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Targeting Welfare: What Are We Talking About When We Talk About “Welfare”?

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1. Round and Round We Go

We are all in the business of defending theories about what makes for individual welfare. We present our own views; we criticize the views of others. Some say that shape matters; others deny it. Some say that moral character matters; others deny it. Some say that a meaningless life very well might be high in welfare; others deny it. Some say that the deceived businessman might have a life high in welfare; others deny it. This might seem to be a robust debate.

Yet it sometimes seems that we are going around in circles, defending the same theories and raising the same objections over and over, without resolution. Some of the main objections to hedonism, for example, were first raised two thousand years ago, and yet hedonism is still with us. Some of us contemplate the objections and immediately conclude that hedonism is untenable; others contemplate the same objections and cannot imagine how anyone could be moved by them. They seem to involve appeals to irrelevancies.

The stalemate may be due to a simple fact: maybe we are just talking past each other. Maybe when one philosopher puts forward a theory of welfare, she is attempting to present a theory about some particular thing; and when another philosopher presents an objection, he is presenting an objection not about the thing the first philosopher was theorizing about; maybe the second philosopher is talking about a different thing. Maybe the two philosophers use the word ‘welfare’ to indicate two different phenomena. In this case, it would be no wonder that they disagree about the cases to which it properly applies.

2. Some Terminological Points

We use a lot of different terms, presumably intending to be talking about individual welfare. Some terms: “well-being”, “personal welfare”, “individual quality of life”, “goodness of the life for the one who lives it”, “choiceworthiness of life”, “prudential value of life”. We can assume that when Kagan described the life of the deceived businessman and said that it is “not all that a life could be”; that it has not “gone about as well as a life could go”, he was talking about individual welfare. Presumably, he was saying that the life of the deceived businessman was not high in individual welfare. Otherwise, it’s hard to see how the example has any bearing on mental state theories of welfare.¹

At least at the outset, I will try to use “welfare” consistently to indicate the relevant feature, and I will speak of lives that have a lot of it as “lives high in welfare”.

Consider two familiar theories about welfare:

¹ Wayne Sumner understands Kagan’s point in this way in “Feldman’s Hedonism”, p. 89 in *The Good, the Right, Life and Death*.

AH: A possible life, L, has a welfare value of n if and only if the net amount of intrinsic attitudinal pleasure contained in L is n.

PR: A possible life, L, has a welfare value of n if and only if the percentage of desires that are satisfied (as opposed to frustrated) in L is n.

Theories like AH and PR are not offered as definitions of welfare. They do not say *what welfare is*. They do not purport to say what ‘welfare’ means. They do not purport to give “an analysis” of the concept of welfare. I find it misleading to say that such theories tell us something about “the nature of welfare”. Theories like these are intended to assert, with respect to something that is not identical to welfare, that it is the ultimate determiner of welfare. Each of them claims, with respect to some feature, that the more of this feature you’ve got, the higher your welfare.^{2,3}

I will say that theories like these are intended to give an account of what *makes for welfare*. By this I mean that theories like these purport to identify the feature that is the ultimate determiner and explainer of welfare.

It’s possible for there to be two philosophers, A and B, who agree entirely about *what welfare is* but disagree about *what makes for welfare*. There is some single thing – welfare – such that A thinks (for example) that the more attitudinal pleasure you have, the more of it you’ve got. B thinks (for example) that the greater the extent to which your preferences are satisfied, the more of it you’ve got. In this case, A and B would really disagree about something.

On the other hand, it is also possible for there to be two philosophers, C and D, who don’t agree about *what welfare is* and then go on to seem to disagree about *what makes for welfare*. In this sort of case, C and D might not be disagreeing about anything of more than trivial terminological preference.

3. *Some Welfare-like Concepts*

² Sometimes I find people saying things like this: “welfare is happiness”, or “welfare is pleasure minus pain”, or “welfare is getting what you want”. Such remarks drive me crazy. They look like identity statements, as if the person (in the first instance) were trying to say that the concept of welfare is identical to the concept of happiness. After all, that’s the most natural interpretation of a sentence that has two singular terms linked by an “is”. It looks like the “is” of identity. But surely when someone says “welfare is happiness” what he really means is that happiness makes for welfare.

