13

Duty, Goodness, and God in Thomas Reid's Moral Philosophy

Terence Cuneo

What did Reid say about how considerations of moral duty and well-being should motivate an agent? And how did he think of the relationship between virtue and well-being? My purpose in this essay is to explore these questions, paying special attention to a pair of claims that Reid defends. The first is that considerations of duty should have motivational priority over those of well-being. The second is that virtue and well-being necessarily coincide. Reid's defense of the first claim, I contend, consists in a multi-layered argument against rival eudaimonist views that builds upon Butler's arguments against Hobbesian egoism. I further suggest that this anti-eudaimonist polemic provides important clues as to why Reid also found utilitarianism wholly unattractive. Reid's defense of the second claim, which concerns the coincidence between virtue and well-being, also has several dimensions, including an appeal to the claim that one cannot achieve a significant degree of well-being apart from having the virtues. I suggest that its deepest component, however, is an appeal to a species of moral faith that emphasizes the moral importance of trust in divine benevolence.

13.1 The rational principles of action

Imagine yourself up late at night, entirely absorbed in a good book. As you glance at the clock, you remember that you must be up very early the next day to prepare for a presentation at work. You very much want to finish the chapter you're reading, however. But you also have a responsibility to be ready for the day ahead – a responsibility, let it be added, that you desire to fulfill. What should you do?

As a rational agent, you needn't simply capitulate to the strongest desire you have at this time, for you have the ability to step back from your desires and critically assess them. To use Reid's terminology, you have the ability to "manage" and "regulate" the various impulses that can move you to action by asking yourself whether you *ought* to act on one or another of them. All

our actions, says Reid, are such that we can regulate them "according to a certain general rule, or law" (Reid, 1969b, p. 222). But in light of what, in this case, should you regulate your conduct? How should you rank the various desires that vie for your allegiance?

In most cases, Reid says, by appealing to either of two "rational principles" – what he calls our "good on the whole" and "duty." (I say "in most cases" because Reid allows for cases of unmotivated action in which an agent acts on a mere whim; see Reid, 1969b, IV.iv.) Concerning our good on the whole, Reid says the following:

> As we grow up to understanding, we extend our view both forward and backward. We reflect upon what is past, and, by the lamp of experience, discern what will probably happen in time to come. We find that many things which we eagerly desired, were too dearly purchased, and that things grievous for the present, like nauseous medicines, may be salutary in the issue.
>
> We learn to observe the connections of things, and the consequences of our actions; and, taking an extended view of our existence, past, present, and future, we correct our first notions of good and ill and form the conception of what is good or ill upon the whole. ...
>
> That which, taken with all its discoverable connections and consequences, brings more good than ill, I call *good upon the whole.* (Reid, 1969b, p. 205)

As for duty, Reid says that the notion is "too simple to admit of a logical definition," although he is happy to give various examples of duties, such as the duty to "to fortify our minds against every temptation ... by maintaining a lively sense of the beauty of right conduct" and "to prefer a great good, though distant, to a less" (Reid, 1969b, pp. 223, 362). Most important for present purposes, however, is not Reid's particular characterization of what a duty is or what counts as a duty, but his claim that among the principles to which rational agents appeal when evaluating various motivational impulses and action plans are not simply prudential but moral ones.

Reid's view, then, is that when evaluating various courses of action, the practically rational agent asks himself two questions: Would acting in such-and-such a way be detrimental or conductive to my overall welfare? And would acting in that way be to conform with what is morally required or appropriate? By setting up the structure of rational agency in this fashion, Reid thereby accepts a version of the doctrine of dual affections, a view most prominently defended by Duns Scotus, according to which all acts of the will stem from an affection for either advantage or justice.[1] As we'll see in a moment, Reid believes that there are two important relations between the rational principles of which we should take note. Before we turn to that

matter, however, let me offer several comments upon what Reid says about the rational principles.

First, although welfare concepts play a fairly prominent role in Reid's account of practical reasoning, he says relatively little about that in which an agent's welfare consists, commenting only that it involves "a correct judgment of goods and evils, with respect to their intrinsic worth and dignity, their constancy and duration, and their attainableness" (Reid, 1969b, p. 215). While not terribly informative, this abstract characterization of an agent's good on the whole suggests that, for Reid, an agent's welfare consists not so much in a life that is enjoyable or satisfying as in a life that is well-lived – one that is appropriately sensitive to the goods and evils of this world. In this respect, Reid's views regarding welfare are rather far removed from the utilitarians and Kant, falling more nearly in line with Stoics such as Cicero, from whom he quotes at some length when explicating his own view (cf. Reid, 1969b, p. 206).

Second, like Bishop Butler, Reid maintains that an agent's conception of her own welfare is general in character, having as its object a property that attaches to an agent's life comprehensively considered. In this sense, an agent's conception of her good upon the whole is distinguished from other "animal principles" of action, such as benevolent motives, which have particular things, such as persons, as their object. As we'll see shortly, Reid's claim that welfare concepts are both general and extremely complex does important work in his brief against eudaimonism.

