

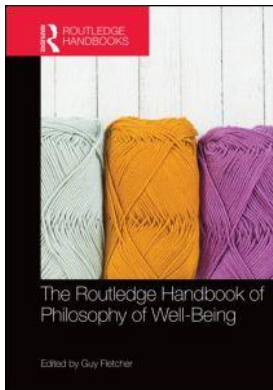
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## The Routledge Handbook Of Philosophy Of Well-Being

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### The concept of well-being

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## 33

THE CONCEPT OF  
WELL-BEING*Stephen M. Campbell*

When contemporary philosophers write about well-being, they are typically preoccupied with the search for the best *substantive theory of well-being*. Substantive theories of well-being purport to tell us what ultimately makes something good or bad for an individual and, more broadly, what makes a life go well or poorly for the one who is living it. Hedonists tell us that it all comes down to pleasure and pain. Desire-fulfillment theorists say it is the fulfillment of our actual or idealized desires. Objective-list theorists claim that it is a plurality of things, some of which need not resonate with the person who receives them. Perfectionists maintain that it is a matter of developing and exercising one's natural capacities. And, of course, a range of other theories have been proposed and discussed.

To properly engage with this debate, one needs to have some grasp of what these philosophers take themselves to be offering theories of. What do philosophers have in mind when they talk about "well-being"? Being clear on the *concept of well-being* is important for at least two reasons. First, it is crucial for comprehending the very content of well-being theories. To understand what the hedonist is claiming about well-being, it is not enough to know how pleasure and pain are being understood. One must also have some understanding of what well-being itself is supposed to be. If we have no pre-theoretical understanding of this, we will lack any clear sense of what distinguishes hedonism about well-being from various other hedonisms (e.g., hedonistic theories of value, of happiness, and of motivation), perfectionism about well-being from other forms of perfectionism, and so on. Second, clarifying the concept of well-being is important because it will provide insight into the most effective methods for adjudicating between competing theories of well-being.

This chapter concerns the concept at the heart of contemporary philosophical discussions of well-being. I begin by reviewing what philosophers standardly say to clarify the topic of well-being. This provides a rough picture of what they take well-being to be. The next section distinguishes two ways of proceeding. The first is to begin the search for the best substantive theory of well-being; the second is to seek an analysis that will provide us with a sharper picture of well-being. In the following section, I examine four analyses. I then discuss two challenges to the assumption that there is a single, coherent topic under discussion in the philosophical literature on well-being. The chapter closes with some reflections on the implications of those challenges.

## The standard picture of well-being

Most philosophical essays and books on well-being proceed in two stages. At the first stage, the author provides some clarifications about well-being so that readers will have a clear enough sense of the subject matter. At the second stage, the author moves into a discussion of substantive theories of well-being with the ultimate goal of making some progress toward identifying the best theory. Let us review what philosophers most commonly say at the first stage.

The most popular method for clarifying the topic of well-being is to highlight a range of associated terms and phrases. Well-being is often discussed under the heading of *welfare*, *self-interest*, *one's interests*, *one's advantage*, *one's good*, *prudential value*, *quality of life*, *flourishing*, or *the good life*. Things that make a positive contribution to your level of well-being are things that are *good for you*, *benefit you*, have *prudential value* for you, and make you *better off*. Things that have a negative impact on your well-being are *bad for you*, *harm you*, have *prudential disvalue* for you, and make you *worse off*. Your well-being is a matter of *how well you are doing*, *how well things are going for you*, or *how well your life is going for you*. It is what you attend to when asking yourself “What’s in it for me?”

What is *good for you* should be distinguished from what is *good* in an unqualified way (i.e., good *simpliciter*, impersonally good, good absolutely). To say that something is good *simpliciter* is to say that it makes the world a better place and, perhaps also, is desirable in the sense of being fittingly or appropriately desired. Saying that *x* is good does not bring to light a special relationship between *x* and any individual in particular, nor does it imply that any particular person will be benefited by *x*. In contrast, to say that *x* is good for Sam implies that Sam stands in a special relationship to *x*: it is something that benefits *him* and improves *his* well-being. The concept of well-being thus involves a kind of “subject-relativity” that is lacking in the concept of good *simpliciter*.<sup>1</sup>

