

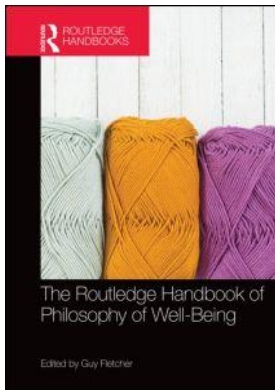
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CHILDREN'S WELL-BEING

A philosophical analysis

Anthony Skelton

In *A Theory of Justice*, John Rawls writes that

we can think of a person as being happy when he is in the way of a successful execution (more or less) of a rational plan of life drawn up under (more or less) favorable conditions, and he is reasonably confident that his plan can be carried through.

(Rawls 1971: 409)

In "Facts and Values," Peter Railton writes that:

an individual's good consists in what he would want himself to want, or to pursue, were he to contemplate his present situation from a standpoint fully and vividly informed about himself and his circumstances, and entirely free of cognitive error and lapses of instrumental rationality.

(Railton 1986: 16)

These are prominently offered up as theories of well-being.¹ A theory of well-being provides an account of what is non-instrumentally good or bad for an individual. Such theories track or explicate the prudential value of a life or part of a life, or how well it is going from the point of view of the individual living it.

It may not be obvious that Rawls is offering us a theory of prudential value. He speaks of happiness rather than well-being. It is important to notice that there are two senses of happiness, a psychological sense and an evaluative sense (Haybron 2008: 29–30).

In the first sense, happiness is a descriptive notion: one is happy when one possesses or is in a certain mental state. To provide an account of this variety of happiness one develops a psychological theory about it. In the second sense, happiness is an evaluative notion: one is happy when one is faring well. To call an individual happy in this sense is to evaluate that individual's life or part of her life. To provide an account of evaluative happiness one develops a theory of the nature of well-being, that is, a theory of prudential value.

Rawls is clearly interested in the second kind of happiness or with well-being. His is a theory telling us what is non-instrumentally good or bad for an individual. He is not in the business of

providing a descriptive or psychological view. Rawls's theory is distinct from both a theory of descriptive happiness and a theory of the ingredients of well-being.

With this background in place, ask yourself the following questions. What makes an individual's life go well? What is non-instrumentally good or bad for an individual? In answering it, think of someone just like you. The frameworks described above seem like suitable, if not plausible, answers to these questions.

Now, ask yourself another question. What makes a young child's life go well? What is non-instrumentally good or bad for a young child? It is unclear that these views provide suitable answers to such questions. These questions are the focus of this chapter. It considers only young children, leaving older children and adolescents aside for the time being.² The focus is on locating a theory of well-being that fits with the abilities and capacities that young children typically possess.

Philosophers have spent surprisingly little time theorizing children's well-being; consequently, there is no meaningful body of philosophical literature devoted directly to it.³ This is remarkable.⁴ The nature of children's well-being is of great relevance to a host of moral, political, and practical questions relating to the treatment of children.

This chapter has three main sections. The first argues that the above views fail to provide accounts of young children's well-being. The second discusses and evaluates some existing views of well-being that are applicable to young children. The third articulates and evaluates three highly attractive accounts of children's well-being.

Philosophers' views fail to provide accounts of young children's well-being

Rawls's view fails to provide an account of what makes a young child's life go well because young children are incapable of framing a rational plan of life, that is, "[a] plan . . . made up of subplans suitably arranged in a hierarchy, the broad features of the plan allowing for the more permanent aims and interests that complement one another" (Rawls 1971: 411). It may be that a child's life must, in some sense, go according to a plan for it to go well. But any suitable plan will depend on, rather than provide, a view of well-being. In thinking about which plan to direct a child towards we think at least in part about what will make her life go well for her.