Third, it is important to see that Reid's claim that mature human agents have a conception of their good on the whole is supposed to have polemical force. At the outset of his discussion of the rational principles of action, Reid announces that his aim is "to show, that, among the various ends of human actions, there are some, of which, without reason, we could not even form a conception" (Reid, 1969b, p. 202). According to Reid, however, to establish this is to make an important point against Hume. For, if Reid is correct, Hume radically instrumentalizes practical reason. According to Reid's construal of it, the aim of Humean practical reason is not to determine the ends that we should have, but merely to ascertain how most effectively to satisfy our passions (Reid, 1969b, p. 202; cf. also Reid, 1969b, p. 68). Although the point is easy to miss in Reid's discussion, by appealing to the doctrine of dual affections, Reid is making an anti-Humean point. In particular, he takes it to be evident that we can form a conception of our good on the whole and regulate our actions in accordance with it. But if we can do this, Reid contends, then Hume's account of practical reason cannot be correct. We can reason not just about means but also ends. Moreover, if Reid is correct and it is the province of reason to form a conception of one's good on the whole, then Hume's more extravagant claims about reason also cannot be correct. For, if Reid is right, not only is it reason's province to form a notion of one's good upon the whole, it is also its role to guide action in

such a way that it is conducive to one's own good. It cannot be true, then, that it is not contrary to reason for an agent to prefer his lesser good to his greater, as Hume claimed.

The two rational principles of action, then, for Reid, are principles that guide action. As I indicated earlier, however, Reid holds that they stand in a certain kind of relation to one another. We can better identify this relation, by having the notion of *motivational primacy* before us.

Suppose we say that a state of affairs P has motivational primacy for an (ordinary adult) agent S just in case three conditions are met. First, in a wide range of ordinary cases, P is a type of consideration in light of which S would act. Accordingly, were S to deliberate about what to do, P is a type of state of affairs that S would, in a wide range of cases, not only use to "frame" his practical deliberations, but also endeavor to bring about. *That my loved ones flourish* is such a state of affairs for many of us.

Second, P is a sufficient reason for S to act. Roughly put, P is a sufficient reason for S to act just in case S takes P to be a reason to act and would endeavor to bring about P even if he believed (or took it for granted) that his doing so would not bring about (or increase the likelihood of his bringing about) any further state of affairs that he values. Imagine, for example, S is like many of us inasmuch as he takes himself to have a reason to bring about the flourishing of his loved ones. This is a sufficient reason for S to act because he would endeavor to bring about the flourishing of his loved ones even if he believed that his doing so would not bring about any further state of affairs that he values, such as his *gaining increased notoriety among his peers*.

Third, P has deliberative weight for S. For our purposes, we can think of this as the claim that P is a reason of such a type that, in a wide range of circumstances, S takes it to trump other types of reasons, even other sufficient reasons. Many of us, for example, hold *that there is a beautiful sunset on the horizon* is a sufficient reason to stop whatever we are doing and enjoy it. Still, for most of us, that an act would bring about or preserve the flourishing of our loved ones has greater deliberative weight than this. If a person had to choose between enjoying a beautiful sunset, on the one hand, or protecting her child from danger, on the other, then the latter reason trumps.

At any rate, having introduced the notion of motivational primacy, I can now identify two claims that I take to be the centerpiece of Reid's discussion of rational motivation. The first of Reid's claims concerns which considerations should have motivational primacy for an agent. It is:

> **The Hierarchy Thesis:** In any case in which an agent must decide what to do, considerations of what is morally required should have motivational primacy. Specifically, what is morally required of an agent should have motivational primacy over what he takes to be his good on the whole.[2]

Having established a hierarchy among the two rational principles of action, Reid also defends:

> **The Coincidence Thesis:** In worlds such as ours, virtue and well-being are necessarily coextensive. It is impossible for a virtuous agent to perform her duty and that not contribute to her overall well-being.

There are several ways to defend this latter claim. One would be simply to identify well-being with virtue; this secures their coextensiveness rather neatly. Another is Reid's preferred strategy, which is to claim that, in any world that is under the governance of a benevolent deity, virtue and well-being cannot come apart. In what follows, I shall consider Reid's defense of these two claims.

13.2 The hierarchy thesis

There is a long tradition in ethics that inverts the hierarchy of motivation that Reid wishes to defend. Eudaimonist positions, as I'll understand them, maintain that when an agent deliberates about what to do she assumes, or ought to assume, that considerations concerning her own well-being or eudaimonia have motivational primacy in a very robust sense.[3] Every act that an agent performs, say eudaimonists, either is or should be taken for the sake of his own happiness. Accordingly, if eudaimonism is true, an agent operates, or ought to operate, with the following principle of action selection: perform only those actions that, to the best of one's knowledge, positively contribute to one's own well-being or eudaimonia. Moreover, in so doing, an agent treats, or ought to treat, considerations concerning her own well-being as being both a sufficient reason to act and having deliberative weight. When asked: "Why did you do that?" an agent's ultimate justification will, or ought to, appeal to the way in which acting in that fashion contributes to her own well-being.

Reid, as I've indicated, rejects eudaimonism thus understood. The character of Reid's rejection, I suggest, comes into sharper focus if we situate it between two trends in the history of British moral philosophy. On the one hand, it will be helpful to look backward to see Reid's view as part of a broader anti-eudaimonistic movement in British moral philosophy. On the other hand, it will be useful to look forward to developments in the commonsense school to gain a better picture of why Reid resisted certain broadly utilitarian trends that would come to dominate ethical theory.

