Happiness, the Self, and Human Flourishing

Daniel M. Haybron
Department of Philosophy
Saint Louis University
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Abstract: The psychological condition of happiness is normally considered a paradigm subjective good, and is closely associated with subjectivist accounts of well-being. This paper argues that happiness’ value is best accounted for by a non-subjectivist approach to welfare: a eudaimonistic account that grounds well-being in the fulfillment of our natures, specifically in self-fulfillment. And self-fulfillment consists partly in authentic happiness. A major reason for this is that happiness, conceived in terms of emotional state, bears a special relationship to the self. These arguments also point to a more sentimentalist approach to well-being than one finds in most contemporary accounts, particularly among Aristotelian forms of eudaimonism.

It may even be held that [the intellect] is the true self of each, inasmuch as it is the dominant and better part; and therefore it would be a strange thing if a man should choose to live not his own life but the life of some other than himself. Moreover . . . that which is best and most pleasant for each creature is that which is proper to the nature of each; accordingly the life of the intellect is the best and the pleasantest life for man, inasmuch as the intellect more than anything else is man.

Aristotle

I. INTRODUCTION

There is more to human flourishing or well-being than simply being happy. You could, for instance, be a happy brain in a vat. And who needs that? But even if happiness isn’t everything, it is obviously a matter of great importance. Less obvious is how it matters. In what follows I will venture an answer to this question, arguing that reflection on happiness’ value points us toward a view of well-being that we do not normally associate with happiness.

Some readers may find the question itself puzzling, since philosophers often use ‘happiness’ as a synonym for ‘well-being’, ‘welfare’, ‘flourishing’, or ‘eudaimonia’. I have no quarrel with that usage, but in this paper I am employing the term in its far more prevalent commonsense usage, where it serves as a purely psychological term like ‘tranquility’ or ‘depression’, for instance when we say things like ‘I just want my children to be happy and healthy.’ As I am using the term, Aristotle seems not to have had a theory of happiness—certainly not in his account of eudaimonia, which is a theory of what I am calling well-being. Aristotelians will have a substantive disagreement not with the account of happiness assumed here, but with the view of well-being I defend (see §5). But not much hangs on the words: call it shmappiness if you like. What matters is that the psychological states I discuss have the sort of value I claim for them.

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Nicomachean Ethics 1178a2-7, trans. H. Rackham.
2 Robert Nozick’s experience machine example is the best-known case along these lines (Anarchy, State, and Utopia (New York, 1974)). Though the specifics of his argument can be disputed (see e.g. Matthew Silverstein, ‘In Defense of Happiness: A Response to the Experience Machine,’ Social Theory and Practice 26 (2000)), I think the basic point is clearly correct.
Among the extant approaches to well-being, the main contenders, arguably, are subjectivist accounts and eudaimonistic theories in the Aristotelian tradition. Eudaimonistic theories share a teleological structure, grounding well-being in ideals of nature-fulfillment: we flourish by fulfilling our natures. The claim is that certain goals are somehow implicit in, or indicated by, an individual’s constitution. Nature-fulfillment consists in the fulfillment of these goals. Aristotle provides the model for the best-known variety of eudaimonism about welfare, but it can be argued that almost all major ancient views of well-being, including Epicurean hedonism, were eudaimonistic in form.

Subjectivism can be understood in any number of ways, but here I conceive it in the manner that seems best to explain the popularity of such theories (roughly following L. W. Sumner). Subjectivist theories of welfare assert the sovereignty of the individual about her own well-being (what Richard Arneson aptly calls the thesis of ‘agent sovereignty’): her own priorities determine what sort of life makes her best-off. Nothing can make you better off that goes against your all-things-considered (informed, etc.) preferences, desires, or judgment. The appeal of such a view lies mainly, it seems, in the plausible idea that by deferring to subjects’ own judgments we respect their status as autonomous agents. We seem thus to avoid a kind of paternalism. Non-subjectivists, by contrast, confront a formidable objection: ‘Who are you to say what’s best for me?’ A related attraction is that subjectivism seems to respect the ‘internalist intuition’ that an agent’s well-being must connect appropriately with her motivational structure. The main impetus behind this intuition is put nicely by Connie Rosati, who writes (citing Peter Railton) that ‘an individual’s good must not be something alien—it must be “made for” or “suited to” her. But something can be suited to an individual only if a concern for that thing lies within her motivational capacity.’ Subjectivist theories include happiness-based views like Sumner’s, which focuses on subjects’ evaluations of their lives, but most subjectivists these days subscribe to desire theories, especially informed desire theories.

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Subjectivism does allow for some kinds of error, such as inconsistency, but not for fundamental errors in one’s values.\textsuperscript{8}

Happiness would seem to be a paradigm subjectivist good. But this appearance, I will argue, is false: while subjectivists like Sumner correctly give happiness a central role in well-being, the value of happiness is not easily accommodated within a subjectivist framework. In fact happiness proves to be a source of counterexamples to subjectivism. The best accounting of happiness’ value requires, instead, a eudaimonistic conception of well-being.\textsuperscript{9} The type of eudaimonism I have in mind centers on the idea of self-fulfillment, which I understand as a specific form of nature-fulfillment: the fulfillment of the self.\textsuperscript{10} While bearing important similarities to Aristotle’s views, we will see that my approach departs from the Aristotelian mold in important ways.

The central contention of this paper is that happiness—or rather, what L. W. Sumner calls ‘authentic happiness’\textsuperscript{11}—has intrinsic prudential value as an aspect of self-fulfillment. This is because happiness bears a special relation to the self: the facts about what makes us (authentically) happy partially define who we are, ourselves. The main argument will be intuitive, centering on a pair of cases to be presented shortly. After drawing out the relevant conception of happiness and its relation to the self in §3, I present two further arguments in §4. The first concerns the inability of hedonism to account for happiness’ value, and the second contends that the self-fulfillment view enables us to solve a pair of difficulties confronting Sumner’s authenticity constraint. Additional support is offered in §5, where I elaborate on the notion of self-fulfillment and sketch a view of well-being in which happiness plays a central role. I will not defend a complete theory of well-being here, and for that reason regard my conclusions as provisional.

II. THE INTUITIVE ARGUMENT: TWO CASES

Consider a young man, Henry, who has a passion for model trains. Henry has the opportunity to go into business with a profitable model railroad shop at which he knows he would be happy. Yet he decides, after careful reflection, to purchase a farm.\textsuperscript{12} He has good reasons for the choice: he imagines—correctly—that he would make a fine farmer, and finds the prospect of working the land highly attractive: he sees an elemental appeal to being outdoors and getting his hands dirty, dealing with matters of human survival, and living in close contact with an independent reality. Nothing made-up about it, and none of the degrading political maneuverings and double-dealings of the professional world. Finally, he desires the extra money it would bring, as it is a highly profitable venture. Henry goes to work on the farm and succeeds admirably. He is, in short, successfully carrying out a thoughtfully chosen plan of life. (We can assume that he fulfills his other major aims: marry-

\textsuperscript{8} I shall understand ‘values’ to encompass an agent’s general sense of what matters. This might be understood e.g. along the lines of higher-order desires (Harry Frankfurt, ‘Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,’ \textit{Journal of Philosophy} 68 (1971)). I focus on agents’ values because, even though subjectivist accounts of well-being typically give weight to ‘mere’ preferences or desires, subjectivists will surely want to keep these subordinate in importance to agent’s values. For instance, ‘alien’ desires for what an agent considers undesirable, such as a smoker’s cravings, should not be allowed to trump the agent’s best judgment.

\textsuperscript{9} It is possible for a theory outwardly to be eudaimonistic and subjectivist, for instance by identifying nature-fulfillment with the satisfaction of informed desires (some subjectivists may tacitly rely on ideals of nature-fulfillment—see §5). But the root motivations for subjectivists and eudaimonists are very different, so that if we classify theories in terms of the ideals that animate them, as I am doing, there will likely be no overlap.


