

PHENOMENAL WELL-BEING

A Thesis

by

STEPHEN MICHAEL CAMPBELL

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

May 2006

Major Subject: Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

Phenomenal Well-Being. (May 2006)

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Hedonism is not terribly popular as a theory of well-being. And there are good reasons to question whether hedonism even supplies the best account of happiness. Yet hedonism captures something important, and it will be the goal of this essay to articulate just what that is. I suggest that hedonism provides the best account of phenomenal well-being (PWB). PWB is a restricted form of well-being that relates to the quality of the *experience* of a life—or, in other words, the quality of one’s *phenomenal life*. If well-being is characterized as “how well one’s life goes,” then PWB is “how well one’s life goes *for her, from the inside*.” In rating a life’s PWB, the life is judged solely on the basis of the contents of the experience of that life rated against the experience of the individual’s other possible lives. Unlike well-being, PWB is guaranteed to track more robust experiential benefits that a person gets out of living a life.

In this work, I discuss the concept of well-being, including the feature of subject-relativity that is sometimes ascribed to it; then, after introducing the concept of a phenomenal life, I develop the concept of phenomenal well-being. I propose what I take to be the best available account of PWB, which involves the hedonistic concept of satisfaction. An epistemic model of life-comparison (inspired by Peter Railton’s full

information account of well-being) on which phenomenal lives are judged on the criterion of satisfaction is presented, followed by some objections, and replies, to PWB as satisfaction. Finally, some rival accounts of PWB are discussed and critiqued—notably, an account of cognitive life-satisfaction that resembles theories of “life-satisfaction” in happiness theory. The claim is that hedonism supplies the best answer to what makes the experience of our lives go best for us. In the closing chapter, I make some suggestions concerning the significance of this fact.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION:

WELL-BEING AND PHENOMENAL WELL-BEING

Hedonism is not terribly popular as a theory of well-being.¹ And there are good reasons to question whether hedonism even supplies the best account of happiness. Yet hedonism captures something important, and it will be the goal of this essay to articulate just what that is. I suggest that hedonism provides the best account of phenomenal well-being (PWB). PWB is a restricted form of well-being that relates to the quality of the *experience* of a life—or, in other words, the quality of one’s *phenomenal life*. If well-being is characterized as “how well one’s life goes,” then PWB is “how well one’s life goes *for her, from the inside*.” In rating a life’s PWB, the life is judged solely on the basis of the contents of the experience of that life rated against the experience of the individual’s other possible lives. Unlike well-being, PWB is guaranteed to track more robust experiential benefits that a person gets out of living a life.

Chapter I discusses the concept of well-being, including the feature of subject-relativity that is sometimes ascribed to it. After introducing the concept of a phenomenal

This thesis follows the style of *Ethics*.

¹ Hedonism as a theory of well-being associates the good and bad for a person with, respectively, pleasure and pain, where these are broadly construed so as to include the more “physical” pleasures and pains (e.g. orgasms, toothaches) as well as more “cognitive” ones (e.g. excitement about reading a thesis in philosophy, ruined hopes). In this essay, I will often use hedonism as an umbrella term for a cluster of views that uphold pleasure and pain as the relevant criteria for, or explanation of, a specified something. For instance, as a theory of motivation, hedonism says that pleasure and pain are what move us. Likewise, hedonistic theories of happiness, of the good, and of rationality give pleasure and pain the leading (if not exclusive) role to play.

life, I develop the concept of phenomenal well-being. Chapter II proposes what I take to be the best available account of PWB. I address the hedonistic concept of satisfaction, present an epistemic model of life-comparison (inspired by Peter Railton’s full information account of well-being) on which phenomenal lives are judged on the criterion of satisfaction, and introduce and answer some objections to PWB as satisfaction. In Chapter III, some rival accounts of PWB are discussed and critiqued—notably, an account of cognitive life-satisfaction that resembles theories of “life-satisfaction” in happiness theory. If my argument succeeds, then hedonism supplies the best answer to what makes the experience of our lives go best for us. In the closing chapter, I make some suggestions concerning the significance of this fact.

1.1 The Language of Well-Being

Just what is “well-being”? Most uninformatively, it is *the state of being well*. We can do a little better perhaps: one’s level of well-being is *how well her life is going for her*.² The term “well-being” is often used interchangeably with “one’s good,” “one’s interests,” “self-interest,” “utility,” “quality of life,” and “welfare” (faring well). To enhance or contribute to one’s well-being is sometimes described as “benefiting her” or “making her better off”; to diminish a person’s well-being is to “harm her,” “harm her interests,” or “make her worse off.”³ And the person with a high level of well-being lives “a good

² Occasionally the term “ill-being” is mentioned but is rarely utilized. In practice, “well-being” seems to be shorthand for “one’s level of well-being.” And though the miserable person is not faring *well* at all, it is not meaningless to talk of his well-being if we think of one’s level dropping into the negatives.

³ The terms and phrases presented here are not all perfectly synonymous; certainly some terms have different applications than others. And many philosophers have suggestions as to which terms we should

life.” Given this level of generality, we might suppose that, other things being equal, everyone wants to have a high level of well-being. Surely all of us who are living lives want to have good lives as opposed to poor ones, to be made better off rather than to be harmed or made worse off.

But this is all too vague. If we can say nothing more about well-being than this, the concept is too empty to interest us (at least for the purposes of conceptual analysis). And if there are further things to be said about what well-being involves, then perhaps we should be hesitant to agree to the conjectures made at the end of the last paragraph without having a clearer idea of what these further things are. Depending on what well-being involves, someone might *not* want to have a high level of well-being. It may be impossible to say without considering a more substantive proposal. And philosophers have certainly provided a number of interesting accounts of well-being. It has become customary to divide well-being theories into three classes: *hedonistic theories* associate the good life with pleasure or happiness, *desire-fulfillment theories* say that getting what you want or value makes you better off, and “*objective list*” theories specify a number of goods that contribute to the good life. I will not give a systematic discussion of this tripartite division here.⁴

use for various purposes. Yet, anyone interested in the topic of well-being as discussed in contemporary philosophical discourse is well-advised to keep their eyes open for all of this terminology. This listing is probably not exhaustive.

⁴ Since my concerns can be addressed by discussing the general concept of well-being, I will spare the reader yet another rehashing of the tripartite division and canonical objections raised against each theory type. For those readers unacquainted with the well-being debate, I would suggest Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), Appendix I; James Griffin, *Well-Being: Its Meaning, Measurement, and Importance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), Chapter 1; and Shelly Kagan, “The Limits of Well-Being,” *Social Philosophy & Policy* 9 (1992): 169-89.

Instead, there are a few points that we can glean from our usage of “well-being” and its associate terms. First, we typically talk of the well-being of individual humans or sentients (hence, “*one’s* good,” not “*the* good”). There are some exceptions; one occasionally hears talk of the interests, good, or well-being of a collectivity, such as a nation; we might even talk of what is in a plant’s interests.⁵ But exceptional cases aside, well-being speaks to the situation of individual sentients.⁶

Second, well-being exists on a scale. To my knowledge, every candidate theory of well-being is in agreement that there are different degrees or levels of well-being. Being well off is not merely an either/or matter; there is also the matter of *how* well or *how* poorly a person is faring. One person will often be better or worse off than the next. Further, most well-being theories seem to agree that a person’s well-being is variable. Certain events or conditions can make a person’s level of well-being rise or fall. On most accounts, a person’s level of well-being might fluctuate a great deal during her life.⁷ Much of the interest in well-being derives from its variability. Individuals typically wish to make wise choices in order to have the best life possible (as opposed to, say, a life that is worth living, but just barely so); they also seek to avoid things that will lower the quality of their lives. And a fundamental motive behind most ethical and political

⁵ Paul Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton, 1986); Gary Varner, *In Nature’s Interests? Interests, Animal Rights, and Environmental Ethics* (New York: Oxford, 1998).

⁶ From this point on, I will save words by addressing the well-being of people only; however, there is very good reason to suppose that many of the conclusions reached in this work will be applicable to other sentients.

⁷ Perhaps some would object to these two points. For instance, a religious person might hold that there are degrees of wickedness but that God’s “elect” (which exhausts the category of the well-off) are all on

theories is the desire to make people’s lives better. Still, these further features leave well-being as a very indeterminate normative concept. What makes a person’s life go best? A number of reasonable answers could, and have been, offered.

1.2 Subject-Relativity and Perspectives of Appraisal

A further feature of well-being is sometimes posited—what Sumner calls the “subject-relativity” of welfare.⁸ It is said that well-being is not simply how well a person’s life is going for her, but how well a person’s life is going *for her* (as opposed to “in itself or from some other standpoint”).⁹ By laying special emphasis on the last phrase, the implication seems to be that a given individual’s well-being must be intimately related to her—more specifically, that her endorsement or appreciation (in some form) of goods *qua* goods is a necessary condition for her to be well off or made better off.

I am unsure whether there is anything in the *general* concept of well-being or its usage that suggests this feature; and if it is found in usage, this might only reflect the majority’s commitment to substantive conceptions of well-being that include subject-relativity. At least in some cases, there seems nothing bizarre or confused in saying that a person is made better off by some event though he did not (and never will) want it to

par in the only significant sense. If so, these views are not represented in contemporary discussions of well-being, so I will set them aside.

⁸ L. W. Sumner, *Welfare, Happiness, & Ethics* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2003), p. 20. See also the “benefit condition” on any adequate theory of well-being that is discussed in Kagan, p. 185. I have only mentioned two works where this feature is proposed, but my impression is that many others endorse this idea.

⁹ Sumner, p. 20. “This subject-relativity is an essential feature of our ordinary concept of welfare. It does not merely rest on the truism that all welfare is someone’s welfare, the welfare of some particular individual.” Sumner, p. 42.

occur, or is not made happier by it, or is incapable of appreciating its value, or all of the above. Suppose that an addict is forced, for some reason, to abandon his addiction; it does not strike me as absurd to claim that he is made better off in the process (for reasons of, say, dignity or autonomy) even if he will never be in a position to appreciate it.¹⁰ My underlying worry is that insisting on the subject-relativity of well-being loads the deck in favor of subjective theories of well-being and against the more objective theories. But this worry can be set aside in this essay, which is concerned with a restricted form of well-being that will incorporate the feature of subject-relativity.

For those who do endorse subjective-relativity, this feature will only do so much to remedy the open-endedness of well-being. What makes a life good *for the individual who is living it*? The subject-relative phrase leaves plenty of room for interpretation. An example will help to draw out a few of these ways. Jackie is happy and thinks her life a great success (particularly on account of her fulfilling marriage), oblivious to the fact that her husband has kept up an affair with her sister for many years. When anyone asks Jackie about the quality of her life, she says that her life could not go any better. Call this her *internal appraisal*—that is, the appraisal of a life made by the person living that life. In contrast, an omniscient third person, knowing what Jackie does not, might judge her life to be most pitiable. Call this an *external appraisal* (i.e. an appraisal of a life made by someone other than the one living the life).

¹⁰ In line with Railton's full information account (which will be discussed in the next chapter), it might be claimed that the addict is already in the position to appreciate it since there is a counterfactual idealization on which his current actual self would appreciate this event. But since Railton's theory leaves room for idealized agents to diverge in their judgments, I see no cause to preclude the possibility that even full information and rationality would not change the addict's mind.

The subject-relativity of welfare would force us to disregard the external appraisal as such, but the situation is not so simple. Say that Jackie goes to the cinema and sees a movie about a woman who is happy and thinks her life a great success, oblivious to the fact that her husband has kept up an affair with her sister for many years. Talking with a friend afterward, Jackie judges that the woman in the film had a most pitiable life; call this a *self-indicting external appraisal* since the pitiable life is relevantly similar to Jackie's own life.¹¹ Jackie also casually makes a *conditional internal appraisal*, saying, "If my husband and sister did that to me, then my life would not be worth living at all." That same afternoon, Jackie comes home to find her husband and sister together and learns the awful truth. Jackie's internal appraisal of her life will now incorporate this newly acquired knowledge. (If Jackie never actually learns the awful truth, we can still talk about her *counterfactually informed internal appraisal* to achieve the same effect; this is how Jackie would have appraised her life, at any given moment, had she been given this information.)

This collection of appraisals raises the question of what makes Jackie's life go better for her. Interestingly, Jackie's newly informed internal appraisal may not match up with the self-indicting external appraisal that she made after the film. Jackie judged that the woman in the film had a most pitiable life. Perhaps when she finds herself in that position, with her own life as the object of evaluation, Jackie will judge that her life is

¹¹ Alternately, someone might want to claim that Jackie's "internal appraisal" was not really an appraisal of *her life*—rather, it was just an appraisal of a different life (one with a successful marriage) that she took to be her life. On this reading, what I am calling a self-indicting external appraisal is what we should call Jackie's internal appraisal: it appraises a life identical to her own in the relevant ways, and it is made by the person living that life.

not pitiable and pathetic. Granted, it was not as good as she had thought, but there are also other sorts of goods in her life that she had previously undervalued—friendships, pleasures, meaningful projects. Was her judgment about the woman in the film hasty, cold, and detached, or was it impartial? Is her newly informed judgment distorted by defense mechanisms, or does it reveal a greater sensitivity to the total situation? Which appraisal properly reflects how her life is going *for her*? Which appraisal is more authentic? These are difficult questions.

Nonetheless, it does seem that an informed or counterfactually informed internal appraisal is more authentic than an uninformed internal appraisal. After all, Jackie's positive internal appraisal was not really an appraisal of *her life* but a life that she falsely believed she was leading (which included a faithful husband and sister). But this does not mean that theories of the good that invoke an information requirement will always capture the way in which one's life is better for her. I have used the overly simplified appraisal model since it neatly illustrates the problem of perspective, yet most theories of well-being do not rate individuals' lives on the basis of cognitive appraisals. We might replace positive internal appraisal with one of the following: feeling pleasure, feeling happy, feeling good about one's life (as opposed to just judging it highly), experiencing the satisfaction of one's desires (of the local or global brand). On some of these, it will be less obvious that more informed is more authentic. Does the satisfaction of counterfactually informed desires make my life better for me? There is a case to be made for the claim that the satisfaction of my actual though uninformed desires is what makes a difference to the quality of my life. It is also extremely difficult to say which of the

competing options determines how well one's life is going for him. Is my life better for me if I get what I want? Or if I think my life is going well for me? Or if I am happy on the whole? All of these seem plausible in their own ways; subject-relativity seems to provide no guidance in settling upon the correct account of well-being.

I will not pursue these matters further. The point is only to suggest that well-being is still a rather open-ended concept even with the feature of subject-relativity.

1.3 Senses of “Me” and My “Life”¹²

1.3.1 Good Sleep

To get a handle on some distinctions that will inform this project, an analogy will help. Frank likes to have “good sleep,” which he thinks involves two conditions: (1) having good dreams, and (2) not having bugs crawl on him during the night.¹³ On those mornings when Frank wakes up with no bug in sight, he feels confident that the second condition was not violated. If he also recalls good dreams, then he will judge that his sleep was good. Beth has a disagreement with Frank's second condition, for she thinks that having bugs crawl on him during the night is completely irrelevant to the quality of his sleep. After all, if the bugs come out and crawl on Frank throughout the night and retreat to their hiding places before he awakens, it is as if the bugs had never been on

¹² This is an allusion to Shelly Kagan's “Me and My Life,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 94: 309-24, with which this section shares some common themes.

¹³ As a disclaimer for what follows: The case of Frank and Beth is being used merely as an illustrative analogy; I do not intend to present a serious philosophical discussion of the conditions of good sleep.

him at all. In most cases, we can presume that his sleep will be exactly the same, bugs or no bugs. In reply, Frank grants that he will sometimes make mistaken judgments about the quality of his sleep. Sometimes he will see bugs on the floor and wrongly think that they had been crawling on him; other times, he will not see evidence of the bugs that did in fact crawl on him. Yet Frank thinks that Beth is missing the point. *Of course* bugs crawling on him during his sleep will not bother him while asleep; it bothers him now. Part of what makes the situation so horrible is that he lies there completely unaware of the bugs and powerless to stop them. Frank wants to say that the event of bugs crawling on him makes for bad sleep even though he may be completely oblivious to its occurrence.

How do we analyze Beth's disagreement with Frank? I will consider three possibilities. The first: Frank and Beth might adhere to different theories of personhood. In that case, there would be ambiguity surrounding "person" and a question about just what constitutes *Frank*. Beth may claim that Frank is just a mind, so he is not affected by bugs crawling on his body (unless of course they have some causal impact on his mental states). Frank, on the other hand, may hold that a person "simply is a body and a mind."¹⁴ Having bugs crawling on his skin is certainly something that affects him insofar as it affects his body, if only in a subtle way; so this at least leaves open the possibility that the bugs matter. But for our purposes here, the ambiguity of "person" may be set aside; the other two possibilities are more pertinent.

¹⁴ Kagan, "Me and My Life," p. 315.

The second possibility is that the source of the dispute between Frank and Beth is an equivocation on “sleep,” which is subject to an internal and an external reading.¹⁵ If we think of sleep internally as an experiential state of the sleeper (i.e. what it is like for the sleeper from the inside), then of course the bugs will not be able to affect Frank’s sleep directly. They certainly might have an indirect effect. As a spider treks across Frank’s face, his dream may be adversely affected by this sensation. Or, who knows, perhaps it will make a positive contribution to his dream—maybe his dream lover starts playfully running her finger down his nose in an effort to tickle him. But in any case, there is no need for recourse to the bugs in order to determine the quality of Frank’s sleep. The first condition captures all that is relevant; the bugs add nothing. Perhaps Beth has this internal sense of sleep in mind, while Frank uses an external sense. On the external reading of “sleep,” Frank’s sleep may be affected in a number of ways though he will have no awareness of it at the time of its occurrence. There are a number of facts about Frank’s sleep that will not enter his awareness: his heart rate, the amount that he snores, whether or not he is next to someone else, whether or not he has bugs on his body, etc. If the dispute between Frank and Beth hinges on these different senses of “sleep,” then it would be mistaken to ask who is right. On the internal reading, Beth would seem to be right about the bugs’ irrelevance; on the external reading, Frank’s conditions seem at least *prima facie* plausible.

¹⁵ “Sleep” may be ambiguous in actual practice in something like the way I’m depicting, but it does not matter if it is not. As with “life,” someone could give an internal interpretation to “sleep” even if they are the first to do so.

Finally, a third possibility is that Frank and Beth are agreed on what constitutes a person and sleep, but Beth endorses a *phenomenal* or *experiential restriction* on the quality of sleep. In other words, things that are capable of affecting the quality of one's sleep are restricted to those things that fall within the experience of the sleeper. Beth would then believe that bugs crawling on Frank's body do affect his sleep in certain ways, but they cannot make his sleep worse for him.

I have sketched three possible explanations for why Beth is in disagreement with Frank over the nature of good sleep. If both parties share a commitment to deciding what good sleep involves, then it will benefit them to home in on just what the source of dispute is. If they are meaning different things by "person" or "sleep," then they can either agree on their terminology or move the debate to the linguistic front. Perhaps there are constraints of descriptive adequacy on words, such that some senses are not faithful to the folk concept; or perhaps they can agree that the most pragmatic rendering of the term should be favored. If their disagreement concerns whether there is a phenomenal restriction on the quality of sleep, then the disagreement seems familiar...

