

# *Fittingness and well-being*

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# Fittingness and Well-Being

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## Abstract

Mental states (beliefs, emotions, moods, desires, etc.) towards things can fit or fail to fit those things. Perhaps actions can fit or fail to fit the situations in which they are done. This paper explores whether having fitting mental states and doing fitting actions can constitute additions to a person's well-being. The paper first discusses the desire-fulfilment theory of well-being. Then the paper considers hedonistic theories of well-being and criticises the recent proposal from Rossi and Tappolet that well-being consists only in fitting happiness. Then the paper turns to the objective list theory of well-being and Badhwar's Aristotelian theory. In this context, the paper considers Bruno-Niño's recent argument for fitting attitudes as a part of well-being. Finally, the paper explores whether, on the objective list theory and Badhwar's theory, doing fitting actions constitutes an element of well-being. The upshots are that fittingness is not an element of well-being according to some theories of well-being and that it is an element of well-being either contingently or necessarily according to other theories of well-being.

**Keywords** Belief · Pleasure · Knowledge · Achievement · Affection · Virtue

## 1 Introduction

Our having certain mental states (including emotions, desires, intentions, and beliefs) towards or about certain things can be *instrumentally* beneficial or harmful to us. For example, if an evil demon would torture us unless we admire him, our admiring him would be instrumental in keeping us from being tortured by him (Crisp 2000; Chap-

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pell 2012; Danielson and Olson 2007; D'Arms and Jacobson 2000; Howard 2019; McHugh and Way 2016; Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen 2000; Sharadin 2015). The instrumental benefits or harms of having various mental states towards things can be contrasted (at least in many if not all cases) with the *fittingness* of attitudes. What makes a mental state with intentional objects fitting is that the properties of its object call for, or merit, the attitude. An evil demon threatening to torture us for the sake of his own vanity clearly is an unfitting object of admiration, even if admiration for him would be instrumentally beneficial. Contempt for the evil demon would be fitting, even if this contempt would also be instrumentally harmful.

Very often, we worry about whether our mental states or actions are appropriate, i.e., fitting. Thus, fittingness figures frequently in our thinking. A good question is thus what the relation is between fittingness and well-being.

Any discussion of well-being needs to start by distinguishing between instrumental benefits and non-instrumental benefits. The classic example of something that is instrumentally beneficial is money, which is instrumental in obtaining further instrumental benefits or non-instrumental benefits. Non-instrumental benefits are what in themselves constitute positive contributions to well-being. As I will discuss below, different theories of well-being mostly disagree about what constitutes benefits, i.e., about what the elements of well-being are. (I shall sometimes follow recent practice in referring to whatever constitutes benefits as 'prudential goods'.)

When we take into account not only the distinction between the instrumental benefits of having certain mental states and the fittingness of those mental states but also the distinction between instrumental and constitutive benefits, we might wonder whether our best theory of well-being implies that having fitting mental states constitutes a benefit, rather than merely being instrumental to things that constitute benefits. The answer is neither immediately obvious nor simple. I will show in this paper that some theories of well-being hold that whether our having fitting mental states constitutes an addition to our well-being is *contingent* on our desires, that other theories of well-being hold that having fitting mental states is *never* part of well-being, and that there are further theories of well-being which accept that fittingness is a *necessary*, constitutive part of elements of well-being. I will also argue that some recent publications on this topic have accorded fittingness too large a role.

Section 2 of the paper argues that the desire-fulfilment theory of well-being accords fittingness only contingent prudential value. Section 3 starts by arguing that the version of hedonism that takes pleasure to be a certain feeling tone accords no necessary prudential value to fittingness. Then I raise objections to the recent theory of Mauro Rossi and Christine Tappolet that well-being consists only in fitting happiness. In Sect. 4, I show how fitting mental states figure in an objective list theory of well-being and in Neera Badhwar's Aristotelian theory, but I put forward objections to Teresa Bruno-Niño's arguments that fitting emotions are prudential goods. In Sect. 5, I contend that an objective list theory and Badhwar's Aristotelian theory imply that fitting actions are part of well-being only if these actions are achievements or required by virtue.

An old idea recently revived is that fittingness is *the* foundational normative concept. On this view, goodness, normative reasons, and what one ought to do are all to be explained in terms of the fittingness of mental states to objects and of actions to

situations (Brentano 1889; Chappell 2012; Cullity 2018, 2022; Ewing 1947; Howard 2019; McHugh and Way 2016; 2023; Stratton-Lake 2022). This paper is not about that view. Instead, the paper is agnostic about whether fittingness is the foundational concept in the architecture of normativity.

## 2 Fitting Mental States and the Desire-fulfilment Theory of Well-Being

Happiness is something we care about—our own and other people’s. Many people also care about things other than happiness, and indeed care more about some of these things than they do about happiness (Nozick 1974: 42–3). For example, Jack might care more that Jill’s professional success than he does about his own happiness (or about her happiness). From the observation that some people care more about other things than their own happiness emerges the theory that a person’s well-being consists in the fulfilment of that person’s desires, whether these desires are about happiness or about other things. This theory is often called the desire-fulfilment theory of well-being (Parfit 1984: Appendix I).

To be plausible, the desire-fulfilment theory of well-being must narrow down the set of desires whose fulfilment constitutes a benefit. Suppose Natasha desires a friendship with Ivor because she believes he cares deeply about other people’s well-being. If her belief about him is false, then the fulfilment of her desire for a friendship with him seems not to constitute a benefit to her. Examples such as this illustrate that the desire-fulfilment theory needs to narrow down the desires whose fulfilment constitutes a benefit to someone to the desires of this person’s that are not based on empirical falsehoods.