Three tasks, then, will occupy me in this section. The first is to highlight the ways in which Reid's anti-eudaimonism is an extension of Butler's attack on eudaimonism. Having done this, I'll then present Reid's own anti-eudaimonistic arguments, which build upon Butler's. And, finally, I'll argue that, despite the subsequent utilitarian trajectory of the commonsense school, there is a principled rationale to be found within Reid's anti-eudaimonism for resisting this trend. Reid's arguments for The Hierarchy Thesis provide reasons not only for rejecting eudaimonism, but also any other view that attempts to ground moral duty in considerations of the well-being of all.

The Butlerian background

Consider what we might call the "standard Scholastic view" regarding rational agency, which is comprised of a trio of claims. In the first place, the Scholastic view tells us that every thing has a natural inclination to achieve its own perfection or eudaimonia. Second, in rational beings, this inclination is identified with "intellective appetite" or will. Third and, finally, the will is such that when something is presented to it as being constitutive of an agent's eudaimonia or happiness, that agent cannot help but will it. In its totality, this view no longer had currency among philosophers in Reid's day, as it had been supplanted by a variety of views concerning agency that rejected Scholastic faculty psychology. But elements of it survived. In particular, if Butler is correct, Hobbes accepted the Scholastic thesis that the will is necessarily oriented toward happiness (although Hobbes rejected the Scholastic account of that in which happiness consists). It was this claim about the will's orientation toward happiness that Butler attacked in his sermons given at Rolls Chapel.

Distinguish, said Butler, between the particular passions, on the one hand, and an agent's orientation to secure his good on the whole, on the other. The particular passions, such as resentment or gratitude, Butler claimed, have as their object not general states of affairs but concrete, particular things. The object of an agent's resentment, for example, is another person. One's inclination to secure one's good on the whole, by contrast, has as its object not particular things but something highly complex and general, viz., the property of what is good for an agent, comprehensively considered. Now consider, Butler asked, the character of actual human action. It would be bizarre, argued Butler, to claim that in every case in which an agent acts, he acts to bring about or otherwise realize his own well-being, as he understands it. Consider, for example, someone who is "abandoned" or entirely invested in securing his own pleasure. It would be, Butler claimed, "ridiculous to call such an abandoned course of pleasure interested [i.e., a case of self-love] when the person engaged in it knows beforehand ... that it will be as ruinous to himself as to those who depend on him" (Butler, 1841, p. 26; cf. pp. 193, 204). The abandoned agent is motivated not by a concern for his own well-being, but by particular passions. To think otherwise is to miss altogether the distinction between these two fundamentally different principles of action.

I believe it is safe to assume that Reid took Butler's attack on eudaimonism to be decisive: there is no plausibility to the idea that agents

necessarily will their own happiness, as they understand it (cf. Reid, 1969b, pp. 122–123). Accordingly, the type of eudaimonism implicit in the standard Scholastic view was, for Reid, not a live option. But Butler's attack left a different type of eudaimonism untouched, one according to which the *practically rational* agent takes her own well-being to have motivational primacy. According to this view, whatever may be the case about how agents actually act, they ought to view their own well-being as having motivational primacy.

As we'll see in a moment, Reid no more than Butler wished to recommend a picture of agency according to which agents should disregard or ignore their own well-being. "To serve God and be useful to mankind, without any concern about one's own good and happiness," Reid writes, is "beyond the pitch of human nature" (Reid, 1969b, p. 219). Furthermore, Reid holds that, when properly understood, a concern for one's good on the whole "leads us to the practice of justice, humanity, and all the social virtues" (Reid, 1969b, p. 215). In this sense, Reid is no Stoic. He does not think we can fail to be invested to a significant degree in our own well-being in the broad sense in which he understands it. He also believes that a concern for one's own welfare thus understood leads to the cultivation of virtue. Still, Reid insists that our good on the whole ought not to be the "only regulating principle of human conduct" (Reid, 1969b, p. 216). Why?

For four reasons. First, Reid claims that "the greater part of mankind can never attain such extensive views of human life, and so correct a judgment of good and ill, as the right application of this principle requires" (Reid, 1969b, p. 216). Reid's point here is that a principle of action should be action-guiding. It should be the sort of thing that, in a wide range of cases, an agent could consult when determining what to do and thereby come to understand what she ought to do. The principles of morality are action-guiding. "Every man of common understanding," says Reid, "who wishes to know his duty, may know it" (Reid, 1969b, p. 370). But gaining a conception of one's good on the whole, let alone an accurate one, and an understanding of what genuinely contributes to it, is something that is very difficult to do. It requires – to advert to a passage quoted earlier – that one "observe the connections of things, and the consequences of our actions," thereby "taking an extended view of our existence, past, present, and future." Many ordinary persons will have neither the time nor the ability to do this, let alone actually gain an accurate notion of that in which their good on the whole consists. If this is right, however, then one's good on the whole is not sufficiently action-guiding to be the most general and fundamental principle of action, as eudaimonists claim.

Second, because one's good on the whole is concerned not only with present satisfaction, but also with the enjoyment of future goods, it proves not to be as motivationally charged as one might hope. We would like to have a clearer and more efficacious guide to conduct. Reid puts the point thus:

> Men stand in need of a sharper monitor to their duty than a dubious view of distant good. There is reason to believe, that a present sense of duty has, in many cases a stronger influence than the apprehension of distant good would have of itself. And it cannot be doubted, that a sense of guilt and demerit is a more pungent reprover than the bare apprehension of having mistaken our true interest. (Reid, 1969b, p. 217)

Duty is, then, according to Reid, in many cases, a better guide to action than interest. Moreover, it is often motivationally more powerful than an appeal to interest, as it connects more intimately with powerful motivating considerations such as one's own guilt.