1.3.2 *Good Lives*

The hedonist's position on well-being is not unlike Beth's position on good sleep. Very roughly, the hedonist claims that the promotion of a person's well-being consists in maximizing her pleasurable mental states and minimizing her painful mental states.¹⁶

¹⁶ This quick and dirty portrait will suffice for the time; it captures a standard form of hedonism.

Recall Beth's insistence that the quality of one's sleep cannot be affected by anything falling outside of the sleeper's experience. Similarly, the hedonist insists that one's quality of life cannot be affected by anything falling outside of that individual's experience. Further, the three possibilities that were raised concerning Beth's disagreement with Frank seem applicable to the hedonist. What follows are three reasons that a hedonist might deny that events falling outside of phenomenal experience are relevant to one's quality of life:

- P1: The hedonist believes that a person is just a mind.
- P2: While the hedonist believes that a person is more than a mind, she takes a "life" to be a matter of experience alone.
- P3: While the hedonist believes that a person is more than a mind and that a life is more than experience, she endorses a phenomenal restriction on the quality of life.

If the hedonist fits within the first option, her war with the *non-experientialists* (those who think that events external to a person's experience can affect her well-being) will need to be waged in the philosophy of mind. Most well-being debates do not focus on the issue of personhood, so I will devote my attention to the other two possibilities.

Moving to the second possible ground of the hedonist's dispute with the non-experientialists, "life" is open to an internal and an external interpretation. On an external interpretation, a life extends further than the individual's experience of his life. Just as we can talk about the bugs that now crawl on sleeping Frank, we can also talk about aspects of people's lives of which the people living those lives are not aware and that fail to touch their experience. Consider again the case of Jackie. Certainly we can list facts about Jackie's life (e.g. that her husband is not faithful to her, that she falsely

believes that he is) of which she is not aware. The external view of a life at least leaves open the possibility that what you don't know *can* hurt you.

In contrast, there is an internal interpretation on which a life is bounded by the limits of one's experience. On this reading, the deceived Jackie's life is (we can suppose) a good one since her husband's infidelities and her sister's betrayal are simply not a part of her life. This internal interpretation seems to fit well with some of our "life" talk. A miserly person may feel no need to give to charities because the suffering of the poor *does not touch his life*; a person may *come into my life* even though I have passed the person on the street a hundred times without noticing her. This experientially bounded notion of life also seems to be captured in personal "world" talk as well: he is *in his own little world*; they are just *living in different worlds*; nothing's gonna change *my world*. Still, whether or not we can clearly discern these two senses of "life" in actual linguistic practice makes little difference. We are certainly able to make the distinction in philosophical practice.

In the case of Beth and Frank, it is very probable that an equivocation on "sleep" is the source of their dispute. Could the same be true of the dispute between the hedonists and the non-experientialists? Might hedonists be invoking the internal sense of "life" (as in P2)? Probably not. A hedonist might fit under any of these options, but my impression is that most hedonists fall under P3.¹⁷ This brand of hedonist does not deny

¹⁷ If hedonists rejected the external interpretation of "life," one would expect to find evidence of this in their discussions of the experience machine argument; I have not found this in many of the leading hedonists' work. E.g. Fred Feldman, *Pleasure and the Good Life* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), pp. 42-43, p. 109 f.; Roger Crisp, "Hedonism Reconsidered," unpublished manuscript, p. 25 f.; Torbjorn Tannsjo, *Hedonistic Utilitarianism*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), pp. 111-12.

that having bugs crawling on you during your sleep or being cheated on behind your back is a part of your life; it is just that this is a part of your life that makes no difference to your well-being (unless it indirectly affects your experience in a positive or negative way). The hedonist invokes a phenomenal restriction on well-being.¹⁸

The non-experientialist believes that our lives can be made better or worse by events that do not affect our experience (and, according to some theorists, this may include events that occur after death).¹⁹ The hedonist rejects this; that which does not effect any change in our experience can have no impact on the quality of our lives. Since the typical hedonist seems to be of the third sort, the conflict between the hedonist and the non-experientialist does not rest upon different senses of “me” or my “life” but on a substantive normative disagreement over what can make our lives better or worse. Nonetheless, the senses of “life” set the stage for the development of a restricted form of well-being.

1.4 Phenomenal Lives and Phenomenal Well-Being

1.4.1 The Concepts

In the previous section, two senses of “life” were introduced. On the external reading, a life includes all sorts of facts pertaining to the person’s situation, even those of which the

¹⁸ Of course, the hedonist’s position is even more restricted than this, for she will claim that only pleasurable and painful mental states count. As we shall see, a phenomenal restriction does not force hedonism.

¹⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2nd ed., translated by Terence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999), p. 15. Griffin, p. 23.

person living the life is unaware. On the internalist reading, a life is a life *as experienced*—that is, an individual’s life as it is *from the inside*.²⁰ I would now like to isolate this internal sense and give it a name: *a phenomenal life*. (In every case, “phenomenal” could be replaced by “experiential,” though I prefer the former.) To talk of a person’s phenomenal life is to talk about his life as it is experienced, from his standpoint, from birth to death. It must be stressed that the concept of a phenomenal life leaves open the question of what constitutes a “life.” In this paper, I will always assume the external interpretation when using “life” *simpliciter* since contemporary discussions of well-being seem to presuppose this interpretation. Yet what we mean, or ought to mean, by “a life” will not be a concern here.

Well-being is generally interpreted as being the quality of a life in the external sense. The creation of the concept of a phenomenal life brings with it a restricted type of well-being: *phenomenal well-being* (PWB), which relates to the quality of one’s phenomenal life. PWB is how well one’s life goes for the individual, from the inside. While to have a high level of well-being is to be well off, to have a high level of PWB is to be experientially well off—to live a good phenomenal life. The experience must be good *for the individual*. This move may seem disingenuous given my suggestion that subject-relativity may not be a feature of the general concept of well-being. However, I

²⁰ Interpretations of “experience” can vary. Perhaps you are looking at a picture on the wall. Next to the picture is a small black spider, which is in your field of vision, though you do not notice its presence. Is the spider a part of your experience? Answers will vary. Or perhaps you do casually notice a black dot but assume it to be a nail hole. Is a spider or a nail hole a part of your experience? I will take the more objective third-person approach in this paper since we will often have an interest in contrasting what seems to be the case with what is the case. Certainly you do not experience the spider *qua* spider. But

am trying to articulate a concept that matters to us, and the feature of subject-relativity captures an important aspect of our concern. Since PWB is not an idea already in circulation among philosophers or laymen, there is no question of remaining faithful to the concept.

What needs to be stressed here is that phenomenal well-being is distinct from well-being, just as the concept of a life is distinct from that of a phenomenal life. No proportional relation between the two is presupposed. A person might have a high level of PWB but a low level of well-being, or vice versa; one's level of well-being might remain constant while her level of PWB fluctuates; and so on. To stake a claim on what contributes to the quality of a phenomenal life in no way closes or nullifies the question of what constitutes the best life *simpliciter*. The dispute over well-being is left intact for anyone who cares to continue engaging in it.

At this point, there are some who will wish to protest: PWB is an awkward concept, and no one cares about it. I find this view doubly wrong. I will first address the charge of awkwardness. Well-being has to do with lives; PWB has to do with phenomenal lives. If it is not awkward to speak of a person's phenomenal life, then I see no reason to believe that it should be awkward to speak of PWB. In the following section, I will argue that our phenomenal lives are of greater practical import than our lives in the external sense. In the process, I will show that there is indeed a natural and

these issues of identification are of secondary importance: our primary concern is whether the spider (or "nail hole" if it be preferred) impacted the quality of your experience positively or negatively.

unproblematic distinction to be made between phenomenal lives versus lives in the external sense.

1.4.2 The Practical Import of Our Phenomenal Lives

It would be nice if I could have certainty that I am making some positive impact on the world, that my most cherished relationships are not inauthentic, that people will speak highly of me when I am dead, and that I am not hooked up to an experience machine right now.²¹ Unfortunately I cannot. That our lives are epistemically bounded is an inescapable feature of the human condition. While I certainly desire that my life is genuinely meaningful, authentic, and all the rest, the best that I can hope for on a more practical level is that my experience will yield enough evidence to convince me of these things.

Granted, our experience might be misleading. Kagan relates an example from Nagel of a businessman who is completely deceived about the quality of his life:

Imagine a man who dies contented, thinking he has achieved everything he wanted in life: his wife and family love him, he is a respected member of the community, and he has founded a successful business. Or so he thinks. In reality, however, he has been completely deceived: his wife cheated on him, his daughter and son were only nice to him so that they would be able to borrow the car, the other members of the community only pretended to respect him for the sake of the charitable contributions he sometimes made, and his business partner has been embezzling funds from the company which will soon go bankrupt.²²

²¹ The allusion is to Robert Nozick's experience machine, which is discussed in more detail at 2.3.3. Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), pp. 42-43.

²² Kagan, "Me and My Life," p. 311.

As this case illustrates, it is certainly possible that our experience does not communicate an accurate picture of our lives in the external sense. We could also concoct an example of a man who was convinced of the failure of his life on numerous levels though he was in fact a success on all of them. In short, bad lives might seem good, good lives might seem bad. These possibilities must be granted. Yet the fact remains, the individual person has every reason to favor the seemingly successful life over the seemingly unsuccessful one. Since she cannot step outside of her own experience, she will never be in a position to verify that a phenomenal life is authentic or not. The better bet will always be the phenomenal life that gives evidence of success.

Generally, people do seem to assume that their lives as experienced will correlate with the external reality of their lives. Those who are epistemologically savvy (and in some cases cynical) enough to recognize the possibility of deception are just the sort who would be alert to symptoms of inauthenticity and thereby less likely to be deceived; thus, even they have reason to assume a correlation between how a life seems and how it is. If their lives show any evidence of inauthenticity, they are likely to pick up on it.²³ On the other hand, a person who fails to make this assumption, worrying about inauthenticity though there are no experiential clues to suggest it, will be looked upon as unhealthy; the labels “paranoid,” “neurotic,” and “conspiracy theorist” come to mind. Of course, such people will find plenty of “clues” to confirm their worries, though they are not reasonably construed as such. Take an overly jealous husband who sees his wife

²³ For simplicity’s sake, I talk of types of people. Clearly though, a single person can be more suspicious in one area of her life and less so in other areas.

engaged in friendly conversation with their neighbor. He decides that she has secret feelings for him, though she is acting exactly as she would act with any other acquaintance, male or female, and the husband has no other reason to suspect that his wife would have feelings for this particular person (or any person other than himself). Interestingly, his wife may indeed have secret feelings for their neighbor, but this does not change the fact that his suspicion is unwarranted.²⁴

Deception paranoia is regarded as unhealthy for at least two reasons. The first is that people can easily conjure up all sorts of inauthenticity that may not be present. Overly jealous husbands (by which I mean those men who find “clues” to cause worry) will pick up on many more non-existent infidelities than they will existent ones. In a similar fashion, the obsessive worrier will see problems and threats where they do not exist, the cynical friend finds ulterior motives where there is only good will, and so on. The second reason that paranoia over deception is thought unhealthy has the marks of practical wisdom: since we ultimately cannot step outside of our phenomenal lives, why assume the worst? Being paranoid and the like will only make you miserable, so you should avoid it.²⁵

²⁴ It should be clear by now that I am rejecting the more subjective interpretation of “experience” on which the husband “saw evidence of his wife’s secret feelings.” What we experience is one thing; how we interpret that experience is another thing. See note 20.

²⁵ These claims are quite broad, so some qualifications are in order. “Paranoia” implies excessive worrying. In some areas of our lives (especially where the risk of negative consequences are high), the term is less applicable. For instance, a mother who is glancing up every five seconds from her novel to see that her toddler is not playing in the road would probably not be labeled “paranoid” even if “overly cautious.” Similarly, there are situations where a careful attentiveness to any signs of deception would not be written off as “paranoia.” Perhaps any thief in a gang of thieves has cause to keep a wary eye on signs of being double-crossed.

This is not to say that practical wisdom insists upon extreme optimism. A person will only be paranoid about *unwelcome* deception (where a life might be worse than the phenomenal life indicates). Alternatively, a person can be hopeful with respect to welcome deception (where a life might be better than the phenomenal life indicates). Thus, the artist who has never sold a painting may hope or even believe that he is the next Vincent van Gogh and will only be discovered after his death. Interestingly, obsession with either type of deception tends to get written off as a character flaw. A person obsessed with the possibility of unwelcome deception will be thought paranoid; the person obsessed with the possibility of welcome deception will likely be thought pathetic and self-deluding.²⁶ The mean between these extremes is the person who allows the evidence of her experience to shape his picture of her life—that is, the person who assumes that her phenomenal life yields a reasonable reflection of her life.

In all of this, it is evident that our phenomenal lives have incredible practical import. Of course we *care* about our lives in the external sense, but caring about them does not change the fact that they are inaccessible to us. If we want to gain more security from inauthenticity, typically our best available option is to seek out ways to expand the bounds of our experience. In this way, we actively see that our phenomenal lives yield stronger evidence that deception has not taken place. In some cases, we view such

²⁶ And of course, while this sort of wishful thinking brings many psychological benefits, it puts one out of touch with reality in ways that might come back to haunt her. The person who is deluded about her own success risks having a major blow to her ego; as the evidence to the contrary continues to pile up, there may come a point at which the illusion cannot be sustained. There are also more material disadvantages. Her delusions of grandeur might cause her to miss out on real opportunities to pursue success or other goods.

efforts as reasonable and healthy. Perhaps the philanthropist should go to some extra lengths to investigate his favorite charities, making sure that the money is being put to proper use. In other cases, such efforts are seen as obsessive and unhealthy (e.g. the jealous husband who begins spying on his wife, reading her diary, etc.). Yet, in no case does a person get beyond his phenomenal life. This is a conceptual impossibility. And as I have tried to show, there seems to be a general presumption in favor of the correlation between our phenomenal lives and our lives.

For all of these reasons, our phenomenal lives have more practical import than our lives in the external sense. And as should be evident by now, the concept of a phenomenal life is far from awkward. It arises from a natural distinction between the parts of our lives that are accessible to us and those that are not and so provides a suitable foundation for a restricted form of well-being. As much sense as it makes to ask what makes a person's life go best, it makes equal sense to ask what makes a person's phenomenal life go best for her.

1.4.3 PWB and a Special Type of Benefit

Perhaps, as I have suggested, the general concept of well-being does not include the feature of subject-relativity. In that case, it is conceivable that a person could be made better off in a way that she is unable to appreciate. If this constitutes a benefit, it is not one that does much for her—at least from her perspective.²⁷ The constraint of subject-

²⁷ I will only address benefits though the following discussion applies to harms as well.

relativity ensures that a benefit will be less alienating; a person will, in some sense, be benefited on her own terms. Yet even subject-relative benefits may not do much for the individual from her perspective. A benefit qualifying as subject-relative might bring no change to a person's phenomenal life though it might increase the quality of her life in the external sense. For example, Susan's deathbed wishes are fulfilled. This might be thought to make her life better and on her own terms (e.g. it was what she desired, she would approve of those fulfillments if she were in a position to learn of them, etc.). Yet her phenomenal life will be identical whether her deathbed wishes are fulfilled or not.

Sometimes we want to know "what's in it for me" and "what will I get out of it." This is often the case when we are faced with major life decisions: where to live, what career to pursue, whom to marry, where to vacation, how to spend our free time. We often want to ensure that we have good lives such that we "get something" out of living them. The sort of subject-relative benefits that in no way affect the quality of our phenomenal lives (or worse, lower that quality) are not satisfactory for such concerns; for convenience, I will simply call these *non-experiential benefits*. Rather, to the extent that we are wanting to get something out of life, we care about *experiential, subject-relative benefits*. Enter phenomenal well-being. PWB tracks the degree to which our phenomenal lives are better or worse for us.

To my knowledge, no existing concept adequately captures what is communicated by PWB. PWB is not necessarily the aim of prudential, egoistic, or selfish thinking. In contemporary discussions, prudence is typically cashed out in terms of practical reason, which is by no means restricted to the attainment of experiential

benefits. Likewise, egoism can also aim at non-experiential benefits. If two rival artists are competing for the greater posthumous fame, it seems appropriate to say that they are being egoistic and thinking only of themselves. Yet at best, the PWB-maximizer will be an egoist of a special brand.

What about the concept of happiness? The possibility that PWB is equivalent to, or a precisification of, happiness should not be dismissed out of hand; it is at least a fascinating suggestion. However, I am inclined to say that they are distinct, though they may come quite close. For even if there is debate over what constitutes the best account of happiness, there is the presumption that happiness is a matter of mental states. Yet PWB allows for the possibility that what makes the quality of our experience go best for us will not be a matter of mental states. Objective list and desire-fulfillment theories of PWB are entertained in Chapter III. Such theories, once restricted in the necessary ways, do not fare well as plausible accounts of PWB but they are at least not excluded from consideration. This suggests a crucial difference in how these two concepts must be approached. With PWB, we are seeking the best available answer to the question of what makes our phenomenal lives go best for us. The search is for what we should care about insofar as we are concerned with getting something out of life in the more robust way that I have sketched in this section. The best candidate will win. However, happiness is a folk notion that is subject to constraints of descriptive adequacy; if we stray too far from how the term is used in practice, we have offered an account of something else. And it would stray too far to say that happiness is, say, getting what you want. Perhaps the best account of PWB and the best account of happiness will coincide. If, however, the best

account of PWB is not the best account of happiness, so much the worse for happiness.

We should care much more about what constitutes PWB.

That PWB is significant to anyone living a life cannot be denied, for this significance is built into the very concept. When a person has low PWB, then her experience of her life is not going so well *for her*. PWB is significant for the actual individual in her actual circumstances in a way that many theories of well-being fail to be. At the same time, it must be stressed that these claims do not imply a commitment to some form of psychological egoism according to which PWB is all we care about. A presupposition of the previous section was that we often care how our lives are *really* going, even if we are ultimately unable to view our lives from some external standpoint. By all indications, we also care about the PWB of other people. So there is no reason to think that we are PWB-maximizers or that we should strive to be. At the same time, an informed decision to lower one's own PWB is surely a sacrifice. PWB is not all-important to our lives, but it is still quite important. It will be worthwhile to seek out the best account of it.

CHAPTER II

PWB AS SATISFACTION

PWB is how good the experience of a life is for the individual living it. Just what makes the experience of a life better? One promising suggestion is that an experience is made better to the extent that it is satisfying—which is to say, the extent to which it feels good on the whole. This hedonistic proposal accommodates the restrictions that separate PWB from well-being proper. First, we need not move beyond the phenomenal life of the agent to determine how good it feels for her (in the sense that interests us). Second, an experience's feeling good is something that benefits the experiencer directly, so the subject-relativity constraint on PWB is satisfied.

