Privileging our future hedonic states

Dan Weijers

AXφI (VUW, 2016)

What really matters?

– This is part of an experimental ethics project with Peter Unger (New York University)

A roadmap. Destination: enlightenment

– Target case & issue: Parfit's surgery case & a bias toward the future?

– Method

– Methodological notes

– Privileging your **future** hedonic states in the moment (vs your **past** HSitM)

– Privileging your **future** HS **in the moment** (vs your HS on **a whole life view**)

– Privileging **your** FHS in the moment (vs **other people's** FHS in the moment)

– Privileging **your** FHS in the moment (vs your future **success** in the moment)

– Respondents privileged only their FHSitM. Why? And, are they right to do this?

Parfit's surgery case #1 (1A2)

~You must have a perfectly safe and effective surgery. You must be able to feel pain during, but you will be made to forget after.

You have just woken up. The nurse says you may be the patient who had the operation yesterday (lasted 10 hours), or the patient who is to have a the operation later today (lasting 1 hour). It is either true that you did suffer for 10 hours, or true that you shall suffer for 1 hour.

Which would you prefer to be true?

Parfit thinks "most of us" would prefer 10 hours past suffering to 1 hour future suffering (both later forgotten)

Parfit's surgery case #2 (1A4)

~Similar to before, but no memory wiping after.

You have just woken up, recalling some recent suffering. The nurse says you may be the patient who had the operation yesterday (lasted 5 hours), or the patient whose operation started yesterday (2 hours) and will be finished later today (1 hour). It is either true that you did suffer for 5 hours, or true that you suffered for 2 hours and shall suffer for 1 hour.

Which would you prefer to be true?

Parfit thinks "most of us" would prefer 5 hours past suffering to 2 past and 1 future hour of suffering (*neither later forgotten*)

Parfit's point & my questions

– *When* pain happens is relevant to it's value

– We appear to privilege future states of suffering

– On the face of it, this privileging seems rational

– But, isn't it rational to prefer a life with less pain overall?

– What is the extent of our privileging of future states?

– Is it rational?

Method

– Exact Binomial p-values for single-sample groups, benchmark of 50% ("most")

– 95% Adjusted Wald Confidence Intervals,

– Results are interpreted as 2-response-option surveys

– Participants:

  – Wave 1 (Nov-Dec 2015): CSUS diverse undergrad philosophy students

  – Wave 2 (Feb-Mar 2016): CSUS diverse undergrad philosophy students

  – Wave 3 (Jul-Aug 2016): UoW undergraduate students

  – Demos not collected

  – Participation rates 90%+

Methodological notes 1

- Reasonable expectations for one-sample proportions

- 80% is impressive (on questions of value?)

- E.g. 1HSS shows that getting over 80% is tricky!

- Which is better: Two lives equal till now. One has 10 more happy healthy years, the other 20. (55/68, 81%, p-value 0.0000)

- Need a threshold for "vast majority" so responses to the scenarios can be used as evidence in arguments, e.g:

  - mean over 70% or 95% confidence interval over 60%?

Privileging our future hedonic states, Dan Weijers, AXϕI (VUW, 2016)

Methodological notes 2

- Qualitative "cleaning"
  - 1GSS shows 56% (25/45) turn to 84% (21/25) after "cleaning"
  - 2A6 shows 59% (51/87) turn to 82% (45/55) after "cleaning"
  - Others show little change
- We need a paper with rules for the use of qualitative methods when intuition pumping and debunking, e.g.:
  - If cleaning, you should use cleaned results
  - Don't do your own cleaning
  - Scenarios returning over 30% "unclean" responses are not fit for purpose

Hypotheses and results

- HS = hedonic states

- itM = in the moment

Privileging your **future** HSitM (vs your **past** HSitM)

Hypothesis

Hypothesis

– Parfit (surgery cases): In the moment, most of "us" would prefer more pain in the near past than less total pain with a little pain in the near future. This is true if we later forget it (1A2, 1A5) or if we don't (1A4).

