

Sacred mountains and beloved fetuses: can loving or worshipping something give it moral status?

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Published online: 8 November 2006
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Abstract Part One addresses the question whether the fact that some persons love something, worship it, or deeply care about it, can endow moral status on that thing. I argue that the answer is “no.” While some cases lend great plausibility to the view that love or worship can endow moral status, there are other cases in which love or worship clearly fails to endow moral status. Furthermore, there is no principled way to distinguish these two types of cases, so we must conclude that love or worship never endow moral status. Part Two takes up the hard question of why we have to be careful of things that others love or worship, given that the things do not thereby have moral status. I argue that it is sometimes bad for those who love or worship the things if we mistreat them. I develop an account of when love and worship, and person projects more generally, succeed in expanding the scope of what counts as good or bad for the person engaged in the project.

Keywords Abortion · Desire · Environment · Fetus · Love · Moral status · Well-being · Worship

Introduction

In this paper, I will address two questions.

In Part One, I will address the question whether the fact that some persons love something, worship it, or deeply care about it, can endow moral status upon that thing. I will argue that the answer is “no.” While some cases lend great plausibility to the view that love and worship can endow moral status, there are other important cases in which some persons deeply care about some things, and yet this fact does no work toward endowing the things with moral status. Consideration of these cases will show that attitudes of love, caring, or worship *never* endow moral status. Because these attitudes seem to be appropriate only if the objects have moral status, I say

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that these attitudes *attribute* moral status, and I will phrase my question as the question whether attributions of moral status can endow moral status.

In Part Two, I will turn to the question: what is the right story about the cases in which love or worship might seem to endow moral status? I will argue that while the loved or worshipped things do not have moral status in these cases, we still have reasons to be careful of them because treating them in certain ways is bad for those who love or worship them. But this does not always hold for love and worship. So I will develop an account of when love and worship, and personal projects more generally, succeed in expanding what counts as good or bad for the person engaged in the project.

Part One

Can attributions of moral status endow it?

First, what is it for something to have moral status? I'll use Mary Anne Warren's initial characterization of the concept, in her book *Moral Status*:

To have moral status is to be morally considerable, or to have moral standing. It is to be an entity toward which moral agents have, or can have, moral obligations. If an entity has moral status, then we may not treat it in just any way we please; we are morally obliged to give weight in our deliberations to its needs, interests, or well-being. Furthermore, we are morally obliged to do this not merely because protecting it may benefit ourselves or other persons, but because its needs have moral importance in their own right.

It is easy to get an intuitive grip on this notion. Persons clearly have moral status, and most animals seem to: the mere fact that we would hurt them is a reason against any course of action. By contrast, material objects such as houses and cars do not have moral status. While the fact that I would hurt (or damage) someone's car does provide a reason against acting, the reason arises not because the car has moral importance in its own right but because the car's owner has moral importance in *her* own right, and it would be bad for her if I damaged her car.

It might seem obvious that whether something has moral status is wholly determined by its intrinsic properties. After all, something's having moral status involves its needs having moral importance "in their own right." However, Warren's characterization does not rule out all relational properties as relevant to moral status. She merely makes clear that something does not have moral status if it matters only because what happens to it affects the well-being of some other things with moral status: e.g., my car does not come to have moral status because harming it harms me. I have sometimes characterized moral status in a way that makes it intrinsic by definition. To do so in this paper would either beg the question I'm addressing, or rather, it would make the answer to my question an obvious "no": whether some persons love, worship, or care about a thing, is a matter of what *relations* that thing stands in, not an intrinsic matter.

Why attributions seem to endow

Consider the following case:

The Mountain: An indigenous tribe has a religious tradition of worshipping Mountain X. Mountain X is central and important to their religion. They

believe that Mountain X matters in its own right, that it protects them and fosters the well-being of the tribe. They believe that any hiking on Mountain X, or other human presence on X, harms the mountain, weakens what is most valuable and important in the world, and is a great tragedy. There are several mountains in the area around X that the tribe does not worship. These mountains are suitable for hiking, but X provides a somewhat more enjoyable hiking experience. Knowing all of these facts, a group of hikers decides to hike on Mountain X.

In this case, I think the following claim is clearly true:

- (1) The tribe's worship of Mountain X, which involves their belief that the mountain is morally important and that hiking harms it, provides some reason that the hikers should not hike there

(1) seems true, even if we add to the case the further stipulation that the tribe will not find out that the hikers have hiked on X. So, it seems that there is a reason against hiking even when hiking will not cause the tribe to be unhappy, worried, or devastated.¹

Some people will think that, while (1) is true, the following stronger claim is also true:

- (2) The tribe's worship of Mountain X, which involves their belief that the mountain is morally important and that hiking harms it, makes it the case that the hikers *should not* hike there (given that the other aspects of the situation are as described).

While I do believe (2) is true, I won't discuss it further.

Some people will think that (1) is true because the following claim is true:

- (3) The tribe's worship of Mountain X, which includes their belief that the mountain is morally important and that hiking harms it, provides some reason that the hikers should not hike there *because* the tribe's worship endows Mountain X with moral status.

¹ A note about my methodology in this paper. Throughout the paper, I make arguments that rely on particular claims about cases. While I take most of these claims to be very plausible (such as (1) and the claims I rely on in Part Two), some of these claims are very controversial (such as a claim I make below about the moral status of fetuses), and all of them are such that some people no doubt do not believe them. In that my arguments rely on premises that some people do not believe, they are no different from any philosophical arguments and more specifically any ethical arguments. Yet some people deny that there is value in arguments with premises that are controversial. There are two kinds of value to these arguments. First, they may succeed in persuading those who believe the premises. Second, they may demonstrate to those who disagree with the premises what some of their opponents (those who agree with the premises) are committed to; this may show an opponent's view to be more or less attractive. In both ways, these arguments further philosophical knowledge and debate. See the end of Part One for a discussion of how my arguments in Part One establish an important conclusion regardless of whether my controversial premise about the moral status of fetuses is true. See footnote 15 for a further note about my methodology.

Thus, the case of The Mountain might seem to lend support to the following claim:

Attributions Endow: The fact that some persons worship or care deeply about the well-being of some thing is sufficient to endow that thing with moral status.

Mary Anne Warren points out that we may be morally obligated to protect objects or places that others consider sacred, and to treat those things in the ways those who value them consider obligatory. She then says, “It may be possible adequately to protect such sacred objects and places without supposing that we owe anything to them. ... But respecting people is difficult if one does not also, to some degree, respect those things or beings to which they accord strong moral status. Respect is, in this sense, transitive” (Warren, 1997, p. 171). Here Warren seems to be saying only the following: there may be some cases in which the fact that others accord strong moral status to something requires us to *accord* moral status to it as well. This stops short of Attributions Endow in two ways: she merely says that this may hold *in some cases*, and she says we should accord moral status to these things, not that they actually have it. On the second point, I think it is best to read Warren as saying that in these cases the things actually do have moral status; otherwise she is saying that we ought to self-deceive and attribute moral status where there is none (which I suspect she isn’t saying, though it is a coherent view, and there may be something to be said for it in these cases of dispute over moral status). I will return to the first idea, that attributions only endow in some cases, later in the discussion. Once we see why the strong claim Attributions Endow is unacceptable, we will examine whether it could be weakened in a principled and reasonable way.

I hope that the case of The Mountain does some work to make Attributions Endow seem intuitively attractive. Consideration of sacred objects also makes the claim seem attractive, I think. A non-believer who accidentally knocks a Jewish sacred text onto the floor may kiss it before putting it back on the shelf, as a believer would say one should, out of respect *for the book*—because the book is respected by others.

Consider what we might say to try to dissuade the hikers. We might say that their activity fails to respect the mountain for what it is—this very mountain is worshiped by a whole tribe of people, loved and worried for by them. The mountain is thereby a different kind of thing from the other nearby mountains; it is special and it has a certain status that the hikers are callously ignoring.

Nevertheless, I will now argue that Attributions Endow is false.

Why attributions do not endow

Suppose that Nina becomes pregnant. She has been using two forms of contraception; as rarely happens, both failed. Nina does not want to continue the pregnancy and she plans to abort. She lives in a town with only one abortion clinic, where there is always heavy picketing. As she walks up to the clinic for her first appointment, members of the crowd correctly surmise that she is pregnant and seeking an abortion. They shout at her, “We love your baby, even if you don’t! We will mourn its death. What you are here to do is a tragedy.” These people are obnoxious: Nina is going through a trying time and facing a difficult decision that is hers to make. They might also seem to be speaking falsely and hyperbolically, referring to a tiny fetus as a “baby”; in fact it’s probably best to say that in calling the fetus a baby they are making a moral claim, that it has the moral status of a baby. Despite their obnoxiousness, these people are speaking honestly. They really do love Nina’s fetus, even

though Nina does not. They really will mourn the death of Nina's fetus. They really do think that what she is here to do is a tragedy.