Further narrowing is needed. We can distinguish between desires for things as means (i.e., desires for things for their instrumental properties) and desires for things as ends (i.e., desires for things because of their non-instrumental properties). Let us refer to desires for things as ends as non-instrumental desires. Suppose I have a non-instrumental desire to quench my thirst. I might then have desires for other things instrumental to the fulfilment of my desire to quench my thirst, such as a desire to drink some water and a desire to go to the water fountain. The desire-fulfilment theory holds that what is *in itself* a benefit to me is the fulfilment of the non-instrumental desire to quench my thirst. The fulfilment of my desire to go to the water fountain and the fulfilment of my desire to drink some water have merely instrumental value as steps needed to quench my thirst, and these fulfilments do not in themselves constitute benefits to me.

In case those ideas need defence, consider a scenario in which I fulfilled my instrumental desire to go to the water fountain and my instrumental desire to drink some water but *not* my non-instrumental desire to quench my thirst (for example, because the drink I took made me even thirstier). In this scenario, the fulfilment of my desire to go to the water fountain and the fulfilment of my desire to drink some water did not constitute any additions to my well-being. Here, what matters for my well-being is the extent to which my non-instrumental desire to quench my thirst was fulfilled or not. In the case at hand, this is what determines whether I benefit and by how much.

Now change the scenario so that my thirst was quenched and thus I did benefit. The size of this benefit is not affected by whether I needed to fulfil lots of instrumental desires or only a few. If the fulfilments of my merely instrumental desires were in themselves benefits to me, then the fulfilment of long chains of instrumental desires would benefit me more than the fulfilment of short chains of instrumental desires. The idea that the fulfilment of long chains of instrumental desires would benefit me more than the fulfilment of short chains of instrumental desires seems absurd. If we reject that idea, we must reject the view that fulfilments of my merely instrumental desires count as benefits to me.

Perhaps even more narrowing is needed. If Jack cares more about Jill's professional success than he does about his own happiness, then does the fulfilment of his desire that she is professionally successful constitute a larger benefit *to him* than his own happiness does? The idea that the fulfilment of his desire about someone else's life constitutes a larger benefit to him than does his own happiness seems implausible. Furthermore, if Jack has a desire to sacrifice his life for the sake of Jill or for some other non-self-interested end, can the fulfilment of this desire constitute a benefit to him? Perhaps, there is some way to modify the desire-fulfilment theory so as to prevent it from having implausible implications in cases where people have strong desires about things that don't involve them (e.g., Jack's desire about Jill's professional success) or desires to sacrifice themselves for the sake of non-self-interested ends (Parfit 1984: 494; cf. Fletcher 2016: 40–44, 119–120). But I set aside this issue here so that I can get on to fittingness.

An initial thought might be that the desire-fulfilment theory of well-being accords no necessary importance to fit between people's mental states and the objects of those mental states. According to desire-fulfilment theory, what constitutes additions to people's well-being are only the fulfilments of their desires. Suppose Shweta desires to believe she is beautiful. If she does believe that she is beautiful, then this desire of hers is fulfilled. The desire-fulfilment theory maintains that she gets a benefit from the fulfilment of this desire, whether or not the belief is true. Now, the predominant theory is that beliefs are fitting if and only if and because they are true (McHugh and Way 2022: 78–9, 88–9). If that theory is correct, then, because the desire-fulfilment theory maintains that the fulfilment of Shweta's desire to believe she is beautiful constitutes a benefit to her whether or not the belief is *true*, the desire-fulfilment theory also maintains that the fulfilment of Shweta's desire to believe she is beautiful constitutes a benefit to her whether or not the belief is *fitting*.

Admittedly, however, Shweta not only wants to believe she is beautiful but also probably wants her beliefs to be true. To the extent that her beliefs don't fit their objects because some of these beliefs are false, her desire that her beliefs fit their objects is not fulfilled. Here is another example. Suppose Archibald strongly desires to be the object of envy. Imagine that this desire is neither merely instrumental nor based on empirical mistakes. Imagine in addition that Archibald desires that all his strong non-instrumental desires are for *objectively valuable ends*, i.e., things *whose non-instrumental goodness does not depend on conative attitudes about them*. Now, if Archibald is the object of envy, his desire to be an object of envy is fulfilled. And yet, if being an object of envy is *not* an objectively valuable end, his desire that all his strong desires are for objectively valuable ends is not fulfilled. Just as Shweta might

have a belief that does not fit with the truth, Archibald might have a desire that does not fit with what is objectively valuable.

When people desire that their mental states fit the objects of their mental states and such a fit obtains, this fit constitutes fulfilment of their desire. The desire-fulfilment theory of well-being therefore entails that mental states' fit with their objects *can* constitute an addition to people's well-being. However, the desire-fulfilment theory entails that whether the fittingness of someone's mental states constitutes a self-interested benefit to this person is contingent on whether the person desires to have mental states that fit the objects of the mental states.

This contingency might at first not seem particularly worrying, since the desire to have mental states that fit their objects is commonplace. Beliefs aim at truth, so people normally want their beliefs to fit the objects of the beliefs. People also typically want their emotions to fit the objects of the emotions, for example, admiration only for the admirable, blame only for the blameworthy, and so on. And many people want their desires to latch onto objects whose value does not depend on being desired.

What we can call pure versions of desire-fulfilment theory insist that a person's desires are alone what bestows *self-interested* value on things, rather than things' having properties that make desiring those things fitting. Admittedly, even pure versions of the desire-fulfilment theory can hold that we can have fitting *non*-self-interested desires, such as moral desires about what happens in situations that do not involve us. But pure versions of the desire-fulfilment theory maintain that the desires relevant to the desire-fulfilment theory *cannot* include desires that aim to fit things that constitute self-interested benefits independently of desire, since there are no such things.