³ A person could accept AH and still say that other things help to determine welfare. He could say, for example, that health, wealth, warm loving relationships, knowledge and other things all help to increase a person’s level of welfare. But if he accepted AH, he would say that if these things increase welfare in some case, they do so because in that case they increase attitudinal pleasure. Attitudinal pleasure, he would say, is the ultimate determiner of welfare. Furthermore, if we want to know *why* something increases welfare, a defender of AH would say that it increases welfare fundamentally because it increases attitudinal pleasure. Facts about levels of attitudinal pleasure are the ultimate and non-derivative explanations, on this view, about facts about welfare.

Many books and essays and encyclopedia articles about welfare start out with an introductory passage in which the authors say that they are going to be talking about welfare; then, after a few words intended to make the target clearer, they begin to discuss the conflicting theories about what makes for welfare.⁴ They seem to presuppose that there is no great problem about getting everyone to focus on the same target. The *nature of welfare* is assumed to be unproblematic. The interesting philosophical controversy, they seem to assume, concerns substantive theories about *what makes for welfare*. But in fact there are several different welfare-like concepts floating around in the vicinity. I fear that some philosophers may be thinking of one of these when they speak of welfare, and others may be thinking of others. If this were true, and if the participants did not realize that they were talking about two different things, it would not be surprising if they felt as if they were disagreeing about what makes for welfare. But, of course, they might simply be talking past each other, with no real disagreement.

We need to disentangle these concepts of welfare; we need to see that they are different; each of us needs to be clear on which one we are talking about when we present our view about welfare.

There are many ways in which we can evaluate lives. Some of these ways of evaluation seem to be ways in which a life can be “good in itself for the one who lives it” even though they are not forms of welfare. Here are four:

3a. Meaningfulness

I hesitate to say what we mean when we say that a life is meaningful. Maybe it has something to do with “making a difference”, or “being significant”. Maybe it is easiest to understand by contrast to a life that is pointless, or wasted. In his valuable article on this topic in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Thaddeus Metz says ‘Perhaps when one of us speaks of “meaning in life,” we have in mind one of these ideas: certain conditions that are worthy of great pride or admiration, values that warrant devotion and love, qualities that make a life intelligible, or ends apart from subjective satisfaction and moral duty that are the most choice-worthy.’⁵

In any case, there is a scale that measures degrees of meaningfulness. There is a zero point in the middle; to the right, there are points indicating greater and greater degrees of meaningfulness. To the left are points representing increasing degrees of meaninglessness. Presumably, every life falls somewhere on this scale. In my view (though I do not defend it here) a life that includes great effort and achievement, especially if the achievements are worthwhile, would rank high on this scale. A life filled with mindless TV-watching or blade counting, or rolling of rocks up hills would rate very low on this scale.

3b. Virtuousness

I assume that some traits of character are moral virtues and others are moral vices. I assume that there is a scale that measures the extent to which a person displays these virtues and vices. If

⁴ Ben Bradley does this in Section 1.1 of his *Well-Being and Death*. Bradley’s remarks in that section make it clear that he is well aware of the problem I mean to discuss in this paper. Valerie Tiberius and Alexandra Plakias do the same in ??

⁵ Metz, “The Meaning of Life” SEP retrieved May 6, 2013.

viciousness can be subtracted from virtuosity, then it makes sense to talk of “net virtue”. To the right of zero on the scale we have increasing positive levels of net virtue; to the left we have negative levels of net virtue. In my view (though again I will not defend it here) a life that is marked by great courage, justice, generosity, compassion, etc. would rank high on this scale. A life filled with cowardice, injustice, selfishness, indifference, etc. would rank low.

3c. Narrative Beauty

In his essay “The Lost Mariner”, Oliver Sacks describes the case of Jimmie G., who suffered a brain injury that destroyed his capacity to remember anything for more than a few seconds. As a result of this profound memory problem, he was unable to engage in any project that would ...

3d. Perfection

We might think that there is some special function that people are intended to fulfill – something that we are uniquely capable of doing. And we might also think that if we do that thing especially well, then we have managed to be excellent human beings. Aristotle famously said that our special function somehow involves “activity of the soul in accord with virtue, and indeed with the best and most complete virtue.”⁶ Another philosopher might have a different view about what it takes to exemplify humanity at its best.

It should be clear that these concepts (meaningfulness, virtuosity, narrative beauty, and human perfection) are different from each other; furthermore it should be clear that none of them is by itself a concept of welfare. It should be obvious that a life could be outstandingly meaningful or virtuous though low in welfare. The same is true of narrative beauty and human perfection. I don’t know that anyone would confuse life evaluation in any of these ways with life evaluation strictly in terms of welfare.

However, there are some concepts that may be viewed as “enriched” concepts of welfare. These could more easily be confused with welfare itself. Each of them involves a combination of welfare with some other evaluative notion.