Railton's view makes sense when thinking about an individual with a mature perspective, e.g., an adult, where difficulties in determining that individual's well-being are plausibly thought to be removable through the imposition of exclusively formal standards correcting for various cognitive and motivational limitations. There is in this case something to Railton's claim to have captured the "range of assessment" involved in judgments about what makes one's life go well (Railton 1986: 11). But does his view capture the "range of assessment" involved in judgments about what makes a young child's life go well? When thinking about what makes a young child non-instrumentally better or worse off from her perspective, it is less obvious that we think only about what might or might not be endorsed by her in the presence of full information and in the absence of mistakes in instrumental reasoning.⁵ It is more common to rely, at least in part, on substantive views of what is good for a child in thinking about her well-being. This is due somewhat to the fact that, unlike in the case of adults, a young child is not thought to have a mature or fully developed point of view or perspective that under suitable conditions might credibly fix her well-being. Indeed, the child is thought to have an immature or undeveloped point of view that cannot, it is credible to think, alone fix what is good for a young child. A substantive standard seems part of what fixes what is prudentially good for a young child.

One might reply on behalf of these views that young children's well-being consists in whatever is necessary to putting children in the position to fare well according to them. Faring well as a child might involve doing whatever conduces to having rational plans or informed preferences. Children do like to get an inkling that they are developing and maturing, and there is a sense in which we think things go less well for a child when she fails to progress toward a typical adult existence. The idea, then, might be that a child is faring well to the extent that she is developing toward meeting the conditions set out by these views.

This suggestion faces a formidable criticism. It does not explain why what matters to a child's well-being is exclusively a function of what conduces to making an adult's life go well. The views just considered claim that in the case of an adult one's well-being depends crucially on one's own chosen plans or on one's own informed desires, that is, on facts about the well-being subject him- or herself. Why, then, shouldn't accounts of children's well-being similarly depend on facts about them and their perspective? The suggestion here is not that there are radical differences between young children's well-being and adult's well-being. Indeed, it would be worrisome if views about each of these were in tension with each other. The claim is rather that the development of a theory of well-being for a set of well-being subjects is done best with the nature of those subjects clearly in view.

That the above views do not extend to young children may be fatal to them. Wayne Sumner argues that, to be adequate, a theory of well-being must be general in two senses (Sumner 1996: 13–15). In the first sense, a theory must be able to explain the range of our well-being judgments, positive, negative, at a time, and across time. In the second sense, a theory of well-being must apply to all core subjects of well-being assessments, including young children, adults, and non-human animals. One might argue on the basis of the second sense of generality that, because the views outlined above fail to extend to young children, they are insufficiently general, and thus should be rejected.

This is, however, too quick. There is another option: deny that theories of the nature of well-being need be general in the second sense. We can hold that some theories have a restricted domain. They apply only to some core well-being subjects. Why think, after all, that one theory fits every well-being subject? Why not think instead that there are distinct views of well-being for different well-being subjects and that the applicable view will depend on facts about the sort of being in question? *A fortiori* one might argue that to make sense of the range of individuals to which the concept of well-being applies we must reject the idea that a theory of it must be general in this sense.

Rejecting generality may, indeed, be desirable.⁶ It leaves us free to select from a broader range of views, such as the ones discussed, for the case of adults. We do not have to reject a view for the case of adults simply because it does not fit children. We are, in this case, more likely to locate accounts of well-being for children and for adults that fit with our considered intuitions about what faring well involves in each case.

One might complain that we cannot have different conceptions of well-being for young children and adults because it is "arbitrary" to hold a view that limits itself to what is good for, say, an adult human being (Kraut 2007: 106, 109). But there is no reason to think that a view that is limited to adults or to children is arbitrary if there is reason to treat the two classes somewhat differently. If it is true that young children and adults are somewhat distinct from each other in terms of their various capacities, there is nothing arbitrary about thinking they fare well in distinct ways.

One might worry that this reply involves treating young children as separate beings like non-human animals. This is not true. Treating young children and adults differently is merely a reflection of the fact that childhood, especially in its early stages, is distinct in many ways from

the other stages in life. It may even be that facts about children make possible certain experiences that are closed to adults. There are different ethical rules for how to treat young children. Why not think that there are different views of what is prudentially good for children?

