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XIV*—ME AND MY LIFE

by Shelly Kagan

The concept of well-being is one of the most central ideas in all of moral philosophy. Normative moral theories may differ as to whose well-being is to be promoted, or with regard to whether a principle of beneficence is the only moral duty—or one among several—but no moral theory disregards well-being altogether. (Of course many normative theories also emphasize prohibitions against doing harm to others; but typically the concept of harm is itself understood in terms of adverse impact on well-being.) Considerations of well-being also play a significant role in many accounts of the *foundations* of morality; indeed, on some accounts the entire point of morality is to ameliorate the human condition, that is, to improve the overall level of well-being.

Despite its importance, however (or perhaps because of it), the nature of well-being is something that is surprisingly ill-understood. What exactly is it for an individual to be well-off? What is it for a life to go well? There are, of course, rival theories on this matter, and the debates go back to antiquity, but the discussion has made remarkably little progress. In large part, of course, this is due to the complexity and difficulty of the topic. But there is a more radical suggestion that I want to consider as well. If we have difficulty settling upon a single conception of well-being, perhaps this is because ‘welfare’ judgments do not actually have a single subject.

When we ask how well-off an individual is or how well that individual’s life is going, it is generally assumed that these are two different ways of asking the same question. But it seems to me possible that these two questions are in fact asking about two different subjects—the individual and his life—and it is no longer obvious to me that all of the matters relevant to the quality of the life are relevant to the well-being of the individual.

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Of course it would be quite implausible to claim that the two are unrelated, but that doesn't mean that they come to exactly the same thing. And if the two can indeed come apart—but this is something that we generally fail to recognize—it would go a long way toward explaining why any given theory can seem at one moment inescapable and at the next moment absurd. (It would also raise the question whether our primary concern in moral theory should indeed be with well-being, or rather with the quality of life.)

Accordingly, in this paper I want to take some initial steps toward exploring and motivating the suggestion that quality of life and level of well-being do not come to the same thing. But I think we'll actually be in the best position to do this if we temporarily put it aside. Initially, at any rate, I simply want to review some familiar objections to two standard theories of well-being, and I want to examine in some detail a particularly intriguing argument that emerges out of a criticism of one of these theories.

I

Among the various theories of individual well-being, hedonism is perhaps the most familiar, claiming as it does that well-being consists solely in the presence of pleasure and the absence of pain. Of course objections to hedonism are equally familiar (which is not to say they are sound). Even when we restrict our attention to mental states, most of us find implausible the thought that how well-off an individual is turns solely on how *pleasant* her mental states are. We value (and we appear to value intrinsically, not merely instrumentally) any number of experiences where the value of those experiences does not seem to be a simple function of the pleasure that those experiences contain.

Now even if we accept this criticism of hedonism, it still leaves us with the possibility of accepting a *mental state* view, according to which well-being is simply a matter of having the right sorts of mental states. For even though hedonism is the most familiar mental state view, it does not exhaust the class. Well-being can still be a matter of having the right mental states, even if we allow other features besides pleasantness to help determine the value of those mental states. Many people find this more basic idea—*mental statism*—quite compelling. (It lies behind the common saying that

‘What you don’t know can’t hurt you’.) There is, however, a standard objection to all such mental state views, for they all seem subject to the following sort of difficulty.

Imagine a man who dies contented, thinking he has achieved everything he wanted in life: his wife and family love him, he is a respected member of the community, and he has founded a successful business. Or so he thinks. In reality, however, he has been completely deceived: his wife cheated on him, his daughter and son were only nice to him so that they would be able to borrow the car, the other members of the community only pretended to respect him for the sake of the charitable contributions he sometimes made, and his business partner has been embezzling funds from the company which will soon go bankrupt.¹

In thinking about this man’s life, it is difficult to believe that it is all a life could be, that this life has gone about as well as a life could go. Yet this seems to be the very conclusion mental state theories must reach. For from the ‘inside’—looking only at the man’s experiences—everything was perfect. We can imagine that the man’s mental states were *exactly* the same as the ones he would have had if he had actually been loved and respected. So if mental states are all that matter, then—since this man has got the mental states right—there is nothing missing from this man’s life at all. It is a picture of a life that has gone well. But this seems quite an unacceptable thing to say about this life; it is surely not the kind of life we would want for ourselves. So mental state theories must be wrong.

(The observant will have noticed that in offering this objection to mental statism, I have started talking about how well the person’s *life* has gone—rather than how well-off the *man* is. If our radical suggestion is correct, then this is actually a significant shift. But for now my point is simply to rehearse a standard objection to mental state views.)