3e. Meaning-Enriched Concepts of Welfare

Suppose that some philosopher has given a theory about what makes for welfare. Suppose the theory is some form of mental statism. Suppose some critic points out that if the proposed theory were true, then a person in an experience machine could have a life high in welfare. But to the critic, this seems obviously impossible. A life in the experience machine would be utterly meaningless. How can anyone think that it’s possible for a life to be high in welfare when it is completely meaningless? The first philosopher shrugs off the alleged counterexample, admitting that there is something funny about a life in an experience machine, but insisting that if the machinist’s mental states were just like those of a real novel-writing, friendship-having, happy real-life duplicate, then his welfare would be high.

⁶ *Nicomachean Ethics* Book I, Chapter 7, §§15-16.

What has gone wrong here? Perhaps what has happened is that this critic has presupposed some Meaning-Enriched Concept of Welfare. He thinks that when we say that a person is living a life high in welfare, part of what we mean is that the person is living a meaningful life. As he sees it, no matter how happy (or whatever) a person may be, if the person is living a meaningless life, he cannot be living a life of very great welfare. But that's only because when he says 'welfare' what he has in mind is some Meaning-Enriched Concept of Welfare.⁷

Obviously, these philosophers are also arguing at cross purposes. The first philosopher did not presuppose a meaning-enriched concept of welfare. He had given a view about what we may call "Pure, Unadulterated Welfare". The second had given a case in which someone had low Meaning Enriched Welfare while satisfying the first philosopher's criterion. This would be a pointless exchange. The second philosopher's example has no relevance to the first philosopher's theory.

3f. Virtue-Enriched Concepts of Welfare

Some philosophers seem to think that no matter how happy a person is, if the person's happiness emerges entirely out of vile and disgusting character traits and behavior, then his welfare cannot be very high. They seem to think that there is some essential connection between welfare and virtue. This can be developed in a couple of different ways. In one way, it goes like this: welfare is basically a matter of happiness; but the welfare value of some happiness needs to be adjusted for moral virtue or vice. A given amount of happiness would make a bigger contribution to welfare if that happiness emerged from morally virtuous behavior and character. The same amount of happiness would make a smaller contribution to welfare if it emerged out of morally vicious behavior and character.

We can imagine a philosopher who takes these remarks about the connection between welfare and virtue to be analytic. As he sees it, virtuosity is conceptually included in the very concept of welfare. Such a philosopher, I will say, has a Virtue-Enriched Concept of Welfare.

Suppose some philosopher says that happiness makes for welfare. Suppose some critic accepts a Virtue-Enriched Concept of Welfare. She describes a morally corrupt but cheerful life. She claims that the possibility of such a life refutes the first philosopher's theory. "There," she says, "that proves that you are wrong. This possibility of this cheerful bastard shows that a person can be happy without having high welfare."

Obviously, the philosophers are arguing at cross purposes. The first philosopher did not presuppose a virtue-enriched concept of welfare. He gave a criterion for Pure, Unadulterated Welfare. The second had given a case in which someone had low Virtue Enriched Welfare while satisfying the first philosopher's criterion. Their "debate" is pointless; they are talking about two different things.

3g. Narrative Beauty-Enriched Concepts of Welfare

⁷ Antti Kauppinen seems to presuppose a meaning-enriched concept of welfare in his paper "Meaningfulness and Time".

Suppose again that some philosopher proposes a theory about what makes for Welfare. Suppose again he thinks it's just happiness. As he sees it, if a life contains many happy moments, and few unhappy moments, then that life is high in welfare. But another critic comes along and proposes a counterexample. The critic asks us to imagine a life that has a scrambled narrative. There are happy moments and unhappy moments, but the whole thing does not add up to a compelling story. It's just a jumble. When the critic thinks of welfare, she thinks that a life cannot be high in welfare unless that life has a suitably coherent structure. Maybe it has to be steadily uphill; or maybe it has to contain dramatic conflict and achievement. But as she sees it, a life that is just a messy jumble of happy moments cannot be high in welfare. The critic takes these claims about narrative structure to be analytic – they are just part of the very concept of welfare (as she uses the term 'welfare').⁸

Perhaps the critic has presupposed some version of the Narrative Beauty-Enriched Concept of Welfare. As a result, she thinks she has an objection to the first philosopher's theory. But of course her example is irrelevant. It is an example of a life that is low in Narrative Beauty-Enriched Welfare; but the first philosopher did not offer a theory about what makes for Narrative Beauty-Enriched Welfare. He offered a theory about what makes for Pure, Unadulterated Welfare. So again the philosophers are talking past each other and making no progress.

