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› Putting the Central Conflict to Rest? Raz on Morality and Well-Being

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Every moral demandingness objection presupposes that there is something like demandingness. Advocates of moderate ethics, e. g. Scheffler (1992), as well as opponents of the objection, e. g. Goodin (2008), seem to agree that demandingness is a conflict between morality and the well-being, good life or (self-)interest of the addressees. Demandingness poses questions¹ which are independent from the questions of the overdemandingness debate; however, the debate on overdemandingness presupposes a clarification of what might be excessive or not, namely demandingness.

Joseph Raz has challenged the debate on demandingness by criticizing (i) that it misconstrues the nature of the conflict between morality and its demands on the one hand, and self-interest, interest or well-being of the agent on the other, and that it is falsely assumed that the conflict is conceptually necessary, as well as (ii) that it rests on wrong premises concerning the existence of a moral point of view and a corresponding dualism of practical reasons.

While Raz' works are unanimously understood as a challenging critique, which deserves a response, it is not at all clear which positive position he advocates. However, since his own position is the basis for his criticism, it should be adequately understood to make clear what the challenge and critique rest on. After all, it is questionable if Raz even offers an alternative, better approach. The clarification of Raz' position is complicated by the fact that he attends to the respective questions in the twelfth chapter ("Personal Well-Being") of *Morality of Freedom* (1986) and then again in a later cluster of essays, which are all to be found in *Engaging Reason* (1999), except for *A Morality Fit for Humans* (1993). As it cannot simply be assumed that the earlier and the later approach to the problem present arguments for the same conclusion separate analyses are necessary.

* Forthcoming in van Ackeren, M./Kühler, M. (eds.): *The Limits of Moral Obligation. Ought Implies Can and Moral Demandingness*, London/New York: Routledge 2015.

1 Cf. Bloomfield 2008

In the following I will show that Raz does not deny that conflicts are possible,² but that he consistently argues for the thesis that demandingness is a conflict which is conceptually not necessary, but possible, and which is empirically rare when the two conflicting poles are properly understood. But it is important to distinguish two arguments: The earlier argument from *Morality of Freedom* is problematic, because the difference between well-being, self-interest and interest is at best unclear (cf. Section 1), and he does not maintain it in later works, and also because the main thesis includes a reference to “social forms” that presupposes too much (cf. section 2). In the second argument (cf. section 3) – to be reconstructed from *The Central Conflict* and *The Moral Point of View* – Raz gives a striking new explanation for the possibility of conflicts. He also alters his view on the agent’s side of the conflict: While in *Morality of Freedom* morality could not be in conflict with well-being – and if at all only little with self-interest –, well-being now is an optional goal, so that the conflict is now between morality and specifically chosen, valuable interests or goals.

The promising challenge of the debate becomes more obvious in later works, as their arguments increasingly rest on criticism concerning the moral point of view, as well as the dualism of practical reasons (cf. section 4). His criticism here has led to two interpretations: According to the strong reading,³ Raz denies any way of distinguishing between the moral and personal point of view and corresponding reasons. According to the weaker interpretation, he only denies that the moral and personal point of view and corresponding reasons can be distinguished in a philosophically deep and context independent way. The weaker interpretation is correct, at least from a doxographic point of view, and from a systematic standpoint it seems much more fruitful for the debate.

1 The Difference between Well-Being and Self-Interest

In the twelfth chapter of *Morality of Freedom*, entitled *Personal Well-Being*, Raz wants to distinguish between well-being and self-interest on the part of the addressees, and show that it is only the conflict between morality and well-being that matters. The problem is that he in fact presents two distinctions that seem to conflict with each other.

Well-being is “one crucial evaluation of a person’s life” and refers to the totality and goodness of life for the person.⁴ Well-being means the “success” of life,⁵ i. e., the fulfillment of valuable goals or at least a sufficient effort to fulfill them.⁶ The value of certain situations for the well-being of a person is also dependent on their goals. Against this background, Raz wants to distance himself from taking “self-interest” and “well-being” to be co-extensive. He regards “‘interest’ as roughly co-extensive with ‘well-being’”,⁷ but according to the first distinction (I) self-interest has to be distinguished from well-being because “self-interest is largely a biological notion”.⁸ And goals which are not biologically determined are crucial, for they have been

2 Cf. Crisp 1997.

3 Cf. Wallace 2004.

4 Raz 1986, 289 and 293.

5 Raz 1986, 289 and 295.

6 Raz 1986, 321.

7 Raz 1986, 295.

8 Raz 1986, 295.

“adopted, or endorsed” and they “contribute to a person’s well-being because they are his goals, they are what matters to him”.⁹ Raz assumes that there is no way to bridge the “gap between self-interest and well-being”.¹⁰ This first distinction (I) defines self-interest as a biological concept and well-being as “a function of their non-biologically determined goals: goals which they have but could have avoided”.¹¹

