

THESIS

ARE SUBJECTIVISTS AND OBJECTIVISTS ABOUT WELL-BEING THEORIZING
ABOUT THE SAME CONCEPT?

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ABSTRACT

ARE SUBJECTIVISTS AND OBJECTIVISTS ABOUT WELL-BEING THEORIZING ABOUT THE SAME CONCEPT?

There are two main camps that theories of well-being fall under: “subjectivism” and “objectivism”. Subjectivists hold that something can only positively affect one’s well-being if one has a positive attitude toward it. Objectivists deny this and hold that some things can positively affect one’s well-being irrespective of whether one has a positive attitude towards them and can even do so if one has a negative attitude towards them. Both views seem appealing and many theorists in the well-being debate attempt to capture the appeal of both views in the theories they posit. Despite this, only one can be correct; they contradict each other. Yet, neither seems satisfactory on its own since, as I argue, they fail to account for the motivations of the other. Hence, we are left with an impasse between the two that is difficult to resolve.

In this thesis, I summarize the main theories of well-being and their objections in chapter one and introduce the distinction between subjectivism and objectivism and the motivations behind each. In chapter two, I summarize several theories that try to account for the motivations of both subjectivism and objectivism, with particular emphasis on “hybrid” theories, and show that they fail at their task. I finish in chapter three by motivating the impasse between subjectivism and objectivism and outlining four possible ways of resolving the impasse. I argue that three of these fail, but that the remaining way is promising. This way holds that subjectivists and objectivists are actually theorizing about two different, but similar concepts.

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CHAPTER 1 - A SUMMARY OF THE WELL-BEING DEBATE

We often talk or ask about how well we or others are and how our or their lives are going. Philosophers call what this talk often reports on or asks for a report of “well-being.” In other words, when we ask someone how their life is going, we seek to know their level of well-being. A person who says she is doing miserably likely has a low level of well-being (or, at least, is reporting a low level of well-being). Despite how common these reports are, it is difficult to determine what exactly constitutes well-being: that is, what it is that a person high in well-being has or has more of in comparison to a person low in well-being. To determine this, it is tempting to point to things that people who report high levels of well-being (i.e., who honestly answer “Great!” to the question of “How are you?”) tend to have: things like good relationships, fun hobbies, enough sleep, etc. Yet, many of these things may correlate with higher levels of well-being because of some feature they all share. For example, having good relationships and getting enough sleep may positively affect a person’s well-being because, for the sake of this example, they both produce pleasure or prevent/decrease pain. This is specifically what philosophers are after when asking what constitutes well-being: whether there is a feature (or features) that all things that correlate with higher levels of well-being share and, if so, what that feature is.

Here, theories of well-being try to describe what is *good for* (i.e., *prudentially valuable for*) a person rather than what is *good* (i.e., *impersonally good or good simpliciter*).¹ An example of something being good is a situation where unvirtuous people are unhappy; the state of affairs existing is good independent of it benefitting anyone or anything. That is, a world in which the state of affairs exists is better than another world in which it does not exist, even if no one in the

¹ C.f., Hurka (2021), who argues that good for is not a distinct concept from impersonal good.

first world benefits from it existing. As Arneson puts it for a different example, it is “good, period,” rather than good for some purpose, person, or group.² In contrast, something is *good for* someone or something when it benefits them. For example, friendship is good for people since it benefits them, whereas, on its own, the state of affairs where vicious people are unhappy is not. Notice that not everything that can be described as good for people is good for them in the sense at issue here (i.e., they do not benefit them). For example, one might claim that it is good for a serious wrongdoer that she is harshly punished via a large fine or jail sentence. When considering the punishment itself, rather than what it leads to, it is hard to see how it benefits such a person. Of course, it can benefit society as a whole or lead to things that are beneficial for her (e.g., it leads her to turn her life around), but it does not itself seem to benefit her. In fact, it seems to harm her. As L. W. Sumner notes, this highlights the “subject-relativity” of good for:

Welfare assessments concern...how well it is going for *the individual whose life it is*. This relativization of [good for] evaluation to the proprietor of the life in question is one of the deepest features of the language of [well-being]: however valuable something may be in itself, it can promote my well-being only if it is also good or beneficial *for me*. Since an account of the nature of welfare is descriptively adequate only if it is faithful to our ordinary concept, any serious contender must at least preserve the subject-relativity which is definitive of [good for] evaluation.³

Thus, for something to be good for someone it must be beneficial *to her*: it cannot just be good, or good for someone or something else.

The distinction between good for versus good is crucial for the well-being debate since theories of well-being should be theorizing about what is fundamentally good for people and, possibly, other entities. It is not enough that somebody or her life has certain good qualities or

² Richard J. Arneson, “Good, Period,” *Analysis Reviews* 70, no. 4 (2010): 733.

³ L. W. Sumner, “The Subjectivity of Welfare,” *Ethics* 105, (July 1995): 769-770.

things—like her life being aesthetically pleasing—for those qualities or things to be good for the person and, thereby, positively affect her well-being. Those things must specifically benefit the person. Thus, it is a strike against a theory of well-being if it posits features as constituting well-being that, on reflection, seem only to be good rather than good for a person.

In this chapter, I survey the main answers philosophers have offered to the question of what feature(s) is shared by all things that correlate with people having higher levels of well-being.⁴ In briefly assessing each theory, I use a method called “reflective equilibrium.”⁵ Reflective equilibrium is the process of examining our judgments on certain cases (here, of a person’s level of well-being in a case), comparing these judgments with our other beliefs and those of others, considering whether there is a plausible explanation for these judgments, and, based on these steps, either maintaining or revising these judgments. An important judgment that serves as a guideline in this process below is the (likely) common thought that a thoroughly miserable person is low in well-being. It is a sign that a theory needs to be revised or abandoned if it diverges from this judgment. In the following, I present the main theories of well-being, what motivates them, and the central objections to these theories.

1. Four Theories of Well-Being

I will sort the following theories of well-being into two rough camps. With the exception of felt-quality hedonism, the first two are firmly “subjectivist” theories of well-being.

Subjectivism about well-being generally holds that something can increase a person’s well-being

⁴ In this way, I do not here address whether there is such a feature(s) that is common to all contributors to well-being for all people, as many philosophers in the well-being debate operate under the assumption that there is such a thing.

⁵ The concept of reflective equilibrium was labeled by Rawls (1971): 48, who, in explaining what it looks like when seeking to theorize about justice, states that “[f]rom the standpoint of moral philosophy, the best account of a person’s sense of justice is not the one which fits his judgments prior to his examining any conception of justice, but rather the one which matches his judgments in reflective equilibrium. As we have seen, this state is one reached after a person has weighed various proposed conceptions [of justice] and he has either revised his judgments to accord with one of them or held fast to his initial convictions (and the corresponding conception).”

if and only if the person has a positive attitude towards that thing. The last two theories and felt-quality hedonism belong in the “objectivist” camp. This group of theories usually holds that while there are things that increase our well-being that involve our positive attitudes, there are others that do not involve our positive attitudes and could even be the object of our negative attitudes. I will discuss some of the advantages of subjectivism and objectivism as it becomes relevant below.

1.1 Hedonism about Well-Being

The first view I will describe is hedonism.⁶ Roughly put, hedonists hold that a person’s well-being is constituted by the amount of pleasure and pain in her life. In other words, a life⁷ high in well-being is one where the person who lives it experiences a high amount of pleasure and a low amount of pain. To many, the most appealing or, conversely, unappealing aspect of the view is its simplicity. It contends that all the things we ordinarily think contribute to well-being, like relationships, knowledge, new experiences, etc., do so just in virtue of producing pleasure. They are thus *instrumentally* related to well-being. They do not intrinsically or in themselves affect well-being but do so just by producing pleasure or pain: the only things that, in themselves, constitute well-being. When considering hedonism, it is important to think of pleasures of all kinds, ranging from simple bodily pleasures, like eating good food, to more sophisticated pleasures, like the satisfaction gained when a long-term project is complete. This is why, for example, Crisp uses the word “enjoyment” instead of pleasure since the latter can seem

⁶ Modern defenders of hedonism include Crisp (2006), Bradley (2009), De Lazari-Radek and Singer (2014), Bramble (2016), and Pummer (2017). Feldman (2004) and Heathwood (2006) hold views close to hedonism.

⁷ Here I refer to “lifetime” well-being since Bramble (2016): 86, in defending hedonism, argues that “momentary” well-being (well-being at a specific moment during a life) is only derivatively valuable from lifetime well-being. This distinction will not be important for this chapter.

only to refer to simple bodily pleasures.⁸ For the sake of clarity, I will stick with the word pleasure in what follows.

Even though pleasure is a central feature of our lives, it is difficult to define. The way a hedonist chooses to understand pleasure has implications for how we understand well-being on her view. There are two main understandings of pleasure that a hedonist can take. The first view is called the “felt-quality” or “internalist” theory of pleasure.⁹ This view holds that an experience is pleasurable just if it includes a positive phenomenal aspect that is common in varying degrees to all instances of pleasurable experiences. In this way, the positive aspect does not wholly constitute the experience but is only a part of it. To unpack this, by positive, I mean that the aspect of experience is agreeable to the agent. Next, the aspect is common to all instances of pleasure; in other words, it is present in all experiences of pleasure and makes it possible for us to refer to all these vastly different experiences as pleasurable. Lastly, this common sensation is present to varying degrees: that is to say, some sensations are more pleasurable than others. Interestingly, the most recent defenses of hedonism argue that the felt-quality theory makes sense of why we desire pleasure, namely, because it feels good.¹⁰ This view of pleasure also seems to capture best what we mean by pleasure in everyday language.

Many have historically rejected the felt-quality theory. The main reason for this comes from the “heterogeneity objection,” which states that it is difficult to see how all our pleasurable experiences have a phenomenal aspect common to them all.¹¹ For example, the positive

⁸ Crisp (2006): 622.

⁹ I take these labels from Bramble (2016): 90 and Sumner (1996): 87 respectively. Defenders of this view include Broad (1930), Duncker (1941), Kagan (1992), Crisp (2006), Smuts (2011), and Bramble (2013).

¹⁰ See Bramble (2016): 91-95 and Crisp (2006): 623-630.

¹¹ I take this label from Bramble (2016): 91.

sensation of drinking one's favorite tea differs significantly from the positive sensation one gets after completing a challenging workout. Given how vastly different these sensations are, it is reasonable to think that there is nothing common between them and, thus, that the felt-quality theorist is wrong to claim that all pleasurable experiences have a single common aspect. In response, the felt-quality theorist needs to show why such differing experiences still have a single common aspect or what this common aspect is.

Some also object to felt-quality hedonism because pleasure seems only able to increase a person's well-being if it is desirable to that person.¹² If the person is apathetic towards pleasure or finds other things much more desirable, it is hard to see how a life full of pleasurable experiences would be a life high in well-being for that person. Notice that felt-quality hedonism holds that pleasure positively affects a person's well-being regardless of her attitudes towards it, making the view an objectivist theory. This helps to introduce the second theory of pleasure, called the "attitude-based" or "externalist" theory of pleasure,¹³ which denies that what distinguishes pleasure from other mental states is a common positive phenomenal aspect. The attitude-based theory instead states that something is pleasurable just if we hold a certain positive mental state, like a desire, towards our experience of that thing. Crucially, while there may be a phenomenal quality to pleasurable experiences, it is not what does the work for the attitude-based theorist. In its place, the fact that we have a positive mental state towards the experience is what makes them pleasurable and, thus, constitutive of our well-being. Hence, attitude-based hedonism is a subjectivist theory of well-being.

¹² This is called the resonance or anti-alienation constraint. As Railton (1986a): 9 puts it, "...what is intrinsically valuable for a person must have a connection with what he would find in some degree compelling or attractive, at least if he were rational and aware. It would be an intolerably alienated conception of someone's good to imagine that it might fail in any such way to engage him."

¹³ I take these labels from Bramble (2016): 90 and Sumner (1996): 90, respectively. Defenders of this view include Alston (1968), Parfit (1984), Carson (2000), Feldman (2004), and Heathwood (2007).

One reason for holding this second view is that it seems better able to answer the heterogeneity objection above and rule out as pleasurable cases where a person experiences a lot of (what the felt-quality theorist would call) pleasure but is apathetic towards it. In response to the heterogeneity objection, the attitude-based theory states that the commonality between the different pleasurable experiences is that we have a positive attitude or desire towards both experiences. For example, I may *like* experiences of eating vanilla ice cream; hence, because I hold a positive attitude towards the experience (here, a liking), the experience counts as pleasurable. Another benefit of the attitude-based theory is that it can help explain why some pleasures are as pleasurable as some pains are painful: namely, we wanted the former just as much as we did not want the latter.¹⁴

An important objection to the attitude-based theory of pleasure is that it seems, when incorporated by hedonism, to undermine what makes a hedonist theory hedonist. This is because the resulting theory appears similar to the next theory of well-being I discuss, namely desire-satisfactionism, according to which a person's well-being increases and decreases in relation to the number and strength of her desires satisfied.¹⁵ The main difference between them is that the attitude-based theorist limits the relevant attitudes to those we hold toward experiences.¹⁶ In particular, attitude-based versions of hedonism undermine the claim, which makes traditional hedonism distinctive, that how experiences make us feel impacts our well-being. As Bramble

¹⁴ Heathwood (2007): 25 makes this point while defending a desire theory of pleasure (a type of attitude-based theory).

¹⁵ Heathwood (2006) argues for this: specifically, that both views are most plausible when incorporating this type of theory of pleasure. Cf. Sobel (2002): 248 who notes that one difference between attitude-based hedonism and traditional desire satisfactionism is that the hedonist may add that the agent needs to experience her desire being satisfied for her well-being to increase. This is what Sidgwick (1962): 131 seems to hold.

¹⁶ Note that a defender of the attitude-based theory could also construe the positive mental state in a way that is different from how the desire-satisfactionist construes desire.

argues, attitude-based hedonism entails that a person's well-being can change without the person experiencing the change.¹⁷ In support of this, Bramble gives the example of someone who, while having an experience she is initially apathetic towards, begins to desire the experience.

According to attitude-based hedonism, the person's well-being increases as a result despite her experience not changing. For hedonists like Bramble, this is a counterintuitive result since the tight connection between how experiences make us feel and well-being, for them, is a core motivation for hedonism.

There are several historically significant objections to hedonism about well-being generally. The first is Mill's "Philosophy of Swine."¹⁸ This objection states that because all that matters for well-being on hedonism is just the quantity of pleasure a person experiences, a pig (or a person) that spends her days wallowing in the mud and eating scraps while thoroughly enjoying doing so could have a high amount of well-being, even compared to that in the average human's life. This is counterintuitive for many since the types of pleasure available in an average human's life, things like knowledge, romance, art, etc., seem more valuable than those in the pig's life and thus contribute to higher levels of well-being. As Mill notes, many of us choose to endure painful things to obtain these "higher" pleasures rather than stick with any amount of the "lower" pleasures of the pig.¹⁹ For example, athletes spend long hours training (rather than enjoying lower pleasures) hoping to obtain the higher pleasure/satisfaction of seeing their hard work pay off on the field. Nevertheless, the type of pleasure is irrelevant on traditional hedonism

¹⁷ See Bramble (2016): 92.

¹⁸ See Mill (1998) Chapter II (originally published 1861). See also Feldman (2004): 40 for a more recent rendition of the objection.

¹⁹ See Mill (1998): 8-9 (originally published 1861): "If one of the two [pleasures] is, by those who are competently acquainted with both, placed so far above the other that they prefer it, even though knowing it to be attended with a greater amount of discontent, and would not resign it for any quantity of the other pleasure which their nature is capable of..."

(often called “quantitative hedonism”). If one, like the pig, utterly enjoys wallowing in the mud and spends her life doing so, then her life can be just as high in well-being, if not higher, than any human’s life. This is an implausible aspect of hedonism for many.

Mill attempted to answer this objection by introducing a qualitative distinction concerning pleasure.²⁰ Here, Mill argues that the types of pleasures that humans experience are more valuable (and so of higher quality) than those of the pig; in virtue of this, these pleasures contribute to higher levels of well-being and so account for many people’s intuitive judgments about the case above. Yet, many have argued that this response runs into a dilemma in light of how Mill can explain what makes some pleasures more valuable than others. On the one hand, Mill can say that some pleasures are more valuable because they are more pleasurable. However, this is just to say that these pleasures are quantitatively different and so not capture Mill’s qualitative distinction. On the other hand, if Mill says that these more valuable pleasures are qualitatively different for reasons that do not have to do with quantitative properties—for example, Mill states that more valuable pleasures are preferable to most people—then the theory is no longer purely hedonistic. This is because it posits that other things are relevant to well-being, like being preferred by most people, than just pleasurable sensations.

The next objection is to hedonism generally and comes from Nozick’s “experience machine.” Nozick here sets up a thought experiment in which one has the option to either live out the rest of one’s life as normal or enter a machine where one could live a life brimming with much more pleasure than one’s former life.²¹ On entering the machine, one would forget that one is in a machine and instead think that one’s experiences are real. Despite this, it seemed clear to

²⁰ See Mill (1998): 8.

