

von Kriegstein, H. (2020). Well-Being as Harmony. In Kaspar, D. (ed.). *Explorations in Ethics* (pp. 117-140). Palgrave Macmillan.

Well-Being as Harmony

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Introduction

Robert Nozick’s experience machine thought experiment is probably the most influential bit of writing in western philosophical theorizing about well-being (Nozick 1974, 42). So it is unsurprising that there is no consensus as to what, if anything, the thought experiment shows. This shall not deter me, however, from stating what I take to be the central takeaway: on the experience machine, our mental states are disconnected from reality in a way that deprives them of (much of) the value they might otherwise have.¹ Our beliefs are mostly false, our desires mostly unfulfilled, our satisfactions mostly illusory, our intentions mostly unsuccessful. Insofar as many of us think that our well-being is negatively affected by these facts, this suggests that prudential value depends often, if not always, on harmonious relationships between mind and world. This is the insight I will try to develop into a comprehensive theory of well-being I call *harmonism*.

The idea that harmony plays a central role in human values is not new. The Stoics thought that the end of life was to live “in agreement with nature.” (Long and Sedley 1987, 395) And philosophers thinking about intrinsic value since have often been tempted to give a prominent place to notions of harmony. Here is A.C. Ewing:

If we are to say there is only one good, the most promising candidate

¹ Cf. Belshaw 2014, 580.

seems to me to be harmony. When we are in harmony on the feeling side with ourselves and our environment we have happiness; when we are in harmony on the intellectual side with reality, we have truth and wisdom; when in harmony with other men, social virtue and love (Ewing 1953, 73).

Ewing immediately rejects the notion that harmony could be the only good, on the grounds that heroic struggle against difficulty appears to be a great good but not an instance of harmony (Ewing 1953, 73). I disagree. A suitably developed notion of harmony can account for values, such as heroic struggle, that might not immediately jump out as harmonic.² Nozick recognized this when, seven years after discussing the experience machine, he developed the idea that all value is organic unity (Nozick 1981, 429-32). I will briefly discuss Nozick's account and how it relates to my project in the conclusion of this paper.

In what follows, will develop a notion of harmony between mind and world that has three aspects. First there is *correspondence* between mind and world in the sense that events in the world match the content of our mental states. Second there is *positive orientation* towards the world, meaning that we have pro-attitudes towards the world we find ourselves in. Third there is *fitting response* to the world. Taken together these three aspects make up an ideal of being attuned to, or at home in, the world. Such harmony between mind and world constitutes well-being. Its opposite – being disoriented, ill-at-ease in, or hostile to the world – makes a life go poorly. And, as we shall see, many of the things that intuitively contribute to well-being are instantiating one or more of

² Cf. the Stoic contention that sometimes even a choice like ending one's own life can be according to nature (Baltzly 2019, section 5).

the three aspects of harmony.

Before I begin, let me make a quick note on terminology. I will frequently speak of *valuable events*. The second part of this locution indicates that I take *events* to be the bearers of value. This is somewhat controversial, but not terribly so.³ The notion of events that I employ is Jaegwon Kim's according to which events are exemplifications of properties and can be denoted as [x, P, t] with x, P, and t standing in for the event's constitutive individual(s), property, and time interval respectively (Kim 1976, 159).⁴ Insofar as pleasure has value, for example, this means that the bearers of said value are events of the form [x, experiences pleasure, t], or [x, is pleased, t]. Unless otherwise noted, the value I refer to is *final prudential value*. And, for the purposes of this paper, to say that an event has final prudential value for someone is equivalent to saying that the event directly (rather than instrumentally) contributes to their well-being, or makes their life go better for them (Sumner 1996, 20-1).

1. What Kind of Theory is Harmonism?

Philosophical theories of well-being are commonly judged on two broad criteria. On the one hand, a theory should cohere with our considered intuitive judgements regarding what a life looks like that is good for the person who lives it. On the other, the theory should have some explanatory power. The former criterion is invoked, for example, when hedonism is rejected by reference to cases, like the experience machine, showing the possibility of a life that, despite being full of

³ Cf. Zimmerman 2001, chapter 3; for an opposing view see Anderson 1993.

⁴ This notion is more or less equivalent to Zimmerman's *concrete states* (Zimmerman 2001, 52-3).

pleasure, does not seem particularly good for the person living it. The second criterion is invoked when objective-list theories are charged with being no theory at all since they only state the (supposed) constituents of well-being without offering any explanation of how the list is populated (Sumner 1996, 42-3).

Moral epistemology being what it is, it is difficult to reject the first criterion out of hand. Thus, well-being theorists typically try to show either that their views are compatible with common sense, or that there is good reason to think that common sense is mistaken in particular instances.⁵ By contrast, some theorists reject the second criterion. For example, Guy Fletcher follows Roger Crisp in distinguishing between *enumerative* and *explanatory* theories of well-being, with the former providing a bare list of things that make life good, and the latter providing an explanation of how that list is generated. But, while Crisp insists that a theory should be both explanatory and enumerative (Crisp 2006a, 102-3), Fletcher is happy to simply treat those as different types of theories and provides a mere enumerative theory himself (Fletcher 2013, 219).