In this chapter, I will discuss a hedonistic account of PWB, focusing on our common sense notion of feeling good or bad on the whole and our ability to gauge changes in our satisfaction level. I argue that these are sufficient to make plausible an epistemic idealization model that allows for the comparison of lives on the criterion of satisfaction. Finally, a number of objections that might be made against hedonistic PWB are considered and answered.

{Terminological Caveat: I am using *experience* very broadly to mean one's total phenomenal state—i.e. what it is like for the person, from the inside—within some period of time. A *phenomenal life* refers to a person's experience from birth to her death. An *experience* will refer to a time-slice of one's phenomenal life. On this usage, the experience of eating chocolate ice cream is not simply the

interplay of the chocolate with one's palate. Rather, one's experience will take in the full spectrum of phenomenal aspects (olfactory, visual, emotional, cognitive, etc.). For this reason, it might be misleading to talk of the experience of doing this or that, but this means of identifying experiences has the virtue of being less cumbersome than "the experience of Geoffrey/4:45 p.m.-4:48 p.m. EST/March 4, 2002 CE."}

2.1 Satisfaction²⁸

On some days, I feel very bad. Of course, there is a multitude of ways that one can feel bad. I might be nauseous, or bored, or depressed, anxious about the future or distressed about the past; my toe might be aching from when I stubbed it, or I may be having troubling thoughts. Depending on which of these applies, there is going to be a unique feel involved. Yet there is nothing strange in saying that I felt bad on Tuesday, because I was tired and stressed, but I felt much worse on Thursday, because I was nauseous all day. Nor is it odd that one should say that feeling bored can be just as bad as feeling very stressed.

In similar fashion, there are many times when we feel good. And feeling good comes in a great many varieties as well. The experiences of reading a Tolstoy novel, riding roller coasters, and having sex are all attended by very different feels—but they

²⁸ In 2.1 and 2.2, I have benefited a great deal from Roger Crisp's unpublished manuscript "Hedonism Reconsidered."

can all feel good. And though very different, some feel better than others, and others we would judge to be roughly equal in terms of felt quality.

We all have experiences of feeling good or bad, and everyone knows what it is to feel better or worse from one moment to the next. I am speaking of how one feels *on the whole* during some experience (in our broad sense), and not the feeling of one isolated aspect of an experience. *Satisfaction* has to do with the quality of one's feeling on the whole; in other words, it pertains to the felt quality of one's experience.

2.1.1 What Affects Satisfaction

During an experience, there tends to be a great number of feeling-improving and feeling-worsening factors at work on an individual. Hence, as I sit here typing this paragraph right now, my upper back is a bit tight from sitting at the keyboard too long, and the dull ache of hunger is steadily increasing. These things do not feel good to me. Luckily, I do feel good on the whole at this moment, thanks to the (currently) enjoyable nature of the philosophical enterprise and the reassuring belief, which comes and goes with some frequency, that this essay will be finished in a reasonable amount of time. If I sit at this keyboard for an hour more, the hunger pangs will probably become stronger to the point that I will feel bad on the whole, and it then might take a fruitful philosophical epiphany to keep me above "hedonistic zero."

A great variety of things can make us feel better on the whole: the reception of kind words, eating one's favorite ice cream, the dissolution of a worry, sexual pleasure, a sense of accomplishment, and so on. Likewise, a great many things can make us feel

worse on the whole: a stubbed toe, ruminations about death, an awkward social encounter, a hair found in one's meal, unwelcome commitments, etc. The listed items are only *typical* contributors to satisfaction or dissatisfaction though. It is crucial to note that, with most of the items, we can imagine them appearing on the contrary list. Eating your favorite ice cream can, under certain circumstances, lower your satisfaction level (e.g. if you are in a very cold environment, if you have already eaten five scoops, etc.). Likewise, take the case of a stubbed toe. Say that you stub your toe just after telling a friend what a klutz he is; the event sets off tear-jerking laughter in both of you that lasts ten minutes and raises your satisfaction level considerably. We could say here that the toe-stubbing enhanced your satisfaction.

This requires some qualification. Whether an event adds to or detracts from your satisfaction level will often depend on the time-slice we are considering. We may focus only on the two-second time-slice where the toe is stubbed (B), contrasted with the preceding one-minute slice (A) and the subsequent one-minute slice (C). Chances are, your satisfaction level is much lower in B, for the physical pain is most intense and the humor of the situation has not yet been realized. You would feel much worse in B than you did in A, and better in C than in A or B. The toe-stubbing incident caused a drop in the overall satisfaction level of the A-B slice, but it increased the satisfaction of the A-B-C slice. Many things in life are of this nature. Eating whatever sort of junk food one pleases in the first part of one's life may boost satisfaction in that period but lead to major health problems in the latter parts of one's life. Alternately, hard work and sacrifice throughout the educational and job-training process can yield a major pay-off in

the end. The influence that something has on our satisfaction level depends on which time-slice is under consideration.

Rather than labeling actions or events as “satisfactions” or “dissatisfactions” (in much the way that hedonists talk of individual “pleasures” and “pains”), there are good reasons simply to talk of actions or events *contributing to* or *detracting from one’s satisfaction level*. Here are two reasons. (1) The avoidance of labels should help to discourage oversimplifications. Just because a certain type of event (like eating one’s favorite ice cream) almost always increase one’s satisfaction level, this does not mean that there will not (or at least could not) be exceptional cases. Also, we have seen that a given event may be either a “satisfaction” or a “dissatisfaction,” depending on the time-slice under consideration; it is best to avoid static-sounding labels. (2) The avoidance of labels allows more explanatory flexibility. If the toe-stubbing is simply a “dissatisfaction” (or a hedonistic pain), then how do we account for the great increase in satisfaction in time-slice C and beyond? One answer is that the realization of the toe-stubbing event or the funniness of the situation was the “satisfaction.” Still, had the toe-stubbing never occurred, there would not have been the drastic rise in satisfaction. It is quite natural to say that the toe-stubbing was the cause of the satisfaction increase. And if you have a chuckle over the memory of the event ten years later, it can be said that the toe-stubbing contributed to your satisfaction level then as well.

By focusing on satisfaction rather than individual pleasures and pains, an account of satisfaction avoids some difficult problems that hedonists usually feel compelled to face. For instance, consider one hedonistic puzzle: what do we make of cases where a

pain sensation is not painful or bothersome to a person? Stuart Rachels mentions a few possible explanations of masochism:

Masochists might like pain but not severe pain; masochists might dislike pain but like the pleasure that accompanies it; masochists might seek stimuli that cause most people pain but cause them pleasure; masochists might dislike how pain feels but like its gratification of their self-loathing.²⁹

Which possibility provides the most promising explanation of the phenomena? For our purposes, all that matters is that getting beaten, etc. tends to raise the masochist's level of satisfaction. The holistic nature of the satisfaction account is not incompatible with an aggregative approach in which one's feeling on the whole is the result of an amalgamation of individual pleasures and pains. But the success of a satisfaction account does not hinge upon an ability to show how pleasures and pains interact to produce feeling on the whole. It is enough that satisfaction is a fact of our everyday experience.

2.1.2 Feeling Better or Worse on the Whole

I introduced the concept of satisfaction by talking of feeling good or bad on the whole. One way to characterize satisfaction is to say that we always feel either good on the whole, bad on the whole, or neither good nor bad on the whole (i.e. neutral). This exhausts all possibilities. But, as the comparison of our experiences reveals, feeling good or bad is a matter of degree, so it is most natural to think in terms of a satisfaction scale rather than just three simple states. Hedonistic zero marks a neutral state in which

²⁹ Stuart Rachels, "Is Unpleasantness Intrinsic to Unpleasant Experiences?," *Philosophical Studies* 99 (2000): 187-210, p. 201. Rachels just mentions these possibilities in passing and is not giving a detailed analysis of masochism.

contributors and detractors to our satisfaction, if there are any, are balancing each other out. We can call this the *zero-relative scale* since an experience's satisfaction level can be gauged by its location in relation to hedonistic zero.

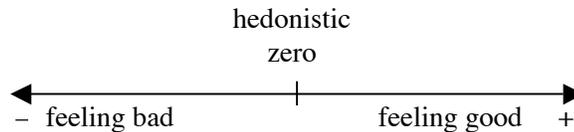


FIG. 1.—The Zero-Relative Satisfaction Scale

In constructing a hedonistic account of PWB, a more economical approach to satisfaction will suffice.³⁰ There is a model that focuses on feeling *better* or *worse* on the whole, paying no attention to the existence or location of hedonistic zero. I will call it the *comparative scale*: the satisfaction level of an experience is its place on the scale relative to other experiences.



FIG. 2.—The Comparative Satisfaction Scale

One benefit that the comparative scale has over the zero-relative scale is epistemic. Do we have some idea of where we are on the zero-relative scale? When we are awake and

³⁰ It will still be convenient to talk in terms of the zero-relative scale at various points.

feel very good or very bad, we seem to know it; we may describe such times by saying that we are in a good or bad “mood,” are “happy” or “depressed” at that moment, or just “feel good” or “awful.”³¹ In other words, when we feel confident that we are either above or below hedonistic zero, we are probably correct. Still, it may be difficult for an individual to say whether she feels slightly good, slightly bad, or perfectly neutral on the whole. She might even get it wrong. It might seem odd to suggest that a person could be feeling bad and think that she is feeling good. Yet how often is an experience complex and mixed enough that, were someone to ask you whether it was satisfying or not, you would be forced to admit, “I’m not sure.”

With the comparative scale, hedonistic zero is of no relevance (and it is hard to see why we should be concerned with it anyway).³² Locating an experience’s place on the scale is achieved by comparing it with other experiences, and this is an ability that people utilize all the time. We are constantly comparing the felt quality of our experiences. Implicit in the judgment that one experience felt good while another experience felt bad, we have judged that the former is better than the latter. So, “certifiably” good and bad experiences are automatically differentiated on the

³¹ Of course, a person can sometimes deceive himself about how he feels at a given time. In the films *Vacation* and *Christmas Vacation*, the main character Clark Griswold, after a long string of disasters in his holiday plans, is on the verge of madness but insists (with wild eyes) that he is perfectly fine and the family will still have a wonderful vacation experience. There is surely such a thing as wishful deception. But if a person is genuinely interested to know how she feels and has no peculiar psychological barriers erected, there should be no difficulty in gauging if she feels “certifiably” good or bad.

³² There may be some uses. A negative utilitarianism [as described in J.J.C. Smart, “An Outline of a System of Utilitarian Ethics” in *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), pp. 28-30] would take the minimization of dissatisfaction as its primary goal; hedonistic zero would be a mark of moral relevance for this sort of ethical theory.

comparison scale. But our abilities go beyond this. In the toe-stubbing example, you could probably determine that C was better than A. We also make comparisons between our past experiences all the time. Was your dining experience better last night or the night before? Was that film more or less enjoyable on the second viewing than on the first? Did you have a better time dating this person or that person? You can probably determine (with some accuracy) that some parts of your life have been more satisfying than others. Of course, when comparing past experiences or large time-slices of our lives, there is the danger that our memories are distorted or that we give unequal representation to the different moments of the experience. The full phenomenal information model introduced in section 2.2 draws on this ability to rate feeling better or worse but adds idealization features to make the judgments more reliable.

People can often tell when their satisfaction level drops or rises (even subtly) from one moment to the next. Even if one is not sure whether she is now feeling neutral or just slightly bad or good on the whole, she may be able to tell that her feeling on the whole just dropped a bit. So, for instance, if she is somewhere in that fuzzy region around hedonistic zero (perhaps feeling slightly good or slightly bad) and she suddenly realizes that there is a fly in the room which is bound to distract her, she may recognize that this realization has lowered her satisfaction level a little. When two experiences are compared side by side, we do seem to have the ability to say whether one is more satisfying than the other. Sometimes of course, the experiences are close enough in terms of satisfaction that it is difficult to say with confidence.

But are not certain experiences incommensurable? Can we really say that playing catch with one's son is on the same satisfaction scale as eating a good Thai meal? That suffering an insult is on the same scale as having a migraine? The answer: Of course! In talking about experiences, we mean time-slices. There is an easy way to illustrate the fact that playing catch with one's son is on the same scale as eating a good Thai meal. The person who would claim that the two experiences (which she must have lived through herself) are incommensurable is claiming, in effect, that it cannot be asserted that one was more, less, or equally satisfying compared to the other. But take a Thai meal experience that is identical to the one under consideration, except that a hair was found in the dish in the last five minutes of eating. Would it still be as satisfying as the hour of playing catch? The point should be obvious. We can continue adding little detractors from the satisfaction level of the meal (a huffy waiter, too much spice on the dish, and so on) so that, at a certain point, there will be no doubt that playing catch was more satisfying than eating the meal. At the very least, it will be apparent when the latter event is more appropriately described as a "bad Thai meal experience." Granted, we can feel good or bad in a wide variety of ways. And when two experiences involve very different types of feeling, it may be difficult to compare them. My contention, however, is that the difficulty in comparing the satisfaction of two experiences tells us only that they are too close in felt quality to make an accurate call. In such cases, the agent can judge the experiences to be "roughly equal."

2.1.3 Four Points about Satisfaction

First, satisfaction is assumed to be a matter of mental states. If a man is satisfied, his satisfaction is not diminished by the fact that he would be very dissatisfied were he to learn of certain things—e.g. that he is a cuckold.³³ Second, any satisfaction, even with the overall “shape” of one’s life, will be reducible to momentary satisfaction. So, the satisfaction of a life will be reducible to the satisfaction of the moments of that life. This is not to say that we live in discrete moments, but only to say that, for any satisfaction that a person experiences, we must be able to specify *when* in that individual’s life the satisfaction was had. We do not experience satisfaction with our lives outside of time.³⁴ Third, satisfaction is affective, a matter of one’s feeling on the whole. This is distinct from satisfaction as it is used in so-called “life-satisfaction” theories of happiness, which claim that being happy involves feeling satisfied with, and giving positive cognitive appraisals of, one’s life as a whole or periods of one’s life. A theory that equates PWB with cognitive life-satisfaction will be examined in Chapter III. Fourth, satisfaction is a hedonistic concept, which might have been termed “pleasure” or “utility.” I prefer to avoid the term “pleasure” since its association with “physical” pleasures has often led to

³³ This is not to say that his being unconsciously aware of evidence of his wife’s infidelities will not have an impact on his satisfaction.

³⁴ I have in mind J. David Velleman’s “Well-Being and Time,” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 72 (1991): 48-77, in which it is argued that the value of a life is not reducible to how well-off one is during the moments of that life. While I am not perfectly clear on what Velleman means by “value” or “well-off,” I wish to make clear that his thesis is not applicable to satisfaction. One’s cognitive judgment that the uphill (i.e., ever-improving) shape of his life makes his life better will only matter to his satisfaction insofar as this shape adds to or detracts from his satisfaction at particular moments. Retrospective or forward-looking assessments of other periods will have no bearing on how satisfying those times were or will be in themselves, though such assessments can have an impact on one’s satisfaction at the time the assessment is maintained.

unnecessary confusion. The term “satisfaction” strikes me as broad and generic enough to cover a wide array of positive experiences, from raw pleasure sensations to a feeling of accomplishment with one’s life and the rewarding feeling that comes from helping one’s neighbor.³⁵ It is also helpful to have distinctive terminology since I am taking a holistic approach to feeling on the whole. And since developing an account of PWB is not intended to set the stage for a utilitarian ethical theory, “utility” is also a misleading terminological choice. My concern here is to offer the best available account of phenomenal well-being; this leaves open the question of what role phenomenal well-being is to play in ethical theory.

2.2 A Full *Phenomenal* Information Account

A fundamental assumption of this chapter is that all experiences (and so all lives, which are merely long experiences) fall somewhere on the satisfaction scale.³⁶ Focusing on the weaker comparative scale, people seem able, in many cases, to reliably perceive whether a given experience feels better than, worse than, or roughly equal to another experience. But sometimes the conditions are not ideal. Experiences may be too long for us to keep in mind all that is relevant. Our memories may highlight certain parts of the experience

³⁵ In an attempt to get away from pleasure/pain talk, many writers favor talking of enjoyment/suffering. R.M. Hare, *Moral Thinking* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), p. 93; Sumner, p. 108 f. I have no serious objection to this terminology—only a mild preference for “satisfaction” (and “dissatisfaction”), which seems to me better suited to the full spectrum of intensities.

³⁶ For some defense of this assumption in the psychological literature, see Daniel Kahneman, “Objective Happiness” in *Well-Being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology*, ed. Daniel Kahneman, Ed Diener, and Norbert Schwarz (New York: Russell Sage, 1999), pp. 3-25.

(peak points or the end of the experience), not giving adequate representation to the other parts. Our memories can also be distorted as time goes on.

In this section, an adaptation of Peter Railton's full information theory of well-being is developed as an idealization model on which a person's possible lives could be ranked on the criterion of satisfaction. This idealization is an extension of our ordinary ability to rank two experiences in terms of satisfaction. If our assumption is granted, then this model is not pivotal to the argument of this chapter, though it provides an epistemic model of how one could conceivably know how satisfying a life is with great accuracy.³⁷

2.2.1 Full Information and Well-Being

There is some plausibility in the idea that we would come closer to wanting what is in our best interests if we only knew more about the world and ourselves and could process this information in a clear and rational manner. Full information accounts of well-being are theoretical developments of this intuition.³⁸ On Peter Railton's account (which is arguably the most defensible version to date and will be our focus here), a person's nonmoral good is indicated by whatever her idealized self would want for her actual

³⁷ If the assumption is not granted by some readers, then perhaps the judgment of the idealized agent about her own possible lives should be taken as authoritatively establishing the satisfaction level of the lives. Of course, if there is not some fact about the satisfaction level of the lives, then this account faces the problem of too many voices, which is discussed later in this work at 2.2.4. I am not aware of an adequate solution to this problem.

³⁸ Henry Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, 7th ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1981), Richard Brandt, *A Theory of the Good and the Right* (Amherst: Prometheus, 1998), and Peter Railton, "Moral Realism" and "Facts and Values" in *Facts, Values and Norms* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 3-68, offer the canonical expositions of this type of view. Accounts that approximate to or share similarities with these full information accounts have been offered by John Rawls, Stephen Darwall, David Lewis, Michael Smith, James Griffin, David Gauthier, John Harsanyi, and L. W. Sumner.

self.³⁹ Take an individual A at time *t*. We can imagine an idealized version of A at *t*, A+, who differs from A in having been given idealized cognitive capacities (for reasoning, remembering, etc.) and full factual and nomological information about the world—including knowledge of A’s history, physical and psychological makeup, and the complete landscape of possibilities lying before A. We do not ask what A+ would want for itself or for herself, but *what A+ would want A to want*. A person’s nonmoral good is thus indicated by her counterfactual second-order desires.^{40 41}

Yet despite the *prima facie* plausibility of Railton’s full information account, a cluster of objections has been raised against his view and against full information theories more generally.⁴² David Sobel and Connie Rosati both entertain an alternative *experiential* model of Railton’s idealization that might be thought to circumvent some of these objections, though they each conclude that it does not succeed.⁴³ In what follows, I adapt a Railton-style experiential model to yield an epistemic model of PWB as

³⁹ Railton, pp. 10-12.