A different theory, a kind of hybrid theory, goes further by holding that not only non-self-interested desires but also self-interested desires can be fitting, for example where these self-interested desires are for things whose self-interested value is not a product of, or otherwise dependent upon, being desired. According to such a hybrid theory, the fulfilments of our desires are non-instrumental benefits to us only if these desires fit their objects and these objects have value that does not depend on being desired. I will set aside such a hybrid theory for the moment but return to it in Sect. 4.

### 3 Happiness and Fitting Mental States

Hedonism holds that well-being consists in happiness and that happiness consists in pleasure minus pain. One view of pleasure holds that it has a certain phenomenology, a determinable feeling tone, i.e., the feeling of being enjoyed, shared by all determinate pleasures (for an influential discussion, see Crisp 2006: 103, 109–110). On another view, pleasures are enjoyed experiential states in response to various intentional objects, such as the pleasant experience of swimming or the pleasant experience of watching an excellent production of *King Lear*. According to this second view, there need be no feeling tone common to the pleasure of swimming and the pleasure of watching an excellent production of *King Lear*. On this second view, what unites pleasures is not feeling tone but connection to desire: all pleasures are experiences desired at the time they are had by the individual having them (for an influential discussion, see Crisp 2006: 104, 106–107).

If hedonism is framed in terms of experiences that share a particular feeling tone, then hedonism leaves no room for fit to be an element of well-being. According to such a form of hedonism, people's levels of well-being are determined solely by how enjoyed their experiences are, not by whether their mental states fit with the objects of their mental states. Admittedly, fit can play various *instrumental* roles. For example, having beliefs that fit with the truth might be instrumental in arranging to have pleasant experiences and in preventing unpleasant surprises. Nevertheless, hedonism framed in terms of experiences with a particular feeling tone cannot hold that fit between mental states and their objects constitutes a non-instrumental benefit.

If hedonism is framed in terms of desired experiential states with intentional objects, there is more room for fit to constitute an element of well-being. A particularly interesting innovation is the theory that Mauro Rossi and Christine Tappolet (2022) have developed. Rossi and Tappolet (2022: 269) hold that 'happiness consists in a broadly positive balance of affective states such as emotions, moods, and sensory pleasures'. Their view of well-being is that it consists of happiness thus construed plus a fittingness restriction. They propose that positive additions to well-being consist only of fitting positive emotions, fitting positive moods, and fitting sensory pleasures (Rossi and Tappolet 2022: 269).

Rossi and Tappolet contend that emotions, moods, and sensory pleasures are 'perceptual experiences of evaluative properties' in intentional objects. If the intentional objects of these perceptual experiences *really do* have the evaluative properties that the objects are represented as having, then, according to their theory, the perceptual experiences are correct as representations of their objects and thus are fitting (Rossi and Tappolet 2022: 275, 276). And if positive emotions, moods, and sensory pleasures are representationally correct about their objects and thus are fitting, then these positive emotions, moods, and sensory pleasures are constituents of *fitting* happiness, according to Rossi and Tappolet.

We can divide their theory into three broad components:

- 1st component: Well-being consists exclusively in fitting happiness.
- 2nd component: Happiness is fitting if and only if its constitutive emotions, moods, and sensory pleasures are fitting.
- 3rd component: Whether emotions, moods, and sensory pleasures are fitting depends on whether emotions, moods, and sensory pleasures are representationally correct about their intentional objects.

Let us start with the 3rd component. To be sure, many attitudes do represent their intentional objects as having evaluative properties. For example, fear of certain things represents these things as being dangerous. Moreover, we can concede that all emotions, moods, and sensory pleasures have causes. Yet that all emotions, moods, and sensory pleasures have causes does not entail that all emotions, moods, and sensory pleasures represent their intentional objects as having evaluative properties. Moreover, there are arguments against the view that all emotions, moods, and sensory pleasures represent their intentional objects as having evaluative properties. For instance, this view seems to overintellectualize the phenomena (McHugh and Way 2022: 91).

Furthermore, counterexamples come to mind. Couldn't someone be euphoric without this euphoria having an intentional object? Likewise, couldn't someone be in a bad mood without there being an intentional object of this bad mood?

Rossi and Tappolet (2022: 274) reply that moods can have *non-specific* intentional objects. Rossi and Tappolet give the example of apprehension, which they suggest is a perceptual experience of fearsomeness in an undetermined object. We can agree that *some* moods have non-specific intentional objects. But, in the face of the examples about euphoria and bad moods, which always have causes but seem not always to have objects, it is harder to accept the blanket proposition that *all* moods that do not have specific intentional objects have non-specific intentional objects rather than no intentional object.

Rossi and Tappolet (2022: 274–75) apparently hold that all sensory pleasures represent the sensory object as pleasurable. Suppose I get sensory pleasure from the taste of coffee. Does my pleasant sensory experience represent the taste as having the evaluative property pleasurableness? That seems a stretch.

The qualms I have just been expressing concern the idea that whether emotions, moods, and sensory pleasures are fitting depends on whether they are representationally correct about their intentional objects. This is the idea listed above as the 3rd component of the theory that Rossi and Tappolet have put forward. Let us turn now to the idea that well-being consists exclusively in fitting happiness, which was listed above as the 1st component of their theory.

To be sure, fitting happiness contributes non-instrumentally to well-being. This is something to celebrate, not dispute. But is fitting happiness the *only* thing that contributes non-instrumentally to well-being? I will now argue that sensory pleasure and positive emotions and moods that aren't fitting can also contribute non-instrumentally to well-being. If this argument is correct, then Rossi's and Tappolet's *fittingness* restriction is too strong.

