When, in the present idealization, it is required that information be fully vivid, *it is in effect required that the individual have undergone whatever experience or education would be necessary for this.*”³⁰

26. Falk, “Action-Guiding Reasons,” p. 97. Falk sets out these requirements in the context of explaining how a revised Humean view of reasons as causes can account for how a person can fail to be moved by the fact that X is a necessary means to her desired end Y.

27. Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and the Right*, p. 111.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 112.

29. Railton, “Facts and Values,” pp. 21 ff.

30. *Ibid.*, n. 16, emphasis added. Railton goes on to say, “Fortunately, as fiction and drama show, not every fact need be directly experienced in order to make a profound

Railton thus generalizes the devices that may be needed to insure that information is rendered fully vivid for a person.

Brandt and Railton construe the problem of appreciation as involving a gap between merely having information and having it in a fully vivid way. Unfortunately, the notion of "full vividness" is never clearly explained. It sometimes seems to depict a feature of representations of information.³¹ But information can be represented in diverse ways—pictorially or verbally, for example—and within each medium of representation different modes of representation are possible. We can represent information from close up or far away, in the form of a poem or of a scientific report. Varying representations differ in kind rather than in degree of vividness. It thus seems implausible to think of some representations as "most vivid" on a single vividness scale.³²

More often, though, the notion of full vividness appears to describe the way in which a person receives information. Since my concern here is not to challenge this notion, I shall suggest that we interpret it causally as follows. Let us say that a person has received information in a maximally vivid way when no more detailed representations of it and no representations of it in yet different media or modes of representation would further alter her reactions. That is to say, information has been rendered maximally vivid when its motivational impact as a function of types of representations has been exhausted.³³ By interpreting the notion in this way, we avoid two difficulties: first, we avoid the hopeless task of trying to explain which representations of information are most vivid; second, we avoid treating information as maximally vivid only when it motivates the recipient in a specific way, which would risk importing substantive evaluative judgments. Construing maximal vividness in this way is of a piece with

impression upon us. A well-told or well-acted or well-filmed tale, perhaps one that connects with whatever kinds of experience one already has had, may do the job."

31. See *ibid.*, pp. 21–22.

32. Velleman makes these points in "Brandt's Definition of 'Good,'" pp. 367–68. It will not help to appeal instead to Sidgwick's vague notion of information being "adequately realized in imagination."

33. Railton proposes something like this understanding of full vividness, though as a way of addressing the problem that different modes of presentation of information might be equally vivid, but different in effect (see "Facts and Values," p. 22). He says that a person must also have facts about how differing representations of information affect her so as to offset effects of differential representation. I assume that any such information is included in full information and need not be used to characterize the notion of full vividness itself. Treating maximal vividness as a causal notion is in keeping with other features of these accounts. Brandt, e.g., construes the notion of "relevant" information causally (see *A Theory of the Good and the Right*, pp. 12, 112). Velleman considers a way of understanding full vividness related to the one that I have suggested and explores some of the difficulties it presents for Brandt's theory (see "Brandt's Definition of 'Good,'" pp. 368–70).

treating fully informed attitudes as those which would stably emerge with increasing information. We can treat those cases in which a person's reactions to information would not stabilize as cases in which there is no fact of the matter about what her fully informed desires would be.

Brandt's and Railton's discussions suggest the following notion of what it is for a person to be fully informed: a person is fully informed when she has received all information in a maximally vivid way and so has no doubt about its truth, and when no further repetitions or differently timed presentations of that information will further alter her reactions to it.³⁴ When a person is fully informed in this sense, she not only knows the facts but appreciates them. Notice that this notion of being fully informed does not tie appreciation of information to particular affective reactions. Different individuals may be equally well informed while reacting to information quite differently.

DO IDEAL ADVISOR VIEWS CARRY NORMATIVE FORCE?

Ideal Advisor views seem to carry normative force, for they develop an ideal standpoint that apparently addresses those concerns we have when we long for a bird's eye-point of view. There are reasons to doubt, however, that they do have normative force. A person will have to change markedly to become fully informed, and Ideal Advisor views lack the resources to guarantee that the fully informed person, though purportedly oneself, is someone whose reactions an individual either will or should regard as authoritative.

What Can Be Informing for a Person

As we have seen, proponents of Ideal Advisor views attempt to resolve the problem of appreciation by requiring that a person undergo whatever education and experiences are necessary to render information fully vivid. The problem of appreciation does not arise, however, simply because we need experiences or education for information to register. It has its root in what it is like to be a particular person.

34. This way of construing the notion of being fully informed is certainly not unproblematic. For instance, repeated representations of information may diminish or enhance desires and aversions without improving a person's epistemic position. For detailed discussion of such difficulties, see Don Loeb, "Full Information Accounts of Rational Desire and Individual Good" (unpublished manuscript). It is difficult to say just when repeated representations or more varied kinds of representations cease to enhance a person's understanding or appreciation of information, without assuming that certain reactions to information are appropriate. Since no proponent of an Ideal Advisor view has resolved this problem, and since Brandt and Railton themselves treat the notion of being fully informed as a causal notion, I believe this characterization fairly represents their positions. The difficulties I wish to raise do not, in any case, depend upon specific problems for this construal of being fully informed.