⁴⁰ Perhaps we should take “second-order desire” here to include desires about other people’s desires, for this is arguably the result we have with A+’s desires for A.

⁴¹ This very rough sketch by no means captures the richness of Railton’s account, which is dispositional, reductively naturalistic, and sets the stage for an account of moral goodness.

⁴² See, for instance, J. David Velleman, “Brandt’s Definition of ‘Good’,” *Philosophical Review* 97 (1988): 353-71; Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 18-22; David Sobel, “Full Information Accounts of Well-Being,” *Ethics* 104 (1994): 784-810; Don Loeb, “Full-Information Theories of Individual Good,” *Social Theory and Practice* 21 (1995): 1-30; Connie Rosati, “Persons, Perspectives, and Full Information Accounts of the Good,” *Ethics* 105 (1995): 296-325; Connie Rosati, “Naturalism, Normativity, and the Open Question Argument,” *Nous* 29 (1995): 46-70; Connie Rosati, “Internalism and the Good for a Person,” *Ethics* 106 (1996): 297-326; and Valerie Tiberius, “Full Information and Ideal Deliberation,” *Journal of Value Inquiry* 31 (1997): 329-38.

⁴³ Sobel, pp. 807-10, and Rosati, “Persons, Perspectives, and Full Information Accounts of the Good,” pp. 324-25.

satisfaction and try to show how it avoids some of the operational worries facing Railton's account.

2.2.2 *The Idealization*

Take an individual B at time *t*. We can imagine an idealized version of B at *t*, B+, who differs from B in having full *experiential* or *phenomenal information*⁴⁴ about what I will call B's "modal network" at *t*, i.e. the set of different life-paths that B might take starting from *t*.⁴⁵ ⁴⁶ Having phenomenal information about a life involves knowing what it is *like* to live that life—in other words, knowing it from the inside, experientially.⁴⁷ I will call the process by which this information is obtained "perspective-hopping." B+ has the

⁴⁴ Concerning this terminology, I use "information" because my purpose in this section is to present an adaptation of Railton's full *information* account, and "experiential" and "phenomenal" because "life" is ambiguous between the external and the internal senses (and I have the latter sense in mind).

However, I am not defending (or indeed taking any position on) what David Lewis calls "the Hypothesis of Phenomenal Information," which claims that phenomenal information is a kind of information irreducibly different from physical information ["What Experience Teaches" in *Mind and Cognition: A Reader*, ed. William Lycan (Malden: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 499-518, p. 505]. I am perfectly content to allow for the possibility that materialism is true and that phenomenal information is just physical information represented in a special way.

⁴⁵ It might seem a misnomer to call my account a *full* information model of phenomenal well-being since I only concern myself with full phenomenal information. Yet it is immaterial to this model whether or not B+ also has full information of the world as in Railton's account. And since my account is modeled after Railton's, allowing B+ full factual information reduces the number of significant departures from Railton's account to one.

Besides, it is futile to restrict B+ to phenomenal information for fear that extra information might corrupt her ranking. Not only will B+ have traits, commitments, etc. that could corrupt her ranking, but external information about lives will sneak in via other lives. For example, B+ may be comparing two lives that are identical up until, say, the last year; in the first, she is happy and oblivious to her husband's infidelities, in the second she discovers his infidelities during her last year. B+, if she is to compare these lives, will be aware that one of them is a deluded life. It is for these reasons that this account does not rely on which life B+ prefers B to have, but instead on which life B+ rates more satisfying.

⁴⁶ For a helpful and more rigorous explication of what I call a modal network, see the discussion of life-trees in Phillip Bricker, "Prudence," *Journal of Philosophy* 77 (1980): 381-401, pp. 384-86.

⁴⁷ Henceforth, by "life" I will generally mean an *experiential* or *phenomenal life* as opposed to the notion of a life that includes a phenomenal and an objective aspect such that your life could be affected without any effect on your experience.

ability to jump into a life (either from birth to death or just from t to death) and experience it from that perspective, at will and as many times as she chooses. If the experience of each life is to be genuine, we also require what Sobel calls an “amnesia” version in which B+, when living each life, is completely subsumed in the life and has no recollection of being B+ or of having lived other lives.⁴⁸ The process of perspective-hopping would be akin to having a dream in which one experiences the dream as reality as long as it lasts but, upon waking, vividly recalls the dream as well as her past experience (of previous dreams and the waking moments between them) and is able to distinguish the dream from her waking experience. Since B+ is comparing whole lives, she will need certain idealized cognitive capacities so that she can accurately recall how each moment of the life felt during that moment, irrespective of how it was reassessed in other periods of the life. (Full rationality is not required for our purposes, though we might need to filter out certain cognitive defects or sources of noncognitive interference that would preclude a reliable comparison.) Given the attainment of these idealization conditions, B+ will be able to construct a rough ordinal ranking of life-options based on the criterion of satisfaction.

The construction could proceed by means of repeatable pair-wise comparisons and a simple scoring system. Each life will be compared with every other life. For every

⁴⁸ This is in contrast to a “serial” version in which the idealized agent remembers each former life as he lives each new one. On that model, if 1963 were included in each of B’s possible lives, then the impact of John F. Kennedy’s assassination (in those “worlds” in which it occurs) would only have a genuine effect the first time. In the remaining lives, B+ would not be affected by the news in the same manner as the person living that life would. So this version is inadequate for our purposes insofar as it fails to capture accurately the experience of the lives.

“win” in a pair-wise comparison, a life gets two points. For every loss, a life gets no points. If B+ is unable to differentiate (with confidence) between the satisfaction levels of two lives after repeated exposure, then we say that they are “roughly equivalent” (i.e. a tie) and each life is given one point. The total score of each possible life then determines the ranking of lives. If we proceed by pair-wise comparisons, something akin to this scoring system is needed to overcome the intransitivities created by rough equality. Rough equality (which functions as an “I’m not sure; they might be equal” response for B+) is not a transitive relation. Perhaps Lives X and Y are too close for B+ to differentiate between them and Y and Z are also too close, so that X is roughly equal to Y and Y is roughly equal to Z. However, B+ may be able to say with certainty that X is more satisfying than Z. The scoring system will rank X higher than Y, and Y higher than Z. If our assumption that all possible lives are somewhere on the satisfaction scale is correct, then the scores help to get us closer to the actual ranking of lives. And since lives with identical scores are still only “roughly equal” and not assumed to be perfectly equal, the ranking should be accurate, even if not perfectly precise.

The key difference between this account and Railton’s should be emphasized. We seek a ranking of lives in terms of satisfaction, so we cannot simply ask what B+ will *want* for her actual self. Since B+ is an idealization of B (who is an individual with her own values, priorities, and so on), we have no reason to assume that B+ will necessarily want B to have the most satisfying life. We can entertain the possibility, for instance, that the most satisfying option is that life-path on which B becomes a serial killer. From the inside, such a life might offer a great deal of (albeit perverse) pleasure,

excitement, and goal-achievement, outstripping the satisfaction afforded by any other life. Hopefully most of us, if idealized, would not want this sort of life for our actual selves even if we knew it to be undoubtedly the most satisfying. And there is no reason to assume that the process of idealization will make satisfaction our sole priority.

Instead, B+ will rate the lives in terms of satisfaction. This, of course, presupposes that B+ has some grasp of the concept of satisfaction. But the common sense notions of feeling better or worse on the whole should suffice if they are adequate for us in our ordinary everyday comparisons. And they do seem to be. If you ask me about which of two meal experiences was the best, or which of two movie experiences was the most satisfying, or in which periods of my life I felt the worse or the best, or whether I enjoyed experience X more or less than (the very different) experience Y, I will know just what you mean and will likely be able to offer a confident answer. You, in turn, would have very good cause to take my judgment as reliable. It is not that my judgment *establishes* which experience felt the best, for in that case I could not be mistaken. I think most of us would agree that a person can be mistaken about such a thing. It is not hard to imagine sources of error: memory distortion, self-deception, etc. The idealization aims to eliminate the sources of error while drawing on the reliability of our capacity to discern satisfaction differences.

2.2.3 *The Convergence of Idealized Agents*

If different idealized agents were to perspective-hop through all of one person's possible lives, would they construct different rankings? Or would their assessments agree? If

there is some fact about the satisfaction of lives, then it is plausible to expect convergence. To make this point, I will consider the case of ordinary ice cream comparisons. Rosati and Sobel both imply that ranking ice cream flavors is a simple and relatively unproblematic task whereas the comparison of lives would be both more complex and more problematic. With our shift in focus, I grant that the analogy is still not perfect, but for a contrary reason. The simple case of ranking ice cream flavors seems *more* problematic than our conceptual picture of comparing lives. In what follows, I will try to explicate why our model of life-comparison would be even more reliable than even our most basic real-world comparisons of the satisfaction of experiences. The account draws its plausibility from real-world cases of comparison that we trust to be reliable.

Simple Real-World Comparisons. Most of us believe that we are able to say accurately which ice cream flavors taste best to us. That is to say, if I took you somewhere to sample thirty-one flavors, you could pick out your favorites (and even construct a rough ordinal ranking of the different flavors). Since taste preferences can shift over time, your ranking may not be authoritative for you over your whole life but would at least seem to be authoritative for you at that time. Yet there are variables that might conceivably affect your taste experience, even given stable gustatory capacities. For instance, your mood, the amount of food on your stomach, the intensity of your craving for ice cream or sweets, mental associations, the last thing you ate, the frequency with which you have chosen this flavor in the past, even the appearance of the ice cream—these are all variables that might affect your taste experience in subtle ways,

perhaps enough to render your ranking inaccurate. The fact that a flavor is named Calorie Lover's Chocolate might prevent you from fully appreciating the taste in and of itself, giving some close competitor an edge. The sequence of the flavors sampled will also have some effect; an ice cream flavor may get a lower ranking following a sampling of Mint Chocolate Chip than it would if it follows Lima Bean Delight.

Strictly speaking, if there is anything that you might be able to competently judge, perhaps it is only which taste *experience* (that is, the time-slice in which you were sampling a given flavor) was the best for you. Focusing on the taste experience, extraneous factors are incorporated without ruining the assessment; indeed, they are crucial to gauging satisfaction. Still, even here there is the question of whether the ranking will be accurate. Your memories of the different experiences might get corrupted. By the time you get to the end of the thirty-one flavors, perhaps you cannot remember what flavors 5 and 12 were like or even what you thought about them at the time. Or perhaps your memory was distorted at some point in the process. You can re-taste those flavors, but you cannot recapture the *exact* taste experience again (since, for one, you will now have more ice cream on your stomach), and we have no guarantee that the re-experience of a sample will not diverge in such a way as to affect your ranking.

Idealized Comparisons. There is a model of idealization on which the distorting factors are eliminated (or, at the very least, minimized exponentially) so that an accurate ranking of taste experiences can be made. Say that Mary tries thirty-one flavors on a certain day within a certain hour, and she is interested to know the relative satisfaction that she experienced when trying each flavor during that hour—i.e., she is interested in

ranking her taste experiences. If Mary is granted the ability to re-experience those past moments, exactly as they occurred and as many times as she wishes, she could, by means of pair-wise comparisons, construct a ranking that avoids all of the complications raised above. If there is some reason why this ranking would not be perfectly accurate, then it at least would prove a profoundly more reliable situation of assessment than the real world allows.

What is interesting about the above idealization is that it allows a way for *any of us* to become competent judges of Mary's taste experiences. In real life, Mary occupies a privileged standpoint since she alone has access to her phenomenal experiences. The proposed model allows her to repeat those phenomenal experiences to overcome the distorting effects of memory. But suppose that any one of us is given the opportunity, via perspective-hopping, to have those same taste experiences. Accordingly, we would be just as competent as Mary to decide how to construct the ranking since we too would share this privileged vantage point. It seems plausible that we should arrive at the same rough ordinal ranking.⁴⁹ This is so because the satisfaction is *built into* each experience. To put the point differently, if we all enjoyed strawberry ice cream intensely in just the same way and we all enjoyed chocolate only moderately in just the same way, we should all judge that strawberry tastes better to us than chocolate. I take this point to be uncontroversial, and the experience of lives should be no different. Provided that the

⁴⁹ I believe that convergence will be preserved if agents are inclined (or instructed) to claim "rough equality" on all cases where there is room for doubt as to the correct assessment. It is not a defeater of this model if agents do not converge perfectly when forced or inclined to rank even very close and unclear cases.

fully informed agents experience the same set of lives or life-segments, $A+$, $B+$, ... $Z+$ should all converge in their assessments. Say that a group of idealized agents is considering the life-options of B . If $B\text{-Life}_{201}$ was just barely satisfying for B_{201} , this is a fact. If $B+$ at some point decides that $B\text{-Life}_{201}$ was actually not satisfying at all, some distortion has occurred. We must keep in mind that we have no interest in the satisfaction created by the after-effects of some life. As relevant as that may be to $B+$, it is irrelevant to answering our questions about B 's life. So, the shift must be a mistake in memory. Our concern is with how satisfying a life is (and not the life *plus* the period following the life-experience). The repetition of pair-wise comparisons should circumvent this problem.

A relevant similarity with real-world ice cream comparison comes out here. In complex pleasures, I might take a more active role; for instance, in watching a film I can purposefully search for and focus upon symbolic elements. But in deciding which ice cream flavors taste best to me, I play a very passive role; the degree of satisfaction is largely *given*.⁵⁰ I never chose to enjoy Mint Chocolate Chip so much, nor could I cease liking it by some effort of the will. My "choice" of the best ice cream flavors is only recognizing a pre-established hierarchy. Similarly, $B+$ (at least when she is not perspective-hopping)⁵¹ plays no active role in deciding which life is most satisfying. That is a fact about the lives themselves. $B+$ is not actively choosing which life is best

⁵⁰ See Rosati, "Persons, Perspectives, and Full Information Accounts of the Good," p. 321.

⁵¹ Perspective-hopping can be taken as an active or passive process. When $B+$ is experiencing a phenomenal life, is she herself making choices and acting, or is she simply subsumed within the experience of the one who is making these choices? Does $B+$ live many lives, or does she merely experience many lives of other people? Take your pick.

but only sorting out what is already given, in much the same way that we ourselves sort out the given pleasure afforded by ice cream flavors.

At this point, it should be reiterated that the idealized agent is not necessary to establish a ranking, for we could simply say that there is a ranking of lives based on the degree to which they feel good. While I am trying to defend the plausibility of the full phenomenal information model, its failure does not threaten the suggestion that satisfaction supplies the best account of PWB. However, the epistemic model does serve some purposes. First, the common sense notions of feeling good or bad on the whole are built upon such fundamental notions (feeling, goodness, badness) that they are not easily explicated and are perhaps too basic to be further described. In lieu of a more philosophically captivating analysis of the concept of satisfaction, it helps to see that our common sense notion would be sufficient to allow a person, under the right conditions, to rate lives. Second, an advantage of the full phenomenal information model is that it is not committed to affirming or denying that a perfectly precise ranking in terms of satisfaction is conceptually possible. And indeed, of what use will it be to demand further precision? Suppose that you sample two flavors of ice cream repeatedly on numerous occasions and always judge that they taste equally good to you. Perhaps it is the case that one of them gives you slightly more enjoyment than the other, though the difference is so slight that you are never able to pick up on it. We would say that the difference is negligible, and I say the same for two lives whose difference in satisfaction cannot be detected by B+ or drawn out by our scoring system. We preserve accuracy by not insisting that any two options are exactly equal—just at least roughly so. And since

PWB is motivated by an interest in a more substantial benefit that touches an individual's experience, we can dismiss satisfaction that cannot be detected.⁵²

2.2.4 *Avoiding Operational Worries*

A number of operational worries have been raised concerning the Railton-style idealization. Due to the shift in focus from well-being to phenomenal well-being, it is not surprising that the full phenomenal information account overcomes or just renders inapplicable most, if not all, of these. It is worth mentioning how some of these objections are avoided.⁵³

Problems Solved by the Convergence of Idealized Agents. On Railton's account, if different idealized agents were perspective-hopping through A's possible lives, they could arrive at very different rankings. This feature of his account is advantageous insofar as it makes his account subject-relative, but it also invites some

⁵² It should be noted that the idealization model may still be powerful enough to pick up on unconscious or unnoticed satisfaction or dissatisfaction of various types. As Haybron relates, a recent study of office noise found that "physiological and behavioral measures of stress were significantly higher in subjects who had worked for three hours in a simulated office with low-intensity noise than in subjects assigned to a quiet office....Yet the researchers were surprised to find *no* differences in reports of perceived stress." Daniel Haybron, "Do We Know How Happy We Are?," pp. 5-6. The study appears in Gary Evans and Dana Johnson, "Stress and Open-Office Noise," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 85: 779-83. Perhaps an idealized agent, through repeatable pair-wise comparisons, would be able to pick up on factors that are not evident to the person living his life. The unperceived stress or unconscious guilt of a life might become apparent when considered alongside a life lacking those features.

⁵³ There may be another benefit of showing how my theory avoids these objections. It is not inconceivable that the full phenomenal information model could serve as a first stage in a full information theory that, at a second stage, takes into account facts that fall outside of phenomenal lives. Perhaps, after a rough ranking of life-satisfaction is constructed, some sort of discounting of lives could be conducted with the aid of fuller information. The happiest life might get demoted in the final ranking because of its immorality or inauthenticity. L. W. Sumner has presented a theory of well-being as authentic happiness that involves something akin to this two-stage process. See his *Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics*. Thus, this account (if defensible) might contribute to the development of a defensible full information theory of well-being that builds from a hedonistic base.

noteworthy problems. Consider what Sobel calls the *problem of too many voices*: we must know which of one's many "selves" to idealize. Are we to idealize Susan at age 5, age 20, or her current age of 50? To make matters worse, what if we decide that a person is most qualified to make the idealized assessment only at the end of her life, when she has had the benefit of a full life's experience? In that case, if Susan is now only fifty years old with many years ahead of her, we must idealize her many possible selves (of which there will be an exorbitant number) and somehow adjudicate between all of these voices. (This is not unrelated to at least one facet of the problem of normative authority, as explicated by Rosati: different idealized agents, with their different respective assessments, would seem to be equally qualified to determine a person's good.) But, of course, a multitude of voices is only problematic if the idealized agents disagree in their verdicts; on our model, the voices will speak in unison. As argued in the previous section, idealized agents should converge.

Similarly, there is the *problem of counterfactual indeterminacy*, which is raised by J. David Velleman in his article on Brandt's full information theory:

Since a person isn't actually capable of knowing everything, his knowing everything would require significant alterations in his actual psychological makeup; and there may be many different alterations that would do the trick. Consequently, there may be many different possible states of affairs satisfying the antecedent 'if he knew everything...' yielding different truth-values for the counterfactuals in question.⁵⁴

For the full information theorist, the desire set of the idealized agent plays a crucial role in determining which lives are better or worse. If different methods of idealization can

⁵⁴ J. David Velleman, "Brandt's Definition of 'Good'," pp. 368-69.

affect the desires in different ways, it will also affect the results. Counterfactual indeterminacy suggests that there is no answer to what is in a person's interests; yet closing the indeterminacy by specifying a particular means of achieving the idealization conditions risks being arbitrary or result-driven.