But what is missing? A natural response to this example is to point out that this person doesn’t really have what he *wants*. He *thinks* he does—but he doesn’t. The businessman wanted to be

1 This expands on an example of Thomas Nagel’s, from ‘Death’, reprinted in his *Mortal Questions* (Cambridge University Press, 1979).

loved and respected. He thought he was—from the inside it *seemed* that he was, he had the same mental states as someone who was—but still he wasn't *really* loved and respected, even though that was what he *wanted*. In short, what is missing is that the person's preferences are not actually satisfied; things are not in fact the way he wants them to be.

These thoughts are often taken to support a desire-based or preference theory of well-being. According to the preference theory, well-being consists in having one's preferences satisfied. To the extent that your preferences or desires are satisfied, you are better off; to the extent that your preferences or desires are not satisfied, you are less well-off. And since the deceived businessman's desires are not in fact satisfied—whatever his mental states—he is not well-off. (What is intended here, of course, is 'satisfaction' in the logician's sense: the question is simply whether or not the states of affairs that are the objects of one's various desires obtain; it is irrelevant whether or not one realizes it, or whether one gets some psychological feeling of satisfaction.)

More generally, it is obvious enough that our desires are not *limited* to matters involving our mental states. We want various 'external' states of affairs to obtain as well. (Indeed, sometimes we prefer that some such external state of affairs obtain even if that means that we will be subject to some undesirable mental state.) In this way we seem pushed toward a pure or unrestricted desire theory. What makes one well-off is the satisfaction of one's desires, period.

However, such a move brings its own difficulties, for there are many cases where it seems quite implausible to suggest that a person's well-being is affected by the satisfaction of the relevant desire. Suppose I meet a stranger on a train.² She tells me her story, and I form the desire that she succeed in her projects. We then part, and I never hear of her or even think of her again. If she does in fact succeed, then my desire has been satisfied. According to the desire theory, then, this makes me better off. But this is intuitively an

2 The example is Parfit's. See Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford University Press, 1984), appendix I. I first discussed this example in 'The Limits of Well-Being', *Social Philosophy & Policy*, vol. 9, #2 (1992), pp. 169–189; in the next several paragraphs I draw heavily from that discussion.

absurd claim. Obviously my level of well-being is not affected *at all* by the success of the stranger. The success of the stranger has nothing to do with *me*.

The intuition at work in this objection seems to be something like this. A theory of well-being provides an account as to which facts constitute my being better off. But whatever the relevant facts are, presumably at the very least they must be facts about *me*. Since my desires can range over facts that having nothing whatsoever to do with me, the mere satisfaction of such desires cannot directly constitute my well-being.

I suspect that something like this thought underlies much of the appeal of mental state theories. For a mental state view, it should be noted, at least has the virtue of keeping the content of well-being within reasonable bounds. On the one hand, facts about my mental states are certainly facts about me. And on the other hand, it is far from clear whether anything external to my mind can count as well, that is, can count as being—in the relevant sense—a fact about me.

Let us, therefore, examine the argument more carefully. Why is it that it seems so clear that the success of the stranger does not contribute to my well-being, even though this satisfies one of my desires? The answer does not seem to turn on the fact that by the time the stranger succeeds, my desire for her success has faded and been forgotten. For even if I continued to wish the stranger success, so long as I did nothing about it, and never heard of her success, it *still* seems as though her success contributes nothing at all to my well-being. Why not?

As I've suggested, the irresistible answer is that the stranger's success has no effect on *me*. I remain exactly as I was before. I am not altered at all by the fact of the stranger's success. But if something is to make a difference to my level of well-being it must make a difference to *me*. The facts that constitute my being well-off must be facts about me.

Presumably your level of well-being is not a free-floating fact about you. It supervenes on various natural facts. You are well-off by virtue of the fact that the relevant natural facts obtain. But individual well-being is a state of the individual person. So it seems plausible to insist that differences in individual well-being must supervene on things that constitute differences in the individual person.

The point can be summarized this way: changes in well-being must involve changes in the person. It is because the stranger's success does not involve a change in me, that it cannot involve a change in my level of well-being.