Just as we must take care to distinguish the concepts of good for and good, so too must we distinguish the concept of a *prudentially good life*—a life high in well-being, a life that goes well for the one who lives it—from a range of other concepts.<sup>2</sup> Consider some other types of “good lives”:

- an *impersonally good life*: a life that directly or indirectly contributes much good *simpliciter* to the world;
- a *morally good life*: a life that exemplifies moral virtue and behavior;
- a *spiritually good life*: a life in accordance with a religious ideal or in which one achieves deep connection with a spiritual reality;
- an *aesthetically good life*: a life of artistic achievement or aesthetic appreciation;
- a *perfectionistically good life*: a life in which one successfully develops or perfects one’s nature;
- an *admirable life*: a life in which one merits admiration;
- a *choice-worthy life*: a life that is worth choosing or aiming to have.

Philosophers of well-being generally agree that these seven concepts are all distinct from the concept of a prudentially good life. This does not close off the possibility that some of these concepts pick out the same type of life. For instance, suppose that developing and perfecting our nature is the only thing that is good for human beings. This would mean that, given any set of possible lives, the prudentially best lives are the perfectionistically best lives. This is just what perfectionists about well-being claim. Even so, there are two independent concepts in play. That is why the perfectionist’s assertion is an interesting and controversial substantive claim rather than a conceptual truth that everyone should accept.

The concept of well-being is widely agreed to be related to various concepts, attitudes, and emotions.<sup>3</sup> Well-being is what an *egoist* or purely *selfish* person always tries to promote for herself, and what the *altruist* tries to promote for others. It is what one knowingly fails to promote for oneself when engaging in *self-sacrifice*. It is what one tries to promote for another against her wishes when acting *paternalistically*. It is what is affected, for better or for worse, when one has *good or bad luck*. It is something that we seek to affect when we *reward* and *punish*. *Caring* or *having concern* for someone involves wanting what is good for that person. Having *ill-will* and *malice* toward others involves desiring what is bad for them. *Pity* is an emotion that is responsive to the perception that someone is doing poorly in some respect. *Envy* is a response to the perception that another is doing better than oneself.

It is generally assumed that, whatever well-being turns out to be, it will be something with great personal and moral significance.<sup>4</sup> It is something that is worth promoting for ourselves, for our loved ones, and even for strangers. Most moral and political theories take well-being into consideration in some form or other. Utilitarianism and other “welfarist” theories hold that well-being is the only thing that matters. Most other theories take well-being to be one very important value among others. Since well-being and harm are conceptually related, well-being plays a role in deontological views that place restrictions on harming others or imposing risk of harm to others.

These are the most common ways in which philosophers try to clarify the topic of well-being. These clarifications comprise what I will henceforth call *the standard picture of well-being*.

## Two ways forward

The standard picture is fuzzy in certain respects. Although it clarifies some aspects of well-being, other important aspects remain obscure. Consider two examples:

1. *Scope*. What sorts of beings have a well-being? It is not uncommon to hear talk of what is good or bad for plants, cultures, corporations, nations, the economy, and the environment. Are these entities capable of being benefited and harmed, or should we instead interpret welfarist language applied to some or all of these things as merely metaphorical?<sup>5</sup>
2. *Normativity*. What, if anything, is the normative upshot of well-being? If the occurrence of some event *e* would be very bad for me, what normative implications does this have? Do I thereby have a special “prudential” or “self-interested” reason, possessed by no one else, to desire that *e* not occur? Or do facts about well-being only generate reasons that apply more broadly?<sup>6</sup>

The standard clarifications about well-being do not shed much light on these and many other questions about well-being. Thus, from what has been said so far, there is still some mystery surrounding our topic. If our ultimate goal is to gain insight into the nature of well-being and to identify the best substantive theory of well-being, how should we proceed?

One approach is to move directly from the standard picture into the search for the best theory. Call this the *substantive theory strategy*. Most philosophers of well-being have opted for this strategy. Armed with our rough sense of what well-being is, they have presented arguments for and against hedonism, desire-fulfillment theory, perfectionism, objective-list theory, and various other theories of well-being. There is room for debate as to whether this is the most promising strategy. On the one hand, it might seem counterproductive to throw ourselves into the project of answering the question “What is the best theory of well-being?” at this stage. Lacking a clear understanding of what is being asked, there is the risk that our attempts to defend and articulate

theories of well-being will ultimately prove to be wasted effort. On the other hand, sometimes the best way to gain clarity on a question is to start trying to answer it.<sup>7</sup> Even if we are not crystal clear on what well-being is at the outset, it is likely that an ongoing investigation into different theories will eventually yield insights about our topic.