It seems to me that the problem of counterfactual indeterminacy is also overcome by the convergence of idealized agents. The full phenomenal information model minimizes the significance of just *how* one is idealized. The point is that any idealized agent capable of having experiences and saying which of the two was the more satisfying—a task which a lab rat might even be able to perform by means of pressing levers—will be in a position to make a judgment between lives. Provided that the idealization conditions are met, we have every reason to expect agents to converge. On Railton's model, subtle changes in the idealization process may affect the agent's assessment; this is a problem since he wishes to get at the agent's fully informed and rational, authentic desire. On our account, an agent's (or agents') assessments should only diverge due to an inability to perceive that one life was more satisfying than another. It is at least conceivable that some idealized agents might diverge from the others due to cognitive deficiency or some sort of noncognitive interference, but I have trouble envisioning just what this would be. It would be analogous to a person being unable to make a reliable assessment of what ice cream flavor she likes best (e.g. saying she enjoyed vanilla more than chocolate when it was the other way around). Nevertheless, if such cases exist, we can hopefully eliminate such deficiencies in the

process of idealization. Another alternative is simply to hold that certain individuals are incapable of satisfying the conditions of idealization.

Problems Concerning the Ranking of Lives. Laying the issue of divergent ideal assessments aside, there have been other worries about the concept of rating lives. Against the full information theorist, Don Loeb raises the criticism that the number of repetitions can affect our reactions in various ways (e.g. making us bored, bitter, indifferent, etc.).⁵⁵ That objection never gets a grip when looking at the repetition of experiences in pair-wise comparisons. It is certainly true that there are some films that you enjoy thoroughly the first time but whose enjoyability has a high rate of decay on each subsequent viewing, while the enjoyment of watching other films stays consistent (or even enhances) the more you watch them. But given our amnesia requirement, each repetition will be exactly like the first time viewing. A Possible Counter: Yes, but we still tire even of good experiences that are the same from time to time. Surely the taste of a certain brand of vanilla ice cream will always be the same as the first time (provided that we are not allowing enough time for taste bud changes and the conditions of each sampling are roughly the same), yet you can still tire of that flavor if you eat only that one type on a regular basis. Rejoinder: Certainly so, but you will experience less pleasure *while eating* the ice cream (not subsequently), so the analogy does not hold. On our model, a given taste experience will always be equally enjoyable. And it is

⁵⁵ Loeb, Section 2a.

questionable whether B+ could ever tire of the experience of *remembering* a given life since she cannot tire of the life itself.

Rosati and Sobel both raise what I will call the *problem of a contextless chooser*, which claims that the process of idealization involves conditions under which we can reasonably question, first, whether B+ qualifies as a person (since to be a person is to occupy a certain perspective) and, second, whether B+ has the context to support a choice among various lives. As I understand it, the worry is that a being that fully appreciates each life from the inside might be too unbiased to choose one life over another. Yet we must remember that B+ occupies a perspective just as actual humans do. True, actual people have experiences, while idealized agents have lives. Yet these lives *are* the experiences of the idealized agent. So it is difficult to see why B+'s ability to rate the satisfaction of her own experiences should prove any more problematic than our ability to rank the satisfaction of the experiences of our lives. (Indeed, idealization puts one in a much better position to make this comparison than we ourselves ever enjoy.) The demand for a context of choice seems more applicable to judgments or reactions determining value (as on Railton's model) than it does to judgments of relative satisfaction.

What seem more pressing are two problems, which I am adapting from Rosati.⁵⁶ The first *problem of remembering lives* springs from the fact that our traits affect how we remember things. Suppose that there is an obtuse idealized agent, whose obtuseness

⁵⁶ Rosati, "Persons, Perspectives, and Full Information Accounts of the Good."

prevents him from appreciating the viewpoints of others. It does not matter that he is fully absorbed in a life while perspective-hopping since he is always obtuse upon awakening. This seems a problem, for he cannot make his assessment unless awakened and he is always obtuse when in this state. But I think it not unreasonable to suppose that the experience of different perspectives would necessarily wear down his obtuseness, which presumably springs from an inability to conceive (with any vividness) the viewpoints of others. Furthermore, though our traits impact how we remember things, our traits often set the stage for how we will remember things *while* we are experiencing them. If I spend an evening dining with friends, certain aspects of the experience will be salient to me due to my particular habits, psychological makeup, etc. Perhaps I will be particularly struck by the taste of the dessert and a kind gesture from a characteristically unkind acquaintance. If, instead, you dine with my friends, different elements of the experience will stand out for you. Yet it is not the case that, if you (or B+) undergo the dinner experience in my shoes (in the extreme sense of perspective-hopping), you might fasten your attention on different elements of the experience than I will. The exact same things will be salient for you in exactly the same way that they would be for me. The point is that the idealized agent's traits will not be operative during the life-experience itself. So, B+'s traits could only have a distorting effect on the memory of a life. Presumably this takes a little time; an idealized memory and the ability to repeat pairwise comparisons should handle this worry.

A second *problem of appreciating lives* is related to the case of the obtuse idealized agent. It concerns how B+ can fully appreciate, simultaneously, two lives that

are in some respect incompatible (e.g., with respect to information, traits, values, etc.).⁵⁷ If this cannot be done, then can we really claim to have an accurate ranking? Suppose, for instance, that B+ must compare two possible lives in which B becomes, respectively, a sadist and a philanthropist. Surely it is not possible, at the same moment, for one to fully appreciate the philanthropist's delight in relieving suffering and the sadist's delight in causing it. I must concede this point. The condition for fully appreciating a life and the various elements that comprise it is being inside of that life, and I in no way wish to suppose that one could simultaneously be in two perspectives (or three, if we include B+). But why should we be bound by this impossible condition of comparison? It is also impossible for me to fully appreciate the individual tastes of chocolate and strawberry ice cream simultaneously, yet no one believes that this makes comparison impossible. We can reject these inflated demands of accuracy. Comparison is not an exact science, but some comparisons are much more reliable than others. For my purposes, I am quite content to have shown that this model of life-comparison is far more reliable than our most reliable cases of real-world comparison.

2.3 PWB as Satisfaction: Some Objections and Replies

I find hedonism about PWB compelling. The claim is that what makes your life go best for you from the inside is being maximally satisfied. There are many interesting issues and implications that accompany this type of view, many of which can be introduced in

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 317.

reply to some anticipated objections. My purpose in this section is to respond to these worries.

2.3.1 *The Episodic Nature of Satisfaction*

Objection: Satisfaction is too episodic to supply an adequate account of PWB. Why should a two-second interval of toe-stubbing count against the quality of one's experience if the person who finds humor in it does not mind it at all and is thankful that it happened? The two-second interval of pain and surprise was a necessary means to having other delightful experiences. A proper account of PWB should only track general patterns of feeling good or bad.

Hedonism is sometimes rejected as an account of happiness because of the episodic nature of pleasure. Happiness, it is said, is not the sort of thing that comes and goes many times throughout a day.⁵⁸ That claim might be contested,⁵⁹ but it is certainly right that satisfaction, as I have construed it here, is not appropriately termed “happiness.” Stubbing your toe does not cause two second of unhappiness.⁶⁰ Luckily, the current aim is not to locate the best account of our folk concept of happiness.

In response to the objection that satisfaction is too episodic, I will make two points. First, we have good reason to suppose that PWB can rise or drop very quickly (at least on any account of PWB on which we always have a certain level of PWB).⁶¹ Think of Oedipus when he discovers that he has committed patricide and incest. No account of

⁵⁸ Smart, p. 23; Daniel Haybron, “Happiness and Pleasure,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 62 (2001): 501-28.

⁵⁹ Wayne Davis distinguishes between occurrent and dispositional senses of happiness, where the former sense would be present in sentences like “I feel happy right now.” Wayne Davis, “Pleasure and Happiness,” *Philosophical Studies* 39 (1981): 305-17.

⁶⁰ Perhaps this is because our emotions do not factor into a quick episodic pain.

⁶¹ The bias towards the last word, discussed in Ch. III, is an exception.

a gradual shift in satisfaction seems appropriate, for Oedipus goes from the height of his success (and presumably happiness) to stabbing out his own eyes in a very brief period. But suppose that it was Oedipus's birthday and everyone had conspired to play a trick on him. Before Oedipus is able to harm himself, the joke is revealed. Oedipus is furious for a little while, but is still very relieved and quickly returns to his previous state. Are we to ignore the tragedy-drop that took place even if it is soon revealed to be based on false information? From Oedipus's phenomenal standpoint, the drop would be as real whether he was deceived or not. Satisfaction has the flexibility to capture such quick shifts in our state, which is a strength and not a weakness.

Second, it seems wrong to ignore exceptional episodes (like toe-stubbing) just because they are brief and sandwiched between experiences with contrasting satisfaction levels. Brief episodes can add up. Take a variation on the Oedipus example. Gus is a good-hearted fellow but quite stupid and gullible (akin to Lenny in Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*), and his cruel trickster brother Harry wants to take advantage of this fact for his own amusement. So he tells Gus that Gus's boss called to say that he is being laid off. Gus's heart sinks, and he begins to feel somewhat queasy. Once Harry has enjoyed the moment (feigning sympathy all the while), he then laughs and tells Gus that he is only kidding. Gus, good-hearted fellow that he is, cheers up immediately upon hearing the news, completely forgetting the incident. Are we to ignore this period of upset because it is brief and exceptional? But I failed to mention: Harry tricks Gus with false "bad news" on a regular basis (several times each day), and Gus always falls prey to it. If it is correct to say that Gus is a "happy" fellow because he has a disposition towards

cheerfulness, this does not erase the fact that a significant portion of his life is spent in (Harry-induced) dissatisfaction. Surely we can appreciate the fact that Gus has a better possible life that is similar except that Harry tricks him only half as much, and an even better life in which Harry is honest. If we are only paying attention to dispositional happiness, we may be blind to the degree to which that disposition is actualized.

Objecting to the episodic nature of PWB as satisfaction is like faulting an account of possible wealth because it counts every penny. The objector might say, “Who cares about five cents! We don’t need a ranking of possible wealth accumulation that appreciates mere penny differences.” Similarly: “We don’t need or even want a ranking that rates one phenomenal life as higher because one more stick of gum was enjoyed.” By no means do I wish to claim that we are supposed to care about a single stick of gum or toe-stubbing any more than we should care about a single nickel. Taken by themselves, these make for very minor differences in one’s overall level of satisfaction (or wealth). However, they are still differences. The person who has one more nickel is wealthier, if only very, very slightly so; the person who enjoys one more stick of gum or avoids a toe stubbing will have a more satisfying life, though only very, very slightly so. It is no fault of a ranking that it appreciates subtle differences, and it would be distorted if it ignored them. For pennies can add up. And as the case of Gus illustrates, episodes of dissatisfaction can add up as well. The fact that we are indifferent to subtle increases or

decreases and that our indifference is an intransitive relation⁶² is not a fault in the satisfaction scale. On the one hand, it reflects the fact that we are not perfect wealth- or PWB-maximizers, even when we are trying to be. The money-grubber might disregard change on the sidewalk all the time (which might have added up to thirty dollars) and yet greedily dive for a five dollar bill when he sees it. The satisfaction-seeker can exhibit similar behavior. If these agents were more fully informed, perhaps they would begin to take subtle increases more seriously. On the other hand, sometimes we know full well the sacrifice of ignoring these tiny improvements. This reflects that fact that we sometimes choose not to maximize our PWB.

2.3.2 *The Shape of a Life*⁶³

Objection: PWB as satisfaction cannot appreciate the shape of a life. To rate lives only on the basis of satisfaction leads to an absurd conclusion: a life that gets progressively worse (a downhill life) is just as good for a person as a life that gets progressively better (an uphill life), provided that the overall satisfaction levels are the same. Furthermore, if the downhill life is just slightly more satisfying, the downhill life has higher PWB.

The satisfaction of a life, as I have already mentioned, is reducible to momentary satisfaction. If two lives are equally satisfying (as in Figure 3), then the hedonist about PWB will claim that they are equally good for the individuals—no matter what shape the lives have.

⁶² I may be indifferent between x and x_0 , between x_0 and x_1, \dots and between x_n and x_{n+1} , and yet not be indifferent between x and x_{n+1} . Maybe x is a wealth accumulation of \$100,000 while x_{n+1} is \$1,000,000. Alternately, x could be the life on which you stub your toe, while x_{n+1} could be a life where you experience a sharp two-second (albeit episodic) pain every five minutes.

⁶³ For convenience's sake, I will refer simply to lives in this section. We can assume that the shape of one's phenomenal life corresponds to that of her life in the external sense.

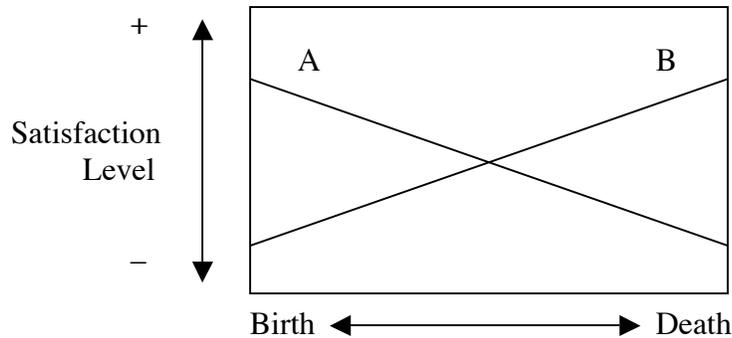


FIG. 3.—The Satisfaction of A and B

Figure 3 maps the satisfaction levels of two individuals, A and B, over the span of their lives. Moving from birth to death, A's life is downhill and B's life is uphill. The objector claims that a downhill life must be worse than an uphill life. I reject this claim. First, it seems to give more weight to the latter part of a life than the earlier part. Notice that if we look at, say, 30-minute time-slices of each life in the reverse order (moving from death to birth), then it is A whose life will be moving uphill and B's life that deteriorates. The moments of A's early years amount to just as much satisfaction as the moments of B's older years; and A's older years are no less satisfying than B's earlier years.

But there is an important intuition behind the objection that needs to be drawn out, both because it is worth seeing and also because PWB as satisfaction already accommodates it. The intuition is that the (perceived) shape of our lives tends to make a big difference to the quality of our experience. To illustrate how PWB as satisfaction

appreciates this intuition, let us begin by building a simple, unrealistic story around

Figure 3:

A and B are both shallow profligates. Luckily, each has a rich aunt who gives him room and board and furnishes him with a regular allowance. A's aunt begins him on a very lavish allowance, the amount of which decreases with each coming year. Alternately, B's aunt starts B off with a very small allowance, which she increases with each coming year.

Two bizarre facts about A and B:

- (1) For A and for B, how good he feels on the whole at any given moment is a function of how much spending money he has.
- (2) Neither A nor B ever thinks about anything other than the present.

On this story, the diagonal lines in Figure 3 represent the income levels and also the satisfaction levels of A and B respectively. Of course, it is bizarre that one's satisfaction level would match perfectly to one's income level; the two bizarre facts make this story unrealistic. We can make it a bit less absurd by dropping the second fact. Let us do so: A and B are not purely present-focused; each is aware of the shape of his life. Given their priorities, the only shape that interests these two profligates is the *financial* shape of their lives. Let us also amend the first fact:

(1') For A and for B, how good he feels on the whole at any given moment is *primarily* a function of how much spending money he has.

With the abandonment of (1) and (2) and the introduction of (1'), A and B are now much closer to ordinary human beings. We can expect that the shape of their lives will have some influence on their satisfaction levels. B is in a nice position. In any given year, B is feeling better than he has in past years, and he knows it. Since he has every reason to trust his aunt to follow through on her allowance plan, he also believes that he has even more spending money (and satisfaction) to which he can look forward. A, on the other

hand, is in an unfortunate position, for he also has every reason to think that his aunt will follow through on her allowance plan. He knows himself well enough to predict that his satisfaction will drop with the dropping allowance and that he will never be able to bring himself to abandon his life of lazy dependence. The future is dismal for A, and his enjoyment of the present is soured by the realization of the better (i.e. more expensive) things he has enjoyed in the past. (Of course, A could react in a number of other ways. To name just one, he might take pleasure in reminiscing on all of the good times he has had in the past and focus less upon the future.⁶⁴ I am only sketching the sort of reaction we might expect when a person's life is clearly improving or deteriorating on his own terms.) Given the descriptions of A and B on the (1') variation of our story, their satisfaction levels need to be adjusted. For simplicity, we can assume that A's awareness of the shape of his life detracts from his satisfaction at any given moment to the same extent that B's awareness of the shape of his life increases his satisfaction:

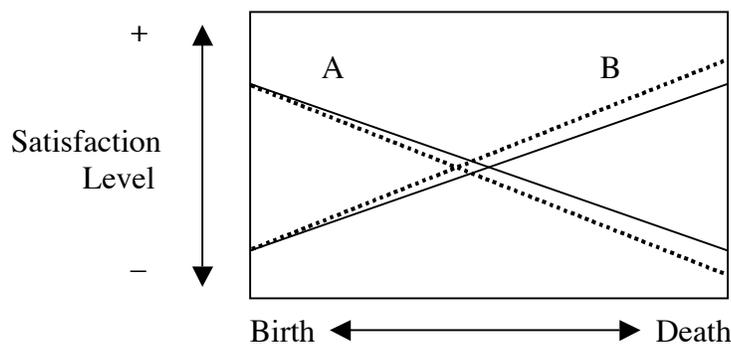


FIG. 4.—The Satisfaction of A and B: Variation 1

⁶⁴ Michael LeBuffe made this suggestion to me.

In making the story a bit more plausible, we have now affected the satisfaction levels (which are represented by the dotted lines in Figure 4 while the undotted lines represent the financial shape of the lives). B's uphill life is more satisfying than the downhill life of A. The intuition of the objection is that the shape of our lives (in the sense of perceived improvement or deterioration) does affect the quality of our experience. The hedonist can appreciate, as much as anyone, that our perceptions of how our lives are going for us tend to impact our satisfaction level. But the objection does not apply to Figure 4, since the hedonist will agree with the objector that the two lives are not on par; after all, A's life is now less satisfying. We require another adjustment to make the two lives equally satisfying. Different adjustments will work, but here is one:

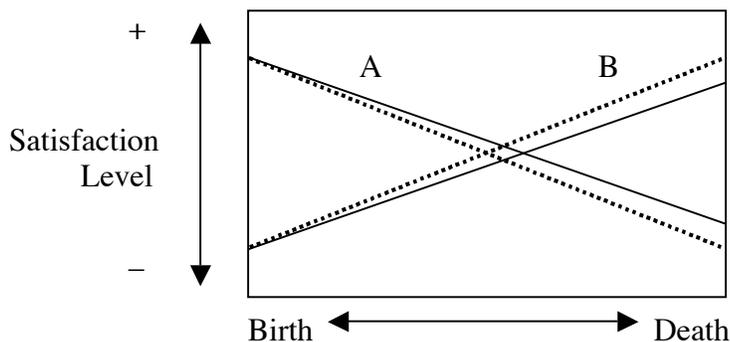


FIG. 5.—The Satisfaction of A and B: Variation 2

In Figure 5, A's satisfaction level has been raised to match B's level so that A and B once again have equally satisfying lives. The allowance plan instituted by A's aunt has

the same rate of diminishment as in Figure 3, and A is just as bothered by the shape of his life in Figure 5 as he is in Figure 4. How is it that A's satisfaction level is on par with B's? The answer: A gets more money. The satisfaction of our hypothetical profligates is only affected by two things: spending money and awareness of the shape of their (financial) lives. Despite having the displeasure of knowing that his life is going downhill, A's satisfaction level is high because he enjoys a great deal of spending money over his lifetime; despite having less lifetime spending money than A, B's satisfaction level is high because the shape of his life is pleasing. A starts off with a much higher allowance than B ever will have, and A's ending allowance is still much higher than B's starting allowance.