It is worth dwelling briefly on what makes a theory of well-being explanatory. Presumably, what is required is that for each event that has final prudential value, the theory can provide an answer to the question why. For example, according to desire-satisfactionism each valuable event is valuable because it is desired by the subject.⁶ But note that typical objective-list theories meet this requirement also. That is because such theories do not list individual events but broad classes of events, such as ‘pleasure’ or ‘knowledge’. Thus, according to such theories, individual events

⁵ See, for example Crisp’s debunking arguments against accomplishment (Crisp 2006b, 637-42).

⁶ This assumes the object interpretation of desire-satisfactionism (Van Weelden 2019, 138).

are valuable, because they are instantiating one of those categories.⁷ There are, of course, differences between those types of explanations. Desire-satisfactionism provides a causal explanation. It tells us what happened in the world that made it such that an event acquired prudential value (the subject desired it). The objective-list theory has no such story. Since a given event will always either be or not be an instance of pleasure, there is nothing that would cause the event to have (or not have) value. (This, of course, is not to deny that something will have caused the event to obtain.) However, we should not demand that theories of well-being provide causal explanations, for doing so would prejudge heavy metaethical questions. It might turn out, after all, that events are never caused to be valuable by some other event, but that whether an event has value is a matter of metaphysical necessity. In that case, the best we could do, in terms of explanation, is to identify the types of events that have such value.

Thus, any dissatisfaction with the explanatory power of objective-list theories should not lie in the lack of a causal explanation. And it usually does not. This is evident from the fact that perfectionism is widely considered an explanatory theory.⁸ According to perfectionism, an event is good for a person, if and only if it instantiates the full development or exercise of an essential human capacity.⁹ This provides no more a causal explanation than an objective-list theory. The latter's explanation for why a given event is valuable might be: because it is an instance of knowledge. Perfectionism would add: and knowledge is an instance of exercising an essential human capacity. This is a further explanation, to be sure, but not a qualitatively different one. Since

⁷ Cf. Rice (2013), 200.

⁸ Sumner 1996, 70; Crisp 2006a, 102; Fletcher 2013, 219.

⁹ Hurka 1993; Dorsey 2010; Bradford 2015.

this is so, we could simply restate perfectionism as an objective-list theory populated with one item (perfection – however, that is spelled out in detail).¹⁰ But if this forces us to say that perfectionism is a merely enumerative theory, it seems we have lost valuable nuance.

The difference between a stereotypical objective-list theory and perfectionism lies not in the type of explanation provided. Both theories explain the value of individual events by identifying them as instantiations of a class of events whose members are valuable. The difference is that the standard objective-list theory allows multiple such classes, while perfectionism only allows one. Or, rather, perfectionism purports that all the classes allowed by the correct objective-list theory are subclasses of the one class it allows. It may appear, then, that the distinction between enumerative and explanatory theories is really the distinction between pluralism and monism. But if this were so, demanding theories to be explanatory would amount to ruling out pluralist theories by fiat.

At this point, it is not easy to see how the distinction between enumerative and explanatory theories of well-being can be drawn such that insisting on explanatory theories can be justified (cf Lin, 2017). If we demand that explanatory theories provide a causal explanation, we prejudge the metaethical question whether value is caused. If we demand that explanatory theories show all prudentially valuable events to belong to a single class of events, we beg the question against the pluralist. Thus, I suggest that the distinction between enumerative and explanatory theories is less important than we might have thought. What can be rescued from the rubble are two thoughts. First, if there are causal explanations of value to be had, we should seek them. Second, other things

¹⁰ Relatedly, many have noted that some forms of hedonism are essentially one-item objective-list theories (e.g. Fletcher 2013, 206).

equal, it is preferable to account for all valuable events with fewer basic classes of valuable events than with more. But there is no magic in the number one here. A theory with two or three basic classes of valuable events might just be the best we can do while accounting for the facts.¹¹

With these preliminaries on the table, let me state what kind of theory I am proposing in this paper. Harmonism does not adduce causal explanations in the way that desire-satisfactionism does. Nor is it a monistic theory like perfectionism. It goes beyond a stereotypical objective-list theory, however, by providing three fundamental axiological principles that explain the objective list, in the sense that events instantiating the items on the objective list also instantiate one or more of those principles. Further, while not reducible to each other, the three principles can be understood as different aspects of a coherent ethical ideal of harmony. Thus, the theory combines the extensional adequacy of an objective list theory with greater theoretical unity than such theories can offer.

2. An Objective-List to Start With

Since I claim to provide a theory that provides a somewhat unifying explanation of the items on the objective-list, I need to start by providing such a list. Here it goes: achievement, knowledge, life-satisfaction, love/friendship, pleasure, self-respect, moral virtue. This list contains items that have been more or less widely embraced as bearers of final value in the western philosophical tradition.¹² The items I included are ones that I believe to have final prudential value. However, this list is no more than a starting point. I will revisit it towards the end of the paper but, ultimately,

¹¹ Cf Hurka 2004, 252.

¹² Cf. Chisholm 2013, 22; Fletcher 2013, 214.

the shape of the list is always going to be somewhat arbitrary. If my theory is correct, the items on the list are valuable in virtue of instantiating one or more of my three axiological principles. Those three, then, are the basic list. Once we extrapolate from this basic list to generate a list that uses common-sense terminology, there is no principled way of determining how fine-grained the categories we use should be. Once we recognize, for example, that both knowledge and achievement are valuable in virtue of instantiating the *non-accidental correspondence principle*, putting each of them on the list as individual items is no less arbitrary than separately putting on physical and intellectual achievement.