An alternative approach is to postpone the search for the best substantive theory until we arrive at a sharper picture of well-being and prudential value. We may call this the *analysis strategy*, since it has most often taken the form of defending some analysis of prudential value. There are different types of analysis. A traditional *conceptual analysis* will seek to provide conditions that are both necessary and sufficient for the application of our concept of prudential value. This might be a worthwhile approach if there is more to our concept of well-being than is revealed by the standard picture. However, if the philosophical concept of well-being is as fuzzy and indeterminate as it appears to be, a straightforward conceptual analysis may do little to illuminate the nature of well-being. A *revisionist conceptual analysis*, on the other hand, seeks to modify or replace our current concept of prudential value. Presumably, this revision will be motivated by the fact that the revised concept is more precise, sufficiently close to our original concept, and well (if not better) suited to play some or all of the roles associated with that concept. A *property analysis* seeks to provide insight into the property to which our concept refers. Like revisionist conceptual analyses, property analyses of well-being tend to move beyond the limits of our current concept of prudential value. However, they also move beyond the focus on our concept of well-being and make claims about well-being itself.

### **Four analyses of prudential value**

What would a plausible analysis of well-being look like? Various proposals have been made in recent years.<sup>8</sup> In this section, I discuss four analyses, with special attention to their implications for the scope and normativity of well-being.<sup>9</sup>

#### ***The rational care analysis***

The most widely discussed proposal in the well-being literature is Stephen Darwall's rational care analysis.<sup>10</sup> This analysis centers around the insight that caring for someone, whether ourselves or another, involves wanting that individual to fare well. Insofar as I care about you, I will tend to desire things that are good for you and hope that you are not subjected to harm. However, it would be a mistake to analyze well-being in terms of what people *actually* desire for themselves or others out of concern. Such desires are often misguided due to faulty reasoning or misinformation. Plus, there may be some unfortunate people or animals who are not loved or cared for by anyone, and we do not want to claim that nothing is good or bad for such individuals. Darwall's ingenious move is to introduce two normative concepts into the analysis of prudential value. What is good for you, he suggests, is what people have *reason* to want for you provided that you are *worthy* of care. More formally, we may state his proposal as follows:

#### **The rational care analysis**

$p$  is good for  $S$  = if  $S$  is worthy of care, then there is reason to desire  $p$  out of care for  $S$ .

$p$  is bad for  $S$  = if  $S$  is worthy of care, then there is reason to want not- $p$  out of care for  $S$ .<sup>11</sup>

This analysis has the ring of truth to it, and it seems to yield a sharper understanding of the scope and normativity of well-being. What sorts of beings have a well-being? Any type of being for

which we might desire things out of concern for them. On the face of it, this seems to allow that plants, animals, and people have a well-being. Perhaps the circle of inclusion can be drawn even wider than this, depending on what the attitude of care allows. What is the normative upshot of prudential value on this view? The rational care analysis yields a fairly clear and explicit answer. Facts about what is good for an individual provide reasons for desire that apply to anyone, on the condition that the individual in question is worthy of care. This means that the normativity of well-being is “subject-neutral” in the sense that it has the same normative implications for everyone.

### *The locative analysis*

G.E. Moore once claimed that the phrase “good for me” must be understood in terms of what is “good absolutely” (Moore 1993/1903: 150). Following Moore’s lead, some philosophers have thought that prudential value, or the closest intelligible thing to it, should be analyzed in terms of the presence of good and bad things in a life.<sup>12</sup>

#### **The locative analysis**

$p$  is good for  $S = p$  is good *simpliciter* and is located in  $S$ ’s life.

$p$  is bad for  $S = p$  is bad *simpliciter* and is located in  $S$ ’s life.

This analysis brings together two ideas. The first is the idea of goodness and badness *simpliciter*. Imagine a world that is much like ours except that it contains much more knowledge and beauty and far less misery and injustice. All else being equal, this imagined world seems better and more desirable than our world precisely because it contains more knowledge and beauty and less misery and injustice. To think that knowledge and beauty are things that make the world a better and more desirable place just is to think that they are good things. In contrast, misery or injustice are bad things insofar as they make the world worse and detract from its desirability.

