

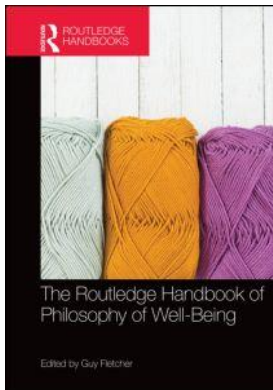
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The Routledge Handbook Of Philosophy Of Well-Being

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Introduction

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INTRODUCTION

Well-being has a long-distinguished history as a locus of philosophical exploration. This should come as no surprise. Much practical philosophy is focused on the questions of how we ought to live in general, what we ought to do, or what morality requires of us. But the answer to these questions must be sensitive to the question of how it would be best for us to live. That is, what I ought to do is surely in at least some way affected by what would make my life go better or worse *for me*. To make this less abstract, think about the following cases.

First, suppose a charity collector stops me in the street and asks me to donate £2. If I am affluent then it is plausible that the effect on my well-being of donating £2 is negligible. It is close to nothing, possibly nothing. If that is so then it is plausible that I ought to donate the money. If, by contrast, I am destitute, hungry and homeless then it does not seem plausible that I ought to donate the money. This is plausibly because the cost *to me* of donating is too high. The ‘currency’ in which we determine these different possible costs to me, the ones we use in thinking about whether I ought to donate, is *well-being*. We are thinking about the effect on how my life goes *for me*.

Ordinary reflection on what makes a life go well reveals that a large number of things positively affect our lives, things such as pleasurable experiences, friendship, meaningful work, feeling good about ourselves, achievements and purpose, leisure and intelligence. It also reveals that a large number of things negatively affect our lives, things such as stress, worry, injury, disease, insufficient money, misery, lack of freedom, lack of self-worth. What is distinctive about the *philosophy* of well-being is its focus on the question of which things *in and of themselves* make someone’s life go better or worse *for them*. It thus seeks an account of what is *fundamentally*, or non-instrumentally, good or bad for us and why.

Philosophers working on well-being give very different answers to this question. Some identify particular goods and bads, seeking to justify the view that (only) these things fundamentally affect well-being. The most famous example of this is hedonism, the view that only pleasure and pain fundamentally affect well-being. Other philosophers look for a kind of grand explanatory story, such as a story of human nature, out of which they hope to extract a theory of what fundamentally determines our well-being. One theory of this type is Aristotelian perfectionism, which is the view that human nature determines the nature of human well-being.

The philosophy of well-being is, as this makes clear, extremely important in its own right. All of our important life decisions are connected with effects on well-being, and the philosophy

of well-being is therefore a major part of philosophical investigation into how to live. It is also important because our conceptions of well-being clearly underpin investigation in so many other fields. Psychology, economics, medicine and law, to name just a few, are all plausibly ultimately concerned with how to protect or promote well-being. The philosophy of well-being is thus vital to these disciplines. But this is only a part of well-being's significance beyond philosophy. A useful question to ask of *any* institution, organisation or area of study is whether it ultimately helps us to live better, or to know how to live better.

The 41 chapters within this handbook are testament to the philosophical significance of well-being. They demonstrate the array of historical traditions which have thought philosophically about the topic, the multitude of theories of well-being, the diverse range of theoretical issues connected to well-being, and the various ways in which well-being is connected to research beyond moral philosophy.

The collection is divided into six parts thus:

1. Well-being in the history of moral philosophy
2. Theories of well-being
3. Particular goods and bads
4. Theoretical issues
5. Well-being in moral and political philosophy
6. Well-being and other disciplines.

Part 1: Well-being in the history of moral philosophy

Part 1 covers historical traditions and opens with Eric Brown's paper on well-being in the Socratic dialogues. Brown summarises thinking about well-being in the local context of the dialogues before showing Socrates' commitment to a view of well-being in which, whilst other things may be non-instrumentally good for us, only wisdom (or, more strictly, wise activity) is unconditionally good for us. Brown also shows why the apparent textual evidence that Socrates had a hedonic conception of well-being is misleading.

Richard Kraut gives an outline of Aristotle's theory of eudaimonia, focusing, first, on the extent to which Aristotle is thinking about *well-being* and, second, on the most plausible interpretation of Aristotle's theory of eudaimonia, one in which well-being is attained through the flourishing of our endowment of inherent powers.