3h. "Be All You Can Be" Concepts of Welfare

In a passage that I mentioned earlier, Shelly Kagan hints at yet another concept of welfare. He suggests that when we say that someone leads a life very high in welfare, what we mean is that that person's life "is all that a life can be"; that it "has gone about as well as a life could go". Presumably, a life would rate highly with respect to this sort of welfare only if it scored well in many scales – happiness, virtue, meaning, narrative beauty, etc.

Again, suppose a philosopher has presented a theory about Pure, Unadulterated Welfare. Suppose Kagan or some other critic comes along and points out that the deceived businessman could have a life that would get high marks on the proposed theory, but that would not be "all that a life could be". Perhaps the critic has presupposed a "Be All You Can Be" concept of welfare, and has pointed out a case in which someone has a life that rates poorly with respect to this sort of welfare. The example would have no direct relevance to the theory in question, since that theory was offered as a theory about Pure, Unadulterated Welfare, and not as a theory about "Be All You Can Be" Welfare.

3i. Pure, Unadulterated Welfare

I have mentioned several scales on which a life can be weighed: meaningfulness, virtue, narrative beauty, human perfection, and the "be all you can be" scale that seems to incorporate several or perhaps all of these. I certainly do not mean to suggest that these are all pointless scales, or that they are somehow incoherent. In my view, each of them gives us a way of assessing a life.

⁸ It's possible that Velleman had some such concept of welfare in mind when he wrote ???

However, it seems to me that there is a core concept of welfare that has been (somewhat confusedly) at the center of debate and discussion since the time of Aristotle and Plato. This is what I have always had in mind when I speak of the life that is “good in itself for the one who lives it”. I grant, of course, that higher degrees of meaningfulness might causally contribute to higher degrees of Pure, Unadulterated Welfare. I also grant that under ideal circumstances higher degrees of virtue might causally contribute to higher degrees of Pure, Unadulterated Welfare. Some of us take pleasure in living lives that are outstanding with respect to narrative beauty. In those cases, higher degrees of narrative beauty might causally contribute to higher degrees of Pure, Unadulterated Welfare.

But Pure, Unadulterated Welfare itself does not analytically contain any of these notions. They are simply other ways of evaluating a life. Later I will say more about Pure, Unadulterated Welfare.

4. Targeting Welfare

Perhaps in an effort to avoid pointless confusion, philosophers who discuss welfare often give us suggestions at the outset, trying to help us focus on the concept of welfare. If they are successful in this, we will at least be clear on what they are talking about. I will say that when they give us these suggestions, they are trying to *target* the subject matter of their theorizing. It is as if they are saying “Before I present my theory, let me emphasize that I meant to be theorizing about *welfare*. You know what I mean – *welfare*”. Then comes a bit of arm-waving. “There! That’s it! Welfare. I am going to give a theory about what makes for precisely that.” When they say these preliminary things, the philosophers in question are not yet giving a substantive theory about what makes for welfare; nor are they trying to give an analysis of the concept of welfare. They are just trying to make sure that we understand at the outset which target they are going to be theorizing about.

4a. Using Care to Target Welfare

In his book *Welfare and Rational Care* Stephen Darwall seems to endorse a general approach to the problem under consideration here. He fully understands the difference between attempting to target welfare and offering a substantive theory about what makes for welfare. He apparently thinks that he can help his readers locate the topic of his theory by saying something about “rational care”. Here is just one example illustrating the sort of thing that Darwall actually says:

My proposal will be that [welfare] is the concept of what we would rationally desire for someone insofar as we care for her, or equivalently, what it is rational to desire for her for her sake. (pp. 11- 12)

Although this involves some unauthorized reinterpretation of the text, I will pretend that Darwall was making some preliminary remarks before presenting a theory about Pure,

Unadulterated Welfare.⁹ With that assumption in place, we can formulate a clearer statement that is based on this and other things that Darwall says in his book:

DT: Getting x would enhance S's Pure, Unadulterated Welfare iff if we were to care about S, it would be rational for us to want for S's sake for S to get x.