The third point that Reid makes is that, although "a steady pursuit of our own good may, in an enlightened mind, produce a kind of virtue which is entitled to some degree of approbation, yet it can never produce the noblest kind of virtue, which claims our highest love and esteem" (Reid, 1969b, p. 218). So, Reid's view is not that a concern for one's own well-being is crass egoism or self-centeredness. To the contrary, there is something admirable about it; to pursue one's own well-being properly requires virtue. For example, if concern for one's self is such that it helps one to discount temptations to a life of ease, leisure, or frivolity, then it is much to be admired (cf. Reid, 1969b, p. 218; but also cf. Reid, 1969b, p. 363).[4] That said, to be genuinely dedicated to the moral life, one cannot grant motivational primacy to one's good on the whole. For our esteem, Reid writes, "is due only to the man whose soul is not contracted within itself, but embraces a more extensive object: who loves virtue, not for her dowry only, but for her own sake: whose benevolence is not selfish, but generous and disinterested" (Reid, 1969b, p. 218). This is a point to which I will return later, but for now the point to emphasize is this: for Reid, virtue requires caring not only about particular persons (they are, according to Reid, the objects of benevolence), but also virtue itself. Being virtuous requires being committed to the idea that the moral life is, in and for itself, worth living. It is not to be made subordinate to considerations about one's well-being.

Reid's fourth point echoes one of Butler's most famous observations regarding the pursuit of happiness: if one primarily aims to secure one's own happiness, in many cases, one increases the risk of not obtaining it. This is not only because directly aiming for one's own happiness can "fill the mind with fear, and care, and anxiety" (Reid, 1969b, p. 219). It is also because a "concern for our own good is not a principle that, of itself, gives any enjoyment" (Reid, 1969b, p. 219). What does give enjoyment, however, are those particular activities and objects to which our affections are directed, such as friendship and the common good. To achieve one's good on the whole,

then, one must, at least part of the time, be focused on and motivated by considerations that are not identical with it.

Earlier I said that a consideration has motivational primacy for an agent just in case the following three conditions are met: first, it is a type of consideration in light of which an ordinary adult agent would act in a wide array of cases; second, it is a sufficient reason for that agent; and, third it has deliberative weight for him. Eudaimonists believe that one's good on the whole has motivational primacy. More precisely, they believe that one's good on the whole has motivational primacy in a very robust sense. They hold that *every* act that an agent performs either is or should be taken for the sake of his own happiness and that there is, or should be, no deeper practical justification for so acting. Reid maintains that eudaimonism thus understood is false. In many cases, agents do not act for the sake of their good on the whole. Nor, in many cases, should they attempt to do so. For one thing, appealing to one's good on the whole is insufficiently action-guiding, because many agents simply do not have an adequate understanding of that in which it consists. For another, to make happiness the final court of appeal when deliberating is to undermine the rightful primacy of virtue.

Reid and utilitarianism

Reid, then, rejects eudaimonism on the grounds that it cannot provide a reliable guide to action and subverts virtue. It is difficult, however, to appraise Reid's rejection of eudaimonism without also having in mind the trajectory of post-Reidian commonsense philosophy. That trajectory is, in large part, shaped by figures such as Alexander Smith, Henry Sidgwick, and G. E. Moore, who accepted much of Reid's broadly non-naturalist approach to ethics, but rejected his deontological approach in favor of one or another brand of consequentialism. Indeed, as J. B. Schneewind tells the story, the history of the Reidian school in ethics is broadly declinist in character: having initially exercised enormous influence, it was deeply shaken by challenges presented to it by those sympathetic with utilitarianism. When faced with these challenges, advocates of the Reidian school did little but "deny the force of objections and reiterate the old teachings" (Schneewind, 1977, p. 78). Whatever may be true of Reid's followers, Reid himself was certainly familiar with the utilitarian tendencies in the work of both Hutcheson and Hume, and expressed no sympathy with them.[5] Why not?

The reasons are complicated, but two stand out in particular. In the first place, Reid believed that utilitarianism is vulnerable to criticisms similar to that which he raises against eudaimonism. Second, utilitarianism, Reid argues, yields an inadequate conception of justice. Let me close this section by considering both reasons in turn.

Contemporary moral philosophers are apt to distinguish two different projects in ethical theory. One project is to construct an ethical theory that is action-guiding. Its aim is to identify substantive ethical principles that

can help ordinary agents to decide how to act and live. Kant's and Mill's projects, for example, were of this variety; the categorical imperative and the principle of utility are, at the very least, supposed to be guides to action, which also justify ascriptions of praise, blame, and guilt. The other project in which ethical theorists engage is to identify the most basic moral norms that are capable of morally justifying action. Once more, both Kant and Mill were also involved in this enterprise; the fact that a maxim can pass the categorical imperative, according to Kant's view, is supposed to be that which renders acting on that maxim morally permissible. As recent discussions of consequentialism make evident, however, these two projects needn't run in tandem. One can engage in the second project, say, by offering a defense of the principle of utility; but in doing so one needn't thereby have engaged in the first. For one might believe that, while the principle of utility morally justifies action, it is of little help in guiding action or justifying ascriptions of praise, blame, and guilt. Reid, however, believes that these two projects cannot be fruitfully split apart; they belong together. Like Kant and Mill, his aim is to identify substantive ethical principles that both can guide us in and morally justify action. Otherwise put, Reid assumes that a normative ethical theory should be "transparent." The ends that actually motivate us should also be capable of justifying why we act and why we ascribe praise, blame, and guilt.