Tim O'Keefe's chapter on hedonistic theories in antiquity considers those ancient theorists who eschewed eudaimonistic or perfectionist theories of well-being in favour of theories that took pleasure to be the sole contributor to well-being. He focuses in particular on the Epicureans and the Cyrenaics and their accounts of well-being and theories of the nature of pleasure before drawing parallels with the Pyrrhonian skeptics.

Next are four chapters considering the place of well-being within certain religious traditions. Richard Kim introduces thought about well-being within Confucianism, focusing on Mencius and Xunzi and their common proposal that the best human life is that which reaches sagehood.

Justin Tiwald looks at well-being in the Daoist tradition, examining the views of human welfare that can be found or extracted from the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*. There is much to learn from this chapter about well-being in the Daoist tradition. Two significant points are that the *Daodejing* supplies objections to a desire-fulfillment conception of well-being, and suggests a certain degree of sympathy with the objective list theory, whilst the *Zhuangzi* offers a radical way of thinking about well-being and its pursuit, one that has some affinities with perfectionism but which does not cohere fully even with this theory.

Christopher W. Gowans examines Buddhist thinking and how it pertains to well-being. He makes clear some of the difficulties in doing so—the Buddhist ‘no-self’ teaching and the difficulty of seeing how unrecognisable as a human life the state of nirvana is described as being. One major strand to the chapter is the extent to which Buddhist thinking about well-being fits within a perfectionist, nature fulfillment, view.

William Lauinger tackles the Christian tradition, covering Augustine, Aquinas and Calvin as well as more contemporary Christian philosophy of well-being such as that of Finnis. He shows that there is no consensus among contemporary Christian philosophers about the nature of well-being.

This historical section closes with a chapter from Robert Shaver in which he covers thought about well-being in the era of Sidgwick, Moore, Prichard, Ross, Carritt, Broad and Ewing, a group of philosophers not commonly taken to have much to say about well-being. Shaver shows that these philosophers, and Sidgwick especially, had much to say of relevance to contemporary work on well-being.

Part 2: Theories of well-being

Part 2 examines particular theories, or kinds of theories, of well-being. Alex Gregory outlines the hedonistic theory of well-being, arguing that Nozick’s experience machine is the most pressing issue for the view. Gwen Bradford provides an overview of perfectionist theories of well-being, one which emphasises the diversity within perfectionist theories.

Next up is the desire-fulfillment theory of well-being. Chris Heathwood brings out the wide range of objections that theory faces but also the wide range of replies it can make. Guy Fletcher provides an outline and defence of the objective list theory. He argues that the challenges to objective list theories often highlight epistemic or explanation problems faced by all theories of well-being (though not perhaps to equal extents) or the need for further refinement of the views of the sort which can also be demanded of other theories of well-being.

Christopher Woodard examines hybrid theories. He makes clear the enormous diversity of hybrid theories and how much work there is left to do. He argues that we must consider specific hybrid theories in detail because hybrid theories neither uniformly solve certain problems nor uniformly suffer standard defects.

The final two chapters of this part highlight an important choice point in theories of well-being, namely to what extent a person’s well-being depends upon that person’s individual nature. Alicia Hall and Valerie Tiberius encourage us to think about the ways in which theories of well-being can be subject-dependent, where such theories hold that well-being must ‘fit the quirks and contours of our own lives’ where this might be a matter of fitting our attitudes, our values, our physical and emotional natures, or our aptitudes and capacities. By contrast, Lorraine Besser-Jones’ paper on eudaimonism distinguishes philosophical and psychological conceptions of eudaimonia but argues that each conception abstracts from the individual to the species because ‘the kind of flourishing embraced by both philosophical and psychological conceptions of eudaimonism is one based on how human beings *tend* to behave and what kinds of things *tend* to enable them to function well’.

Part 3: Particular goods and bads

Part 3 examines particular things that are thought to contribute positively to well-being (and, in the case of pain, negatively) with an eye to seeing how the correct theory of the nature of these things can help us to understand their contribution (or non-contribution) to well-being. In the background here are the questions of how plausible it is that these things contribute to

well-being and, if so, how (instrumentally or non-instrumentally), and why. First up are pleasure and pain. Ben Bramble examines pleasure, arguing for a felt-quality theory of pleasure, and then suggesting that it is not only the degree of pleasurable-ness of a given pleasure that determines its contribution to a person's well-being.