However, this does not really make clear whether the distinction between well-being and self-interest (Ia) rests on a distinction between two kinds of goals, namely between those that have been chosen, that are important to the agent and bring about well-being and those, which are biologically determined, and thus have not been chosen.¹² Or (Ib) is the distinction between well-being and self-interest based on the assumption that goals always have to be chosen and are thus important to the agent, while self-interest consists in biologically determined “needs and desires”, which are not necessarily goals?¹³¹⁴ Although biologically determined needs do not necessarily lead to corresponding ambitions, they “normally”¹⁵ do so. Hence, Raz writes that “[a] person’s well-being is not reduced by the shortening of his life, nor by frustrating his biological needs, when this is the means of or the accepted by-product of his pursuit of a valuable goal”.¹⁶

He gives a warning: “Given the absence of a boundary between the biological and the cultural or conventional, one should not make too much of the position that self-interest is a biological concept.”¹⁷ This introduces the second distinction (II): “self-interest ... is served by the success in those of his pursuits and relationships which he does not enter into to improve the well-being of others. This explanation is a negative one. It works by exclusion. Self-interest is what remains after subtracting from the wider notion of well-being success in those projects whose value (in the eye of the person in question) is their contribution to the well-being of others.”¹⁸

While distinction (I) was about a “gap”,¹⁹ distinction (II) refers to self-interest as an “aspect”²⁰ or a “biological determined component”²¹ of well-being. Also, another group of values and goals is now mentioned in order to define self-interest: those goals, whose value consists in supporting the well-being of others. Self-interest is seen as the one aspect of well-being, which is not concerned with these goals.²² This negative explanation, however, also reveals a positive

9 Raz 1986, 292.

10 Raz 1986, 296.

11 Raz 1986, 294.

12 Distinction (Ia) is supported by him writing about “isolated goals, reasons and or desires. They are often biologically determined...” and later about “biologically determined goals” (Raz 1986, 297); cf. also p. 290, where he mentions “biological determined wants” and “other goals”.

13 Raz 1986, 305–6.

14 Distinction (Ib) is supported by the statement that biologically determined needs are not necessarily goals: “a person is better off when well fed, in moderate temperature ..., whether he adopts these as his goals or not.” (Raz 1986, 290).

15 Raz 1986, 290, 317.

16 Raz 1986, 296.

17 Raz 1986, 296.

18 Raz 1986, 297.

19 Raz 1986, 296.

20 Raz 1986, 297.

21 Raz 1986, 308.

22 Cf. Raz 1986, 318.

aspect of well-being: if self-interest as a part of well-being is defined by the exclusion of those goals that are valuable due to their promotion of the well-being of others, well-being must – in the wider notion – consist of two parts, namely those goals which are concerned with the well-being of others and self-interest. This way of distinguishing between self-interest and the other part of well-being which is concerned with the promotion of the well-being of others also corresponds to Raz' description of self-interest as an aspect of "self-serving".²³

Raz' main purpose is clear enough: He wants to diminish the importance of self-interest, and view the problem of demandingness as a relation between morality and well-being: "Their well-being, and not their self-interest, matters most both morally and to people themselves. Therefore, the relation between an agent's well-being and morality is the real issue. The notion of self-interest is thus demoted a secondary place".²⁴

However, it is not quite clear how those statements can be in accordance with the definition of self-interest as an aspect, a component of well-being. For when Raz writes: "What really matters to people is all that we group under their well-being",²⁵ and when he states that the relation between well-being and morality is the real problem, it seems as if he does not mean the entire well-being which includes self-interest, but only well-being without self-interest. Otherwise, self-interest would not be demoted to second place, but it would be included in the first, i. e., that of well-being.²⁶ It seems as if the "gap" was back.

The clear attempt to diminish the importance of self-interest can also be found in Wallace: "While agreeing with Raz that narrow self-interest does not constitute an interesting class of normative considerations, I contend that there is a broader class of 'eudaimonistic' considerations that is significant".²⁷ Still, Wallace position is afflicted with the same obscurity: The claim that self-interest on the part of the agent – when in conflict with morality – is not an interesting class to be an antipole can be understood in two ways: It can either mean that self-interest by itself is not enough to be that antipole – but that it still belongs to the broader class of eudaimonistic reflections –, or that only the other part of those eudaimonistic reflections (but not self-interest) can be an antipole.

Raz and Wallace point out that agents sometimes decide to make a sacrifice, i. e., not to pursue their self-interest (in the sense of biologically determined goals) in favor of another chosen goal.²⁸ However, this only shows that there are cases in which conflicts between self-interest and other aspects of well-being can occur. These cases occur, but I fail to see how this gives an answer to the question of whether self-interest on the part of the agent (by itself or as a part of well-being) can be in conflict with moral demands. It also does not answer the question of whether those conflicts are morally significant, and how and what we should rationally choose. In short: Are those conflicts between morality and self-interest truly never a "real issue"?

