

# The desire satisfaction theory philosophy essay



**ASSIGN  
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The desire-satisfaction theory of welfare states that a persons well-being is the overall level of desire-satisfaction in their life as a whole. The theory tells us that your life goes well for you to the extent that you get what you want. Something is good for you if, and only if, satisfies your desires (Shafer-Laudau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, 39). In short, the more you get what you want the better your life is, and when you dont than your life goes badly because your desires are frustrated. If we accept this theory of welfare and care about the welfare of others, then we would try to satisfy other peoples desires, whatever they may be. Desire-satisfaction theory is egalitarian such that everyones desires are equally important, and no desire is of more importance than another desire. This is because desire theory rejects all forms of objective theories on welfare. Objective theories pertain that what contributes to a good life is fixed independently of your desires and your opinion of what is important (Shafer-Laudau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, 40). It takes into account peoples autonomy. It is important that for desire-satisfaction to be good, people must have freedom of choice and control over their lives. Of course there are cases where people desire the wrong things or things that they would not normally desire. These so called problem desires are caused by lack of information about their desire, logical errors in determining their desire, false beliefs, and or desiring mutually impossible things. Even if a person desired the right things for the right reasons, there is still the objection of whether those desires are instrumentally pointless; such is the case of the Grass Counter Objection.

“ In a position of rational and informed choice, Cara, who is capable of a life of great accomplishment, friendship, love and pleasure, would desire most strongly a life of counting blades of grass” (Crisp, 56).

In this objection, Cara is a rational and well informed person who is capable of accomplishing much in her life. Instead, Cara chooses to count blades of grass. This objection questions whether the desire-satisfaction theory is wrong for saying that everyone's desires are equal, because a life of counting grass cannot compare to a life with love and pleasure. It also questions if getting your preferences actually promotes your well-being. In the case of Cara, she desires counting blades of grass, even though she has great potential to further her life and obtain more happiness if she did not solely desire counting grass. Common sense tells most people that Cara is actually wasting her life. It may seem that Cara's desire to count grass is pointless and doesn't actually make her life any better. Even if Cara finds great pleasure in counting grass, it cannot possibly compare to the higher pleasures such as love and friendship. Furthermore, by not pursuing these higher sources of pleasure, which would promote more happiness, Cara's decision to count grass is incorrect, such that fulfilling her desires cannot be the morally right action for her well-being. This objection can further conclude that not all desires are equal and some desires, even if they are rational and informed ones and do no harm to the person desiring it, it may be pointless. This objection may seem to prove that desire satisfaction is wrong about well-being, that the best life is not one which one desires. Although I would agree with the objectors that love and friendship is more valuable than counting grass, I do not believe that it is bad or pointless for

Cara's well-being to desire counting blades of grass. In fact, I believe it is the action right for her.

A desire might strike us as defective not because we desire it for the wrong reasons, but because the desire may seem pointless. An afternoon spent counting grass might seem tranquil, but an entire life spent counting grass may seem pathetic. But desire-satisfaction theory will approve of lives spent doing the most pointless things, so long as the person continues to want to be doing those pointless things. Under the condition that we know Cara is a well informed and a rational individual, who is not suffering from some type of neurosis from counting grass, and her desire to count grass is bringing her more pleasure than pain, then we can safely assume that counting grass is bettering Cara's well-being. Desire theory does not put intrinsic value on pleasure, such that everyone's desires are of equal importance. Therefore, Cara's desire to count grass, even at the cost of not furthering pursuing higher levels of pleasure, will make her happiest, and to assume otherwise would be bias on the objectors part. It is bias of the objection to assume that counting grass is less worthy than a life with love and friendship. Even if we could empirically prove that love and friendships are more valuable than counting grass, if Cara doesn't desire such things then it will not be bettering her well-being. This is because she cannot truly appreciate the benefits of these so called higher valued desires if she does not desire them. For a person to accrue well-being from a desire, that person must actually have such desires. Image a college student whose desires to become an artist, even at the cost of knowing that her life would probably be much more financially stable if she chose to pursue careers such as doctor or engineer. Now image

if her parents finally persuaded her to become a doctor. She becomes a doctor, saves many lives and is well respected. But because she never desired to become a doctor, but was persuaded by guilt and responsibility by her parents, she cannot possibly appreciate all pleasures she has obtained from being a doctor. There will probably be the strong lingering yearning for pursuing an artistic career. This example shows that a more pleasant life is not necessarily better for those who live it (Shafer-Laudau, *The Fundamentals of Ethics*, 43). In this example it is an error on the parents' part for forcing their personal desires onto their child without considering the personal aspect of desires. Desire-satisfaction states that we desire that which brings us happiness, such that everything we desire is either the means or the end to a means to happiness. So if we don't desire such things like becoming a doctor, even in the case it brings much good to the world, our happiness and well-being would actually be stunted. Furthermore, to claim that one object is more valuable than another would amount to an objective list theory with probably some sort of desire-satisfaction base. In the case, where that college student truly did desire being a doctor but presently did not desire it, becoming a doctor would not benefit her either. In Caras case, any theory which claims that her choice of counting grass is of lesser value than other pleasures, is sanitizing Caras desires, not for her own benefit, but of conflict based on objectors personal desires.

An objection against my argument may include that counting grass is an activity that is unworthy of desiring not just because it is pointless, but because it lacks excellence and any dignified human being would not pursue the pointless desires over the excellent. I think this argument fails because

the objector is measuring a subjects well-being by the amount of excellent desires that is pursued and accomplished. This form of measurement is flawed because it does not value a subjects autonomy of not pursuing excellent desires. To not value a subjects autonomy will put that subjects welfare in danger. The objectors measurement based on a desires excellence should not be confused by the measurement of welfare in a persons life. Caras grass counting life may lack engagement in the excellent, but this does not mean her well-being is damage because of its lack in excellence. In the case of the college student who wanted to pursue art but ended up becoming a doctor, who is to say that being a doctor is more worthy than being an artist just because the career is more excellent? To those whose view of excellence is that of saving lives, than being a doctor is more preferred, but for those who view creativity and imagination as more excellent, than an artist life would be the desired choice. The excellence of a desire is subjected to individuals opinions, such that the most pointless desire to one person may be the most exciting desire to another. Desire theorist avoid such problems about the value of a pleasure because they understand that a good life consists of many things, such that everyone desires are unique to them. Furthermore, it is likely that we could harm Cara, if we diminish her well-being, by precisely refusing to let her pursue her hearts desire, despite the lack of excellence of the activity. So my reply is that desires may be considered pointless if there were a universal way of measuring the excellence of that activity, but in no way are there pointless desires on the welfare scale based on desire-satisfaction.