Note that the protesters do not simply have general beliefs that many abortions are performed all over the country, or in this clinic, and that these abortions are tragic. They also have specific attitudes toward, and beliefs about, *Nina's fetus*. They have seen Nina, they have correctly surmised that she is pregnant, and they have formed attitudes toward the specific living thing inside her body.

Consider what Attributions Endow implies about this case. In this case, Nina's fetus is loved and cared about by many people. The protesters who see her love and care about it. They tell others about seeing Nina—they believe in praying for each soul lost at the clinic, and so they repeat specific details in order to ensure that each soul is prayed for by many people. Others know simply that some abortions are going on all over the country, and while they lack identifying knowledge of Nina's fetus, they care about it in caring about all fetuses that are killed in abortions. These many people who love and care about Nina's fetus care about it *a great deal*. They do not think that protection of Nina's fetus would simply be a nice thing, which would make the world somewhat better, like the preservation of a beautiful park for people to enjoy, or the saving of the life of a fish with a low level of moral status. Rather, they think that the preservation of Nina's fetus is of vital moral importance, equivalent to the protection of any child from murder. In this case, Attributions Endow implies that Nina's fetus has some moral status in virtue of others caring about and loving it.

This is a strong conclusion, which many would find intolerable. Many people would say that Nina's fetus does not have any special status at all in virtue of these strangers' caring about it, and it is *very important* that it does not. Of course whether early human fetuses have any moral status is a controversial question. For the purposes of this paper, I assume the following claim:

- (4) Pre-conscious fetuses lack moral status.²

I might seem to need only the following weaker claim for my argument:

- (5) The mere fact that many people care about and love a fetus does not endow any moral status on the fetus.

Claim (5) is, implicitly, taken for granted by most or all of those who discuss the ethics of abortion and the moral status of fetuses. The fact of widespread devotion to fetuses on the part of anti-abortion protesters is common knowledge yet never appealed to (to my knowledge). Many people who are concerned to argue that pre-conscious fetuses have moral status believe they have moral status due to their potentiality to become persons, or due to their being human. These people would endorse the following claim:

- (6) If pre-conscious fetuses do have moral status, that fact is not due to anyone's loving or caring about these fetuses. Indeed, if no one loved or cared about these fetuses they would still matter exactly as much as they do now.

² For the purposes of this paper, I assume (4), though my considered view is not (4) but rather that pre-conscious fetuses *that will die without ever becoming conscious* lack moral status. I think that future consciousness is sufficient for present moral status; see the extended argument in Harman (1999) and the brief mention in Harman (2003).

One might object as follows. I say that most who believe pre-conscious fetuses have moral status would nevertheless endorse (6). But it may be that they never mention or rely on the way that loving fetuses can endow moral status on them because, either (a) loving something only *endows* moral status when the thing otherwise lacks moral status, or (b) loving something raises moral status but the love of fetuses raises their moral status a very small amount in comparison to the great level of moral status they have independently.

This objection is persuasive. In particular, if we suppose that fetuses have moral status independently of being loved then the case of fetuses can provide no objection to the claim that attributions of moral status can endow moral status on things that otherwise lack moral status. For this reason, I do not simply assume claim (5) but also assume claim (4):

- (4) Pre-conscious fetuses lack moral status.
- (5) The mere fact that many people care about and love a fetus does not endow any moral status on the fetus.

And I revise Attributions Endow—the claim I seek to reject—as follows:

Attributions Endow-II: The fact that some persons worship or care deeply about the well-being of some thing, when that thing otherwise lacks moral status, endows that thing with moral status.

I can now make the following argument:

Premise 1: All pre-conscious fetuses lack moral status.

Premise 2: If Attributions Endow-II is true, then many pre-conscious fetuses have moral status.

Conclusion: Attributions Endow-II is false.

Premise 1 is simply an assumption. Premise 2 is clearly true, given that many pre-conscious fetuses are loved and cared about by anti-abortion protesters.

Reconsidering fetuses

One response it's natural to make at this point is that my assumption that pre-conscious fetuses lack moral status is a very radical claim, believed by very few people, and so an argument that relies on it is not very interesting. Indeed many people believe the following claim:

- (7) Abortions of pre-conscious fetuses are morally permissible, though pre-conscious fetuses have some moral status. The badness to the fetus is outweighed by other moral considerations, such as the pregnant woman's right to decide what happens to her fetus.

I have argued elsewhere (Harman, 1999) that many people adopt this claim for bad reasons—they are driven away from the view that pre-conscious fetuses lack moral status by some persuasive but mistaken arguments. But note that those who tend to believe (7) also believe:

(8) Pre-conscious fetuses have only a low level of moral status. The moral badness of their deaths is not very morally serious.³

I will now argue that (8) may be hard to maintain in the face of Attributions Endow-II.

First, note that the protesters feel very strongly about Nina's fetus. It may be right to say that they feel as strongly about Nina's fetus as it is possible to feel about another thing that isn't conscious and can't emote back or actively participate in a relationship. Not only do they feel very strongly but their beliefs attribute a very high level of moral status to Nina's fetus—the highest level there is, equivalent to that of persons. If attributions of moral status endow at all, there may be varying degrees of moral status that attributions can endow. It certainly seems that the protesters' love of Nina's fetus would endow the highest level of moral status that attributions *can* endow. So, it might seem that Nina's fetus comes to have a high level of moral status in virtue of their love. This worry could be blocked by stipulating that attributions can never endow more than a low level of moral status.

Second, consider what happens to Nina's fetus when she aborts it. Aborting the fetus harms it in a very serious way. By aborting it, we deprive the fetus of the chance to live life as a person—this is a huge deprivation, of a spectacular good. There may be no harms worse than this one. (Perhaps the imposition of a life of utter misery is worse, or the cutting off of a rich life right in its middle.)⁴ Even if Nina's fetus matters only to a small degree, even if it has a low level of moral status, it would still seem that a harm of this magnitude would be very morally serious. This worry could be blocked by saying that if something has a low degree of moral status then even very grave harms to it, which are very morally serious when suffered by things with a higher degree of moral status, are not very morally serious. Low moral status is then seen as having a multiplicative effect, of making big harms matter less because they happen to a less significant thing.

I have argued elsewhere (Harman, 2003) that there are no degrees of moral status in this sense—there are no cases in which two things have moral status but one matters more than the other such that a harm to it matters more, morally, than an *equal* harm to the other. The case against degrees of moral status is made persuasively by Peter Singer⁵ when considering harms to animals; I have argued that consideration of the nature of human babies' moral status shows this view should be adopted.

In this section, I haven't tried to establish that we must believe pre-conscious fetuses lack moral status. However, I've tried to show that allowing that protesters' love and concern for fetuses can endow moral status on them is problematic.

³ I don't mean to suggest that abortion of a fetus with moral status is permissible only if the aborted fetus has *low* moral status. Rather, I endorse the arguments given by Thomson (1971) showing that even if the fetus has the moral status of a person, abortion is still permissible. But I claim that as a matter of fact, many who believe (7) also believe (8). The truth of (8) is important to them, and they're right to find it important. While Thomson is right that abortion is permissible even if the fetus is a person, in that case abortion is a very morally weighty choice; early abortion is not.

⁴ Some argue that fetuses' deaths are not very bad for them, because fetuses lack psychological investment in their futures. (McMahan, 2003 makes such an argument.) I think this cannot be right. The deprivation of such a significant good is bad for something even if it can't appreciate the badness and even if having psychological investment in its potential future would make the deprivation even worse.

⁵ See "Chapter Three: Equality for Animals" in Singer (1993).

Some attributions endow?

If we've succeeded in rejecting Attributions Endow—II, on the grounds that pre-conscious fetuses are not endowed with moral status by protesters' love of them, a proponent of the idea that attributions can endow moral status may move to this claim:

Some Attributions Endow: The fact that some persons worship or care deeply about the well-being of some thing, when that thing otherwise lacks moral status, sometimes endows it with moral status.

They can furthermore claim that moral status is endowed in the case of The Mountain; after all, if love or worship ever endows moral status, then it seems to do so in this case.⁶ And they can grant that moral status is not endowed in the case of Nina's fetus.