23 Raz 1986, 296.

24 Raz 1986, 317.

25 Raz 1986, 318.

26 It cannot be meant, however, that the fulfillment of self-interest is only a necessary requirement. For in that case, the biologically determined needs would necessarily become goals, which could not even be (partially) abandoned when in conflict with other goals pertaining to well-being. Although it is an aspect of well-being, self-interest can be sacrificed for well-being.

27 Wallace 2004, 386.

28 Cf. Raz 1996, 315ff., Wallace 2004, 394.

Some of Raz' own deliberations hint at that: "the value of biological determined goals transcends their usefulness as means to other ends. At the very least they are also a precondition of one's ability rationally to adopt new goals and pursuits, and abandon existing ones. And that ability is of value independently of whether it is wanted or not."²⁹ If self-interest can have an independent value, we can suspect that conflicts between morality and this independent value are possible and significant. Cases, in which the moral goal is not particularly important but in which self-interest is crucial cannot simply be decided with reference to the fact that there are those two kinds of goals, of which one is always more important than the other.³⁰

It is thus reasonable to ask how the thesis that everything human beings consider important belongs to the concept of well-being and not to that of self-interest can be compatible with the assumption that self-interest is also an important part of well-being that has an independent value.

The distinction between self-interest and well-being and its relation to the problem of demandingness is not yet clear.

Raz issues another warning: "the very distinction between well-being and self-interest is, and can be, no more than a rough and ready discrimination. It breaks down if too much is made of it."

According to his own warning, he concludes the chapter with the definition of a moral person that deliberately refrains from referring to the distinction:

At a superficial level one is inclined to say that he is a person among whose pursuits there are many non-self-interested ones, and whose self-interested goals do not conflict, except occasionally, with the well-being of others. This, though true, takes divide between one's self interest and the other aspects of one's well-being too seriously. A better answer is that the morally good person is he whose prosperity is so intertwined with the pursuit of goals which advance intrinsic values and well-being of others that it is impossible to separate his personal well-being from his moral concerns.³¹

In later publications he explicitly abandons the distinction: "I will use 'in one's interest', 'self-interest', and 'well-being' interchangeably."³² But *Engaging Reason* entails another significant shift, as the importance of well-being is diminished, and it is no longer that which is in conflict with morality (cf. section 3).

2 Social Forms and the Alleged Necessity of the Conflict

The second important thesis in the twelfth chapter of *Morality of Freedom* is the following:

If there is an inherent or a fundamental conflict between well-being and morality, if morality is indeed the limiting of the pursuit of well-being in the interest of others, then the projects and interests that people develop and care about must have an inherent or natural tendency to conflict with the interest of others. There is no denying that such conflicts happen all too often. ... But I know of no reason to regard the

29 Raz 1986, 297.

30 Cf. McDowell 1998, 93.

31 Raz 1986, 320.

32 Raz 1996, 303; see also 1993.

existence of pervasive conflicts as conceptually or naturally inescapable. Occasional conflict between well-being and morality is endemic. ... On the contrary we have reason to think that conflicts between morality and the agent's well being, albeit inevitable, are only accidental and occasional.³³

The explanation rests on the importance of social forms, i. e., “forms of behavior which are in fact widely practiced in [their] society”,³⁴ but also “shared beliefs, folklore, high culture, collectively shared metaphors and imagination, and so on”.³⁵ According to Raz, individuals cannot adopt or pursue goals without social forms for three reasons: Firstly, because they need to be acquainted with those social forms; secondly, because the meaning that individual behavior has depends on its relation to those social forms; and thirdly, because especially comprehensive goals cannot be adopted through “explicit deliberation”, but only through habituation.³⁶

Comprehensive goals are not necessarily long-term goals, but they affect an important dimension of life, and at the same time consist of various types of action like, for instance, a marriage.³⁷ Thus, the fulfillment of those comprehensive goals is particularly decisive for a person's well-being. If goals depend on social forms, and well-being depends on the fulfillment of (comprehensive) goals, Raz concludes that “[a] person's well-being depends to a large extent on success in socially defined and determined pursuits and activities.”³⁸ For his explanation that the relation between interests and well-being is only allegedly a conceptual and therefore necessary conflict, Raz refers to Bernard Williams. In contrast to interpretations which claim that Williams wants to strengthen the personal standpoint as opposed to the moral standpoint, Raz takes Williams to argue that we should stop considering morality and personal interests separate perspectives.³⁹ And Raz considers social forms the factor which allows us to recognize the “essential identity of people's responsiveness to their own well-being and to morality”.⁴⁰ He argues that, when choosing goals whose fulfillment leads to a good life, individuals necessarily draw on the pool of social forms. And even if they “invent” new ones, they assess their value with reference to existing ones. And also moral values cannot exist without social forms (as is later explicated in *Practice of Value*). It thus follows:

The source of value is one for the individual and the community. It is one and the same from the individual and the community. Individuals define their contours of their own lives by drawing on the communal pool of values. These will, in well-ordered societies, contribute indiscriminately both to their self-interest and to other aspects of their well-being. They also define the field of moral values. There is but one source for morality and for personal well-being.⁴¹

33 Raz 1986, 318.

34 Raz 1986, 308.

35 Raz 1986, 311.

36 On the criticism of those explanations, see Crisp 1997, 508–10.

37 Cf. Raz 1986, 308–309.

38 Raz 1986, 309.

39 Raz 1986, 314f., with reference to Williams, *Utilitarianism For and Against*, 116f.

40 Raz 1986, 319.

41 Raz 2005, 318–9.

The argument can easily be misunderstood (i) with respect to the question of whether it implies conventionalism or (ii) presupposes certain premises, and (iii) when the conclusion and its relevance for the demandingness debate are misinterpreted.

ad (i) The thesis that individuals cannot adopt and pursue goals without social forms does not imply that social forms have to be positively accepted, or that the individuals choose a certain goal because it is a social form. Raz simply assumes that individuals have to know social forms. Agents can deliberately choose a goal or practice that is not part of the approved stock of social forms. “People can, and sometimes do this, but inevitably in such cases the distance they have travelled away from the shared forms is, in these cases, the most significant aspect of their situation.”^{42 43}

ad (ii) According to the first important premise, the argument is only valid “provided those social forms are morally sound”⁴⁴ or for “well-ordered societies”.⁴⁵ If Raz assumes that none of those conditions can be fulfilled, it is questionable whether this might be too limiting for the validity of the thesis. The degree of limitation is a result of the degree of the condition: If Raz wants to validate his thesis he must assume that every social form of a society actually realizes good values. It is questionable, however, if by emphasizing the premise Raz really means that it cannot be fulfilled. Then, the scope of the thesis would be limited to those societies in which it is fulfilled, and it is dubious in how many societies’ social forms exclusively realize good values. But has he really always had this premise? For in *Practice of Value* he argues that false value concepts “cannot have instances”, and that “they remain unattached to anything real”.⁴⁶ According to this assumption, the first premise would always be given.

The second premise is connected to the first one. According to this second premise, agents do not necessarily choose the goals of the social forms – as the objection of conventionalism has shown – but may also have morally incorrect goals. But – and this is decisive – reaching those goals, Raz says, does not contribute to well-being, but reduces it. If only the fulfillment of truly valuable goals secures well-being, a conflict between well-being and morality is impossible even if bad goals were chosen.

Raz’ position here is Socratic-Platonic, for he takes conflicts not to be necessary, and he also opposes a certain thesis (which is the basis for this understanding of the necessity of the conflict), namely that immoral actions can lead to well-being. As Williams⁴⁷ has shown, this also implies opposing a conception of the conflict which presupposes that moral actions are necessarily and always the second best, whereas immoral behavior facilitates well-being. Anyone who believes that morality can only be the second best must also assume that the conflict necessarily exists.⁴⁸ The next section will argue that Raz’ later position is not entirely ancient, since he considers conflicts possible.

42 Raz 1986, 312–3.

43 It is debatable whether Raz advocates the strong thesis which claims that amendments individuals make when setting their goals, and which deviate from the social forms have to be excluded a priori.

44 Raz 1986, 319.

45 Raz 1986, 318.

46 Raz 2005, 24.

47 Cf. Williams 2006, ch. 6.

48 Raz differs from the ancient conceptions in two more ways. On the one hand, as with Raz, the ancient thesis that there is no necessary conflict also rests on the assumption that there is a certain source, but this source is presumed to be in nature and metaphysical instances. On the other hand, Raz does not advocate the ancient thesis that morality and interest necessarily coincide (cf. also the next footnote). The assumption that the demands of ethical theories and the interests of the addressees of those demands cannot be in conflict can rest

ad (iii) Raz objects the thought that the conflict is inherent, fundamental or “conceptually or naturally inescapable”.⁴⁹ Instead, he assumes that if the above-mentioned premises are met, there is a “rough coincidence” or “essential identity”.⁵⁰ His thesis, however, is not that the conflict does necessarily not exist,⁵¹ as he claims “that there are occasional conflicts between the agent’s well being and the well-being of others. That is indeed the main problem.”⁵² It should not be irritating that Raz’ statements concerning the frequency with which those conflicts occur are not very precise (“all too often”, “occasional”⁵³), as this depends on contingent factors. Some of those factors are individual, but the important ones are, again, social.⁵⁴

It is not only crucial that Raz considers conflicts possible, but also that he interprets them in a new way, and that he does not think they are always resolvable. This lead to the aspects of practical rationality and esp. reasons that are involved here, for he denies “that there is a logical difference between a conflict of reason which affects only the well-being of the agent, and such a conflict where the well-being of the agent is in conflict with that of others”.⁵⁵

Although he still stresses the importance of well-being as one pole of the conflict, his later and more fully developed claim that well-being is just an optional super-goal already becomes apparent, for he denies that “we pursue our goals because their pursuit serves our well-being”⁵⁶.