We ordinarily think that any particular person will be unable to appreciate certain facts, given what she is currently like. Because of her intellectual and psychological features, she occupies a point of view, a perspective from which she views the world and which determines what can be informing for her. Her features affect what can be received and how it will be assimilated. We see how intellectual features affect what can be informing, for instance, when we teach. Unless and until we explain material in a way that a particular student can understand, what we say cannot be informing for her.

Psychological features also affect what can be informing for a person. Consider the person who holds an ideal of complete honesty but who lacks empathy. Such a person will kindly declare to you her real feelings about you or helpfully assist you in realizing your true faults. She will not hesitate to lay the blame where she thinks it is due or to tell you how to conduct yourself if she judges that you need guidance. If you express your discomfort with her revelations and advice, she will clearly explain to you that this is (again) your problem. Information about how her controlling activities affect those around her cannot be informing for such a person. Just as what can be informing for her is a function of her personality structure, so what can be informing for us is a function of our personalities, or more generally, of who we are at a time.

If a person is to appreciate information, then, she must be capable of receiving it. For this, more will be needed than to eliminate her cognitive shortcomings and give her information. Other barriers to receiving information must be removed. Some barriers can be overcome simply by the devices Falk and Brandt propose, such as properly timed transmission and repetition of information and correction of mistakes in reasoning. As Railton observes, however, other barriers will be overcome only if a person undergoes education or experiences of a kind sufficient to render information fully vivid. What's more, barriers may be overcome only if a person changes either prior to or by means of undergoing those very experiences; she must become someone capable of receiving information that she cannot now receive. Where such change is impossible, a person may forever remain uninformed about certain matters. The experiences a person must undergo in order to appreciate information may enable her to appreciate it only by changing her quite dramatically. This will certainly be the case for the person who is to compare what her various possible lives would be like for her as the persons she would be were she living them. To appreciate what these different lives would be like for her, experience will be required—in the extreme, the experience of living those lives as her possible selves. She must, to use Mill's apt phrase, engage in "experiments in living."

How we assess any given experience, however, will depend upon our prior and subsequent experiences, as well as on our traits and motivational systems. If a person is successful to compare her possible lives, the process of rendering her fully informed will have to overcome not only the problem of appreciation but what I will call the “problem of experiential ordering.”

The problem of experiential ordering is akin to the problem of ordering of information explored by cognitive psychologists. Experiments in cognitive psychology show that we tend to be swayed irrationally by the order in which information is presented to us, so that we are led to make judgments unsupported by the evidence.³⁵ How we assess information tends to depend on the order in which we receive it.

How we experience things similarly depends upon the order in which we experience them. Poverty after wealth is experienced differently than poverty after near poverty or wealth after poverty. Of course, the problem of experiential ordering differs from the problem of ordering of information in one important respect: the fact that how we assess things is affected by the order in which we experience them does not exhibit any specifiable cognitive shortcoming. Still, we often revise our estimations of the value of what we experience in light of other and later experiences. So the process of fully informing a person will need in some way to offset the effects of experiential ordering, by requiring, for instance, that a person experience all lives (or whatever is necessary for her to appreciate what those lives would be like for her as the self who lives them) in all possible orders.³⁶

Think about the changes a person would have to undergo to be fully informed about herself, her circumstances, and all the possible

35. Richard Nisbett and Lee Ross report various experiments that document ordering effects in *Human Inference: Strategies and Shortcomings of Social Judgment* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1980). In one reported experiment, subjects observed a target person who was attempting to solve a number of multiple-choice problems. Although the target person always solved the same number of problems, subjects tended to rate a target person who solved more problems early as higher in intelligence than one who solved more problems later (see p. 174).

36. I will not explore here whether the “all possible orders” move really resolves the difficulty. I simply point to a problem for Ideal Advisor views that needs a solution. Because the effects of experiential ordering do not exhibit any specifiable cognitive error, we cannot counteract them by supplying the information that an ordering effect is in play, as we can in the case of cognitive shortcomings. Of course, we do assess critically how we experience things, based on our concerns about experiential ordering effects. For instance, we sometimes discount our desires or attitudes when we understand them to have followed upon a traumatic episode. But on the other hand, we sometimes think trauma heightens the accuracy of our perceptions. In any case, since what is good for us is supposed to depend upon our reactions, we cannot readily say what the errors are in the case of reactions to our experiences without begging the question of what is good for us.

trajectories her life might follow. At a minimum, she would have to have capacities of reason, memory, and imagination far surpassing those she actually has.³⁷ She would have to be able to have all of the necessary experiences and keep them clearly before her mind, remembering them as experienced in themselves and as experienced in relation to what comes before and after. In addition, she would have to retain features of her personality that enable her to experience her lives as she would as the persons living them, desiring and being motivated as she would be from within those lives, while losing all features of her personality that keep her from absorbing information. At the end of the process of imaginatively surveying her possible lives in all their permutations, she must have what we will later see to be problematic—traits that enable her to appreciate what each experience was like, rather than traits that enable her to appreciate only some experiences while not appreciating others.

Even if we assume that we are still imagining a person at the end of this process, it is surely a person radically different from (albeit continuous with) the person who underwent idealization.³⁸ We will have learned what “she” would want with full information, in the sense that it is this very individual who underwent the process of idealization; her personality was held “constant.” And we will have learned what someone “like her” would want, in the sense that it was this sort of person who underwent the process. But surely we have not learned what *she* would want, or even what someone *like*

37. In “Moral Realism,” Railton introduces the notion of an “objectified subjective interest” of an individual A as follows: “Give to an actual individual A *unqualified cognitive and imaginative powers*, and full factual and nomological information about his physical and psychological constitution, capacities, circumstances, history, and so on” (pp. 173–74; emphasis added). In “Facts and Values,” he seems to have a less extreme picture in mind (see his characterization of an individual’s good on p. 16 and his discussion of determinateness at pp. 22–23).