I think it is very hard to see why the tribe's attributions would endow moral status on the mountain, but the protesters' attributions would not endow moral status on Nina's fetus. We might be tempted to say the following thing. There is nothing morally serious about granting that the mountain has moral status, but there is something very morally serious about granting that the fetus has moral status: on the one hand all that's at stake is whether some hikers will get a nicer hike, but on the other hand what's at stake is the fate of Nina's body and, possibly, whether she becomes a parent. Yet while these claims seem right, they seem to be the wrong type of fact to explain why the mountain would have moral status but Nina's fetus wouldn't. Rather, we might appeal to the fact that where the hikers hike isn't a very big deal to them, and the fact that whether Nina aborts is a very big deal to her, as showing whether there are strong moral reasons that might *outweigh* reasons given by the moral status of the mountain and the fetus. But how could the strength of independent reasons against doing what would be safeguarding something's well-being affect whether it has moral status? While these other reasons might affect how we should act, it's hard to see how they should affect whether other factors even enter into our considerations.⁷

How else might we try to support the claim that the tribe's worship does endow the mountain with moral status, but the protesters' concern does not endow Nina's fetus with moral status? We cannot appeal to a difference in the intensity of feeling, because the protesters clearly feel very strongly. We cannot appeal to a difference in the centrality of the feeling to the lives of those who care—some anti-abortion protesters make their protests the central projects of their lives, and think that abortions are so serious that we should all be working all the time to prevent them.

Therefore, I think there is no way to maintain that the tribe's worship endows the mountain with moral status, while the protesters' concern does not endow Nina's fetus with moral status.

⁶ Note that to explain why the tribe's worship provides a reason against hiking, it is not enough to assume their worship endows moral status on the mountain. We must also assume their worship gives the mountain the particular *type* of moral status they envision, such that hiking on the mountain *harms* the mountain. This makes the claim that the reason against hiking is due to the mountain's moral status somewhat less plausible. My discussion leaves this complication aside.

⁷ Warren (1997) seems to have a view along the lines of the proposal I consider and reject in this paragraph.

We now have a new argument:

Premise One: If attributions ever endow moral status on things that otherwise lack moral status, then Mountain X has moral status in virtue of the tribe's worship.

Premise Two: If attributions ever fail to endow moral status on things that otherwise lack moral status, then Nina's fetus does not have moral status in virtue of the protesters' love.

Premise Three: It cannot be that Mountain X has moral status in virtue of the tribe's worship, but Nina's fetus does not have moral status in virtue of the protesters' love.

Conclusion: Some Attributions Endow is false.

This argument is controversial. It relies on the assumptions that early fetuses like Nina's fetus lack moral status independently of being loved, and that they do not gain moral status in virtue of being loved. Someone who doubts these assumptions may deny either Premise Two or Premise Three. I do want to make these controversial assumptions, because I want to argue for the strong claim that attributions of moral status never endow moral status. However, there is a weaker point that my discussion has established, which does not rely on my controversial assumptions. In cases such as Mountain X and other sacred objects, it seems clear that attributions of moral status provide strong reasons to be careful of the things to which moral status is attributed. To claim that attributions endow moral status in *these cases* seems to be *uncontroversial*—it seems clear that we have strong reasons to be careful of the loved or worshipped things, and saying that they have moral status in virtue of the love or worship is a way of explaining this fact. However, I've argued that there are other cases in which things are loved or worshipped but where it is *deeply controversial* to say that these things thereby gain moral status. And I've furthermore argued that there is no principled way of explaining why attributions would sometimes endow moral status without always endowing moral status—so, there is no *uncontroversial* claim available to us that attributions of moral status always or sometimes endow moral status: it's deeply controversial to claim that they always do, and it's unprincipled to claim that they sometimes do, so that claim simply shouldn't be held. My weaker conclusion is that, though it may appear that it is pretty uncontroversial and plausible that some attributions of moral status endow moral status, that's false: it's deeply controversial.

Part Two

At this point, we should ask ourselves what the right story is about why claim (1) is true:⁸

⁸ It might be objected that (1) is false, because once we realize that the tribe's worship of Mountain X is simply a *mistake* we'll realize it doesn't provide any reasons. (1) is an assumption of this paper and I do not argue for it in the paper. However, I will note that the objector is wrong to say that simply noticing that the tribe members are getting something *wrong* easily dissolves our problem. On the contrary, the problem of how to explain facts like (1) arises precisely in cases where others have deeply felt attitudes that are appropriate only if the objects in question independently have moral status, but where the objects *do not* independently have moral status. Thus, the problem is specifically how to handle cases where others are *wrong* about the moral status facts. The problem is to explain how their attitudes give us reasons despite their being wrong.

- (1) The tribe's worship of Mountain X, which involves their belief that the mountain is morally important and that hiking harms it, provides some reason that the hikers should not hike there.

Part Two develops what I take to be the right story. In the first section, I offer an initial proposal. In the next three sections, I raise objections to the proposal on the table and offer a revised proposal. The view I advocate is stated in the fourth section, which is titled "Objections from ignorance, indifference, and indecisiveness." In the fifth section, I outline two alternatives to my view; in the sixth section, I argue against them. In the seventh and eighth sections, I turn back to considering the claim Some Attributions Endow. In the seventh section, I consider and reject an objection that seeks to resurrect Some Attributions Endow in light of my argument for my view in Part Two. In the eighth section, I consider another argument against Some Attributions Endow and argue that it is not successful.

What is the right story?

I claim that (1) is true because hiking on the mountain harms the tribe, even given our earlier stipulation that when the hikers hike on Mountain X, the tribe never finds out about it. I claim that the hikers' hiking on Mountain X is bad for the tribe even though it does not make them sad or upset them in any way (because they don't learn about it). We can then explain the reason against hiking by appealing to the moral status of the tribe members themselves; we need not appeal to the claim that the mountain has moral status.

There are familiar reasons for saying that an event can be bad for someone though it does not affect her experiences. A woman may believe herself to be in a happy marriage, and believe her husband to be faithful. If in fact he has carried on a long affair throughout their marriage, though she never finds out about it and (improbably) it does not make her experience of her life worse in any way, it does seem that the fact of the affair makes her life worse. It is bad for her that he has the affair, though she never finds out about this. This is commonly explained by the claim that *desire-satisfaction* is an important component of well-being. The fact that she wants her husband to be faithful, and that this desire is not satisfied, explains why her life is thereby worse. Similarly, we can point to the fact that the tribe members deeply desire that no one hike on the mountain as an explanation of why the hikers' hiking harms the tribe members.

However, a new problem now emerges. The abortion protesters also have a very strong desire, that Nina's fetus not be killed. Must we now say that aborting Nina's fetus is bad for the abortion protesters? Must we furthermore say that there is thereby a moral reason against aborting Nina's fetus? Even if we grant that the reason is outweighed by Nina's own more weighty interests in whether her fetus is aborted, it will strike some people as deeply wrong to grant that Nina has *any* reason not to abort in light of the protesters' desires.

I think we should deny that aborting Nina's fetus is bad for the protesters. We are then faced with the problem of explaining why it is that hiking on the mountain is bad for the tribe while aborting Nina's fetus is not bad for the protesters. This is a hard problem—but, I claim, it is a problem we already face. We already have the burden of explaining why some desires are such that their satisfaction does impact the desirer's well-being and others are not.

Suppose that Sally, a middle-aged married woman, has developed an odd interest in the twenty-year-old college student, Mark, who works in her local video store. She never talks with Mark, but she is fascinated by him. She knows little about his life, but she imagines it in detail. She knows that she will never talk with him or be involved with him: he has never noticed her, and she will never act. She then develops a deep desire that he be alone, now and forever: she hopes that Mark now lacks a lover and indeed never gets to have one. If Sally cannot be with Mark, and she concludes that she cannot, then she desires that no one be with him. Surely this story is possible. Surely desires like this, in circumstances like these, do arise. Sometimes one person develops a strong desire about another's life, though the second person plays no part in the first person's life. I claim that in this case, it is clearly *not bad for Sally* if Mark indeed is in a happy relationship, or if he has happy relationships in his future. We can grant that it would be bad for Sally if she discovered he were in a happy relationship, but the badness for her would arise from how upset she would be, and not from its actually being bad for her that he is in a relationship. If Sally thinks it is bad for her that he is in a relationship, then she is confused about what her well-being consists in. (If, however, Sally thinks she might ever try to be with Mark, then the fact that he is in a happy relationship could be bad for her, because it would make it less likely that she would get to be with him.)

It is tempting to say that the whether Sally's desire is satisfied is irrelevant to her well-being because her desire is about something which has *nothing to do with her life*. Her desire is not about anything that happens to her or anyone with whom she has, or has had, a close relationship. It is simply a desire she has formed about something that is utterly outside of her life. We may propose that a desire's satisfaction matters to someone's well-being just in case the desire concerns some aspect of her life. We must be careful to understand this proposal so that it is not tautologous: plausibly anything that affects Sally's well-being is *part of her life*. We must also make the condition itself not trivially satisfied: any truth can be re-stated as a truth about me, that I am in a world in which it's true. So we must have a more robust notion of what counts as part of someone life. Our proposal may be stated as follows:

- (9) A desire's satisfaction impacts the desirer's well-being if and only if the desire concerns some aspect of her life: what happens to her and what happens to those she loves and to whom she is close

But there may be problems with this proposal: there seem to be cases in which events that have nothing to do with someone's life nevertheless affect her well-being, and there are also cases in which a desire's not being satisfied does not seem to be bad for someone, although the desires are about the person's life. In the next section, I explore these problems.