²¹ See Nozick (1974): 48.

Nozick that most people would not enter the machine.²² One reason for this is because Nozick thought that people want more than to experience certain things but also to *do* them and *be* the kind of person that does them in the real world: where, in the machine, one is not actually doing the things they experience or becoming a kind of person.²³ Another way of putting this is that we seem to want our experiences to be authentic rather than illusory. Yet, this cannot be accounted for by the hedonist since all that matters for well-being, on her view, is pleasure and pain, and so not whether one's experiences are authentic. The lesson from this for Nozick is that a person's experience, *contra* hedonism, is not all that matters for well-being.²⁴ Instead, for instance, the fact that one's experiences and relationships are genuine also seems to matter: something that hedonism cannot account for.

If the experience machine is too fanciful, consider Kagan's similar but more concrete example of the deceived businessman.²⁵ In this case, a businessman who thinks that his family and community love him and that his business is successful is wrong about all these things. In fact, behind his back, everyone in his life hates him and his business is going bankrupt. While the businessman's life is high in pleasure, it seems low in well-being for many. Just like in the case of the experience machine, pleasure is insufficient for making a life high in well-being (*contra*

²² C.f. Goldman's (2022) discussion of the empirical work on people opting to enter the experience machine or not. Goldman argues that the evidence does not support Nozick's assumption that most would refrain from entering the machine.

²³ This is a paraphrase of the three reasons Nozick gives on page 49 for why most people would not enter the machine.

²⁴ This may only apply to felt-quality hedonism since the attitude-based hedonist could respond by saying that the reason we do not enter the machine is because we desire/like for our experiences to be authentic. However, while this may work for the desire-satisfactionist below, I am not sure that it does for the attitude-based hedonist who may hold that, in addition to desiring an experience (or holding another positive mental state towards it), we must also experience our desire as satisfied for the experience to be pleasurable and increase well-being (see footnote 15). This is because it is unclear whether we can experience the satisfaction of our desire for authentic experiences since the experiences inside the machine will feel the same as those outside of it.

²⁵ See Kagan (1994): 311. Notably, Kagan is here objecting to "mental state" views, of which hedonism is a type.

hedonism): instead, the authenticity of the pleasurable experiences and relationships also seem to matter for well-being.

1.2 The Desire-Satisfaction Theory of Well-being

The next view I will describe, the desire-satisfaction theory of well-being, holds that well-being increases or decreases in proportion to the number and strength of desires satisfied in a person's life: the more desires satisfied and/or the stronger they are, the higher the level of well-being.^{26,27} One of the primary motivations for desire theories is that it seems strange to say that something can increase your well-being if you do not find that thing desirable. After all, a person who passionately cares exclusively about harnessing energy from nuclear fusion (and so not about pleasure) but is forcefully prevented from trying to do so and, in exchange, given an endless supply of various sources of pleasure, does not seem to be living a life high in well-being even if it is high in pleasure (*contra* felt-quality hedonism). Notice that this is also a motivation for subjectivism about well-being (which some desire-satisfaction theories fall under). It is hard to see how something can positively affect our well-being if we do not hold a positive attitude toward that thing: thus, it is plausible that only things we hold positive attitudes toward can positively affect our well-being.

There are many types of desire-satisfaction theories, each with their own worries. A helpful way of grouping these theories is by putting them on a spectrum between what I will call “actual” and “idealized” desire-satisfaction theories. The first of these, actual desire-satisfaction theories, focuses on the desires that a particular agent actually holds: the more and/or stronger of

²⁶ Notable defenders of this view include Railton (1986a, 1986b), Baber (2007, 2010), Bruckner (2016), Sobel (2016), and Goldman (2018).

²⁷ See footnote 15 for the relationship between desire satisfactionism and attitude-based hedonism.

these desires are satisfied, the more well-being increases.²⁸ Because it holds that whether something will increase our well-being depends on whether we desire that thing, and since desires are a type of positive attitude, actual desire-satisfactionism is a subjectivist theory of well-being.

Unfortunately, actual desire-satisfaction theories may lead to results that are hard to accept since many of our desires, when fulfilled, seem to decrease our well-being or have no effect. For example, a person may dream of having a prestigious job, but on getting that job, be miserable (when she was not before) and overworked: possibly leaving her wishing she never took the position. We can further stipulate that the person knew the job would be difficult but still desired to have it, that her desire to have the job was stronger than her desire not to be miserable, and that no other desires were satisfied or frustrated in the process. Despite this, the person's well-being likely decreased, thus leading to her misery, despite her stronger desire being satisfied. I think this is somewhat intuitive since a person who becomes miserable at a moment in time after not being miserable has likely undergone a decrease in well-being at that time *ceteris paribus*.

Some of our desires may also be irrational or have no effect on our well-being. For instance, one might desire that a certain number of ants exist in the world at a given moment. If satisfied, such a desire does not seem to impact the person's well-being. After all, it is plausible that for something to impact our well-being, it needs to affect us. Yet, it is not clear how the number of ants in the world, even if it corresponds with a desire, can affect someone in a way

²⁸ See Murphy (1999), who, while conceding that the "Simple" desire theory (similar to what I call actual desire-satisfactionism) has difficulties, argues that the move to a "Knowledge-Modified" desire theory (a type of idealized desire-satisfactionism) lacks sufficient rationale. Nevertheless, few other modern authors defend actual desire satisfactionism. Some on this end of the spectrum defend something similar, but with the caveat that the relevant desires for well-being are those for a thing's own sake rather than because it can produce or lead to other things. These seem to include Sidgwick (1962): 109 and von Wright (1963): 103-104.

relevant to her well-being. One way of seeing this is by contrasting this case with examples where the satisfaction of a person's desire seems to affect her more clearly: like when a person's desire to achieve a fitness goal is satisfied. In an example like this, many are likely more inclined to say that the person's well-being increased as a result of achieving the fitness goal. Another objection is that a person's desire can be satisfied without her knowing.²⁹ For example, we can stipulate that the person with the desire about the number of ants in the world does not know when it is satisfied. In this case, it is even harder to see how the satisfied desire will affect her in a way relevant to her well-being. Hence, here again, the person's well-being seems not to increase as a result, despite the satisfaction of the desire.

Lastly, another objection to actual desire-satisfaction theories is that they cannot account for adaptive preferences. An adaptive preference forms because of "the unconscious altering of our [original] preferences in light of the options we have available."³⁰ To see this, consider the following cases:

Adaptive Amy: As a result of growing up temporarily in a highly misogynistic community, Adaptive Amy comes to believe that she ought not form certain opinions on her own and so, through unconscious processes, comes to believe only what the men around her believe on certain topics. Nevertheless, many of Adaptive Amy's desires are capable of and will be fulfilled throughout her lifetime.

Unadaptive Amy: Unadaptive Amy is identical in every respect to Adaptive Amy, including in her upbringing, except that Unadaptive Amy does not form the adaptive preference to only receive her opinions from men.

²⁹ Notably this does not apply to the type of desire-satisfaction theory that Parfit (1984): 494 calls the "Success Theory:" which states that only desires about our own lives (i.e., self-regarding desires) matter for our well-being.

³⁰ Colburn (2011): 52. The concept was originally introduced by Elster (1983).

In considering these cases, even though many of Adaptive Amy's desires will be satisfied, it seems that Adaptive Amy will have a lower level of well-being, due to her adaptive preference, than Unadaptive Amy. The desire-satisfactionist may object that this appearance may be because it is easier to imagine Unadaptive Amy having more or stronger desires satisfied than Adaptive Amy because she does not have the adaptive preference. In response, we can stipulate that, throughout their lifetimes, both Adaptive Amy and Unadaptive Amy have an equal number and degree of desires satisfied. In this case too it seems that there is reason to think that Adaptive Amy has a lower level of well-being than Unadaptive Amy, even if the actual desire-satisfactionist would say that they are equal. This reason is that Adaptive Amy is not capable of exercising her reasoning and belief-forming capacities: something that it seems better to prefer to do than not. In this way, even though many of her desires are satisfied, it appears that Adaptive Amy's life is missing something that seems relevant to and can increase her well-being, and which does not reduce to her desires being satisfied.

In response to the worries the actual desire-satisfactionist faces, one might move to the other side of the spectrum and hold to a version of idealized desire-satisfaction theory. Some of these hold that the relevant desires which, when satisfied, increase well-being, are those one would hold if one was fully informed and/or rational.³¹ On this view, the person above who wants the prestigious job would be better off, in terms of her well-being, if her actual desire to get the job is frustrated. This is because she would not want the job if she was fully informed and knew what it is like to perform it. Similarly, in cases like the person above who desired a certain number of ants and Adaptive Amy, the fully informed/rational version of these agents would hold different desires than they do. These desires, when satisfied, will, as in the case of the ant-

³¹ See Sobel (1994).

counter, positively affect the agent's well-being (rather than not affect it at all) or, as in Adaptive Amy's case, will increase their well-being to a higher level compared to if the agents' actual desires were satisfied. Idealized desire-satisfactionism then helps to avoid objections to actual desire-satisfactionism that arise because of a person's desires being uninformed, irrational, or constrained (as in the adaptive preferences case).

It is important to note that there is a possible distinction within this type of view between whether a) the relevant desire is the one that the fully informed/rational version of myself holds for themselves or b) the desires they hold for me. It is unclear how one could defend a) since the fully informed/rational version of us is likely very different from the real us and hence, their desires for themselves may not, when satisfied in our lives, increase our well-being. After all, the fully informed/rational version of us may desire things that the real us does not desire and may even find repugnant. For example, the fully informed/rational version may enjoy reading about military history, despite the real us finding it painfully boring. Given this, if the real us were to read a book on military history (or many), it seems that it would not increase our well-being, even if it satisfies the desire of the fully informed/rational version of us and, presumably, increases their well-being.

Some, then, argue for b): that the relevant desires are not the ones the fully informed/rational version of us would hold for themselves, but rather the desires they would hold, and so know is best, for the real us.³² As mentioned, this helps to avoid cases where the desires of the fully informed/rational version of us would, when satisfied in our lives, decrease or have no effect on our well-being. The question arises, though, of what it means, on these accounts, to be fully informed/rational. One way of spelling this out is by claiming that, out of

³² See Railton (1986a).

the set of all our desires, the fully informed/rational version of ourselves holds the desires that are not mistaken—that is, actually increase our well-being when satisfied. Another, more idealized, way of describing what it means to be fully informed is to say that the fully informed/rational version of ourselves holds both our non-mistaken desires and other desires, which the actual us does not hold, that would positively affect our well-being when satisfied. This would entail that the fully informed/rational version of ourselves would at least have some desires for the real us that we do not have.

While ideal desire-satisfactionism helps avoid some of the objections to actual desire-satisfactionism, others still arise. For one, the move to an idealized desire-satisfaction theory undermines one of the core motivations of desire theories, namely the appeal of subjectivism about well-being: that something cannot positively affect our well-being if we do not hold a positive attitude towards it. This is because these views make it so that our attitudes are not the only things relevant to our well-being: other things matter too, like the desires of alternate versions of ourselves. This makes ideal desire-satisfactionism an objectivist theory of well-being.

Another objection, due to Rosati, is that it is unclear why, even if the ideal version of us is fully informed/rational, we have reason to do what the fully informed/rational version of us desires for us (when we have a reason to promote our well-being). That is, why the desires of the fully informed/rational version of us are authoritative when it comes to our well-being. Rosati notes that it is generally thought that we take our own judgments to be authoritative when it comes to our well-being. Besides identifying it with “normative force,”³³ Rosati does not give an explicit definition of what it means to be authoritative, but I take it that a charitable understanding of a judgment/desire being authoritative for us is just for us to have good reason to

³³ Rosati, Connie, “Persons, Perspectives, and Full Information Accounts of the Good,” *Ethics* 105, no. 2 (1995): 299.

act according to it. Notice that our judgments being authoritative for us in this sense is still consistent with us sometimes (or even, oftentimes) being mistaken about what is good for us; we can have good reason to follow our own judgments even if we are often wrong (perhaps, because we are still correct more often about what is good for us than others, it would be strange or have negative implications to say that a person lacks good reason to trust her judgments, etc.).³⁴ Consequently, the judgments/desires of the fully informed/rational version of ourselves are seen to be authoritative due to their being *our* judgments/desires (the only caveat being that this version of us is fully informed/rational).

But Rosati thinks that, in virtue of being fully informed/rational, the ideal version of ourselves is no longer us and, thus, that their judgments/desires are no longer authoritative for us. Rosati argues for this by contending that whether a person will appreciate³⁵ and be informed by certain pieces of information (as is necessary for being fully informed) depends on the type of person she is: a premise that Rosati supports by citing the work of people like Peter Railton and W. D. Falk.³⁶ For example, a person may have a deep-seated mistrust of authority figures and so often fail to appreciate or be informed by information coming from people in authority. We can stipulate that one piece of information necessary for the agent to hold in order to be fully informed is (at least for our purposes here) the fact that it is in the person's best interests to listen to what authority figures have to say. The fully informed/rational version of this person would know and appreciate this fact. Yet, in order to do so, the fully informed/rational person would

³⁴ Notice, I am here trying to reconstruct the reasoning behind Rosati's argument. This is not necessarily a claim I am committed to.

³⁵ Rosati (1995): 304 argues that in order for a person to be informed by a certain piece of information in such a way that the information can constitute a reason for action to her, she needs to be able to "appreciate" the information such that it "animates" or "takes hold" of her." This is because a person could know or receive a piece of information, but not recognize that it has bearing on her life and gives her reason to act in a certain way.

³⁶ See Rosati (1995): 304-307

then need to lack the person's mistrust of authority figures, since it is unlikely that she would appreciate and be informed by this information were she to have this trait. The fully informed/rational version of the person would then be different from the original person in an important way. Given this, the desires of the fully informed/rational version of the person may not be authoritative for that person, according to Rosati, since the ideal version is so importantly different from her (and, thus, not her).

Rosati also argues that the fully informed/rational version of us that the idealized desire-satisfactionist has in mind may not be possible.³⁷ As Rosati explains, how we experience things and whether they increase or decrease our well-being depends partly on the people we are. For instance, a person who is inclined to work with her hands would experience having a desk job differently than someone who enjoyed that type of job; this entails that the job would impact her well-being differently. Hence, to truly know how we would experience something and understand how it would impact our well-being, the fully informed/rational version of ourselves (to be fully informed) would need to inhabit our perspective by possessing the qualities that we do.³⁸ Yet, who we are is not fixed and can change over the course of a lifetime depending on the contents of that lifetime. Given this, the different possible ways that our lives could go will contain different versions of ourselves. For example, in possible life (1), we may become the type of person who loves taking risks. In possible life (2): we may become the type of person who gets highly anxious when taking risks and for whom doing so is painful. This means that, in comparing these possible lives, the fully informed/rational version of us will have to take on the

³⁷ Rosati (1995): 314-324. See also Sobel (1994) who seems to argue for a similar conclusion.

³⁸ This seems to be a crucial premise in Rosati's (1995) argument that may be controversial. Rosati (1995): 319-321 seems to defend it by responding to an objection which states that the fully informed version of us may be capable of comparing the possible lives, even though they had different qualities in each, by remembering what living each of them felt like. Rosati responds to this by arguing that even the memory of how a life felt will depend on the qualities the fully informed version of us has when doing the remembering.

unique qualities of these different versions of ourselves in order to know whether the life is high in well-being compared to another.

However, the qualities of the version of us in possible lives (1) and (2) are different and, because they are different, will entail that different, and possibly even contradictory, things will increase and decrease our well-being. Given this, it is not clear how the fully informed/rational version of ourselves could compare the levels of well-being in different possible lives since doing so would require them having different, and possibly even contradictory, sets of qualities all at the same time. This does not seem, according to Rosati, to be a conceptual possibility and so it is hard to see how an idealized desire-satisfaction theory could appeal to such a fully-informed/rational version of ourselves in the first place.

1.3 Perfectionism about Well-Being

The next theory I will describe, perfectionism, is a clear example from a group of theories that deny subjectivism about well-being. As noted, I will call these “objectivist” theories. Roughly speaking, perfectionism holds that something increases a person’s well-being if it develops the person’s faculties, capabilities, or aspects of her human nature.³⁹ For instance, health is an aspect of our nature: thus, being healthy, by developing this aspect, is a constituent of well-being. Because perfectionist accounts widely vary, I will summarize the ones that seem to me to be the most notable and discuss how they fare against various objections to perfectionism: these accounts beings Hurka, Bradford, and Kauppinen’s.

³⁹ While Hurka (1993) is often cited as a holder of the view, the book was only meant to formulate the strongest version of perfectionism. According to Lin (2022): 9, Hurka currently holds to another objectivist theory known as objective-list theory. Kraut (2007) defends a form of perfectionism combined with hedonism; nevertheless, in Kraut (2018) Kraut defends a view which holds that all, or almost all, things that affect well-being are experienceable (*contra* traditional perfectionism). Bradford (2017, 2021) defends perfectionism against modern objections, though notes that it is unlikely able to account for the most intuitive reason why pain is bad. Murphy (2001) and others in the natural law tradition defend a form of perfectionism. Arguably, Nussbaum (2011) holds to a loose version of perfectionism as part of an objective-list theory.