3. The Principles of Harmonism

I said that harmony has three aspects: correspondence, positive orientation, and fitting response. It is now time to elaborate on each of them.

3.1 Correspondence

Discussing the experience machine, Christopher Belshaw suggests that *conformity* between reality and the way we represent it is valuable (Belshaw 2014, 580). Similarly, Hurka argues that there are forms of *correspondence* between mind and world that are intrinsically valuable.¹³ This is a natural way of thinking about being connected with the world. Following Hurka, I operationalize the notion of correspondence as follows: (one valuable way of) being in touch with reality obtains when the intentional content of a mental state corresponds to what is actually the case (Hurka 2011, 76). This claim needs to be qualified. First, it cannot be true of all intentional mental states.

¹³ Hurka 1993, chapters 8-9; Hurka 2011, chapters 4-5.

Consider the case of disbelief. To disbelieve a proposition is to have an intentional mental state, but if the content of this disbelief actually corresponds to reality, the person is not thereby in touch with reality (au contraire). Similar considerations apply to other kinds of intentional mental states, such as imagining something, or being anxious about something. What these examples show is that only some of our intentional mental states are, as it were, aimed at correspondence with the world. We may say that such mental states have success conditions that are fully determined by their intentional content.¹⁴ And it is only those mental states that put us in touch with the world through such correspondence.¹⁵ Second, mere correspondence does not constitute enough of a connection between mind and world to make claims about harmony or value plausible. If the correspondence was simply an entirely accidental isomorphism, it would be a stretch to call this a harmonious relationship. We can imagine, for example, someone whose hunches are, due to sheer chance, always right (an unlikely but not impossible scenario); while such a person's mind would be corresponding to, it would not be in harmony with, the world.

In order for correspondence to be a form of harmony, it must be no mere accident. What exactly this non-accidentality requirement comes to may differ from case to case. For purposes of illustration, think of Leibnizian monads. While never interacting, the correspondence between individual monads is nonetheless not a coincidence, but rather the result of God's plan. Thus, it

¹⁴ Cf. Searle 1983, 10-1.

¹⁵ Cf. Keller 2009, 668.

makes sense to speak, as Leibniz does, of harmony in this case.¹⁶ The current suggestion, then, is that non-accidental correspondence between a subject's mind and the world contributes to the subject's well-being. We can capture this idea as follows:

The Non-Accidental Correspondence Principle (NACP): Events of the form [x, having an intentional mental state the success conditions of which are (a) given by its intentional content and (b) non-accidentally satisfied, t] are bearers of final prudential value for x.

I take NACP to be a plausible rendering of the idea that being in touch with reality is an important part of a good life. NACP's appeal is further strengthened by the fact that it explains two of the items on the objective list: knowledge and achievement.

While there is considerable disagreement about how to conceptualize knowledge, it seems clear that instances of knowledge are events of the type described by NACP. Knowledge involves belief which is the kind of mental state that is aimed at correspondence with reality.¹⁷ And if this correspondence obtains in a non-accidental way (what this comes to exactly is a much-discussed problem in epistemology), our beliefs constitute knowledge. Thus, if NACP is true, all instances of knowledge are intrinsically valuable. Similarly, while there is no agreement on the details of the

¹⁶ I would say, however, that the locution *pre-established harmony* is misleading insofar as it obscures the fact that the pre-establishment on God's part is a necessary condition for there to be harmony at all rather than mere correspondence.

¹⁷ This is not to endorse a correspondence theory of truth. Rather, it is to endorse the truism that truth is objective, i.e. that true beliefs "portray the world as it is." Lynch 2004, 12. Any theory of truth (and of knowledge) will have to capture that thought.

best analysis of achievement, the general contours are enough to see that achievements instantiate NACP. Achievements are events where an agent successfully fits the world to their goals or intentions.¹⁸ In order for such success to count as genuine achievement, this will have to be done competently, ruling out mere accidental correspondence.¹⁹ Achievements and knowledge, then, are structurally analogous events. We can think of them as mirror images of each other. The main difference between them lies in the direction of fit between mind and world. There are sure to be further differences when we get into the details, for example, of what is required for non-accidentality in each case. But it is their shared structure that accounts for their value. They each instantiate NACP which is plausible in its own right, and NACP receives further support from the fact that it explains how knowledge and achievement each earn a place on the objective list.

3.2 Positive Orientation

NACP sees value in our mental states corresponding to events in the world, when this is no fleeting accident. A true belief based on no evidence, or a goal reached by pure luck do not instantiate the value of one's mental life being securely tethered to reality which is what NACP is meant to capture. However, with some of our mental states, correspondence to the world is valuable, even if accidental. A fulfilled hope or desire can make my life better, no matter how accidental the match may be. I suggest that we can drop the non-accidentality condition for those of our mental states that combine accurate representation of an event with a positive orientation towards it. Such

¹⁸ Keller 2004, 34; Hurka 2011, 97; Bradford 2015, 25; Navarro 2015, 3343; von Kriegstein 2019, 404.