DT is not offered as a definition of the nature of Pure, Unadulterated Welfare. Nor is it offered as a theory about what makes for Pure, Unadulterated Welfare. (Darwall goes on to present such a theory later in his book.) Rather, the idea here is that reflection on DT will help us to make sure we are thinking about the right concept. It might be thought that DT could help us to understand that in his book, Darwall's target is Pure, Unadulterated Welfare.¹⁰

I think that DT fails to identify any sort of welfare; thus it fails as a suggestion for targeting Pure, Unadulterated Welfare. Suppose we think that it's more important for a person to have a meaningful life than it is for a person to have a life high in any sort of welfare. Suppose that when we care about a person, we find ourselves hoping that she will have a more meaningful life. If someone were to ask us, we would admit that it would be nice if those we cared about could have lives of higher welfare; but we especially care if they could have lives that are outstandingly meaningful. I can't see why it would be irrational for us to care in this way about the meaningfulness of the lives of those we care about. So I think DT doesn't distinguish between meaningfulness (whatever precisely that might be) and any sort of welfare, no less Pure, Unadulterated Welfare.

The same would be true in the case in which we care more about virtue than we do about any sort of welfare. I guess it might be rational for us to want increased levels of virtue in those we care about. This provides another reason to think that DT does not target any sort of welfare. Virtue, whether combined with welfare or not, seems to satisfy the requirements of DT.

DT goes wrong in the opposite direction as well. Suppose we see that there is something that would enhance S's Pure, Unadulterated Welfare; suppose we also see that if S were to get that thing, then S's level of virtue would go down. Suppose on this basis and out of concern for S, we do not want S to get this thing. Our lack of desire might be rational. In that case, DT implies that the thing in question would not enhance S's Pure, Unadulterated Welfare; but ex hypothesi, it would.

⁹ In fact I think Darwall was aiming for an account of some sort of enriched welfare – perhaps meaning enriched, but I am not sure of this.

¹⁰ In his wonderfully helpful article "Welfare" in the *Routledge Companion to Ethics*, Chris Heathwood briefly mentions several tests for welfare. In the first paragraph, while identifying the target of his discussion, he says "Some people's lives are quite good; if someone we cared about were to live such a life, this would please us." This is in several ways very similar to things that Darwall said. The view suggested by Heathwood (modified so as to be explicitly about Pure, Unadulterated Welfare) seems to be this:

HT: S's life, L, is high in Pure, Unadulterated Welfare iff if we cared about S, we would be pleased to learn that S lived L.

My comments on DT apply also to HT.

Of course we could easily modify DT so as to make it yield the right results in all cases:

DT': Getting x would enhance S's Pure, Unadulterated Welfare iff if we were to care exclusively about S's level of Pure, Unadulterated Welfare, and we were omniscient, and nothing else would be affected by our desire for it, it would be rational for us to want for S's sake for S to get x.

As a way of helping us focus on Pure, Unadulterated Welfare, this is a total non-starter. If you don't already have a firm grip on the concept of Pure, Unadulterated Welfare, you are in no position to understand this proposal.

4b. The Pre-Existence Test

In a so-far unpublished paper, Aaron Smuts discusses a version of our problem and offers a solution.¹¹ Smuts says that a life would be "well worth living" if it passed what he calls "The Pre-Existence Test" or "PET". Imagine that some "caretaker" has the power to decide whether S will come into existence or not; imagine that this caretaker satisfies a full information test – he knows precisely what will happen to S if S lives. The caretaker is "benevolent"; evidently Smuts is imagining that the caretaker's benevolence is directed entirely toward S. The test is this: "Given a synoptic pre-view, a benevolent caretaker should allow one to be born rather than to never have been." As modified¹² so as to be directly relevant to the problem as I have formulated it, Smuts's idea seems to be this:

ST: S has a life of positive Pure, Unadulterated Welfare iff a benevolent caretaker who cared only about S, given a synoptic pre-view of the life S would live, would allow S to be born rather than never to exist.

The concept of S-directed benevolence figures essentially in ST. Obviously, if the caretaker were not benevolent, or if his benevolence were indiscriminately directed toward everyone, then there could be millions of different reasons why the caretaker would allow S to be born. In some of those cases, even though the caretaker would allow S to be born, his allowance would not be a sign of high Pure, Unadulterated Welfare in the life of S. Thus we have to be sure that the caretaker is not only benevolent, but that his benevolence is exclusively directed toward S.

But what is benevolence? We might think that the idea is this: a caretaker is benevolent toward S iff the caretaker is motivated to do things when he thinks they will enhance S's Pure, Unadulterated Welfare. But of course if we try to target benevolence in this way, we make ST circular. Without a firm prior grasp on the concept of Pure, Unadulterated Welfare, we could not use this test to isolate our target – the concept of Pure, Unadulterated Welfare.