\textsuperscript{11} Sumner, \textit{Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics}.

\textsuperscript{12} This example resembles one used by L. W. Sumner (‘Two Theories of the Good,’ \textit{The Good Life and the Human Good}, eds. E.F. Paul, F.D. Miller Jr. and J. Paul (New York, 1992)).
ing a woman he loves, having happy and healthy children, etc.) I will stipulate that his plan of life is consistent with what he would choose were he fully informed, reflective, and rational (in the sort of minimal sense employed in informed-desire theories).¹³

The trouble is, Henry is deeply unhappy, and has been since taking over the farm. Though he would prefer to be happy, he thinks such matters overrated: a small, and ultimately dispensable, part of the good life. Life isn’t supposed to be fun. Besides, he’s pursuing a noble calling: happiness is small potatoes by comparison. (He reads a lot of Tolstoy.) But a few of Henry’s old friends see things differently: he chose the wrong line of work. In spite of his ideals, working the land is not an activity that moves, inspires, or fulfills him. It has the opposite effect. It’s not that he hates everything he does; again, he thinks it worthwhile, and it pleases him when his crops do well. But the only time he comes alive is when he indulges in his hobby. That’s what turns him on.

Henry could still go into the model train business, and he knows that he would be far happier if he did. But this is an option he does not take seriously: after all, he’s successfully pursuing a lifelong, and surely worthwhile, dream of working a farm. And model railroading, he thinks, is an amusing but somewhat frivolous hobby. This is not to say that he believes a life running the shop would be completely pointless; he recognizes that such a life would still be meaningful and worthwhile. It’s just that he considers farming to be more worthwhile, a better choice. Further information and reflection would not change his mind.

Consider also the case of Claudia, an attorney. Claudia too has chosen a life of unhappiness, in her case because she prefers wealth and social status to happiness, and she found lawyering to be the most efficient means to these ends. She has succeeded, amassing great hordes of money, acquiring the finest luxuries, and earning the envy of her peers. But work at the kind of prestigious firm that meets her needs is, for her, stressful and emotionally unfulfilling. As a result she is irritable, stressed out, anxious, and mildly depressed. She could be happy in other pursuits, such as teaching or painting, which she would see as perfectly meaningful and worthwhile. Yet such happy-making activities do not bring her the riches and social prominence she desires. She would like to be happy. But she does not regret her choice, and would not accept a life of average means and standing for any amount of happiness. As with Henry, her choice does not depend on errors in reasoning, factual ignorance, or thoughtlessness: these are her values.¹⁴

Intuitively, Henry and Claudia have chosen professions that do not suit the kinds of people they are. There are ways of living that make them happy, and farming and lawyering, respectively, are not among them. Such facts comprise an important part of who they are, their natures or selves. Were their constitutions altered so that very different things made them happy, they would be very different people.

The question is whether, by living in conflict with their natures, Henry and Claudia have made a mistake. I would submit that they have: their values are misplaced. They assign too little importance to their happiness. I think their more perceptive friends would, quite plausibly, say that they are living in conflict with who they are. This mistake is prudential: they would be better off happy. And the mistake concerns the value of happiness as an aspect of self-fulfillment: living in a manner that conforms to the sort of person one is, permitting the fulfillment of the self. We ought

¹³ Instrumentalism is an obvious candidate, but we need not commit to a particular view here. Informed desire theories may be qualified in various ways that do not materially affect the arguments here, involving references to ‘cognitive psychotherapy,’ what one would want oneself to want, etc. I will ignore such niceties in what follows.

¹⁴ Readers worried that she irrationally fetishizes these goods—a claim not obviously available to the subjectivist—are free to suppose that her desires are rooted in more comprehensible values. E.g. she may have ideals that center on competitive success.
not to live in conflict with our natures, or at least the aspect of the self involving happiness, without
good reason (e.g. a weighty moral reason). If this is correct, then happiness is, in an important sense,
an objective good: it is good whether one values it, or would value it given all the facts etc., or not.\footnote{While I am prepared to insist for the sake of argument that no amount of reflection could alter Henry’s or Claudia’s preferences, I think such a case unlikely. The point of stipulating that they would not change their minds is simply to make clear that their welfare doesn’t wholly depend on what they do, or would, think. Subjectivists and objectivists alike believe that optimal reflection will typically lead people to the right values.}

This criticism of Henry and Claudia resembles what we say of someone who lives in a kind
of self-imposed bondage, such as a man with a great love and talent for painting who chooses to do
something which he has neither the inclination nor any special ability to do, such as accounting,
simply because it is more ‘respectable.’ We are liable to think his choice a poor one, and not simply
because he lets his talent go to waste. We may think that his way of life needlessly frustrates the ex-
pression of his nature, of who he is. Think also of the repressed, dutiful Victorian daughter living as
she is told. Or a gay man struggling to lead a heterosexual life. (Homosexuality is notoriously criti-
cized as unnatural, a point often used against nature-fulfillment theories of well-being. Yet it is far
more plausible to say that it is the gay man leading a heterosexual lifestyle who lives contrary to his
nature. Notice that this is not, as we tend to suppose, due mainly to the frustration of his desires. For
if he would be no happier given their satisfaction, we would not likely see him as fighting his nature
in any problematical way.)

It may be objected that we can handle these cases without invoking the vexed notion of the
self: Henry and Claudia have simply erred in taking the less pleasant route, or they aren’t really get-
ing what they want.\footnote{Thanks to Roger Crisp for bringing the latter objection to my attention.} I will address the first objection in §4.1; whereas the second assumes too
much about their psychologies: the mere fact that Claudia would be happy, say, as a teacher, doesn’t
show that she \textit{wants} to be a teacher at all; perhaps the thought of teaching never occurred to her. Nor
must we imagine that she has a burning desire to engage in the sorts of activities that teaching (etc.)
would entail. We can more easily envision that Henry’s heart’s desire is to run the model train shop,
but again this assumption is dispensable. The information about happiness suffices to ground our
intuitions in these cases; we do no not need to make further inferences about Henry and Claudia’s
desires to see the problem. The notion of the self is indeed somewhat obscure, and we will need
greater clarity about it before a self-fulfillment view of well-being can be fully vindicated (I will say
a bit more about it later). But we are not likely to be rid of the notion anytime soon: ideals of self-
fulfillment have been with us for at least as long as the philosophy of well-being has, and such ide-
als strike very many people as deeply compelling. And the literature on the self is vast, spanning a
variety of disciplines and ideologies: people seem to care very much about what defines them as the
distinct persons they are, and this concern informs much philosophical work in other realms. For
example, it is not obvious that we can make sense of autonomy or freedom of the will without some
conception of the self. If we employ the notion elsewhere, why deny it to the theorist of well-being?
Particularly if, as I am suggesting here, no other notion will do the job.

Readers worried about the specifics of these cases are free to change them. Those who think
farming sufficiently worthwhile to justify Henry’s misery should imagine him in some other, less
estimable profession. Note that even such skeptics should grant the crucial point: that Henry, mis-
taken or not, is \textit{worse off} than he would be running a train shop. I focus on Henry only because,
\textit{pace} Claudia’s case, our intuitions are less likely to be clouded by feelings of disapproval that have
nothing to do with the matter at hand. In fact our inclination toward his choice, considered apart
from its effects on his happiness, is probably favorable. I chose examples involving the choice of an
occupation because such choices are especially helpful for illustrating the relevant phenomena. But the point is quite general. A relationship can go poorly, for instance, because one’s partner is not well suited to one’s nature: there’s nothing wrong with him; he just doesn’t make you happy.