Figure 3 could easily represent the information in Figure 5. I have taken this roundabout path, taking a simplistic interpretation of Figure 3, to make the point that satisfaction (the extent to which one feels good on the whole) will already reflect the individual's concern with the shape of her life. Whenever two lives—one perceived as uphill, the other downhill—have equal levels of satisfaction, we should not assume that the uphill life is to be preferred. There must be some explanation for why the downhill life matches the uphill one in satisfaction. Perhaps the downhill life is significantly richer than the uphill life in certain respects, even if the richness is ever decreasing.⁶⁵ Or perhaps the person living the downhill life is not terribly bothered by the perceived

⁶⁵ And of course, it should not be assumed that this richness translates into the pleasures of profligacy. The downhill life might be richer in artistic achievement, deep personal relations, etc.

shape of her life.⁶⁶ Indeed, there is every reason to take the satisfaction level of a life as authoritative. The shape of the life, insofar as it impacts the individual's life, will already be factored into the satisfaction level.

That being said, I tend to agree with the objector that we might prefer an uphill life to a downhill life, though the latter is slightly more satisfying. If I was given a choice between two meals, the first of which begins with dessert and ended with a serving of squash (which I despise), the second of which begins with squash and ends with dessert, I would be inclined to choose the second meal even if the second meal's dessert was less appetizing. Here is another case in which we are not perfect PWB-maximizers and do not care to be. But this abandonment of maximization should not be exaggerated. If the satisfaction level of the downhill life was significantly higher, it would be inadvisable (perhaps even irrational) to choose the lesser uphill life on account of shape. Again, satisfaction captures the degree to which the uphill shape of a person's life does something for her.

2.3.3 *The Experience Machine and Being Deceived*

Objection: PWB as satisfaction implies that a life spent hooked up to an experience machine could make an individual's life maximally satisfying for her, from the inside. Indeed, abducting people while they are sleeping and hooking them up to experience machines without their knowledge might be the best way to raise their PWB (and so help them "get something" out of life). Additionally, you can raise people's PWB by lying to

⁶⁶ I should add here that the very concept of the "shape of a life" is somewhat elusive. I have assumed that the shape of a life is the shape of one's satisfaction curve, which may result from the person's life going bad on her own terms given her priorities. A person's perception of the shape of her life is not necessarily accurate. And it is also clear that our interpretation of what the shape is and our attitude towards it can have an enormous influence on what the shape is. In short, unless we are taking a third person perspective on whole lives, the concept of the shape of a life is hard to get a grip on.

or actively deceiving them. Rather than respecting Jackie enough to tell her the truth (even if she would want to know it), her husband might be benefiting her in a special way by keeping her in the dark.

Everything stated above is exactly right. PWB concerns how well a person's life goes *from the inside*, so rich experiences (even if simulated) and comforting beliefs (even if false) certainly might enhance a person's PWB. That this might be seen as an objection to an account of PWB may reflect one of two assumptions, both of which need to be dismissed.

Assumption #1: PWB must be something we are willing to endorse and would be willing to choose when we look at the PWB of lives in the external sense. This assumption might be suitable when thinking about well-being, but it is inappropriate when we are looking at PWB. The whole point of PWB is gauge the quality of the experience of a life; what makes a life good for a person when she cannot step outside of her life and observe it from that standpoint? Outside considerations are only relevant insofar as they affect the experience. Further, it would be quite bizarre to assume that PWB is something we would choose when we are looking at a life from the external standpoint. The experience machine argument, as presented by Robert Nozick, suffices to make plausible that we do not only care about PWB. Nozick writes:

Suppose there were an experience machine that would give you any experience you desired. Superduper neuropsychologists could stimulate your brain so that you would think and feel you were writing a great novel, or making a friend, or reading an interesting book. All the time you would be floating in a tank, with electrodes attached to your brain....Of course, while in the tank you won't know that you're there; you'll think it's all actually happening.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ Robert Nozick, pp. 42-43.

After sketching the idea of the experience machine, Nozick then asks, in a vein that is remarkably well-suited to our discussion of PWB as satisfaction: “Would you plug in? *What else can matter to us, other than how our lives feel from the inside?*”⁶⁸ Nozick points out that we often want to *do* certain things and to *be* certain types of people, which is deeper than the mere experience of these things. He concludes: “We learn that something matters to us in addition to experience by imagining an experience machine and then realizing that we would not use it.”⁶⁹ If this is right—that is, if we do care about more than just our experiences, then it is unreasonable to accept Assumption #1.

Assumption #2: Provided that no one’s PWB is lowered, it should not ever be morally wrong to raise a person’s PWB. There are various ways in which this assumption may be challenged. An initial point to be made is that the cases sketched in the objection might not be morally wrong. Our moral “gut reactions” could be unreliable guides to making fair assessments of these situations. In our world, deception is typically a way for the deceivers to gain some advantage for themselves, often at the expense of the deceived. And perhaps this is the case when Jackie’s husband keeps her in the dark or when abductors hook someone up to an experience machine. But if the deceivers have

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 43.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 44. Assuming that the experience machine is sufficiently complex and allows for the experience of a rich phenomenal life, Nozick’s sweeping intuition is surely wrong. I feel quite confident that some individuals would plug in. Of course, in Nozick’s example, every two years you would awaken from the machine and then decide whether or not to plug in again. Yet even with the two-year stipulation, I feel sure that at least some people would choose the machine again and again. Is this hard to believe? People already engage in countless forms of escapism (e.g. sleep, self-delusion, drugs, fantasy), and the experience machine would provide the ultimate means of escape. Life is so often a painful struggle, and it is naïvely optimistic to suppose that our desire for authenticity would always outweigh the alluring promise of the experience machine. That being said, I suspect Nozick’s intuition is at least right about many, if not most, of us.

only the satisfaction of the deceived in mind, then the morality of the actions, at the very least, becomes tougher to call. Say that Jackie's husband has ended all extra-marital relations and is repentant. He knows that Jackie would want to know the truth about such a thing even if it would throw her emotional life into turmoil, and he has no reservation about suffering the shame of confessing. Yet, knowing that his wife will lead a much more satisfying life if she never learns of this betrayal, he decides to keep it from her. Is he acting immorally? The point is this: when the choice is between respecting a person's wishes (or counterfactually informed wishes) and raising a person's satisfaction level, it is far from obvious that choosing the latter over the former constitutes an immoral choice.

But Assumption #2 should also be challenged in a more direct way: why should it not sometimes be morally wrong to maximize a person's PWB? This is not to belittle the importance of having high PWB, for surely we are benefited in a significant way by having our PWB raised. It just recognizes that we care about things other than our PWB. The fact is, I might prefer not to hook into an experience machine even if it guaranteed me the highest PWB possible, perhaps because authenticity matters to me. Therefore, I surely do not want to be abducted and hooked up to an experience machine without my permission. Most of us would want to be given the option and want our decision to be respected. If we do not work by the maxim "Always raise PWB" in our own lives, it would be strange if the best moral theory insisted that we follow it when dealing with other people.

2.3.4 The Absurdities of Satisfaction Totalism and Averagism

Objection: If we are to accept PWB as satisfaction, then we must decide on the proper method for arriving at an ultimate PWB level: on totalism, the momentary PWB levels across a life are totaled; on averagism, the momentary PWB levels across a life are averaged. Both lead to absurdities. If we accept totalism, then a life with very high levels of PWB could be less satisfying than a life with very low PWB levels if the latter life was made long enough in duration. If we accept averagism, a very short life with high PWB would be more satisfying than a very long life whose PWB level was almost as high. Since either approach of PWB as satisfaction leads to absurdities, satisfaction cannot supply the right account of PWB.

Totalism. We should embrace averagism. Here is one argument against totalism.⁷⁰ Say that the satisfaction levels over hedonistic zero range from +1 to +10. If a life stays at level 1 fairly consistently, it will obviously have trouble competing (in terms of satisfaction) with a life situated around level 8. Totalism says that the reason for this is that the momentary PWB levels of the first life do not add up to much, while the levels of the latter life do. But this implies that if the life at level 1 was only longer (by a thousand years perhaps), it would eventually be more satisfying than the 8-level life. Who would choose the 1-level life over the 8-level life if they are only thinking in terms of maximizing their satisfaction? That the very long 1-level life is more satisfying than the short 8-level life *in one sense* is certainly true: it contains more satisfaction when you add moments together. But we are interested in the quality of feeling. Being at level 1 does not do a whole lot for me; being at level 1 for a longer period of time is not going to do anything more for me. Moments of feeling just barely good do not amount to feeling fantastic if one experiences enough of those moments. Satisfaction—how good one feels

⁷⁰ I have adapted this from Roger Crisp's Hadyn and the Oyster example in Crisp, pp. 18-19.

on the whole at a given moment—already factors in any sort of extra feel-goods that might be accumulated.

That totalism would even be entertained as an approach to the concept of satisfaction probably rests on a failure to distinguish between hedonistic zero and non-existence. To illustrate this point, it will help to look at a case of particular “pleasures.” It seems right to say that a pleasure (eating chocolate cake with a cold glass of milk) can often be outweighed by enough instances of a lesser pleasure (eating chocolate chips, two at a time). If we assume that the person will be at hedonistic zero when she is not eating, the impact that the two pleasures will have on the person’s satisfaction level across moments can be mapped as follows:

chocolate cake	<5,0,0,0,0,0>
chocolate chips	<1,1,1,1,1,1>

Whether we average or total, the chocolate chips provide the most pleasure. A person who is solely concerned with maximizing her satisfaction will choose the chocolate chips over the cake. By analogy, someone might think that the comparison between the 8-level life and the very long life at level 1 reduces to a comparison between the following sets of momentary satisfaction levels:

8-level life	<8,0,0,0,0,0,0,0>
1-level life	<1,1,1,1,1,1,1,1>

The problem, of course, is that there is a significant disanalogy between these two cases. The person who opts for cake rather than chocolate chips continues existing! Her subsequent satisfaction level is hedonistic zero, which is worse than it would be if she were eating chocolate chips right then. On the other hand, a person arguably has no

satisfaction level at all after death. Satisfaction is how one feels on the whole—the felt quality of one’s experience—but the dead do not have experiences and do not feel anything.

Someone might wish to contest this: “Hedonistic zero is not significant for how it feels. Its significance is exhausted by the negative fact that it does not feel good and it does not feel bad. Trees, rocks, the dead, and the unborn are always at hedonistic zero. People are sometimes there.” This type of view implies that it is better to be born and have a life barely worth living than to never exist at all. In reply, I will only mention a few points. First, to claim that the dead are at hedonistic zero presupposes that the dead exist—not an uncontroversial position. Second, we are interested in satisfaction (the felt quality of experience) as an account of PWB (the quality of experience). If it is agreed that the dead do not have experiences (i.e. that it is not *like* anything to be dead), then the non-experiential sort of hedonistic zero does not interest us. Third, most of us will have a pretty strong intuition that a life at level 1 is not made more satisfying by adding on an indefinite number of level 1 moments. We can capture this intuition by adopting averagism.

Averagism. One of averagism’s virtues is that it disregards the length of lives, which means that a very satisfying life is not outdone by a barely satisfying life of any length. But this very virtue may appear to be a flaw in other cases. Averagism is committed to saying that the life with an average satisfaction level of 8 is more satisfying than a 7-level life, irrespective of the lengths of those lives. This means that a life at level 8 where the person dies suddenly at age 20 is better than a life of 80 years at

level 7. A critic can press the point even further, given the episodic nature of satisfaction. Suppose you are in some Platonic pre-existence and are given the choice between the following:

- (1a) One minute of life at level 8
- (1b) Eighty years of life at level 7.9

Are we going to say that you would maximize your PWB by choosing 1a? This may be the most challenging objection facing PWB as satisfaction. Confessedly, it is a hard bullet to bite, but I think we should bite it.

There are a few considerations that may help to soften the discomfort with rating 1a over 1b in terms of PWB.

(i) The felt quality of 1a is still better than that of 1b. Feeling better on the whole is a benefit that requires no explanation or justification; anyone who has felt their satisfaction level rise knows just what it is and why it enhances the quality of their experience. 1a is better than 1b in terms that we can appreciate.

(ii) One reason the objection seems so strong is that it draws on our insensitivity and indifference to subtle differences in the satisfaction levels of lives, a phenomenon discussed at 2.3.1. If the gap were not so narrow, we might at least need to pause over this matter. Take the following choice:

- (1a') One minute of life at level 9
- (1b') Eighty years of life at level 0.01

Perhaps most of us would still choose 1b' but it is far less obvious that we are not sacrificing our PWB for the sake of having a longer experience. The fact that 1a and 1b

involve very close cases (with levels so close that we are bound to be indifferent to them) does not change the fact that 1a rates higher on a scale we can appreciate.

(iii) The objection also draws on our expectations concerning a reasonable duration of life (and probably our instinct to seek our own survival as well). Notice that, for many people, 1b' would win out over 1a'. How dissatisfying would an eighty year life have to be before we would pass it up for a great minute? Chances are good that many of us would even prefer a life that was, on average, dissatisfying so long as there were at least some moments of satisfaction in the life. The point is that our expectations concerning a reasonable length of life may override our desire to maximize PWB.

A short moment can still be a great moment, and a short life can still be a great life. Further, as it was pointed out in the critique of totalism, a life comprised of a string of mediocre moments is not made less mediocre because the string is longer. We should take seriously the fact that 1a has a higher level of satisfaction. "But it is so short!" To get beyond the fantastic case of a one-minute life with high PWB,⁷¹ let us consider a relatively short life—one of 20 years. We are bothered by the idea that a life can be cut so short, no matter how it happens. But it is important to keep in mind that this shortness did not prevent the person living the life from having a very high level of PWB. Why is that? If she knew of her impending death, either it did not bother her a great deal or the rest of her life was so good that her overall level of PWB was high enough to

⁷¹ It is fantastic because the first minute of life (whenever it is) is most likely not going to have very high PWB. We could talk about hopping into a minute somewhere in the middle of a life, but I prefer to have a more down-to-earth discussion here.

counterbalance it. If death came quickly and unexpectedly, it may have had no negative impact on her PWB whatsoever. That we as onlookers are affected negatively by an early death or the idea of an early death is beside the point since our subject matter is PWB—how a person’s life goes *for her from the inside*. The shortness of 1a obviously does not prevent it from being very satisfying—indeed, more satisfying than 1b.⁷²

2.3.5 *The Pleasure Machine*

Objection: If satisfaction provides the best account of PWB, then a person’s quality of experience might be maximized by spending most of her time hooked up to a pleasure machine that stimulates the pleasure centers of her brain. But surely this cannot provide the best quality of experience. And if PWB is to figure prominently in the best ethical theory, is our ideal society one in which people spend most of their time on these machines?

After discussing a series of experiments in which rats had areas of their brains stimulated by electrodes, J.J.C. Smart discusses the possibility of a pleasure machine for humans:

This calls up a pleasant picture of the voluptuary of the future, a bald-headed man with a number of electrodes protruding from his skull, one to give the physical pleasure of sex, one for that of eating, one for that of drinking, and so on. Now is this the sort of life that all our ethical planning should culminate in? A few hours’ work a week, automatic factories, comfort and security from disease, and hours spent at a switch, continually electrifying various regions of one’s brain? Surely not.⁷³

The pleasure machine has strong affinities to the experience machine. Both are alternatives to living life and to achieving satisfaction the “natural” way. Both are

⁷² Before leaving this subject, it should be noted that averagism supplies another very good reason why we do not want an ethical theory that simply maximizes PWB. In that case, it might actually be moral to kill people when their PWB is expected to drop.

⁷³ Smart, p. 19.

something that we might or might not refuse to hook into. An experience machine might only be a more advanced virtual-reality model of the pleasure machine; perhaps the experience machine would not only feed you phenomenal experiences but also stimulate your brain in various ways. However, the more bare-bones pleasure machine is a bit more unsettling. With the experience machine, people might choose to live through experiences that most of us find rich and meaningful, at least when they are authentic. I might have experiences of creating art or enjoying deep personal relations; I might choose to take part in some great event of history. With the pleasure machine, the subject would just sit in front of a switchboard, stimulating herself. It is not an appealing thought that this could provide the highest PWB for a human life.

The first thing to point out is that it is not at all obvious that a life on the pleasure machine *would* provide the highest level of PWB for most people. Satisfaction takes in the full spectrum of physical and mental “pleasures” and “pains.” Perhaps most people would be psychologically distressed if they spent too much time on a pleasure machine since (in contrast to the experience machine) they would be aware of all the aspects of life on which they are missing out. It might be that the lives with the highest PWB would strike a healthy balance between work, hobbies, relationships, and time on a pleasure machine (including daily pleasure-breaks perhaps).

Yet suppose that in general people’s satisfaction would be maximized by maximal time on the pleasure machine. A benefit of hedonism (at least of the quantitative brand) is its neutrality; satisfaction is satisfaction, dissatisfaction is dissatisfaction. All that matters is the intensity of the satisfaction, not the source. In

many respects, people are highly peculiar and will be pleased and pained by different sorts of things. One person gets pleasure from helping others, another from hurting them. One person is pained by the disapproval of others, another is indifferent. One person is deeply distressed by the lack of meaning in his life; another does not consider her life meaningful nor is she greatly bothered by the fact. By rating PWB in terms of satisfaction, a person's experience is, in a strong sense, judged on her own terms. If she happens to be extremely sensitive (or indifferent) to physical pleasures and pains, then her PWB will be significantly affected (or unaffected) by the presence of physical pleasures and pains. And if most people would derive greater satisfaction from a machine that stimulated their brains than they would out in the world achieving satisfaction in more traditional ways, then hedonism appreciates this aspect of our make-up.