Raz’ argument presupposes a lot: The fulfillment of bad goals does not contribute to well-being, and every social practice of a society has to realize true values. Further, even if those requirements are met (and the question is where and when the latter requirement is ever met), it is noteworthy that he “only” shows that the conflicts do not exist as conceptionally necessary conflicts. The explanation of the actual and existing conflicts remains to be given.⁵⁷

In his following works, Raz pursues an approach which is only hinted at here, namely to explain the conflict without the notion of a dualism of practical reasons. It is noteworthy that Raz continues to debate the connection of values and social forms (cf. *Practice of Value*), but that he does not employ this connection for a thesis concerning demandingness anymore.

I now turn to his later theories concerning demandingness.

on the hypothesis that (i) the demands of a theory and the interests of the addressees conceptionally coincide because (ia) the interests are conceptionally determined by ethical demands or because (ib) the demands are conceptionally determined by interests, or that (ii) demands and interests are conceptionally different, but that they coincide empirically (cf. Scheffler 1992, 3–5). Ancient ethics advocate position (i), though it is not easy to decide whether they all advocate (a) or (b), or whether there are differences or even hybrid theories. Nagel (1986, 195f.), however, considers Plato a supporter of (b) and Aristotle a supporter of (a). In Aristotle’s case this is quite problematic, because he assumes that the happiest life is that which is in accordance with the highest virtues, i. e., the theoretical and not the practical. This already touches upon the fact that the theorem of supererogation does not exist in ancient pagan ethics.

49 Raz 1986, 318.

50 Raz 1986, 319.

51 Crisp’s interpretation is different and stronger: “But Raz’ claim here is stronger, to the effect that there is a conceptual reason for thinking that they do not so conflict.” (Crisp 1997, 513).

52 Raz 1986, 320.

53 Raz 1986, 318.

54 Cf. Raz 1986, 318–9; Scheffler 1992, ch. 8 and 9.

55 Raz 1986, 320.

56 Raz 1986, 317.

57 Crisp’s argument against the presuppositions of Raz’ argument is stronger: “In our world, conflicts between morality and self-interest are naturally inescapable.” (Crisp 1997, 512).

3 The Possibility of the Conflict

According to Raz, something is good for an agent when two conditions are met: “(a) that the thing is good, and (b) [...] the agent has the ability and the opportunity to have that good.”⁵⁸ Raz then distinguishes⁵⁹ between activities which are good not due to their consequences but simply by acting and acts which are good for the agent because of the consequences they have. Many moral actions are good for the agent as an act, as she profits from the demanded moral action whenever the conditions (a) and (b) are met and the action has the corresponding consequences. Whether the activity itself is inconvenient does not alter the conclusion. Raz refers to a sprinter who sets a new record: “Those who achieve it cannot complain that they do not enjoy the activity of racing which led to the result as well. The reward is in the result. The same is true of giving to charity. There need be no intrinsic value in the activity which constitutes the giving. Writing a cheque need not be intrinsically rewarding. The value is in the giving to charity, in doing something that is morally good. That is the reward, just as setting a new record is the reward of the sprinter.”⁶⁰ Doesn't this explanation imply that moral demands – if the two conditions are met and the desired result occurs - cannot conflict with well-being? It is tempting to affirm this crucial question as Crisp⁶¹ has done, for Raz sympathizes and agrees with the ancient eudaimonistic positions of Plato and Aristotle.⁶²

But Raz explicitly warns that “we are in danger of denying that morality and self-interest can ever conflict.”⁶³ This warning, however, poses a problem: How can his argument about the sprinter and his sympathies for the ancient position be consistent with assuming that conflicts are possible? In other words: How can we assume that moral acts contribute to well-being and – at same time – possibly be in conflict with it?

The key to the answer comes with another case he mentions, namely a person that – due to contingent external circumstances - needs to decide whether to volunteer as a driver for a food convey that will prevent many people from starving or alternatively start university studies. Raz says: “While my volunteer work will contribute to my well-being it is plausible to assume that it would not do so nearly as much as would a university education.”⁶⁴ The sprinter argument and his sympathies for the ancient philosophers led him to assume that a moral act always contributes to the well-being of the agent. But he additionally assumes that situations are possible in which the agent has other options – options that lead to a greater contribution to her well-being. Since he also mentions the possibility of those conflicts in his works after *Morality of Freedom*,⁶⁵ his position is consistent in this point.