My criticisms of Henry and Claudia require that they have, or had, alternatives that would make them significantly happier. They might have been incapable of greater happiness in any line of work. If their values were sufficiently strong and deeply ingrained, they might have had no better options. But we need not assume their values were like that: few people made unhappy by their way of life have such rigid and narrowly-oriented constitutions and values that they could not have been happier living in some manner other than the one of their choosing. I have also assumed that the happier options would strike them as worthwhile and meaningful, for we will see in §5 that well-being probably also depends on such factors: gains in happiness can fail to make us better off if they require deep enough conflicts with our commitments. My contention is not that Henry and Claudia’s desires and values are irrelevant to their welfare; only that happiness is part of the story, and can trump such factors when they conflict.

Three further qualifications. First, note that my claim about the need for happier alternatives reads ‘happier,’ not ‘happy.’ The congenitally miserable can fulfill their natures (somewhat?) by at least reducing their unhappiness. Second, our natures do not dictate one kind of life; many options could be consistent with self-fulfillment. Third, I do not claim that just any sort of happiness, say from eating Aldous Huxley’s soma, is consistent with self-fulfillment. I mention some constraints on it in §3.4.

We have, then, some grounds for thinking happiness important to who we are and, for this reason, to well-being. In §4 we will consider two further arguments for this point. First we need some explanation of the notions of happiness and the self and how they relate to each other.

III. HAPPINESS AND THE SELF

A. What happiness is

Theories of happiness typically fall into one of two camps. The best-known of these is hedonism, which identifies happiness with experiences of pleasure: to be happy is for one’s experience to be predominantly pleasant. The other theory, whose proponents include Nozick and Sumner, is the life satisfaction view: to be happy is to be satisfied with one’s life as a whole.

I believe that neither gives an adequate account of happiness, but will not discuss life satisfaction theories here. Hedonism’s troubles are more pertinent: most saliently, it is psychologically superficial. It reduces happiness to little more than the experiential aspect of a series of mental episodes. The other aspects of our emotional conditions are left out. This is implausible. Let me ex-


19 I elaborate on these concerns and others in ‘Happiness and Pleasure’.
plain by sketching an alternative conception of happiness—an emotional state theory—which I have defended elsewhere. Roughly, happiness consists in a person’s overall emotional condition. To be happy is for one’s emotional condition to be (sufficiently) positive.20

Being happy on this view should not be confused with the acute emotion of feeling happy: a Stoic’s tranquility plausibly suffices for being happy, and an irascible Archie Bunker-type might be happy if his kvetching doesn’t get him down (maybe he enjoys it). Happiness has two aspects. First, we must distinguish central, versus peripheral, affective states; happiness incorporates only the former. Paradigm central affective states include such ‘deep’ affective states as contentment, joy, anxiety, or depression, moods in general, and most of the paradigmatic emotions. Paradigm peripheral affects include physical pleasures and pains, as well as other psychologically ‘superficial’ states like mild amusement or irritation.

Intuitively, the central/peripheral distinction concerns whether a given affect involves one’s emotional condition. Physical pleasures and pains can be notoriously unemotional. But so can the myriad small ‘mental’ pleasures and displeasures we experience every day: we note an illegally parked car with disapproval, are pleased by the sight of some flowers by the roadside, etc. But there is a big difference between being merely annoyed by something and getting upset about it. Only the latter seems to alter one’s emotional condition. I cannot explicate the notion of a central affective state in detail here, but moods are paradigmatically central. Among other things, they tend to be phenomenologically profound, pervasive, and persistent, having far-reaching effects on one’s psychology, behavior, and physical state. They also have dispositional aspects, disposing us to experience other affective states, to see things in a different light, etc. (Consider deep sadness or an irritable mood: one’s whole psychic disposition seems altered by such states.) By contrast, one’s mild annoyance at dropping a letter while bringing in the mail is superficial, focused, and short-lived; its effects are limited; it does not seem to affect our emotional disposition. It is not central but peripheral. The distinction does not concern intensity: a low-key mood may be less intense, yet more central, than a strong pain or an orgasm.21 The latter may not move you, or get to you. Though they are not coextensive with what we ordinarily call moods—e.g. pronounced emotions like extreme anger aren’t strictly moods, though they involve our mood states—I sometimes refer to central affective states as moods.22

A credible emotional state theory should incorporate, in addition to central affective states, a subject’s disposition to experience certain moods rather than others—what I call a mood propensity. When one is happy, bad moods can still occur in response to negative events. But they are less likely

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20 ‘On Being Happy or Unhappy’ and ‘Philosophy and the Science of Subjective Well-Being,’ The Science of Subjective Well-Being, eds. M. Eid and R.J. Larsen (forthcoming). ‘Emotional condition’ is more accurate, and I will sometimes use this expression. But calling happiness an ‘emotional condition’ makes it sound like a disorder, so I will usually stick to ‘emotional state’. The qualifier ‘sufficiently’ is necessary because a bare majority of positive affect might not suffice for happiness. I will not define ‘positive’ or ‘negative’ here, save to note that I use them in roughly the same manner that empirical researchers do in writing of positive and negative affect. They are not value terms, being more akin to ‘pleasant’ and ‘unpleasant’. In general, this conception of happiness is in no way parasitic on an account of well-being, so there should be no circularity worries. I defend the emotional state view in ‘Happiness and Ethical Inquiry: An Essay in the Psychology of Well-Being,’ Ph.D. Dissertation (Rutgers University, 2001) and ‘On Being Happy or Unhappy’; see also Haybron, ‘Philosophy and the Science of Subjective Well-Being.’ For more on the methodology employed in determining the nature of happiness, see my ‘What Do We Want from a Theory of Happiness?’ Metaphilosophy 34 (2003).

21 Consider also the state of ‘flow’ one experiences while lost in a challenging activity, like sailing (Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Flow: The Psychology of Optimum Experience (New York, 1990)). Though we aren’t even aware of feeling anything at the time, this is clearly a pleasant and psychologically deep condition involving our emotional conditions.

22 The reader might think of the central/peripheral distinction as roughly a distinction in ‘mood-involvingness.’
and will tend to yield quickly to positive ones. This sort of emotional resilience is one of the great
benefits of being happy. Mood propensity varies more or less constantly, and hence is distinct from
a person’s temperament. That notion concerns how, at some very basic level,23 one is characteristi-
cally disposed to respond emotionally—and perhaps in other ways—to various circumstances. For
simplicity, I will not focus on mood propensity in what follows, though it clearly enhances the sig-
nificance of happiness for the self. To avoid confusing the reader with unfamiliar terms, I will refer
to the states involved in happiness as ‘emotional states,’ though for various reasons a new term
would be preferable. (While my view focuses on mood-related affect, ‘emotional state’ seems better
to encompass the relevant phenomena than ‘mood state’ or other terms. E.g., moods seem constitutive
of a person’s emotional state, even if they are not strictly emotions; whereas ‘mood state’ seems
to omit emotions altogether.24)

For the hedonist, happiness is merely a state of one’s consciousness. This, I am suggesting,
is a mistake: happiness is better understood as a state of one’s being. It is in some ways more accu-
rate to think of happiness as, not a good mood, but psychic flourishing.25

What is the value of having a positive emotional condition—being happy according to the
present theory? I initially thought it was simply this: it is pleasant. Yet the attempt to account for
happiness’ value in purely hedonic terms seems to miss something. It does not account for the ap-
peal of criticizing hedonism on the grounds that it is psychologically superficial. It seems important
to note the psychological depth of happiness, the fact that it involves much more of our psycholo-
gies than just their phenomenal surfaces. Why? The answer, we will see, lies mainly in the connec-
tion that happiness makes with the self.