My argument against the fittingness restriction consists of an example illustrating that joy coming from false (and therefore, on their view, unfitting) beliefs can constitute an addition to well-being. Suppose Amir lived three hundred years ago, when communication across long distances was often very difficult and slow at best. Amir and his sister Nur ended up on opposite sides of the world. He received a few letters per year for a few years and then the letters stopped. Amir assumed they stopped because Nur died. But he was led to believe by her letters to him that she had an ideal life, with a happy family, many friends, interesting activities, etc. He took great pleasure from his belief that during those years she was flourishing. But the truth is that she was miserable, surviving by doing work that was both demanding and very boring, with no family of her own, virtually no friends, and very little free time. Suppose Amir died without ever finding out the truth about his sister's life of misery.

Did the joy caused by Amir's false beliefs about his sister's happiness constitute an addition to Amir's well-being? Such joy wasn't a sensory pleasure but was a strong positive emotion. When asked why he was smiling so much, he sincerely reported that he was joyful his sister's life turned out so well for her. The joy Amir experienced about his sister's life *does seem to* count as an addition to his well-being, even though that joy was directed at an object, her life, that did not have the positive properties that the joy represented her life as having. Because Amir's joy involved



incorrect representations of its intentional object, the joy was unfitting. We might thus conclude that Amir's case is an example of how a positive emotion that is unfitting can constitute an addition to well-being.

At the very end of their paper, Rossi and Tappolet make some comments that might suggest a reply. Rossi and Tappolet hold that to be pleasurable is to be a fitting object of pleasure. The life of Amir's sister Nur was an unfitting object of Amir's joy because (although Amir was ignorant of this) Nur's life was miserable. However, the joy Amir got from his false belief that Nur's life was going well was something Amir experienced (and represented to himself) as fittingly pleasurable. When emotions, moods, and sensory pleasures are experienced as pleasant, their phenomenology makes it fitting to enjoy them. Thus, Rossi and Tappolet (2022: 287, fn. 18) agree, 'there is one respect in which unfitting positive emotions, moods, and sensory pleasures can legitimately contribute to well-being, namely in virtue of their fitting enjoyed character.' Rossi and Tappolet go on in that footnote to concede that a life containing fittingly enjoyed unfitting affective states that are caused by massive delusion (as in Nozick's experience machine) 'will contain some prudential goodness' (a similar position appears in von Kriegstein 2000: 131).

The concession that Rossi and Tappolet make here seems to take the bite out of their proposal that only fitting happiness adds non-instrumentally to well-being, a proposal I am calling the fittingness restriction. In the face of counterexamples to the fittingness restriction, Rossi and Tappolet seem to distinguish between, e.g., taking pleasure in joy and the joy itself, and then to maintain on the one hand that joy which doesn't fit with its intentional object is not beneficial but on the other hand that the pleasure taken in the joy is. However, to distinguish between joy and the pleasure taken in joy seems artificial. Moreover, if their theory concedes that the pleasure Amir gets from believing his sister has a flourishing life constitutes a benefit to Amir even though the belief is not fitting because false, this concession seems to me to defang their fittingness restriction.

Consider another example. Jealous and vindictive Randolph believes that his old rival is miserable. Suppose that, given the evidence Randolph has, his belief is reasonable. Suppose also that his belief is false. Now although Randolph does not believe that his rival deserves to be miserable, Randolph's belief that his old rival is miserable gives Randolph joy. Randolph's false but reasonable belief that his old rival is miserable does not fit with the joy Randolph gets from this belief.

The point of raising this example is to juxtapose the joy Amir gets from the false but reasonable belief that his sister leads a flourishing life with the joy that Randolph gets from the false but reasonable belief that his old rival is miserable. Amir's joy fits with his false but reasonable belief; Randolph's joy does not fit with his false but reasonable belief. If Randolph's joy constitutes an addition to his well-being, then joy does not need to fit with the agent's beliefs in order to be a prudential benefit.

The conclusion that joy does not need to fit with the agent's beliefs in order to be a prudential benefit is the one that I think would be reached by people who believe sadistic pleasure, though morally bad, is nevertheless a benefit to the person who gets this pleasure. In contrast, people who think that sadistic pleasure does not constitute a benefit to the person who gets this pleasure will probably think that the joy Randolph gets from his belief that his old rival is miserable is no benefit to Randolph.

Since the dispute over whether sadistic pleasure has the self-interested value is beyond my capacities to resolve, I leave that dispute open. Let me point out, however, that leaving it open does not require jettisoning my earlier argument concerning Amir's taking joy in the false belief that his sister is flourishing. But perhaps I should narrow the conclusion I draw from the example about Amir to this: *non-sadistic* pleasant mental states can constitute a contribution to well-being even if these pleasant mental states are unfitting in that they misrepresent their intentional objects.

#### 4 Fitting Mental States, the Objective List Theory, and Badhwar's Aristotelianism

An objective list theory of well-being maintains that well-being includes not only pleasure and happiness but also important knowledge, deep personal relationships, important achievement, autonomy, and perhaps other things, which might include virtue. This kind of theory holds that these things are elements of our well-being whether or not we want these things (Parfit 1984: 499–502; cf. Arneson 1999; Crisp 1997: ch. 3; Finnis 1980; Fletcher 2012; 2013; 2016; Griffin 2000; Rice 2013).

There are diverging views about whether perfectionism is a version of objective list theory about well-being. Perfectionism, broadly stated, holds that the development and exercise of capacities characteristic of living humans is the most basic good. With development and exercise of such capacities as the most basic good, perfectionism can go on to endorse a list of goods that is more or less identical to an objective list theory's list.

Perfectionism can be put forward as an overarching theory of what one always ought to care about and do, rather than as a theory of well-being (e.g., in Hurka 1993). However, the kind of perfectionism relevant to the present discussion is perfectionism *as a theory of well-being*. A perfectionist theory of well-being holds that what constitutes non-instrumental additions to people's well-being are the development and exercise of their capacities as living humans. One advantage perfectionism as a theory of well-being seems to have over other objective list theories is that perfectionism putatively explains and unifies all the things on the list, whereas non-perfectionist brands of objective list theory just enumerate a list.