The distinctiveness of this position will become clearer when compared to three others:

First, a footnote to Plato: Raz shares the assumption that moral acting is in the agent's interest, and that it always contributes her well-being, but unlike Socrates in the *Gorgias* or book II of the *Republic* he does not argue that the moral option is always the one that supports the well-being of the agent best.

58 Raz 1999, 260.

59 See Wright 1936.

60 Raz 1999, 267f; 308f.

61 Cf. Crisp 1997, 513.

62 Cf. Raz 1999, 304.

63 Raz 1999, 311.

64 Raz 1999, 314.

65 Cf. e.g. Raz 1999, 265; 268; 311; 314.

Second, Wallace: I will now come back to the argument that moral acts are like sprinting and setting a new record. Wallace criticizes this argument. His “skeptical challenge”, as he calls it, runs like this: Even if moral acts are necessarily good for the agent, it can be doubted whether they are as good for the agent as pursuing his ground or personal projects.⁶⁶

The example of the volunteer work shows that Raz anticipated this argument. Both Wallace and Raz seem to accept the idea that moral acts always contribute to the well-being of the agent, but that this contribution might not be as big as an alternative course of actions. The difference lies somewhere else: Wallace seems to assume that moral acts always contribute less to the agent’s well-being than actions that lead to the realization of one’s personal ground project. To Raz this question is open; or, to be more precise, it is a question of the context, the specific situation and personal judgments – all of which may vary. Sometimes there are other options that make a bigger contribution to the agent’s well-being, sometimes not. Wallace sticks to the categorical distinction between moral and non-moral actions and reasons (cf. section 4), and he argues that the distinction might also be seen with regard to the contribution to well-being.

Third, Scheffler⁶⁷: Like Scheffler, Raz thinks that conflicts are possible but not necessary, and both share the notion of potential congruence. But there are two versions of potential conflicts (congruence):

- (c1) Every moral action is a contribution to the well-being of the agent. Conflicts may only occur when there is an alternative course of action, which makes a bigger contribution to well-being.
- (c2) Not every moral action contributes to well-being. Conflicts arise when the agent has to decide between a moral action that does not make a contribution and a different action, which does make a contribution to well-being.

Although many formulations leave it open,⁶⁸ Raz advocates (c1) for he never mentions that there are moral actions which do not contribute to well-being (c2). His argument about the two conditions would not allow for (c2): Agents choose a moral actions because of reasons by virtue of which the actions realize a value. When the agent – like the sprinter – reaches his goal, it contributes to his well-being; just as a donation to charity is a contribution to well-being when it serves the valuable goal of reducing misery in the world. Raz believes that the fulfillment of valuable goals always contributes to well-being, because well-being is defined as the fulfillment of valuable goals. And that is the sense in which he endorses the first sentence of (c1). But he also thinks that there can be alternative courses of action, which contribute even more to the well-being of an agent (the choice between the food aid work and studying).

The statement “I am not trying to deny that pursuing a moral good may be against the interest of the agent”⁶⁹ does thus not mean that the pursuit of a moral action is not good for the agent. It means that this action might go against the interest of the agent because the moral course of action might not contribute as much to his well-being as an alternative course of

66 Wallace 2004, 389.

67 Cf. Scheffler 1992 and 1994

68 For instance: “there are no moral considerations pursuits of which cannot serve the agent’s well-being ... One can profit from, one’s well-being can be served by, compliance with, or the attempt to comply with, any moral consideration.” (Raz 1999, 310).

69 Raz 1996, 268.

action. Thus, Raz' thesis is indeed closer to the ancient conceptions.⁷⁰ The other variant (c2) of potential congruence is advocated, for instance, by Samuel Scheffler.^{71 72} In his view, conflicts arise if an agent has to choose between moral acts that do not contribute to well-being and courses of action that do. Scheffler's claim is weaker, less classical, as he argues that the moral action is only potentially one that contributes to the well-being of the agent. Raz and Scheffler both talk about potential congruence, but they assume different relations.

Besides his explanation of the possibility of conflicts, Raz' ideas on the role of well-being in the conflict is distinctive.

Although there can be a conflict between morality and well-being in the sense that has been outlined above, for Raz the conflict does not – as it might suggest itself – arise because agents strive after well-being and the moral action is not the one that contributes most to it, in contrast to other given courses of action.