38. An initial puzzle concerns which you we are to idealize. According to Ideal Advisor views, a person is to be fully informed, while holding her motivational system constant. But at what point in her development is a person to become fully informed about the life paths open to her? We might start when she is a baby, or during puberty, or when she turns twenty-one. The question, consequently, concerns *which* motivational system, which her, is to be held constant. The point at which we start importantly affects the results of the inquiry, both because certain possibilities may already be foreclosed to a person given her development to date, and because what her motivational system is like will depend upon when we begin, on the ways in which *it* has developed to date, and this in turn will affect how she will react to information and what can be informing for her. We can pose the problem in a way that does not exploit the unique features of childhood development. Where a person can undergo experiences that will change her motivational system, e.g., we must wonder whether her idealized self provides the answer as the correct course to take before or after the change in her motivational system has occurred.

her would want, in the senses in which we ordinarily understand these terms.³⁹

Given the changes that a person must undergo to become fully informed, Ideal Advisor views do not guarantee that we are the persons who occupy the ideal standpoint. A person might thus plausibly contend that the fully informed person would not really be her, just as we now often contend that the person who would result from a procedure that changed us in ways we regard as alien would not be us. This consideration suggests that you will not be motivated upon learning of the desires of your fully informed self by the consideration that it is “you,” but rather it will be “you” only if you are motivated.

Reinterpreting the Bird’s-Eye Point of View

Proponents of Ideal Advisor views may rightly argue that it does not matter whether, in our ordinary sense, we ourselves occupy the ideal standpoint. We need to interpret our ideal of a bird’s-eye point of view less literally. After all, we did not desire to survey our possible lives as our imperfect, unreasonable selves. We wanted to survey them as our “better selves.” As long as the fully informed standpoint speaks to those concerns that led us to seek the bird’s-eye point of view in the first place, we can accord normative authority to the reactions of the person who occupies that standpoint.⁴⁰ Her reactions are fully informed and are directed at the interests of the actual person, with her limitations and her possibilities. The recommending force of judgments about our good, they might argue, is thus preserved.

But Ideal Advisor views do not even guarantee that the fully informed individual is someone we can accord normative authority. Contrary to what these views suggest, the qualities of being fully in-

39. To insist that we will have learned what she would want is to be committed to an extremely controversial view about personal identity. According to this view, an individual who results from a series of changes in a person is identical with that person no matter how radically different she is or, we might add, no matter whether that person herself or some alien force initiates those changes. On the latter point, see Christine M. Korsgaard, “Personal Identity and the Unity of Agency: A Kantian Response to Parfit,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 18 (1989): 101–32, pp. 122–23. To insist that we will have learned what someone “like her” would want is to be committed to an equally controversial view about what it is to be a certain sort of person.

40. Peter Railton has suggested such a possibility. One might reply to the argument of the preceding section that all that matters is that the person who results from being fully informed be “appropriately continuous” with the actual individual. For purposes of identity, such continuity of personality may indeed be sufficient. But the correct reply is that all that matters is that the resulting individual have those features we seek in an ideal advisor. That is because the issue concerns normativity, not personal identity. A person’s reactions might not be recommending for me, even though she is appropriately continuous with me; conversely, a person’s reactions might be recommending though she is not continuous with me.

formed and rational are not sufficient to render someone an ideal advisor. How a person would react from the ideal standpoint is a function not only of full information and rationality but of her traits and motivational system. What a given individual's motivational system will be like once she is fully informed will depend upon what it was like before she was fully informed and how it has changed as a result of idealization. In order for us to be sure that we can regard the fully informed individual as authoritative, we must have a conception of what it would be for an individual's motivational system to change for the better, and thereby a more substantive conception of an ideal advisor—one that incorporates an ideal of the person. In addition, we must have good reason to believe that the process of idealization invariably changes a person's motivational system for the better. By appealing to the fully informed reactions of an individual herself, proponents of Ideal Advisor views have tried to develop a standard of our good that avoids relying on substantive evaluative judgments, such as judgments about appropriate ideals of the person. But as I will try to show, there is no neutrality to be had here.

Proponents of Ideal Advisor views might respond in one of two ways to the claim that the qualities of being fully informed and rational are not sufficient to render someone an ideal advisor. First, they might directly dispute the claim. They might insist that, regardless of her other features, being fully informed and rational is enough to make someone an ideal advisor, relative to those concerns that attracted us to the ideal of a bird's-eye point of view.

An immediate difficulty, of course, is that we have no conclusive reason to believe that all fully informed individuals would have the same reactions, since in the ordinary case persons have distinct features and these lead them to react differently to information. Since any fully informed and rational person equally possesses these qualities of an ideal advisor, proponents of Ideal Advisor views must tell us which one a person must accord authority. To do this, however, they will need to defend a particular vision of the ideal advisor.