If a pleasure machine would maximize our satisfaction, then I see no reason to abhor the thesis of PWB as satisfaction. That reaction seems misplaced. More aptly, one should abhor the nature of the human animal—that such a life could prove most satisfying to it. Satisfaction captures our most noble pleasures: those that come from helping one's neighbor, raising one's children, loving one's spouse, contributing something positive to mankind, and so on. It also captures our more routine and "animalistic" pleasures: eating, sleeping, excreting, copulating, etc. These pleasures do not exist in isolated spheres. The joy of accomplishment can be lessened by a migraine; the joy of sex can be lessened by pangs of guilt. Hedonism makes room for the angel and the beast in us. It allots weight to each element to the extent that it has weight according

to our collective and our particular make-ups. If it turns out that the beast is more central than we had formerly supposed, that is a shame. But this shame should not keep idealized agents from converging in the assessment that, from the inside, a pleasure machine life is typically best.

Fortunately, PWB has only restricted normativity. To the extent that we care only about getting something out of our lives, we should try to maximize PWB. But most of us have other concerns and so would have ample reason not to become captives to the pleasure machine. Likewise, as was suggested in 2.3.3, there is no reason to think that PWB-maximization must be the sole aim of our ethical theory or our policy decisions.

CHAPTER III

RIVAL ACCOUNTS OF PWB

Any plausible account must be faithful to the concept of PWB and so needs to meet two requirements. First, it must be subject-relative. It must link up to the individual's concerns or feelings in some way, showing how a phenomenal life is better *for the individual*. This will automatically bar from consideration any kind of objective list theory whose list does not link up to the subjective states of the individual. Second, any plausible account must take seriously the fact that only the experience of a life is under consideration. It cannot say that one phenomenal life is better than another when the two are identical. One implication of this is that events occurring after one's death are automatically excluded from affecting one's PWB.

Given these requirements, I know of only a few worthy contenders for the best account of PWB. Chapter II dealt with PWB as satisfaction. This chapter will discuss and critique some rival accounts: objective list, desire-fulfillment, and cognitive life-satisfaction. PWB as cognitive life-satisfaction seems the most threatening contender. While this account also meets the two requirements on any plausible account of PWB, I will try to show that it fails to satisfy our intuitions as to what makes the experience of one's life go best for her. First, something should be said about the two less promising contenders.

3.1 Objective List and Desire-Fulfillment Theories of PWB?

While objective list and desire-fulfillment theories may be heavyweights in the well-being debate, they do not fare so well as theories of PWB. The most popular forms of such theories violate the restriction to a phenomenal life. Indeed, a great part of their appeal (in contrast to hedonism) is that they are able to move beyond experience and the individual's actual perspective to gauge the quality of a life. Hedonism's most unattractive feature as a theory of well-being becomes one of its virtues as a theory of PWB. Meanwhile, objective list and desire-fulfillment theories must be amended to meet the demands placed on any account of PWB. I will briefly suggest how each theory type would need to be adjusted and why neither appears to be a formidable opponent to hedonism.

3.1.1 Objective List Theories

Objective list theories are so named because they specify certain goods that make for a worthwhile life.⁷⁴ Usually there is more than one good specified—hence the list. And while enjoyment or some other subjective component may be among the goods of a life, the list will usually include at least one non-subjective good (i.e. something that is good independently of, and perhaps in absence of, the individual's endorsement).

What would an objective list theory of PWB look like? It would have to meet the

⁷⁴ Perfectionism and the so-called capabilities approach are two of the more significant representatives of objective list theories. See, respectively, Thomas Hurka, *Perfectionism* (New York: Oxford, 1993) and Amartya Sen, *Commodities and Capabilities* (Delhi: Oxford, 1999).

two specified requirements: the restricted domain of the experiential, and subject-relativity. The restriction to the experiential is manageable; an objective theory could enumerate types of experiences or aspects of experience that make a phenomenal life valuable. Perhaps the experience of a life will be valuable to the extent that one exhibits virtues of character in her actions. Or the *experience* of having deep personal relations, a sense of accomplishment, etc. might make a phenomenal life worthwhile. (No matter if what you take to be deep personal relations are in fact inauthentic, or even if you are hooked up to an experience machine and are not interacting with real people at all. It is understandable that a well-being theorist may want to see that the experience of these things is the result of a reality in which they exist. Since PWB is only addressing the quality of one's experience, it is not objectionable that the experience alone should be good.)

It is the requirement of subject-relativity that presents a problem. We are interested in how good the experience of a life is *for the individual who is living it*. It is not enough that some of the items on the list link up to the subjective endorsement. Take the good of having understanding—or since we are restricted to the phenomenal, having a *sense* of understanding.⁷⁵ It is not difficult to imagine a person who has a strong sense of understanding of life, human motivation, etc. but who is tormented by this knowledge, regrets having it, and wishes that he did not. This seems to violate the subject-relativity constraint concerning goods that contribute to PWB. And it should not surprise us that

⁷⁵ Understanding (or knowledge, we might say) is an item on James Griffin's objective list of prudential values.

the *objective* list theory will have this tendency. The inclusion of non-subject-relative goods (i.e. goods that need not involve or require the endorsement of the agent) is a problem for an objective list account of PWB. For what if Life A differs from Life B only with regard to non-subject-relative goods while it is identical with respect to goods endorsed by the subject? The objective list theory would seem committed to saying that the life was less good.

If PWB was simply related to the quality of one's experience without including the subject-relative requirement that it be good for her, then an objective list theory might be perfectly acceptable. But that is not the concept that interests us here. In all likelihood, the objective list theory will only be able to meet the demands of subject-relativity by collapsing into a hedonistic or desire-fulfillment theory.⁷⁶

3.1.2 *Desire-Fulfillment Theories*

Desire-fulfillment theories say that getting what you want or wanted makes your life go better for you.⁷⁷ "Fulfillment" in this sense has nothing to do with how satisfying or pleasing it is when you get something you desired.⁷⁸ A desire's being fulfilled is

⁷⁶ This is a bit disingenuous since hedonism and desire-fulfillment theories might be seen as one-item objective list theories. At any rate, if we are reduced to a one-item objective list containing pleasure, then we have still seen the demise of the type of objective list theory that stands in opposition to hedonism. If the list includes desire-satisfaction, then that type of list is considered in the next section.

⁷⁷ The phrase "desire-satisfaction" is perhaps more common and comes to the same thing; but I use "fulfillment" in the hopes of minimizing confusion with the concept of satisfaction as presented in Ch. II and the concept of cognitive satisfaction introduced in the next section.

⁷⁸ This is only partly true. Desire theories often take into account the "strength" of a desire. And when a desire is what R. M. Hare terms a *synchronic experiential preference* (i.e. a desire for an experience that one is having at that moment), then the strength of the desire effectively gauges how much satisfaction or dissatisfaction the agent is experiencing. R. M. Hare, "Preferences of Possible People" in *Preferences*, ed. Christoph Fehige and Ulla Wessels (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998), pp. 399-405, p. 399. However, when a

analogous to the way a promise or the guidelines of a contract are fulfilled: a desire for some event e is fulfilled when e occurs. This does not require that the individual be aware of e 's occurrence, or even that e affect her experience in any way other than fulfilling her desire.

What would a desire-fulfillment theory of PWB look like? Again, the two requirements imposed by the meaning of PWB must be met. With this type of theory, we can focus our attention on the restriction to phenomenal lives. Desire theories typically violate this requirement since a life with more desire-fulfillments will be better than a life with less even if the two lives are experientially identical.⁷⁹ To fix this problem, we would need to add an *experience requirement*, on which a desire-fulfillment contributes to a person's PWB if and only if that fulfillment makes some difference to the person's experience.⁸⁰ If a person learns that the desire was fulfilled, this will certainly have an impact. And impacts can be made in other ways.

This is quite strange though. Why should my experience be made better just because the fulfillment of one of my desires impacted my experience in any way at all? The impact might be trivial. Consider: Tabatha has a desire for some event e . At the

desire is not for one's current experience, then the strength of the desire will be independent of how one will feel upon having it fulfilled. Of course, there may be some types of informed desire theories on which a desire is informed and rational if it corresponds to the reaction one will have from obtaining a desired object. At that point, the distinction between hedonism and a desire theory seems to break down.

⁷⁹ It might be claimed that the two phenomenal lives are not identical since the one involves the experience of more desires that will be fulfilled than the other. This, however, is only to violate our restriction by moving beyond the phenomenal life. To help us out, we can imagine that we only have the phenomenal lives to judge by without any information as to which lives are authentic, what happens after the death of an individual, etc. The full phenomenal information account adheres to this since the idealized agent brackets off all considerations other than the phenomenal lives in making her assessments.

⁸⁰ I borrow this idea from Griffin, p. 13.

relevant time, e occurs, but Tabatha has no idea whether e did or did not come about. Being an event in the world, e impacts a chain of other events that results in Tabatha seeing a man in a red shirt walking out of a drugstore. Had e never occurred, Tabatha still would have seen the man, but he would have been wearing a green shirt. This man's choice of what shirt to wear that day was influenced by some event in a chain extending back to e . Now, Tabatha desired e , her desire was fulfilled, and this fulfillment affected her experience. Yet it seems absurd to think that her experience is made better by seeing red rather than green (unless, of course, the color red does something for her). Aside from the problem of the trivial effect, there is also the problem of the negative effect: getting what you want might impact your experience in a negative way.

Nor does it help to turn the experience requirement into an *awareness requirement*, on which a desire-fulfillment contributes to a person's PWB if and only if the person becomes aware of that fulfillment. Like impacts on one's experience, becoming aware of a desire-fulfillment may have no effect or even a negative effect on the agent. The individual may not have understood what the desired object involved (either intrinsically or extrinsically), and so getting what had been desired may turn out to be a let-down or a curse. Or an individual may have lost a desire by the time it gets fulfilled, and perhaps developed a contrary desire. The point is that it is difficult to make sense of the claim that getting what you want necessarily enhances the quality of your *experience*.

One might think that it is simply presupposing hedonism to claim that experiencing the impact or awareness of a desire-fulfillment cannot count if it does not

feel good. But this criticism of the “experienced desire-fulfillment” theory is supported by our intuitions about examples like Tabatha and the red shirt. Similar sorts of cases are commonly invoked, even by desire theorists themselves, to show that the fulfillment of people’s *actual* desires cannot be what decides a person’s well-being since our actual desires are often misinformed or irrational. To remedy the problem, the fulfillment of ideally rational and informed desires is often suggested as the determinant of well-being, as in Railton’s account. Is this a promising theory for PWB?

Imagine a full phenomenal information account, similar to the one presented in Chapter II, on which the idealized agent forms preferences just on the basis of the phenomenal lives (and not specifically about how good they feel). This would leave open the possibility that some idealized agents would use satisfaction as their criterion, implicitly or explicitly. But it could also allow informed desires for experiences that are not maximally satisfying.⁸¹ Consider C+, the idealization of C at time *t*, who perspective-hops through C’s modal network at *t*. The life in which C becomes a crazed serial killer is undoubtedly the most satisfying, but C+ nonetheless consistently favors the less satisfying (and less homicidal) options in pair-wise comparisons.

This model might seem to meet the two requirements adequately. On the one hand, idealizing C and letting his desires be the determining factor makes the account subject-relative; on the other hand, C+ is only judging on the basis of phenomenal lives.

⁸¹ This shows that an informed desire account is not just an awkward attempt to make a desire-fulfillment theory extensionally equivalent to hedonism (though some informed desire accounts appear to fit this description).

Unfortunately, this model has problems. We cannot expect the convergence of idealized agents on this model. Different agents would rate the phenomenal lives of *C* differently, depending on their own values and inclinations. An idealized serial killer who is allowed to live out *C*'s experiences would presumably have no qualms about selecting the most satisfying homicidal life. This may not seem a problem for us since the subject-relativity of PWB requires us to ask what phenomenal lives are better *for C*. There is a problem though—the problem of too many voices raised in 2.2.4. Idealizing *C* at *t* may result in the most noble experience being the most desired; five years later, the idealization of *C* might favor the most moral life; five years after that, the idealization of *C* might favor the most satisfying life. Our desires, ideals, and worldviews change over time, which means that convergence among the idealized *C*+s is too much to hope for. This model leads to the unwelcome result that there is no determinate answer to the question of which phenomenal life is best *for C*—it simply depends on which “*C*” you idealize. Perhaps a model might be postulated that somehow adjudicates between the vast multitude of *C*+s (where every, say, five minute period from *C*'s modal network is represented by an idealized agent), but that conceptual monstrosity will not be investigated here. We will deal with a non-idealized variation on this idea below (3.2.3) and note its many problems and complications.

In any case, all of the types of informed desire theory covered in this section seem to violate the spirit of PWB by driving a wedge between the two distinctive elements of PWB. We want a theory of PWB that captures how well your life goes *for you from the inside*, and not a theory that tells us how well your *life from the inside* goes

for you from some external vantage point. The full phenomenal information account of Chapter II avoids this problem since it is an epistemic model that gauges how one’s life goes for her from the inside. In the next section, a more promising competitor for hedonism will be considered—PWB as cognitive “life-satisfaction.”

3.2 PWB as Cognitive “Life-Satisfaction”

3.2.1 General Features

In the spirit of so-called “life-satisfaction” views in happiness theory,⁸² it could be argued that the best available model of PWB will be based, not on satisfaction in an affective sense (as developed in Chapter II), but on satisfaction in a cognitive sense. What I will call cognitive life-satisfaction, or sometimes just cognitive satisfaction, is how well one *judges* that her life is going—that is, a person’s internal appraisal, as discussed in 1.2. I wish to give attention to the cognitive element of an internal appraisal even if an affective element is present. Granted, it may not be possible to make a perfectly clean distinction between, on the one hand, *feeling* good about your life (when you are reflecting on it) and, on the other hand, *judging* that your life is going well (i.e. being cognitively satisfied with your life). Our internal appraisals are often a blurry mixture of both elements. Feeling good about your life might lead you to rate it highly,

⁸² I have benefited greatly from the discussions of life-satisfaction in the work of Daniel M. Haybron (including, e.g., “Life Satisfaction, Ethical Reflection, and the Science of Happiness”) and Sumner’s discussion in Sumner, pp. 140-56.

or the fact that you rate it highly might cause you to feel good about it. And it does not help that we can use the language of “feeling” to make judgments (e.g. “I feel like my life is going well.” “I feel satisfied with how it is going”). Nonetheless, it seems that the cognitive and the affective dimensions of an internal appraisal are distinct and can diverge. In my own experience, I have found that I can sometimes be depressed by the thought of my life and yet, at the same time, sincerely tell myself that my life is going well and that I would not change a thing. When such divergence occurs, cognitive life-satisfaction tracks the judgment that is made, not the attendant feeling.

It is also important to see the distinction between a satisfying life and a cognitive satisfying life. It will often happen that the two coincide, yet we can easily imagine cases where they diverge. For instance, a person who feels good on the whole most of her life (perhaps because she has been continually hooked up to a pleasure machine) might nevertheless judge that her life is empty and a waste. Alternately, a martyr, even while on the rack, can judge that his life has been extremely worthwhile, despite his having had a life full of suffering and sacrifice. When a person’s cognitive appraisal of his life’s value diverges from his life’s value on a hedonistic scale, it is not absurd to suppose that his own internal appraisal determines how well his phenomenal life is going *for him*. It might even be thought paternalistic to say that the value of his phenomenal life is exhausted by its level of satisfaction since the person himself may consider his own satisfaction a low priority. A great appeal of this type of approach is that it respects human beings as reflective, autonomous individuals capable of valuing things other than

their own comfort. The cognitive life-satisfaction account says that PWB is how well a person's life goes *according to him*.

At this point, the reader might be wondering why a person's judgment about his *life* should determine the value of his *phenomenal life*? The answer: The individual is only in a position to make a judgment about his life as perceived—that is, the picture of his life given to him by experience. Individuals have no access to their lives in the external sense. The internal appraisal of a “life” is typically the appraisal of the life as experienced—that is, the phenomenal life.⁸³ In Chapter I, I noted how the matter of perspectives creates a problem for a well-being theory that is subject-relative since it must be decided which of an individual's perspectives is authoritatively *hers*. And the internal appraisal is not likely to be favored since it does not necessarily evaluate the actual conditions of a person's life. However, since we are now only concerned with the quality of the experience of the life (and not interested in any conditions lying beyond), the internal appraisal meets our needs as well as any idealized perspective meets the needs of a theory of well-being. And it respects the conjunction of PWB's two distinctive features (the restriction to the phenomenal and subject-relativity) by capturing the inside perspective of the individual living the life.

⁸³ Do most people make the distinction between a phenomenal life and a life in the external sense? I suspect that most people are at least implicitly cognizant of it. That we could all be brains in vats (or that a god could just be feeding us images) is not so much conceptually problematic as it is a wild hypothesis for which there seems to be no respectable evidence. And people are surely aware of the basic epistemological point that they might be deceived about certain things. However, I think the reason people's internal appraisals are still fairly taken as judgments about their lives is that people generally assume that their experience faithfully reflects how their lives are going (a point discussed in 1.4.2). It seems unlikely that anyone, when asked how her life is going, would respond with: “My life?! Well, I'm not in any position to know about *that*. I can certainly tell you how my life seems to be going, though this is perfectly fallible.”

As with the hedonistic theory of PWB presented in Chapter II, the theory of PWB as cognitive life-satisfaction will rate the quality of an individual's possible phenomenal lives, this time on the criterion of cognitive life-satisfaction. If it is to respect the two special features of PWB, the account must remain neutral between the different standards on which individuals rate their lives. So, for example, on the possible life in which Sam is a sadist, he may be quite satisfied with his life by virtue of the great suffering he has caused others; on Sam's life as a philanthropist, he might rate his life highly because he has alleviated much suffering. A theory of PWB as cognitive life-satisfaction cannot favor the philanthropist's standard. Presumably, if Sam the sadist and Sam the philanthropist give equally strong, positive appraisals of their lives, then Sam will be just as phenomenally well-off on either option.

Yet we need to be more specific about how we arrive at a person's *ultimate* cognitive life-appraisal. Unfortunately for this theory, it is not the case that people's evaluations of their lives remain static from their births to their deaths. How one feels about her life as a whole (or the current period of her life) can fluctuate considerably over time—indeed, even over a very short period of time, like an afternoon. The problem of too many voices returns. One's earlier self might rate the life highly while her later self might rate it poorly. We have an intertemporal intrapersonal disagreement over the value of a life, so we must decide how one voice is to arise from this disharmony. I will sketch two variations of the cognitive satisfaction theory of PWB that address this problem.

3.2.2 *The Last Word*

One solution to the problem of too many voices takes one voice or certain voices to be authoritative. Consider the case of Ivan Ilych, who near the end of his life comes to see (or at least, believe) that his life has been a failure.⁸⁴ Does this reassessment establish the bankruptcy of Ivan Ilych's life from the internal viewpoint? Many would say so, and that is certainly the moral to which we are drawn in reading Tolstoy's story. In the spirit of Parfit, we can call this position *the bias towards the last word*. This bias treats one's final assessment of her life to be her ultimate or overriding assessment. There is at least one good argument for this bias. We are talking about the appraisal of a whole life but one cannot assess a life until one knows just what the life involves, and that cannot be known until the end of the life.⁸⁵ As Velleman recognizes, if one only focuses on particular moments of his life, he might not be sensitive to the overall pattern of it.⁸⁶ A man might be able to look back over the past fifty years of his life and see the degree of degeneration that has occurred, while he would never have picked up on this larger pattern had he only focused on individual years. It is not unlikely that he will consider a fifty-year deterioration to have more disvalue than the disvalue of a single year of deterioration when multiplied by fifty. And just as we would be unable to judge the quality of a novel until we are in a position to reflect on it in its entirety, it may be that a life cannot be properly appraised until one is at the end of it.