Guy Kahane's chapter looks at pain, tackling the question of which type of theory is the best account of the nature of pain and of why it is bad. He also examines views which claim that pain is not always bad, as well as some evolutionary-based reasons to be sceptical of the badness of pain.

S. Andrew Schroeder looks at the vexed relationship between health and well-being. His conclusion is that the connection between health and well-being is a mere contingent one and that reductions in health probably reduce well-being less than is commonly thought.

Diane Jeske defends a similar view with respect to friendship. She argues that the claims about friendship and well-being, such as that friendship is *essential* to a good life, exaggerate its importance, partly by relying upon an overly idealistic conception of the nature of friendship. Jeske argues that with a more plausible conception of friendship in hand we see that the connections between friendship and well-being are numerous, but contingent and causal. We are not *necessarily* better off for having friends, even if we very often are.

Virtue is the topic of the next two chapters. Anne Baril highlights the difficulty of determining whether virtue contributes to well-being. She outlines a number of different questions connected to this issue—the different ideas of virtue and the different ways in which something might contribute to well-being—before concluding, on an optimistic note, that we should not rule out the view that some degree of virtue is (not simply instrumentally) necessary for the highest degrees of well-being.

Allan Hazlett undertakes a similar task for epistemic virtues or epistemic goods in particular. His question is: what things are both epistemic and conducive to well-being (either the well-being of some salient individual or the well-being of individuals in general)? His answer is pessimistic for knowledge; he argues that we have failed to find a plausible (non-trivial) articulation of the idea that knowledge is necessary for well-being, but cautiously optimistic for other goods such as being known and being ignored.

Next up is achievement and meaningfulness, with chapters by Gwen Bradford and Simon Keller, and by Antti Kauppinen. Bradford and Keller examine achievement—both what it is and why it might contribute to well-being. They distinguish three paradigmatic features of achievement—*independent value*, *effort* and *purposiveness*—before discussing the reasons for thinking that achievement is necessarily or only contingently well-being promoting.

Kauppinen examines *meaningfulness*, a topic whose relation to well-being is unclear. His chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the different theories of meaningfulness in life along with a discussion of the ways in which meaningfulness and well-being may be distinct types of value.

The next chapter, by Marco Grix and Philip McKibbin, discusses needs. They argue for an understanding of what needs are, which takes them as being fundamentally connected, not to harm avoidance or survival, but rather to well-being. They then turn from this proposal to examine links between need theory and theories of well-being, arguing that each side has much to learn from the other.

Neera K. Badhwar's chapter is on happiness. She begins by noting the difficulties in tackling happiness and well-being, not least in the frequency with which 'happiness' and 'well-being' are used interchangeably. Having clarified this, she then surveys the major theories of happiness, including hedonistic theories of happiness and those theories that take happiness to be a form of emotional fulfillment or of affective and evaluative satisfaction given your own values. Having

provided helpful coverage of the strengths and weakness of each proposal she then turns to how plausibly happiness is incorporated with the main theories of well-being.

Turning once more to the negative side of well-being, this section ends with Ben Bradley's chapter on well-being and death. Bradley starts by carefully distinguishing all of the different claims that might be made in saying that death is bad for us. He addresses the view that death is bad for us by being some form of deprivation and then turns to issues where well-being, death and time connect, such as posthumous harm. Finally he considers what attitudes it is rational for us to have towards death.

Part 4: Theoretical issues

In Part 4 Eden Lin examines and clarifies the debate between monism and pluralism about well-being. He makes clear exactly how to conceive of the two sides of the debate and usefully presents the main arguments of each side, clarifying their strong and weak points.

Jason Raibley details the debate between atomists and holists about well-being (roughly put, the debate between those who treat lifetime well-being as being built from discrete units of momentary well-being, and those who deny this). Raibley applies this to recent debates about whether the 'shape' of a life has some effect on overall well-being.

Jennifer Hawkins examines the putative 'experience requirement' on theories of well-being, an issue stemming from Nozick's experience machine example. Hawkins subjects the example to forensic scrutiny, detailing just what it assumes and the weak points it has, thereby demonstrating how many subtle issues are tangled together by it.