¹⁹ Keller 2004, 33-4; Bradford 2015, 20; von Kriegstein 2019, 394.

affirming mental states are commonly called pro-attitudes. I propose to capture this thought in the following principle:

The Positive Orientation Principle (POP): Events of the form [x, having a pro-attitude towards an obtaining event, t] are bearers of final prudential value for x.

The insight captured by POP is that our lives go better for us, when we are content with the events that make up the world around us. Conversely, finding that the world is in a state we disapprove of, or find hostile, makes our lives go worse. This much is widely accepted. In fact, many theorists subscribe to the *resonance constraint* according to which nothing could ever enhance a subject's well-being unless it involved the subject's pro-attitudes.²⁰ That said, few would be inclined to accept POP as stated. Those who accept that satisfied pro-attitudes contribute to our well-being typically subscribe to theories of well-being that are much more restrictive than POP.

The most widely discussed pro-attitude-based theories of well-being are desire-satisfaction theories and versions of hedonism that employ an attitudinal analysis of pleasure. The literature on those theories contains plenty of cases appearing to show that a principle like POP is too liberal. First, consider the *scope problem* (Darwall 2004, 29-31).²¹ This concerns pro-attitudes towards events that are so removed from our own lives that it seems implausible that their satisfaction would make a difference to our well-being. Derek Parfit illustrates this with his desire that a stranger he only met once will recover from an illness (Parfit 1984, 494). The stranger's recovery would satisfy Parfit's desire, but it does not seem that Parfit's well-being is thereby enhanced.

²⁰ Railton 1986, 9; Rosati 1996, 300.

²¹ Cf. Griffin 1986, 17.

Second, any connection between our pro-attitudes and our well-being may appear to be severed, if a pro-attitude is, in one way or another, defective. The most salient examples are cases where our pro-attitudes rest on false information, and cases where the pro-attitudes are formed inauthentically. Third, there is the problem of pro-attitudes towards events that themselves have negative value. Suppose, for example, that someone is taking pleasure in the suffering of others, or desires the annihilation of an ethnic group. Many think that the satisfaction of such pro-attitudes has no positive value.²² I take those three types of consideration to represent the strongest reasons for restricting POP. If any of them succeeds, we should modify POP. This would not threaten the overall architecture of harmonism, as it could incorporate a modified version of POP. But I think harmonism should incorporate POP as stated, and will indicate my reasons for this briefly. (While I am under no illusion that the following remarks will be fully convincing, this is not the place to relitigate at further length the debates around restrictions to pro-attitude-based theories of well-being.)

Let me begin with three preliminary observations. First, the term ‘pro-attitude’ captures a wide range of attitudes such as being happy about, craving, desiring, judging to be good, taking pleasure in, wanting, and wishing for. However, as I use the term in this paper, ‘pro-attitude’ does not refer to what Chris Heathwood has recently called ‘behavioral desires’, namely

[...] a state defined by what it does; in this case: an intentional state that disposes the person in it to try to act in the ways that (according to the person’s beliefs) would make its content true. (Heathwood 2017, 12)²³

²² Aristotle 1984, book X.3; Broad 1930, 234; Feldman 2004, 39.

²³ Cf. Stalnaker 1984, 15.

One can have a behavioral desire for an event without a corresponding pro-attitude. I may act to bring about an event because I perceive it to be my duty, for example, even though I thoroughly wish that the event would not come about. While behavioral desires are typically accompanied by pro-attitudes, it is only the latter whose fulfillment contributes to our well-being according to POP. Second, it is important to keep in mind that we are discussing POP as one of three axiological principles that make up harmonism, rather than as a stand-alone theory of well-being. This gives us additional resources to deflect objections. Most obviously, any claim that there are goods not captured by POP would be no objection, since POP is not supposed to cover all that is valuable. More subtly, some events, though valuable according to POP, may not be valuable overall, since they directly negate either of the other principles.²⁴ Third, while POP allows all satisfied pro-attitudes to be valuable, it says nothing about how much value each satisfied pro-attitude has. This should not be taken to imply that POP commits us to the implausible view that all satisfied pro-attitudes have equal value. Let us now turn to the considerations mentioned above.

The scope problem seems to show that we need to rein in POP and distinguish between well-being-relevant and well-being-irrelevant pro-attitudes. There are three types of suggestions for how to do this. Some authors single out particular psychological kinds of pro-attitudes,²⁵ some restrict the range of events that can be the object of well-being-relevant pro-attitudes,²⁶ and some

²⁴ I cannot discuss ill-being in this paper. I hope that the extrapolations I make when needed are uncontroversial. For more discussion of the negative analogue to well-being see Kagan 2015; Mathison 2018.

²⁵ Feldman 2004, 64-5; Dorsey 2012, 415.

²⁶ Overvold 1980, 117-8; Bykvist 2002, 480.

focus on the grounds on which a pro-attitude is held (Sumner 1996, 134). So far, none of these three paths has resulted in a satisfactory solution (von Kriegstein 2018, 424). Elsewhere, I argue that the way forward is to turn our attention to the question of how to measure how much a given satisfied pro-attitude contributes to our well-being. The answer to this question will be a scale assigning a weight to each pro-attitude. Well-being-irrelevant pro-attitudes are simply those whose assigned weight is zero. Beyond that there is nothing special about them that would require restricting POP to rule them out (von Kriegstein 2018, 425). I suggest a bifurcated scale for measuring the impact of satisfied pro-attitudes. For pro-attitudes accompanied by the belief that the favoured event already obtains, the contribution to well-being is measured by the pro-attitude's amount of hedonic tone. For pro-attitudes not accompanied by such a belief, the contribution to well-being is measured by how committed the subject is to bringing about the favoured event (von Kriegstein 2018, 426). Very roughly speaking, the idea is that enjoying an event we correctly believe to obtain contributes to well-being proportionally to how enjoyable it is, while events fulfilling wishes or desires contribute to well-being to the degree that we were willing to work for them to come true.