Even if all fully informed individuals did have the same reactions, surely this would not show that we must accord them authority. Suppose that the process of fully informing did lead all or even most of us to have the same reactions, but that we all became callous or self-destructive. It would seem more reasonable to conclude that the process destroys our capacities as judges of our good, rather than inexorably renders us ideal. To insist otherwise is really to adopt a certain ideal of the person as "critical purist," rather than to remain neutral as between ideals. According to this ideal, a person must accept as authoritative her fully informed reactions, regardless of the changes that idealization happens to effect in her or of the reactions it leads her to have due to the contingencies of her psychology. Brandt's discus-

sion of his method of reforming definitions reflects this ideal when he describes the method as one in which we first “frame our questions clearly” in terms of criticism by facts and reason “and then go out to find answers, letting the chips fall where they may.”⁴¹ Of course, it is open to proponents of Ideal Advisor views to defend their ideal of the person. But we have good reason to reject it. For the ideal holds hostage to psychological contingencies the answers to our most urgent self-regarding normative questions.⁴²

As a second possibility, proponents of Ideal Advisor views might acknowledge that the qualities of being fully informed and rational are not sufficient to render someone an ideal advisor. But they might argue that the process of fully informing a person and heightening her cognitive capacities will itself equip her with any other qualities we might reasonably regard as essential to an ideal advisor. Suppose that we can agree on what these qualities are. The suggestion then is that becoming fully informed and rational will also render a person benevolent, patient, and kindhearted, for instance, rather than indifferent, impatient, and hardhearted. We know in the ordinary case, however, that further information and experience can further harden a person’s heart.⁴³ Why think that in the limiting case, the hard heart would become a tender one? Whatever qualities we might agree upon, nothing about the structure of Ideal Advisor views gives us conclusive reason to believe that the process of becoming fully informed and rational will endow a person with those qualities rather than ones opposed to them. Admittedly, the counterfactual case is no ordinary case, but if we are to speak sensibly of it we must extrapolate from the ordinary case. The fully informed person is, of course, supposed to determine what she would want the actual person to want, were she about to assume the place of that person. But this fact does not insure that the fully informed person will react as would someone the actual person might regard as an ideal advisor, since it does not insure that she has the traits the actual person would seek or ought to seek in an ideal advisor.

Ideal Advisor views do not guarantee that the individual who occupies the ideal standpoint is someone whose reactions we would regard as authoritative. They thus lack normative force since they do not secure

41. Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and the Right*, p. 3. Also see p. 245. For criticism of Brandt’s claim that the method of reforming definitions “lets the chips fall where they may,” see Nicholas Sturgeon, “Brandt’s Moral Empiricism,” *Philosophical Review* 91 (1982): 389–422.

42. I borrow this basic point from Allan Gibbard, who uses it in a different context. See *Wise Choice, Apt Feelings*, chap. 10, pp. 196–97. Obviously, more would need to be said to assess this ideal fully.

43. The example is Velleman’s (“Brandt’s Definition of ‘Good,’” p. 360).

the second link of the internalist requirement. The concerns that attract us to the bird's-eye point of view are not met by accounts that fail to guarantee that choices between our possible lives and selves are made by someone whose reactions we can reasonably regard as authoritative.

WOULD THE "FULLY INFORMED" PERSON BE FULLY INFORMED?

The notion of a person being fully informed faces a second problem: because of what it is like to be a person and to occupy a perspective, it appears that no person could be fully informed. I shall here present considerations intended to raise doubts about whether we have a coherent picture of the fully informed person. The problem comes through most clearly under those very conditions that attract us to our ideal of a bird's-eye point of view—those in which we must compare very different possible lives and selves.

The picture we are asked to imagine of the fully informed person is exceedingly complex. Recall that she must have capacities of reason, memory, and imagination far surpassing our own; and she must have had whatever experiences are needed to appreciate what her possible lives and selves would be like in such a way as to offset the problem of experiential ordering, so that she is now positioned to compare them. A person cannot be sufficiently informed about her possible lives merely by being given certain facts about what each would be like—that it would involve certain frustrations and successes, gains and losses, pains and pleasures. She must also be informed about what it would be like for her from the standpoint of the person she would be if living it, motivated as she would be from within that life, desiring some things and spurning others. Otherwise, she will not have been informed about something that is crucial to comparing lives: the feel of living that life as that person. In order to be thus fully informed, she must be capable of both acquiring all of the necessary experiences and keeping them clearly before her mind. For this she must, on the one hand, retain cognitive features and features of her personality that enable her to experience her lives as she would as the persons living them and, on the other hand, lose all features that create barriers to acquiring further information. Once having experienced her lives, she must be able to recall what each life was like for her as the person she was when living it.

Of course, we are unable, for epistemic reasons, among others, to fully inform a person. Perhaps if we had a highly sophisticated psychological theory, we could engage in theory-assisted extrapolations to determine how an actual individual's desires might evolve with increasing information.⁴⁴ But we cannot, as a practical matter, fully

44. Railton suggests this possibility in "Facts and Values," pp. 19–20. And Lewis suggests something like it (p. 122).

inform a person. Moreover, no actual person could be fully informed, it appears, without violating laws of psychology and physiology. Yet however complex, the notion of a fully informed person may itself seem unproblematic.

Let me explain briefly one specific practical problem about fully informing a person, so that it will not be confused with the problem that I wish to raise. This problem is that acquiring some information may interfere with a person's ability to acquire other information. If you first experience your possible life as a Marxist atheist, this may prevent you from accurately experiencing your possible life as a nun. The beliefs and attitudes you took on while experiencing the first life now obstruct the bliss you would otherwise have felt in the second life.⁴⁵ To sidestep this problem, I will assume that there is a way to give a person an unadulterated experience of each of her lives.