Existing views of well-being that are applicable to young children

Some existing theories of well-being do fit young children, including hedonism and objective-list views. It is typical that in discussions of them adult well-being subjects are the focus (Skelton 2014). This need not persuade us that they fail to provide accounts of faring well as a young child. Even if we reject them as accounts of well-being for adults, they may remain promising accounts of well-being for young children.

Before evaluating these accounts of well-being, it is worth discussing two other views of well-being that also fit young children but that seem especially unpromising, the “normal functioning” view and the actual-desire satisfaction view.

David Archard advances an account of children’s well-being according to which it consists in “the normal functioning of the entity in question” which, in the case of a child, comprises normal physical and emotional development (Archard 1993: 150). He relies on this to explain the harm of child abuse, which he believes must be understood in terms of a “detriment to well-being” (Archard 1993: 150).

This account of well-being may suit Archard’s purposes. It captures and explains our attitude that emotional and physical abuse of children is harmful and therefore wrong, for such abuse does in typical cases impede, at the very least, emotional development. All the same, Archard’s account is not the only or the most persuasive account of well-being to do so. The main problem is that he provides no account of what “normal” development involves. What counts as “normal” in this context? Archard has in mind good physical and emotional development. This surely has some role in faring well as a young child.⁷ However, it is far from clear that this is the whole story about faring well as a young child, which surely involves, among other things, friendship and happiness, the prudential value of which is not exhausted by their contribution to “normal” development.

Indeed, the proper account of what counts as “normal” physical and emotional development seems in part to be established by a view of well-being. In this case, the appeal to what is normal exploits rather than provides an account of what well-being consists in. In most cases in which we lament the lack of emotional and physical development or growth we do so on account of the fact that this lack interferes with well-being by, for example, interfering with happiness or with the pursuit and maintenance of valuable relationships that are satisfying to their participants or with enjoyable intellectual activity.

The actual-desire satisfaction view of well-being states that what is non-instrumentally good for a child is the satisfaction of her desires and that what is non-instrumentally bad for a child is the frustration of her desires. A child’s life is going well, according to this position, insofar as she has on balance more desire satisfaction than frustration. The very best life for a child has the greatest sum total of desire satisfaction.

This view faces a serious objection. Many of the desires that young children have are poorly formed or unreasoned. My children, for example, have at various points in their lives wanted to touch the animals in the zoo, to jump into deep water without being able to swim, and to cross a busy road without looking. It is not obvious that the satisfaction of these desires makes them better off. True, many of the desires that adults have are based on poor information, poor reasoning, and on mistakes in logic. This is why it is common for those who defend the desire-satisfaction

approach to well-being to adopt the account according to which well-being consists in the satisfaction of desires that one's fully informed self would want one to want in one's actual circumstances (Railton 1986: 11). This view, we noted, is not suitable for young children. We cannot rely on it to defend the desire-satisfaction approach to children's well-being.

Is there another way to save the actual-desire satisfaction view? Perhaps. One might argue that the reason that the satisfaction of a child's desire to touch the animals in the zoo does not appear to make him better off is not due to the fact that it fails to be non-instrumentally good for him; on the contrary, the reply continues, the satisfaction of the desire does make the child non-instrumentally better off to some extent. The reason that it is not good for the child to satisfy the desire is that it is non-instrumentally bad for him to satisfy it all things considered. Its satisfaction conflicts with the satisfaction of the other and stronger desires that he has, namely, the desires not to be mauled by a wild animal, not to suffer, and to carry on seeing the rest of the animals in the zoo. One can save the actual-desire satisfaction theory from the objection that many of our desires are poorly formed not by moving to a fully informed desire satisfaction view but by, as Sumner puts it, bringing "into play the full structure of . . . [a child's] preferences, including . . . [her] priorities among them" (Sumner 1996: 131). That is, to defend the desire view all one need do is bring into view a child's "full hierarchy of preferences" (Sumner 1996: 159).⁸

This defense of the actual-desire satisfaction theory may work when thinking about well-being for adults. It will not do in the case of young children, for two reasons. The first is that this reply presupposes that there is a hierarchy of desires that is reasonably stable and reasonably authoritative. The initial objection could not be deflected without this presupposition. This assumption may ring true in the case of adults. It does not do so in the case of young children. One fact about most young children is that they do not typically have stable preferences or preferences arranged into authoritative hierarchies. We cannot assume, as we might in the case of an adult, that the full structure of her desires reflects the entirety of what is non-instrumentally good for her.