A classic formulation of perfectionism is Hurka's account, where the focus is on the essential properties that make something count as a human and a living thing and not the essential properties humans share with non-living things (e.g., taking up space).⁴⁰ Developing these essential properties increases a person's well-being.⁴¹ In particular, these properties include our theoretical rationality, practical rationality, and physical essence (i.e., the essential capacities of the human body).⁴² Our theoretical rationality refers to our capacity to form complex beliefs on the basis of evidence and make inferences from these beliefs. Similarly, our practical rationality concerns our ability to form complex intentions and plans, even far in the future, act upon them, and regulate these intentions in accordance with other intentions. Hurka holds that the development of both these kinds of rationality is a function of the number and quality of the relevant outputs from each. For example, a person with a developed capacity for theoretical rationality has a high number of things she knows, where these also are of high-quality and/or non-trivial. Similarly, a person with a developed practical rationality has achieved a high number of important goals not on the basis of luck. Lastly, our essential bodily capacities include all the physical processes necessary for our bodies to function well and be healthy. For example, when one is dehydrated, her bodily processes are negatively impacted—for example, by impeding or preventing her kidneys from functioning—thus, negatively affecting her well-being.

⁴⁰ See Hurka (1993): 16.

⁴¹ Though note Lin (2022): Footnote 91, “Hurka writes (p. 17) that this theory should not be understood as a theory of well-being, but I think we should read him as making that claim only on the assumptions that prudential value [i.e., for our purposes, well-being] cannot be given a Moorean analysis and that well-being must be understood subjectively. Although this theory was intended primarily as an account of what makes a human life impersonally or simply good, it can also be construed as a theory of well-being.”

⁴² Hurka (1993): Chapter 4

On Kauppinen's account, the relevant capacities are those "characteristic of one's biological species" and exercising these capacities is constitutive of well-being.⁴³ Kauppinen uniquely argues for a form of "diachronic" perfectionism. The view is diachronic because it holds that what is best for an agent's well-being is what leads to the best exercising of her capacities over the course of her lifetime. In particular, Kauppinen holds that what is best is what maximizes a *balanced* exercising of one's capacities over her lifetime. For one to exercise her capacities in a balanced way involves her not exercising one or some to a disproportionate amount compared to and to the detriment of her other capacities. For example, the person who only focused on developing her bodily capacities (e.g., because she was an athlete) and almost completely ignored developing her intellectual capacities had a life lower in well-being than someone who developed these capacities more equally.

Bradford's account agrees with Hurka that the relevant capacities are our theoretical rationality, practical rationality, and essential capacities of the human body.⁴⁴ Yet, Bradford nuances the classical perfectionist formulation by distinguishing between *capacities*, *activities*, and *functions*. Capacities refer to the standard sense of the term by perfectionists (e.g., the capacity of theoretical rationality). Activities are what one does when one exercises her capacities; when exercising the capacity of theoretical reason, one is doing activities like making inferences, forming beliefs, etc. Lastly, functions refer to the rightful outcomes of exercising capacities; for example, the rightful outcome of theoretical rationality may be knowledge. With these distinctions in mind, Bradford indicates that while exercising one's capacities without achieving the rightful outcome (e.g., by not obtaining knowledge) is somewhat beneficial for

⁴³ Antti Kauppinen, "Working Hard and Kicking Back: The Case for Diachronic Perfectionism," *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy*, (2009): 1.

⁴⁴ Bradford (2021).

one's well-being, it is not as beneficial as when the rightful outcome is achieved. Similarly, when one's capacities fail to operate properly (Bradford calls this a "malfilment of the capacity"⁴⁵) and hence, lead to a bad outcome (e.g., false belief), one's well-being is negatively affected.

An advantage of perfectionism is that it can account for our adaptive preferences. Perfectionism, and objectivist views generally, can seemingly account for this better than many subjectivist views—specifically, here, actual desire satisfactionism and attitude-based hedonism. To see this, consider Adaptive Amy above who grew up in a highly misogynistic community and formed an adaptive preference to rely only on men for forming certain opinions. As noted, it seems that Adaptive Amy's well-being is restricted in a way that Unadaptive Amy's is not. While actual-desire satisfactionism struggles to account for this, perfectionism can easily do so. The perfectionist would say that Adaptive Amy's well-being is negatively affected by her adaptive preference because it has prevented her from developing her reasoning and belief-forming capacities to a certain degree. This is especially because the faculty in question is important and can be considered a central aspect of her human nature.

Yet, perfectionism faces several problems.⁴⁶ In particular, it diverges from other objectivist theories, and theories of well-being generally, because it is arguably not able to satisfyingly account for the common judgement that pain has a negative effect on our well-being. After all, the ability to experience pain is an important faculty and aspect of our human nature. If this is the case, then, according to traditional perfectionism, our well-being should increase or at least not decrease were we to develop this faculty. For example, on Hurka's account, the ability

⁴⁵ See Bradford (2021): 596.

⁴⁶ As Lin (2022): 9 notes, "although perfectionism is often considered one of the main theories of well-being, it seems to have few contemporary adherents." Of course, as noted in footnote 39, some authors defend hybrid versions of perfectionism combined with other theories of well-being.

to feel pain is a function of our bodily processes: without it, our bodies would not be able to function well (e.g., because we would not know when something is harming them). Even though the ability to feel pain helps our bodies to function properly, accounts like Hurka's do not seem able to incorporate the thought that the experience of pain generally has a negative impact on our well-being. As Bradford argues, while Kauppinen's account can agree that a life filled with pain is low in well-being (because it means that other capacities were not as developed), it does not seem able to capture that pain is in itself harmful to our well-being.⁴⁷ This is because the only reason why something is bad for someone's well-being on the account is because it leads to a capacity not being developed or being developed in a disproportionate way compared to one's other capacities.

Only Bradford's account has the resources available to agree with the thought that pain is in itself harmful to our well-being. This is first because, on Bradford's account, there is not a capacity to feel pain since capacities are abilities to do activities and feeling pain is not an activity. Instead, Bradford argues that the experience of pain is a failure of one's practical rationality to function well. Bradford here thinks that everyone has a goal to "avoid pain and pursue pleasure."⁴⁸ Feeling pain, then, entails that one failed in this goal at that time and that her well-being suffered as a result. While this is a plausible way that perfectionism can agree with the thought that pain is bad for our well-being, it is not, for Bradford, a satisfying way. This is because Bradford argues that the fundamental reason why pain is bad for our well-being is that it

⁴⁷ See Bradford (2021): 593-594.

⁴⁸ Gwen Bradford, "Perfectionist Bads," *The philosophical Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (2021): 599.

feels bad/hurts.⁴⁹ Yet, perfectionism, at least on these construals, cannot account for something being bad for our well-being because of the way that it feels.

Another objection targets the thought that there is a human nature with capacities or essential properties that all humans share. For one, it is unclear whether there are capacities that only humans have that other animals do not possess in some form. For example, while humans are immensely social in ways that other animals are not, many species have at least a proto-form of this capacity (e.g., the sociality of bees in a hive). Moreover, even if there is a distinct human nature, perfectionism likely overemphasizes good human capacities over bad ones. For instance, we may have a capacity to inflict pain on each other and ourselves. Such a capacity probably does not positively affect our well-being when developed. If this is true, then it undermines the perfectionist claim that developing human capacities positively affects our well-being.

1.4 Objective-List Theories of Well-Being

Despite the problems faced by perfectionist theories of well-being, many are sympathetic to objectivism about well-being. The main reason for this appears to be that there are things that many do not hold a positive attitude towards which, nonetheless, seem connected to our well-being (*contra* subjectivism).⁵⁰ For example, we sometimes assume that knowledge alone, irrespective of what we use it for and the attitudes we hold towards it, can increase our well-being. It is also common to think that something can increase someone's well-being, despite the person having a negative attitude towards that thing. For one, Darwall gives the example of a person with major depression who, because she thinks that she is worthless, does not want to see

⁴⁹ See Bradford (2020).

⁵⁰ This is similar to a point made by Heathwood (2014): 205.

her friends.⁵¹ Here, we can stipulate that she even holds a negative attitude toward meeting her friends. Nevertheless, it seems clear that meeting her friends would still be good for her, regardless of her attitude towards doing so.⁵² Lastly, some might be attracted to objectivism because it can make sense of the thought that someone who is deeply immoral and only has positive attitudes towards vile things does not seem to be living a life high in well-being.⁵³ An objective theory can do this by making one of the factors of well-being have to do with moral virtue, regardless of one's attitudes towards acting morally.

The last view I will describe, the objective-list theory, is another example of an objectivist theory.⁵⁴ This theory differs from the preceding theories because it holds that there are many things, rather than one, that constitute well-being. In this way, an objective-list theorist may hold that the previous examples of knowledge, friendship, and virtue all individually constitute well-being. Objective-list theorists hold that well-being is constituted by a plurality/list of goods (which can include things like knowledge, freedom, pleasure, etc.) that are irreducible to each other. By irreducible, I mean that the goods are not just a form of another good on the list or contribute to well-being only in virtue of another good. For example, a list may have two items (though it could have more): pleasure and eating ice cream. The good of eating ice cream, arguably, only affects well-being in virtue of it being pleasurable. Thus, eating ice cream is not an irreducible good, making this example view not a genuine objective-list theory. A genuine

⁵¹ See Darwall (2002): 5-6.

⁵² Bramble (2016): 107-109, while arguing for hedonism, makes a similar point.

⁵³ While there are few, if any modern defenders of this thought, Aristotle (2000) held in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that virtue is inseparable from well-being: that is, the good life (roughly, the life high in well-being) just is a virtuous life. C.f. Fritts (2022) who defends a version of subjectivism that can account for this intuitive thought.

⁵⁴ Note, though, that some authors posit objective-list theories where the items on the list are chosen in light of their being perfectionistic goods. These are not the type of objective-list theories I am after here.

objective-list theory may have items like knowledge, desire-satisfaction, and the development of one's capacities, where these are *prima facie* irreducible to each other.

One example of an objective-list theory is Guy Fletcher's, whose list is comprised of "Achievement, Friendship, Happiness, Pleasure, Self-Respect, [and] Virtue."⁵⁵ Fletcher holds that all six of these items have positive attitudes as necessary components. By this, Fletcher means that they involve a "person's engagement through her holding various kinds of [positive] attitudes such as endorsement, desires and affection."⁵⁶ For instance, friendship involves us holding a positive attitude, like affection, towards our friends. This is important for Fletcher because he wants to account for the subjectivist thought that something cannot positively affect our well-being if we are "cold" (i.e., feel nothing) towards or are "alienated" from it.⁵⁷

Nevertheless, as Lin argues, Fletcher's account fails to do this because it is possible for someone to have virtuous desires (e.g., for world peace), and so fulfill the virtue component of Fletcher's theory, but be cold toward everything in her life.⁵⁸ The thought here is that, despite having these desires that, on Fletcher's view, contribute to her well-being, the person does not "resonate" with anything in her life, where resonating with something, for the subjectivist, is vital for well-being. Thus, the person seems alienated from virtue as a proposed source of well-being.⁵⁹ This entails that Fletcher's view is an objectivist theory (and, hence, an *objective*-list theory) since it posits a

⁵⁵ Guy Fletcher, "A Fresh Start for the Objective-List Theory of Well-Being," *Utilitas* 25, no. 2 (2013): 214.

⁵⁶ Fletcher (2013): 216.

⁵⁷ This is the gist of the resonance/anti-alienation constraint. See footnote 12 for Railton's full formulation of this constraint.

⁵⁸ See Lin (2016): footnote 29.

⁵⁹ See Lin (2016): 103.

component of well-being that falls outside of what subjectivists say can constitute well-being (i.e., it is something one can fail to resonate with).⁶⁰

There are several traditional objections to objective-list theories. First and foremost, it is not clear whether these theories are giving the fundamental explanation of well-being that other theories take themselves to be giving. This is to say that it is unclear whether the components on these theories' lists are actually irreducible to something else like pleasure, desire-satisfaction, perfectionism, etc. On this point, Crisp's distinction between "enumerative" and "explanatory" theories of well-being is helpful. Enumerative theories outline what things increase our well-being, whereas explanatory theories explain what it is in virtue of which these things have this effect.⁶¹ For instance, the hedonist may enumerate many things that positively affect our well-being, things like hobbies, good health, friendships, etc., but explain that these things do so only in virtue of producing pleasure.⁶² Hedonism, desire-satisfactionism, and perfectionism all seek to be explanatory theories. If it is true that an objective-list theory's components are reducible to something else, as defenders of other views might contend, then it would be a merely enumerative theory of well-being. To be an explanatory theory, the objective-list theorist likely must claim that there is no further explanation as to why certain things are on the list besides the fact that they do seem to affect our well-being; in other words, there is nothing else we can point

⁶⁰ In particular, according to Lin (2016): 102, it posits a constituent of well-being whose tokens do not "consist (at least in part, and in the right way) in your having a positive attitude towards something." The reasons why subjectivism is defined this way are complicated and do not add or subtract anything from the larger point I am making about subjectivism and objectivism in this thesis. Given this, I define subjectivism here and in the next two chapters as it has been traditionally defined to help with clarity.

⁶¹ See Crisp (2006).

⁶² Though, felt-quality hedonism may be an enumerative theory according to some, like Fletcher (2013): 206.

to, like pleasure, to explain why the list items have the effect they do on our well-being.⁶³ Many might find this unconvincing, depending on the items on the list, because they may see it as an arbitrary stopping point.

Next, it is likely that some items on the list contribute to well-being to a greater extent than other items. An objective list theorist is then faced with the issue of determining how to account for this. If, for example, the theorist attempts to rank the items on the list, it is hard to see how she can do this, especially if she also claims that the fact of why these items are on the list is brute. She cannot explain one item being ranked higher than another in terms of it being, for instance, more pleasurable, since this admits of a more fundamental explanation of well-being that the items on the list likely reduce to.⁶⁴

2. Conclusion

In this chapter, I surveyed the main theories of well-being and discussed various objections to each. These theories included felt-quality hedonism, attitude-based hedonism, actual desire-satisfactionism, idealized desire-satisfactionism, and several types of perfectionism. I have throughout noted that two of these theories, attitude-based hedonism and actual desire-satisfactionism, count as subjectivist theories, and the other three, felt-quality hedonism, idealized desire-satisfactionism, and perfectionism, count as objectivist theories. As noted, subjectivism and objectivism about well-being have certain advantages over the other; subjectivism because it can help account for the thought that some things cannot positively affect our well-being if we do not have a positive attitude towards it, and objectivism because it captured the idea that some things do seem to positively affect our well-being regardless of

⁶³ This is the strategy that Fletcher (2013): 217-218 adopts. Here, Fletcher argues that this is a problem for any theory of well-being.

⁶⁴ See Bradley (2012): 226-230 for a fuller discussion of objections to objective-list theories.

whether we hold a positive attitude towards them. In the following chapter, I will survey several theories that try to incorporate both subjectivist and objectivist elements and hence capture the benefits of both types of views.

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CHAPTER 2 - HYBRID THEORIES AND OTHER INNOVATIVE VIEWS

The purpose of this chapter is to survey a couple of the main ways philosophers have sought to eliminate the impasse between subjectivism and objectivism. One way this has been done is by offering a robust defense of a theory that belongs to one of these two views; in section 1, I assess Heathwood's famous arguments for actual desire-satisfactionism/attitude-based hedonism as an example of this strategy. Another way, which will be the main focus of this chapter, is by positing a "hybrid" theory, which holds that well-being is constituted by the combination of both a subjective component (holding a positive attitude) and an objective component (goods/projects that are valuable irrespective of one's attitudes towards them).⁶⁵ Given that my hope in this thesis is to help the impasse between subjectivism and objectivism move forward, I pay particular attention below to whether these theories can account for both motivations of the subjectivist and objectivist, as well as their plausibility overall.

If you recall, subjectivism holds that something can only positively affect your well-being if you have a positive attitude toward that thing. The main motivation for this view is the thought that something cannot affect one's well-being if one is alienated from it, where this seems to follow from one lacking a positive attitude toward it. In chapter 1, I gave the example of a person who only cares (a positive attitude) about harnessing energy from nuclear fusion but is prevented from pursuing this and given various sources of felt-quality pleasure instead. Given that the person does not care about the pleasures but only about harnessing energy from nuclear fusion, the subjectivist thinks she would be miserable without this project and so low in well-being. The subjectivist thinks it is wrong, then, to say that these pleasures contribute to the

⁶⁵ This is roughly how hybrid theories are defined; the details will be explained further below. See Lauinger (2013): 270, Woodard's (2017): 164 "joint necessity model," and Hurka (2019): 451.

person's well-being (*contra* at least one objectivist view—felt-quality hedonism) since they do not “do anything” for her, she is “cold” toward them, and seems alienated from them as a putative source of well-being. The subjectivist thinks this applies to all other sources of well-being that the objectivist offers as not depending on one's positive attitudes. One of the main downsides of subjectivism is that it seems to have difficulty with cases where an agent's well-being seems positively affected by something she does not hold a positive attitude towards. In the previous chapter, I used Darwall's case of a highly depressed person who has a negative attitude toward seeing her friends as an example. Despite the person's negative attitude towards it, seeing her friends would likely increase her well-being.