B. Happiness and the self: initial considerations

Everybody knows about the central/peripheral distinction; we just don’t call it that. But we
employ it regularly, as when talking about things that do, or do not, move us, get to us, bring us
down, lift us up, or bounce right off us. A popular song implores a lover to ‘satisfy my soul,’ and it
is obvious that the singer is not asking to be amused: he wants a deeper kind of satisfaction, the kind
that penetrates to his very being—his soul or spirit, as we sometimes say.26 (Such talk need not con-
cern anything occult. It is often just a way of talking about certain aspects of our psychology.) Cen-
tral emotional reactions somehow constitute temporary changes in us, and are not just things that
happen to us. Indeed, changes in emotional state, particularly mood propensity, are tantamount to
temporary changes in personality: they alter the way we perceive things, how we evaluate things, the
inferences we make, how we react (emotionally and otherwise) to events, what we desire, our
physiology, and so on. (Compare how someone is when depressed with what he is like having fallen
madly in love.) Suitably extended changes in emotional state can quite literally amount to differ-
ences in personality: a once dour person may now be high-spirited, a serene individual may become
anxious, etc. Peripheral affects, by contrast, have few if any such implications: your chronic back-
ache might cause you to be an irritable person. But the pain does not constitute a change in personal-

23 The qualifier reflects the fact that our temperaments do not wholly fix our characteristic emotional dispositions. Our
values, characters and habits of thought, inter alia, also have a role.
24 Elsewhere I suggest we use the term ‘thymic state,’ in reference to the ancient Greek thymos (‘Happiness and Pleas-
ure,’ ‘Happiness and Ethical Inquiry’).
25 This term can also mislead, however: ‘flourishing’ is normally used as an evaluative term, whereas ascriptions of
happiness in the present sense entail no value claims: ‘happiness’ is just a psychological term. Moreover, happiness
could in principle be disordered, in which case we would not think of it as ‘psychic flourishing.’
26 Bob Marley, ‘Satisfy My Soul.’ It is tempting to say that the domain of central affect is literally the soul or psyche.
ity, in who you are. It is something that happens to you. (And which, if you can, you will not allow to get to you. The stoic strive to remain unmoved by the unpleasantness of their pains. The language here is interesting: we say ‘I am happy,’ versus ‘I am experiencing pleasure’—i.e., more or less, ‘Pleasure is happening to me.’ Such talk appears to construe happiness as a property of the person, and pleasure as something that impinges on the person.\(^{27}\)

The central/peripheral distinction appears to be quite important, relating not only to the phenomenology and causal role of affect but to the character of the self. Consider how a normally happy person might react to a bout of depression: ‘This just isn’t me; I feel like I’m not myself anymore, like a different person has taken over my body.’ Interestingly, chronic sufferers of depression sometimes find the happiness brought on by a successful course of antidepressant therapy to be deeply unsettling. They may discontinue the therapy altogether. This phenomenon, called ‘uplift anxiety,’ reflects a feeling that one is naturally an unhappy person, and that one is no longer oneself. Essentially, it is anxiety over the loss, deep alteration, or displacement of one’s identity. One must either embrace a new identity or go back to being depressed. To the best of my knowledge, people do not undergo identity crises when relieved of chronic pain.

C. Concepts of the self

What is meant by the self? I am not concerned with the question of reidentification of individuals over time—the problem of ‘personal identity.’\(^{28}\) I am interested rather in those aspects of us that are important to making us the distinct individuals we are, that are important to understanding who we are, and not so much which individuals we are. I am not denying that these questions are related, but they do seem different. Suppose we believe that personal identity consists in nothing more than physiological continuities, or that it is a primitive relation. We should still be concerned with the ‘thicker,’ more substantive notion of the self that interests us here. Explaining this idea clearly is difficult, but it should become intelligible enough in what follows.

We can distinguish at least four broad notions of this thicker self. We might, for instance, distinguish a person’s ‘social identity,’ where this is a matter of how others see the individual, or the individual’s social role. Second, we might focus on certain morally or ethically important aspects of who a person is: her ‘character.’ Third, there is an individual’s temperament: whether, for instance, she has a depressive, cheerful, extroverted, etc. temperament. Fourth, there is a family of notions pertaining to a subject’s self-understanding or self-conception: the understanding of herself that is implicit in the way she sees or thinks about her herself, her life, her ideals, her projects and commitments, and her relationships to society and other people. This is what we typically have in mind when we speak without qualification—as I will in this paper—of a person’s ‘identity.’ Examples include the concepts of ‘ideal identity,’ ‘practical identity,’ ‘self-esteem identity,’ ‘narrative identity,’ etc.\(^{29}\)

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27 The linguistic data are not unequivocal, however, since we can naturally say things like ‘I am a bit annoyed by that fly.’ Perhaps they only apply to physical pleasures, as Roger Crisp has suggested to me.

28 See e.g. Derek Parfit, Reasons and Persons (Oxford, 1984).

If the contentions of this paper are correct, the self has at least one further aspect, which I will call a person’s ‘emotional nature.’ With qualifications to be noted in the next section, to have a certain emotional nature is to be disposed characteristically to be happy in certain circumstances and not others. Our emotional natures are partly determined by our temperaments, but not wholly: our desires, values, characters and habits of thought, perhaps among other things, also have a role. (Although, as Henry and Claudia illustrate, our values are sometimes less significant for our natures than we might expect.) As I am arguing in this paper, our propensities for happiness are not merely a part of our natures; they are more specifically a part of who we are: the self. Our propensities for physical flourishing or pleasure, by contrast, seem not to be part of who we are, though they plausibly constitute a part of our natures. We can put the difference this way: the fact that certain ways of living are healthiest for me, or bring the most physical pleasure, plausibly determines some aspect of my nature: the sort of creature I am, we might say. It’s simply my nature to be made healthier by exercise, and to find the taste of broccoli pleasant—that’s the sort of creature I am. But these things seem not to affect who I am: I would not be a different person if a sedentary life were best for my body, or if broccoli tasted awful to me. Changes in these respects would not, in general, engender identity crises.

The term ‘emotional nature’ bears an unfortunate connotation, namely that our emotional makeup is more or less permanently fixed, if not innate. The notion of emotional nature, as I understand it here, requires no commitment about such matters. But the idea that a person’s emotional makeup is set in stone, much less innate, is deeply implausible. Our propensities for happiness clearly evolve over time, depending heavily on social and cultural factors as well as our particular values, among other things. Indeed, one might reasonably embark on a plan to change one’s emotional nature, say by undertaking to become a cellist, and thus to be made happy by the things that tend to make cellists happy (like playing the cello well). This sort of example poses no difficulty for my view: our emotional natures will still constrain the options that make sense for us. If you do not have the right sort of nature to begin with, or do not go about training as a cellist in the right way, your plans may fail. Some people aren’t cut out to be cellists, because they lack talent, pa-

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30 ‘Characteristically’ because happiness itself alters our emotional dispositions while it lasts.

31 For this reason the term ‘emotional self’ might be clearer, but it is more awkward and alien to ordinary usage.

32 At least non-derivatively. Exceptions would involve people whose self-conception is tied to these things—a ‘health nut,’ for instance. In such cases matters like health are important to who we are, but only derivatively.

33 Note that, while identity is not the only part of the self, it is plausible that major changes in the self should often have implications for one’s identity: if who one is changes, one’s sense of who one is liable to change as well.

34 Although some of my claims presuppose that our emotional natures do not always track our desires or values. Thanks to Martha Nussbaum for bringing this worry to my attention.

35 Another sort of case involves changing the way one thinks about things, say by adopting a more optimistic explanatory style (see e.g. Martin Seligman, *Authentic Happiness* (New York, 2002)). It may seem odd to think of this as a way of changing one’s emotional nature or emotional self. But when such efforts succeed we do often describe them as altering the self—not just changing what I think or do, say, but changing myself. Admittedly the change in one’s emotional propensities is cognitively grounded, but it is not at all clear that who we are, emotionally speaking, must be definable independently of how we think. Again, we are not simply talking about temperament.
tienced, or simply can’t find satisfaction in it. So while we can alter our emotional natures, we must attend to the limitations imposed by our existing emotional makeup (which itself, note, is partly a product of our values, past choices, etc.). A further limitation comes in the form of the authenticity constraint, discussed in the next section: we can alter our emotional propensities through brainwashing or surgery, but such methods will only make self-fulfillment harder to attain. Indeed, they amount to ways of corrupting or destroying the self.