What impacts well-being?

The first problem arises from cases in which one's work and one's projects are aimed at events which do not seem to be part of one's life. Nevertheless, whether one's projects succeed is commonly recognized to be relevant to one's well-being. Consider Ellen, who works throughout her life to raise money in the U.S. to relieve

famine in Africa. Ellen plays a small but important role in famine-relief efforts in a particular country. Suppose that some time after her death, these efforts come to really pay off: the situation in that country turns around. I think this is good for Ellen, and many people will agree. Ellen was working hard toward this goal, with many other people of course; some time after her death this goal is finally achieved, and her work played a role in its being achieved. This makes Ellen's life turn out to have been better than if, in the end, the situation in that country had gotten worse despite her efforts. Yet it does seem natural to say that what happens to the starving people in this African country is no part of Ellen's life. They matter to Ellen's well-being because she has taken an interest in them. This case demonstrates one way that (9) is false. Ellen's desire that the famine be relieved does impact her well-being, although whether it is relieved is not part of her life.

We must figure out how to revise (9) in order to get Ellen's case right, without going astray in other ways. Just as Ellen has taken an interest in the famine victims, Sally has taken an interest in the video-store clerk Mike. Still, perhaps we can draw an important line between Ellen and Sally: Ellen took an interest in the famine victims through her actions of aid, not only through desires about their lives; Sally merely formed a desire about Mark.⁹

We now face a hard problem with the case of sports fans. Alex, a Red Sox fan, deeply wants the Red Sox to win their games. Tom, a Notre Dame football fan, deeply wants the football team to win its games. These are examples of two teams that have many deeply loyal and fanatical fans—but indeed, all sports teams seem to have some incredibly devoted fans. As anyone who has ever lived with a sports fan knows, it really does seem to be better *for Tom* when Notre Dame wins, and it really seems to be bad for Tom when they lose. But it seems hard to say how the events of this game are any part of Tom's life. Let's suppose that Tom lives far away from Indiana, that he has not seen a Notre Dame football game in person in years, and that he has never met any of the players in today's game. We could handle this case by saying that the loss is bad for Tom simply because it upsets him—it is bad for him to be upset, but if he did not know that the team lost, its loss would not make his life worse than it would otherwise be. It is hard to imagine the scenario in which a devoted fan's team would lose without the fan knowing (indeed, knowing instantly), but I think this is nevertheless bad for the fan—so the fans would say, of course. Or it is tempting to say that the whole ritual of being a sports fan involves participation in a fiction, according to which what happens to the team matters to the fans, and this simply isn't true: if the fans don't know, then the losses don't matter to them. On the other hand, we could handle this case by saying that the events involving the team really are a part of Tom's life. Suppose Tom attended Notre Dame, and during that time religiously attended the football games. Tom then participated in these games, in a broad sense, and developed a relationship with the team based on a kind of real interaction: they played their best—for him, since their play is at least partly for the fans; and he cheered them on. While the players have changed, over the years *that team* has continued to exist, and since Tom developed a relationship with *the Notre Dame football team*, events that involve that team may still be a part of his life. I am not sure how satisfying that story is. It's true that many sports fans become fans by supporting local teams and often attend the games in person. But many fans become

⁹ I consider a modification of the Sally and Mark case, in which Sally takes an active interest in his life, below.

fans by watching teams on television, and this seems to involve no real interaction, which may affect the plausibility of this story. In any case, Tom seems more involved with Notre Dame than Sally seems to be with Mark.

What about cases where someone has a desire about something that is clearly part of her life, but it seems not to be bad for her when the desire is not satisfied? One kind of case involves deeply mistaken desires. Consider the dangerously thin anorexic's desire to be thinner; it is not at all good for her if she becomes any thinner. We might try to handle this case by saying that it is very bad for her health if she becomes thinner, and also a bit good for her because it is what she wants, and so overall it is bad for her to become thinner. But that just seems wrong: it seems that it is not at all good for her to become thinner. Her desire is simply confused. (This case is a bit tricky, because she may be made happy by becoming thinner, and we might grant that it's good for her to be made happy. Indeed, it might be impossible that she become thinner without knowing it—this really is impossible for most anorexics, I think. However, I think even her *happiness* at becoming thinner may not be a respect in which the event is good for her. We might deny this happiness has value for her well-being just as we might deny that a sadist's happiness at someone's pain has moral value.) Another kind of case involves desires about parts of one's life that seem trivial. Consider the obsessive-compulsive's desire to touch the doorknob exactly 14 times before leaving the house. She fears miscounting; she thinks it is important that there be exactly 14 touches. But it does not matter at all whether she touches the doorknob 14 or 15 times (though of course it would be better if she would leave the house without touching the doorknob at all). If she indeed miscounts and does not realize it, her desire is not satisfied but this is not bad for her. These two cases show that (9) is false because not every desire about an aspect of a person's life does impact her well-being.

I hope that my discussion of these cases has shown two things: first, that there really are cases in which the failure of someone's desire to be satisfied does not make her worse off, and second, that it is hard to explain why some cases fall into this category and some don't. Let's turn back now to the protesters' desire that Nina's fetus not be aborted. On the one hand, what happens to Nina's fetus seems to be no part of the life of any protestor. They have never spoken with Nina, beyond shouting at her outside the clinic. They have no relationship with her, the fetus's father, or anyone else with whom Nina is close. They certainly have no relationship with the fetus. On the other hand, they are engaged in a serious life project: they are working to stop abortions. Just as Ellen seems to have connected herself, via her efforts, to the famine victims in Africa, these protestors may seem to have connected themselves to Nina's fetus. (Indeed, this is a comparison that they would like; they like even better the comparison between themselves and abolitionists.)

To some people, it will seem wrong to say that, after all, it is bad for the protestors when Nina's fetus is killed, just as it's good for Ellen when the famine victims are saved. So we might be moved to deny that it is really good for Ellen when the famine victims are saved. This might not seem like a bad result. After all, Ellen is motivated by concern for them, not by a selfish desire to make her own life better by helping them: she would be happy to say that it's no better or worse for her that they be saved, but it's very good for them and that is why she acts. But this can't quite be right. It creates an odd asymmetry between personal projects that are moral in nature and other personal projects. When a writer's work continues to be read after his death, a goal he actively sought, this does seem to be good for him. When an urban's planner's

vision for a city is finally adopted, after his death, this seems to be good for him. It does not seem that the satisfaction of Ellen's project should be irrelevant to her well-being merely because her project involved helping others. And there are other cases of moral projects that do seem to impact the agent's well-being. Suppose a teacher struggles to get a class of underprivileged students to attend college and then suddenly dies their senior year. If the students do go on to college, due to his efforts, this makes the teacher's life turn out to have been better because this goal was achieved.

We need a different tactic. If we consider merely whether some desire is about a part of a person's life, then given the way a person's projects can become part of her life, the protesters' project seems to make the fate of Nina's fetus a part of their lives. We can consider a variant of the Sally and Mark case to see that some projects do not succeed in incorporating their subjects into the agents' lives. Suppose that Sally does not just watch Mark in the video store, but secretly stalks him. She learns all about his life and makes a project of investigating him. Still it seems that what happens in his romantic life is irrelevant to her well-being, if she remains firmly resolved not to try to get involved with him but also deeply desirous that he be alone if she can't have him.

Now we might notice that the famine victims in Africa, the high school students of the ambitious teacher, and the Notre Dame football players all have something in common: they welcome the agents whose projects involve them into their lives—they welcome the connection with these agents (or, at least, it seems they should welcome them). By contrast, Mark does not welcome Sally. He doesn't know about her. More importantly, it's likely that Mark wouldn't welcome Sally's project involving him. And Nina certainly does not welcome the project of the protesters. We might propose the following claim:

- (10) A person's projects lead aspects of another otherwise unconnected person's life to be relevant to the first person's well-being if and only if the second person welcomes the first person's projects.¹⁰

What happens in Mark's life doesn't impact Sally's well-being because Mark doesn't welcome her project into his life, and they are not connected except via her project. What happens in Nina's life doesn't impact the protesters' well-being because Nina doesn't welcome their project into her life, and they are not sufficiently connected except via the project. We might wonder about Nina's fetus: the protesters might claim that Nina's fetus would welcome their involvement, just as the

Claim (10) is restricted to cases of desires about the lives of otherwise unconnected people, so it doesn't address the cases of the anorexic and the obsessive compulsive. I don't develop a view about such cases in this paper. However, I will briefly mention how we might explain the case of the anorexic, in which although her desire is about a part of her life, its satisfaction is not good for her. We might distinguish (a) the question whether an event is part of someone's life, and (b) the question of the event's *valence*, whether it is good or bad for the person. We might say that for cases like Ellen's project of helping the famine victims, the desire that is part of her project settles the answers to both (a) and (b): her desire expands her life to make the relief of famine part of her life, and because there is nothing else to determine whether that event is good or bad for her (after all, it's otherwise unconnected to her), her desire makes that event good for her. By contrast, the anorexic's desire doesn't make her becoming thinner an event in her life—it is independently part of her life. Nor does the anorexic's desire determine whether that event is good for her; it is bad for her independently of her having the desire. We might say that desires set the valence of an event only if there is nothing else to set that valence. See footnote 11 for another thought along these lines.

famine victims would welcome Ellen's. However, we are assuming that the protesters are wrong: Nina's fetus is a morally insignificant being. It is not conscious and has no attitudes; and since it's morally insignificant, attitudes that might be had on its behalf seem irrelevant.