On the other hand, objectivists deny subjectivism and hold that at least some things can positively affect your well-being, irrespective of your holding a positive attitude toward them. The main motivation for this view is just that some things do seem to positively affect people's well-being even if they do not hold a positive attitude towards them, like, for example, engaging in self-determination. The main worry for objectivism is that it seems to consider things that an agent is cold towards as positively affecting her well-being: making her alienated from what the objectivist claims is a source of well-being. For instance, Heathwood gives the example of a person who, after hearing that knowledge can increase well-being, reads a textbook on insects despite not caring about insects, only to find that it ““does nothing for [him].””⁶⁶ In this case, the agent's newfound knowledge does not affect him, making it hard to see how his well-being is impacted as a result.

⁶⁶ Chris Heathwood, “Subjective Theories of Well-Being,” in *The Cambridge Companion to: Utilitarianism* edited by Ben Eggleston and Dale E. Miller, (2012: Cambridge University Press): 203.

1. Heathwood

The first view I will describe is Heathwood's, who defends subjectivism by arguing that the strongest form of hedonism and the strongest form of desire-satisfactionism just are the same view. Heathwood holds that actual desire-satisfaction theory is preferable to idealized desire-satisfaction theory and can overcome the classic objections raised against it. If you recall, actual desire-satisfactionism holds that well-being is constituted by the amount and intensity of a person's satisfied desires. On the type of actual desire-satisfactionism that Heathwood argues for, the desires relevant to well-being are "intrinsic" desires, which are desires for something in itself and not for what it can lead to. For example, a person may desire a certain job title because she thinks it will make others respect her more and wants them to do so. The person's desire for the job title is not intrinsic since she only wants it because it will lead to the satisfaction of another desire. The second desire, for people to respect her more, is an intrinsic desire since it is for the thing itself and is not desired because it will help her achieve other desires. For Heathwood, well-being is constituted by the number and intensity of intrinsic desires for states of affairs that the agent believes are satisfied (by believing the desired states of affairs obtain) subtracted by the number and intensity of intrinsic desires the agent believes are frustrated.

Heathwood holds that attitude-based hedonism is preferable to felt-quality hedonism. He argues that something is pleasurable for a person just so long as the person "takes" pleasure in it or, in other words, "enjoys" it, where these are understood as propositional attitudes.⁶⁷ Again, the relevant pleasure is intrinsic enjoyment/pleasure, and so in the thing itself. On this view, well-being is constituted by the number and strength of a person's intrinsic pleasures.

⁶⁷ See Heathwood (2006): 551-552.

Heathwood thinks that both these versions of desire-satisfactionism and hedonism are the same theory. This is because they hold to what Heathwood calls the “Motivational Theory of Pleasure.”⁶⁸ This theory holds that something is pleasurable to an agent just if that agent has an intrinsic desire for it and believes that the thing obtains.

Heathwood’s main motivation for combining hedonism and desire-satisfactionism seems to be what he sees as the plausibility of the motivational theory of pleasure. If the theory is true, then the versions of hedonism and desire-satisfactionism Heathwood favors that are largely based on it seem likely to be true. As Heathwood puts it, “that we have arrived at this theory [the Motivational Theory of Pleasure] via two independent avenues [hedonism and desire-satisfactionism] gives us added reason to think the theory is true.”⁶⁹

A large part of the success of Heathwood’s theory depends on the plausibility of the motivational theory of pleasure that motivates it. Note that the motivational theory makes Heathwood’s view similar to some actual desire-satisfaction theories discussed previously, just with the caveat that the person believes the object of her desire obtains. While the caveat helps to mitigate concerns over agents who are ignorant about the fulfillment of one of their desires and so do not seem to increase in well-being as a result, it is unclear whether it can account for cases where the desire, despite being fulfilled, leads to the person being miserable. For example, a person may think that she would enjoy going to a certain concert but, on going, be miserable. It is strange to say that the person is better off, in terms of well-being, because of this desire being satisfied; in fact, she seems worse off.

⁶⁸ Heathwood (2006): 556.

⁶⁹ Chris Heathwood, “Desire Satisfactionism and Hedonism,” *Philosophical Studies* 128, no. 3 (2006): 559.

Heathwood responds to this type of objection by distinguishing between “intrinsic goodness” for someone and “all things considered goodness” for someone.⁷⁰ Here, we can understand intrinsic goodness for someone as that which contributes positively to a person’s well-being; for the desire-satisfaction theorist, satisfied desires are intrinsically good. On the other hand, something is all things considered good for someone if it leads to the most intrinsic goodness overall and in the long run, given all the relevant factors. With this distinction in hand, the desire-satisfaction theorist can say that while the above person’s satisfied desire to go to the concert was intrinsically good for her (i.e., it led to some increase in well-being), it was not all things considered good for her since it led to the frustration of other desires (e.g., the desire not to be miserable) and, hence, less intrinsic goodness overall.

It should be said that Heathwood’s view, because it is a purely subjectivist view, likely does not account for the objectivist thought that some things can increase our well-being regardless of whether we have a positive attitude towards them. I illustrated this earlier through a case of an adaptive preference. There I compared a person, Adaptive Amy, who desires to not form her own beliefs on certain topics but only believe what the men around her believe on these, to a counterpart, Unadaptive Amy, who does not have this desire. I stipulated that both Amys have and will have an equal number and degree of desires satisfied over their lifetime; we can also add that they believe these desires are satisfied. As a result, Heathwood is committed to saying that both Amys are equal in well-being. This will be difficult to accept for many who think that Unadaptive Amy is higher in well-being than Adaptive Amy. One reason they might think this is, for example, that exercising one’s capacity of self-determination (via exercising one’s reasoning and belief-forming capacities) is important for well-being, regardless of whether

⁷⁰ See Heathwood (2006): 546.

one holds a positive attitude towards doing so (as Adaptive Amy does not). On this explanation, Unadaptive Amy is higher in well-being than Adaptive Amy because she has had more opportunities to exercise this important capacity and, we can say, has seized these opportunities to do so. Heathwood's theory cannot explain why this would be so.

2. Hybrid Theories

As noted, subjectivism and objectivism seem to have compelling motivations and drawbacks. It would be nice if we could reconcile these motivations while avoiding the drawbacks of these views. One possible way of doing this is by saying that well-being is constituted by both a subjective and an objective component, where both are necessary for something to increase well-being. Views that hold this are called hybrid theories of well-being.

The main hybrid theory we will look at is Kagan's. Here, Kagan posits (though does not outright endorse) a view where well-being is constituted by an agent's enjoyment of objective goods in her life.⁷¹ Parfit, interestingly, suggests a nearly identical view.⁷² The subjective component for the view Kagan presents is an agent's enjoyment or pleasure understood according to the attitude-based theory of pleasure.⁷³ The objective component involves goods worth enjoying, which are objective because their status as a good is independent of a person's attitudes towards them. Both of these components are necessary for well-being on the view. Hence, pleasure is insufficient for Kagan for affecting well-being (*contra* hedonism), and so is the presence of objective goods in an agent's life (*contra* some objectivist theories); the agent

⁷¹ See Kagan (2009).

⁷² See Parfit (1984): 501-502.

⁷³ Though, Kagan holds to this theory just for the sake of presenting his view. He remains neutral on how to actually define pleasure/enjoyment and indicates that there may be multiple versions of his view given this, where one is committed to what I called the felt-quality theory of pleasure and another to the attitude-based theory. See Kagan (2009): 255. Given this and how I (following others) have defined hybrid theories, the other version of his view that holds to a felt-quality theory of pleasure is not a hybrid theory.

must specifically take pleasure in the objective goods for her well-being to be positively affected. While Kagan does not give a definitive list of objective goods, some examples include knowledge, accomplishment, and even, for Kagan, our bodies—as when we have a bodily pleasure, like in eating.⁷⁴

The main appeal of Kagan’s view is that it may incorporate the virtues and avoid the vices of purely subjectivist views (e.g., attitude-based hedonism) and purely objectivist views (e.g., perfectionism). Kagan agrees with the subjectivist that mental states, especially pleasurable mental states (i.e., positive attitudes towards things on the attitude-based theory of pleasure), are important for well-being; one cannot be alienated from a source of well-being. But Kagan wants to avoid the thought that these states are alone sufficient for well-being, which he sees as a vice of subjectivism since what we take pleasure in and whether our experiences are authentic also seem to matter.⁷⁵ While objectivism has the virtue of accommodating this thought that pleasure alone is insufficient, it, for Kagan, runs into worries about alienating an agent, by claiming that she is high in well-being when there are objective goods in her life, even if she does not have a positive attitude towards them. In contrast to purely subjectivist and purely objectivist views, the view Kagan posits, while saying that pleasurable mental states and objective goods are important for well-being, denies that they can affect well-being independently of each other. As Kagan puts it, “well-being requires getting both the ‘insides’ *and* the ‘outsides’ right.”⁷⁶

Whether Kagan’s view can account for the above virtues of subjectivism—the thoughts that positive attitudes and a lack of alienation are crucial for well-being—depends on what it

⁷⁴ See Kagan (2009): 269.

⁷⁵ Kagan (2009): 255.

⁷⁶ Shelly Kagan, “Well-Being as Enjoying the Good,” *Philosophical Perspectives* 23, (2009): 255.

counts as an objective good. In some cases where a purely subjective good is at play (a good that lacks objective worth), Kagan's view seems to fail at this because it denies that a person who takes pleasure in something and does not seem alienated from it has an increase in well-being. This opposes what the subjectivist wants to say in these cases. For example, a person could have a positive attitude towards something or find it pleasurable when it seems not to be an objective good, like counting blades of grass. Many subjectivists and even objectivists would find it hard to deny that this increases the person's well-being by, at least, a small amount, given the pleasure it produces. After all, the agent is not alienated from this seeming good (i.e., she is not cold to it) and has a positive attitude toward it. This can especially be seen by comparing the grass-counter to a counterpart who is identical in all respects and has lived an almost identical life except that she does not have a positive attitude or take pleasure in counting blades of grass. It seems that, even if it is a small difference, the grass counter is higher in well-being than her counterpart because of her positive attitude towards/pleasure in counting grass. This is why the thoughts above, that positive attitudes and a lack of alienation are central to well-being, are virtues of subjectivism; they make it very easy for the subjectivist to explain our judgments in these cases that the person's well-being was positively affected. Yet, Kagan likely cannot agree with most of our judgments and the subjectivist on this case unless he includes counting blades of grass as an objective good, which seems wrong.⁷⁷ This cuts against what subjectivists would want to say about this case: that the grass counter's taking pleasure in the activity means she is not alienated or cold towards it which, in turn, seems to entail that it positively affects her well-being. Thus, even if Kagan is right above that what we take pleasure in seems to matter for well-being, his

⁷⁷ Though, note that this also depends on whether Kagan's view is committed to what Hurka (2019): 453 calls a "moderate" hybrid theory, that is, a theory that concedes that some purely subjective goods can increase well-being though not nearly to the degree that objective goods the agent holds a positive attitude toward can. Hurka (2019): 453 notes that Kagan "at times suggests" this type of theory.

view denies that purely subjective goods can positively affect well-being and so fails to account for the virtues of subjectivism in cases like this.

Kagan would likely have to respond by denying that the grass-counter has a higher level of well-being than her counterpart. But this is a difficult claim to make given that, as seen in the first section, many theorists who deny hedonism or even subjectivism generally still want to account for the thought that pleasure, irrespective of whether it is directed towards an objective good, can positively affect well-being. Heathwood argues that the most plausible version of desire-satisfactionism holds that something is pleasurable if a person desires that thing and believes it obtains. I noted before that many perfectionists recognize that a powerful objection to their view is that it has difficulty accounting for the thought that pain negatively affects well-being because of how it feels. For similar reasons, perfectionist views also have difficulty accounting for pleasure's positive impact on well-being by virtue of how it feels.⁷⁸ Lastly, it is common to see pleasure as one component of an objective-list theory of well-being.⁷⁹ Kagan would thus run against what many of these theorists want to claim—that pleasure (on either a felt-quality or attitude-based account) can positively affect our well-being irrespective of whether it is in an objective good. Thus, Kagan's view fails to account for the virtues of subjectivism and is forced to make a claim that most in the well-being debate see as implausible.

Similarly, by requiring that an agent take pleasure in an objective good, Kagan's account may fail to capture the motivation for objectivism that some purely objective goods seem to positively affect our well-being irrespective of our attitudes towards them. Here, a purely

⁷⁸ See Bradford (2016): 130-131. Note that here the perfectionist wants to hold to a felt-quality theory of pleasure. She would still likely see counting grass for the grass counter as pleasurable for her and would want to account for that: something Kagan's account cannot do even when using a felt-quality account of pleasure. See footnote 73.

⁷⁹ See, Lin (2022): 8.

objective good is a good that seems to positively affect our well-being irrespective of our attitudes toward it. Recall the case of Adaptive Amy and Unadaptive Amy. I presented Adaptive Amy as desiring (a type of positive attitude) to not form her own beliefs on certain topics but only believe what the men around her believe on these. Adaptive Amy thus engaged in self-determination less than Unadaptive Amy because of her adaptive preference. We can stipulate here that Unadaptive Amy also did not have a positive attitude towards engaging in self-determination (e.g., because she did not think about it). With this in mind, it again seems that Adaptive Amy has a lower level of well-being than Unadaptive Amy because she engaged in self-determination less. Notice that self-determination is likely objectively valuable for Kagan. Assuming this, it is difficult to see how Kagan's view could account for the thought that Adaptive Amy has a lower level of well-being *ceteris paribus* than Unadaptive Amy.⁸⁰ Because Unadaptive Amy lacks a positive attitude toward self-determination, it does not positively affect her well-being on Kagan's view, contrary to what the objectivist and others want to say in this case. Kagan's view, then, by claiming that the subjective and objective components are jointly necessary for well-being, seems to be mistaken here. This is because Unadaptive Amy seems higher in well-being than Adaptive Amy without reference to the subjective component because of the purely objective good of self-determination.

Notice that the problem in both cases above, the grass counter and Adaptive Amy, is that Kagan's view cannot account for purely subjective goods (like pleasure in an objectively valueless activity) or purely objective goods (like Adaptive Amy with self-determination) because it holds that the subjective and objective components are both necessary for well-being. Hence,

⁸⁰ One response that Kagan may take, that will become relevant in chapter three, is that while Unadaptive Amy is not better off on this view than Adaptive Amy, her life may have gone better because of the presence of the objective good in it. Here Kagan distinguishes between how well-off *someone* is and how well her *life* goes. See Kagan (2009): 257 and Kagan (1994).

hybrid views like Kagan's face the issue of how exactly to construe the relationship between the subjective and objective components. If both components are jointly necessary, then the view runs into problems with cases of purely objective goods like Adaptive Amy and cases with purely subjective goods like grass-counter above.⁸¹

2.1 Wolf's Hybrid Component

To consider how a hybrid theory might describe the relationship between the subjective and objective components to make up for the shortcomings of Kagan's view, consider the meaningfulness component of Susan Wolf's objective-list theory. Her theory states that a person's well-being is constituted by, among other things, the meaningful things she engages in, where this involves "active engagement in projects of worth."⁸² Since she is committed to an objective-list theory, this is not to say that having engagement in projects of worth is necessary for having well-being according to Wolf. Instead, meaning is just one thing, among others, that contributes to a person's well-being when present in her life (i.e., it is sufficient for having well-being).⁸³ In this way, Wolf's view is not strictly a hybrid theory, but since the meaningfulness component of her view is a hybrid component and is often cited in discussions of hybrid theories, I discuss her meaningfulness component here. The meaningfulness component of Wolf's theory is a hybrid because it involves a subjective aspect (active engagement) necessarily tied with an

⁸¹ Note that Kagan does go into detail about what it means to possess an objective good in the right way, what features of the good one should take pleasure in, and that well-being requires a type of virtue, but he does not elaborate on whether each component is necessary or if well-being is positively impacted by just one. See Kagan (2009): 269-270 and Footnote 77 above.

⁸² Wolf (1997): 209.

⁸³ I say that meaningfulness is only one constituent of well-being for Wolf because Wolf is specifically committed to an objective-list theory of which a hybrid component where meaningfulness, is just one item on the list; see Wolf (1997): 208. As explained in the first chapter, an objective-list theory holds that there is an irreducible plurality of things that individually constitute well-being. Wolf does not expand on the other items on the list but seems sympathetic to the thought that there is at least one purely subjective item on it: happiness—see Wolf (1997): 224.

objective one (projects of worth). I include Wolf's view here because of the questions it raises and attempts to answer about the relationship between the subjective and objective components of a hybrid theory and especially because it relates the two slightly differently than theories like Kagan's. Though, Wolf's view still holds that both components are necessary for something to positively affect a person's well-being. In this way, I am not trying to assess the plausibility of Wolf's view as a whole but am only trying to assess how it describes the subjective and objective components relating to one another.