The Basic Model of the Fully Informed Person

The idea of a person who is fully informed about her possible lives draws its intuitive plausibility from cases in which it seems not only conceptually but practically unproblematic for a person to be fully informed. Consider the person who is choosing between thirty-one flavors of ice cream. She can choose in an informed way only among those flavors that she has tasted. She will have tasted certain flavors in the past, and so will be informed about how they taste to her. She will have to sample as yet untasted flavors, perhaps more than once, to be informed about them. Once she has sampled all the flavors, though, she need only decide which flavor appeals to her more.

Notice that a person does not lose information about how a particular flavor of ice cream tasted as a result of going on to taste other flavors. And she need not, on each occasion of choice, retaste every flavor to make an informed comparison. Nor need she be able at one and the same time to call to mind the flavors of different ice creams, say, licorice and peach, in order to choose in an informed way between them. Once having tasted the various flavors enough to fix them in her memory, she is as fully informed as she need be or could be about how they taste to her. All she need do is recall their tastes, or more simply, whether she liked them. Indeed, remembering how a certain flavor of ice cream tasted is curiously like tasting it now.

There are complications, to be sure. For one thing, our tastes change. As a child, you may have liked only chocolate ice cream, which you now dislike. You may instead favor coffee chip, a flavor you wouldn't have enjoyed then. Our tastes also "develop," as we sometimes say, particularly in the case of changes in our tastes for wines

45. David Sobel explores this problem in detail in "Full Information Accounts of Well-being," *Ethics* 104 (1994): 784–810.

and other “delicacies.” In some cases, too, we deliberately cultivate a taste for things that we previously did not enjoy. These complications, however, do not undercut what we might call “the basic model” of the fully informed person.

Trying on and comparing lives might seem to be much the same thing as tasting and comparing flavors of ice cream. It is simply a more complicated enterprise, and for the reasons discussed earlier, one that we cannot actually undertake. Yet that does not undermine the plausibility of a criterion of a person’s good that appeals to the notion of being fully informed.

How Apt Is the Basic Model?

But how apt is the basic model as applied to a comparison of possible lives and selves? The most conspicuous difference between comparing ice cream flavors and comparing lives is that lives are intricate wholes that can be evaluated along many more dimensions. They can be evaluated, for instance, in terms of whether they are more or less contented or challenging, peaceful or exciting, happy or meaningful, and they can be evaluated additively or in terms of their narrative structure.⁴⁶ Moreover, a single life includes many varied kinds of experiences, and a person’s possible lives may differ greatly in the experiences they contain. In contrast, the tastings of various ice cream flavors are a more uniform kind of experience. These differences, however, still speak only to the relative complexity of the comparisons.

Another difference, however, is more serious. How a given flavor of ice cream tastes to a person does not seem to depend upon her cognitive features and features of her personality in the way that her experiences of life events do. The “bon vivant” might not find so enjoyable or attractive those activities that sweep him up were he not inclined to discount options that are not immediately available. But this tendency won’t alter whether he likes the taste of cherry ice cream. The worrier might enjoy recreational activities more were she only able to stop dwelling on what might go wrong. But her worrying won’t affect whether she prefers vanilla to rocky road. The obtuse person’s obtuseness will not influence whether she enjoys chocolate ice cream, but it will influence whether she responds to a crying friend with sympathy or irritation.

The influence of our cognitive features and personalities might not pose a problem for comparisons of our possible lives if the same features always affected how we perceive our experiences. But we change, even within a life. In significant ways, we are often not the

46. For a discussion of additive vs. narrative ways of evaluating lives, see J. David Velleman, “Well-being and Time,” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 72 (1991): 48–77.

same persons through the one life we actually lead, and the selves we might be in our sundry possible lives will surely differ in more marked ways. Because our features affect the quality of our experiences, partly making them what they are for us, and because our features can change, there is no such thing as “what the experience is like for me.” Rather, there is “what the experience is like for me, given what I am like at time T.”

The fact that our motivational and cognitive features affect how we experience things poses a deeper problem than it may initially seem. For it suggests a tension between what it is like to be a particular person and what is required in order for a person to be fully informed. Part of being a particular person with particular traits is occupying a point of view—one that involves a certain way of seeing, feeling, and evaluating and which gives access to certain information while making other information inaccessible. If a person is to be fully informed, however, she must be able to enter into all her possible points of view. She must be capable of now appreciating all her lives as the persons she would be if living them—side by side, so to speak. The problem concerns how she can occupy a point of view that gives her equal access to viewpoints that may be in direct conflict, each excluding information accessible from the other.

As a person is becoming fully informed, she will need to take on her possible points of view. To experience life A as the person she would be in A, a person will need to take on A’s point of view and thus to have certain motivational and cognitive features. To experience life B as she would be in B, a person may need to have different motivational and cognitive features. But the person who is to compare lives A and B will have yet different features. Some of these are cognitive features that correct for or expand her actual cognitive powers. They are thus features that she did not have in either life A or B and that would have altered her experience of those lives had she had them. Other features are simply the by-product of the processes she must undergo in order to become fully informed. Yet her features collectively must enable her simultaneously to be informed about what lives A and B were like for her as the persons she was when living them, so that she occupies a point of view that makes each viewpoint accessible. The problem thus more specifically concerns what features might enable a person to be informed in this way.