⁸⁴ Leo Tolstoy, *The Death of Ivan Ilych and Other Stories*, translated by Aylmer Maude (New York: Penguin, 1960), pp. 93-152.

⁸⁵ Cf. "Then should we count no human being happy during his lifetime, but follow Solon's advice to wait to see the end?" Aristotle, p. 13.

⁸⁶ Velleman, "Well-Being and Time."

But there are reasons to reject the bias towards the last word. Here is one objection. Imagine an eighty-year-old man who suffers great pain during his last week. During those last days, he is only able to focus upon the pain except for some brief interludes in which he finds himself compelled to dwell on the negative aspects of his life, feeling great self-loathing and pity. Up until his death, he had considered his life to be very good on the whole. Is this deathbed appraisal authoritative? The objector will say: Surely there are conditions under which we are not fit to make an appraisal—conditions under which our appraisals are distorted. Yet this objection seems weak, for despite its intuitive appeal it smuggles in our own doubts about the conditions of appraisal, which are probably motivated by our own doubts about the content of his appraisal. The proponent of the cognitive life-satisfaction theory should point out that, when we are seeking one's level of PWB (which concerns how his life is for him from the inside), we should only care about what *he* thinks. If he is not in doubt about his appraisal, this is all that matters.⁸⁷

A better reason to reject the bias towards the last word involves calling into question the idea that the last word has any claim of authority over earlier appraisals of the life. The aforementioned argument for this bias is that it is only from the end of one's life that one can see the whole life in its entirety. But this claim is misleading. We humans are not like B+ with her idealized memory. We do not remember the whole of

⁸⁷ There is more to be said. Perhaps if he miraculously survived the ordeal, escaped death, and was able to look back on his "deathbed" appraisal, he himself would believe that his appraisal was distorted by the pain. We often make such retrospective judgments. But then, if we are only taking the final assessment as authoritative, then there is no higher authority about the phenomenal well-being of the man's life in the event that he does die after the week of pain.

our lives. We remember events selectively, and many memories are repressed or just forgotten altogether. And even of the memories we are able to recall, we can only entertain so many memories in a limited period of time. To muddy the waters even more, we often do not remember our lives accurately—that is to say, we do not remember our experiences as they were when we had them. Not only do memories fade, but they often evolve over time, in part because they are transfigured by the influence of later experiences. Further, our emotional needs seem to have an influence over the evolution of our memories. I have noticed in myself a tendency to glamorize periods of my past, infusing them with meanings that they did not have when they occurred.

All of these reasons undercut the main argument for the bias towards the last word. We might have favored the last word because it takes into account the whole life as experienced, but now it seems that it is not the real phenomenal life that is being taken into account. Instead, we have at the end of our lives a narrative portrait comprised of memories of some experiences, many of which have undergone some reinterpretation or outright distortion over time. The case of the man dying in pain, while it may not provide a knock-down objection, at least highlights an inadequacy of the bias towards the last word. Since we are interested in the quality of a phenomenal life, we cannot help but feel that the man's eighty years of positive internal appraisals should carry some weight and that a week of pain should not be sufficient to render the whole life a waste.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ The Ivan Ilych story undercuts the bias towards the last word in another way. A key moral of the story is that a person can be deluded about the value of his life—internal appraisals can be mistaken. After all, Ilych comes to believe that he spent the bulk of his life completely deluded about its value. But if his earlier self was so deluded, why should the later Ilych assume himself to be free from delusion? They might both be wrong; perhaps his life was not a great success or dismal failure but somewhere in between.

These considerations might motivate a version of the cognitive life-satisfaction theory that gives fuller representation to the internal appraisals given over the span of a person's whole life.

3.2.3 *Letting Every Voice Be Heard*

We turn now to a more democratic solution to the problem of too many voices. On this view, an individual's momentary internal appraisals over her entire life carry equal weight and are in some way averaged to produce an ultimate internal appraisal.⁸⁹ The logistics of quantifying appraisals will not be our concern here, but the basic idea should be clear enough. A person who consistently rates his life highly will have higher PWB than a person who consistently rates it as only moderately good. And an individual who rates his life quite poorly during the first half and rates it quite highly during the last half (such that his average appraisal would rate the life as roughly neutral) will have lower PWB than a person who consistently rates his life as being moderately good.⁹⁰

A significant initial problem for the averaging view is that a person can rate her life on different scales at different times—a phenomenon called *scale norming*. To get a

Perhaps the fear of death taints the later Ilych's assessment in much the same way that we would think the eighty year old man's appraisal is distorted by his pain. The Ilych story, no doubt antithetical to Tolstoy's intentions, might foster in us a skepticism that any internal appraisal can be known to be authoritative.

⁸⁹ There are a number of potentially problematic operational issues that I will not discuss. For instance, the fact that we are not always assessing our lives means that some periods may get more representation than others. But I will charitably assume that some amendment to the theory could be made, such that we count the response an individual would have given had he thought about his life at any given moment. This seems tolerably counterfactual and not a gross violation of the restriction to phenomenal lives.

⁹⁰ For similar reasons to those offered in Chapter II, the averaging approach seems more fitting than a summative approach. The latter would yield the counterintuitive conclusion that a life rated very highly could be experientially worse than an extremely long life that is consistently rated just barely worth living.

picture of this problem, imagine a teacher who is grading a large stack of tests. Sometime in the second hour, a headache starts to set in, he is frustrated by seeing more and more students make mistakes that they should not be making, and he inadvertently begins grading more harshly. The next morning, he sits down over a cup of coffee, refreshed, and grades the last few tests more generously than he had even at the beginning. Because the teacher did not remain consistent throughout, there will be tests of equal quality with different grades. In many cases, a better test will get a lower score than a worse test. The same problem exists with internal appraisals over the span of one's life. As Daniel Haybron notes, "we aren't sure whether two individuals, or two time-slices of the same individual, are rating their experience using similar scales."⁹¹ Just as teachers can be generous or strict graders, individuals can be more or less generous or strict in how they evaluate the quality of their own lives.

The proponent of the averaging approach may be unphased by scale norming, for she can claim that the only value that experiences have *for the individual* is revealed by the individual's internal appraisal. If there are times when you rate your life on a more demanding scale because you have higher expectations, then so be it. Additionally, unlike the bias towards the last word, the averaging view can grant that the appraisals of our "lives" are based upon our subjective perceptions of our lives, including our selective and distorted picture of the past and our sometimes unwarranted expectations about the future. In fact, it is difficult for the averaging approach to avoid this stance since our appraisals will often contradict one another as to the value of some period in

⁹¹ Haybron, "Do We Know How Happy We Are?", unpublished manuscript, p. 10.

our lives. The averaging view can also allow that we shift the criteria of evaluation; a person may treat satisfaction as the most important factor in the early period of his life, but in other periods be convinced of the fundamental importance of making a positive impact on the world. On the averaging view, PWB is a matter of how good your life *seems* to you at any given moment.

The averaging view has its appeal. It avoids the absurd conclusion in the case of the man dying in pain; his low internal appraisals in his final week would probably be unable to outweigh the eighty years' worth of positive internal appraisals. Also, it recognizes that, from the inside perspective at a given moment, there is a sense in which the individual is her own ultimate authority. The fact that you *now* believe that your life is going well has authority in this moment, regardless of what others think or what you yourself might have thought yesterday. At the same time, the authority of an appraisal in this moment does not override the authority of other appraisals. In this way, the averaging view takes seriously, as much as any view we have covered, the subjective standpoint. However, I want to suggest some reasons why the averaging approach—indeed, the cognitive life-satisfaction approach in general—is unattractive as a theory of PWB.

3.2.4 Some Problems with Internal Appraisals

As a theory of PWB, cognitive life-satisfaction has significant problems.⁹² I suspect that the motivation for accepting this type of theory rests on an idealized portrait of what internal appraisals involve. According to this picture, human beings rate their lives according to their own concerns and priorities. Since these are multi-faceted and complex, the individual will most likely be unable to articulate just what they are. For instance, an actress might care about how successful she is, but she cannot say just how many awards or how much money or what kind of film projects will do the trick. There will simply come a point when she knows that she has (or has not) met her own standards. On this view, judgments about a life's worth are somewhat like judgments about attractiveness. Most of us cannot specify or predict the exact characteristics that make someone attractive in our eyes; we simply have to observe and interact with the person and then make a judgment call. Presumably, the complexity of our priorities and concerns is the reason why certain informed desire and cognitive life-satisfaction theories place the agent in an appropriate conditions and let her reaction decide the value of a life.

What is overly idealized about this picture is the supposition that our internal appraisals are judgments based on stable priorities and concerns. There is reason to doubt that this is always the case. Our appraisals often seem to be nothing more than

⁹² I will focus on the averaging view, though many of these points are just as applicable to versions of PWB as cognitive life-satisfaction that will try to make one voice authoritative.

manifestations of our current mood.⁹³ When I find myself in a happy mood, the world takes on a positive glow. The air is fresher, people are nicer, the future is more hopeful, and (unsurprisingly) I believe that my life is going better than I had thought at other times. Positive aspects of my life become salient, and the negative aspects are either given a positive spin or their importance is minimized. Alternatively, when a bad mood sets in, the very same aspects of my life that gave me pleasure in the high moment can seem empty. Moody people will know better than others that our evaluations of our lives can be subject to wild fluctuations within relatively short periods of time. This suggests either that our appraisals are not always based on our stable priorities, or else our priorities may not be so stable.

In a similar vein, Daniel Haybron points out two sources of arbitrariness in life-satisfaction reports. First, ethical norms can influence the sorts of appraisals that a person gives:

A typical person might, for example, value both gratitude and non-complacency without having any special commitments regarding either ideal. For such a person it can be somewhat arbitrary how much to emphasize each virtue.⁹⁴

A second source of arbitrariness is the perspectival nature of our life assessments. In the idealized picture above, it was said that we might be unable to articulate our concerns and priorities because they are so complex. However, there is also the possibility that we do not have a stable set of concerns and priorities at all. Haybron supplies an example:

⁹³ For some support for this claim, see Norbert Schwarz and Fritz Strack, "Reports of Subjective Well-Being: Judgmental Processes and Their Methodological Implications" in *Well-Being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology*, pp. 61-84.

⁹⁴ Haybron, "Life-satisfaction, Ethical Reflection, and the Science of Happiness," unpublished manuscript, p. 7.

Emma, a healthy 64, has recently lost her beloved husband of many years. Several months into her grief, she finds her attitude toward her life vacillating between two extremes. For on some days she thinks her life in relation to those she regards as truly unfortunate....But on other days she reflects more on the enormous gap her husband's passing has opened in her life and wonders how she can go on....Because she looks at her life from different perspectives at different times, Emma's attitude toward it alternates among highly disparate verdicts. Which is more authentic or otherwise authoritative? Clearly neither needs be.⁹⁵

One appeal of the averaging view is that it is designed to allow in highly disparate verdicts. However, if these verdicts are indeed arbitrary such that an individual could just as easily be taking a different perspective or invoking a different norm at any given point without any change in her phenomenal life, then cognitive life-satisfaction may not be equipped to provide a satisfactorily determinate answer to our question of what makes our phenomenal lives go best for us.

Further, our appraisals sometimes function as therapeutic devices. Just as a person can try to coax herself out of a bad mood by reminding herself that her life is going well, it may help a person survive difficult or terribly unhappy times, or even an unsatisfying life, to tell herself that her life has value. And I think most of us find it plausible that some people rate their lives highly as a form of ego-cushioning and are engaged in self-deception. This certainly deviates from the idealized picture of internal appraisals since the appraisal becomes, not a matter of rating one's life against certain criteria, but a coping mechanism.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 8.

⁹⁶ This point is also made by Haybron with regard to deciding which norms to emphasize at different times: "We might even have good reasons to be satisfied primarily when things are going badly, and dissatisfied mostly when they are going well: it could be reasonable for one's life-satisfaction attitudes systematically to have the opposite valence of one's well-being. Which of course would turn the usual view of the relation between life-satisfaction and welfare almost precisely on its head." Haybron, "Life-

These reflections do not provide conclusive evidence against cognitive life-satisfaction views of PWB, but I hope that they will at least suffice to cast doubt on the idealized picture of internal appraisals. If our internal appraisals fall short of the ideal even some of the time, then so do the averaged appraisals from which these are constructed. Once we are working with a more realistic picture of what internal appraisals can be, it is questionable whether the notion of an internal appraisal can really support the weight put upon it by PWB. PWB is how well an individual's life goes *for her, from the inside*. We want this concept to be prudentially respectable. If an individual is given a choice of different phenomenal lives she might live, there should be a clear sense in which living a life with higher PWB is going to benefit her. Hedonism satisfies this prudential requirement, for it is obvious that feeling good is a benefit—that the person “gets something out of it.” Can cognitive life-satisfaction meet this prudential constraint? To press this point, we might ask the defender of this sort of view: Why should we care about having the most positive internal appraisals possible? Are we willing to say that the way a life *seems* to the individual living it exhausts how good her experience is for her? In my mind, the fact that internal appraisals may often be arbitrary, simply reflect a person's current mood, and sometimes serve as therapeutic devices (that, ironically, can reflect the converse of one's current mood) make cognitive life-satisfaction an unappealing candidate for PWB.

satisfaction, Ethical Reflection, and the Science of Happiness,” p. 7. Though Haybron's point is geared towards a contrast between cognitive life-satisfaction and well-being, the point seems just as applicable to PWB.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Hedonism, which tends to be unpopular in almost any form it takes, seems to me underrated. The driving goal of this essay has been to uphold the significance of satisfaction—namely, that it determines how well our lives go for us from the inside. My defense of PWB as satisfaction has been two-pronged. First, I tried to show in Chapter II that PWB as satisfaction can withstand what I take to be the most powerful objections leveled against it. Second, Chapter III discussed the ways in which hedonism's key rivals seem to be disqualified.⁹⁷ Many well-being theorists will welcome this result insofar as it seems that hedonism is being demoted from consideration as theory of well-being to a theory of PWB. But, as stated earlier, taking a stance on the best account of PWB in no way settles the question of well-being. Hedonism might still provide the best answer to our inquiries about the good life, if indeed such inquiries admit of an answer. I leave that question for others to discuss. Yet whether or not we are hedonists about well-being, we should all be hedonists about phenomenal well-being.

Hedonism's place as the best theory of PWB is not inconsequential. Hedonism is often rejected as a theory of happiness. Some hold that happiness is a function of one's internal appraisals. Others claim that happiness is affective (as the hedonists think) but is

⁹⁷ My defense is by no means exhaustive. There are surely other objections in the offing that I have failed to anticipate. Likewise, there may be a number of other contenders for the title of PWB. My goal is only to make an initial case for PWB as satisfaction.

a matter of one's emotional states, which are dispositional and not so episodic as satisfaction.⁹⁸ I have no quarrel on this matter, nor do I see any need for it. Perhaps hedonism does not yield the best theory of happiness. Yet, if it nonetheless supplies the best account of PWB, then I propose that satisfaction is more important to us than happiness.⁹⁹ It often seems to be assumed that happiness is the ultimate subjective good. The presumed sovereignty of happiness as a subjective good explains why hedonists feel the need to battle for the concept, and why it seems so defeating for hedonism if it fails. That sovereignty needs to be challenged. Of course, it is sometimes suggested that happiness has a normative element.¹⁰⁰ If the interest in happiness reflects an interest in a normative concept, then it will serve us better to arrive at a more precise formulation of it. Perhaps our interest in happiness has been a concern with PWB all along. If not, perhaps it should be.

More ambitiously, this essay opens up an alternative to the well-being debate. Progress in philosophy requires not only innovation in the answers that are given, but also innovation in the questions that are asked and the ways in which debates are framed. Well-being is a very open-ended normative concept. Even if there is an answer to be had about the best account of what makes a person's life go well, it may be too much to hope that people (much less philosophers) will ever reach consensus on it. Perhaps too much weight is put upon this concept. By restricting well-being in certain ways, we arrive at

⁹⁸ Daniel Haybron, "On Being Happy or Unhappy," unpublished manuscript.

⁹⁹ Of course, this may not hold if the common assumption that happiness is a matter of mental states is denied. If happiness is made identical to well-being, then PWB may be of lesser importance.

¹⁰⁰ Smart, p. 22.

PWB—a concept on which we can hopefully reach consensus and move on to more productive questions in our prudential, ethical, and political discussions. That PWB is relevant to these matters and may provide a basis from which to work follows from the fact that any acceptable theory of well-being would presumably need to take PWB into account. And if, in turn, any acceptable prudential, ethical, or political theory needs to take well-being into account, then PWB gets in the door as well. In lieu of consensus on the best account of well-being, agreement on PWB provides a firm common ground.

Besides being something we can agree about, PWB has a further advantage over well-being in that there is less of an ethical presumption in favor of its maximization. There is something odd in saying that it can be moral to make a person worse off (i.e. to lower her well-being) when no one else is made better off. When a person's PWB is lowered however, she is only made worse off in terms of the quality of her experience. But this need not imply that she is worse off in the more absolute sense. As a result, the replacement of well-being with PWB may allow for greater flexibility in consequentialist ethical theory. If satisfaction provides the best account of PWB and if the best ethical theory mandates the maximization of PWB, then we have, in effect, a version of hedonistic utilitarianism. Yet since the failure to maximize PWB is less objectionable than the failure to maximize well-being, the best ethical theory might very well be quasi-maximizing.¹⁰¹ Indeed, a recurring theme of 2.3 was that we do not want to be PWB-maximizers. There could be a quasi-utilitarianism that works on a *prima facie*

¹⁰¹ I borrow the phrase from Stuart Rachels, "A Set of Solutions to Parfit's Problems" *Nous* 35 (2001): 214-238.

principle of PWB-maximization with certain important exceptions. For instance, when a person autonomously and informedly desires to lower his own PWB (to sacrifice himself for some cause, to raise the PWB of others, or to live authentically rather than pursuing maximal satisfaction on an experience machine), perhaps we should not interfere with his decision.¹⁰² Alternately, there are situations in which a person wants one thing but is not informed or desiring autonomously. In such times, it may be that we need respect the person's counterfactually informed and rational desires—a sentiment that is defended in the full information theories of Brandt and Railton, and also in the authentic happiness theory of L.W. Sumner. Notice, however, that we can reach these desirable conclusions without ever staking a claim on the elusive question of what constitutes well-being. If we can agree on the best account of PWB, this may provide a foundation from which we can discuss the very interesting and difficult question of when and why satisfaction is not to be maximized.

¹⁰² The utilitarian might insist that it will not maximize PWB to force a person against his will, but this reply obviously does not work in our abduction example. Even if we forced a person to hook into an experience machine while he was awake, kicking and screaming, we could still expect the PWB-benefits of being on the machine to outweigh by far a brief period of anger.

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