Once we see that, for Reid, a moral theory should be transparent, we can identify the first reason that Reid resisted utilitarianism. Utilitarian views are, in Reid's view, the philosophical progeny of the eudaimonistic positions that he rejected. In reply to the question "Why ought I to do this?" eudaimonists say: because it will contribute to your own welfare. To the same question utilitarians reply: because it will positively contribute to (indeed, maximize) everyone's welfare impartially considered. While the differences between these answers are clear enough, so also is their common element. Both maintain that considerations about the welfare of agents are what ultimately justify moral action.

Return now to Reid's rejection of eudaimonism. Recall that the first point Reid makes is that most ordinary agents have neither the time nor the competence to form an accurate notion of their good on the whole (let alone derive the virtues from this conception). For most, the matter is simply too complex. Moreover, as Reid also notes, forming a conception of one's own good is a social project; it requires good training and the development of powers of discernment and attention. These social conditions, as Reid also notes, are often not intact (cf. Reid, 1969b, p. 372). But if it is true that, for most agents, ordinary conditions do not favor the formation of an accurate conception of their own welfare, it follows that they also do not favor forming an accurate conception of the welfare of *all* rational agents comprehensively considered; the issue is overwhelmingly complex. However, if this is true, utilitarianism would give us insufficient practical guidance about how

to act and live. It is no surprise, then, that Reid exhibits no sympathy for the view; it is subject to the very same type of concerns that drive him to reject eudaimonism.

Let me approach the second reason that Reid rejected utilitarianism indirectly. Recall that, following Butler, Reid holds that to achieve one's own welfare, one must attend to considerations other than one's own welfare. The cultivation of what Reid calls the "benevolent affections," in particular, has a central role to play in the achievement of our own good. All benevolent affections, Reid writes, are agreeable; "next to a good conscience, to which they are always friendly, and never can be adverse, they make the capital part of human happiness" (Reid, 1969b, p. 142). It is, however, an important feature of Reid's treatment of the benevolent affections – and indeed, of his understanding of many of the so-called propositional attitudes – that he thinks of them in a de re/predicative style. The immediate object of the benevolent affections, says Reid, are "persons, and not things" (Reid, 1969b, p. 140; cf. also p. 410).

To see how Reid is thinking, consider a case in which I form a benevolent affection toward you, thereby desiring that you perform well on an upcoming exam. If we are thinking of this attitude along de dicto lines, my attitude is directed toward a proposition or the state of affairs of *your performing well on an upcoming exam*. By contrast, if we think of the attitude along de re/predicative lines, the object of my affection is you; I desire, with respect to you, that you perform well on the exam.

Why is this of any importance to assessing Reid's resistance to utilitarianism? Because central to utilitarian approaches to ethics is the conviction that the proper response to value is to promote it. Any case in which we respond to value in some other way than promotion must be such that, in responding that way, one thereby indirectly promotes value. But suppose that we understand the benevolent affections as Reid does. If so, their objects are not states of affairs but persons. Moreover, the attitudes that Reid identifies as comprising the benevolent affections are ones such as gratitude, esteem, and affection (cf. Reid, 1969b, III.iii.iv). If we understand the objects of the benevolent affections as Reid does, however, it makes little sense to say that one ought to promote them. We can, as Reid maintains, esteem or express gratitude toward persons, but there is no evident sense in which we can promote them or maximize the values they bear, such as being worthy of appreciation or esteem. And if it be pointed out that this is compatible with the fact that by honoring a person one can thereby indirectly promote everyone's welfare, Reid's response, I take it, is this.

The benevolent affections are responses that are, in large measure, *due* others. As such, they fall within the province of justice, for to exercise justice is, in Reid's eyes, "to yield to every man what is his right" (Reid, 1969b, p. 416). Suppose, then, it were claimed by someone with utilitarian sympathies that

what ultimately morally justifies the fact that an agent ought to esteem another is that doing so would promote the welfare of all. Reid's reply is that such an approach fails to comport with an adequate account of justice for at least two reasons.

In the first place, Reid contends, it cannot be that justice requires that an agent promote the good of all. Humanity or all the members thereof do not have the right against me to have its (or their) overall welfare promoted by my actions, for "when we employ our power to promote the good and happiness of others, this is a benefit," not the recognition of a right (Reid, 1969b, p. 410). There is, after all, no way in which I or any other agent could know what their overall welfare is. And, so, on Reid's assumption that one cannot have an obligation to perform an action that, through no fault of one's own, one does not and cannot know how to perform, there is no obligation for me or any other agent to maximize the welfare of all. But if utilitarianism is true, it is presumably the case that what morally justifies an agent in, say, esteeming another is these two things: that doing so would maximize the aggregate well-being of all and that there is a moral obligation to promote the well-being of all. If Reid is correct, however, there is no such obligation and, hence, no such justification.