Claim (10) is intuitively attractive. One of the things we're doing when we engage in a project is trying to expand the scope of our lives, we might say. Ellen's project expands what counts as part of her life to include the state of famine in the African country she is aiding. Tom expands the scope of his life to include the successes and failures of the Notre Dame football team. But not all efforts at expanding our lives in this way succeed. If we seek to expand our lives to include events that are clearly parts of others' lives, the others get *veto power* on this expansion: if they don't welcome our projects, then the expansion fails.

While claim (10) seems promising, it threatens to give the wrong result in the case of Mountain X. The tribe's project, involving worship of Mountain X, makes it true that whether the hikers hike on Mountain X impacts the well-being of tribe members. So claim (10) gets this case wrong.

Notice that the protesters' project involves a *central aspect* of Nina's life, while the tribe's project involves a comparatively peripheral aspect of the hikers' lives: where they hike. Perhaps this is what makes the difference between the cases: we have veto power over others' expanding the spheres of their lives only if those expansions involve central aspects of our lives. We might revise our explanation as follows:

- (11) A person's projects lead *central* aspects of another otherwise unconnected person's life to be relevant to the first person's well-being if and only if the second person welcomes the first person's projects.

This revision will handle all the cases we have discussed so far. We can claim that a person's projects succeed in expanding the scope of her life, in general, but when the expansion would involve central aspects of another person's life, that person has veto power.

Objections from bad preferences and moral or immoral projects

I have proposed that (11) gives the right story of when a person's projects can expand the scope of what is part of her life. In this section, I will raise several objections to (11) and revise it to handle these objections.

One kind of objection arises in a variant of Ellen's case. Ellen is working to relieve famine in an African country. Suppose that those she is working to aid in fact *do not* welcome her help. They think the U.S. is a horrible country and therefore they want nothing from any American. Furthermore, they do not want charity; they want to make their lives better for themselves. But Ellen's efforts do nevertheless succeed (along with the efforts of many others) and the situation of those in the African country is greatly improved. Is this not good for Ellen, simply because her efforts were not welcomed? I think that is the wrong result, and part of why it seems wrong is that her efforts *should* have been welcomed. While it may be understandable to resent the U.S. for its often selfish and destructive foreign policy, it is not reasonable to thereby shun all Americans. And while it is reasonable to want to

help oneself, one may find oneself in a situation that was not one's own fault and from which one cannot escape without help. Most importantly, the threat of famine is so serious that the Africans *should* welcome the help because they desperately need it. This case suggests the following revision of our principle:

- (12) A person's projects lead *central* aspects of another otherwise unconnected person's life to be relevant to the first person's well-being if and only if the second person welcomes or should welcome the first person's projects

Another kind of objection comes from cases of conflict. Suppose that one engages in a project of aiding one group that is in conflict with another group—one's project is to help the first group win. Here the first group welcomes one's project but the second group does not. If success or failure in the conflict is a central aspect of the lives of members of the group, then the second group's attitude makes it the case that one's project does not succeed in expanding the scope of one's life. In some cases this result may be fine. But in other cases this result is deeply troubling. Suppose that Tanya worked for many years in an Anti-Apartheid organization in the U.S., working to end Apartheid in South Africa. When Apartheid did finally end, it seems that this was good for Tanya—a project she had been working hard on had success. Of course many people for whom the end of Apartheid amounted to a huge change in central aspects of their lives did welcome (or should have welcomed) Tanya's project—the black South Africans. But there were also many people for whom the end of Apartheid amounted to a huge change in central aspects of their lives who did not welcome Tanya's project—the white South Africans who were pro-Apartheid. Furthermore, we cannot say that they are mistaken about what is best for them or that, for their own sakes, they *should* welcome her project, the way we could say this about black South Africans who don't welcome it. The end of Apartheid makes the lives of the white pro-Apartheid South Africans go much worse. In addition, it is certainly a central aspect of their lives whether Apartheid continues or ends, so we can't ignore their attitudes on that count.

This case raises the specter that many morally good projects will never succeed in expanding the scope of the lives of those who engage in the projects, because morally good projects often involve working against morally bad people—and those morally bad people will not welcome these projects.

Nevertheless, we can appeal to (12) to get the right result in this case by saying that even though it is bad for them, the white pro-Apartheid South Africans *should* welcome the end of Apartheid simply because the end of Apartheid is such a morally good, indeed morally necessary, outcome—they should welcome it for the reasons *everyone* should welcome it.

This appears to imply that *any* morally good project will succeed in expanding the scope of the life of the person who engages in that project—because those affected by the project *should* welcome it.

Consider now morally bad projects. Consider Arthur, who was working with a pro-Apartheid group while Tanya worked for her anti-Apartheid group. When Apartheid ended, this major project of Arthur's failed. Was this bad for Arthur? Here again, we have two groups for whom the failure of Arthur's project impacts central aspects of their lives. The black South Africans do not welcome Arthur's

project; the white pro-Apartheid South Africans do. Here we might be inclined to think we should have symmetry. If Tanya's project succeeds in expanding what counts as part of her life while one group welcomes it and one group doesn't, shouldn't Arthur's project also succeed in expanding what counts as part of his life? We need not grant this symmetry, and I think we should not. While it seems that the white South Africans should not have veto power over the end of Apartheid being good for Tanya, it does not seem as bad to say that the black South Africans may have veto power over the end of Apartheid being bad for Arthur. In particular, if Arthur had been successful we might have wanted to resist the idea that his life actually goes better in virtue of his helping to keep the blacks oppressed, and their not welcoming his project could have explained why his life would not thereby go better. (12) helps us to distinguish the case of Arthur from the case of Tanya. The black South Africans do not welcome Arthur's project—and it is not the case that they should: they have neither prudential nor moral reasons to welcome his project. So, his project does not succeed in expanding the scope of his life.

This implies that many immoral projects—all immoral projects that have “victims” or people for whom they are bad—will fail to expand the scope of a person's life, because its victims will not welcome the project.¹¹

But now we might wonder about immoral projects in which the victims *do* welcome the projects. Do these projects succeed in expanding the scopes of their agents' lives?

For example, suppose that Timmy has been brainwashed into believing that his place in life is to be a slave. He does whatever he is told, and endures horrible living conditions without any complaint. Suppose that John is working hard to preserve the institution of slavery of which Timmy is a part. John is working to keep Timmy and others like him subjugated and oppressed. Suppose that the other slaves are like Timmy, they have been brainwashed into believing that being slaves is their rightful place in the world. No one impacted in the success or failure of John's project fails to welcome it. The slaves are happy to continue to be slaves; the owners are happy as well. Nevertheless it is clear that John's project is immoral. It seems horrible to say that it's good for John when his project of keeping the slaves oppressed succeeds. And why should this be good for him when other immoral projects, which also have victims, are not such that their success is good for their agents?

¹¹ I will mention, but not pursue, an alternative view about immoral projects. We might preserve the claim that the success of an immoral project is not good for its agent without claiming, as I do, that the success is neither good nor bad for the agent. Instead, we might pursue the line of thought I mentioned in footnote 10 above. I suggested that we distinguish (a) the question whether an event is part of someone's life, and (b) the question of the event's *valence*, whether it is good or bad for the person. I then suggested that when a desire settles the answer to (a) by making an event part of someone's life, there is nothing other than the desire to determine the answer to (b), the event's valence: because the event is not independently part of the person's life, it seems the event that is the desire's satisfaction must simply be good for the person. However, if an event is the success of an *immoral* project, we might say that the event is bad for the person by invoking a general principle that it's bad for one to succeed in immoral projects. This view preserves my claim that the success of immoral projects is not good for agents, but differs from my view in claiming such success is actually *bad* for agents.