– In the moment, most of "us" also prefer more future over more total happy years (1ESS, 1ESS2,1ESS4)

Privileging our future hedonic states, Dan Weijers, AXφI (VUW, 2016)

Privileging your **future** HSitM vs your **past** HSitM (painful surgery)

Scenario Code	Wave	Total N	A (more past/total suffering)	A#	A%	p-value	B (more future/less total suffering)	B#	B%	p-value
1A2*	2	91	You suffer 10 hrs yesterday, 0 today, later forgotten	65	71%	0.0000	You suffer 0 hrs yesterday, 1 today, later forgotten	26	29%	-
1A5	3	63	You suffer 10 hrs yesterday, 0 today, later forgotten	45	71%	0.0004	You suffer 0 hrs yesterday, 1hr in 10 mins, later forgotten	18	29%	-
1A4*	2	67	You suffer 5 hrs yesterday, 0 today	56	84%	0.0000	You suffer 2 hrs yesterday, 1 today	11	16%	-

* Parfit's originals

Privileging your **future** HSitM vs your **past** HSitM (happy years)

Scenario Code	Wave	Total N	A (more past/total happy years)	A#	A%	p-value	B (more future/less total happy years)	B#	B%	p-value
1ESS	2	63	you lived 70 happy years, 10 to go	22	35%	-	you lived 40 happy years, 30 to go	41	65%	0.0113
1ESS2	3	42	you lived 70 happy years, 1 to go	6	14%	-	you lived 40 happy years, 30 to go	36	86%	0.0000
1ESS4	3	80	you lived 90 happy years, 1 day to go	17	21%	-	you lived 20 happy years, 60 years to go	63	79%	0.0000

Conclusion

– So, most respondents seemed to privilege their future hedonic states over their past hedonic states (painful surgery: 71-84%; happy years: 65%-86%)

Privileging our future hedonic states, Dan Weijers, AXφI (VUW, 2016)

Privileging your **future** HS **itM** (vs your HS on **a whole life view**)

Already supported

– *Parfit (surgery cases): In the moment, most of "us" would prefer more pain in the near past than less total pain with a little pain in the near future. This is true if we later forget it (1A2, 1A5) or if we don't (1A4).*

Hypothesis

– But, this is not the case on a "whole life" view. From two otherwise equal lives, most of "us" would rather have the one with the short painful surgery, than the long one. This is true if we later forget it (1BS) it or of we don't (1BSS).

Already supported

– *In the moment, most of "us" report preferring more future over more total happy years (1ESS, 1ESS2,1ESS4).*

Hypothesis

– But, this is not the case on a "whole life" view. We know that most of "us" would rather have a longer (e.g. 60-year) than a shorter (e.g. 30-year) happy life (2A5).

Privileging your **future** HS **itM** vs your HS on **a whole life view** (painful surgery)

Scenario Code	View	Wave	Total N	A (more past/total suffering)	A#	A%	p-value	B (more future/less total suffering)	B#	B%	p-value
1A2	itM	2	91	You suffer 10 hrs yesterday, 0 today, later forgotten	65	71%	0.0000	You suffer 0 hrs yesterday, 1 today, later forgotten	26	29%	-
1A4	itM	2	67	You suffer 5 hrs yesterday, 0 today	56	84%	0.0000	You suffer 2 hrs yesterday, 1 today	11	16%	-
1BS*	WLV	1	62	Your life with 10hr v. painful surgery, later forgotten	1	2%	-	Your life with 1hr v. painful surgery, later forgotten	39	63%	0.0279
1BSS	WLV	2	40	Your life with 5hr painful surgery	4	10%	-	Your life with 1hr painful surgery	36	90%	0.0000

* Also had Option C: "equally good" 22/62 = 35%

Privileging our future hedonic states, Dan Weijers, AXφI (VUW, 2016)

Privileging your **future** HS **itM** vs your HS on **a whole life view** (happy years)

Scenario Code	View	Wave	Total N	A (more past/total happy years)	A#	A%	p-value	B (more future/less total happy years)	B#	B%	p-value
1ESS	itM	2	63	You lived 70 happy years, 10 to go	22	35%	-	You lived 40 happy years, 30 to go	41	65%	0.0113
1ESS2	itM	3	42	You lived 70 happy years, 1 to go	6	14%	-	You lived 40 happy years, 30 to go	36	86%	0.0000
1ESS4	itM	3	80	You lived 90 happy years, 1 day to go	17	21%	-	You lived 20 happy years, 60 years to go	63	79%	0.0000
2A5*	WLV	2	83	You: 60 year happy life	63	76%	0.0000	You: 30 year happy life	4	5%	-