To illustrate the difficulty, consider again our obtuse friend who holds an ideal of complete honesty. She will experience her life and the events within it as she does because of both her cognitive features and her personal traits. So long as she continues to be obtuse and insensitive, she will be oblivious to her own feelings and to those of others and will be incapable of seeing her controlling behavior as anything but helpful, though misunderstood. She can’t help it, after

all, if other people will not face up to the truth about themselves. Imagine, however, that her possible lives include one in which she is especially sympathetic, tactful, and generous. Within this life, she will likewise respond to and experience events as she does because of what she is like.

Now it is clear that the obtuse person cannot know what it is like to be the sympathetic person, at least not so long as she remains as she is. That, after all, is in keeping with what we mean by being obtuse. Nor can the sympathetic person know what it is like to be the obtuse person. Her very traits are such that certain events call forth in her particular responses. She sees a friend's failings as calling for support. She responds automatically to perceived distress. Being as she is, she cannot fail to see the distress or to respond to it as she does, nor can she see what she now sees as distress as merely irrational behavior in need of correction. She can, of course, know that the obtuse person either fails to see distress or sees it in that way. She may even have some understanding of the obtuse person's reaction. But that is not the same thing as seeing it the way she does or knowing what that is like.

Consider next the fully informed person who is to compare lives. She will have far greater cognitive capacities of reason, memory, and imagination than she would have within any of her possible lives. Indeed, she had better not have these capacities *while* she is experiencing each of her lives. For undoubtedly she would experience any life differently than she would as the person living it if she were to experience it with stronger capacities of reason, memory, and imagination than she would have as the person living it. Painful experiences might be more painful than they would have been otherwise, for instance, if one had a better memory. One might have worried even more, with greater capacities of imagination. Or less, with enhanced reason. The person who is to be fully informed must somehow acquire these features later in the process, so as not to interfere with the experience of her lives.

As a person is experiencing each of her possible lives, she will need to have the traits or personality that she would have as the person living that life, since these affect how she would experience it. When she experiences the life of her obtuse self, she had better be oblivious, for instance, and when she experiences the life of her sympathetic self, she had better have the requisite sensitivity. But when it comes time to compare these lives, a person must have features that enable her to appreciate both what it is like to be her obtuse self and what it is like to be her sympathetic self.

Presumably, the fully informed person cannot herself be obtuse or insensitive, for then she would not be able to appreciate what it was like to be her sympathetic self. Insofar as she is obtuse or insensi-

tive, she will be unable to grasp what it would be like to be self-reflective and responsive to others. Notice, however, that the idealization described by Ideal Advisor views does not rule out the possibility that the fully informed person would be obtuse. As we saw earlier, a fully informed person would have whatever traits she would come to have as a result of the changes effected in her preexisting traits by the process of idealization. Nothing about the process ensures that a person will have a particular set of traits rather than some other set, except, of course, that this set must include those cognitive traits which the idealization requires. It might well be that the effect on a particular person of experiencing all her possible lives is numbing, so that her insensitivity deepens. Clearly, then, it matters what traits the person who undergoes idealization has at the end of the process, since not just any traits are compatible with her being fully informed.

It might seem that, having gone through the process of living her various lives, and having the capacity to remember her experiences, a person is bound to have acquired features that permit her access to information about all of her lives. But what traits might enable a person to appreciate side by side what it is like to live lives of possible selves whose traits are so at odds? Is the fully informed person a hybrid, for instance, someone who is at once perceptive and sensitive, obtuse and controlling? Well, not all at once; these traits cannot, as a conceptual matter, operate at one and the same moment with respect to one and the same thing. Even if they could, how would the presence of such mutually conflicting traits ever permit a person to unite her experiences in one mind and compare them? Surely this will not do.

Proponents of Ideal Advisor views might respond to the problem I have been developing in one of two ways. First, they might suggest that it does not matter what traits the fully informed person acquires. It will matter, of course, insofar as a fully informed person's traits affect how she reacts to information about her different lives; that is just the problem about normative force that we explored earlier. But perhaps it does not matter to the question of whether a person can be fully informed. As long as a person can remember what her different lives were like for her as the persons she was living them, then regardless of what traits she has come to have as a result of her experiences, she will still be in a position to compare her different lives and selves. If her memory functions properly, once having experienced these lives, she can call up their feel and flavor to her as the persons she was living them, in the way that she can call up the tastes of chocolate and rocky road. She may no longer be those selves and may no longer see, experience, and evaluate things as she did when she was those selves, but that does not matter. She does not thereby lose any information. Indeed, in a curious way, she may, at least in some cases, better appreciate what it was like to be a certain self after she

no longer is that self. For she may have words to describe her feelings and inner life, whereas she was formerly inarticulate about them. To surmount the problem, then, a person must simply remember what her experiences were like for her as a person with certain traits, now that she is a person with very different traits.

The difficulty for this suggestion is that there is no reason to think that our traits affect how we remember (memory itself being a kind of experience) any less than they affect our other experiences. If a person must have certain traits in order to experience something in a certain way, it seems she must also have those traits (or at least ones which are similar enough to allow her access to the same information) in order to remember what it is like to experience that thing in that way. In order for the obtuse person to be fully informed about her life as a sympathetic person, she must take on those qualities and have the requisite experiences. But suppose the effect of idealization is, ultimately, to entrench the obtuse person's features. If she cannot now see another's distress as calling for a sympathetic response, it is unclear how she could accurately remember what it was like to so view it. In order to recall what it is like to see another's distress as calling for a sympathetic response, it would seem that she must now be capable of seeing another's distress in that way.