D. Authenticity and the role of happiness in self-fulfillment

Self-fulfillment consists at least partly in the fulfillment of our emotional natures: roughly, in being happy. ‘Roughly,’ because some forms of happiness, like that of the deceived or brainwashed, are problematical. Could such individuals really be flourishing? This is implausible. But so is the idea that one could attain self-fulfillment in this manner.

Sumner has recently proposed a novel means of handling such worries while retaining a central role for happiness in welfare. He argues that well-being consists in authentic happiness: being (well enough) informed and autonomous in one’s happiness. He explicitly identifies happiness with life satisfaction, but his view is better understood as a hybrid that includes pleasure—conceived along the lines of a preferred experience theory—as well. Happiness amounts to having all-around favorable attitudes toward one’s life: finding one’s life to be satisfying.

Sumner contends that well-being has to be subjective, reflecting the subject’s point of view and priorities. Happiness as he conceives it arguably meets this criterion in the standard case. But what if our happiness is based on complete ignorance of our circumstances? What if we evaluate our lives favorably only because we have been brainwashed or manipulated? In both sorts of cases our happiness arguably fails to be a response to our lives that is truly ours. In cases of the former sort, it is not really our lives to which we are responding, but an illusion: we aren’t adequately informed. In cases of the latter sort, the values that ground our attitudes are not truly our own. It isn’t really us responding to our lives: our happiness is not autonomous.

There seems to be something deeply right about Sumner’s notion of authentic happiness. I would like to co-opt the notion for my own purposes, substituting the emotional state conception of happiness for his, and allowing that well-being has other aspects even as happiness remains central: self-fulfillment requires authenticity. I would suggest refining the autonomy constraint to allow that happiness need not be rooted in autonomous values; it may instead reflect, say, one’s temperament. Autonomy presumably does require, however, that one’s happiness not be based on values that are manipulated or otherwise non-autonomous. The activities that ground one’s happiness should likewise be autonomous: a free-thinking slave might have autonomous values, but any happiness she might achieve nonetheless seems less than fully authentic if it is grounded in activities that aren’t autonomous. For her happiness reflects a life that is not really her own. Authenticity also seems to require proper functioning, at least within broad limits: someone whose brain is pathologically stuck on ‘happy,’ no matter what happens or what she thinks, is not credibly viewed as authentically happy. Such happiness is more like that of the soma eater. (In severe cases where the self is badly disrupted it may not be clear what could count as authentic: some people lack well-formed selves.)

36 Sumner, Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics. Interestingly, this expression has recently turned up in the title of a book by psychologist Martin Seligman (Authentic Happiness). The usage appears to be independent.

37 The authenticity constraint does not seem limited to the happiness-related aspect of self-fulfillment. Insofar as self-fulfillment has other dimensions, it is plausible that they too will need to meet an authenticity requirement.
Authenticity arguably has a further dimension, beyond the information and autonomy requirements, namely richness. Briefly, the authenticity of one’s happiness increases, other things being equal, to the extent that it is grounded in richer, more complex ways of living. For such ways of living more fully express one’s nature. Someone might conceivably be happy, for example, leading the impoverished life of Rawls’s grass-counter. The choice to lead such a life could well be autonomous, say as a means of making happiness easier to come by. But there is not much of him in such a way of life, for he isn’t really doing much of anything—indeed, his happiness reflects a stunted version of himself. Whittling oneself down in this way hardly seems a path to authenticity. A more authentic life—a life more fully expressing his nature, his individuality—would have him fully engaged in the business of living, with all the richness of an ordinary human life. And the resulting happiness would, it seems, be more authentic as well.

This characterization of authenticity is admittedly somewhat cursory. But I am not trying to articulate a complete account of well-being here; further precision can wait until we have a broader theory to guide our reflections. In fact the definition of authenticity is best left somewhat vague, since we should allow room for dispute about what counts, for instance, as being autonomous. Just insert the conception of autonomy that seems most credible to you, and you will likely get the reading of authentic happiness that strikes you as most promising.

With the notion of authenticity in hand, we can add the necessary qualification to our characterization of emotional nature: to have a certain emotional nature is to be disposed characteristically to be authentically happy in certain circumstances and not others. The fact that I would be happy with a frontal lobotomy does not seem important to who I am.

We can now state the central claim of this paper: well-being consists partly in authentic happiness—in ‘emotional nature-fulfillment.’ More specifically, authentic happiness has intrinsic prudential value as an aspect of self-fulfillment, which in turn constitutes at least part of well-being. This value, moreover, is objective in the sense that it benefits you whether you want it, or would want it after reflection, or not. This might seem a weak claim, but it rules out virtually all extant theories of well-being.

E. Is there really an emotional self?

Some readers may balk at the very idea that mere affective dispositions could be central to who we are. Won’t it seem to Henry as if his unhappiness reflects an alien part of him? He wills that he live in a certain manner, and he succeeds. Yet his emotional nature rebels; it does not reward him with the happiness he expects. From Henry’s point of view it may seem that he is not, even partly, a set of emotional dispositions, but is rather the entity doing the willing. And these emotional dispositions are thwarting him. Discussing the phenomenology of choice, Korsgaard writes: ‘When you deliberate, it is as if there were something over and above all of your desires, something which is you, and which chooses which desire to act on.’ Whether this self is something over and above your desires, or is itself constituted by certain desires, it certainly seems distinct from your emotional propensities.

Such appearances are exactly what we should expect given the distinction between emotional nature and identity. Our felt sense of who we are concerns the latter, happiness concerns the former. One’s emotional nature need not be perceived as part of the self. Moreover, consider how it will look to Henry’s friends. Those who know him well enough may not think his unhappiness the

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38 Rawls, A Theory of Justice.
39 Sumner goes further into the details in his book (Welfare, Happiness, and Ethics).
40 Korsgaard, ‘The Sources of Normativity.’
result of anything alien at all. On the contrary: his unhappiness very much reflects who he is. The problem is not that his true self is being thwarted by alien forces erupting from the nether regions of his psyche. It is rather that he is blinkered, insufficiently appreciative of his own nature. He is living in conflict with who he is.\textsuperscript{41} If anything, his friends may see his snobbish values as alien, the impositions of a sometimes tyrannical intellect. (This is even clearer in Claudia’s case.)

If all this is right, then matters of affective makeup are far more significant than we tend to suppose. Why hasn’t this putative fact gotten more recognition? Mainly, it seems, because ‘mere’ matters of emotional constitution are seen as little more than parameters that limit the range of our realistic options in life, much as the facts about how tall or intelligent one is are among the brute facts one must accommodate when planning one’s life. A rational agent had best take such factors into account when deciding what to do, but this is not because they have any special value. It is just that she won’t get what she wants otherwise. Typically we very much want to be happy, and so we shall need to consider the facts about what makes us happy when deciding what to do. Traditional subjective theories of well-being, like the desire theory, can readily accommodate this phenomenon. But what if someone doesn’t consider happiness to be particularly important? This is among the questions raised by the cases of Henry and Claudia, and subjectivism is less plausible here. There is, I suspect, a second reason for the neglect of our emotional natures: a naïve assumption that happiness neatly tracks the extent to which we are getting what we want. What makes us happy is getting what we want. Some writers have clearly made this assumption: the switch from happiness to preference as the gauge of utility among economists was substantially premised on the belief that preference satisfaction could serve as a proxy for happiness, which they found too difficult to quantify and measure.\textsuperscript{42} In short, we have tended either to ignore the emotional self altogether, or to consider it significant only as a potential obstacle to the satisfaction of our desires.