However, there are powerful objections to perfectionism as a theory of well-being. The most obvious thing to put on an objective list theory of well-being is pleasure and the most obvious thing to take to be a harm is pain. Yet perfectionism contains no compelling explanation of why pleasure is a non-instrumental benefit and pain a non-instrumental harm (Bradford 2016: 131–32; Fletcher 2016: 87–89; Sumner 2020: 430). A more general problem for perfectionism is that it is not immediately evident that the bare fact that some capacity is characteristic of living humans is relevant to whether its development and exercise is a non-instrumental benefit. Indeed, capacities characteristic of living humans might include some whose development and exercise would not be non-instrumentally beneficial. Examples that jump to mind are human capacities for greed and envy.

Suppose we are convinced by these objections to the idea that the development and exercise of capacities characteristic of living humans is the most basic good. In

that case, we will want to keep that idea out of our theory of well-being. We might nevertheless retain the idea that pleasure, knowledge, achievement, deep personal relationships, autonomy, and so on constitute elements of well-being. In this case, our theory of well-being is an objective list theory. Be that as it may, I will henceforth confine my discussion of object list theory to versions of it that do not aspire to explain the items on the list by reference to the development and exercise of capacities characteristic of living humans.

Neera Badhwar's Aristotelian theory of well-being is that well-being consists in *eudaimonia* (Badhwar 2014). Although she asserts "*eudaimonism* is not an objective list theory" (Badhwar 2014: 189), her theory, like the objective list theory, holds that a person's well-being is neither purely a matter of pleasure and enjoyment nor purely a matter of the fulfilment of whatever empirically informed desires this person has. Badhwar takes hedonism and desire-fulfilment theory to picture well-being as purely subjective. For her, this makes those theories implausible, since she holds that there are objective prudential goods. Her own theory of well-being weaves these objective goods together with subjective states (pleasures, emotions, and desires): *eudaimonia* involves subjective attraction to and enjoyment of objectively valuable states and activities (Badhwar 2014: 45, 50, 188).

A view that combines subjective attraction and objective goods is a kind of hybrid theory, as mentioned earlier. Badhwar and many other contemporary Aristotelians espouse such a hybrid theory, as do many others (e.g. Parfit 1984: 502; Kagan 2009; Raz 1986: ch. 12; Wolf 1997). Indeed, such a hybrid theory has considerable initial appeal. But there are objections to it (Hooker 2015: 29–33; Fletcher 2016: 124–29; Woodard 2016: 165–67), some of which connect with my main objection to Rossi and Tappolet.

As I explained, Rossi and Tappolet conclude that pleasure is a positive emotion, mood, or sensation that constitutes an addition to well-being only when it is fitting. I argued against them that a pleasure can constitute a benefit even if the pleasure is unfitting in that it involves a mental state that misrepresents its object. If my argument is correct, then any theory of well-being holding that pleasure constitutes an addition to well-being only when it is fitting is mistaken.

Let us turn now to other items on the objective list, or elements of *eudaimonia*. Knowledge of important matters is one element appearing on the objective list theory of well-being. Some bits of knowledge can be important because of their wide explanatory power (Hurka 1993: chs. 8–10; 2011: ch. 4). Yet knowledge about oneself and about people or other things closely connected to oneself can be more important than knowledge of more general, less personal matters (Hooker 2015: 18). In Badhwar's theory, being 'reality-oriented' ('intellectually and emotionally disposed to track truth or understanding') and 'in touch with the important facts of one's own life and human life in general' are essential elements of a worthwhile life (Badhwar 2014: 89, 222).

What is knowledge's connection to fittingness? If a belief cannot be knowledge unless at least it is both true and justified, then the belief cannot be knowledge without being fitting. Hence both objective list theory and Badhwar's Aristotelian theory accept that fittingness is part of knowledge.

For the sake of argument, assume that evaluative and moral judgements can express beliefs and some of these evaluative and moral beliefs are true. Not all true evaluative beliefs and not all true moral beliefs would be candidates for *important* knowledge. Some true evaluative beliefs and some true moral beliefs are of very narrow scope and about matters with no personal connection and no implications for present or future decisions. For example, these might be true beliefs about the attitudes or actions of particular people long ago in cultural circumstances that were very different from any today. In contrast, the belief that it is morally wrong to humiliate others merely for entertainment is important knowledge, to cite just one of many possible examples.

Now, suppose we combine the idea that important knowledge is on the objective list with the idea that many moral beliefs qualify as important knowledge. We are headed in the direction of the idea that the objective list includes virtue (for a recent discussion, see Badhwar 2014: chs. 6–7; cf. Hooker 1996). Having virtue is typically understood as involving certain intellectual, attitudinal, and behavioural dispositions which result in one's having certain beliefs, attitudes, and desires and one's doing or not doing certain kinds of act. Presumably, the beliefs, attitudes, and desires integral to virtue are fitting. Putting off for the moment discussion of fitting attitudes and fitting acts, we can conclude at this stage that, if virtue is indeed an element of well-being, then having whatever *fitting* beliefs and desires are required by virtue is part of well-being.

Let us turn now to autonomy as one of the values listed by the objective list theory. The objective list theory would hold that one is not autonomous if one is deluded about facts relevant to the alternatives among which one is choosing. On the objective list theory, the truth and fittingness of at least some beliefs are thus required for autonomy. Autonomy is also important in Badhwar's theory (2024: chs. 4–5). According to Badhwar, for someone to be autonomous, this person must be intellectually and emotionally disposed to track truth and understanding in important areas of life (Badhwar 2014: 86). The truth-tracking requirement makes having some kinds of fitting beliefs a prerequisite for autonomy.