As noted, Wolf argues that for someone to live a meaningful life and, hence, have one source of well-being, she must be living a life of active engagement in projects of worth. To see the objective component of this, Wolf holds that some activities are objectively more valuable than others. While perhaps pleasurable, these others may be worthless insofar as they do not "make life worth living."⁸⁴ Wolf contends that it is relatively clear that some things are and are not projects of worth and thus do not contribute to the meaningfulness of our lives. Some of those that do include "...moral and intellectual accomplishments and the ongoing activities that lead to them," as well as "[r]elationships with friends and relatives...[a]esthetic enterprises...the cultivation of personal virtues, and religious practices."⁸⁵

Wolf does not think, however, that it is enough (for meaningfulness) for a person to have projects of worth if she is not "actively" engaged with these projects. Here, "active engagement" describes the subjective component. Wolf holds this to account for the thought that a person can do objectively worthy things but not be engaged or even be bored by them such that she does not have any "categorical desires" based on the objectively worthy activities that "give her a reason

⁸⁴ Wolf (1997): 210.

⁸⁵ Wolf (1997): 210.

to live” and, hence, do not contribute meaning to her life.⁸⁶ In other words, the objective component (projects of worth) alone is insufficient for meaningfulness without active engagement. Crucially for our purposes, Wolf argues that active engagement does not necessarily involve pleasure since “[a]ctivities in which people are actively engaged frequently involve stress, danger, exertion, or sorrow;” instead, active engagement involves being “gripped, excited, [or] involved [in the activity].”⁸⁷ This is the main difference between how the subjective and objective components relate on Wolf’s view compared to Kagan’s. Given this, we can now see how this alternative framework fares against the two objections to Kagan’s view above.

Above, I argued that Kagan’s view might not be able to account for the objectivist thought that some things positively impact our well-being regardless of our attitudes towards them. To do this, I offered the case of Adaptive Amy and Unadaptive Amy. I contended that because of Kagan’s requirement that an agent take pleasure in an objective good, his view could not accommodate the judgment that Adaptive Amy was lower in well-being than Unadaptive Amy. Interestingly, Wolf’s alternative framework may be able to give a more satisfying response to this objection. Unlike Kagan, Wolf thinks that taking pleasure in a project of worth is just one way that one can be actively engaged in it; Wolf just requires that the person be somehow “gripped” or “involved” by the project (where taking pleasure in a project is one form of being gripped by it). It is unclear what exactly this involves, and it raises the question of whether one can actively engage with something without having a positive attitude toward it: Wolf does not seem to clarify things too much here. If active engagement does not require the person to have a positive attitude, then, unlike Kagan, Wolf may be able to say that someone like Unadaptive

⁸⁶ See Wolf (1997): 211.

⁸⁷ Wolf (1997): 209.

Amy has a higher level of well-being than Adaptive Amy (despite not having a positive attitude towards self-determination). *Prima facie*, it seems possible that Unadaptive Amy is gripped by instances of self-determination (e.g., by intense sessions of thinking deeply about her goals for life, assuming this is a project of worth), despite lacking a positive attitude towards self-determination because, for instance, she has never thought about it. In contrast, Adaptive Amy is not gripped by instances of self-determination or self-determination generally. This would then allow Wolf to give a possible explanation, where Kagan cannot, for why Adaptive Amy is lower in well-being than Unadaptive Amy.

This victory is short-lived, however, since there are other cases where an agent's well-being seems positively affected, despite only the objective component of Wolf's view being satisfied. For example, imagine that Unadaptive Amy still engages in self-determination by thinking about her goals for life but that these sessions are not intense like they were above. These sessions may even be boring for Unadaptive Amy. Here again, Unadaptive Amy does not have any positive attitudes towards self-determination generally. Unadaptive Amy is thus likely not actively engaged by self-determination and so does not satisfy Wolf's subjective component. Nevertheless, many still might think that Unadaptive Amy's well-being was positively affected by her engaging in self-determination, especially in comparison to Adaptive Amy who did not (or at least did not to the same extent). If this is right, then Wolf's framework cannot account for cases where only the objective component is satisfied, but the agent's well-being seems to be positively affected, despite likely accounting for more cases than Kagan's view.

Wolf's alternative framework, like Kagan's, still struggles with cases where only the subjective component is satisfied, but the agent's well-being still seems positively affected. In other words, it might not be able to account for the subjectivist thought that some things can

positively affect our well-being, given our positive attitudes toward those things, regardless of whether they are objectively valuable. Consider the case above of the grass-counter who had a positive attitude toward counting blades of grass and whose well-being seemed positively impacted as a result, especially compared to a counterpart not gripped by grass counting. While the activity may grip the grass-counter, counting blades of grass is likely not a project of worth on Wolf's view. Thus, Wolf's view does not yield the judgment that the grass-counter's well-being was positively affected by the activity: this is contrary to what many might hold in this case.

To take stock, both Kagan and Wolf's frameworks for the relationship between the subjective and objective components of a hybrid theory failed to account for cases where an agent's well-being was impacted by things that are purely objectively valuable (though Wolf's view was marginally more successful) or purely subjectively valuable. We may be able to tentatively generalize this conclusion. Here, hybrid theories like Kagan and Wolf's, by making both an objectivist and a subjectivist component necessary for something to increase a person's well-being, fail to account for both the subjectivist thought that some things can positively affect a person's well-being merely in virtue of an agent's positive attitude towards them (regardless of their objective value) and the objectivist thought that some things can do the same even if the agent lacks a positive attitude towards them.

2.2 A Different Kind of Hybrid Theory: Holism

Part of what made the two hybrid theories above susceptible to certain objections is that they claimed that the subjective and objective components are jointly necessary for something to positively affect a person's well-being. This raises the question of whether there is a way of relating the two components with one another in a hybrid theory without claiming they are

jointly necessary. Enter “holism,” which (usually) holds that well-being is constituted by a subjective and objective component, where each can contribute to well-being on their own but amplify the contribution of the other when both are present.⁸⁸ In particular, according to Woodard, holistic theories can be understood as building on two fundamental conditions, where X and Y each stand for a subjective component (e.g., desire-satisfaction, attitude-based pleasure, etc.) or an objective component (e.g., achievement, projects of worth, etc.):

1. The contribution to the subject’s well-being of each amount of factor X depends on facts about at least one other factor Y [and vice-versa].
2. The contribution to the subject’s well-being of each amount of factor X is not zero when the amount of Y is zero [and vice-versa].^{89, 90}

Because holistic theories are committed to Woodard’s second condition above, they avoid the objections that posed a problem for the previous two theories. To see this, consider a holistic theory where the components are a) the amount of attitude-based pleasure one has and b) the number of objective goods (e.g., knowledge, valuable projects, accomplishments) one has. Applying this theory to the case of the grass counter above, its second condition would hold that counting blades of grass positively affects the person’s well-being, even if it is an objectively

⁸⁸ Kagan (2009): 263-271 seems to gesture that his hybrid theory above can be construed in this way, but he seems to deny that either component can contribute to well-being on their own: something that raised problems for his view above. Sarch (2012) is a much clearer representative of holism. Though note that Sarch’s theory places a number of sophisticated constraints on the extent to which each component affects the contribution of the other to well-being. Sarch’s theory also allows for the components to have a negative impact on the other when they do not meet a specified threshold. Nevertheless, because these constraints have more to do with the degree of each component’s contribution given the presence of the other rather than why they have this effect, I think my objections below still apply.

⁸⁹ Christopher Woodard, “Hybrid theories,” in *The Routledge Companion to Well-Being*, edited by Guy Fletcher, Routledge, 2016: 168.

⁹⁰ It is possible for a holist theory to claim that a component X can only contribute to well-being when Y is present, where Y can contribute to well-being on its own, but this would likely be a commitment to 1) below, and so face the problem of whether it is actually a hybrid theory.

valueless activity. Though if the person possessed some objective goods, including whether counting blades of grass is objectively good, then the contribution of the activity to the person's well-being would be higher. Applying the theory to the case of Adaptive Amy yields the judgment that Adaptive Amy has a lower level of well-being than Unadaptive Amy since she does not possess the objective good of self-determination, whereas Unadaptive Amy does. Unadaptive Amy's possession of the objective good in itself and in combination with the attitude-based pleasures in her life contributes an additional amount (in comparison to Adaptive Amy) to her well-being. This is even though her life is otherwise the same as Adaptive Amy's. Consequently, holistic theories better account for the central motivations of subjectivism and objectivism than other hybrid theories.

Yet, it's not clear that holistic theories should be categorized as hybrid theories, where instead, they seem to be either one of the non-objective list theories in the first chapter or a type of objective-list theory.⁹¹ This is important because, if I am right, then they are vulnerable to the objections I raised towards these theories in the first chapter. As noted, the difference between the two is that while objective-list theories hold that well-being is constituted by a *plurality* of goods that are irreducible to one another, hybrid theories and the other theories in the first chapter⁹² hold that a single good constitutes well-being. This good is a combination of two or more parts for hybrid theories.⁹³

⁹¹ Interestingly, Sarch (2012), despite Woodard (2016) citing his view as a type of hybrid theory, seems to think that his view is not a hybrid theory since he calls it a "multi-component" theory which, for our purposes, is similar to an objective-list theory.

⁹² Note that this may not apply to perfectionism, depending on how it is formulated.

⁹³ See Woodard (2012): 167-168. Here, Woodard contrasts holist theories with "pluralist" theories. Pluralism just refers to the category of views that objective-list theories belong to, which posit a *plurality* of goods.

It is hard to see, though, how a hybrid theory could hold to Woodard's second condition above (roughly, that each component can contribute to well-being on its own) without affirming the defining feature of objective list theories: that well-being is constituted by a plurality of goods/components that are irreducible to each other. The thought here is that a holist has to say that a component can contribute to well-being on its own because it is either 1) reducible to the other (or another) component or 2) irreducible to the other component(s). With 1), the component would likely contribute to well-being on its own only because it specifies a particular way that the other component affects well-being; for instance, meaningful projects may only contribute to well-being because they are especially pleasurable. Hence, because it does not describe a combination of two or more components, but just one component doing the work (in the example above, pleasure), 1) above is likely not a response that the holist can take since it makes the view no longer a hybrid theory.⁹⁴ Depending on the component doing the work, the theory would likely instead be a version of the theories in the first chapter (e.g., if the component was pleasure, then it would be a type of hedonism).

This leaves 2) as the only plausible recourse the holist can take. Notice that 2) essentially states what objective-list theories, as I defined them, hold: that there is a plurality of goods (or, as the holist may call them, components) that constitute well-being and are irreducible to each other. While the holist adds the claim that these goods can amplify/de-amplify the contribution of other goods to well-being, this seems compatible with the definition of objective-list theories I gave. The caveat also does not help the theory avoid my objections to objective-list theories in the first chapter. If I am right here and no other explanation can be given besides 1) or 2) (it is

⁹⁴ While the component which the other(s) reduces to could itself be a hybrid, this would only make the theory susceptible to the objections that views like Kagan and Wolf's face or susceptible to this objection again.

hard to see what another one could be), then we can treat holistic theories as either one of or similar to the theories in chapter 1, including possibly as an objective-list theory.

3. Conclusion

To recap, I have been trying to show how both subjectivists and objectivists have compelling aspects of their views that the other side wants to account for, but that there is an impasse between the two. In this chapter, after summarizing Heathwood's view, I gave one way that theorists have tried to appease both sides of the debate, by positing views that have both a subjectivist aspect and an objectivist one. However, notice that the preceding hybrid views all faced a similar problem; they cannot account for cases where a person's well-being was positively affected by a purely subjective and/or objective good. Holist views that tried to evade this problem were seen to likely reduce to a form of objective-list theory and, thus, in virtue of being an objectivist theory, not help capture the subjectivist's thought that only things we have positive attitudes towards can positively affect our well-being. In the following chapter, I will assess other strategies of eliminating the impasse between the subjectivist and objectivist and argue for one of these.

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CHAPTER 3 - THE SUBJECTIVIST AND OBJECTIVIST ARE THEORIZING ABOUT DIFFERENT CONCEPTS

In the previous two chapters, I tried to show how part of the impasse in the well-being debate arises because of the conflict between objectivism and subjectivism. Both views seem appealing and make sense of some of our judgments around certain cases. Yet purely subjectivist theories (e.g., actual desire-satisfactionism) and purely objectivist theories (e.g., perfectionism) face strong objections, partly because they do not account for the motivations of the other side. Hybrid theories of well-being that try to accommodate both objectivism and subjectivism also face several problems owing to the trouble they have accounting for purely subjective or purely objective goods. The question then becomes what we should do in light of this impasse. In this chapter, I first motivate the problem and then outline four ways that we could proceed from this. The first three are consistent with the assumption that subjectivists and objectivists are trying to theorize about the same concept, whereas the last way denies this assumption. I then argue that this last way is the most promising of the options despite not being well explored in the literature. This way states that the subjectivist and objectivist offer such convincing analyses of certain cases despite appearing to contradict each other because they are actually theorizing about two different but easily conflated concepts.

1. The Problem

Subjectivists and objectivists largely assume that they are theorizing about the same concept.⁹⁵ Both appeal to certain kinds of cases in support of their views where they can explain

⁹⁵ See, for one, Campbell (2016): 11, “Hedonists, desire-fulfillment theorists, perfectionists, and objective list theorists generally take themselves to be in genuine disagreement with each other over a common subject matter that is both coherent and significant. Likewise, analyses of well-being are often presented as casting new light on the concept or property of well-being.”

why certain people's lives were higher or lower in well-being. The strong support that these cases seem to lend to opposing positions helps to show why the debate between objectivism and subjectivism seems to be at an impasse. Subjectivists offer cases like this one from Heathwood, which I will call “Sorry Charlie:”

Charlie wants to improve his quality of life. He has heard that it is philosophers who claim to be experts on this topic, so he looks through some philosophy journals at his library. He finds an article claiming to have discovered the correct account of [well-being]. It is an objective theory that includes the items [happiness, knowledge, love, freedom, friendship, the appreciation of beauty, creative activity, and being respected] ...Charlie decides to go about trying to increase his share of some of the items on the list. For example, to increase his freedom, he moves to a state with higher speed limits. Charlie is careful to make sure that the move won't have any detrimental side effects...After succeeding in increasing his freedom, Charlie finds that he doesn't care about it, that he is completely indifferent to it. Although he is free to drive faster, he never does (he never wants to). Nor does the freedom to drive faster get him anything else that he is interested in. Charlie considers whether he is any better off as a result of the increase in his freedom. He concludes that he is no better off.⁹⁶

From this case, it seems highly plausible that Charlie was not better off (i.e., did not have an increase in well-being) because he did not have a positive attitude towards his increased freedom. This conclusion is hard to deny and subjectivists take this to show something fundamental about well-being: that something cannot positively affect our well-being if we do not have a positive attitude toward it.

Objectivists also appeal to certain cases that seem to yield strong judgments supporting their view. The case of Adaptive Amy that I have been using is one such example. Recall,

⁹⁶ Chris Heathwood, “Faring Well and Getting What You Want,” in *The Ethical Life: Fundamental Readings in Ethics and Moral Problems*, edited by Russ Shafer-Landau, 35, Oxford University Press, 2014.

Adaptive Amy grew up in a highly misogynistic society and, as a result, developed a strong preference to not form her own beliefs on certain topics but only believe what the men around her believe on these. Adaptive Amy's counterpart, Unadaptive Amy, is identical in all respects to Adaptive Amy—including having the same number and strength of desires satisfied and, we can here stipulate, amount of attitude-based pleasure—except that she did not have Adaptive Amy's above preference, and so exercised self-determination to a greater extent. This case yielded the judgment that, despite Adaptive Amy lacking a positive attitude towards greater self-determination through coming to certain beliefs on her own, her life had a lower level of well-being than Unadaptive Amy's. In other words, it seems highly plausible that Adaptive Amy's life could have gone better for her if she exercised greater degrees of self-determination, despite her lacking a positive attitude towards doing so. Objectivists conclude from this that some things, like self-determination, can positively affect our well-being regardless of whether we hold a positive attitude towards them.

2. Four Possible Solutions to the Problem

The conclusions that subjectivists and objectivists make from these cases contradict each other despite seeming so apparently true in their respective case. It cannot both be true that a) only things we hold positive attitudes towards can positively affect our well-being and b) some things can positively affect our well-being even if we do not have a positive attitude towards them. Hence, we are left with what seems to be an impasse where not only is it hard to choose between these two views, but neither appears satisfactory, given that they seem unable to account for the other side's case (more on this in section 3.2). In other words, both seem appealing, just so long as they just apply to their own cases, but since they are supposed to be competing with

one another, we cannot separate them like this. I can see four ways we can move forward in light of the impasse resulting from this. We can:

1. Create a hybrid account that tries to account for both the objectivist and subjectivist's judgments.
2. Argue that either the subjectivist or objectivist can agree with our judgments in the opposing side's case (Sorry Charlie or Adaptive Amy) or explain away these judgments.
3. Appeal to pre-theoretical descriptions of well-being to argue that one side is not actually theorizing about well-being.
4. Argue that the subjectivist and objectivist are theorizing about two different concepts.