Furthermore, for this reply to work we must assume that the pool of desires at issue ranges over all the matters that, intuitively speaking, make a difference to how one is faring. In short, we must assume that the preference set is robust. Is this assumption plausible in the case of young children? My child does seem to have the desires that are appealed to in the case of desiring to touch the zoo animals. But what about the case in which my child does not want to develop his intellectual abilities? What about the case in which my child does not want to seek out certain valuable relationships? It is not clear that we can appeal only to his desires to show that it would not be good all things considered for him to expand his mind or to seek valuable relationships. That young children lack the desires that might be appealed to in the above cases explains why we encourage them to develop those having to do with the development of their intellectual, physical, and social abilities.

The views just discussed are not suitable accounts of well-being for young children. A more promising option is hedonism. When philosophers do deign to discuss children's well-being they often suggest that it consists exclusively in pleasure or enjoyment or cognate state of mind. R.B. Brandt, for instance, maintains that well-being consists in happiness, which consists in surplus enjoyment, and that "[o]bviously in the case of children, animals, and mental defectives we want to make them happy and avoid distress" (Brandt 1979: 147).

Hedonism is the view that well-being consists in surplus pleasure, and that ill-being consists in surplus pain. Pleasure is non-instrumentally good for a child and pain is non-instrumentally bad for a child. One's life is going well when it has, on balance, more pleasure than pain, and one's life is going poorly when one has, on balance, more pain than pleasure. The very best life is the one with the greatest sum total of surplus pleasure.

Hedonism is compelling: there does seem to be a strong connection between faring well as a child and experiencing pleasure. That this is true explains the emphasis on the importance of having fun and on the importance of innocence in childhood.

Rawls accuses hedonism of being “unbalanced and inhuman.” He thinks that the pursuit of all and only the sensation or feeling of pleasure when thinking about one’s own good is like an “overriding desire to maximize one’s power over others or one’s material wealth” (Rawls 1971: 557). It has, in short, little merit.

Rawls’s criticism is aimed at Sidgwick. Sidgwick defines pleasure as:

feeling which the sentient individual at the time of feeling it implicitly or explicitly apprehends to be desirable;—desirable, that is, when considered merely as feeling, and not in respect of its objective conditions or consequences, or of any facts that come directly within the cognizance and judgment of others besides the sentient individual.

(Sidgwick 1907: 131; also 127, 398)

He might deflect Rawls’s complaint by noting that he denies that there is “common quality” among the states of mind called pleasure (Sidgwick 1907: 127) and that his definition includes “every species of ‘delight,’ ‘enjoyment,’ or ‘satisfaction’” (Sidgwick 1907: 93).

Indeed, he might adopt Sumner’s view of young children’s well-being, according to which it consists in affective happiness: “what we commonly call a sense of well-being: finding your life enriching or rewarding, or feeling satisfied or fulfilled by it” (Sumner 1996: 146, 147). On this view, what is non-instrumentally good for a young child is feeling satisfied with her life. What is non-instrumentally bad for a young child is feeling dissatisfied with her life. A child is faring well when her life is on balance satisfying to her. The very best life contains the greatest sum total of satisfaction. This retains hedonism’s animating idea, that only one’s own mental states are relevant to one’s well-being, while capturing all of the affective conditions that seem relevant to it, and (seemingly) all of the intuitions about well-being that hedonism captures.

It is not clear that this view is “unbalanced and inhuman.” A proponent of this view might further deflect this criticism by noting that one does not best acquire happiness by pursuing it directly; instead, it is obtained best by aiming at things other than happiness, including, in the case of young children, play, valuable relationships, and intellectual activity. One might recommend this in part because these things are reliable indicators of what will make a child happy and in part because there is a paradox of happiness: the more one attempts intentionally to obtain happiness directly the more unlikely it is that one will get it.⁹ This view seems less susceptible to Rawls’s charge; it encourages pursuing a broad range of goods and affective states and motivations.