¹¹ Aaron Smuts "A Life Worth Living", retrieved on April 7, 2013 from <http://philpapers.org/rec/SMUALW>.

¹² In fact, Smuts does not offer his "test" a test for Pure, Unadulterated Welfare. He offers it as a way of focusing on whether or not a life is "well worth living". He emphasizes that this is different from welfare. So I am using the test for a purpose that its author did not propose.

Maybe Smuts thought that the concept of benevolence needs no definition; maybe he thought that we could just glom onto benevolence in some intuitive way and then make use of it in our attempt to target Pure, Unadulterated Welfare.

I think this would be a mistake. Suppose a benevolent caretaker is concerned about S's life; he wants it to go well for S. Suppose he sees that if S lives, he will be outstandingly happy but his happiness will be based on things that are all disgraceful and disgusting. The caretaker thinks it would be a pity if S were to get a life like that, so he does not allow S to be born. This would show that this caretaker's benevolence was not just a concern for S's Pure, Unadulterated Welfare; perhaps it was a concern for S's Virtue-Enriched Welfare.

Another benevolent caretaker might deny life to S if he saw that S's life would be low in Meaning-Enriched Welfare. This caretaker could also be benevolent – but his benevolence would take a slightly different form. This one might be moved by thoughts of meaning enriched welfare.

As a result of this, it should be pretty clear that ST needs to be modified. Here is one way to fix it. Let us say that a caretaker is *S-Directed Pure, Unadulterated Welfare Benevolent* iff that caretaker is motivated exclusively by a desire to enhance the Pure, Unadulterated Welfare of S. Then we can say:

ST': S has a life of positive Pure, Unadulterated Welfare iff an S-Directed Pure, Unadulterated Welfare benevolent caretaker, given a synoptic pre-view of the life S would live, would allow S to be born rather than never to exist.

The circularity of this test should be obvious. If there was any question about the target of Pure, Unadulterated Welfare before, the introduction of ST' will not help us target it.

4c. Envy and pity

Some philosophers have attempted to help us grasp the concept of welfare by appeal to the concepts of envy and pity.¹³ They ask us to imagine a certain life. They ask us about our emotional reaction when we think of that life. They suggest that if we envy the person who lives that life, then we are thinking that the life is high in welfare; but that if we pity the person who lives that life, then we are thinking that the life is low in welfare. This suggests a different test for Pure, Unadulterated Welfare.

We can imagine what we may call the "Pity to Envy Scale". This scale measures the extent to which we pity or envy a person, S, for getting to live a certain life, L. To the right of the zero point, we have increasing numbers representing increasing degrees of envy that we feel for S's getting to live life L. The higher the number, the more we envy S for getting to live L. To the left of the zero, we have decreasing numbers representing increasing degrees of pity that we feel for S for having to live L. When we contemplate a certain life, L, lived by a certain person, S, our emotional reaction to S's getting to live L falls somewhere on this Pity to Envy Scale. We can call this point the "Pity-Envy Score" for S for L.

¹³ Brad Hooker [see citation in WITCH p. 163].

The Pity-Envy test for Pure, Unadulterated Welfare can now be stated:

PET: S has a life of positive (negative) Pure, Unadulterated Welfare iff if we had full information about the life that S gets to live, then we would give that life a positive (negative) Pity-Envy Score.

PET is also open to many objections. Here is one: suppose I am living a life of extraordinarily high Pure, Unadulterated Welfare. Suppose I am well aware of this fact about myself, and I take great pleasure in it. Suppose now you tell me about S, who is fairly happy – a guy who is by all accounts leading a pretty good life. But suppose that S is nowhere near as happy as I am and I know this. In this case, I might not envy S at all. My emotional reaction to his life might get a score of zero on the Pity to Envy scale.

We can revise PET in an effort to avoid this problem:

PET': S has a life of positive (negative) Pure, Unadulterated Welfare iff if we had full information about the life that S gets to live, *and our own life was neither outstandingly good nor outstandingly bad*, then we would give the life of S a positive (negative) Pity-Envy Score.

In virtue of appealing to the concepts of the outstandingly good, and outstandingly bad life, PET' is circular. But in addition to that, it yields incorrect evaluations. Suppose we are especially interested in meaningfulness; we pity anyone who leads a meaningless life. Now we are told about S, who led a very happy but meaningless life. We pity him; PET' then implies that S had a life of negative Pure, Unadulterated Welfare; but that could be wrong; if eudaimonism is true, S led a life high in Pure, Unadulterated Welfare.