* Also had Option C: "equally desirable" 15/83 = 18%

Privileging our future hedonic states, Dan Weijers, AXϕI (VUW, 2016)

Privileging your **future** HS **itM** (vs your HS on **a whole life view**)

Already supported

- *While most respondents seemed to privilege their future hedonic states over their past hedonic states* **in the moment:** *painful surgery: 71-84%; happy years: 65%-86%)...*

- The same is not true when they evaluated their own **life as a whole**: painful surgery: 2*-10%; happy years: 5%^

  - *or 37% if you include option C: "equally good"

  - ^or 23% if you include option C: "equally desirable"

Conclusion

- So, for most of "us", the privileging of future HS (over total hedonic states) seems to apply to itM judgements about our lives, but not WLV judgments about our lives.

Privileging **your** FHSitM (vs **other** people's FHSitM)

Already supported

- *Parfit (surgery cases): In the moment, most of "us" would prefer more pain in the near past than less total pain with a little pain in the near future. This is true if we later forget it (1A2, 1A5) or if we don't (1A4).*

Hypothesis

- But, this is not the case for "our" itM judgements about the lives of others. "We" think it's better that the painful surgery is shorter overall even when it means suffering in the future for the person (1FSS)

Already established

- *In the moment, most of "us" report preferring more future over more total happy years (1ESS, 1ESS2,1ESS4).*

Hypothesis

- But, this is not the case for "our" judgements about the lives of others. "We" think its better for others to have more happy years in total than more in the future (1GSS2, 1GSS3).

Privileging our future hedonic states, Dan Weijers, AXφI (VUW, 2016)

Privileging **your** FHSitM vs **other** people's FHSitM (painful surgery)

Scenario Code	S	Wave	Total N	A (more past/total suffering)	A#	A%	p-value	B (more future/less total suffering)	B#	B%	p-value
1A2	You	2	91	You suffer 10 hrs yesterday, 0 today, later forgotten	65	71%	0.0000	You suffer 0 hrs yesterday, 1 today, later forgotten	26	29%	-
1A4	You	2	67	You suffer 5 hrs yesterday, 0 today	56	84%	0.0000	You suffer 2 hrs yesterday, 1 today	11	16%	-
1FSS	SYCA	2	50	SYCA* suffers 10 hrs today, 0 tomorrow	6	12%	-	SYCA suffers 0 hrs today, 1 tomorrow	44	88%	0.0000

* Someone you care about

Privileging our future hedonic states, Dan Weijers, AXϕI (VUW, 2016)

Privileging **your** FHSitM vs **other** people's FHSitM (happy years)

Scenario Code	Sub-ject	Wave	Total N	A (more past/total happy years)	A#	A%	p-value	B (more future/less total happy years)	B#	B%	p-value
1ESS	You	2	63	You lived 70 happy years, 10 to go	22	35%	-	You lived 40 happy years, 30 to go	41	65%	0.0113
1ESS2	You	3	42	You lived 70 happy years, 1 to go	6	14%	-	You lived 40 happy years, 30 to go	36	86%	0.0000
1GSS2*	LLR^	3	50	LLR lived 70 happy years, 10 to go	38	76%	0.0002	LLR lived 40 happy yrs, 30 to go	12	24%	-
1GSS3	LLR	3	74	LLR lived 70 happy years, 1 to go	54	73%	0.0000	LLR lived 40 happy yrs, 30 to go	20	27%	-

* Qualitatively "cleaned" results   ^Long-lost relative

Privileging **your** FHSitM (vs **other people's** FHSitM)

Already supported

– *While most respondents seemed to privilege **their** future hedonic states over their past hedonic states in the moment: painful surgery: 71-84%; happy years: 65-86%) …*

– The same is not true when they evaluated the lives of others in the moment: painful surgery: 12%; happy years: 24-27%

Conclusion

– So, for most of "us", the itM privileging of future HS (over total hedonic states) seems to apply to "our" judgements about our own life, but not "our" judgments about the lives of others.