This kind of view faces one serious criticism due to Robert Nozick (1974: 42–45). It is aimed at hedonism, but Sumner’s view is susceptible to it, too. Nozick asks us to imagine that scientists have invented an experience machine. It is capable of providing those who plug into it with any range of affective experiences that they might choose. While in the machine they think that the things from which they derive satisfaction are real when in fact they are not. Suppose that we could plug a child into this machine and that it would provide her with more satisfaction on balance than she could acquire in the real world. Would this imply that life in the machine would be best for her?

Nozick believes that it would not imply this. Many agree, thinking that there is more to faring well than surplus happiness. The best life would not be determined simply by summing the magnitude of the mental states that one experiences. But not everyone is convinced. Some think it possible to undermine our intuitive reactions to Nozick’s thought experiment and to

vindicate the mental state view.¹⁰ Establishing the acceptability of these replies would require a detailed analysis of them. Fortunately, it is not necessary to address them. The better tack is simply to ask why one would persist in defending a mental state view in the face of this objection. For it is possible to capture many of the main claims of mental state views by arguing that happiness, as Sumner understands it, is a necessary rather than a necessary and sufficient condition of well-being.

The main reason that philosophers want to defend mental state views is, it appears, to avoid claiming that possessing certain kinds of things, e.g., knowledge, is good for an individual in the absence of some positive mental state (Sidgwick 1907: 398, 401; Crisp 2006: 122). They accept the strong intuition that nothing can make our lives go well in the absence of positive affect.¹¹ But one does not have to reject this intuition when one rejects the claim that well-being consists in positive experiences alone. The claim that happiness is a necessary condition is effective in capturing the intuition.

It is, after all, difficult to see what is gained by showing that children's well-being consists in happiness alone. Sidgwick argued for the view in part on the grounds that it was, of those he considered, the only one fit to supply a systematic and "coherent account of Ultimate Good" (Sidgwick: 1907: 406). But this reason for accepting the view is no less controversial than the view itself. It is not clear that this is a compelling enough reason to accept the happiness view.

There may be some peculiarities associated with the view that happiness is a necessary condition of faring well. One may wonder why, e.g., a valuable relationship contributes to a child's well-being when she experiences happiness in it, but not when she fails to experience happiness in it. In reply, one might argue that insisting that happiness is a necessary condition of young children's well-being is crucial to capturing many of our common-sense beliefs about children's well-being and that it is a way to ensure that a child's perspective is registered in thinking about children's well-being. In addition, the view registers the fact that happiness is not all that matters to children's well-being because of the relative immaturity of their perspective and that therefore other factors play a role in determining what is prudentially good for them.

It is not clear, then, that only states of mind such as happiness make a young child's life go well. There appears to be more to children's well-being than happiness. One plausible account is that a child's life goes well when she possesses in addition to happiness certain things in which it is good for her to be happy, e.g., intellectual activity, valuable relationships, and play (Skelton 2014).

It is useful to pause here to discuss the objective-list view. The most common versions of the view are articulated with adults in mind.¹² But it is possible to defend a version of the view that is suitable for young children. One of the attractions of the view is that it can accommodate differences between children and adults in terms of the kind of prudential goods it recommends. Such an objective-list view might state that what is non-instrumentally good for a child is to possess the goods just mentioned. What is non-instrumentally bad for a child is to lack these goods or to have dissatisfaction, disvaluable relationships, intellectual passivity, and so on. A child's life goes well when she has a surplus of objective goods, and it goes poorly when she has a surplus of objective evils. The very best life is the one with the greatest sum of objective goods.

The objective-list view provides a compelling view of young children's well-being.¹³ We encourage children toward certain goods, e.g., friendships, physical activity, artistic creation, on grounds that these are fundamentally good for children. We do not face the (perceived) problem that we face in the case of adults, namely, that of dictating to other people what is or is not good for them. That a theory of well-being allows for paternalism about prudential ends in the case of children is a mark in its favor. *A fortiori* we tend to think that not every experience that a child wants is equally good for a child. We seem to have a decided preference for some over others.