4d. The Appeal to Obligation

In *Principia Ethica*, Moore made a brief remark that might be taken to suggest a way of targeting Pure, Unadulterated Welfare. (pp. 146-7) He was talking about disgusting pleasures. He was imagining a life full of the lowest forms of sexual enjoyment, but devoid of all higher pleasures. He said that if such a life were outstandingly good, then “all human endeavors should be devoted to its realization.” The idea that we have any obligation to produce such a life, of course, he held to be false and paradoxical.

Though Moore does not commit himself to anything quite like this, his remarks suggest:

MT: S would have a life of high Pure, Unadulterated Welfare iff we have a moral obligation to cause S to live that life.

This seems to me to be another non-starter. Even if S's life would have high Pure, Unadulterated Welfare, there are any number of reasons why we might have no obligation to do anything about it. Maybe it's not in our power to make S live; maybe making S live would be tremendously

costly – maybe it would make millions of others live lives of misery; maybe S himself would be a nasty bastard who would mess things up for all the rest of us.

Valerie Tiberius and Alexandra Plakias¹⁴ also emphasize a connection between welfare and obligation. They say that the concept of well-being is an “action guiding, or normative notion”. More exactly, they say this:

significance. Whatever well-being is exactly, the concept is meant to point to something we aim at for ourselves and ought to promote for others. Insofar as well-being is an action-guiding, or normative, notion that has a role in personal deliberation and public policy, accounts of well-being are subject to competing pressures. On the one hand, “well-being” aims to pick out an empirical phenomenon that can be measured, compared, and (one hopes) realized in people’s lives: to achieve well-being is to enjoy a certain kind of life or set of experiences that we can investigate and influence. On the other hand, it has a kind of normative significance: it *makes sense* to promote well-being, procuring it is a *good* thing to do. In this chapter we aim to give an account of well-being that meets both of these demands.

When I say that Tiberius and Plakias suggest something Moorean, I have in mind that they also hint at a connection between welfare and obligation. Suppose we focus on their remark that well-being is “something we aim at for ourselves¹⁵ and ought to promote for others”; suppose that when they speak of well-being, they are thinking of what I have been calling ‘Pure, Unadulterated Welfare’; suppose we take this to be a proposed way of helping us to target the concept of Pure, Unadulterated Welfare. Then we get this:

TTP: Pure, Unadulterated Welfare: something that we ought to promote in the lives of others; something that it “makes sense” to promote; something whose procurance would be a good thing.

Perhaps some utilitarians would agree that we have an obligation to promote the welfare of others; but even they would not claim that I have any obligation to promote the welfare of *everyone*. If increasing your welfare would make many others worse off, I might have an obligation (according to some forms of utilitarianism) to *decrease* your welfare. And, of course, very many philosophers are not utilitarians in the first place. They might say that we have no obligation to increase anyone’s welfare. Or they might say that we have an obligation to increase the welfare of those who deserve to have their welfare increased, but an obligation to

¹⁴ In Tiberius, V. and Plakias, A. “Well-Being”, in Doris, J., & the Moral Psychology Research Group. (eds.). *The Moral Psychology Handbook*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) pp. 401-431.

¹⁵ I take it to be obvious that in fact we don’t all aim at enhancing our own welfare. Some people are consciously and intentionally self-destructive; others are more interested in achievement or virtue, and are willing to forgo their own welfare. In what follows I ignore the claim that well-being is “something we aim at for ourselves”.

decrease the welfare of those who deserve to have their welfare decreased, and in the vast majority of cases no obligation to do anything about the welfare of others. Many would agree that in hard cases I might have an obligation to increase the welfare of my own child, even if that means that some stranger's welfare would be reduced more than my child's welfare would be increased. Procuring the stranger's welfare in such a case might be a *bad* thing to do; and in the Organ Harvest case, doing the thing that would most enhance welfare of all affected parties would be a moral monstrosity (at least as many plausibly see it).

I cannot see how remarks such as these about our obligations can help us to target Pure, Unadulterated Welfare – or any kind of welfare

4e. The Appeal to Appealingness

In a paper that is forthcoming in *Utilitas*, Stephen Campbell writes:

What is it for something to be good for you? It is for that thing to contribute to the appeal of being in your position or, more informally, in your shoes. To be in one's position or shoes in the broadest possible sense is to have that individual's life. Accordingly, something is good or bad for a subject in the broadest possible sense if and only if it contributes to or detracts from the appeal of having her life. What then, is a prudentially good life, or a life that goes well for the one living it? It is an appealing life. More precisely, it is a life such that having it is worthy of appeal, in and of itself.¹⁶

Campbell distinguishes between two concepts of desire. In some cases, a person finds himself motivated to go for something – e.g., more beer even though he knows it is not in the long run best for him. This would be a case of sheer *motivational desire*.