IV. FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS FAVORING THE SELF-FULFILLMENT VIEW

A. The argument concerning hedonic value

Someone might grant that Henry made a mistake but dispute my diagnosis. We might think Henry’s error consists simply in having chosen a needlessly unpleasant life. The mistake is purely hedonic. Notice that this proposal makes pleasure out to be an objective good: we are better off with pleasure whether we want it or not. This implication is actually quite plausible: it is not as if we make pleasure good in wanting it, as if pleasure were itself neither good nor bad—as if our preference for pleasure, rather than displeasure, were arbitrary. I do not mean arbitrary in the sense that there could be no explanation of any sort for it. The idea is rather that, if pleasure is not intrinsically good, then we ultimately have no more reason to like it qua experience—for the way it feels—than to dislike it. We could just as well have been constructed to want experiences of extreme nausea or depression rather than massages and happiness, and there would be no non-instrumental reason for preferring the one constitution to the other. This is hard to believe.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{41} This is not to deny that he might be living in accordance with some aspects of who he is. But in this case the conflict outweighs the agreement.


\textsuperscript{43} To be fair, no view of pleasure is especially attractive. Pleasure is an elephantine problem for virtually any nonhedonistic axiology: neither desire nor anything else seems capable of explaining its value. Its value just seems brute. Perhaps pleasure can be understood as a kind of subjective fulfillment: an aspect of nature-fulfillment that is essentially tied to the subjective point of view. (A further type of ‘subjectivism’ centers not on agent sovereignty but on the subjective
Even if we grant the objective value of pleasure, that cannot be the whole story, for three reasons. First, peripheral displeasures, such as physical pains, do not seem to invoke the same intuitions. We might think it irrational for someone to choose a life of discomfort involving back pain without good reason. But we would not be especially inclined to describe such person as living in a way that conflicts with who she is, except insofar as the discomfort makes her unhappy (perhaps she is stoic and doesn’t let it get her down). Our criticism of Henry, by contrast, resembles what we say of repressed artists and the like, as I remarked in §2. Hedonism seems false to our understanding of these cases. It is not just that Henry’s experience is unpleasant. More pressing is that his very being seems to be in rebellion against his way of life.

Second, the kind of disvalue involved in Henry-type cases does not neatly track the hedonic disvalue. Intense back pain can be more unpleasant than a mildly depressed mood, even if you somehow manage not to let it get to you. Yet we are much more likely to consider gratuitous inflictions of negative emotional states as involving conflicts with, or the suppression of, our natures. The disvalue of unhappiness tracks not only the intensity of the displeasure, but the centrality of the affective states involved as well.

Third, if Henry’s problem were merely hedonic, we could fix it by giving him a pleasure pill or brain implant, were such treatments available. Such measures would confer some benefit, namely by making his life more pleasant. But they would not solve the fundamental problem, which intuitively is that his nature is unsuited for farming. Indeed, they would seem to make him worse off, as the resulting happiness would be a sham. At least his present unhappiness is his. My account can explain this: however little Henry fulfills his nature as an unhappy farmer, he would fulfill it even less by unhinging his mind from reality.

B. The authenticity argument: Sumner’s problem

I now want to argue that the present account of self-fulfillment enables us to solve two difficulties that confront Sumner’s theory of welfare: the authenticity constraint sits better with my view than Sumner’s. The most serious problem is that Sumner seems unable to give a plausible account of how authenticity affects the value of happiness. Is the value of happiness wholly conditional on authenticity? This is not credible: surely you are better off as a happy brain in a vat or brainwashing victim than as an unhappy one. Certainly you are better off in one respect, as we just saw: your experience is more pleasant. In fact the hedonic value of happiness appears not to be affected at all by considerations of authenticity. In what way, then, is your well-being compromised? This is hard to say. Inauthentic happiness is not prudentially worthless, nor is it simply bad. It appears to be a mixture of good and bad. Sumner’s theory seems unable to account for this, save perhaps by ad hoc stipulation. If happiness is valuable not just hedonically but also as part of self-fulfillment, however, then we can plausibly account for the significance of authenticity: whereas happiness’ hedonic value is untouched by inauthenticity, its value qua self-fulfillment is undermined in proportion to the shortfall in authenticity. In short, we cannot achieve self-fulfillment insofar as our happiness de-
Pends on ignorance about our lives, on being mindless tools, or on other forms of inauthenticity. Self-fulfillment is manifestly incompatible with lacking autonomy, at least on some reasonable views of autonomy. It also rules out being badly deceived about the conditions of one’s life, for self-fulfillment is not credibly viewed as a solipsistic ideal that concerns only the state of the individual. It involves an individual’s leading a life that suits her nature. Even with other animals, where we commonly assess well-being in terms of the fulfillment of the creature’s nature, we do not think such fulfillment supervenes entirely on the state of the individual: a happy ‘wolf-brain in a vat’ is liable to strike us as pathetic, failing badly to fulfill its nature. Likewise, self-fulfillment for me requires my responding favorably to my life, not a mirage.

Sumner’s account has another difficulty: reconciling the authenticity constraint with his subjectivism. Suppose I live under a totalitarian regime that has indoctrinated me to venerate its leaders and accept the state’s values. I might be happy, yet inauthentically so: my happiness is not autonomous, for it depends on the acceptance of values imposed on me through manipulative practices. This is a problem. Is it a subjectivist problem? It is not a problem from the subjective point of view: I wholeheartedly endorse my values and way of life. I see nothing wrong with my circumstances. This affirmation may persist through reflection and exposure to the facts. You might call my attention to my lack of autonomy, the inauthenticity of my happiness. I might agree with you on this, but then say, ‘so what?’ I do not value autonomy or authenticity. As far as I am concerned, these are the decadent values of a pathologically individualistic society. Leave me alone.

It is worth considering what is to be done with someone like me. Deprogramming seems the only route to enlightenment. Sumner writes of the ‘individual sovereignty which characterizes a subjective theory’ of well-being (1996, p. 160). Yet his own theory denies that the individual’s own best judgment, even when well-informed, is always sovereign. This sounds a lot like an objectivist claim. (Consider how it will sound to the heteronomous agent.) Sumner will, of course, deny that it is really one’s own judgment at all when autonomy is lacking. To the agent, however, it seems for all the world like it’s his judgment, that it really reflects his values. The only way to make sense of Sumner’s contention, it seems, is to see it as appealing to an objective conception of the self: the agent’s judgment does not reflect his true self—who he really is, as opposed to who he takes himself to be. Or the self he would be were he not so benighted. This should not sit well with the subjectivist, who will normally want to resist appeals to ‘true selves’ that differ from the selves we take ourselves to be. While there is no formal inconsistency in basing a subjective view of welfare on an objective view of the self, the conjunction is unnatural. We shall doubt whether the theory of well-being is reasonably considered subjectivist.

The point is not to quarrel over the word ‘subjectivist’. It is that an authenticity requirement seems to run against the basic rationale of Sumner’s approach, which stresses the agent’s point of view and priorities, and the importance of individual sovereignty with respect to the agent’s own well-being. At any rate, it is doubtful that his response to the heteronomous agent offends subjectivist sensibilities significantly less than my response to Henry and Claudia. In both cases we override the agent’s own best judgment, and in neither case do we recommend a way of life that the agent, once in it, will find onerous. Quite the opposite.