For the sake of clarity, it is probably best to note explicitly that what is being required here are *intrinsic* changes in the person. That is to say, the intuition must be that changes in well-being must involve intrinsic (nonrelational) changes in the person affected. I don't mean to suggest that 'merely relational' changes are not genuine changes. But we are trying to explain the intuition that my level of well-being cannot be affected by the success of the stranger on the train, and if we are to do that along the suggested lines then we must exclude merely relational changes. After all, when the stranger succeeds this does in fact alter my *relational* properties. Apparently, then, the intuition must be this: changes in well-being must involve nonrelational, or intrinsic, changes in the person.

Now this still leaves open the issue of what exactly does constitute an (intrinsic) change in the person. And this in turn requires our taking a stand on the nature of persons. I imagine, however, that at least some mental statist will be quite prepared to take such a stand, as follows: a person is simply the right sort of collection of mental states—that is to say, a mind. Armed with this view a mental statist would be in a position to argue for a mental state theory of well-being.

The argument she puts forward has two premises:

- (1) Changes in well-being must involve changes in the person.
- (2) A person simply is a collection of mental states.

These two premises seem to yield the desired conclusion that changes in the well-being of a person must involve changes in the mental states of that person. Nothing can make a difference to my well-being that does not make a difference to my mental states. My being well-off just is a matter of having the right mental states.

What are we to make of this argument? Obviously enough the second premise is quite controversial. I am myself strongly inclined to reject it. As far as I am concerned, people are not mere minds,

they are physical organisms—bodies—as well.³ But I won't try to argue that here. For our purposes, I think, the crucial point is actually deciding whether or not the *first* premise is true. To see this, suppose we agree to modify the second premise. Whatever it is that people are, presumably a person is nothing more than a body and a mind. So suppose we restate the argument as follows:

- (1) Changes in well-being must involve changes in the person.
- (2') A person simply is a body and a mind.

These two premises seem to yield the conclusion that changes in a person's well-being must involve changes in either the person's body or their mind.

Now this obviously will not satisfy the mental statist, since it allows for the possibility that some changes in my body that make no difference to my mental states might nonetheless affect my level of well-being. But the conclusion seems a strong and surprising one nonetheless. For quite some time I found myself strongly inclined to think it must be in error. Now, however, I find myself inclined to think that it is probably right. At any rate, I take it that the second premise is now unexceptionable, so the question is whether the first is correct. (This assumes, of course, that the conclusion does follow from the premises.)

(Once again, the observant will have noticed something important: the plausibility of the second premise relies heavily on the fact that it involves a claim about the nature of the *person*. It is not nearly as plausible to assert that a person's *life* is comprised solely of facts about that person's body and mind. We'll return to this point below. For now, we can take the argument to be concerned solely with the nature of the individual *person's* well-being. If the radical suggestion is correct, this distinction makes a difference. Here we begin to see how that could be so.)

Now despite the fact that the first premise, or something very much like it, appears to underlie our conviction that the success of the stranger cannot affect my well-being, I do not think it at all

3 Tim Snow has suggested to me, however, that the truth of the second premise may follow from certain contemporary theories of personal identity that appeal to a psychological criterion of identity (like that put forward by Parfit in Part III of *Reasons and Persons*).

obvious that the first premise is correct. I think in point of fact that some of the reasons that might be offered for accepting it are based on confusions concerning the nature of intrinsic value. Nonetheless I do find the first premise extremely plausible, and I am inclined to accept it. I don't have the space to try to argue for it properly here,⁴ but it may be worth remarking that the premise seems most plausible to me when I reflect on the fact that well-being, whatever its precise nature, constitutes a *benefit* to the individual. And it is hard to see how it could do this unless it consisted of changes in the intrinsic state of the person.

This is, of course, too quick. Various changes (e.g., in wealth, or in political power) can be of instrumental benefit to a person, even though they only involve relational changes in the person herself. But well-being is of more than merely instrumental value. It is no mere means to the payoff; it is the payoff itself. And I find the following thought compelling: if something constitutes an ultimate, or final, benefit to a person, it must involve the person's intrinsic properties. If something is to be a genuine (ultimate) benefit *to* a person, it must involve a change *in* the person. That is, it must involve a change in the person's intrinsic properties. And if this is so, then since well-being is such an ultimate benefit, changes in well-being must involve changes in the person's intrinsic properties. Thus I accept the first premise.

With the first premise in place, the argument we have been considering goes through. Increasing well-being must involve altering the person's intrinsic properties. Since a person just is a body and a mind, changes in well-being must involve changes in the person's body or mind.