Now consider important achievement as an element of well-being. The most plausible objective list theory identifies important achievement as a non-instrumental benefit but does not include unimportant achievement as a non-instrumental benefit. Thus, on this theory, other things being equal, one's well-being would be greater if one's achievements were important rather than unimportant. A natural extension of that idea applies to a comparison of important achievements. This natural extension is that, other things being equal, the prudential good of a more important achievement is greater than the prudential good of a less important one, even if both are above the threshold that separates important achievements from unimportant ones.

Suppose I could desire and pursue one possible achievement or another, where achieving both together is impossible. And suppose I have the same probability of success for each of them and the sacrifices involved in pursuing them would be equivalent. In such a case, it would be fitting for me to desire and pursue the more important achievement. Now if pursuing more important achievements rather than less important ones is fitting, then an objective list theory's inclusion of important

achievement as an element of well-being knits fittingness into well-being beyond the extent to which knowledge, virtue, and autonomy already do.

In case these arguments about important achievement seem suspect, let me point out that what is not suspect is that achievements vary in importance. Some achievements are immensely important, e.g., solving Fermat's Last Theorem, composing 'The Magic Flute', designing the Taj Mahal, writing 'King Lear', or developing a vaccine for Alzheimer's. Some other achievements are clearly *unimportant*, e.g., compiling the largest private collection of shoes or counting all the blades of grass in lawns on the street (Rawls 1971: 432).

Beyond citing examples, we can try to identify what determines the size or importance of an achievement. The determinants of the size and importance of an achievement can be its complexity, difficulty, hierarchy of goals and sub-goals, and generality (Hurka 1993: chs. 8–10; 2006; 2011: ch. 5; cf. Bradford 2015). Assessed as a *process* of achieving some goal, an achievement that requires a greater range of well-developed skills and more intricate and hierarchical planning is a greater achievement than one that does not. Assessed as the *output* of a process, the development of a theory that explains more phenomena is a greater achievement than the development of a theory that explains less phenomena, independently of whether the process of reaching the theory with wider scope required a greater range of well-developed skills and more intricate planning.

An achievement's being instrumentally beneficial to others can also contribute to the size and importance of the achievement. For instance, developing a vaccine for Alzheimer's would be an immense achievement because of the aggregate benefit to others. Although this achievement would be a non-instrumental benefit to the person who developed the vaccine (as well as probably an instrumental means to other things that benefit this person), the non-instrumental benefit to this person of his or her achievement does not preclude the achievement's importance being a matter of its instrumentality in benefiting others.

Suppose we accept (what some people deny) that important achievement *is* an element of well-being. We must accept that achievements can vary greatly in importance. Having accepted these ideas, can we reasonably deny that someone's less important achievement constitutes less of a non-instrumental benefit to that person than the person's more important achievement? Here I can but report that my intuition is that the importance of an achievement does affect the size of the achievement's non-instrumental benefit to the agent. It also seems obvious to me that, other things being equal, it is fitting to desire and pursue more important achievements rather than less important ones.

Turn now to deep personal relationships. To have a deep personal relationship, the parties must know one another very well (though of course *complete* knowledge is not necessary) and have strong and sustained affection for one another. Since the parties to a deep personal relationship must have extensive knowledge about one another, the parties must have quite a lot of true and thus fitting beliefs about one another. Must the affection each has for the other also be fitting?

Some very *immoral* people have relationships of deep mutual understanding and affection with one another (though, in these relationships, trust will often be absent). Such deep personal relationships can be instrumental in providing the parties

involved with enjoyment, knowledge, help, and other benefits. However, our focus here is on whether having deep personal relationships *constitutes* a *non-instrumental* benefit to the people involved. Arguably, in order for a person's deep personal relationships with others to constitute additions to that person's well-being, this person's affection for those others must be fitting in that the other people must be good enough to merit the person's strong affection for them (Hooker 2021; 2022; cf. von Kriegstein 2020: 124).

In case that conclusion seems implausibly hard, let me mention a more concessionary view. Imagine that you have some deep personal relationships with people who do *not* merit the affection you have for them. A concessionary view would concede that these deep personal relationships constitute *some* benefit to you. But this concessionary view would nevertheless maintain that your having such relationships does not constitute *as great* a benefit to you as having deep personal relationships with people who *do* merit the affection you have for them. According to this concessionary view, although the fittingness of affection is not a necessary condition of the relationship's constituting a benefit to you, the fittingness of the affection does influence the size of the benefit to you.

We have seen that an objective list theory of well-being takes fitting beliefs, fitting desires, and fitting affection to be integral to different elements of well-being. Badhwar's Aristotelian theory can agree. Indeed, since her theory holds that 'virtue is the primary element in well-being' (Badhwar 2014: 207), her theory implies that having whatever fitting beliefs and fitting desires are required by virtue is necessary for *eudaimonia*.

Now let us consider whether fitting emotions such as fitting admiration, fitting pride, fitting indignation, and fitting grief are also integral to well-being. Having fitting emotions is in some cases *morally* required, e.g., fitting indignation can be morally required. And having fitting emotions is often *instrumentally beneficial*, e.g., fitting fear can inhibit dangerous activity. Our focus now, however, is not on whether a fitting emotion is morally required or instrumentally beneficial, but rather on whether having it constitutes an element of well-being.

Bruno-Niño (2024: 19–21) has advanced a powerful argument that it does. Contrast three alternative reactions that Cocoa might have to her achievement of finishing a beautiful drawing:

1. She might feel happily proud of it.
2. She might recognise that it is a beautiful sketch and feel glad it exists but not feel anything positive about herself as the creator.
3. She might feel no emotion about drawing the beautiful sketch but nevertheless get a pleasant sensation from having drawn it.