In short, Sumner appears to make authenticity an objective good. The worry is similar to a charge sometimes leveled against existentialists: despite their protestations to the contrary, they do posit at least one objective value, namely authenticity. You must be authentic whether you like it or

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45 See also Ibid.
46 At least, it does on a plausible reading of ‘own best judgment.’
not. It also resembles the complaint some have made that the strong information requirement demanded by informed desire theories of well-being raises skeptical worries about the significance of welfare: why should I care what I would say if fully informed, which is to say very different from my present condition? That isn’t me, the person actually making the choice.48

The objective value of authenticity is a problem for Sumner’s view, but not mine: authenticity is necessary for self-fulfillment, which is objective to begin with, and rests on the sort of objective account of the self that we need. By taking happiness to be objectively valuable as part of self-fulfillment, we can accommodate the authenticity constraint. This provides considerable support for the account I have been defending. Indeed, what originally seemed a problem for it is actually a virtue: for now we can say what is wrong with, say, a happy soma eater. This individual’s happiness doesn’t reflect who she is. Her way of life does not embody self-fulfillment.

Interestingly, the authenticity constraint also seems to explain what’s right with many cases of antidepressant use. Recall the discussion of uplift anxiety in §3.2. More common, I gather, is the reverse: ‘Finally, I’m really myself.’ What’s going on? Intuitively, many such cases seem not to involve inauthenticity: we do not begrudge these individuals their newfound happiness, perhaps because we see the depression as a genuine disorder; the drug simply restores proper functioning. So the happiness is authentic enough, at least in some cases, and what the patients’ testimony reflects is the phenomenology of self-fulfillment.

More authenticity is not always better. Sometimes we do not want to know all the facts. Sometimes we are happy to maintain certain minor illusions, particularly about our loved ones. (Do you want to know everything about your parents?) In fact there is considerable evidence that happy people typically have inflated opinions of themselves, are unrealistically optimistic about their prospects, and otherwise see the world through rose-tinted lenses.49 Indeed, about the only people who seem to have a truly realistic sense of themselves are depressed, or suffer from low self-esteem. This may seem problematical for my view. On the contrary: the present view can explain our ambivalence about these phenomena. Insofar as our happiness depends on illusion, it is less authentic, hence less valuable with respect to self-fulfillment. But insofar as we are happier, our experience is more pleasant, hence better in that respect. It stands to reason that small departures from perfect authenticity—minor illusions—may be justified by a significant hedonic payoff in some cases. We trade a little bit of authenticity for a sum of pleasure. So we may be better off for it, but there is a cost nonetheless.

V. TOWARD A SELF-FULFILLMENT THEORY OF WELL-BEING

I will not defend a full-blooded account of well-being here. But it will help situate my claims about happiness if we have a rough picture of the ideal in question. Self-fulfillment, again, is a eudaimonistic ideal, a species of nature-fulfillment. Many moderns find the teleological structure of welfare eudaimonism objectionable, but numerous commentators have recently emphasized that teleology in ethics need not rely on any metaphysical teleology. What we count as the relevant ‘nature’ may well reflect our ethical outlook, and cannot simply be read off ‘the facts’.50 One possibility is that value is somehow a projection of human psychology, and that the mind projects value

50 See e.g. Annas, The Morality of Happiness.
onto the world according to a teleological paradigm. We see things as having ‘natures,’ and see value in the fulfillment of those natures.

The idea that some sort of nature-fulfillment is intrinsically valuable has a very broad appeal: eudaimonistic ideals can arguably be found among not just the ancients and their followers but Thomists, Marxists, Nietzsche, the existentialists, and humanistic psychologists like Maslow and Rogers, among many others. Whereas ancient and medieval thinkers tended to focus on our generic natures as human beings, the modern era has taken an inward turn, emphasizing the peculiar psychological constitution of the individual person: the self. Because it is easy to characterize certain ideals of self-fulfillment in wholly ateleological terms, self-fulfillment may play a far greater role in modern accounts of well-being, even among subjectivists, than is generally recognized. This is arguably the case, we saw, with Sumner’s view. And it is questionable whether desire theories of human welfare would be so popular if we did not also tend to think that our desires, understood broadly to include values, ideals and the like, are important to who we are.51 In satisfying our important desires, we find self-fulfillment. Indeed, perhaps the only popular account of well-being that seems not to rest on an ideal of nature-fulfillment is the pleasure theory: welfare hedonism. Here the value seems brutally phenomenological. Yet there have even been hedonistic forms of eudaimonism: Epicureans grounded their brand of hedonism in nature-fulfillment, holding that we are, at bottom, pleasure seekers.52 And Mill is perhaps our most eloquent spokesperson for self-fulfillment, as we find in his paean to individuality in On Liberty. Other hedonists, like Sidgwick and Brandt, have rooted their views in a type of desire theory, and hence may have relied implicitly on the notion of self-fulfillment.

It is worth noting some points of contrast between the variety of eudaimonism suggested here and its Aristotelian relatives.53 Theories in the Aristotelian tradition are perfectionist, conceiving of nature-fulfillment in terms of doing things or functioning well. Instead of focusing on the desire-fulfillment of the desire theorists, or the type of nature-fulfillment sketched here, such theorists typically consider nature-fulfillment to be a matter of capacity-fulfillment: fulfilling one’s human potential, or exercising one’s distinctively human capacities. Such theorists standardly base these claims on a non-individualistic view of the relevant nature: what is essential to being human, say, or what the distinctively human qualities are. However the details work out, the relevant nature is typically said to be human nature: our species nature.

The present view, by contrast, is individualistic, grounding nature-fulfillment in the particular (and arbitrarily idiosyncratic) makeup of the individual. This good is not perfectionist, but straightforwardly prudential. Aristotelians regard it as both: well-being consists in perfection. Doing so enables them to forge a strong a priori connection between virtue and welfare, but for obvious

51 Gewirth, Self-Fulfillment. Cf. Rosati’s discussion of the intuition underlying the autonomy-based argument for internalism about a person’s good (which underwrites much of subjectivism’s appeal): the intuition is that ‘the good of a creature must suit its own nature’ (‘Internalism and the Good for a Person’). See also Rawls, A Theory of Justice, esp. secs. 40, 65, 79, 85-6.
52 See e.g. Annas, The Morality of Happiness.
53 See e.g. Philippa Foot, Natural Goodness (New York, 2001), Thomas Hurka, Perfectionism (New York, 1993), Rosalind Hursthouse, On Virtue Ethics (New York, 1999), Richard Kraut, Aristotle: Political Philosophy (New York, 2002), Martha Nussbaum, Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach (New York, 2000) and Christopher H. Toner, ‘Aristotelian Well-Being: A Response to L.W. Sumner’s Critique,’ Utilitas (forthcoming). The Aristotelian literature has yet to integrate fully with the contemporary literature on well-being, so it is often difficult to tell where an author stands on well-being. (Hurka e.g. rejects a ‘well-being’ interpretation of his view, yet there is considerable overlap in our concerns.) For related views, see Darwall, Welfare and Rational Care, LeBar, ‘Good for You,’ Mark C. Murphy, Natural Law and Practical Rationality (New York, 2001) and George Sher, Beyond Neutrality: Perfectionism and Politics (New York, 1997).
reasons makes the position open to serious objections. The ambitions of my view are narrower: to characterize well-being, period. The theory of human excellence remains a separate question. (So it is no objection to my view that someone with a depraved nature could flourish, unless—with the Aristotelian—you think depravity incompatible with well-being.)

The present account also differs from Aristotelian views in positing a less intellectualistic view of human nature, placing a greater emphasis on its affective dimension as something that matters independently of its connection with reason. But this is not a romantic irrationalism. The claim, recall, is that happiness has intrinsic prudential value as a part of self-fulfillment. A full-blooded account of welfare would likely incorporate goods other than happiness, depending on how we view our natures. Obviously important in this regard—so important that it tends to be conflated with the self—is a person’s identity. And it is highly plausible that self-fulfillment will involve, not just being happy, but success as well in relation to those commitments that define who we are and lend meaning to our lives. Consider, for instance, the role that one’s spouse has in giving meaning and structure to one’s life and sense of self. We might claim that welfare consists partly in the appropriate fulfillment of this role: how well the narrative of one’s life goes depends, at least in part, on how things go with respect to the commitments that shape one’s identity. The loss of one’s spouse vacates a crucial (‘narrative’) role in one’s life: one’s life loses meaning, and a part of the self is lost—a phenomenon no doubt reflected in the common observation among the bereaved that it is as if they’ve suffered an amputation. This seems a prudential loss quite apart from its effects on one’s happiness. (Eventually one may adapt and stop grieving; but the vacancy remains.) Such phenomena indicate that we should consider incorporating identity-related fulfillments into an account of well-being as part of self-fulfillment.