Despite the intuitive plausibility of the first premise, it is of course tempting to reject it based on the thought that, unless we do reject it, we will be led to the undesirable conclusion that well-being can only be affected by intrinsic changes in the body or the mind. Recall the example of the businessman who has been deceived into thinking that he is loved and successful. Surely—we seem to want

4 I examined a number of arguments for and against the first premise in 'The Limits of Well-Being'. (I should note that the printed version of that article introduced an error at p. 182. It incorrectly repeated the original statement of premise (2), instead of modifying the second premise as above: (2') A person simply is a body and a mind.)

to say—this person is not as well-off as he would have been had he genuinely been loved and successful. So it must be false that what benefits someone must affect them intrinsically; it must be false that changes in well-being must involve changes in the intrinsic properties of the person.

Nonetheless, when I consider the first premise in its own right I find myself unable to maintain this rejection. Instead, I find myself inclined to think that what is mistaken is the moral we normally draw from standard examples, like that of the deceived businessman. These examples are typically taken to be cases where well-being is affected, but in fact, I now think, they are not. To be frank, I am not completely convinced of this claim. But for the time being, at any rate, it seems to me that the argument for severely restricting the limits of well-being may well be sound. The limits of well-being may be the limits of the person.

II

Suppose the argument of the last section were correct. This would not yet establish the truth of mental statism. For, as I have already noted, the conclusion leaves open the possibility that well-being might be affected by certain changes in the body, even though no changes in one's mental states were involved. Nonetheless this does not yet close off all hope for the mental statist. All that the argument shows is the *possibility* that certain nonmental bodily changes might affect well-being. It is still open to the mental statist to argue that in fact no nonmental bodily change *does* affect well-being. And this does not seem an altogether implausible claim (though I won't explore it here).

Where does all this leave us so far? Suppose the argument of the previous section is correct. Then a variety of 'external' goods that are often taken to be constitutive of well-being are actually irrelevant to it. Well-being itself will have to be understood 'narrowly'. But even if this is so, this does not at all show that the various external goods are not genuine goods. Indeed, they may well be more significant than well-being itself. We will still care deeply about the presence of these external, relational goods. And nothing suggests that we are mistaken to do so.

We might call these external goods *personal* goods, for even though they are external to individual well-being *per se*, their value lies in their relation to the given person. Conceivably, in some cases promoting the existence of these personal goods might do nothing at all to benefit the person; and yet, for all that, from the moral point of view we may still have weighty reasons to promote them. We may, for example, be obligated to promote them out of *respect* for the person. If something like this is correct, then the importance of well-being may be less than we normally take it to be: in many cases the pursuit of the external personal goods will be far more important than the pursuit of the internal goods that happen to comprise well-being.

Recognizing the reality and significance of these external, personal goods may go some slight distance toward reducing the unattractiveness of the conclusion that well-being must be understood fairly narrowly. But we could, I think, go even further in this direction were we to endorse the radical suggestion I noted at the start of the paper—that is, the suggestion that it is one thing for a person to be well-off, and another thing for that person's life to go well. Indeed, in the light of the argument that I have been examining, this suggestion begins to take on a certain plausibility.

As I have explained, the conclusion that personal well-being has to be understood fairly narrowly seems to be forced upon us by the twin thoughts that changes in personal well-being must involve (intrinsic) changes in the person, and that a person simply consists of a body and a mind—so that changes in the person must involve changes in the body or the mind.

It is the second of these two thoughts that I want to focus on now. For although I take it to be uncontroversial that a person consists of nothing *more* than a body and a mind, as I have already noted parenthetically the corresponding claim about a person's *life* seems much less plausible.

Of course, unlike a person, a life is not an object, or a substance, but rather—I take it—something like a sequence of events or facts. (I won't try to arrive at a more careful metaphysical description than this.) So the corresponding claim would be something like this: a person's life consists solely of facts about that person's body and mind—so that (intrinsic) changes in the person's life must involve changes in the (intrinsic) facts about the person's body or mind.

If we accepted this claim, and then combined it with the claim that changes in the quality of a life must involve changes in that person's life,⁵ we would be led to the corresponding 'narrow' conclusion, that changes in the quality of life must involve changes in the facts about the person's body or mind. And if we accepted this conclusion then indeed it would seem that there was nothing to the suggestion that it is one thing for a person to be well-off, another thing for that person's life to be going well. (Strictly, perhaps, given the difference in metaphysical type between a person and a life, the suggestion would be correct. But since quality of life and personal well-being would turn on exactly the same facts, the distinction would not point to anything significant.)