In the second place, while it is an initially curious feature of Reid's view that he does relatively little to identify the ways in which duty and one's good on the whole are connected, he does identify what he calls the "branches of justice," which are: "that an innocent man has a right to the safety of his person and family, a right to his liberty and reputation, a right to his goods, and to fidelity to engagements made with him" (Reid, 1969b, pp. 415–416). Presumably, Reid's thought is that states and events such as *enjoying one's liberty* and *being such that one's family is not harmed* are life-goods to which we have rights. And for every such right, there is a correlative obligation to honor it, as "all right supposes a corresponding duty" (Reid, 1969b, p. 378). But, Reid maintains, it is not as if we have to cast about for reasons why these goods generate the rights and obligations in question. They are themselves sufficient to do that. If this is correct, though, then it is not the case that the rights and obligations in question are "derived solely from ... utility, either to ourselves or society" (Reid, 1969b, p. 414; see also p. 431). At most, the fact that respecting the life-goods contributes to the good of all gives us additional reason to honor them. But this is not the only or the deepest reason to honor them. Once again, the particular life-goods themselves generate reasons for us to act.

To which Reid adds the following point:

> To perceive that justice tends to the good of mankind, would lay no moral obligation upon us to be just, unless we be conscious of a moral obligation to do what tends to the good of mankind. If such a moral obligation be admitted, why may we not admit a stronger obligation to do injury to

> no man? The last obligation is as easily conceived as the first, and there is as clear evidence of its existence in human nature. (Reid, 1969b, p. 433)

Reid's aim is not to deny that considerations of the public good have a role to play in grounding the rights and obligations that fall under the branches of justice. But even if we admit that we have an obligation to further the public good, there is, says Reid, little reason to hold that this obligation is more fundamental than the obligation "to do injury to no man." To be sure, this doesn't establish that this latter obligation is more fundamental to justice than the obligation to promote the good of all. But, says Reid, it goes some distance toward establishing that simply appealing to the putative obligation to promote the welfare of all is insufficient to secure the case for utilitarianism. What utilitarians take to be evident is not obviously so.

Reid, I've argued, developed a considerably more sophisticated opposition to utilitarianism than was appreciated by his followers and commentators. This opposition, moreover, was formulated in the face of a powerful tendency among his contemporaries to "de-justicize" moral philosophy, which included downplaying the role of rights that had a more prominent place in the broadly natural law theorizing of figures such as Hugo Grotius and Gershom Carmichael. In Reid's eyes, while philosophers such as Lord Shaftesbury, Adam Smith, David Hume, and Joseph Priestly were not eudaimonists, they tended to think of the moral realm primarily in terms of benevolence, devoting relatively little attention to the subject of rights and their relation to justice.[6] It was Reid's insight that the dispute with utilitarianism would hinge on how we think about justice and the role of rights. In that respect, he proved to be particularly prescient.

13.3 The coincidence thesis

What has emerged from our discussion is that Reid resists eudaimonism at every turn. According to Reid, our fundamental aim as moral agents is not to secure our own good on the whole. Nor is it to secure the most happiness for others. In the terminology I've employed, neither one's own good on the whole nor that of others should have motivational primacy for an agent. And yet Reid did not wish entirely to divorce considerations regarding one's good on the whole from duty. To the contrary, Reid thought it important to defend what I've called The Coincidence Thesis or the claim that, in worlds such as ours, reliably performing one's duty and enjoying well-being coincide. Why did Reid believe this coincidence to hold?

To fix our intuitions, Reid asks us to consider good moral pedagogy, broadly conceived.

> That a due regard to what is best for us upon the whole, in an enlightened mind, leads to the practice of every virtue, may be argued from considering what we think best for those for whom we have the strongest affection, and whose good we tender as our own. In judging for ourselves, our passions and appetites are apt to bias our judgment; but when we judge for others, this bias is removed, and we judge impartially.
>
> What is it then that a wise man would wish as the greatest good to a brother, a son, or a friend?
>
> Is it that he may spend his life in a constant round of the pleasures of sense, and fare sumptuously every day?
>
> No, surely; we wish him to be a man of real virtue and worth. We may wish for him an honorable station in life; but only with this condition, that he acquit himself honorably in it. ...
>
> Such would be the wish of every man of understanding for the friend whom he loves as his own soul. Such things, therefore, he judges to be best for him on the whole. ... (Reid, 1969b, pp. 213–214)

Reid is sometimes portrayed as propounding a version of commonsense philosophy that appeals to the opinions of the masses to justify certain claims. Whatever truth this portrayal may have – and I don't think it has much – in this passage, he is certainly not doing that. To understand what is in an agent's own best interest, suggests Reid, we shouldn't appeal to the first-person perspective; that perspective is limited and often distorted. But neither should we appeal to the third-person perspective, such as that occupied by a Smithian idealized spectator, for it is often too distant from the genuine interests of the agent. Best, Reid claims, to appeal to the second-person perspective, such as that occupied by a "friend whom he loves as his own soul" (cf. Zagzebski 2004). The person who occupies this perspective provides both enough critical distance from and sympathetic engagement with an agent to render reliable advice. And were we to listen to such advice, Reid claims, we would find that it tells us not only that a concern for one's good on the whole is "friendly" to virtue, but also that a life of virtue is the best type of life on the whole.