The scope problem, then, is no reason to restrict POP. Any axiological principle telling us that events of a certain type are valuable will need to be further specified by an account of the features determining the amount of value a particular event will have. POP is no exception. At the margin, the amount might be 0, but in practice this will be rare. Genuine pro-attitudes will usually come with at least a small amount of hedonic tone or commitment. Thus, most pro-attitudes will be well-being-relevant, though many of them to a negligible degree.

The case of misinformed pro-attitudes strikes me as relatively easy to dispose of. We do often have false beliefs about the objects of our pro-attitudes, in particular when those pro-attitudes

are prospective. I might, for example, have a desire to go to Greenland for what I imagine to be its lush vegetation. But cases like this are easily dealt with even within a theory of well-being that relies solely on prospective pro-attitudes. My desire to go to Greenland is not my only desire. I also desire to see lush beautiful plants on my vacation. On plausible views regarding the relative importance of satisfied and frustrated pro-attitudes, the frustration of the latter desire probably more than outweighs the value of the former. We might think, for example, that intrinsic desires are more important than instrumental ones. Insofar as I want to go to Greenland only to satisfy my further desire to see lush vegetation, the desire to visit Greenland is merely instrumental. Somewhat more troubling is the fact that humans are bad at affective forecasting. That is to say even a factually accurate representation of a future event, will often be accompanied by a mistaken belief about one's emotional reaction to the event's obtaining (Wilson and Gilbert 2003). Sports fans, for example, often overestimate how happy they will feel, when their team wins a title. However, not all pro-attitudes are prospective. Thus, POP's assessment of how much your team winning a title affects your well-being will not be solely based on how much you desired the event beforehand, but also on how much you enjoy the event once it has occurred. In most cases, in fact, POP would assign very little value to the satisfied desire of a sports fan, because fans, knowing that they have no influence on the games, typically do not display commitment to bringing about their desired outcome. Thus, a victory's contribution to a fan's well-being is almost entirely a function of how much it is enjoyed. By contrast, the contribution to a player's well-being is a function of both how much they enjoy the victory and of how hard they were willing to work for it. This seems exactly right.

The context in which the problem of inauthentic pro-attitudes has received the most attention is in discussions regarding adaptive preferences. Those are pro-attitudes, formed under

oppressive conditions, towards events not usually thought to be conducive to the subject's well-being (Khader 2011, 42). We need to distinguish two types of scenarios here. On the one hand, a person may temporarily have inauthentic pro-attitudes because they are not, as it were, themselves. Perhaps they are drunk, or in the grips of a hypnotist, or a very powerful speaker. I think that such pro-attitudes are well-being-relevant. Being short-lived, however, they do not carry much prudential weight. On the other hand, someone may permanently alter the kinds of things they care about. This, of course, happens to everyone all the time, and is worrying only when it appears to involve self-destructive pro-attitudes, or when it happens under the undue influence of adverse circumstances or of others. In our context, we can bracket concerns about undue influences. The reason we should not brainwash people is that doing so violates their autonomy; the reason is not that doing so makes them necessarily worse-off. If someone's personality is altered as a result of being brainwashed, the question of how well-off they are will have to start with their new personality traits not their old ones. We may mourn, in such cases, that the old person is "gone", while acknowledging that the new person is doing quite well. We do, however, need to worry about pro-attitudes that do not track the well-being of the person as they are now. In the most severe cases, people may have pro-attitudes toward events that are by all appearances positively bad for them. Think of the desire of a battered spouse that their partner may return to them. Those types of cases, however, can be handled by resources internal to a pro-attitude-based model along the same lines as the cases of misinformation above. That is to say in such cases the satisfaction of the pro-attitude in question is likely to lead to a highly negative balance of frustration over satisfaction, and this explains why the person would be better-off with the pro-attitude frustrated. A subtler treatment is required for less severe cases.

Amartya Sen's discussion of adaptive preferences focuses on people responding to living

under bad circumstances by adjusting their pro-attitudes (consciously or unconsciously) so as to be able to satisfy a good chunk of them even in adverse conditions. If well-being was only a matter of satisfied pro-attitudes the lives of such people would be going equally well as the lives of those living under much better circumstances whose pro-attitudes embody accordingly more expensive tastes. This, Sen suggests, is an unacceptable way of thinking about the hardships faced by those with adaptive preferences (Sen 1987, 45-6). I agree. However, POP is not a comprehensive theory of well-being. Within harmonism there are other ways of capturing that living in destitute circumstances tends to have negative effects on well-being. For example, being poor will often mean a lack of opportunity to accumulate the most valuable achievements one would otherwise be capable of. At the same time, POP does imply that there is one respect in which having adaptive preferences satisfied does make one's life better. But this is as it should be. It is why adapting one's pro-attitudes to one's circumstances can be a prudent strategy. I am better-off enjoying my KIA than pining for a Ferrari I will never own. This point stands even in cases of real deprivation (as opposed to the frivolous example just given).²⁷