A standard worry for the objective-list view is that it seems unable to explain why the things that it says are good for us are in fact good for us when we take no satisfaction in or care nothing for them. This worry is starkest in cases where it says that, e.g., intellectual activity is good for us even though we derive no happiness from it (Fletcher 2013). That we have this worry explains our reservations about Tiger Mothers and Gradgrindian educations.

Objective-list theorists have replies. One is to argue that it just seems correct that the possession of certain goods in the absence of happiness or positive affect is good for you. Richard Arneson argues that, if you think otherwise, you have to concede that a life rich in objective goods, whatever they are, is one that contains, implausibly, no well-being when one takes no satisfaction in them. Surely these goods contribute something to well-being in the absence of a positive attitude or happiness (Arneson 1999: 141).

A second reply involves arguing that only goods that have positive attitudes built into them are good for you. On this view, only goods involving certain positive attitudes—desire, endorsement, and so on—matter to one's well-being, e.g., friendship, achievement, and virtue. This allows the objective-list theorist to say that the things that are good for one are not so independently of one's pro-attitudes (Fletcher 2013: 216).

These are reasonable replies. It is just not clear why one would bother with them. What is gained in showing that the objective-list view is a complete picture of well-being? The proponent of the objective-list view is typically worried about views that entail that something is good for one even though one is engaging in something that appears on the face of it to be shallow, bizarre, or perverse.¹⁴ One can deflect this worry by holding that the possession of goods is a necessary condition of well-being. This allows one to retain the animating idea of objective-list theories, that more than the magnitude of mental states matters to well-being, without having to deal with or accept the claim that one can fare well even when one is unhappy or unsatisfied with the goods one's life instantiates.

This is a more plausible route for the objective-list theorist to take than offering either one of the above replies. The first reply seems anyway to secure only a weak intuition about an unusual case in which our intuitions are unlikely to be firm. The second reply is open to being undermined by a different version of the original objection. For it is not clear that, even if the goods do contain a pro-attitude, it is the right attitude for the purposes of avoiding the problem of being alienated from the putative constituents of one's well-being. One might, for instance, claim that intellectual activities contain a desire but that this is not enough to show that a child's pursuit of it alone would be good for her, since such a good, even with the positive attitude, in the absence of happiness (the right valuing attitude) would not be good for a young child.

Three accounts of children's well-being

Both happiness and the pursuit of things in which it is good for her to be happy seem like important elements of faring well as a young child. Neither of these things alone appears to tell the whole story about faring well as a young child. Perhaps, then, the right position is that happiness and the possession of things that it is good for a child to be satisfied with are individually necessary and jointly sufficient. Well-being, on this view, is a hybrid.¹⁵ In the case of young children, it seems that one's life goes well when one is both satisfied/happy and when one's satisfaction/happiness is experienced in things in which it is good for one to experience satisfaction or happiness, e.g., play, valuable relationships, intellectual and physical activities.¹⁶

It is not clear, one might object, that this view captures all of our common-sense judgments about what is non-instrumentally good for a young child.

One worry is that it cannot explain why it is beneficial for a child not to suffer because the view holds that, just as well-being involves both happiness and things in which it is good for a child to experience happiness, ill-being involves both unhappiness and things in which it is bad for a child to experience unhappiness. This is a mistake. This worry supposes that well-being and ill-being are symmetrical. However, it is not obvious that an individual who holds the view of well-being above must hold the corresponding view of ill-being. These two notions might not possess the same structure. It might be that for ill-being it is sufficient that one suffer, in which case a proponent of the hybrid view of well-being can hold that it is bad for a child to suffer. To suffer is to fare poorly. To be relieved of suffering is therefore a non-instrumentally beneficial improvement in a child's well-being.

A second worry is that, on this view, if a child has some positive but simple experience which is not taken in something in which it is good to experience satisfaction, e.g., enjoyment in cloud watching on a warm summer day, she is not in any way prudentially benefitted. Yet, it does seem that this experience makes a child, to some extent, prudentially better off. It contributes directly to her well-being.