Reid has his eye on something important here. When good people teach their children, they tell them that being virtuous is, or is apt to be, good for them on the whole. Indeed, morality appears to require that we encourage those we care most deeply about to be virtuous (cf. Adams 1999, pp. 377–378). If so, The Coincidence Thesis, or something like it, is not a philosopher's artifact, but something deeply embedded in the moral life. Still, it is one thing to identify the moral importance of believing that virtue and well-being coincide; it is another matter altogether to identify specific reasons to believe this. The question, then, is whether there are additional considerations for believing that the coincidence holds.

Reid marshals a two-pronged argument in favor of the coincidence. The first prong of the argument consists in furnishing various considerations for believing that virtue and an agent's well-being are intimately intertwined.

The second prong advances the stronger claim that they are necessarily coextensive, at least in worlds such as ours.

Let's begin with the first prong of the argument. As I've already indicated, Reid says relatively little about that in which an agent's good on the whole consists, indicating that enjoying those life-goods to which we have rights are components of an agent's well-being. Nonetheless, in certain places, Reid expands upon the theme of an agent's good upon the whole, proposing that it includes at least these two elements: being harmoniously related to oneself and being harmoniously related to others. The first prong of Reid's argument for The Coincidence Thesis consists in claiming that we can better see the intimate connections between virtue and well-being by reflecting on these two components of one's good on the whole.

Suppose we were to consider a morally decent person, one whose moral sense is working well, but who acts against virtue. Such an agent, according to Reid, experiences "dread" and "worthlessness" so acutely that "consciousness of ... [it] would make him detest himself, hate the light of the sun, and fly, if possible, out of existence" (Reid, 1969b, p. 244). By contrast, a person's conforming to the dictates of virtue, "cannot fail a present reward" by giving "strength of heart" and making "his countenance to shine" in the "joy of good conscience" and the "confidence of divine approbation" (Reid, 1969b, p. 245). For, Reid claims, "the highest pleasure of all is, when we are conscious of good conduct in ourselves." This is so, according to Reid, because of its "dignity, the intenseness of the happiness it affords, its stability and duration, its being in our power, and its being proof against all accidents of time and fortune" (Reid, 1969b, p. 242).

Perhaps so. But why would this lead us to believe that what is good for us upon the whole "leads to the practice of every virtue"? Reid spells out his thought most explicitly in the following passage:

> This rational principle of a regard to our good upon the whole, gives us the conception of a *right* and a *wrong* in human conduct, at least of a *wise* and a *foolish*. It produces a kind of self-approbation, when the passions and appetites are kept in their due subjection to it; and a kind of remorse and compunction, when it yields to them.
>
> In these respects, this principle [i.e., one's good on the whole] is so similar to the moral principle, or conscience, and so interwoven with it, that both are commonly comprehended under the name of reason. This similarity led many of the ancient philosophers, and some among the moderns, to resolve conscience, or a sense of duty, entirely into a regard to what is good for us upon the whole. (Reid, 1969b, p. 210)

Take any agent, says Reid, who formulates or revises a conception of her good on the whole, thereby seeking to implement it. To engage in any of these activities with any degree of success requires exercising practical rationality.[7] But, Reid continues, *being practically rational* is really a conceptual place-holder for a wide array of skills that are, if not themselves moral virtues, at least have moral dimensions.

Consider, once again, what formulating a conception of and successfully pursuing one's good on the whole involves: it requires that we "observe the connections of things, and the consequences of our actions ... taking an extended view of our existence, past, present, and future," and correcting "our first notions of good and ill" (Reid, 1969b, p. 205). It also requires "a correct judgment of goods and evils, with respect to their intrinsic worth and dignity, their constancy and duration, and their attainableness" (Reid, 1969b, p. 215). It is easy, Reid suggests, to go wrong with respect to these matters, as many are "misled by their passions, by the authority of the multitude, and by other causes" (Reid, 1969b, p. 208). Acquiring an accurate conception of one's good on the whole and pursuing it with success, then, requires that (in the ordinary case) one be attentive to detail, fair-minded and careful in considering evidence regarding it, open-minded to the testimony of qualified advisors, temperate, self-controlled, and so forth (cf. Reid, 1969b, pp. 363, 89). For someone who has an accurate conception of her good and is committed to pursuing it, failing to act in these ways – say, by acting negligently or intemperately – leads to feelings of "remorse" and "compunction," which are similar to those experienced by one who suffers from an overtly moral failing. It is because of this, Reid suggests, that some philosophers have been led to conflate moral considerations with prudential ones. But while intimately related, these considerations are not identical. For, while considerations concerning one's good on the whole and duty may "lead to the same conduct in life," questions such as "Is this conducive to my good on the whole?" and "Is this my duty?" are not identical (cf. Reid, 1969b, pp. 210, 233).

The first reason, then, that Reid offers for believing that virtue and welfare are intimately connected is that any good life is such that an agent must be harmoniously related to herself, not suffering from such maladies of the spirit as internal strife, discord, or the like. But any agent who is either morally decent or has an accurate conception of her own good on the whole, suggests Reid, will not be able to enjoy sufficient harmony of self were she to act contrary to virtue – or, at least, to act contrary to those virtues necessary for pursuing her good on the whole. For she will, perforce, be committed to acquiring and exercising these virtues. And acting against virtue results, in at least the properly functioning agent, in exactly the sort of internal discord that threatens to undercut a life well-lived.