The second idea is location within a life. Many of the things that we consider to be good or bad *simpliciter* are things that occur within people’s lives. Consider the four examples above. Misery and knowledge are always the misery and knowledge of this or that individual. Injustice is often perpetrated by one individual or group of individuals and befalls another. Beauty is something that can be exemplified, created, promoted, and appreciated by us. To assess an individual’s level of well-being on the locative interpretation, then, we must examine the extent to which her life contains or is appropriately related to good and bad things.

What does the locative analysis tell us about the scope and normativity of well-being? It implies, first, that the kinds of beings that have a well-being are those with lives that can contain good or bad things. Presumably, this rules out non-living entities on the grounds that they lack lives. Whether it allows that all living entities have a well-being is less clear. Does a beautiful orchid have high well-being in virtue of the fact that beauty—arguably, something of impersonal value—is located within its life? The answer to this question will depend on precisely how we interpret the idea of a life and of location within a life. Turning to the issue of normativity, facts about goodness and badness *simpliciter* are generally thought to have normative implications for everyone. If some event would make the world a better and more desirable place, then it makes sense for anyone to desire that this event take place. This means that, given a choice between increasing or decreasing anyone’s well-being, it is fitting for us to prefer the former option, all else being equal. That is because it is fitting to desire things that will make the world a better place.<sup>13</sup>

### The positional analysis

We as individuals inhabit different positions or circumstances in the world. Our positions are distinguished in countless ways—our physical appearance, health, mental capacities, wealth, opportunities, experiences, relationships to other people and things in the world. Taking such differences into account, it is evident that some positions are more desirable to occupy than others. All else being equal, it seems far more desirable to be in the position of one who is happy, healthy, and safe from danger than one who is miserable, malnourished, and afraid for her safety. These are things that impact the degree to which a position is desirable to occupy. In contrast to the locative analysis, which assesses lives by their relation to the desirability of the world, the positional analysis concerns the desirability of occupying positions in the world.<sup>14</sup>

#### The positional analysis

$p$  is good for  $S = p$  contributes to the desirability of being in  $S$ 's position.

$p$  is bad for  $S = p$  detracts from the desirability of being in  $S$ 's position.

The first thing to clarify about this analysis is the idea of a position. A position is associated with some set of properties or features, and to occupy or be in a position is to have those associated properties. We may understand *one's position at a time* to be associated with all of the individual's properties at that time. In contrast, *one's overall position* is defined by the complete set of properties had by that individual at any time. Interpreting the term "life" in a broad way, it may be said that occupying one's overall position just is to have that individual's life. So, the positional analysis also pertains to the desirability or undesirability of having one's life.

The next thing to clarify is the notion of desire. "Desire" should not be understood as referring to a bare motivational urge to pursue something, irrespective of whether one has any positive feeling toward the thing. (Philosophers often use the term in that broad way.) Instead, on the relevant notion of desire, it is essential to my desiring some state of affairs that I like or take some pleasure in the prospect of it. It must be something that *appeals* to me. There is a corresponding negative attitude that essentially involves an attitudinal element of disliking a thing and not merely a motivational tendency to avoid it.

On the positional analysis, the scope of well-being is restricted to beings whose positions and lives can be more or less desirable to occupy. This applies most naturally to beings with a conscious perspective on the world, and it seems to exclude non-living entities like economies and rivers. What is less clear is whether it makes sense to think of non-conscious living beings (e.g., flowers, individuals in a permanent vegetative state) as occupying a position in the world. This will depend on our interpretation of the idea of a position. As for normativity, to say that someone has a high level of well-being is to say that it is fitting or appropriate to desire to be in that person's position. On a common interpretation, this claim is subject-neutral: if a certain position is desirable to occupy, it makes sense for *any of us* to desire to occupy it. Thus, on the positional analysis, the concept of well-being has normative implications for what we as individuals have reason to desire for ourselves. Whether we should value or promote the well-being of others is an open normative question.

