

Living Well and the Demands of Morality

Clashing Demands

Three Questions for Concern

1. To what extent are the desire to live well and the demands of morality independent?
 2. If they are not independent, which has priority in determining the content of the other?
 3. If they are independent, and also incompatible, how does one choose, in a rationally governed sort of way, which one should resist in favor of the other?
- * 'We therefore have to consider the relation among three concepts: the good life, the moral life, and the rational life.' —Nagel (*VN*, 193)

What this is not

- * This is not a conflict between the attractions and demands of consequentialism and Kantian deontology.
- * It is rather a conflict between the demands of the personal and the impersonal.

An Ancient Concern

- * Plato's *Republic* ii: why should justice be regarded as something good in its own right—where that justice is meant to be something, as a virtue, I have reason to pursue?
- * Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*: how does one reconcile eudaimonism with the impartial point of view? Or even with cosmopolitanism?

Five Alternatives

1. Subordinate the moral life to the demands of living well as a matter of definition. ('This is Aristotle's position, more or less.' —VN 195)
2. Subordinate the demands of living well to the moral life, again as a matter of definition. ('This is Plato's position.' —VN 195-196).
3. Living well overrides the moral life. ('This is Nietzsche's position. It is expressed also by Thrasymachus in the *Republic*.' —VN 196)
4. The moral life overrides living well. (This seems a natural form of Utilitarianism, and also the view of non-theistic deontology. Basically living well and the demands of morality can and do conflict, and when they do, living well gives way.)
5. Neither living well nor the moral life overrides the other. (Neither is either, as in (3) and (4), to be defined in terms of the other.)

A General Worry from Williams

- * The demands of impersonal morality—of *any* impersonal morality, of any form—are bound to be self-alienating.
- * We might tend to valorize those who self-alienate (though rarely to the extreme of emulation, one may note). . .
 - * . . .but should we?
 - * More to the point, why should we?