In their chapters, Anthony Skelton and Christopher M. Rice turn attention to subjects long neglected in the philosophical study of well-being: children and non-human animals. Rice considers theories of *animal* well-being, arguing that there are useful insights from animal well-being for thinking about human well-being and vice versa. Skelton points out the ways in which philosophical theories of human well-being have neglected well-being in *children*. He points out the ways in which theories of well-being generate bad results when applied to children and the failings in specific theories of children's well-being.

This part of the collection closes with two chapters, one by Anna Alexandrova and one by Stephen M. Campbell, questioning the assumption that there is one single topic which theorists of well-being are investigating. Alexandrova examines the plurality of constructs used in *scientific* investigation of well-being whilst Campbell finds a similar plurality among *philosophical* discussions of well-being, despite the assumption of commonality of subject matter. These chapters outline important challenges for philosophers of well-being.

Part 5: Well-being in moral and political philosophy

This section opens with Dale Dorsey on welfarism—the view that welfare or well-being is the only thing that makes a normative difference. Dorsey carefully spells out exactly what could fall within the scope of a 'welfarist' theory along with the difficulties in providing positive, non-circular arguments for the view. He also examines the wide range of objections standardly brought against welfarism.

Molly Gardner's chapter also examines the connection between well-being and practical normativity. In particular she focuses on well-being and the 'non-identity problem', namely the problems that arise from cases where an 'action that is the condition of an individual's worthwhile existence also imposes certain constraints on the individual's prospects for well-being'. As Gardner notes, such cases raise serious questions about the connection between practical reasons

and well-being. Gardner discusses two strategies for solving the non-identity problem through appeal to well-being, noting difficulties for each.

Sarah Conly examines the relationship between well-being and autonomy. She argues that realistic governmental interference is likely to do nothing significant to us as persons, in damaging or undermining our psychology, and that worries about governmental interference to promote our well-being are overblown. Whilst bad interventions are possible, there is no reason to think that a broad range of beneficial interventions are not possible.

Government intervention is a theme also in the chapter on well-being and disadvantage, by Jonathan Wolff and Doug Reeve. They examine the thought that, at least in some cases, governments should intervene to promote the well-being of the most disadvantaged. They look at the question of how to identify the least advantaged. They consider the ‘separate spheres’ approach, one which treats different aspects of people’s lives as providing distinct realms of possible advantage/disadvantage, before defending a development of the capability approach, one incorporating work from social psychology.

Jules Holroyd’s chapter is on well-being and feminism. As she points out, it is a commonplace that gender inequality damages women’s interests. One question this provokes is whether this should be understood in terms of reduced well-being. Should feminists put this claim in terms of well-being at all? If so, which theory of well-being best underpins the claim? Holroyd’s chapter also nicely brings out the many contributions to the theory of well-being that come from feminist thought, for example through the question of whether the correct theory of well-being could entail that well-being is something which could be attained despite gender inequality or, rather, whether well-being is ‘part of what gender justice would achieve for women’.

Part 6: Well-being and other disciplines

Alex Sarch investigates the way in which well-being and law are related, via the plausible thought that law, in general or particular laws, might have the aim of promoting or protecting well-being. After looking at the law and economics movement, which claims that law should (perhaps exclusively) promote well-being, Sarch examines the role of well-being in tort law, arguing that tort law for the most part protects well-being only indirectly.

Well-being and economics is the focus of Erik Angner’s chapter. Angner explores conceptions of well-being underlying contemporary welfare economics. He outlines three different approaches to welfare assessment and finds that each corresponds to a specific account of well-being: while standard economics is based on preference satisfaction accounts, the economics of happiness is based on mental-state accounts, and the social indicators/capability approach on objective-list accounts. The discussion underscores how economists both use and produce philosophy in their scientific practice.

Daniel Groll closes this volume by examining the multifaceted connections between medicine, well-being and autonomy. The first part of the chapter examines whether, and if so how, well-being plays a role in typical doctor–patient interactions and how the patient’s autonomy should be treated. Does the doctor have promoting the patient’s *well-being* as her goal? If so, does she have any special *expertise* on this, and is this expertise *qua* doctor? Can the doctor ever *impose* treatment upon the patient? The second part of the chapter looks at cases of doctor–patient interactions where the patient is in some way less able to exercise agency, such as through being disabled or unconscious. Groll makes clear the number of thorny issues that arise in medicine from such cases.

As these all-too-brief summaries make clear, these chapters cover a huge amount of ground both within the theory of well-being and in other areas of practical philosophy.