Bruno-Niño agrees that (2's) gladness and (3's) pleasure can be benefits to Cocoa. But Bruno-Niño plausibly proposes that the alternative in which Cocoa is happily proud of her achievement—that is, in which Cocoa's response is not just positive but really fits its object—contains an extra prudential benefit. If Cocoa misses out on this prudential benefit of fit, as happens in the second and third alternative reactions listed above, Bruno-Niño (2024: 22) thinks we would feel compassion for Cocoa.

While powerful, Bruno-Niño's example involves an emotion about which we might have mixed feelings. Pride is often unjustified or at least excessive, and it very often leads to dangerous over-confidence. With such ideas in the background, we might feel reluctant to praise pride.

Nevertheless, I admit that when someone achieves something particularly impressive, joyful pride is the fitting response from this person. At least sometimes, people should savour their successes, take pride in what they have accomplished, frame their medal and put it on the wall. Significant achievement should be celebrated.

If we want to resist Bruno-Niño's argument, we had better argue that joyful pride in one's achievement is so poignant and gratifying that no amount of gladness that the achievement exists or pleasant sensation accompanying the achievement could equal the experience of joyful pride. Here we would be arguing that the experience of joyful pride is just sweeter or in some other way richer than positive feelings of gladness or pleasant sensation. We would be arguing that the joyful pride is a non-instrumental benefit to the person who achieves something significant not because joyful pride is more fitting but because of something else about the felt experience.

Bruno-Niño's contention that the bare fittingness of an emotion can constitute a prudential benefit seems vulnerable to an objection centred on fitting *negative* emotions. Setting aside moral reasons for having negative reactions (such as blame, resentment, and indignation) to moral wrongs, let us focus sharply on the question of whether someone's having a fitting negative attitude constitutes a benefit to that person. Imagine that Cocoa's wonderful sister died of breast cancer in her 20's. Cocoa reacted with profound grief. Her grief was fitting, but did her having it somehow constitute a benefit to Cocoa?

To take another example, imagine that Cocoa did some things in response to which her feelings of guilt were fitting. Did those fitting feelings of guilt constitute benefits to Cocoa?

Here is one more example. Cocoa is deeply sad about the innocent people being killed in a war right now, and she is indignant towards those who started or escalated the war. This sadness and indignation are fitting. But is having such negative attitudes, fitting though they be, part of Cocoa's well-being?

These examples all seem to have the same implication. If we hold as much as possible equal between two alternative lives, say a life in which someone has fitting negative responses and a life as much like that one but without those negative responses, then the life with those negative responses seems worse for the person precisely because of the aversive nature of these negative responses. Having negative attitudes seems to count as a harm rather than a benefit for that person, even if these negative attitudes are entirely fitting.

In case that argument needs help, I want to compare having *fitting* negative emotions with having *unfitting* negative emotions. Imagine that Yungsuk responds with profound grief when he hears that his distant cousins are experiencing pain and misery in a country from which there is no escape and with which there is no communication. In one scenario, what he hears is true and thus his grief is fitting. In the other scenario, what he hears is false and thus his grief is not fitting. The grief Yungsuk experiences in these two scenarios is equally intense and equally prolonged. So that we can focus on the question of whether

having a fitting negative emotion constitutes a prudential benefit, let us imagine there are no relevant differences in instrumental effects as between these two scenarios.

Admittedly, Yungsuk has a degree more important knowledge in the scenario where his belief about his cousins' misery is true than he does in the scenario in which this belief is false. But, apart from the difference in degrees of important knowledge in the two scenarios, Yungsuk's well-being does not seem higher in the scenario where his grief is based on true belief than in the scenario where his grief is based on false belief. Yet, if the fittingness of Yungsuk's grief *itself* constituted a benefit to him, then his well-being would be higher in the scenario where his grief is based on true belief than in the scenario where his grief is based on false belief. This supports the conclusion that the fittingness of his grief does not constitute a benefit to him. Parallel examples would, I think, show the same to be true for having other fitting negative attitudes.

As against that conclusion, the following argument might be put forward:

Premise 1: Virtue is one element of well-being.

Premise 2: Virtue involves, among other things, having negative emotions such as contempt, indignation, and resentment when these emotions fit their objects (Hurka 2001).

Conclusion: Having these fitting negative emotions is part of one of the elements of well-being.

Those who cannot accept this conclusion might try to reject at least one of the premises. Which premise is the easiest to reject is too large a matter to take up here. Another matter I cannot take up here is the intriguing idea, suggested by a reviewer for this journal, that fitting negative emotions are *worse* prudentially than unfitting negative emotions.

## 5 Fitting Actions, Objective List Theory of Well-Being, and Badhwar's Theory

Some philosophers hold that *actions* cannot be fitting, since only *mental states* can be fitting or unfitting. In the case of mental states, the fit is supposed to be a match between the mental state and the object of the mental state. If actions are supposed to be fitting or unfitting, what can the action either fit or fail to fit? A prominent view is that ideas about the fittingness of actions are really about the fittingness of the intentions behind the actions (McHugh and Way 2022: 181).

There are well known counterexamples to the view that the fittingness of actions can be reduced to the fittingness of intentions to do the actions. These counterexamples are cases where a fitting action would be stymied or undermined by having an intention to do that action. For example, an intention to impress wise people might prevent impressing them. Admittedly, very often what prevents people from achieving their intention is not actually that they have it but that others see that they have it. Nevertheless, I think there are examples where what causes trouble is not that others see what the agent's intention



is but rather just that the agent has it. For example, one's intention to act spontaneously would get in the way of one's acting spontaneously.