### The suitability analysis

We talk quite comfortably about things being good or bad for a wide range of entities, both living and non-living. Getting water and sunlight is good for most plants. Failing to change the oil in an automobile is bad for the engine. The rampant burning of fossil fuels is harmful

to the environment. What is evident from these examples is that whether some  $x$  is good or bad for some  $y$  depends crucially, not only on the nature of  $x$ , but also on the nature of  $y$  and on whether there exists a certain *fit* or *match* between the two.  $x$  must be *well suited* to  $y$ . Drawing on this line of thought, Richard Kraut has proposed the following analysis of prudential value:<sup>15</sup>

### The suitability analysis

$p$  is good for  $S = p$  is suitable for  $S$  in that it serves  $S$  well.

$p$  is bad for  $S = p$  is unsuitable for  $S$  in that it serves  $S$  poorly.

The suitability analysis provides a striking contrast with the previous three analyses in terms of its implications about the scope and normativity of well-being. What sorts of things fall within the scope of well-being? Anything for which it is true that there is something else that is well suited to it and serves it well. According to Kraut, this includes plants (growing is good for plants), artifacts (dry air is bad for pianos), activities (watches are good for telling time), and individuals *qua* professionals (thinking fast is good for corporate lawyers) (Kraut 2007: 3, 9, 87). So, on this view, the scope of well-being is quite broad.

Does this broad scope imply that we have reason to promote or protect the interests of artifacts, activities, and professional roles? It seems not. While there is clearly an evaluative element in the suitability analysis (pertaining to the quality of fit between two things and to one thing's being served well by the other), it does not appear to have normative implications for action or attitudes in the way that the rational care, locative, and positional analyses do. As Kraut puts it, "When we say that something is good for someone, that statement leaves entirely open the question . . . whether anyone has reason to do or want anything" (Kraut 2007: 75; see also pp. 63–64, 81). Thus, on a natural interpretation of the suitability analysis, assertions about what is good or bad for an individual thing or person (even oneself) do not entail anything about what we have reason to do or feel. Whether we have any such reasons is a matter for normative debate.

This brief survey of four analyses of prudential value leaves a great many questions unanswered. What kind of analysis is being offered? Is the analysis non-circular and informative? Does it allow us to draw important distinctions (e.g., between intrinsic and instrumental prudential value, between "momentary well-being" and "lifetime well-being")? How well does the analysis fit with the various elements of standard picture of well-being? Does it rule out any seemingly intelligible substantive theories of well-being? Addressing such issues is crucial for assessing the plausibility of an analysis of prudential value.

### Concepts of well-being?

There is an assumption that seems to underlie both the substantive theory strategy and the analytic strategy—namely, that a single, coherent topic lies at the heart of philosophical discussions of well-being. 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. But is there more than one topic in play in the well-being literature? Should we recognize multiple concepts of well-being? Let us consider two possibilities that would undermine the assumption of a single topic of well-being.



### Talking past

A first possibility is that, in some cases, philosophers of well-being have been “talking past” one another—that is, talking about different topics while wrongly believing that they are talking about the same topic. It is not difficult to see how such miscommunication could occur. As noted earlier, the dominant approach in the well-being literature has been the substantive theory strategy. Philosophers of well-being usually gesture toward the standard picture—or, more commonly, a limited portion of that picture—and then move directly into discussion of substantive theories of well-being. This practice leaves us in the dark about what precisely (or imprecisely, as the case may be) different well-being theorists take well-being to be. Do they have the full standard picture in mind or only some parts of it? Are they giving more emphasis or weight to certain elements? Do they have some particular analysis in mind?

To the extent that philosophers of well-being have different concepts in mind, their disagreements might be merely apparent. To illustrate this, imagine two philosophers, A and B, who are debating about the best theory of “well-being.” A favors hedonism. B is a die-hard objective list theorist. Yet, A is drawn to the positional analysis and assumes that B is as well; B is drawn to the locative analysis and assumes that A is as well. These philosophers need not have any real disagreement between them. A favors hedonism as a theory of (let us call it) *positional well-being*, whereas B favors an objective list theory of *locative well-being*. These two views might both be true. It might be true that pleasure and pain are the only things that make a position more or less desirable to occupy *and* that there is a plurality of things that have impersonal value and can be located in a person’s life. With better communication, A and B both might come to endorse the other’s favored theory without abandoning their own. This is not to deny that these philosophers might still have a genuine disagreement about what constitutes the best way of sharpening the standard picture of well-being or about which concepts are worth talking about. But, at the level of substantive theories, there does not seem to be any genuine disagreement.