One reply is to stand firm and argue that such pleasures are not directly good for a child. Joseph Raz, for example, takes this approach to such experiences, which he describes as "passive pleasures" (Raz 1994: 7).¹⁷ He thinks that such pleasures might contribute to one's well-being provided that one takes an interest in them, that is, provided "they fit in with one's active concerns and plans" (Raz 1994: 7). Otherwise, they make no non-instrumental contribution to one's well-being.

One might reasonably balk at the suggestion that it is only in virtue of fitting into an individual's "active concerns and plans" that something makes one non-instrumentally better off. Why think that this is the relevant criterion for determining whether something makes (especially) a young child directly better off?

This is a reasonable response. Nonetheless, Raz is, it seems, on to something. If passive pleasures are not ones in which a child takes satisfaction, it is compelling to think that they make no direct contribution to her well-being.

It is unclear that this provides a complete defense of the hybrid view. It implies that something like satisfaction or happiness alone makes a young child non-instrumentally better off. But this is compelling. After all, what do we say about a world in which there are no opportunities for pursuing things in which it is good for a child to experience happiness, one in which there are no opportunities for play or valuable relationships or for meaningful intellectual and physical activities? It is not unreasonable to say that in this world, although it would not be one in which a young child is faring terribly well, it would be prudentially better for a child to be happy in so-called passive pleasures than to be sad. If so, then happiness is sufficient for well-being.

Accepting that happiness is sufficient for faring well (to some extent) as a young child suggests a different view. According to it, the hybrid provides an account of young children's full well-being or full fare, but that in some cases happiness by itself is sufficient for well-being, though this well-being is low well-being or low fare (Skelton 2014).

This view has its own troubles. One worry is this. Is happiness alone always inferior to happiness experienced in things in which it is good to experience happiness? Suppose a child is choosing between a day full of lots of happiness in experiencing Raz's "passive" pleasures, and a day full of only a small amount of the hybrid, say, some (surplus) happiness in drawing and playing Junior Monopoly. Is the latter clearly prudentially better for the child? This may be hard to accept. If the amount of surplus happiness is great, it is not implausible to think that it is better for the child to experience the day full of happiness in the passive pleasures.

The proponent of this second view could concede that it is better for the child to experience the happiness alone. This is a small concession, for cases in which a child experiences (simple) happiness alone are going to be quite rare on account of the entanglements between happiness and things in which it is good for a child to experience happiness and on account of the fact that we seem to hold (in our reactions to the experience machine objection) that provided we have enough of the hybrid no amount of simple happiness is sufficient to outweigh it. After all, our objection to the experience machine is not that it is not on full blast.

A second worry about this view is that it allows that happiness alone is capable of making a young child better off while (apparently) denying that the possession of things in which it is good for a child to experience satisfaction in the absence of happiness makes a child better off. But, one might think, the possession of valuable relationships and intellectual activity, even in the absence of happiness, makes a young child better off at least to some extent, however small.¹⁸ It is not entirely implausible to hold that intellectual development is good for a child despite her experiencing no satisfaction in it.

A third view captures this intuition. It holds that the hybrid is full fare, but that both happiness alone and things in which it is good for a child to experience happiness alone make a young child prudentially better off, though these are cases of low well-being.

Raz provides a counter to the view that something in which it is good to experience satisfaction makes one better off in the absence of happiness (Raz 1994: 6). He suggests that, while one does not have to reflectively endorse or have a second-order desire for such a good in order for it to contribute directly to one's well-being, one does have to pursue it "with the spirit suitable to the activity" (Raz 1994: 6). By this he means that for something to contribute directly to one's well-being one must pursue it in the absence of "resentment, pathological self-doubt, lack of self-esteem, self-hate, etc" (Raz 1994: 6). Again, Raz is on to something, though it is more compelling to say in the case of children that for something to contribute to well-being it must be in the very least satisfying, for this is what these other, negative attitudes tend to interfere with. This view is attractive in the case of a young child.