Some philosophers are not convinced that fittingness of action cannot be reduced to fittingness of intention (McHugh and Way 2022: 183–84; Smith 2013: 62–3). We need not get bogged down in this controversy. We can sidestep it by assuming that actions can be fitting to the situations in which they are done (Ross 1939: 315; Stratton-Lake 2022: 130). Whether the fittingness of actions to the situations in which they are done can be reduced to fit between the situations and the intentions behind those actions is a further question we can leave open.

Now typically achievements are constituted by a series of fitting coordinated goal-directed actions. For example, your achievement in a beautiful piano recital involves playing the right notes in the right sequence with the right timing and intensity, and so on. Could an achievement consist in a single fitting action, with no prior planning and practice? If a single fitting action can be an important achievement, then both that single fitting action and an ensemble of fitting actions constituting an important achievement will, under the banner of important achievement, constitute elements of well-being.

However, there are very many fitting actions that are neither by themselves achievements nor stages of a process that culminates in an achievement. Imagine that you do an action that is fitting to its situation, followed by a second that is fitting to its situation, followed by a third that is fitting to its situation. It might be that you speak out in favour of the people in a democracy who defend their country against a dictator's invasion. Then you feed your hungry dog. Then you buy a resupply of pills the doctor advised you to take. These three fitting actions are too disconnected to be part of a single project (cf. Kauppinen 2012: 366–68).

Switch now to a case in which you do a fitting action preceded and followed by actions that are *not* fitting. Here again, the fitting action might be neither an important achievement in itself nor a part of an important achievement. When your fitting action is neither an important achievement in itself nor a part of an important achievement, then there can be no argument from achievement to the conclusion that doing this fitting action is an element of your well-being.

Now let us imagine someone who consistently does fitting actions that are neither individually nor in orchestrated groups achievements. This person would be consistently doing fitting but disconnected actions. The very idea of a series of fitting but disconnected actions might be challenged on the ground that the fitting thing to do is very often something that builds on one's previous actions and leads into subsequent actions. To be sure, what makes many actions fitting is their fit with previous and subsequent actions. I have already agreed that, where an action is fitting because it is part of an ensemble of interconnected actions working together to achieve something significant, this action is part of something that constitutes a positive contribution to the agent's well-being. My point now is that, if a series of disconnected but fitting actions is possible, this series does not constitute a significant achievement.

I started the present discussion with the point that typically achievements involve series of fitting actions. I then asked about disconnected fitting actions that are not part of a significant achievement. The conclusion to draw seems to be that, if a series of disconnected fitting actions does not constitute a significant achievement and if being part of a significant achievement is the only way fitting actions can constitute

a contribution to well-being, then being the agent of a series of disconnected fitting actions would not constitute a positive contribution to the agent's well-being.

Let us return to the role of virtue in connecting fittingness with well-being. If virtue is an element of well-being and there are fitting actions that are among the things virtue requires, then doing these fitting actions is part of an element of well-being. Accepting this conclusion does not require us to deny that being part of a significant achievement is the only way fitting actions can constitute a contribution to well-being. For we might think that doing whatever fitting actions are required by virtue constitutes a significant achievement.

## 6 Conclusion

Section 2 of this paper explained how the *desire-fulfilment theory of well-being* holds that whether fit between mental states (including emotions, desires, and beliefs) and their objects is a non-instrumental benefit is conditional on whether the person has certain desires about fit. On a desire-fulfilment theory, fit is a non-instrumental benefit *conditionally*.

Section 3 of the paper addressed *hedonistic theories of well-being*. On views of happiness and pleasure that emphasise enjoyment as a feeling tone, the fittingness of mental states does not in itself constitute a contribution to well-being (though the instrumental benefits of fitting mental states are many). Rossi and Tappolet contend that well-being is constituted by fitting happiness, construed as consisting of sensory pleasures and positive emotions and moods all of which fit with their intentional objects. My main argument against them was that a non-sadistic pleasant mental state that does *not* fit its object can constitute a benefit to the person who enjoys it.

Section 4 turned to how fitting mental states figure in the *objective list theory of well-being* and in *Badhwar's Aristotelian theory of well-being*. I argued that knowledge, important achievement, and virtue are constituted partly by fitting beliefs and goals. I also contended that the amount of benefit constituted by having a deep personal relationship depends on whether the other person in the relationship merits deep affection. I went on to argue against Bruno-Niño that having a fitting positive attitude such as joyful pride constitutes a benefit to the agent not because it is fitting but because of the felt richness of joyful pride. On the face of it, having fitting *negative* attitudes does not constitute a prudential good. However, I noted the line of thought that begins with the idea that virtue is an element of well-being, then points out that having fitting negative attitudes is required by virtue, and draws the conclusion that having fitting negative attitudes can be part of an element of well-being.

Section 5 turned to the question of whether being the agent of fitting actions constitutes a benefit to the agent. Actions can be fitting to their situations without these actions' being either significant achievements in themselves or parts of a set of interconnected actions that constitutes an achievement. Where an action is fitting but is neither itself an achievement nor part of an achievement, being the agent of such a fitting action does not constitute an addition to the agent's well-being, unless this fitting action is required by virtue and virtue is an element of well-being.

I close with some comments on the implications of this paper's conclusions. This paper has shown that theories of well-being that incorporate objective list or Aristotelian

elements are the theories that most easily accommodate fittingness as a necessary part of well-being. But the paper has also argued both that pleasure can be unfitting and yet still be a non-instrumental benefit and that a fitting negative attitude is not a non-instrumental benefit.

The relations of fittingness under discussion in this paper have been, with one exception, relations between mental states and the external world. That one exception was the brief discussion of the relation between beliefs and emotions, a relation between internal items. But whenever the relations of fittingness are between mental states and the external world and these relations are attested by some theories to be parts of well-being, these theories highlight the extent to which the elements of well-being are not woven purely out of mental strands.<sup>1</sup>

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