Lastly, there is the problem of pro-attitudes towards evil events. The intuition that we should not ascribe final value to, say, sadistic pleasure is widely held. As Fred Feldman points out, however, things change a bit when we focus on prudential value specifically. That is to say, while it seems very clear that sadistic pleasure is bad, it is not so clear that it is bad for the person whose pleasure it is (Feldman 2004, 39). If Don authentically desires the suffering of his neighbours, we

²⁷ Adapting one's pro-attitudes is not necessarily a prudent strategy. Insofar as it might undermine one's motivation to improve one's circumstances it might keep one from improving one's well-being more substantially than adapting one's pro-attitudes does.

should certainly not condone this attitude. Nor should we make the neighbours suffer in order to fulfill Don's desire. But neither of those is forced on us by admitting that the fulfillment of the desire would be good for Don. In addition, harmonism has resources to explain why sadistic pleasure and other inappropriate pro-attitudes are bad overall in prudential terms, even when we accept that they have value via POP. As Franz Brentano points out, we can say that pro-attitudes towards evil can be good as satisfied pro-attitudes, while also bad as inappropriate attitudes (Brentano 1889, 94-5). We will return to the latter claim shortly.

A final observation needs to be made concerning cases in which subjects mistakenly believe that their pro-attitudes are satisfied. On the face of it, such 'false pleasures' are not valuable according to POP, since POP applies only to actually obtaining events. To some degree this is a happy result, as it avoids experience machine type objections. But the verdict that false pleasures have no value whatsoever may appear a bit harsh. It seems that a person who is happily deluded may be at least somewhat benefitted by their happy thoughts, even though they would clearly be better off if the objects of those thoughts would actually obtain. POP can deliver the result that false pleasures, while falling short of true ones, have some value. The assumption needed is that, when we have pro-attitudes towards events we believe to obtain, our pro-attitudes are directed not only at the event itself but also at our contemplation of it. If, for example, Sumantra takes pleasure upon hearing that his team won a big title, the object of his pro-attitude may be both his team's win as well as his own thinking about his team's win. If so, POP would say that he is better-off even if his team actually lost, since one of the objects of his pro-attitude does obtain. While I am unsure about the plausibility of this move, this uncertainty matches my pre-theoretical doubts about the value of false pleasures (von Kriegstein 2018, 436-7).

I submit, then, that POP is a plausible rendering of the idea that life is better when we

approve of the state of the world around us. POP also offers an explanation of two entries on my provisional objective list: life-satisfaction and pleasure. The former should be obvious, since life-satisfaction just consists of positive evaluative attitudes towards one's own life (Haybron 2008, 82). The case of pleasure is more delicate as it relies on accepting an account of the nature of pleasure according to which pleasure consists of a type of satisfied pro-attitude. Arguing for such a view would go beyond the scope of this article, so let me just say that I accept something close to the attitudinal analysis provided by Murat Aydede (Aydede 2014).²⁸

Many events instantiating POP are instances of life-satisfaction, pleasure, or both. But not all of them. Harking back to my discussion of the scope problem, pleasure and life-satisfaction both involve pro-attitudes towards events we believe to obtain. But POP also includes the satisfaction of pro-attitudes not accompanied by such a belief. Thus, we need to add the satisfaction of such pro-attitudes to the list. This strikes me as a plausible addition.²⁹ Note also that, according to POP, many achievements have value beyond what is accounted for by NACP. Achievements involve the pursuit of a goal which implies a commitment on the part of the subject toward reaching it (von Kriegstein 2017, 32). Insofar as the goal is also the subject of a pro-attitude (as opposed to merely a behavioural desire), reaching it will be valuable both as an instance of NACP and as an instance of POP. This strikes me as exactly right. Many achievements combine the value of shaping the world in accordance with a plan (as captured by NACP), with the value of the world conforming to our standards (as per POP). Such achievements are better for the achiever than having a desire fulfilled randomly, or achieving something they do not really care about – though

²⁸ Cf. Heathwood 2007.

²⁹ Cf. Arneson 1999, 124; Keller 2009, 659.

each of those has some value also.

3.3 Fitting Response

Taken together, NACP and POP tell us that our lives go well when we approve of the way the world is represented in our minds, and reality conforms to that picture. According to a third principle of harmony, how well our lives are going also depends on whether we respond appropriately to the world. Here is one way of operationalizing this idea:

The Fitting Response Principle (FRP): Events of the form [x, having a fitting attitude to an event, t] are bearers of final prudential value for x.

FRP is compatible with, but does not presuppose, a fitting-attitude account of value à la Ewing (or, more recently, Scanlon).³⁰ Whatever our views about the meaning of terms like ‘good’ or ‘valuable’, it seems plausible that events to which those terms apply call for certain responses (e.g. love, admiration) and not others (e.g. scorn, hatred). FRP advances the further claim that fitting responses are themselves bearers of value. This is more controversial, but has been defended at length by philosophers such as Brentano, Nozick, Hurka, and Bradford.³¹ However, FRP is yet more controversial, as it claims not only that fitting attitudes are valuable, but that they are prudentially valuable. In other words, I expect few to take issue with the notion that we should love the good and disapprove of the bad, more to object to the idea that doing so is itself valuable, and even more to deny that the value in question is final prudential value. Suppose, for example, that Nigel enjoys contemplating the misery of starving children. Nigel is clearly morally lacking,

³⁰ Ewing 1939; Scanlon 1998.