Obtuseness may seem a special case, since it involves an incapacity to grasp certain information. But we can substitute other traits instead which, like obtuseness, Ideal Advisor views lack grounds to preclude but which give us similarly problematic results. Suppose, then, that the obtuse person undergoes idealization and that the process removes her obtuseness but also renders her cynical and distrustful. Now she must simply recall the experiences that she underwent and compare them. She must remember and evaluate what she experienced as a tactful, sympathetic person, from the standpoint of her cynical, distrustful self. Being cynical isn't the same thing as being oblivious. But if she really is a cynic, then her cynicism will likely affect her recollection of what it is like to be trusting and optimistic. Suppose she does remember her experience, but remembers it with disdain. Does that count as remembering what it was like for her as the person who had the experience? Or consider a different example. Suppose that before she was fully informed, a person was lighthearted and had a wonderful sense of humor but that the effect of fully informing her is that she has lost her sense of humor. If she can no longer find things funny, it is hard to see how she could remember what it is like to find things funny. When we remember what it was like when we found something funny, we are likely to find it funny again.

Just as how a person experiences her lives is a function of what she was like when she went through them, so it would appear that how she remembers her experiences of those lives as those selves is

affected by what she is like as the person who remembers them. In this way, remembering our life experiences is unlike remembering the thirty-one flavors of ice cream that we have tasted. Since how we experience a flavor of ice cream does not depend upon our features, recalling what a flavor tasted like will also generally not depend upon our features or how we may have changed personally. I may like chocolate through a variety of personal changes.

Our own experiences indicate that while we can sometimes recapture perspectives we occupied at previous times in our lives, often we are quite unable to do so. We may be unable, for instance, to recapture the perspective we had before undergoing an important kind of training or therapy, or before we fell in or out of love for the first time, or before we experienced a particular trauma or revelation. Our inability is not due to insufficient memory or imagination but to the character of the change that we have undergone. This is not to say that we can never recapture what earlier parts of our lives were like, for surely we can, but unless we have undergone very marked personal changes, that is what we should expect.

As a second possible reply to the problem I have been developing, proponents of Ideal Advisor views might argue that certain features can enable a person to be fully informed, having access to all her possible points of view. The process of idealization does not, of course, logically exclude the possibility that the obtuse person, for instance, would emerge obtuse. But it makes this possibility empirically unlikely, since she will have to take on other traits in order to acquire information about her other possible lives. If a person emerges obtuse at the end of the process of idealization, then she is admittedly not fully informed, but only because the process has somehow gone awry.

Until we know what traits might permit a person access to her possible points of view, though, we will lack a clear picture of what it would be for the process not to go awry. Consider what may seem the most plausible candidate for such a trait. The obtuse person undergoes experiences of her different lives, and the effect is to remove her obtuseness and render her not merely sympathetic but empathic. Of course, we have no reason to suppose that the effect of fully informing persons would be to render them empathic. But we could amend Ideal Advisor views to hold that a person's good is indicated by what she would want herself to want were she fully informed, rational, and empathic. Counterfactually rendering a person empathic, unlike rendering her benevolent, arguably need not import any substantive evaluative judgment, and so the amendment preserves the spirit of these views.

The second reply thus formulated has intuitive appeal. Traits can be more or less restricting, allowing access to more or less information. We think that the person who is really repressed, for instance, is sealed

off from all sorts of information. And we often think of the empathic person as having a broad receptivity. She is able to set aside her own feelings and outlook and to take on the feelings of others, to understand their points of view. If the person who has undergone idealization is empathic, then it might seem that all she need do is remember her experiences. Since she is able to take on the feelings of others and to appreciate their points of view, presumably she can also take on in memory the feelings and points of view of her possible selves. She can slip in and out of her possible selves, as it were, and then compare her experiences.

Although this reply seems promising, it is doubtful that the ordinary notion of empathy can do the work that is here being asked of it. We do think of the empathic person as someone who is able to appreciate how others feel and view things. But I doubt that we mean by this either that the empathic person literally takes on another's point of view or that she completely sets aside her own perspective. We seem to mean instead that she understands another's thoughts and feelings, possibly by drawing on her own similar experiences, and perhaps also that she responds in an uncritical way. And what the empathic person understands is not an entire outlook but feelings that are common human responses to particular situations. The empathic person will still have her own perspective. Some ways of seeing and responding to things will come automatically to her and others will not. Compare what it would be like for the obtuse person to remember having to contend with that obnoxious homeless person on the street corner and what it would be like for the empathic person to remember what it was like for her as the obtuse person to contend with that obnoxious homeless person on the street corner. The memories ought to be the same, if the empathic person is indeed fully informed, but whether they would be is unclear. Whether empathy can do the necessary work, then, is certainly not settled by the very concept of empathy. Thus, to say that the person who is fully informed is empathic does not settle the question of what traits a person might have that would give her access to all her possible points of view.