Notice that 1, 2, and 3 assume, or are at least consistent with the thought, that subjectivists and objectivists are trying to theorize about the same concept. The view I argue for, 4, denies this. In the following section, I explain what 1, 2, and 3 entail and why they may not help with the impasse between the plausible but contradictory judgments of the subjectivist and objectivist. I then go on in section 4 to defend 4 as a feasible solution to the problem.

3. Solutions 1-3: Subjectivists and Objectivists are Theorizing About the Same Concept

3.1 Eliminating the Impasse by Positing a Hybrid Account

As noted in the previous chapter, hybrid accounts of well-being are unlikely to help the impasse between the subjectivist and objectivist. This was because, by making a subjective and objective component necessary for well-being, they ruled out cases where someone's well-being seemed positively affected by a purely subjective good with no objective value (e.g., counting blades of grass) or by a purely objective good with no subjective value (e.g., self-determination as in Adaptive Amy's case). Holist accounts that did not make the subjective and objective components jointly necessary also did not help to solve the impasse since they seemed to reduce to a type of objective list theory. This made them subject to the objections to objective list theories outlined in chapter 1 and also not convincing to the subjectivist because they contradict

the subjectivist's thought in Sorry Charlie that only things one has a positive attitude towards can positively affect well-being. Given this, we can move on to discuss the second possible way of eliminating the impasse.

3.2 Eliminating the Impasse by Agreeing with Our Judgments or Explaining Them Away

The second way we can move forward is to argue that the subjectivist or objectivist can agree with our judgments in Sorry Charlie or Adaptive Amy with an explanation as plausible as the other side's explanation of these judgments or explain away these judgments. I will refer to the first strategy, where the objectivist or subjectivist explains how her view can agree with our judgments in the two cases, as the "Agreement Strategy." I will refer to the second, where the objectivist or subjectivist explains away our judgments that seem to favor the other side (i.e., shows why they are mistaken), as the "Explaining Away Strategy." If one side can successfully do one of these, it gives us reason to prefer that side over the other since it can give plausible explanations of both cases or undermine our judgments favoring the other side in their case. If neither can do this, we will still be left with an impasse and have to look for other ways around it.

3.2.1 Subjectivist Use of the Agreement Strategy

First, the subjectivist may try to show how her view can agree with our judgment that Adaptive Amy has a lower level of well-being than Unadaptive Amy with an explanation as plausible as the objectivist's explanation of this judgment. She may do this by arguing that her view is compatible with the thought that some people would have a higher level of well-being if they did not have a positive attitude towards what they do (e.g., because it is continuously frustrated) and had one for something else.⁹⁷ For example, I may strongly desire (a type of

⁹⁷ This response is inspired by Lemaire's (2021) argument for (a type of) subjectivism being compatible with our common judgments in cases of adaptive preferences like Adaptive Amy.

positive attitude) to become a professional basketball player, but because I lack the build and the athleticism to do so, the desire would be continuously frustrated or satisfied fleetingly, and so, on subjectivism, not contribute much to my well-being. My well-being would be positively impacted to a higher degree were I to lose this desire and strongly desire instead to do something that better aligns with my capabilities. Notice that the subjectivist can still emphasize here that this alternative career choice positively affects my well-being only if I have a positive attitude toward it, and thus that this response is consistent with her view.

The subjectivist would then apply similar reasoning to Adaptive Amy. Adaptive Amy would have a higher level of well-being if she lost her preference (another type of positive attitude) to not form her own beliefs on certain topics and only believe what the men around her believe on these. Perhaps this is because Adaptive Amy is naturally inclined to think for herself and so continually frustrates her preference. Another possible justification could be that, given her circumstances and abilities, a preference to think for herself would be satisfied much more than her current preference. Note that dropping her original preference leads to Adaptive Amy having a higher level of well-being only because it means that her well-being is not negatively impacted by the original preference anymore. The subjectivist might also say, then, (on either justification above) that Adaptive Amy should take up a new preference for coming to her own beliefs and, hence, for self-determination, since this preference would positively contribute to her well-being.

While this explanation does enable the subjectivist to broadly agree with the objectivist about Adaptive Amy, it is likely not as plausible as the objectivist's explanation of the judgment, since it only applies to particular variations of Adaptive Amy. On other variations where, for example, Adaptive Amy thoroughly satisfies her original preference and would often frustrate an

alternative preference for coming to her own beliefs, the subjectivist is forced to say that Adaptive Amy is better off with the original preference. Yet, as before, it seems that a lack of self-determination, regardless of whether Adaptive Amy prefers it, is bad for her well-being. After all, the objectivist may point to the fact that many of us, in thinking about the well-being of someone we care about or even a younger version of ourselves, would want that person to engage in self-determination to the degree Unadaptive Amy does, regardless of whether they have a positive attitude towards not doing so. The subjectivist is forced to say that we are mistaken in thinking this way because we need to consult whether the person we are thinking about has a positive attitude towards self-determination first before wanting it for them. If they do not have a positive attitude towards it, we would be mistaken to want this for them. Yet, this opposes how we ordinarily think about well-being; we want the person to have greater degrees of self-determination just because we think it is, in itself, good for them, not because we think they want it, and so, only then will it positively affect their well-being. Because the objectivist can account for our common thoughts about well-being here, particularly surrounding self-determination, we likely still have reason to prefer her explanation of the case.

3.2.2 Subjectivist Use of the Explaining Away Strategy

The subjectivist may alternatively try to explain why we are mistaken to think that Adaptive Amy has a lower level of well-being than Unadaptive Amy in a way consistent with her view. She may emphasize, as noted in Chapter 1, that theories of well-being are trying to theorize about what is good *for* people and, thus, that when theorists propose a good like self-determination, this good must specifically benefit the people themselves (not just their lives, society, the universe, etc.). This describes the subject-relativity of well-being. Many explain this idea of well-being's subject-relativity via a requirement called the "resonance constraint"

holding that goods need to “resonate” with and “engage” us or be “compelling” to us for them to constitute our well-being; they cannot do nothing for (i.e., alienate) or be repugnant to us.^{98,99} In this section, then, references to things engaging or resonating with us will be a shorthand for those things being good for us, according to the resonance constraint, in the subject-relative sense involved with well-being. Subjectivists especially hold to the resonance constraint, though objectivists can too. For example, the felt-quality hedonist can likely refer to pleasure as “engaging” us. In the last chapter, I illustrated the constraint with the example of a scientist who exclusively cares about harnessing energy from nuclear fusion but is prevented from doing so and given a variety of sources of, depending on which account of pleasure is correct, either felt-quality pleasures or things that many people find pleasurable. This seemed to entail that the scientist would be miserable even with the pleasures. It thus seemed that the pleasures would not do anything (or much) for her, and she would be cold toward them. Hence, it seemed that she would be alienated from these pleasures as putative sources of well-being. For the subjectivist, the most natural explanation for why she is alienated from these putative sources of well-being is that she lacks a positive attitude towards them, given that she only has a positive attitude towards harnessing energy from nuclear fusion. Thus, for the subjectivist, for something to engage rather than alienate us, it must be something we have a positive attitude towards.

The subjectivist may then argue that we only think Adaptive Amy's life has a lower level of well-being given her lack of self-determination because we ourselves are engaged and not

⁹⁸ This is alternatively called the “anti-alienation” constraint and is summarized by Railton (1986): 9. I use it here because Heathwood (2012): 203 sees it as summarizing the main motivation behind subjectivism. Dorsey (2017): 196 also sees the thought that “the good must ‘fit’ the person whose good it is” as the “beating heart” of subjectivism.

⁹⁹ Notice that this thought does not, *prima facie*, exclude theorists who think that some things can positively affect our well-being even without us experiencing them. For example, it may still be compelling for the deceived businessman in chapter one that his relationships with others be genuine even though this will not affect his experience.

alienated by self-determination since we have a positive attitude toward it, whereas it does not engage Adaptive Amy. If we were to live Adaptive Amy's life and only believe what men around us believe on certain topics, we would be frustrated or even miserable and so have a lower level of well-being than if we lived Unadaptive Amy's life. The subjectivist might emphasize, though, that the question is not what our level of well-being would be were we in Adaptive Amy's shoes, but how Adaptive Amy's life goes for *her*. The subjectivist would direct us to judge how well Adaptive Amy's life went *from her perspective*. From Adaptive Amy's perspective, her life goes well: she prefers to believe what men around her believe, and so is engaged and resonates with a life of doing so. Plausibly, this could mean that she has a higher level of well-being than we initially thought, even one equal to that in Unadaptive Amy's life.

For similar reasons as above, this likely does not explain away the plausible thought that Adaptive Amy's life has a lower level of well-being than Unadaptive Amy's life. Objectivists who think that self-determination in itself positively affects our well-being may respond to the subjectivist by arguing that the subjectivist's interpretation of how something can engage us (via positive attitudes) is not necessarily the only way that something can do so.¹⁰⁰ For one, something may engage us because we are a certain type of creature that is engaged by things like it (regardless of our having a positive attitude towards it); in other words, given the creatures we are, with various (often) shared capacities and needs, some things make our lives go well *for us* (and, hence, be good for us). A human could spend her whole life without developing close relationships with other humans and lack a positive attitude towards doing so (e.g., because she

¹⁰⁰ This is just one way that the objectivist could respond. For example, using Lin's (2017) "Newborn Test," she could also argue that the subjectivist's interpretation of what it means for something to resonate with someone is false since it implies, wrongly, that newborns cannot have well-being. She may also argue alongside Ferkany (2012) that the subjectivist is arbitrarily privileging how well Adaptive Amy is "doing" over how well things are "going" for her. One may even argue that, on subjectivism, were Adaptive Amy to lose her preference, it would not make sense for her to regret formerly holding the preference on the basis that it limited or decreased her well-being. Yet, it seems that Adaptive Amy can coherently regret it for this reason and, thus, that subjectivism is wrong about her.

has not considered it). Yet, humans are immensely social animals that tend to thrive when in close relationships with other humans. Given, then, that the human above is a human, it makes sense to think that close relationships would engage or resonate with her, irrespective of her having positive attitudes toward it. This, by virtue of her being a member of a species with strong needs and capacities for socialization: a species whose members' lives seem to go better (and be good for the ones living them) when those needs are met.¹⁰¹ Similar reasoning can apply to Adaptive Amy; Adaptive Amy is a human, a species that tends to thrive when exercising their capacity for self-determination, so exercising self-determination would likely engage her regardless of her positive attitude toward not doing so.

Likewise, felt-quality hedonists and the objective-list theorist that includes felt-quality pleasure on her list can offer another explanation of why certain things engage us without reference to positive attitudes. Ben Bramble, in arguing for felt-quality hedonism, gives the example of a person who despises The Beatles' music and does not want to enjoy it but "[o]ne day, to his extreme annoyance... finds himself tapping his toes and humming along to Please Please Me."¹⁰² Bramble thinks this person is experiencing felt-quality pleasure since he cannot be having an attitude-based pleasure given his lack of a positive attitude towards enjoying the music. Bramble thinks this pleasure seems to have a small positive effect on his well-being.

¹⁰¹ See also Königs' (2022) argument for why the need for something to engage a person does not exclusively support the thought that something can positively affect a person's well-being only if the person has a positive attitude towards it. C.f. Bramble (2016) who, in defending felt-quality hedonism tries to oppose the resonance constraint. Though, it seems to me that Bramble is here assuming that the subjectivist is right that the resonance constraint implies that something can only engage us if we have a positive attitude toward it. There is reason to deny this though; Königs argues that descriptions of the resonance constraint either do not exclusively support subjectivism, are not distinct enough from a core component of subjectivism to support subjectivism, or are not explicit enough in general (i.e., are too ambiguous) to support subjectivism or objectivism. See also Bruno-Niño (2022) who argues that the objectivist can understand resonance in a way consistent with her view.

¹⁰² Ben Bramble, "A New Defense of Hedonism About Well-Being," *Ergo* 3, no. 4 (2016): 107. Notably, Bramble is here trying to oppose the resonance constraint (see footnote 98) in defense of felt-quality hedonism. Though, see footnote 101.

Given this, it is plausible that the music engages the person, by virtue of his taking felt-quality pleasure in it. If this is right, then something can engage and, hence, be good for us and Adaptive Amy by extension, in ways not involving positive attitudes. For instance, the objectivist may say that exercising a greater degree of self-determination would engage Adaptive Amy because it will produce more felt-quality pleasure than if she did not exercise this degree of it. This, even if she maintained her positive attitude towards not exercising such a degree of self-determination.

3.2.3 Objectivist Use of the Agreement Strategy

Conversely, the objectivist may try to explain why her view agrees with the judgment that Charlie is not any better off in Sorry Charlie. She may do this along the lines of the objectivist response before this, by arguing that the increased freedom for Charlie did nothing for him and so did not increase his well-being for reasons other than his lacking a positive attitude towards it. For example, perfectionists would say that the increased freedom did not develop any of Charlie's capacities because driving faster does not involve any relevant capacity or because he never used this freedom to drive faster. Objective-list theorists may argue that the increase in freedom was not the kind that is relevant for well-being, where the relevant freedom might be freedom from coercive influences (assuming that the punishment for driving over the speed limit is not coercive in this case). Lastly, the felt-quality hedonist may say that the increased freedom did not affect Charlie's well-being because it did not produce felt-quality pleasure. Hence, it does not necessarily follow that the reason why Charlie is not better off in Sorry Charlie is that he lacked a positive attitude toward driving faster.

This response is likely not compelling. This is because it does not account for the plausible thought that had Charlie cared about driving faster, it likely would have positively affected his well-being *by virtue* of his starting to care about it. This thought seems compelling;

after all, many of us seem to experience an increase in well-being after starting to care about something in our lives that we did not before. For example, we may have taken something for granted, like access to transportation, only to have reason to be grateful for it instead (e.g., because we were without it for a week). We often seem *ceteris paribus* to have a higher level of well-being when we are grateful for these things compared to when we take them for granted. Given that gratitude seems to be a type of positive attitude, the change in attitude in such instances likely caused the seeming increase in well-being. Notice that a similar argument could be made with goods we may become grateful for that objectivists think constitute well-being: this gives reason to think that the determining factor of well-being in all these cases is our positive attitudes.¹⁰³ Hence, it seems plausible that, were Charlie to start caring about driving faster, he would also experience an increase in well-being just like we did when we started caring about things that we did not before, and thus that his positive attitudes are what determined whether the increased freedom positively affected his well-being in the original case.

3.2.4 Objectivist Use of the Explaining Away Strategy

The objectivist may alternatively try to explain away our judgment that the increased freedom did not affect Charlie's well-being because he lacked a positive attitude towards it. She may do this by arguing that freedom alone constitutes well-being without reference to positive attitudes and so did positively affect Charlie's well-being. It is helpful to note, though, that the increase in freedom in Sorry Charlie is small, meaning that any increase in well-being would also be small. This fact may help to make the objectivist's argument here more plausible.

¹⁰³ E.g., we may become grateful for having a level of freedom that we lacked temporarily, we may start to care about developing our human capacities and do so, we may start to care about gaining knowledge after hating doing so in school, etc.

In arguing that freedom is good for Charlie, regardless of his attitudes toward it, the objectivist may define freedom in a particular way. One way she could do this is by defining freedom like Philip Pettit does as “non-domination.” For Pettit, a person P is dominated to greater and lesser degrees if someone else has 1) the “capacity to interfere” with P, where interference “makes things worse for [P]”, 2) can do so “on an arbitrary basis,” and 3) can do so “in certain choices that [P] is in a position to make.”¹⁰⁴ In *Sorry Charlie*, the police enforcing the speed limits dominate Charlie because they can 1) interfere with Charlie by giving him a ticket, 2) do so arbitrarily by choosing or refraining from interfering, and 3) can do so concerning certain choices Charlie makes while driving. Crucially, Pettit holds that a person can be dominated even if the dominator never interferes with that person. This means that Charlie is dominated in his original state and to a lesser degree in the new state, even if the police never interfere.

The objectivist would argue that, *prima facie*, being dominated to a lesser degree or not at all is good for people (i.e., it positively affects their well-being). As Pettit puts it, “every such person [in a pluralistic society] has reason to want freedom as non-domination” since “[t]he dominated...person is someone with reason to watch what they say, someone who must be assumed always to have an eye to what will please their dominators [among other things].”¹⁰⁵ The objectivist may here argue that anxiously watching your actions and speech like this for fear of intervention just is another way of saying that one is dominated and that domination understood in this way seems to negatively effect one’s well-being. Presumably, it also has this

¹⁰⁴ Philip Pettit, *Republicanism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997: 52.

¹⁰⁵ Pettit (1997): 91. Pettit here is arguing that non-domination is a “primary” good, where “[p. 90] a primary good is something that a person has instrumental reasons to want, no matter what else they want: something that promises results that are likely to appeal to them, no matter what they value and pursue.”

effect regardless of one's attitudes toward it: how a person feels about being dominated or towards her dominators does not change the fact that these dominators can interfere in her life in ways that harm her. Non-domination, on the other hand, seems to make a life go better since those who are dominated to lesser degrees or not at all seem to have richer and more authentic lives. This is at least partly because these people are not always worried about or beholden to their dominators. The objectivist would thus argue that since Charlie is dominated to a lesser degree in his new state, even by a small amount, he is better off because of it, irrespective of his attitudes toward this lesser degree of domination.