The popularity of the substantive theory strategy has created an environment in which it is often unclear what a given well-being theorist means when talking of “well-being.” It would not be at all surprising if there has been some talking past. This represents one way in which there might be multiple topics under discussion in the well-being literature.

### Conflation

Even where philosophers of well-being are not talking past each other, they might be conflating two or more distinct topics. This is a possibility explored by Shelly Kagan in his essay “Me and My Life” (1994).<sup>16</sup> On the standard picture of well-being, “how well you are doing” and “how well your life is going for you” are two ways of getting at the same idea. According to Kagan, this runs together two distinct concepts: how well a person is doing (which he calls “well-being”) and how well one’s life is going (“the goodness of one’s life”). Imagine a businessman who dies in a happy state, ignorant of the fact that his wife was unfaithful to him, his children didn’t respect him, and his business will soon go bankrupt (Kagan 1994: 311). Kagan sees this as a case where well-being and the goodness of one’s life come apart. Arguably, the *life* of the radically deceived businessman did not go well for him, but *he* was doing perfectly fine during his life since the various things about which he was deceived had no negative impact on his mental or physical state. If Kagan’s hypothesis is on the right track, philosophers have been mistakenly treating two separate topics as if they were one, and we will want to distinguish two concepts of well-being. Of course, even if Kagan’s particular conflation hypothesis is not on the right track, there may be other confluents at work in the well-being literature.

Let me now propose the outlines of a new conflation hypothesis, which draws upon different elements of the standard picture. Recall, first, that well-being is standardly thought to be the thing we are tracking when we judge a person pitiable, enviable, lucky, or unlucky.<sup>17</sup> Two features of these judgments are worth highlighting. First, there is a very broad range of things that can lead us to make judgments about pitiability, enviability, and luckiness. I might believe that my neighbor is enviable and lucky because she is the great-great-granddaughter of Tolstoy. If I later find out that she just made that up to impress people, I would probably think her pitiable on the grounds that she feels compelled to lie to win people's favor. The fact that these judgments are intelligible suggests that it is also intelligible to think that such properties—being descended from Tolstoy, being disposed to tell lies to impress others—can impact one's well-being. The second feature to highlight is that judgments of pitiability, enviability, and luckiness need not depend upon the subject's own attitudes toward these things. I can intelligibly think someone who is descended from one of the world's great novelists is enviable and lucky in that regard even if she herself is completely unmoved by this fact about her genealogy. I can believe that my neighbor is pitiable for lying to others even if she has no reservations or regrets about it, and even takes great pride in her skills of deception. This suggests that the concept of well-being must be quite broad and must allow 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.

Similar lessons can be drawn from well-being's putative relation to the attitude of care or concern. Well-being, it is said, is something that we desire for a person insofar as we care for that individual.<sup>18</sup> There is a wide range of things that people can be led to want out of concern for a person, and these things need not meet with his or her approval or positive feelings. Indeed, it seems that anything that might render someone pitiable is something that we will not want for that person out of concern. Likewise, caring for someone involves wanting that person to enjoy good luck and not suffer bad luck. So, some aspects of the standard picture of well-being—in particular, well-being's putative relation to pitiability, enviability, luck, and care—call for a concept of well-being that is characterized by a certain breadth and attitude-independence.

Yet, other components of the standard picture seem to imply that well-being is intimately connected to subjects' attitudes. Take self-sacrifice. Well-being is standardly thought to be the thing that is knowingly sacrificed when a person engages in self-sacrifice.<sup>19</sup> Ordinarily, we think that a self-sacrifice must be *felt* or *experienced* as a sacrifice by the one making it. A "sacrifice" that one does not mind making is no sacrifice at all. To illustrate this point, imagine a student who is deliberating about whether to pursue a career in art or in medicine. She believes that, on balance, life as an artist would be best for her—because she would enjoy the work, and it would result in many valuable achievements. Yet, she feels alienated by the idea of making such artistic achievements; that aspect of the artistic life does not really resonate with her, though she does think it would help to make her life go better for her. Conversely, she is quite excited about pursuing a career as a doctor, primarily because she is eager to improve people's lives in a robust way, but also because she thinks it would be the life with greatest overall life-satisfaction for her. Even if she judges that the life in medicine would not be the prudentially best or most enviable life of the two options before her, it is nonetheless the one that she desires the most and that resonates with her most strongly. If she opts for the medical career, we would not normally say that she has engaged in self-sacrifice. This suggests that the notion of well-being that figures in our ordinary concept of self-sacrifice must bear some intimate connection with the attitudes of the person making the sacrifice.