Raz considers well-being an evaluative perspective, which measures the goodness of a certain way of life for the agent. Saying that well-being follows from a sufficiently successful pursuit of worthwhile goals does not entail the assumption that well-being itself has to be a goal. According to Raz it is only an optional goal. Even if we choose it, it cannot help deliberate which goals to choose. The point is that we can reach well-being without having well-being as a goal, namely by successfully approaching our goals. And we do not choose and aim to reach our goals because we want to secure our well-being, but only because we think that those goals are valuable. Also, some of our most important and comprehensive goals, e.g. love, marriage and friendship, cannot be chosen because we wish to secure well-being.⁷³ Well-being is only an optional goal, and if we choose to have it as a goal it does not help us to choose other goals. Raz himself recommends using well-being only as an evaluative perspective and not as a goal, “though this is a matter of personal preference”.⁷⁴

In a previous account in *Morality of Freedom* Raz diminished the role of self-interest: “What really matters to people is all that we group under their well-being.”⁷⁵ In *Engaging Reasons* the importance of well-being (as a goal) is diminished. If this is meant to be consistent, the only possible interpretation is that well-being itself does not necessarily fall into this group: “There is a concern which is central to being a person, but it is not a concern for one's well-being. It is concern for one's self.”⁷⁶ For Raz, this means that people care about their goals and their value. Well-being can only be one of these goals. If it is, then it is only one among many, and not one which influences the choice of other goals.

Against this background, the thesis that conflicts between well-being and morality can exist has to be further specified. The example of the choice between aid work and studying has shown that a conflict arises because studying is a comprehensive goal, which – from the evalu-

70 Closer, but not identical, because the ancient eudaimonists do not allow any conflict, not even in the sense of (c1). Raz is wrong in assuming that “[t]he classical view does not lead to the conclusion that morality and agent's well-being cannot conflict.” (1999, 314). Raz' conception considers cases in which an alternative course of action leads to a greater contribution to well-being. In those cases the moral action would only be a second best – a thesis which is being attacked, for instance by Socrates in Republic I and II.

71 Cf. Scheffler 1992, 1994

72 Scheffler 2008 makes a clear shift towards Raz' position.

73 Cf. Raz 1999, 325–330.

74 Raz 1999, 330.

75 Raz 1986, 318.

76 Raz 1999, 331.

ative perspective of the agent – makes a bigger contribution to her quality of life than the participation in the aid convoy. It is not a conflict between well-being and morality as goals. The conflict between morality and well-being that Raz describes, is a contingent epiphenomena of the conflict of reasons: “As for the question, ‘How is it that people sometimes act for moral reasons in ways detrimental to their well-being?’ the answer turns out to be simple. People act for reasons, that is, for what appear to them to be adequate reasons, regardless of whether or not they serve their well-being. Sometimes the reasons which appear to be conclusive, even when conforming with them affects the agent adversely, are moral reasons.”⁷⁷

Raz denies that morality and well-being are context independent domains, and he also denies that moral reasons just by virtue of being moral reasons override non-moral reasons. Again, it is not only controversial if his position is plausible, and what it means for the debate. It is also controversial what his position actually is.

4 Practical Reasons and Demandingness

This is the criticism: “[W]hen deliberating we consider which reasons are most pressing in a way which transcends and defers the common division of practical thought into moral and self-interested (and other) considerations.”⁷⁸

But before answering the question of how this helps to deal with the problem of demandingness, we need to know exactly what lies behind his rejection of the “common division”. Here are two readings⁷⁹:

(a) The strong reading:

Raz rejects any way of distinguishing between moral and non-moral considerations and reasons. According to this interpretation, the problem of demandingness is dissolved. In the words of Wallace who adopts this strong reading: “If morality does not constitute a unified normative domain, however, then the general question about the normative force of ‘moral’ considerations will fail to get a grip—it will be basically unclear what we are even asking about.”⁸⁰

The strong thesis, which implies the dissolution and destabilization of the poles to the extent of non-identifiability, is highly problematic. First, it is not well supported by the texts, for Raz uses expressions like moral demands, morality and so forth. Second, it makes Raz appear to be saying something very strange, namely that we – in theories and our actual lives – should stop using the distinction and related terms in theories and in our life, or that we do not mean what we are saying when speaking of moral reasons and so forth.

So here is

(b) the weaker interpretation:

Raz rejects only a “philosophically deep way of dividing”,⁸¹ but allows for a shallow distinction.

77 Raz 1999, 332.

78 Raz 1999, 306.

79 See Scheffler 2008.

80 Wallace 2004, 385.

81 Raz 1999, 247.

The weaker interpretation (b) is correct, but before assessing its implications for demandingness, it has to be shown what the rejection of the “deep” distinction or “common division” actually rejects. Raz only rejects three claims,⁸² namely that

- (i) the distinction is deep because it has a metaphysical, ontological or epistemological meaning.
- (ii) this (i) context independent distinction is the correct and decisive one, even if other distinctions should exist,
- (iii) moral considerations – due to (i) – have a special weight so that they override non-moral considerations.

For two reasons, the third thesis (iii) is different from the other two, and thus to be treated later: Firstly, it presupposes the first two. Secondly, the first two theses determine what exactly conflicts in a demandingness conflict, while (iii) gives information on the importance of moral considerations concerning rational decisions with regard to the conflict.