Again, this is not a compelling response. The subjectivist would likely object that either non-domination only benefits someone by making other goods possible (this is Pettit's view) or can only benefit a person if she has a positive attitude toward it. Consider what Pettit says above about how domination leads people to watch what they do and say for fear of their dominators intervening. Here, non-domination seems only to be good because it leads to the good of not having to anxiously watch what you do and say. After all, it is hard to see how one can claim that non-domination benefits people (i.e., irrespective of any goods it may lead to). To see this, we can stipulate that, Charlie does not come close to driving over the speed limit in his old or new state and knows that he never will. He is, thus, not anxiously watching his speed while driving; he never even thinks about the possibility of being pulled over, and his life does not change in any significant way. Hence, the only difference is that Charlie is dominated to a lesser degree, not that there are more or larger goods available to him by virtue of this fact.

Yet, Charlie's life does not seem relevantly different in this case in a way that would constitute an increase in well-being in the new state compared to the old one: especially since he does not live any differently than he did. Even if Charlie did think about being pulled over and

about his speed in the old state, his thinking less about these things in the new one does not seem enough to constitute a change in his well-being unless he held a positive attitude towards the decrease in domination. If Charlie was indifferent to being pulled over and, by extension, being dominated in this domain, it is hard to see how the decrease in domination makes a difference to Charlie's well-being. After all, it seems no different from Charlie being indifferent about the weather in both states but happening to check the temperature less in the new state. If his checking the weather less does not affect his well-being, then it seems to follow that neither does the decrease in domination. While the objectivist may be right, then, that non-domination seems to be a good thing, on further analysis, it is only good because it leads to goods that themselves affect well-being or because people hold a positive attitude toward it. If this is true, then freedom as non-domination does not by itself positively affect people's well-being, and, thus, the objectivist is wrong to argue that Charlie benefitted (directly) from his increased freedom.

It should be said that a myriad of responses and counter-responses could have been included here, especially because objectivists and subjectivists have spilled a lot of ink trying to argue for their view through this option and continue to do so. I have tried to pick the ones that seem the strongest to me, but a full analysis of this way of eliminating the impasse would require much more space than I have here. And so, while I think this is a possibly effective route one can take, I hope to have shown that there is reason to think it will most likely fail to get rid of the impasse.

3.3 Appealing to Pre-Theoretical Descriptions of Well-Being to Eliminate the Impasse

The third way to remove the impasse is for the subjectivist or objectivist to argue that the other is only theorizing about a part of well-being or a different concept entirely. This can be done by appealing to "pre-theoretical descriptions" of well-being. Pre-theoretical descriptions

help theorists to locate contexts where the concept is relevant and distinguish the concept from other related concepts. I gave a pre-theoretical description of well-being at the beginning of Chapter 1 by referencing language about how one is doing. Another example is in the free will debate, where it is common to see the pre-theoretical description of free will as *the level of control over one's actions required for one to be morally responsible for those actions*. This description helps free-will theorists locate contexts where the concept is relevant—where one of these, among others, is where an agent is blameworthy—and distinguish it from other similar concepts—where these could be autonomy, intentional action, uncoerced action, etc. A theory of these concepts, with these pre-theoretical descriptions in mind, will then seek to determine what constitutes the concept; for free will, some may say that it is constituted by the ability to do otherwise, while others may say that it is constituted by one being the source of one's actions.

Most theorists in the well-being debate will spend some time in a given paper or book offering a pre-theoretical description of well-being. The following is a list of many of these different descriptions. Note, some of these refer to specific phenomena where well-being is present, but these phenomena do not necessarily exhaust all of the instances where well-being is present or absent for these authors.

- > *What in virtue of which some lives go better than others, or what makes a life go well or poorly for the person living it.*¹⁰⁶
- > *What in virtue of which someone is benefitted or harmed, what utilitarianism seeks to maximize, or what a duty of beneficence requires one to promote.*¹⁰⁷
- > *Target of the question "what's in it for me?" or what self-interest promotes.*¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ See, among others, Heathwood (2010), Sumner (1996), Bramble (2016), Lin (2022), Campbell (2016), and Crisp (2006).

¹⁰⁷ See, among others, Kagan (1994), Campbell (2016), Lin (2022), Heathwood (2010), Bradley (2012), Sumner (1995), and Sobel (2002).

¹⁰⁸ See, among others, Campbell (2016), Lin (2022), Sumner (1995), and Bramble (2016).

- > *What pity or envy are directed towards.*¹⁰⁹
- > *What is decreased in self-sacrifice.*¹¹⁰

It's important to note that the dominant pre-theoretical description of well-being used by both objectivists and subjectivists is the first: *what in virtue of which some lives go better than others for the people living them*. Given that the subjectivist and objectivist agree on this as a pre-theoretical description of well-being, it is best that they use this description or others they agree on when arguing that the other side is only theorizing about part of the concept of well-being or another concept entirely. To successfully do this, the subjectivist or objectivist would need to show that there are either 1) contexts where the concept of well-being applies according to this pre-theoretical description that the other side's theory cannot account for (e.g. because they seem to involve things that make a life go well for a person but the other side denies that these things constitute well-being) or 2) that this description seems to describe a concept different from the one that the other side is theorizing about. Heathwood, for example, gestures towards the thought that 2) applies to some objectivist theories because they seem to be theorizing about "which sort of life is most worth choosing, while advocates of...subjective theories may be telling us in which sort of life one would be most well-off [i.e., have the highest level of well-being]."¹¹¹ On the other hand, an objectivist would likely try arguing that 1) applies to subjectivists. Here, she would contend that having a positive attitude towards something is only necessary for some goods constitutive of well-being but not all of them.

¹⁰⁹ See Lin (2022) and Sumner (1995).

¹¹⁰ See Lin (2022).

¹¹¹ Chris Heathwood. "Welfare," in *The Routledge Companion to Ethics*, edited by John Skorupski, 654, Routledge, 2010. Note that, in this section, Heathwood does not explicitly refer to the pre-theoretical description above but does in other places of the text. These other areas seem to make it likely that he takes the description to apply to how "well-off" one is (i.e., their level of well-being). Cf. Ferkany (2012): 479.

While I could assess the strength of these arguments, there seems to be a general problem with this strategy (1) and 2) above) as applied to the well-being debate. This is because pre-theoretical descriptions like the one above are vague, and so could be plausibly interpreted in different ways by the subjectivist and objectivist, despite both using it. To see this, consider two plausible but different interpretations that the subjectivist and objectivist could give for the pre-theoretical description *what in virtue of which some lives go better than others for the people living them*:

Subjectivist Interpretation: The description leads us to consider what is valuable for lives to include (hence, *what makes them go better/well*) from the agents' perspective while they are living them (hence, *for the people living them*). We should take on the first-person perspective of agents and consider what they want or like for their lives to include while they are living them.

Objectivist Interpretation: The description leads us to consider what things are valuable in a life (hence, *what makes it go better/well*), where, in virtue of these things being valuable, a life with them is more desirable for a person to live compared to one without them (hence, *for the people living them*).¹¹² From a third-person perspective, we should consider what things in a life are valuable and give anyone reason to want to live a life with them in it (i.e., because they make it desirable).¹¹³

Prima facie, these seem to be two plausible interpretations of the pre-theoretical description. As will be seen in the next section, I also think they broadly describe the approaches both sides use when thinking about their respective cases. But notice that they lead to different

¹¹² Notice that this is not because agents *actually* desire those things, but because those things in a life make it so that agents *should* desire to live that life.

¹¹³ One may object that some things can make a life desirable to live for reasons that obviously do not have to do with well-being. They may say that a life spent tirelessly working for a good cause despite being constantly punished for it, is desirable, but only because it makes the person highly morally praiseworthy, not because she is well-off in that life. One response the objectivist can make is to say that this objection assumes a certain way of understanding well-being that arbitrarily assumes that well-being is not concerned with how desirable or choiceworthy a life is; this is the response that Ferkany (2012): 479 seems to make.

conclusions about the level of well-being in a case. Take the case of Adaptive Amy and Unadaptive Amy. Using the subjectivist interpretation of the pre-theoretical description, one is led to think that Adaptive Amy has a comparable level of well-being to Unadaptive Amy. This is because, from her perspective while living her life, she has just as many things that she wants/likes as Unadaptive Amy does and would not see the additional self-determination as contributing to the value of her life. In comparison, using the objectivist interpretation, one is led to think about what things are valuable in a life and so make that life desirable to live. A life with higher degrees of self-determination seems desirable, given the apparent value of self-determination. Thus, on the objectivist interpretation, Unadaptive Amy has a higher level of well-being than Adaptive Amy because she has a higher degree of self-determination.

Because these interpretations of the pre-theoretical description both seem plausible and yield different conclusions in some cases, it is unlikely that the subjectivist or objectivist could argue on the basis of the pre-theoretical description that the other is only theorizing about a part of the concept of well-being or a different concept altogether. Since both sides take themselves to be theorizing about the concept of well-being and seem entitled to interpret pre-theoretical descriptions of well-being in different ways (given the lack of a shared or obvious interpretation), we cannot appeal to this pre-theoretical description to adjudicate over who is actually theorizing about well-being. Though I lack the space to fully argue for it, I think this same problem applies to all pre-theoretical descriptions of well-being.

One may object that this argument does not apply to more specific pre-theoretical descriptions that pick out certain contexts (like, self-sacrifice, reward/punishment, etc.), presumably because these descriptions are less vague. But I do not think these descriptions are any more effective. To assess this, consider the descriptions of well-being as *what is decreased*

in instances of self-sacrifice and what is increased in rewards and decreased in punishment. It is not clear that the objectivist and subjectivist will agree on what is being picked out by these descriptions. For example, the objectivist may say that felt-quality pleasure is decreased in self-sacrifice/punishment and felt-quality pain is increased, whereas the subjectivist may say that things one has a positive attitude toward are lost in self-sacrifice/punishment. These seem both to be *prima facie* legitimate interpretations of the descriptions, and so we are left with the same problem as before. Even if the two agreed on an interpretation of these descriptions, this would not help the impasse. For example, the two may agree that self-sacrifice involves giving up things one has a positive attitude toward.¹¹⁴ Notice that this does not entail that only things one has a positive attitude toward are relevant for well-being. Objectivists may point to other contexts where a person's attitude towards something seems irrelevant to its impact on her well-being, like self-determination in Adaptive Amy. She would then argue that while well-being is partly constituted by whether we have a positive attitude toward something, it is not solely constituted by this. This leaves us with the impasse since it means that the subjectivist, for example, cannot use the shared interpretation of *what is decreased in self-sacrifice* to argue that the objectivist is theorizing about other concepts besides well-being in other contexts. The objectivist can just deny that they are doing this. Since the pre-theoretical description cannot adjudicate between these two claims, we cannot eliminate the impasse via this strategy.

4. Solution 4: Subjectivists and Objectivists are Theorizing About Two Different Concepts

In my view, the best way of eliminating the impasse between the subjectivist and objectivist is to argue that the two are theorizing about different, but easily conflated concepts. To motivate this way of eliminating the impasse, recall that the impasse arises given how hard it

¹¹⁴ Though some objectivists, like felt-quality hedonists, would likely be forced to disagree with this.

is to see how we can decide between the two views. This is because they both give highly plausible explanations of their own cases, but these explanations contradict one another and are unsatisfactory given that they do not seem able to account for the other side's case. As Kagan puts it, "any given theory [of well-being] can seem at one moment inescapable and at the next moment absurd."¹¹⁵ Assuming I am right and the three previous strategies of removing this impasse fail, where these all assumed that the subjectivist and objectivist are theorizing about the same concept, and given that it is hard to see what other strategies could exist, then this seems to give some evidence that we should not continue to assume that the two are theorizing about the same concept. Several philosophers have argued for similar conclusions. However, I think there are reasons to think their arguments are insufficient.

For one, Kagan argues that there is a difference between a person's well-being and how well her life is going (or her quality of life) and that theorists in the well-being debate have often conflated the two. For Kagan, "changes in [a person's] well-being must involve changes in the person's body or mind."¹¹⁶ Whereas the quality of a person's life will include other factors that may not affect one's body or mind, like whether one's experiences and relationships were genuine, one's level of achievement, etc. Yet, even if Kagan is correct here, it does not help to solve the impasse between the objectivist and subjectivist. This is because it does not give us reason to prefer either objectivism or subjectivism, but just adds a restriction to what counts as well-being that both sides could agree with: that well-being involves changes to one's body or mind. Moreover, it does not give us reason to think that the two sides are theorizing about

¹¹⁵ Shelly Kagan, "Me and My Life," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 94, (1994): 310.

¹¹⁶ Shelly Kagan, "Me and My Life," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 94, (1994): 316.

different concepts, where this would remove the impasse. In this way, the impasse between the two views would continue on Kagan's view.

Next, Fred Feldman argues that, given how ambiguous talk about well-being is, there are two *conceptions* (not concepts) or visions/perspectives that one could be operating out of when thinking about well-being. The first is "Pure Welfare Narrowly Conceived" (hereon, "pure" well-being), and the second is "Enriched Welfare Broadly Conceived" (hereon, "enriched" well-being). Pure well-being involves "the sort of value that directly and ultimately determines how well a person's life is going for that person."¹¹⁷ For Feldman, this value is the amount of intrinsic attitudinal pleasure one has. Feldman does not give a precise summary of what enriched well-being involves but notes that it could include things like meaningfulness, moral excellence, how well-structured a life is, and the perfectionist's understanding of developing human capacities. Crucially, Feldman seems to think that these two visions are not necessarily two different concepts but, given the ambiguity of talk about well-being, two different perspectives one could be taking when thinking about well-being. Feldman, in fact, thinks that we have reason to prefer the vision concerning pure well-being.¹¹⁸

It is unlikely that Feldman's view could help solve the impasse between the subjectivist and objectivist. This is because it seems to only be describing the two different ways that theorists approach theorizing about well-being but does not give much reason to think one side is truly or best theorizing about well-being (which would remove the impasse because we would be led to prefer that side)¹¹⁹ or that the two sides are theorizing about different concepts (which

¹¹⁷ Fred Feldman, "Two Visions of Welfare," *The Journal of Ethics* 23, (2019): 108.

¹¹⁸ See Feldman (2019): 111-112.

¹¹⁹ As noted, Feldman (2019): 111-112 does argue briefly that the vision involving pure welfare is preferable to the other vision. He does this by saying that it seems wrong to replace a person's pure welfare with a higher amount of enriched welfare and indicates that it is counterintuitive to think that the person would be better off. I am skeptical

would also remove the impasse). It seems possible on Feldman's view that both sides are theorizing about the same concept in plausible ways, which means that the impasse still stands. While removing the impasse is likely beyond what Feldman was trying to do, and hence the fact that it cannot is not strictly a problem for his account, it is a problem for us since it means that we need to look elsewhere for ways to remove the impasse.

Lastly, Stephen Campbell argues that theorists about well-being may be conflating two different concepts. The first is a "broad" concept of well-being that "allow[s] for the possibility that something's being good or bad for a person bears no essential connection to his or her favorable or unfavorable attitudes."¹²⁰ The second is a "narrow" concept of well-being that is closely tied to an agent's favorable and unfavorable attitudes towards certain things. Campbell does this by going through four widely used pre-theoretical descriptions. Two of these, *what in virtue of which we envy or pity a person* and *what we fundamentally want for people we care for or are concerned about*, tend to pick out many features that lead one to the broad concept of well-being. The next two, *what is sacrificed in instances of self-sacrifice* and *what reward increases and punishment decreases*, lead one to the narrow concept of well-being. Since these two concepts contradict each other, they cannot be a single concept according to Campbell.

Yet, I do not think Campbell's argument helps us to remove the impasse. This is because, as I argued in section 3.3, it is possible that different theorists plausibly interpret a given pre-theoretical description in different ways. Given this, and that it would be difficult to adjudicate between different interpretations, we likely cannot conclude that different descriptions yield

that people who do not already hold to the vision involving pure welfare would find this objection compelling and thus, remove the impasse by leading them to prefer that vision.

¹²⁰ Stephen Campbell, "The Concept of Well-Being," in *The Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Well-Being*, edited by Guy Fletcher, 13, Routledge, 2016.

different concepts since we would have to rely on an agreed-upon interpretation of these descriptions to do so. Hence, we cannot conclude that the two sides are theorizing about different concepts from Campbell's argument and are, thus, still left with the impasse. Moreover, even if there was an agreed-upon interpretation of a description above, this would not help to determine whether the features picked out by that interpretation wholly make up a concept of well-being rather than only partly doing so. For example, even if the objectivist agreed that punishment and reward involve one losing or gaining things she has a positive attitude towards, this does not necessarily entail that there are two concepts of well-being: one that only has to do with things one has a positive attitude toward and one that includes other things as well. Instead, as the objectivist would likely argue, it could also possibly entail that there is a single concept of well-being, that includes both things one has a positive attitude toward and things that one does or may not have a positive attitude toward. Thus, we cannot conclude from Campbell's argument that both sides are theorizing about different concepts and so cannot remove the impasse by doing so.