Privileging our future hedonic states, Dan Weijers, AXφI (VUW, 2016)

Privileging **your** FHS itM (vs your future **success** itM)

Already supported

– *Parfit (surgery cases): In the moment, most of "us" would prefer more pain in the near past than less total pain with a little pain in the near future. This is true if we later forget it (1A2, 1A5) or if we don't (1A4).*

Already supported

– *In the moment, most of "us" report preferring more future over more total happy years (1ESS, 1ESS2,1ESS4).*

Hypothesis

– But, this is not the case for "our" itM judgements about our own success. "We" think it's better that we get more total success, than less success with more of it in the future. This is true for publishing more books (**1CSS**), higher quality scientific discoveries (**1DSS**), and more (undefined) wins (**1DSS2**).

Privileging **your** FHS itM (vs your future **success** itM)

Scen. Code	Good	Wav	Tot N	A (more past/total good)	A#	A%	p-value	B (more future/less total good)	B#	B%	p-value
1A4	Hedonic states	2	67	You suffer 5 hrs yesterday, 0 today	56	84%	0.0000	You suffer 2 hrs yesterday, 1 today	11	16%	-
1ESS2	Happy years	3	42	You lived 70 happy years, 1 to go	6	14%	-	You lived 40 happy years, 30 to go	36	86%	0.0000
1CSS*	Quantity of Books	2	28	You published 5 in past, 0 in future	23	82%	0.0005	You published 0 in past, 1 in future	5	18%	-
1DSS*	Quality of discovery	2	33	You had 1 revolutionary past discovery	20	61%	0.1481	You'll have 1 very important future discovery	13	39%	-
1DSS2*	Wins	2	46	You: 5 past wins, 0 future	29	63%	0.0519	You: 0 past wins, 1 future	17	37%	-

* Qualitatively "cleaned" results. Only 1CSS was significant without "cleaning"

Privileging **your** FHS itM (vs your future **success** itM)

Already supported

– *While most respondents seemed to privilege **their** future hedonic states over their past hedonic states in the moment: painful surgery: 71-84%; happy years: 65-86%) …*

Note strong test, weak results

– The same is not true when they evaluated their own success in the moment: Quantity of books: 18%. An, **possibly** not true for Quality of scientific discovery: 39% ns; and wins: 37% ns.

Conclusion

– So, for most of "us", the itM privileging of future HS (over total hedonic states) seems **not** to apply to "our" judgements about our own success.

Privileging our future hedonic states, Dan Weijers, AXφI (VUW, 2016)

Main conclusion: Respondents privileged only their FHSitM.

– Can't definitely say respondents tend to privilege **only** future hedonic states in this way

– Can't definitively say **people** tend to privilege future hedonic states in this way

– But these data support the interesting finding that:

– Some people seem to privilege their future hedonic states when asked from an "in the moment" point of view, and not some other states, for some other people, or from some other points of view

Respondents privileged only their FHSitM. Is it wrong?

– Perhaps our FHSitM evaluative intuitions are wrong

– Perhaps our **non**-FHSitM evaluative intuitions are wrong

– Perhaps they are all not-wrong in some way

– Compare again two painful surgery cases: your own (1A2) and SYCA (1FSS)

  – The apparently contradictory results both "feel" right

– Highlights the interesting 1st person/3rd person distinction in theorising about wellbeing

Privileging our future hedonic states, Dan Weijers, AXϕI (VUW, 2016)

Respondents privileged only their FHSitM. Why? Is it rational?

– Perhaps evolution by natural section has elicited our intuitions, which are largely emotionally driven, to be the way they are to ensure we are constantly doing all we can to maximise our fitness

– (Selfish gene): Our genes don't care about the past, they just want to create more and better mating opportunities!

– So, perhaps our privileging of our FHSitM is a bias in the sense that it serves our genes, but not us

  – This works for considered desire-based and "objective" prudential views of rationality

– But then, we should care about not being born earlier (equivalent to living longer)