In a second sense, what one most desires, wants, and prefers is whatever most appeals (or is least unappealing) to the person, or whatever the person most likes (or least dislikes). Call this desire in the attitudinal sense.

Campbell says that a thing appeals to you iff you desire it in the attitudinal sense. Furthermore, you can desire something in this way *for its own sake* or *intrinsically*, rather than because of its consequences. When we say that a thing appeals to you we are not saying that you are turned on by its flashy external superficial sparkle. Nor are we saying just that you think it would be pleasant.

Campbell makes essential appeal to the concept of *appeal worthiness*. Even if no one in fact notices X, and thus X does not actually appeal to anyone, it may still be worthy of appeal – it deserves to be an object of intrinsic appeal. With these preliminaries in hand, we can state something like Campbell's test for welfare. Campbell describes this as an "analysis of prudential value". I will restate it not as a proposed conceptual analysis, but rather as another test for Pure, Unadulterated Welfare. So reconstrued, Campbell's idea is this:

¹⁶ "An Analysis of Prudential Value" forthcoming in *Utilitas*. Retrieved from Campbell's website on May 2, 2013.

WAT: S has a life of positive Pure, Unadulterated Welfare iff S's life is intrinsically worthy of appeal.

It seems to me that WAT confronts an array of problems. Suppose a beloved saint or other moral giant led a life that was not particularly happy, but that was nevertheless an exemplar of moral virtue. Such a life seems to me to be intrinsically worthy of appeal – it would not be irrational to wish to be in the shoes of such a saint. Yet the saint's life may have had a low level of Pure, Unadulterated Welfare. To say that the saint had high welfare simply because he led an appeal-worthy life seems to me to reveal a confusion. It confuses evaluation on the welfare scale with evaluation on the moral virtue scale.

A similar thing could be said about a great artist. Suppose such an artist led a life that was not particularly happy, but that nevertheless was filled with artistic triumphs. (One thinks here of someone like van Gogh.) I think it's reasonable to say that the life of this artist is worthy of appeal even though not particularly high in Pure, Unadulterated Welfare.

5. Lessons to Be Learned

I start with what I take to be an uncontroversial lesson. When we state our views about welfare, we should take a bit more time and trouble to make clear what we are talking about.

I am not aware of any published test for welfare that actually works; thus it probably would be a good idea not to appeal to the Crib Test, or the Life Swap Test, or the Pity-Envy Test, or the Rational Care Test.¹⁷ If you make use of any such test, your readers still will not know what you are talking about.

Another uncontroversial lesson concerns concepts that are not concepts of welfare at all. If you mean to give an account of meaningfulness, then you should clearly state that you are talking about meaningfulness. You should not confuse us by saying that you are talking about welfare. The same is true of virtuosity, or human perfection. These are fine things; none of them is a form of welfare.

A somewhat more controversial point concerns the hybrid or "enriched" concepts of welfare. My own view is that we should avoid them. They breed confusion. They seem to me to be monsters created by the forced intermarriage of different scales of evaluation. But if you insist on talking about some such thing, then you can at least do your readers this favor: stop writing as if you are talking about "welfare". Make clear that you are talking about some enriched hybrid.

In my view, there is no need to introduce any concept of welfare other than Pure, Unadulterated Welfare. Perhaps you think that meaningfulness enhances welfare. No problem. We can account for this by pointing out that in many cases as lives become more meaningful, they also get higher scores on the Pure, Unadulterated Welfare scale. It's just a matter of causal connections. In the typical case, a person's Pure, Unadulterated Welfare will be increased as a

¹⁷ It now seems to me that my own "triangulation test" as described in *What Is This Thing Called Happiness?* pp. 165-9 also fails – and it fails because it does not discriminate between Pure, Unadulterated Welfare and the various forms of enriched welfare.

result of living a more meaningful life. The same is true of virtue (in ideal circumstances), narrative beauty, and human perfection. When they are good for a person, and enhance that person's welfare, they do it causally by enhancing that person's Pure, Unadulterated Welfare.

I think that Pure, Unadulterated Welfare is the most important concept of welfare. I like its simplicity and clear focus. I acknowledge, however, that I have no argument for the claim that it is most important. If you think some other concept of welfare is more important, perhaps you can tell us why you think so.