Next, consider reward and punishment. The standard picture suggests that well-being is what we seek to influence in rewarding and punishing.<sup>20</sup> In many contexts, the point of rewarding and punishing is, at least in part, to repay someone for past deeds or to influence future behavior.

Either way, reward and punishment can lose their point if they are not appropriately connected to the affective and motivational states of those who receive it. Similarly, our practices of giving gifts and doing favors are quite often driven by the desire to please. We typically want our gifts and favors to be such that, on balance, they meet with the approval of the recipients, just as we want acts of retaliation and revenge to meet with the recipients' disapproval. A concept of well-being that does not bear any essential connection to the attitudes of the person will be ill suited to characterize the sort of "benefits" and "costs" that we seek to bestow on others when we reward, give gifts, do favors, punish, and take revenge.

Still other aspects of the standard picture suggest a more restrictive concept of well-being—in particular, one that screens off the possibility that acting morally, in and of itself, is good for us. The egoist is standardly defined as one whose sole ultimate aim is the promotion of his or her own well-being.<sup>21</sup> Yet, many philosophers have seen the egoist as a natural critic of morality and someone who must be convinced that being moral can, by some indirect route, serve his or her own best interests. They do not seriously entertain the possibility that the egoist might view being moral as an important component of the good life. What may underlie this tendency is an assumption that well-being is *morality-excluding* in the following sense: it is either impossible or deeply implausible that being moral is intrinsically good for us.

Another element of the standard picture that seems to call for a narrow concept is the idea that well-being has an important role to play in moral theory. If well-being is not morality-excluding, it threatens to introduce a regress into moral theories. For suppose that morality requires us to promote the well-being of other people, and suppose that being moral is a component of well-being. The result would be that morality requires, among other things, that we strive to promote moral traits and action in others, which will partly involve those individuals striving to promote moral traits and action in others, which will partly involve those individuals striving to promote moral traits and action in others, which will partly involve . . . There seems to be a kind of emptiness to this dimension of our moral obligations. To avoid this result, we need a narrower concept of well-being that is morality-excluding.

All of this appears to indicate that the standard picture of well-being is a conflation of two or more concepts. A single concept could not possibly satisfy all of these demands. It cannot be the concept of something that is both independent from *and* dependent upon the attitudes of the subject. It cannot both include *and* exclude being moral as a possible component of well-being. This brings to light a second way in which, contrary to initial appearances, there may be multiple topics at work in the well-being literature.

## Conclusion

Perhaps it is time for us to rethink our approach to the topic of well-being. For the past three decades, the philosophical literature on well-being has been dominated by the substantive theory strategy. Most philosophers working in this area have invoked the standard picture of well-being and then moved directly into the debate over the best theory. Some have pursued the analytic strategy, attempting to arrive at a sharper picture of well-being. Yet, both of these approaches are typically pursued with the assumption that we are dealing with a unified subject matter. The considerations discussed in the previous section cast doubt on that very assumption. They give us reason to suspect that there is more than one topic in play in the philosophical literature on well-being. If there has been talking past, the obvious remedy is better communication. Philosophers of well-being need to be more explicit about precisely what they take well-being to be. If there has been some conflation, this raises several challenging questions. What led philosophers to this conflation? What exactly are the conflated topics? What light

might this conflation shed on disagreements between well-being theorists over the past several years? And, most pressingly, which concept or concepts *should* be our focus as we move forward? Needless to say, these are issues that must be addressed before we can hope to make serious progress in the philosophy of well-being.<sup>22</sup>