³¹ Brentano 1889; Nozick 1981; Hurka 2001; Bradford 2015.

but is this something that is bad for him? Nozick answers in the affirmative:

The immoral person thinks he is getting away with something, he thinks his immoral behavior costs him nothing. But that is not true; he pays the cost of having a less valuable existence. He pays that penalty, though he doesn't feel it or care about it. Not all penalties are felt. ... Others who understand value will realize how he is worse off, even if he himself does not. (Nozick 1981, 409-10)

The objection that Nozick replies to in this passage, is that something a person cannot be motivated to care about cannot be something that benefits or harms them. This is a version of the aforementioned resonance constraint. It should come as no surprise by now that I reject this constraint. Harmonism is not a subjectivist theory of well-being in the sense that it makes a subject's pro-attitudes a necessary component of any event with prudential value.³² Via POP it gives an important place to such events but, already via NACP, it also allows values, such as knowledge, that might leave a subject cold.

Setting aside objections to including any objectivist goods, it might still be objected that FRP confuses moral with prudential value. It is uncontroversial that appropriately responding to the normative valences of events constitutes a life of high moral worth. But this does not necessarily mean that such a life is good for the person living it. I readily admit as much. These are two different modes of evaluating a life. What I am suggesting is merely that having fitting attitudes is a partial constituent of well-being. Like Nozick, I am not trying to reduce all of morality

³² A fortiori, it is not a subjectivist theory in the sense that would require every valuable event to be the content of a pro-attitude (Van Weelden 2019, 147-9).

to self-interest. According to harmonism, it is *ceteris paribus* good for you, if your attitudes fit their objects. But other things are not always equal, and it almost certainly is sometimes in your own best interest not to have fitting attitudes. Being left cold by some normative considerations can free you up to pursue other values in your life. Sometimes you can gain more that way than what you lose. But this does not mean that you lose nothing. Somebody who can act unimpededly by moral qualms, for example, may hurt others while laughing all the way to the bank. Our main objection to this will be that it is wrong to hurt others. But we can acknowledge, at the same time, that the transgression also comes at some cost for the transgressor themselves. It seems to me that righteous indignation should always be mixed with some amount of pity.³³

My discussion of FRP so far has focused on attitudes towards events that are morally good or bad. What is fitting to such events are pro-attitudes and their opposites respectively. Applying FRP to these types of attitudes allows us to give a plausible explanation of the notion that moral virtue belongs on the objective list of prudential goods. As Hurka has argued at length, loving good and hating evil seem to be central components, if not the entirety, of what virtue consists in (conversely, hating good and loving evil constitute vice) (Hurka 2001).

What further consequences the FRP has depends on how widely the standard of fittingness applies. We may think, for example, that amusement is a fitting response to an event that is genuinely funny (we might even think that being the fitting object of amusement is constitutive of the property of being genuinely funny) (Wiggins 1987, 195). If so, being amused by something that is genuinely funny is valuable according to FRP. Another example, made famous by G.E.

³³ In cases of outrageous moral violations our indignation may, of course, quite rightfully overpower any such pity, however appropriate.

Moore's discussion, concerns the beautiful. Moore argues "that the beautiful should be defined as that of which the admiring contemplation is good in itself." (Moore 1903, 201). He thinks that whether something is beautiful is an objective matter, that admiring contemplation is the fitting response to beauty, and that instances of truly beautiful things being contemplated admiringly are valuable. The last point is closely related to FRP (though Moore does not think about value in terms of prudential value). My inclination is to deny that there are objective standards of humor and beauty that determine whether our corresponding attitudes are fitting. I am less than fully confident in this assessment however and, as far as FRP is concerned, I am quite content to let the chips fall where they may. If it turns out that we can be right or wrong about what is funny or beautiful, then I think we should accept that our lives are going better for us when our attitudes conform to those standards.

It is worth noting that, unlike NACP and POP, FRP does not require the objects of our mental states to obtain. This reflects the fact that to be guided by the normative standards of the world around us includes having fitting attitudes towards events that do not obtain. Whether or not an event obtains does typically make a difference as to which type or intensity of attitude is fitting. The recovery of Parfit's stranger, for example, is a fitting object of hope when it does not yet obtain, and of joy when it does.³⁴ This observation leads quite naturally to the question of what happens when we are mistaken about what events obtain. Suppose I am pleased because I falsely believe that a friend has received a long-awaited promotion. Assuming that the attitude would be fitting, were my belief true, what are we to say about this case? The answer is that it depends on whether my false belief is justified based on my evidence. If it is, the attitude is fitting, otherwise

³⁴ Cf. Maguire 2018, 793.

it is not. The reason why FRP has to be understood in this evidence-relative way (rather than in a strictly objective way) is that FRP captures the sense in which it is good to let oneself be guided by the normative features of the world, and the world can provide guidance only via the way it presents itself to us (cf Sepielli 2009, 8). In cases where our attitudes rest on misleading evidence, the world is failing to guide us (rather than us failing to let ourselves be guided). This lack of guidance is bad, to be sure, but this is already captured by NACP. Thus, what determines the fittingness of an attitude toward an event are its normative features together with our evidence as to whether the event obtains.