It seems that in cases where a victim is deluded into welcoming a project that is in fact immoral and thereby bad for him, the mere fact that he *should not* welcome the project is sufficient to undermine the project's expansion of the scope of its agent's life.¹² So the fact that Timmy and the other slaves *should not* want to be slaves and should not welcome a project that seeks to keep them as slaves is enough to undermine the expansion of John's life. We should revise as follows:

- (13) A person's projects lead *central* aspects of another otherwise unconnected person's life to be relevant to the first person's well-being if and only if (a) the second person welcomes or should welcome the first person's projects, and (b) it is not the case that the second person should not welcome the first person's projects

Objections from ignorance, indifference, and indecisiveness

In this section, I consider objections to (13) that arise from three different kinds of cases: cases where one person has a project that concerns central aspects of a second person's life, but the second person is *ignorant* of the project and has formed no attitude about such projects; cases in which one person has a project that concerns central aspects of a second person's life, and the second person is *indifferent* to the first person's project; and cases in which one person has a project that concerns central aspects of a second person's life, and the second person is *indecisive* in her attitude to the project, not in that she fails to form attitudes about it but in that her attitudes change back and forth over time.

First, suppose that Albert is an avid reader of internet blogs about philosophy, and an avid follower of philosophers' careers. Albert is not a philosopher, but he follows the progress of some philosophy careers the way a baseball fan will follow the careers of his favorite players. Albert is very impressed with a philosopher named Steve Smith, he invests considerable time and energy in learning about Steve and following his career via the web, and Albert desperately hopes that Steve's career will go well. Suppose Steve has no idea that anyone has such a project, and furthermore that Steve has never contemplated the possibility of such a project, and so has formed no attitude toward such a possible project. Steve does not welcome Albert's project. Nevertheless, suppose further that if Steve learned of Albert's project, Steve would welcome it. It also appears to be clear that in this case, while Steve *would* welcome Albert's project, it is not the case that Steve *should* welcome Albert's project: if Steve knew about Albert's project and resented it because he

¹² One might raise the following objection: if we deny that it can be good for a person that an immoral project succeed, our view will falsely imply that *morality is not demanding* in a way it clearly is. Clearly, we are sometimes required to forgo a project *whose success would be good for us* precisely because that project is immoral. But this objection fails to distinguish two questions. One is whether an immoral project can lead to events that are clearly parts of my life and clearly good for me—the answer, on my view, is “yes.” An immoral project may lead me to become very wealthy, or to get a very good job; the view I am developing does not deny that these things are good for someone. The other question is whether, if an immoral project's success only involves events remote from my life, the success of the project *in itself* can be good for me—the answer, on my view, is “no” (if the project has victims).

prefers not to have strangers emotionally invested in his life, that would not be unreasonable. The objector maintains that in this case, where Steve has no attitude to Albert's project but would welcome it if he knew of it, it is clear that it is good for Albert when Steve's career goes well. Why should the mere fact that Steve has never contemplated a project like Albert's cut off Albert's capacity to expand his life to include events in Steve's career? Yet according to (13), because Steve neither welcomes nor should he welcome Albert's project, it is not good for Albert when Steve's career succeeds.

I think this objection is well-taken, and that (13) should be revised to handle the case. We should adopt this claim:

- (14) A person's projects lead *central* aspects of another otherwise unconnected person's life to be relevant to the first person's well-being if and only if (a) the second person welcomes, should welcome, or would welcome the first person's projects, and (b) it is not the case that the second person should not welcome the first person's projects.¹³

By adopting (14) we allow that the fact that Steve *would welcome* Albert's project is enough to make Albert's project succeed in expanding the scope of Albert's life.¹⁴

The second objection arises in a case in which one person has a project that concerns central aspects of another person's life, and the second person is *indifferent* to the project. Consider a variant of the last case in which Steve knows of Albert's project and Steve is simply indifferent to Albert's project: Steve is neither happy with the project nor irritated by it; he does not care about it at all. The objector maintains that, in this case, it is good for Albert that Steve's career succeeds, even though Steve is not positive about Albert's project and so does not welcome it. The objector claims that this case brings out that the crucial issue is not whether the second person *welcomes*, or has a positive attitude toward, the first person's project but rather whether the second person *fails to reject*, or fails to have a negative attitude toward, the first person's project. The objector claims that while the second person should have *veto power* over the first person's project's expansion of the first person's life, it's not the case that the first person needs to *positively endorse* the second person's project.

¹³ I anticipated the relevance of attitudes the second person *would have* in discussing the case of Sally and Mark the video-store clerk. I said that Mark does not welcome Sally's project and that he *would not* welcome it.

¹⁴ Note that in discussing this case, I have implicitly assumed that if Steve has contemplated the possibility of having an internet fan, and he has formed a positive attitude toward that possibility, then this is sufficient for it to be the case that Steve *does welcome* Albert's interest. That is, in order to welcome a project it is enough that someone have a positive attitude toward projects of that type, without having a positive attitude toward the particular project. This assumption is not crucial, however, in light of the revision to (13), because when a person has a positive attitude toward a type of project then (in most cases) she *would* have a positive attitude toward a particular project of that type.

Again, the objector seems to be right. We should revise as follows:

- (15) When a person's project concerns *central* aspects of another otherwise unconnected person's life, then:
- (a) if the second person should not reject the first person's project, then whether the project succeeds is relevant to the first person's well-being
 - (b) if the second person should reject the first person's project, then whether the project succeeds is not relevant to the first person's well-being otherwise:
 - (c) whether the project succeeds is relevant to the first person's well-being if and only if: the second person does not reject the first person's project, and it's not the case that she would reject the project if she formed an attitude toward it

This is a more radical revision than earlier revisions of our tentative proposals, so it is worth briefly showing that it handles all the cases we have seen so far.¹⁵

Consider cases in which the second person should welcome the first person's project. In these cases, the person should not reject the first person's project, so clause (a) applies. These are cases in which the first person's project succeeds in expanding her life: Ellen is made better off by the relief of famine in Africa and an anti-Apartheid activist is made better off by the end of Apartheid. This is so, regardless of the actual attitudes of those relieved of famine and those who go through the end of Apartheid.

Consider cases in which the second person should not welcome the first person's project. I assume that in these cases, the second person *should reject* the first person's projects. (It seems impossible that indifference would be permissible, and yet welcoming would be impermissible). Thus these are cases to which clause (b) applies. These are cases in which the first person's project fails to expand her life: the pro-Apartheid activist is not made worse off by the end of Apartheid and a pro-slavery advocate is not made better off by the continuation of slavery. This is so, regardless of the actual attitudes of the slaves and those who go through the end of Apartheid.

Finally, consider cases in which it is neither the case that the second person should welcome the project nor the case that the second person should not welcome the project. These are cases in which clause (c) applies. The first person's project succeeds in expanding her life if and only if: the second person does not reject the first person's project, and it's not the case that she would reject the project if she formed an attitude toward it. If the second person rejects the project, then the project does not succeed in

¹⁵ It might be objected that the view I advocate, (15), is too complicated to be the right story, and indeed that this shows that my methodology is misguided: if one is committed to accommodating a bunch of particular claims about particular cases, one will end up with a messy and gerrymandered conclusion. I do not think that (15) is complicated or gerrymandered, but I would like to respond to this objection by focusing on its underlying claim: that, in principle, my methodology does not leave room for this kind of worry. That charge is wrong. Like any advocate of reasoning by reflective equilibrium, I allow that we may have to give up some of the claims we initially accept in order to arrive at the right conclusion, and we may have to give up very many of these claims if that is the only way to preserve another single claim that seems much more clearly to be true. For example, most of us believe very strongly that moral principles are not *ad hoc*, that there is always some principled explanation wherever there is a moral distinction. If an argument from specific claims arrives at a general principle that is *ad hoc*, it may well be the right response to the argument to say that some of the specific claims must be false because the general principle cannot be true. See footnote 1 for another comment on my methodology.

expanding the first person's life: it is not bad for the protesters when Nina aborts. If the second person welcomes the project, then she does not reject the project, and it's not the case that she would reject it, so the project succeeds in expanding the first person's life.¹⁶ If the second person neither rejects nor welcomes the project, and it's not the case that she would reject the project, then the project succeeds in expanding the first person's life: Albert the internet fan is made better off by the success of Steve's philosophical career, because although Steve does not in fact welcome Albert's project, it's not the case that Steve *would reject it* were Steve to form an attitude toward it. (This holds for both versions of the case, both the version in which Steve would welcome the project and the version in which Steve has an attitude of indifference to the project.) Finally, if the second person neither rejects nor welcomes the project yet she would reject the project if she contemplated it, then the project does not succeed in expanding the first person's life.

Claim (15) is the view I advocate.