Of course, Ideal Advisor views idealize a person's memory and other cognitive capacities. Perhaps they might also equip a person with a kind of "ideal empathy" which does include the capacity completely to set aside one's own perspective and literally to take on the perspectives of others. But if we are puzzled about what traits a person might have that would enable her to take up diverse perspectives, I suspect that we will be just as puzzled about how ideal empathy works. The problem thereby reemerges at another point. Related problems surface with it. Given what it is like to be a person and occupy a perspective, is it possible for anyone to be ideally empathic? Would the ideally empathic person retain enough perspective of her own to compare and choose

between possible lives? These problems are vexing and should lead us to doubt that we yet have a clear picture of the fully informed person.

Perhaps, though, we have just imagined the fully informed person in the wrong way. Instead, we should suppose that fully informing a person will simply wash away any traits that obstruct her access to information and, hence, that would influence how she remembers her experiences. But if fully informing a person succeeded in washing away such traits, it would arguably leave her with no point of view at all: she would have no traits that could lead her to react in one way rather than another to her experiences and would therefore lack any reactions that could indicate her good.

The foregoing considerations at least suggest that the notion of being fully informed employed by Ideal Advisor theories cannot figure in a plausible analysis of our notion of a person's good.⁴⁷ But two final points are in order. First, my arguments have focused on the problem of how a person might occupy a perspective that gives her equal access to lives in which she would have conflicting traits. The problem is made worse when we consider that the perspectives given by a person's possible lives involve not only differing traits but conflicting commitments and belief systems.⁴⁸ The fully informed person will have a vastly different belief system from that of the persons she would be in her various possible lives, and these beliefs will surely affect her efforts to call up and compare what those lives were like.

Second, my central example has been of two lives which are such that, apparently as a conceptual matter, a person cannot simultaneously be fully informed about both. This example would seem to show that a person cannot be fully informed—unless, of course, her possible lives include no lives that so deeply conflict. It is a complicated question how we should understand the notion of the lives “possible” for a person. Attempts to restrict what lives are possible for someone entangle us in difficult questions about free will, without clearly

47. I have examined the idea of a fully informed standpoint only as it pertains to accounts of a person's good, though my arguments have implications for appeals to a fully informed standpoint to address the problem of interpersonal comparisons of utility or well-being. See R. M. Hare's discussions of hypothetical role reversals in *Freedom and Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), chap. 6, and *Moral Thinking*, chap. 5. For early critical discussion of Hare's role reversal arguments, see C. C. W. Taylor, critical notice of *Freedom and Reason*, *Mind* 74 (1965): 280–98, pp. 286–91; Harry S. Silverstein, “A Note on Hare on Imagining Oneself in the Place of Others,” *Mind* 81 (1972): 448–50; Michael H. Robbins, “Hare's Golden-Rule Argument: A Reply to Silverstein,” *Mind* 83 (1974): 578–81. More recent discussion can be found in James Griffin, “Well-being and Its Interpersonal Comparability,” in *Hare and Critics*, ed. Douglas Seanor and N. Fotion (Oxford: Clarendon, 1988).

48. Sobel nicely develops this consideration and draws out certain problems that it poses for Ideal Advisor views.

avoiding the kind of problem cases that I have presented. For this reason, I have all along treated the notion as including any lives that are not logically impossible or nomologically impossible given the facts about a particular person's nature. On this understanding, there is no reason to assume that any actual individual will not have among her possible lives ones that involve conflicts of traits and attitudes, and thereby of perspectives, like those in my examples. Our notion of a person's good is not, in any case, restricted to those of us whose range of possible lives and selves is sharply limited.

CONCLUSION

The two objections that I have raised against Ideal Advisor views share, at least in part, a common source. The process of idealization that these accounts envision is purely causal. Only a person's cognitive features are fixed; what other features a person would have when fully informed is an empirical question. As a consequence, Ideal Advisor views can neither capture the normative force of our notion of a person's good—which does not await an answer to this empirical question—nor explain how a person can be fully informed. To solve either problem, it appears, Ideal Advisor views would need to employ an idealization that fixes a person's noncognitive features, and it is not obvious what way of fixing them would both capture normative force and provide for a coherent picture of the fully informed person.

I have argued that Ideal Advisor views face certain problems because of what it is like to be a person and to occupy a perspective. My objections should not be taken to imply, however, that we are each hopelessly glued to our own standpoints. We certainly can achieve critical distance on our desires and our lives, and one important way of doing so is by acquiring more information. Moreover, I grant that there may be some things we would want and others we would reject no matter what perspective we occupied. But these considerations are compatible with nearly any account of a person's good and lend no special support to Ideal Advisor views.

Our attraction to such views and to the ideal of a bird's-eye standpoint reflects our peculiar predicament. As persons, we occupy a point of view. Yet, as many have observed, we have the capacity to step back from that point of view, insofar as we can critically reflect on our lives and our selves. Our attempts to design vantage points outside of us spring from our distinctive capacity as persons for self-reflection and from a desire to move beyond the limitations that come with occupying a particular point of view.

The difficulties for Ideal Advisor views suggest, however, that the notion of a bird's-eye point of view is too problematic to serve as a constitutive ideal, an ideal that tells us what constitutes a person's good. Theories of the good for a person that attempt to embody it

will simply not be plausible on reflection. Yet I suggested at the outset that it may still be serviceable as a regulative ideal, an ideal that guides theoretical inquiry about a person's good.⁴⁹ As such, it bids us to construct theories of a person's good that afford us a critical perspective on our lives and choices, one sensitive to relevant information and rationality, while reminding us, in keeping with the internalist requirement, to ground a person's good within her affective reach.

49. I owe the idea of using the label 'regulative ideal' to Meredith Williams.