4.1 My View

So, we need a different argument for the conclusion that subjectivists and objectivists are theorizing about different concepts. I think my argument is more likely to be successful than the ones above because, unlike Campbell's it does not rely on our having agreed-upon interpretations of pre-theoretical descriptions, and, unlike Kagan and Feldman's, it can remove the impasse because it concludes that the two sides are actually theorizing about different concepts. My argument starts with the observation that when subjectivists and objectivists use cases like Sorry Charlie and Adaptive Amy to come to conclusions about well-being, they do so based on different kinds of features and from different perspectives (where these are different

from Feldman's perspectives above). I will try to summarize these below. Importantly, the success of my argument does not rely on the differences I identify between the two approaches, but instead on whether it is true that the two sides take such different approaches. These approaches are:

First-Personal Well-Being (Subjectivist Approach): Takes the first-person perspective of a person while she is living her life and pays attention to features that the person does or did have a positive attitude towards having in her life. Given that Charlie, from a first-person perspective while living his life, does not have a positive attitude toward his ability to drive faster, the ability does not contribute to his well-being for the subjectivist and indicates that only things one has a positive attitude towards can positively affect well-being.

Third-Personal Well-Being (Objectivist Approach): Takes a third-person perspective to determine whether certain valuable features are present in a person's life because they make the life more desirable to live when assessing it as a whole. Adaptive Amy's life lacks a certain degree of self-determination, and because this lack of self-determination makes her life less desirable to live (e.g., because she will not experience the thrill of coming to her own beliefs about important topics nor certain events that come from doing so),¹²¹ she is lower in well-being than Unadaptive Amy for the objectivist. This indicates for the objectivist that some things can positively affect well-being even though the person does not have a positive attitude towards them.

These are two very different approaches, not just because they look at different features, but because they take different perspectives (one a first-personal perspective and the other a third-personal). Given this, the question we should consider is whether we have reason to think

¹²¹ The subjectivist may object that this smuggles in subjectivism by referring to, for example, the "thrill" of certain experiences, where this seems to involve pleasure, which involve positive attitudes for the subjectivist. There are several ways I can respond. For one, I could argue that it is possible that there are states that positively affect one's experiences that are not forms of pleasure. For example, as quoted in Chapter 2, Wolf (1997): 209 argues that her subjective component does not involve pleasure. Moreover, I could argue that many objectivists deny the attitude-based account of pleasure; see, for example, Bramble's (2016): 90-95 argument against this account in favor of hedonist's holding to the felt-quality account.

they are different approaches to theorizing about the same concept, rather than approaches to theorizing about similar but distinct concepts. As I will argue, it is difficult to see what reason we have to think they are different approaches to theorizing about the same concept, where instead there seems to be reason to think they are approaches to theorizing about distinct concepts.

4.1.1 Reasons to Think the Two Approaches ARE Theorizing about the Same Concept

I can see two ways that someone could argue that two approaches/theories are theorizing about the same concept; 1) the two approaches/theories are trying to answer the same well-defined question or there is some other way to distinguish the concept they are theorizing about from other concepts and 2) the two approaches come to similar conclusions in most cases, but just do so in different ways.

We can try to determine whether 1) applies to the two approaches above: that they are trying to answer the same well-defined question or there is some other way to distinguish the concept they are theorizing about from other concepts. To see what I am getting at, consider how, in at least some versions of the free will debate, the competing sides are plausibly trying to answer the same question (though, if you think this is controversial you can substitute this for another debate), where this can be construed as “What is required for a person to have a sufficient level of control over her actions such that she is morally responsible for them?” This seems to be a well-defined question because it is hard to see how it can be interpreted in very different ways. In contrast, it is not clear that the two approaches to well-being above are responding to a single well-defined question. One possibility is that they are both approaches to answering the question, “What and how many valuable features are present in a person’s life?” But notice that this is ambiguous; one can understand features as “valuable” in vastly different ways. The first-personal approach/subjectivist may think things are valuable only if they are

valued by the agent living the life, whereas the third-personal approach/objectivist may think that this is not necessary for them to be valuable. Since the two approaches can interpret the question in many different ways it is not clear that they are really answering the same question (or an approximately similar interpretation of the question). Notice also, that this difficulty to see what well-defined question both approaches could be answering seems to follow from what I argued above: that there is likely no general pre-theoretical description of well-being that both objectivists and subjectivists have approximately similar interpretations of. If there was one, then the two sides could use it to formulate a well-defined question.

Another way of putting this consideration (1) above) is to question whether there is another way for us to distinguish the concept the two approaches are theorizing about from other concepts. I take it that formulating well-defined questions is just one way of doing so. Doing this can give us the tools to determine when a theory/approach is likely theorizing about a particular concept. Thus, if, by using these tools, we can determine that the two approaches are likely theorizing about the same concept, this gives us strong reason to think they are doing so. It seems to me that any way of attempting to do this must do both of two things:

- a) Approximately distinguish the concept of well-being from other concepts and (approximately) delineate contexts where the concept is relevant from those where it is not in a way that both sides roughly agree with.
- b) Show that neither approaches/theories go outside of the boundaries or relevant contexts established in a) and so are likely theorizing about the same concept.

In a), I say that we need to give a way of distinguishing the concept from others that both sides roughly agree with because agreement on which concepts are not identical to well-being and on the contexts where well-being is relevant would strongly indicate that they have the same concept in mind. For example, many theorists in the free will debate would agree that most, if

not all, instances where an agent can be blamed or praised are ones where the agent acts freely. This helpfully delineates a big chunk of relevant cases from non-relevant ones, and the fact that the theorists agree on this means that they are likely thinking about the same concept. As I argued in section 3.3, though, it is doubtful that we can do this with the well-being debate. There, I noted that the task of a) is usually done by appealing to pre-theoretical descriptions, but that the existing general ones for well-being are vague and likely interpreted by the subjectivist and objectivist in different ways that incorporate or eliminate different contexts and give rise to radically different judgments. Because of this, and in the absence of an agreed-upon interpretation of a pre-theoretical description, we likely will not be able to distinguish the concept of well-being from others and delineate contexts where it is relevant in a way that both the objectivist and subjectivist would roughly agree with.

Besides using well-defined questions and pre-theoretical descriptions, it is hard to see how else we could accomplish a). It is thereby unlikely that we could do b). Hence, concerning attempts to do 1) above (distinguish a single concept that the two approaches are theorizing about from other concepts) we lack reason to think that the two approaches are theorizing about the same concept.

Another factor that would give us reason to think two theories/approaches are theorizing about the same concept is 2) that, except for in edge cases, the theories usually come to the same/similar conclusions, but just do so differently. For example, except for instances like Frankfurt cases, the compatibilist and libertarian about free will likely often agree on whether an action was performed freely (and especially when it seems clear that the agent is blameworthy or praiseworthy). In contrast, the two approaches above seem to come to radically different judgments in many cases. Recall that in Adaptive Amy, the objectivist (third-personal approach)

says that Adaptive Amy is lower in well-being than Unadaptive Amy, whereas the subjectivist (first-personal approach) says that she is higher. In Sorry Charlie, the subjectivist says that Charlie is not any better off, whereas at least some objectivists would say that he is better off (however slightly).¹²² In the case of the grass-counter, the subjectivist says that the grass-counter likely enjoyed a great amount of well-being (depending on the strength of the desire or attitude-based pleasure), whereas the objectivist would say that the person's well-being was likely not that high or could have been much higher had she pursued other things (perfectionists would probably say both). Even in more mundane cases, the objectivist and subjectivist can disagree radically. For example, recall the case of the person who wanted to go to a concert but was miserable when she was there. Subjectivists will say that this person was low in well-being at the concert. However, some objectivists may strongly disagree depending on other features of the case (where these features would not change the subjectivist's judgment); a perfectionist may say that going to the concert helped develop certain important capacities, an ideal-desire satisfactionist may hold that the idealized version of the person would have wanted to go to the concert, and many objective-list theorists may hold that there were certain important goods on their lists that the person obtained by going to the concert.

Notice that the disagreement here is not just at the level of theory. For one, the two approaches do not refer to components of specific theories like desire-satisfactions, felt-quality pleasures, the development of capacities, etc. The subjectivist perspective is compatible with various subjective theories and supports the subjectivist's judgments in the above cases, and the objectivist perspective is compatible with various objective theories and supports their judgments

¹²² In particular, any objective list theorist who includes freedom on the list would likely say this. Perfectionists likely would say that Charlie would be better off if he exercised this newfound freedom, regardless of his lack of positive attitudes toward it (where subjectivists would disagree). However, it is not clear that the idealized-desire satisfaction theorist would agree.

in these cases. Instead, the two perspectives seem to disagree on how to even approach theorizing about whether the people in these cases were high or low in well-being. A good explanation of this disagreement is that the different perspectives are not theorizing about the same concept but think that they are, and so vehemently disagree about how to approach theorizing about the concept. With this and the previous consideration in mind, it is hard to see what reason we have for thinking that the two approaches are theorizing about the same concept.

4.1.2 Reasons to Think the Two Approaches Are NOT Theorizing about the Same Concept

I think there are also things that give us reason to think the two approaches are not theorizing about the same concept, but instead are theorizing about two different ones. By outlining these reasons, I can hopefully also preempt the objection that I am requiring too much of a theorist in any given debate. Such an objector may claim that even theorists in other debates where opposing sides seem clearly to be theorizing about the same concept would likely fail to give us reason to think they are theorizing about the same concept according to 1) and 2) above. While I am skeptical of this, I think the two reasons I identify below for thinking that the two approaches are theorizing about different concepts will help me avoid the force of this objection if it is correct. The first reason is that the type of intractability that characterizes the impasse between the two approaches is likely what we can expect to see if the two approaches were theorizing about different concepts. The second is that the two perspectives seem to be homing in on distinct sources of value and so, at least from a pragmatic standpoint, the claim that they are getting at different concepts may help us to better understand, describe, and theorize about these sources of value.

As I argued in section 3, the impasse between the objectivist and subjectivist is likely intractable; each strategy of removing the impasse faced notable obstacles. Recall, by impasse, I

am not just referring to strong disagreement, but a type of disagreement where each side seems plausible on their own when applied to their own case, but neither is very satisfactory all-things-considered, given that they do not seem able to account for the other side's case. I think that such an impasse is what we can expect to see if two competing theories/approaches, while taking themselves to be theorizing about the same concept, are actually theorizing about two similar but distinct concepts. To see this, imagine two people arguing about what makes a scientific theory "good."¹²³ One person believes that a scientific theory is good just if it is or is approximately true. The other thinks that a scientific theory is good just if it helps to promote our understanding of the world, regardless of whether it is true to any degree. Both vehemently disagree with one another and going through the strategies above does not seem to help remove the impasse. There is reason to think that a hybrid account cannot be created because it will exclude some scientific theories as good that are only true but do not promote understanding and/or exclude other theories as good that are false but promote a great amount of understanding. Similarly, we can stipulate that neither view can explain or explain away the other's case; there is something valuable about true theories as well as about theories that promote understanding and neither side can deny this (and so explain it away) nor account for this in their view (e.g., because something promoting understanding need not be true and vice-versa). Lastly, as you can imagine given how broad the term is, both sides struggle to agree on a pre-theoretical description of a theory being "good." Hence, the impasse between the two seems intractable just like the impasse between subjectivism and objectivism.

¹²³ It is difficult to find examples of real philosophical debates where this may be happening. One possible example is the debate between internalists and externalists about justification. As Bonjour (2009): 216-219 discusses, some have argued that internalists and externalists may be theorizing about different types of knowledge, where each framework is help for different types of questions. Interestingly, Bonjour describes the two types of knowledge in terms of a first-person and a third-person perspective (I was not aware of this when I wrote the two approaches for the objectivist and subjectivist above). However, I do not use this example here because many still seem to think that the two views are in genuine competition with one another.

But notice that there is little reason to think both sides are theorizing about a single concept of “theory-goodness.” Presumably, one side is theorizing about the theoretical value of true theories in science and the other is theorizing about the theoretical value of theories that promote understanding. Here, the intractability of the debate seems to flow from the two sides wrongly assuming that they are both theorizing about the same concept. After all, when theorizing about two different concepts A and B, it is going to be hard to give a hybrid account of the two concepts simply because, in virtue of being two different concepts, a hybrid theory will fail to account for situations where only A applies or ones where only B applies. Next, it will be hard to account for concept A in a theory of concept B or explain away the reality of concept B (or vice-versa), simply because they are different, independently existing concepts. Lastly, it is likely hard to give a non-vague pre-theoretical description of A and B when assuming that they are a single concept since descriptions of A and descriptions of B will have some incompatible features by virtue of A and B being different concepts. Thus, we likely can expect that an impasse between two theories seems intractable in the way that the impasse between the objectivist and subjectivist seems intractable just when opposing theories in that debate are theorizing about different concepts. This, in turn, gives us some reason to think that objectivists and subjectivists are theorizing about different concepts.

Next, the two approaches above seem to be homing in on two sources of value that at least give us pragmatic reason to think they are theorizing about different concepts. To see this, recall the two approaches above. The first-personal approach looked at, from the agent’s perspective while she is living her life, whether and to what degree she has positive attitudes towards the things that are and have been in her life. Let’s call the concept this perspective may be after “contentment.” The third-personal perspective seeks to determine whether and to what

degree a person's life, taken as a whole, has features that make living the life desirable. Let's call the concept this perspective may be after "flourishing." Notice what the distinction between these two concepts can do in the following case:

Studious Sam: Sam is an avid learner who has amassed a great deal of knowledge. This knowledge has positively colored his experience of his life and made it more desirable to live. For one, because of his knowledge, Sam was asked by the president of the United States to lead important peace talks. He did so with great success. However, while there are some things that Sam has a positive attitude toward in his life, he has deeply negative attitudes towards the process he underwent to amass his knowledge (it was a terrible experience for him): negative attitudes stronger than the combined number and strength of positive attitudes he holds toward other things in his life. Assuming a comparison can be made, the degree to which things in Sam's life made the life desirable to live is equal to the number and strength of negative attitudes Sam holds toward various aspects of his life.

This is a difficult case to think about. The objectivist would likely say that Sam's life did not, in general, go well or poorly for him (i.e., he did not have a high or low amount of well-being). The subjectivist would likely say that Sam's life, in general, went very poorly for him and so had a very low level of well-being. Yet, because they only involve one source of value, these judgments seem too coarse-grained compared to what we can say when assuming that contentment and flourishing are different concepts. Here, we can say that Sam had a low level of contentment and a high degree of flourishing, but that there is not a general answer to how well Sam's life went for him given these two concepts. Instead, we have to consider this question through the separate lenses of the two concepts. Notice that this can help us break down and think about the case in a more nuanced way. My view's lack of a general answer then seems to fit with how complex this case is.

Note also that I just used contentment and flourishing to speak to how well a person's life went for her. This is because, given how broad this description is (as I argued in 2.2.), I think these concepts seem to answer questions involving it and, more importantly, I think these concepts can overlap in certain contexts. For example, it seems plausible that on a theory like utilitarianism, we are obligated to maximize one's contentment and flourishing and minimize her dis-contentment and dis-flourishing. Both contentment and flourishing, then, describe specific ways to benefit a person but do not reduce to a single concept. The fact that these two concepts can do this helps to explain why, in some cases, the objectivist and subjectivist seem to be theorizing about the same thing (e.g., cases where we think about what our obligations are on utilitarianism) and, in others, seem to be theorizing about very different things (e.g., Adaptive Amy). In cases where they seem to be talking about the same thing, the concepts are both applicable to the same question about these cases, and in cases where they seem to be talking about different things, they are not applicable to the same questions about these cases.

I think this also helps soften the blow of my ultimate conclusion: that objectivists and subjectivists face such an impasse because they have been theorizing about different concepts. This is because it does not necessarily mean that theorists have been completely talking past each other or that the debate has been a waste of time. In fact, assuming my conclusion is true, the well-being debate has been a place where theorists have thought long and hard about two important and occasionally overlapping sources of value for people. Therefore, given the fact that the well-being debate has faced an impasse between objectivists and subjectivists that does not seem resolvable when assuming that both theorists are after the same concept, and that there are both philosophical and pragmatic reasons for removing the impasse by thinking that they are

after different concepts, we should conclude that the two sides are theorizing about different concepts.

5. Conclusion

In this thesis, I examined the well-being debate with particular attention to the impasse between subjectivism and objectivism. In chapter 1, I gave an overview of the main views in the debate and their objections, as well as gave reasons for holding to subjectivism and objectivism. In chapter 2, I gave an overview of ways that theorists have tried to eliminate the impasse by positing innovative theories, where many of these were hybrid theories, and argued that this strategy was unlikely to be successful. I then finished in this chapter by looking at other possible ways to remove the impasse that retain the belief that subjectivists and objectivists are trying to theorize about the same concept. I argued that these ways likely fail to achieve this task. I then offered my own view, which holds that objectivists and subjectivists are theorizing about different concepts. I contended that there are philosophical and pragmatic reason to hold this view and responded to several objections throughout.

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