The point, however, is that it does *not* seem plausible to claim that a person's life consists solely of (intrinsic) facts about that person's body and mind. Putting the difference in metaphysical category aside, what is striking is this: a person's *life* seems to be broader and more encompassing than the person himself; it includes more within it. Thus even if we agree that changes in the quality of that life must involve changes in the life itself, given that a life includes more than simply facts about the body and the mind, changes in the quality of that life need not involve changes in the body or the mind. Accordingly, certain changes might constitute changes in the quality of a person's life without constituting changes in the person's level of well-being. That is to say, it just might be one thing for a person to be well-off, and quite another thing for that person's life to be going well.

When I made the observation just now that lives seem to include more than persons, I did not offer any examples. But our story of the deceived businessman does nicely. It certainly seems to be a central fact about his life that he is unsuccessful—that he has failed to achieve any of the significant goals he set for himself, and that he has failed to so much as even recognize this fact. Of course, I obviously would not want to deny that these are facts about the person himself. But they are only relational facts about the person, rather than being intrinsic facts about the person. (And so, if our

5 Once the first premise is altered in this way—so that it talks about lives, rather than persons—there are new questions about its justification. But I cannot pursue these matters here.

argument is sound, they cannot be relevant to how well-off he is.) In contrast, these facts seem to be more than merely relational facts about the man's life: they seem to be prominent among the very facts that constitute the man's life itself; they constitute part of his history, the sequence of events that comprises his life. In short, these facts—facts external to the man himself—are internal to his life, they are intrinsic facts about that life. (And so, even given our argument, they can still be relevant to how well his life is going.)

I certainly do not mean to suggest that any fact whatsoever is intrinsic to any given person's life. Lives have boundaries too, although I do not presently feel at all capable of precisely demarcating where they lie. (In this regard, the metaphysics of the person are much simpler than the metaphysics of lives.) But the example of the stranger on the train seems to me to give a reasonably clear case of a change that does not constitute an intrinsic change in the person's life: intuitively, when the stranger succeeds, this does not involve any (intrinsic) change in my life at all.

These metaphysical judgments are reflected in the evaluative judgments we are prepared to make concerning these two examples. The fact of the businessman's failure is a fact about his life, and accordingly most of us feel quite comfortable in claiming that his life has not gone well. The fact that the stranger later succeeds, in contrast, is not a fact about my life, and accordingly we are quite unprepared to accept any theory that holds that the stranger's success improves the quality of my life.

Note that we might well feel differently about the case of the stranger on the train, if rather than merely wishing her well, and forgetting about her, I had gone home and invested a certain amount of time and energy in trying to assure her success. If she does later succeed—especially if this is in part a result of my efforts—then even if I should never hear about it, we might still be prepared to say that my life is the better for it: in this small regard, at the least, my own life has been successful. (The intuition grows stronger the greater this project has been in my life. All this suggests—what seems quite plausible in any event—that included within the boundaries of a life are facts about the person's agency, what he has *done*. But I won't pursue this here.)

In sum, facts about a person's life appear to involve more than merely facts about that person. And so some facts irrelevant to the

person's well-being may for all that be highly relevant to the quality of that person's life. And this seems to open up the possibility that a person's life might be going poorly, even though the person himself is well-off.

Once again, the example of the deceived businessman may illustrate this possibility. The judgment that we seem most confident about making involves the claim that something is amiss in the deceived man's *life*, that his life is not going as well as it might be. But holding this is quite compatible with also claiming that the man himself is still well-off, since none of this (intrinsically) affects *him*. Or rather, these two claims are compatible—if we embrace the suggestion that quality of life and personal well-being can come apart.

I recognize, of course, that not everyone is comfortable combining these two beliefs. The thought that it comes to the same thing to ask how well a person is doing, and how well that person's life is going, is a quite familiar one, and it is, obviously, difficult to knowingly combine what we take to be contradictory judgments. For myself, I am not yet completely at ease in simultaneously accepting both judgments; but I find that my resistance is weakening.

There is, moreover, some evidence that the distinction is not completely unintuitive. (That is, it's not simply forced upon us by metaphysics.) As I have just noted, in thinking about the deceived businessman the judgment that I am myself most confident about is that his *life* is not going well. In contrast, when I ask myself whether *he* is well-off or not, I find myself much less confident, and I find myself with *some* sympathy for the thought that the deception doesn't affect his level of well-being. Yet what could possibly explain this difference in reactions if not for an implicit sensitivity to the fact that in assessing the life and assessing the person, we are switching subjects, and so—potentially—switching standards?