I will turn finally to discussing a third objection that might be raised, given by a case in which the second person's attitude changes across time—she is in this sense *indecisive* in her attitude. Suppose that Sue is contemplating abortion and some anti-abortion protesters urge her not to abort. Suppose that before encountering the protesters, Sue has a very negative attitude toward any such projects in which strangers would seek to influence her against aborting. However, when she encounters the protesters she becomes moved by their advocacy and for some time has a very positive attitude toward their efforts to influence her; it seems that she comes under their sway. Sue chooses to abort. Later, she comes to have a strong negative attitude toward the protesters' efforts to get her not to abort (though she need not also regret the choice to abort). The objector claims that my view does not yield a clear verdict about this case. This is a case in which Sue is not mandated to have any particular attitude, so her actual attitude should determine whether the protesters are made better off by her failing to abort. But her actual attitude changes over time. It won't do to say that whether the protesters are made better off *changes across time*. There must simply be a fact about this. What we need is an overall judgment as to whether, all things considered, a case in which someone changes her attitude across time is, in the relevant sense, *more like* a case in which someone welcomes a project or a case in which someone fails to welcome a project. We can answer this question by taking seriously the insight provided by the objection from cases of indifference: what's crucial is whether the second person *rejects* the project, not whether she *welcomes* it. Sue does reject the project, at some times, and so she seems to be importantly more like someone who simply rejects a project than like someone who welcomes or is indifferent to a project.

¹⁶ Here I assume that if the second person welcomes the first person's project, then it's not the case that she would reject it if she formed an attitude to it. But if we read a counterfactual "if p, then q" as true just in case *most sufficiently close worlds* where p is true are worlds where q is true, then even if p is true and q is false, "if p, then q" can be true, when most of the sufficiently close p-worlds to the actual world are worlds where q is true. How could it be that the second person welcomes the first person's project but in most nearby worlds where she considers the project, she rejects it? This could be so if her character would very likely lead her to reject the project and by an *unlikely fluke* in the actual world, she welcomes the project. As (15) stands, it says that in this case the first person's project does not succeed in expanding her life (because while the second person fails to reject the project, she *would reject it*). This may seem odd, given the second person *welcomes* the project. But I think it's more plausible that the second person's *true self* or character should settle this issue, rather than her actual attitude (just as what attitude she should have trumps what attitude she actually has in settling the issue).

Happily, (15) as it stands will handle this case correctly. Clause (c) applies to this case. Because Sue sometimes does reject the project, it is not the case that she does not reject the project, so (c) implies that the project does not succeed in expanding the first person's life: the protesters are not made better off by Sue's failing to abort.¹⁷

Badness without a reason?

Let's take stock. I argued that we need some explanation of why there are reasons for the hikers not to hike on the mountain, in virtue of the tribe's worship, but there are no reasons against Nina's aborting, in virtue of the protesters' love of her fetus—I argued that we cannot explain these facts by saying that attributions of moral status endow moral status. I have been developing a view according to which the hiking is bad for the tribe members, but the abortion is not bad for the protesters. I think the view I have developed is right, but in this section I will turn to considering two other explanations we might give.

We might grant that aborting Nina's fetus is bad for the protesters and yet deny that this provides any moral reason against Nina's aborting. We need not grant that *all* desires are such that their satisfaction impacts well-being. As I've argued, some desires clearly seem to be such that their not being satisfied is not bad for the desirer. Nevertheless, we might be convinced that the protesters' project is sufficient to make the death of Nina's fetus bad for them, as it is a partial failure of their project. We would then say that while the death of Nina's fetus is bad for the protesters, this fact provides no reason against Nina's choosing to abort or against the doctor's performing the abortion. This claim, like the claim of the last section, raises a problem we must solve anyway. Our problem is of explaining why the badness to the tribe of hiking on the mountain does create a reason for the hikers not to hike, while the badness to the protesters does not create a reason for Nina not to abort. We already have a problem of explaining why sometimes the fact that an action would be bad for someone else provides a reason against acting, and sometimes it provides no reason.

Suppose we have advertised a junior position in our philosophy department, and we are considering whom to hire. Alice and Bob are on the short list. Suppose that Alice has offers from several good schools, but Bob has no other prospects. It may well be good for Alice to get an offer from us, but it will be much better for Bob. Suppose further that, though it is irrational, Bob will leave philosophy if he does not get a job this year, his first year on the market—that is, if we do not hire him. These facts seem to provide no reasons to us at all.¹⁸ We ought to hire the best person for the job, and the only reasons for or against hiring Alice and Bob are reasons to do with how they will do at the job. I do not mean to be saying anything controversial about hiring. It may be relevant whether either is a member of an under-represented minority. It may be relevant how well each gets along with people. It may be rele-

¹⁷ The Sue case does provide a counterexample to earlier proposals we considered, such as (14). (14) would imply that the protesters' project does succeed in expanding their lives because Sue does (at some time) welcome it. Thanks to Jason Kawall for raising the case of Sue as an objection to a version of my proposal close to (14).

¹⁸ Note that we shouldn't conclude that Bob's inclination to leave the profession if we don't hire him shows him to be inadequately committed to philosophy, or otherwise undesirable. It need not indicate any such fact.

vant what our teaching needs are. But it is simply irrelevant that Bob will struggle in pursuing a new profession if we do not hire him.

To make things more complicated, it does not seem that hiring decisions are immune from reasons to do with what will happen to those we do not hire. Suppose that a weird Mafia boss is at work. He paid for Bob's education, unbeknownst to Bob, but has now revealed himself and demanded that Bob prove the boss's attentions were rightly bestowed: he will kill Bob if we do not hire him. Here I am inclined to say that the badness to Bob of being killed if we do not hire him does provide a reason for us to hire him. It's not obvious that we should hire him in this case, but it does seem that the fact that he will die if we don't hire him provides us with a reason to hire him. Indeed, if the choice between Bob and Alice is very close, though we would pick Alice based on their talents, and if Alice has another good job waiting for her, then perhaps we should pick Bob in this case. (Some may say that we should never allow gangsters to engage in this kind of blackmail, but suppose that the Mafia do not intend to be threatening *us*. Also, it seems that we could consider a variant of the case in which Bob's life is in danger for some other reason.)

Consider another case. Suppose that Dan and Missy are dating, and Dan asks Missy to marry him. Dan will be devastated if Missy says "no"; it will clearly be bad for Dan if Missy says "no." Nevertheless, it seems that the fact that it would be bad for Dan if Missy refuses his proposal is simply irrelevant to what she should do. It provides no reason at all. Missy should decide whether to marry Dan based on whether she loves him, wants to marry him, and thinks they can have a happy and successful marriage. That Dan will be devastated if she does not marry him should not play a role in her thinking.

It seems that some decisions should be made by taking only certain kinds of considerations into account. Other facts about how good or bad the outcomes will be should not influence these decisions, and do not provide reasons to act in one way rather than another. But there also seems to be an exception for cases where these reasons are particularly weighty, such as when Bob's life is at stake.

We might say that the decision whether to have an abortion should be made taking into account only the effects on the pregnant woman herself, her family and the child that the fetus will develop into if she does not abort. She should not take into account the strain on her work colleagues of her maternity leave: if continuing the pregnancy is otherwise the right choice, then the strain on her colleagues provides no reason. She should not take into account the disappointment of her mother that she is, let's suppose, having a mixed-race baby; though she might take into account the strain on the child of having a grandmother with this attitude. She should take into account the desires of the fetus's father.¹⁹ She should take into account her own desires about what her life will be like. She should take into account the needs of her other children. She should not take into account the badness for the abortion protesters of her abortion.

We might also say that, by contrast, the decision whether to hike on Mountain X is not constrained in the same way. It is not the kind of decision to which only a very special class of reasons should be relevant. Thus, the fact that it would be bad for the tribe if the hikers hike *is* relevant to what they should do; it does provide a reason.

¹⁹ If the fetus's father cares about the fetus and has a strong desire that it not be killed, its death does impact his well-being and does provide a reason against aborting (though of course other reasons may well outweigh this one). On the view I'm here considering, the father's concern for the fetus is importantly different from the protesters' concern for the fetus.

Of course this story would need to be spelled out. Why are some actions such that only certain kinds of considerations can provide reasons about how to act? Which kinds of actions are like this? How do we explain which kinds of considerations are relevant? While there is much work to be done, the initial gesture at a view here does seem to capture an important phenomenon.

In the previous sections, I advocated the view that Nina's abortion is not bad for the protesters. In this section I have articulated the alternative view that Nina's abortion is bad for the protesters, but this does not provide a reason against aborting. I will now mention one more view we could hold: that Nina's abortion is bad for the protesters, that it does provide a reason against aborting, but that this reason is *silenced* by other reasons.

Sometimes reasons interact simply by one *outweighing* another. If I come upon six people in peril, and I can either let five die or let one die, the reasons to save the five outweigh the reasons to save the one. If I am trying to decide which job to take, the ways in which one job will be good for me may outweigh the ways in which another would be good for me, making it the case that I should take the first job. If I am trying to decide whether to swim after dinner, the reason given by the stomachache I would get may outweigh the reason given by the enjoyment of swimming.