The first claim (i) is crucial. But Raz’ denial here does not lead to the strong interpretation. For he allows a distinction in terms of content: moral considerations are special as they refer to moral values. As a consequence, the potential conflict of the two is still identifiable. The weak position is supported by the fact that it permits, for instance, skeptical or colloquial manners of speaking. A distinction in terms of content can go hand in hand with a “deep” distinction and assumptions concerning metaphysical, ontological or epistemic peculiarities of moral considerations, but neither one of them is a necessary condition, nor a necessary consequence.

Which consequences does the rejection of a philosophically deep distinction of moral and non-moral considerations have for practical rationality with regard to demandingness?

The advantage of the weak thesis is not only that it allows speaking about moral and non-moral considerations without far-reaching or controversial background assumptions.

While the strong interpretation dissolves the conflict by making it impossible to identify the poles of the conflict, the point of the weaker interpretation is to normalize the conflict. Instead of assuming that two deeply divided classes of antagonistic values and reasons conflict, this view takes demandingness to be a conflict like other conflicts, e.g. like a conflict between different non-moral or moral values.

Finally, the weak thesis, which does not assume a “deep” distinction between moral and non-moral considerations, sheds new light on the conflict and on the approach to it, because both are normalized. There is no longer an opposition of two deeply divided classes of reasons and values, but only of those that differ in terms of their content. The conflict becomes one of values and goals like any other, for instance, one between biologically determined self-interest and well-being, between two context-dependent irreconcilable moral goals or between long-term goals, whose fulfillment supports well-being. The demandingness conflict is normalized: Demandingness itself becomes a problem regarding goal-constellations, which occur within certain contexts and due to certain preferences of the agents.

The fact that Raz rejects a metaphysical, ontological or epistemic distinction because it is too “deep”, but that he can still distinguish moral demands and values from non-moral ones with reference to their content, is important for understanding his denial of the third thesis (iii).

82 Cf. Raz 1999, 247–9.

By claiming that moral demands or reasons are not “deeply” distinguished, Raz must also assume that their importance (when compared to non-moral demands) does not depend on the fact that they belong to this deeply distinguished class of considerations and reasons. He thus rejects the overridingness thesis of morality. But it is easy to misunderstand this rejection of the overridingness claim:

First, it is not meant – in the sense of some Williams-interpretations or Crisp – that non-moral, personal considerations are given more weight so that they are on the same level with moral ones. Second, it does not deny that reasons to act morally might be overriding.

The first misunderstanding neglects that his theory of the non-deeply distinction also applies to the other pole of considerations on the part of the agent. The second misunderstanding concerning this matter is even more serious: It might be concluded from the theses that moral considerations can never be superior. Raz’ thesis, however, only denies that it is always rational to do what morality demands because moral reasons belong to a deeply divided class of moral reasons. If moral considerations are only identifiable as such because of their particular content, but not because they are deeply divided, their strength or relative weight does not depend on whether they are of one type or the other.⁸³

Therefore, if conflicts can and actually do occur, it is not clear whether decisions in favor of morality are always necessarily rational in those cases. This conception might as well result in the interpretation of our life as an endless chain of individual decisions.⁸⁴ If conflicts occur, and if the decision of what might be rational to do is not predetermined by a deeply divided class of reasons, the decision has to be based on the reasons themselves and not their classes, as well as on the values and goals, which are context-dependent and agent-relative. In this sense, demandingness is a “main problem”,⁸⁵ i. e., a problem of the agents, which cannot simply be solved with reference to a philosophical classifications. If conflicts occur, we need to make specific context-dependent decisions concerning the values which are at stake, regarding which of them matter most to us, and which reasons are most pressing.

5 Conclusion

No argument so far was meant to show that Raz is right. The main purpose was to understand his position. But it is clear that his challenge concerns three major aspects of the demandingness problem. It firstly deals with the question of which poles are actually in conflict in a demandingness situation. Secondly, it tackles the problem of whether the conflict is necessary, impossible or possible. And lastly, it treats the question of which decisions are rational in cases of conflict.

Even if one does not agree with Raz, his approach to the three arguments reveals that there are more distinctions, perspectives and theoretical options for each of the three aspects than previous accounts have discussed. Beyond that, his position has certain advantages:

83 Although McDowell has objected to the idea, put forward by Foot, that moral demands are not categorical, he explicitly grants an important caveat along the lines of Raz’ reasoning: moral reasons, however weak they might be, do not necessarily override or silence non-moral reasons, however strong they might be (cf. McDowell 1998, 93).

84 There is an “indefinite succession of first-order deliberative questions that confront individual agents as they make way through life, questions that can be resolved only by reflection on the nature and significance of the concrete values that are at stake” (Wallace 2004, 386).

85 Raz 1986, 320.

It avoids the extreme positions, namely that morality and well-being always or never conflict.

It assumes that morality contributes to our well-being and – nonetheless – can be in conflict with it.

In explaining the possibility of these conflicts it acknowledges the importance of circumstances and agent-relative aspects.

It does not entail any philosophically burdened dualism of practical reasons.

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