Of course, this entails accepting that in a world in which a child cannot experience happiness, but in which she can experience the things in which it is good to experience happiness, she cannot fare well. It may not be entirely unpersuasive to say that this is a world in which a young child cannot fare well and that this is one reason to lament this world. And a child may in this world have elements of the good life, since this might include things beyond what makes a young child non-instrumentally better off.

Conclusion

What is non-instrumentally good (bad) for a young child? This question has been the focus of the foregoing discussion. It began by outlining some views of well-being that are incapable of serving as accounts of well-being for young children. This was designed to highlight that children's well-being has been ignored in the philosophical literature on well-being. The second section of the chapter discussed some views of well-being that do serve as accounts of young children's well-being. It was argued that these are not acceptable views of children's well-being and that perhaps the most appropriate account of children's well-being is a hybrid. The third section of the paper discussed objections to this view. In this context, two other, similar views of well-being were discussed. Both accepted that the hybrid is an account of full well-being for young children. One version of this view allowed for the possibility that in some cases happiness by itself is sufficient for well-being, but that this counts as low well-being or low fare. Another version of this view allowed for the possibility that in some cases the possession of certain goods

in the absence of satisfaction was sufficient for well-being, but that this counts as low fare. Each of the views faced some challenges. It is not yet clear which of them is true.¹⁹

Further reading

- R. Kraut, “Desire and the Human Good,” *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 68 (1994): 39–54, evaluates the desire-fulfillment theory of well-being with special reference to children’s well-being. A useful set of papers focusing on the nature of children’s well-being and its role in practical deliberations is A. Bagattini and C. Macleod (eds.), *The Nature of Children’s Well-being: Theory and Practice* (New York: Springer, 2014). David Wendler, *The Ethics of Pediatric Research* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) and “A New Justification for Pediatric Care without the Potential for Clinical Benefit,” *The American Journal of Bioethics* 12 (2012): 23–31, outline and defend a conception of children’s well-being with a view to justifying some non-therapeutic pediatric research.

Notes

- 1 On Railton’s view, only a sub-set of these desires matter to one’s well-being.
- 2 For older children, especially adolescents, a separate treatment seems appropriate.
- 3 Although Kraut (2007) devotes considerable attention to the nature of children’s well-being.
- 4 For speculation about why philosophers have ignored children’s well-being, see Skelton (forthcoming).
- 5 Rosati (2009: 208–209) agrees, though for different reasons, that Railton’s view does not fit young children. I owe this reference to Eden Lin.
- 6 This is not to deny that generality is a desirable feature of a theory. The point is that it is not a constraint at the outset.
- 7 For discussion, see Kraut (2007) and Brighouse and Swift (2014).
- 8 For a similar view, see Heathwood (2005). Note that Sumner is offering this as a defense of the actual-desire satisfaction view as applied to adults.
- 9 That is, one might defend Sumner by relying on Sidgwick’s tools for defending hedonism. See Sidgwick (1907: 401ff).
- 10 See, for example, Silverstein (2000), Crisp (2006), and Hewitt (2010).
- 11 For example, pleasure, enjoyment, and satisfaction. In what follows, the focus will be on satisfaction.
- 12 For discussion, see Skelton (2014).
- 13 For an objective-list view of children’s well-being, see Brighouse and Swift (2014: 52, 62–65).
- 14 Parfit (1984: 500–501); cf. Fletcher (2013: 216–217).
- 15 A similar view is defended in Kraut (2007). The view of children’s well-being discussed here differs from Kraut’s in that it relies on happiness rather than pleasure and it disregards the appeal to human nature and to healthy development. For discussion of Kraut’s view, see Skelton (forthcoming).
- 16 For a detailed discussion of these goods, see Skelton (2014).
- 17 Raz does not consider children’s well-being.
- 18 This criticism could be directed at the first, hybrid view of well-being.
- 19 I wish to thank Brian Ball, Guy Fletcher, Stephen Campbell, Anne Skelton, Carolyn Macleod, Eden Lin, and audiences at St Anne’s College, Oxford University, at the Carnegie-Uehiro-Oxford Conference in Practical Ethics, and at the Institute of Applied Ethics, University of Hull for helpful feedback on previous versions of this chapter.

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