But reasons can interact in other ways as well. The fact that it would make my friend Julie happy if I spent five more minutes chatting with her provides a reason to stay; the fact that I promised my friend Ryan I would meet him in five minutes provides a reason to go. Does the fact of my promise *outweigh* the fact of my friend's enjoyment? It is tempting to say that outweighing is not what's going on. Rather, the fact of my promise *silences* the reason given by my friend's enjoyment: it makes my friend's enjoyment irrelevant. I simply ought to keep my promise, regardless of what good would come of breaking it. (Though, of course, things are more complicated: my promise does not silence a reason to save someone's life.)

So, we might say that both the badness to the tribe of the hikers hiking on Mountain X, and the badness to the protesters of Nina's aborting, provide reasons against these actions. But we might say that in the case of Nina's abortion, factors about what Nina wants and needs, and what those close to her want and need, *silence* reasons to do with the effects on the protesters: they render these effects irrelevant to what she should do.

Why we should prefer the no-impact-on-well-being view

Now that I've articulated two alternative views, I'll argue briefly that my own view is the best of the three. Each view is an effort to preserve the idea that, while the fact of the tribe's worship of Mountain X provides an active reason against the hikers' hiking, the fact of the protesters' love of Nina's fetus doesn't provide an active reason against her aborting. (Say that a "silenced" reason is not "active.") The views are:

- A. The protesters' love of Nina's fetus does not make aborting it bad for them.
- B. The protesters' love of Nina's fetus does make aborting it bad for them, but this does not provide a reason against aborting it.
- C. The protesters' love of Nina's fetus does make aborting it bad for them, this does provide a reason against aborting it, but the reason is silenced.

My concern with views B and C is that they still lead us to have to say false things about how Nina should think and feel about her choice to abort. In the case where we

decide not to hire Bob and he leaves philosophy, we should feel somewhat bad about his fate—we should feel bad for him and we should feel bad about playing a role in this fate, even though we know that we should not have taken it as a reason to act differently. In the case where I leave my friend Julie to keep my promise to Ryan, I should feel sorry to leave Julie when she wants to keep talking—I should be apologetic although I recognize her desire that I stay to provide a reason that is silenced by my promise. It seems that if we adopt view B or C, we ought to say that Nina, too, should feel somewhat bad about the badness to the protesters of her abortion. But that seems wrong; indeed, some would say it is offensive to suggest Nina should feel bad for the protesters, whose interest in her life she does not welcome.

Hope for some attributions endow?

I've articulated views A, B, and C, mentioned in the last section, as ways of explaining an important difference between the protesters' love of the fetus, and how it impacts Nina's reasons, and the tribe's worship of Mountain X, and how it impacts the hikers' reasons. Now one might object to my earlier argument against Some Attributions Endow. That argument contained this premise:

Premise Three: It cannot be that Mountain X has moral status in virtue of the tribe's worship, but Nina's fetus does not have moral status in virtue of the protesters' love.

I argued that no principled reasons could be given for why Nina's fetus would not get to have moral status in virtue of the protesters' love if Mountain X does get to have moral status in virtue of the tribe's worship. Now an objector might argue that an explanation of how views A, B, or C manage to make a difference between the two cases could be *adapted* to explain the difference given by Some Attributions Endow.

For example, the objector says, we might adopt an analogue of my view (15) to explain how moral status is sometimes but not always endowed by attitudes of worship or love:

- (16) When a person has a project that includes worship or love of something that otherwise lacks moral status, and central aspects of another otherwise unconnected person's life play a role in the well-being of that thing, then:
- (a) if the second person should not reject the first person's project, then the object is endowed with moral status
 - (b) if the second person should reject the first person's project, then the object is not endowed with moral status
- otherwise:
- (c) the object is endowed with moral status if and only if: the second person does not reject the first person's project, and it's not the case that she would reject the project if she formed an attitude toward it

But as I mentioned in first discussing Some Attributions Endow, the fact that another person's life is implicated in effects on a thing—that Nina's life is implicated in what happens to the fetus—may provide countervailing reasons against any reasons

given by her fetus's status. But it is hard to see how the presence of these countervailing reasons should affect whether the fetus has status at all. The considerations outlined in (16) simply seem to be the wrong type of considerations to determine whether something has moral status.

Can attributions lower moral status?

In Part One, I argued that others' *attributions* of moral status do not endow moral status. There is a very different argument that might be made, which goes as follows:

Premise 1: If attributions of moral status give some things moral status, then someone's view that something lacks moral status or has low moral status lowers that thing's moral status.

Premise 2: If someone's view that something lacks moral status or has low moral status lowers that thing's moral status, then the attitudes of racists lower the moral status of those they believe to have low moral status, and the attitudes of speciesists (or those who believe animal suffering matters very little) lower the moral status of animals.

Premise 3: The attitudes of racists do not lower the moral status of those they believe to have low moral status, and the attitudes of speciesists do not lower the moral status of animals.

Conclusion: Attributions of moral status do not give some things moral status.

A proponent of this argument will argue that Premise 1 follows from a need to be principled and consistent: if moral status can be affected by attributions of moral status, then it ought to be affected also by attributions of low moral status, or of no moral status. If moral status is sensitive to our beliefs about it, then it ought to be sensitive to all those beliefs. While this is a natural thought, I think that Premise 1 will be easy to resist for those who believe that attributions of moral status can endow it. They can argue that *raising* moral status ought to be much easier than *lowering* moral status. Their idea is that the fact that some people care about something provides another reason for it to have moral status, in addition to whatever reasons there may independently be. Having moral status is simply being such that one of a number of different conditions apply to you; lack of moral status is simply the absence of any of these conditions. But there aren't any conditions which themselves support the *denial* of moral status, and so no positive condition can lower moral status.²⁰

Conclusion

The case of Mountain X is a case in which the tribe members' worship of, and concern for, the mountain gives us reasons not to treat the mountain in a certain

²⁰ The view in Warren (1997), as initially stated, appears to imply only that we have reasons to treat things that are believed to have moral status as though they do have moral status. But at one point Warren suggests that her view also implies that we have reasons to "respect" views according to which things have lower moral status than we believe them to have; and she seems to hold that "respecting" a view involves accepting it to some degree. This would be a dangerous position, as the examples of racism and speciesism illustrate. (On page 209, she says that her "Transitivity of Respect" principle implies that the pro-choice and anti-abortion groups should respect each others' "judgments about the moral status of women and fetuses.")

way. We might explain these reasons by saying that the tribe members' attitude, which attributes moral status to the mountain, also *endows* the mountain with moral status. I've argued that this explanation cannot be right. I first argued that it cannot be that all attitudes that attribute moral status also endow moral status, because pre-conscious fetuses do not come to have moral status in virtue of anti-abortion protesters' caring about them. I then argued that there is no principled way to hold that the mountain gets moral status in virtue of the tribe members' concern for it while pre-conscious fetuses do not get moral status in virtue of the anti-abortion protesters' concern for them. I concluded that this claim is false:

Some Attributions Endow: The fact that some persons worship or care deeply about the well-being of some thing, when that thing otherwise lacks moral status, sometimes endows it with moral status.

I then discussed the hard question that remains after we have rejected the view that attitudes attributing moral status can endow it: why does the tribe's worship of the mountain give us reasons to treat the mountain in certain ways, but the anti-abortion protesters' love of Nina's fetus gives us no reasons to treat Nina's fetus in particular ways? I claimed that the anti-abortion protesters' love of Nina's fetus does not bring the fetus's death to be bad *for the protesters*, while by contrast the hikers' hiking on the mountain is bad *for the tribe members* in virtue of their worship of the mountain. It is hard to explain this difference; but we already face a hard problem of explaining why some desires are such that their satisfaction impacts the desirer's well-being and other desires are not. I proposed this solution:

- (15) When a person's project concerns *central* aspects of another otherwise unconnected person's life, then:
- (a) if the second person should not reject the first person's project, then whether the project succeeds is relevant to the first person's well-being
 - (b) if the second person should reject the first person's project, then whether the project succeeds is not relevant to the first person's well-being otherwise:
 - (c) whether the project succeeds is relevant to the first person's well-being if and only if the second person does not reject the first person's project, and it's not the case that she would reject the project if she formed an attitude toward it.²¹

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²¹ I am indebted to the many people who gave me comments on drafts of this paper. Thanks in particular to Elisabeth Camp, Julia Driver, Alex Guerrero, Dale Jamieson, Jeff McMahan, Michael Rescorla, and audiences at the 2005 Bellingham Summer Philosophy Conference, Nassau Community College, and the Princeton University Center for Human Values.