I find a similar switch in my reactions when I think about a severely retarded individual who does not realize how crimped and crippled her life is. She herself, let us suppose, is contented and—if it does not beg the question to put it this way—happy. When I ask myself whether such a person's life goes well, I unhesitatingly answer No. But when I ask whether her own personal well-being suffers, I am not at all confident that the answer is Yes.

The same switch occurs yet again when thinking about ‘the endorsement thesis’—the claim that the possession of some ‘good’ can only be a genuine good for a person if that person values and endorses it. When I ask whether some feature could make a life better, even though the person whose life it is does not particularly value that feature—I find myself inclined to think that this might well be a possibility. Yet when I ask instead whether possession of this feature could directly leave the person better off, could be better *for him*, even though he would rather be without it—I find myself somewhat attracted to the thought that indeed this could not be so.

No doubt, not everyone will share all my intuitions, nor will everyone register differences in levels of confidence in the way that I have reported. But I suspect that my reactions are not especially idiosyncratic, and they provide at least some evidence for the claim that many of us have recognized—if only unconsciously—a distinction between questions about the quality of life and questions about individual well-being.

In itself, the force of such evidence is weak, and would do little to establish the claim that these two subjects can indeed genuinely come apart. But when combined with the earlier argument, which virtually seems to force such a conclusion upon us, the ‘radical’ suggestion grows significantly more plausible, and worthy of further investigation.

Many questions remain. I cannot pursue them further in this essay, partly for reasons of space, and partly because I am even less confident what plausible answers would look like. But let me end by noting several issues that remain open.

First off, I noted at the start of this section that if we agree that the limits of well-being must be drawn narrowly, then many external goods will be irrelevant to individual well-being. I find it plausible to think that many of these external goods—personal goods, I called them—will be *internal* to the person’s life, and so, although irrelevant to individual well-being, highly relevant to the issue of how well the person’s life is going. On the other hand, I doubt that they are *all* relevant to the quality of a person’s life. But all this needs to be sorted through much more carefully.

Second, although the arguments I have given open the door to the possibility that the standards for evaluating lives and persons

differ, I have not actually argued for the conclusion that the appropriate standards *are* different. At best the argument only serves to mark the outer limits of the facts relevant to the two issues. All that the argument in the first section establishes is that changes in individual well-being must involve changes in either the body or the mind; as I noted, one could still go on to argue for the further conclusion that in point of fact only mental states are directly relevant to well-being. Similarly, then, even if the argument of this section is correct, all it shows is that in principle the facts relevant to the quality of life might be a more encompassing set than those relevant to well-being; for all that, however, it might turn out that most of these facts are irrelevant anyway: perhaps mental statism is the appropriate theory for lives as well. I do not believe that this is so, but it remains to be shown.

Third, even if quality of life and level of individual well-being are two different things, and are indeed subject to different standards, they are obviously not unrelated. But the precise nature of the relation is not clear. As we have seen, facts about a person's life seem to go beyond facts about the person herself. But for the most part, facts about the person do appear to be facts about the person's life. (This doesn't seem to be true for all facts about the person; but perhaps such facts are not even relevant for individual well-being.) If we sort the facts internal to the person's life into two groups—those internal to the person, and those external to the person—what is the relative significance of these two groups? We've already considered examples which might be described as ones where the person is well-off even though her life is not going well. Can there also be cases where the life is going well even though the person is *not* well-off? And if the two can indeed split, which is the proper object of our concern? Morally, should we aim to promote individual well-being, or the quality of lives? Rationally speaking, should my concern be with my own well-being, or with how well my life is going?

Let me close with a single illustration of the potential practical significance of adopting the view I have been exploring in this paper.⁶ Coercive legislation is sometimes justified on paternalistic

6 I owe this illustration to Gerald Dworkin.

grounds—that is, on the grounds that the restrictions in question promote or protect the well-being of the coerced individuals. Suppose, however, that promoting well-being need not promote quality of life. Would this serve to undercut the traditional paternalistic justification? Alternatively, would we now be open to justifying coercive measures on the parallel ground that they promote the quality of an individual's life—even if we come to recognize that the restrictions in question do nothing at all to promote individual well-being?

I cannot yet answer these questions. But they suggest that the topic of welfare is even more complex than has been previously recognized. For if there are two subjects where previously it has been thought that there is only one, then things are much more than twice as complicated. We will need an account of what is good for me, an account of what is good for my life, and an account of the relationship between me and my life.

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