## Notes

- 1 An influential discussion of the subject-relativity of well-being appears in Sumner (1996: 20–44).
- 2 Sumner (1996: 20–25); Scanlon (1998: 111–113); Feldman (2004: 8–9); Campbell (2013: 335–336).
- 3 For a similar catalogue of relations, see Sumner (1996: 10–20); Darwall (2002: Chapters 1–2); Feldman (2010: 160–170); Heathwood (2010: 646); Heathwood (2014: 199–201); and Campbell (2013: 336–339).
- 4 Sumner (1996: 1–4); Scanlon (1998: Chapter 3); Tiberius and Plakias (2010: 402).
- 5 On the issue of welfare’s scope, see Sumner (1996: 14–16); Kraut (2007); and Rosati (2009a).
- 6 As commonly understood, a normative reason for some attitude or action is “a consideration that counts in favor of it” Scanlon (1998: 17). For an influential discussion of well-being’s normativity, see Darwall (2002: Chapter 1).
- 7 I owe this point to Dale Dorsey and Gwen Bradford.
- 8 See, for instance, Darwall (2002: Chapters 1–3); Rosati (2006); Kraut (2007: 81–88); Zimmerman (2009); Tenenbaum (2010); Skorupski (2010: 267–269); Fletcher (2012a); and Campbell (2013).
- 9 For present purposes, I will remain neutral on whether each analysis is best interpreted as a traditional conceptual analysis, revisionist conceptual analysis, or property analysis.
- 10 This analysis is defended in Darwall (2002: Chapters 1–3). For critical responses, see the symposia in *Philosophical Studies* 130 (2006) and *Utilitas* 18 (2006); Skorupski (2010: 284–85) and Fletcher (2012b: 86–90).
- 11 This formulation is adapted from Darwall (2006: 642), where he clarifies his analysis in response to Fred Feldman (2006).
- 12 See, e.g., Regan (2004); Brewer (2009: Chapter 6); Fletcher (2012a); McDaniel (2014); and Hurka (forthcoming: Chapter 1).
- 13 One objection to the locative analysis is that it fails to capture the special relationship that people seem to have to their own well-being. Ordinarily, we think that people have more reason to care about their own well-being than that of strangers. Yet, as Sergio Tenenbaum observes, “there is no reason why, on this view, it should matter more to the agent that a good occurs in his life than that it occurs in the southwest corner of San Antonio” (Tenenbaum 2010: 215). For a more complex locative analysis that handles this worry, see Fletcher (2012a).
- 14 For a more detailed introduction and defense of this analysis, see Campbell (2013).
- 15 See Kraut (2007: 85–87, 94–96). My formulation of the suitability analysis is drawn from Rosati (2009a: 212), who critiques Kraut’s analysis and challenges the idea of a single good for relation.
- 16 He reports a modification in his view in Kagan (2009: 257).
- 17 Philosophers routinely defend substantive claims about well-being by appealing to claims about envy and pity. See, e.g., Sumner (1996: 12); Adams (1999: 84, 97); Darwall (2002: 3); Heathwood (2010: 646); and Tenenbaum (2010: 206–7, 222). Brad Hooker (1996: 149–155) and Daniel Haybron (2008: 32) both introduce tests that depend on the well-being/pity relation. On the relation between luck and well-being, see Rescher (1990: 7) and Lippert-Rasmussen (2014).
- 18 See, for instance, Adams (1999: 91–93, 97–98, 101); Darwall (2002); Feldman (2004: 9–10); Toner (2006: 225–226); Kraut (2007: 51–52, 125, 192); and Haybron (2008: 159–160).
- 19 Overvold (1980); Darwall (2002: 53); Rosati (2009b).
- 20 See Crisp (2006: 639); Heathwood (2010: 646, 653); Heathwood (2014: 201); and Bradley (2014: 229). The association between well-being and reward is also evident in such questions as “Is virtue its own reward?”—the title of a 1998 essay by L.W. Sumner on the relationship between virtue and well-being.
- 21 See, e.g., Shaver (2010).
- 22 Many thanks to those who provided feedback on this chapter—including Anne Baril, Anne Barnhill, Gwen Bradford, Brad Cokelet, Dale Dorsey, Billy Dunaway, Guy Fletcher, Chris Heathwood, Richard Kim, William Lauinger, Eden Lin, Sven Nyholm, Jason Raibley, Connie Rosati, Alex Sarch, Wayne Sumner, and David Wasserman. I also benefited from conversations with the participants at the 2014 Kansas Well-Being Workshop.

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