4. Revisiting the List

Having introduced and elaborated on the three principles of harmony, it is time to revisit the objective list we started with. As you may recall it had seven entries: achievement, knowledge, life-satisfaction, love/friendship, pleasure, self-respect, moral virtue. I have argued that knowledge and achievement instantiate NACP; POP accounts for the value of life-satisfaction, pleasure, and some additional value of many achievements; and FRP captures the value of moral virtue. In addition, we have seen that accepting POP requires us to add the satisfaction of pro-attitudes we do not yet believe to be satisfied to the list. Depending on the views we take regarding the objectivity of, e.g. beauty and humor, FRP might require us to make further additions. If, for example, Moore was right that beauty is an objective property, we should accept his further claim that the appreciation of such beauty makes our lives go better. FRP also helps us to account for the value of what Ewing called heroic struggle against difficulties. What I have not yet discussed are the goods of love/friendship and self-respect. This is because those goods instantiate more than one of the principles of harmony.

Self-respect is a multifaceted concept. On the one hand, there is what is often referred to as *recognition self-respect* which requires that we recognize ourselves as having a certain status (whether it is as a person, or as a specific part of some social group), and see ourselves in a certain evaluative light because of that. This idea can be captured by FRP once we make the appropriate assumptions about what aspects of a person's identity make affording respect fitting. *Evaluative self-respect*, which involves that we respect ourselves not just for what we are, but for how we behave can be accounted for by POP, since it involves our living up to our own standards, i.e. our actions by and large are events that we have pro-attitudes towards. We might also think that evaluative self-respect can be either appropriate or inappropriate depending on whether the standards an individual measures themselves against are acceptable. If this is right, FRP will help us to capture the thought that appropriate evaluative self-respect is better than the other kind.

Interpersonal relationships like love and friendship have the potential to instantiate all three of the principles of harmony. An extensive analysis of love is out of the question here, but we can note that at its best it involves knowledge of another person, as well as earning (achieving) both their affection and their happiness. Friends and lovers often have and achieve shared goals. These goods are captured by NACP. They enjoy spending time with each other, hope that the other one feels the same, desire to be understood by the other, and wish that the other person will think of them well. In a good relationship, these pro-attitudes will be satisfied and POP captures their value. Finally, the best interpersonal relationships involve appreciating in the other person what makes them admirable in ways small and large. This can be captured by FRP.

Conclusion

In *Philosophical Explanations*, Robert Nozick claims that all value is organic unity, i.e. that events

are intrinsically valuable if and only if, and to the degree that, they display “unity in diversity” (Nozick 1981, 416). One way of conceiving of the current paper, is as the project of isolating the attractive core of this rather striking claim by (a) scaling down its scope from all value to human well-being, and (b) providing a more precise rendering of what counts as a unifying relationship.

Nozick starts with the observation that what is considered valuable in the aesthetic realm tends to be what in some way or other unifies diverse elements such as physical materials, ideas, or form-elements (Nozick 1981, 415-6). He proceeds to touch on an impressive array of realms in which value vocabulary is used discussing the value of organisms, ecosystems, scientific theories, organizations, societies, systems of belief, and mystical experiences (Nozick 1981, 416-22). The value of all of these, he claims, is a function of their degree of organic unity, i.e. of how diverse the elements are that they unify and of how tightly they do so (Nozick 1981, 416). The project fails to deliver on this hugely ambitious scope because Nozick never clarifies what counts as a unifying relationship across all those realms. In the case of aesthetic value his discussion does not go beyond evocative examples, while his discussion of the value of pro- and con-attitudes (‘V-ing’ and ‘anti-V-ing’ in his terminology) shifts back and forth between notions close to all three of the principles of harmony discussed in this paper.³⁵ This prompts Hurka to complain that Nozick is “papering over” different unifying relations (Hurka 2001, 39). This is unfair to Nozick who never pretends that there is a single unifying relationship across all realms. His failing is rather that he tells us too little about what unifying relationships there are, and how exactly they are supposed to work.

This is where the project of this paper picks up. NACP, POP, and RFP are clearly distinct from each other; yet each of them specifies a way in which our minds can be related to the world

³⁵ See Nozick 1981, 427 for NACP; 432 for POP; 433 for FRP.

in a valuable way. I think of them as different species of the same genus. Nozick might say that each principle specifies a unifying relationship. I prefer a slightly different terminology, calling them principles of harmony. Naturally, much more could be said about how to fill out the details of these principles. Moreover, the acceptability of my claim that these principles can account for the items we find on a plausible objective list of prudential goods depends not only on how exactly we understand the principles but also on what is the best analysis of those goods themselves. In this article I was able to give only the most perfunctory account in this regard. A full development and defense of harmonism, then, is a project for (a lot of) future work. What I hope to have achieved here is to make the case that harmonism provides an attractive framework for thinking about well-being, and that the work of developing it more fully is therefore well worth taking on. Taken together, the principles of harmony I have proposed in this paper make up an ideal of being attuned to, at home in, or in harmony with the world. I find this an attractive ideal and hope that others will too.

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