The view that emerges roughly reflects a familiar understanding of the self, on which it has an emotional aspect and a rational aspect. (While the ‘rational’ aspect obviously has an emotional dimension, and might even be defined partly in terms of emotion, our reflective concerns—e.g. a commitment to vegetarianism—are quite central to our identities. And what we reflectively deem to be unimportant to us tends not, barring self-deception, to be important for our identities.) This paper may be viewed as arguing for a more central place for the emotional self in our view of human flourishing: self-fulfillment is not simply a matter of living up to our ideals, achieving our goals etc., but also of living in accordance with our emotional natures. And sometimes the demands of the emotional self will have normative primacy over those of the rational. While these two aspects of the self are deeply intertwined and overlapping, they require separate attention. The upshot is that some improvements in happiness, even authentic ones, may not make our lives go better for us on the whole. For they may deprive our lives of too much meaning. Why aren’t Henry’s and Claudia’s cases like this? I have assumed, first, that Henry and Claudia would be much happier in different occupations: we are not talking about taking happy people and making them a little happier, but taking patently unhappy people and making them happy. Second, I have assumed that they could lead lives that make them happier and are perfectly meaningful.

The suggested addition of identity-related fulfillments may not yield a complete account of well-being. For there might be further aspects of the self to consider, and there are subpersonal as-

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54 Aristotle hardly considered affect unimportant—he thought it an essential part, and ‘completion,’ of virtuous activity—but he regarded it as properly integrated with, and subordinate to, reason.

55 Terned, perhaps, ‘narrative role fulfillment.’

56 See e.g. Frankfurt on wholeheartedness (‘Identification and Wholeheartedness’) and Copp on self-esteem identity (‘Social Unity and the Identity of Persons’).

57 I am grateful to Talia Bettcher for helping me to see the importance of this point.
pects of human nature that may beg for inclusion. For example, we might conclude that well-being consists not just in the fulfillment of the self’s two parts, but also in the fulfillment of our subpersonal, ‘nutritive’ and ‘animal’ natures: health or physical vitality and pleasure.\(^{58}\)

To arrive at a complete account of well-being will plainly require a broader theoretical framework, one that can among other things explain what counts as an individual’s ‘nature’ in the relevant sense. Why do propensities for happiness count, for instance, and not the appetites? But these remarks should help to situate my contentions about happiness, illustrating the sort of place happiness might occupy in a fuller theory of well-being.

VI. CONCLUSION

The central aim of this paper has been rather modest: to establish, at least provisionally, that happiness has intrinsic prudential value as an aspect of self-fulfillment. And the arguments for this claim have themselves involved fairly modest claims, notably that at least part of well-being can be characterized in terms of self-fulfillment, and that the facts about what makes us happy are important to who we are. These contentions seem quite plausible, and not particularly shocking. But they have led us to some interesting places. I will close by noting three of them.

As I noted at the outset, the allures of subjectivism result mainly from the thought that objectivist alternatives both violate individual autonomy and make our well-being something that is alien to us. But I have argued that one reason for the objective value of happiness is precisely that it is \textit{not} alien to us: it is deeply bound up with the self. Subjectivism seems necessary to avoid alienation only if we assume certain narrow views of the self—views that, I have argued, are false. And as the discussion in §4.2 suggests, ostensibly subjectivist theories themselves face worries about paternalism insofar as they are prepared to override subjects’ considered judgments about their lives.\(^{59}\) Most such theories are so prepared—and must be, if they are to be at all plausible. Do we all, then, fail to respect autonomy? It is hard to see why: we respect persons’ autonomy not by agreeing with their judgments about their lives. We respect it by taking those judgments seriously, whether we agree with them or not.\(^{60}\)

Second, our discussion has pointed us toward an ancient approach to well-being that in the recent literature has been overwhelmingly dominated by the followers of Aristotle. But welfare eudaimonism can take many forms, some—like the Epicurean variety—diverging widely from the Aristotelian paradigm. There is something deeply appealing about the basic idea of grounding well-being in the fulfillment of our natures, and this root notion deserves more attention. We may find, as I have tried to indicate, that the most promising form of eudaimonism bears a stronger resemblance to the subjectivist accounts favored by moderns than we might have expected. The view suggested here takes a middle path, one that promises greater critical power than subjectivist theories can offer without imposing the stringent—some would say alien—demands that make Aristotelian eudaimonism so hard for many contemporaries to accept.

Third, the present view of well-being marks a turn away from a kind of rationalism that has arguably characterized most recent thinking about human welfare, one that places tremendous

\(^{58}\) See Aristotle, \textit{Nicomachean Ethics}, 1098a1-3. While such additions would not fall within the scope of self-fulfillment, the resulting view could still usefully be termed a ‘self-fulfillment’ view of well-being given the central and distinctive role self-fulfillment plays in it.

\(^{59}\) For a similar claim, see Scanlon, ‘Value, Desire, and Quality of Life.’

\(^{60}\) A similar point appears in Brad Hooker, ‘Does Moral Virtue Constitute a Benefit to the Agent?’ \textit{How Should One Live?} ed. R. Crisp (New York, 1996).
weight on agents’ reflective judgments about their lives.\textsuperscript{61} Aristotle’s view is rationalistic in the intended sense: to flourish is, for him, to lead a highly reflective life of excellence with reason firmly in charge. Subjectivists also privilege reflective judgment, though naturally according a less demanding standard: if the idea is to show respect for individuals’ autonomy by making people the ultimate authorities on their own welfare, then agents’ reflective judgments about their lives will naturally need to bear a lot of weight. Pleasures, cravings, etc. that the individual does not, or would not, endorse on reflection might perhaps get some weight in the subjectivist’s scheme. But they cannot be allowed to trump the individual’s own best judgment. Subjectivism thus embodies a kind of rationalism: it makes well-being strongly dependent on the part of us that reasons, deliberates, and reflects. (Accordingly, most subjectivists include a rationality constraint, as one usually finds in informed desire theories. It is hard to see how subjectivists can avoid some such requirement: why should even I regard my judgments or desires as authoritative when they are self-defeating, contradictory, or otherwise blankly irrational?)

The view defended in this paper takes a more sentimentalist approach to thinking about well-being: human flourishing depends substantially on the verdicts of our emotional natures, to a significant extent independently of what we think about our lives. There is a large part of well-being, in short, that hinges on matters of sentiment, needing no stamp of approval from reason. Of course I have not denied an important role for reason in a fuller account of well-being, so that a complete view would likely have both sentimentalist and rationalist elements (in contrast, say, to hedonism, which in its canonical forms is a wholly sentimentalist approach). Nor have I suggested that reason and sentiment can be wholly separated; for all I have said, sentiment might always have some rational element and vice-versa. But it does appear that our reflective judgments do not bear the sort of authority regarding our welfare that many of us take them to. Nor, perhaps, are they supposed to.\textsuperscript{62}

\textsuperscript{61} I will not give precise definitions of welfare rationalism or sentimentalism here, and will simply discuss them as broad tendencies in thinking about well-being. These notions are not intended to mirror precisely the concepts of moral rationalism and sentimentalism, though the distinctions are not unrelated. One difference is that I am not assuming that the judgments privileged by welfare rationalism are solely the product of rational insight. We might distinguish a strong form of welfare rationalism that does make this assumption. But when thinking about well-being the more important question seems to be whether the ‘I’ that reflects, deliberates, and judges enjoys a special authority.

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