The second reason that Reid advances in favor of an intimate interconnection between virtue and well-being turns upon issues concerning relations not to oneself but to others. Striking a broadly Aristotelian theme common to Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Butler, and others, Reid writes that "the Author of our nature intended that we should live in society" (Reid,

1969b, p. 159; cf. p. 137). More specifically, writes Reid, to love and esteem and be loved and esteemed, "are next to a good conscience ... the capital part of human happiness," the very "balm of life" (Reid, 1969b, p. 142).

In this case, Reid endeavors neither to over nor underplay the effects that the disapprobation of others can have on us. Reid's claim is not that the disapprobation of others who are outside of our more immediate social ties is inimical to achieving our good on the whole. Rather, he repeatedly speaks of the importance of friendships, families, and society; when we are the object of the disapprobation of such people and social entities, we experience internal distress in the form of guilt, shame, and remorse (cf. Reid, 1969b, p. 161). In effect, then, Reid asks us to distinguish those persons and social entities with which we have special relations of intimacy and responsibility – what sociologists sometimes call a "reference class" – from those which we do not. It is primarily expressions of approbation or disapprobation from persons and social entities of the former sort that abet or impede our well-being.

Having noted the importance of these special social relationships for happiness, Reid nonetheless resists resolving "our moral sentiments respecting the virtues of self-government, into a regard to the opinion of men." Smith, in Reid's view, comes perilously close to endorsing this view. But, says Reid, "this [view] is giving a great deal too much to the love of esteem." To be sure, in most instances, "the opinion of others ... is a great inducement to good conduct." And so it is that we gain the habits of "restraining ... appetites and passions within the bounds which common decency requires," even when "a sense of duty has but a small influence" (Reid, 1969b, pp. 135, 134). But to restrain our appetites and passions for this reason is not the whole of virtue. For the "sense of honor," which Reid takes to be present in every virtuous agent, "is nothing else, when rightly understood, but the disdain which a man of worth feels to do a dishonorable action, though it should never be known nor suspected" (Reid, 1969b, p. 240). Love of esteem and love of virtue, if Reid is correct, are clearly distinct.

Reid's overarching argument for The Coincidence Thesis, I claimed earlier, has two prongs. If I am right, the first prong is one in which Reid argues not that well-being and virtue are necessarily coextensive, but rather that they are bound together in various important ways. Because being harmoniously related to both self and others are important components of one's good on the whole and, because acting contrary to both virtue and one's good on the whole tends to disturb these relationships, the practically rational agent views a life of virtue as better than a morally misguided one. Still, it is important to see what Reid is not arguing.

Unlike Butler, who, in at least some places, appears to think that happiness is purely a mental state, Reid denies that an agent's good on the whole is internal in this sense (cf. Butler 1841, sermon XI.5). Indeed, he admits that we must recognize that, given everything we see, the coincidence between

virtue and well-being does not hold, for there are life-goods necessary to well-being, such as the well-being of one's family, that even the virtuous can lack. While he has little patience for passionate speeches about the gloominess of human life, such as one finds in Bayle (cf. Reid 1769, pp. 84, 94–95), Reid recognizes that there is powerful reason for believing that the necessary coincidence between virtue and well-being does not hold in this life. In his lectures on the Nature and Duration of the Soul, for example, Reid says that "it cannot be denied that there are instances {both} of successful Villanies which are not punished as they deserve in this World & of virtuous Actions for which men Suffer {or are not rewarded}" (Reid 2002b, p. 622). And exercising more rhetorical liberty, Reid raises the issue of what becomes of those who have struggled for justice and suffered: "Will death put them upon a level with the Tyrant that wallowed in human blood, and spread desolation ... to gratify his ambition and lust of power? Is there no Ear to hear the groans of those whom his sword hath made Widows and fatherless?" (Reid 2002b, p. 623).

Certain features of Reid's position have strong affinities with Stoicism – the elevation of the importance of good conscience comes to mind. Nonetheless, Reid does not accept the claim that the well-being of friends and loved ones is not constitutive of an agent's good on the whole, belonging only to what the Stoics called the "preferables" (cf. Reid, 1990, p. 121).[8] Instead, Reid finds himself impelled to develop what I've referred to as the second prong of his argument for The Coincidence Thesis. According to this prong of the argument, Reid contends that the only way to secure the coincidence of welfare and virtue is by positing the existence of a benevolent deity. If such a deity exists, then it is reasonable to expect that, in a future life, virtue will be rewarded, rendering a life of virtue coincident with one's good on the whole:

> While the world is under a wise and benevolent administration, it is impossible, that any man should, in the issue, be a loser by doing his duty. Every man, therefore, who believes in God, while he is careful to do his duty, may safely leave the care of his happiness to Him who made him. (Reid, 1969b, p. 256)

No doubt it was Reid's conviction that our happiness ought, in the final analysis, to be placed in the care of not human beings but God that contributed to Reid's anti-utilitarian tendencies. (Although, it should be added that Reid strenuously denied that God is best thought of as operating according to utilitarian principles; see (Reid, 1969b, p. xi)). Be that as it may, what I should like to emphasize in closing are the following pair of points regarding Reid's position.

Reid, I suggested earlier, holds that something like a commitment to The Coincidence Thesis lies deep in the moral life. Good people, Reid believes,