Playing the hand you’re dealt

Well-being and the poker-hand account

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ABSTRACT

This thesis advances a novel theory of well-being called the poker-hand account. On this account welfare is not one-dimensional (as is traditionally supposed) but two-dimensional. This bipartite model of welfare draws a distinction between how a person is ‘going’ (what states-of-affairs obtain, regardless of whether they are the result of the agent’s actions or external factors), and how that same person is ‘doing’ (regardless of what states-of-affairs obtain, the person is responding to and actively making the best of their circumstances). Besides being the most plausible refinement of the two-dimensional nature of well-being, the poker-hand account also provides the resources to address several disputes concerning the good life. First, the poker-hand account explains why people do not share any widespread intuition with regards to experience-machine thought experiments. Second, the poker-hand account generates an error theory that resolves several problems arising due to the shape of a life phenomenon. And third, the poker-hand account provides a fresh means of constructing an objective-list theory that is resistant to two fundamental problems leveled at this category of theories. In short, the aim of this thesis is to show how the poker-hand account is both a robust and highly plausible theory of welfare.
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INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I advance a novel theory of well-being I call the *poker-hand account*. On this account welfare is not one-dimensional (as is traditionally supposed) but two-dimensional. This bipartite model of welfare draws a distinction between how a person is ‘going’ (what states-of-affairs obtain, regardless of whether they are the result of the agent’s actions or external factors), and how that same person is ‘doing’ (regardless of what states-of-affairs obtain, the person is responding to and actively making the best of their circumstances). Besides being the most promising refinement of the two-dimensional nature of well-being, the poker-hand account also provides the resources to address several disputes concerning the good life. First, the poker-hand account explains why people do not share any widespread intuition with regards to experience-machine thought experiments. Second, the poker-hand account generates an error theory that resolves several problems arising due to the *shape of a life phenomenon*. And third, the poker-hand account provides a fresh means of constructing an objective-list theory that is resistant to some of the most persistent problems leveled at this family of theories.

In short, the aim of this thesis is to show how the poker-hand account is both a robust and highly plausible theory of welfare.

This thesis proceeds as follows. In chapter 1 I demonstrate attempts to clarify the question, ‘what is welfare?’ actually results in ambiguity. This ambiguity arises from the traditionally held view that well-being is one-dimensional. In chapter 2 I argue well-being is actually two-dimensional (the *bipartite distinction*). I do so by firstly showing the ambiguity outlined in chapter 1 is present in ordinary welfare inquiries. I then argue this ambiguity conflates two dimensions of well-being that I will refer to as (i) how a person is ‘doing’, and (ii) how that same person is ‘going’. Finally, I explain how our welfare inquiries, assessments, and judgments support my view. However, the bipartite distinction is compatible with several competing refinements of it, all of which differ in their significance. I dedicate chapter 3 to finding the most promising refinement. I argue
my own account – the poker-hand account – is the only refinement that (a) correctly *accounts* for the nature of ‘doing’ and ‘going’, and (b) explains the *relationship* between these two dimensions. To round out this half of the thesis I consider several different philosophers who have argued welfare is, in some way or other, not one-dimensional. This is the business of chapter 4. I argue each of their accounts fail and that the evidence they provide for their respective views can be better explained by the poker-hand account.

In the second half of this thesis, I apply the poker-hand account to several disputes found in the literature.

Chapter 5 examines the first dispute, involving Nozick’s experience machine. Many philosophers believe the experience machine serves as a decisive refutation against mental-state theories of welfare. More recently, hedonists have argued Nozick not only fails to defeat such theories, but that he provides no argument whatsoever. They reason Nozick’s anti-hedonist assumption (i.e., that we would not plug-in) is unfounded, as empirical evidence suggests people do not share the anti-hedonist intuition. I argue the poker-hand account explains the divergence of intuitions: intuitions are not conflicting over the nature of welfare, but rather are uncertain about where the greater welfare pay-off lies. Chapter 6 considers whether the *shape of a life* – the temporal distribution of welfare over a life – has significant prudential value separate from the sum-total of welfare within that life. I side with a family of theories called *story theories*, so called because they suggest the significance of shape is explained by narrative relations, meaning, or the story of that life. However, story theories disagree about whether or not narrative relations can be calculated into the aggregate total of synchronic welfare. The poker-hand account helps resolve these issues by generating a highly plausible story theory I call the *forward-looking view*. This view holds that the value of narrative relations, or meaning, can be dispersed into synchronic welfare, but only at times after the relevant narrative event or events.

Finally, in chapter 7, I proceed onto a more exploratory project by considering how the poker-hand account might provide a novel means of constructing an objective-list theory. I argue such a construction avoids or resists two fundamental problems for any such theory. These are the problems of *arbitrariness* and *elitism*. I suggest the poker-hand account can provide a non-arbitrary putative good, thus resolving the accusation of arbitrariness, and that my account is not vulnerable to problematic types of elitism.
CHAPTER 1
Motivation

Well-being matters, that much is clear. Not only is it an interesting topic in its own right, but it also holds a crucial position in many other fields of inquiry including ethics, political philosophy, psychology, and law. Theoretical presuppositions about well-being often play significant roles in many downstream discussions in these aforementioned areas. Assumptions about well-being are made when thinking about punishment, distributive justice, bioethics, paternalism, harm, care, etc.

Further, well-being must be first understood in order to make sense of many other concepts and emotions (Campbell 2016). Acts of self-interest hope to promote one’s own well-being, whilst acts of self-sacrifice knowingly give it up. Egoists and altruists are both interested in the good life, but differ on whose life they should be concerned with; egoists for themselves, altruists for others. To believe that we know what is best for another is to be paternalistic. Rewarding someone attempts to make them better off, while punishment aims to reduce a person’s welfare. When we show caring or concern for another we want what is best for them. When we feel malice we wish them to be worse off. We pity someone when we believe their life is not going well, and we might envy those we perceive as having a better life than our own.

So what, if anything, are the basic necessary constituents of well-being? A substantive theory of well-being posits an answer to the above question, telling us what is necessarily required to live well or be well off. A quick glance at the philosophical literature shows no shortage of theories. While there is no consensus on which theory is correct, there does appear to be an implicit agreement on two different assumptions: (i) well-being is a one-dimensional concept, and (ii) the argument about the correct theory of well-being is a substantive (not merely terminological) one. Combined, this duo make up the traditional view.
In this chapter, I aim to give a topography of the philosophy of well-being. Doing so will familiarize the reader with the concept, language, and theories that we shall be concerned with throughout this thesis. Additionally, I explain how the traditional view (as described above) generates two claims, both of which I find highly dubious. The first claim being that every welfare inquiry has the same content. The second is that (given the first claim) the same one answer will adequately satisfy every welfare question.

1.1.

The prevailing theme shared between theories of welfare is the idea of something being ‘good for’ something else. Theories of well-being are thought to be theories about this particular kind of value, or theories about the relationship in which a good stands to an individual. To distinguish this value – good for – from other kinds of value it is called prudential value.1 We can understand this delineation between kinds of value or goods by comparing them. For example:2

Prudential good: good for an individual.

Moral good: to be promoted, protected or otherwise respected and upheld.

Spiritual good: good according to one’s religious, spiritual or metaphysical doctrine.

This is not to say that these values do not, nor cannot, overlap; many have argued they do. An objective-list theorist might claim a person is better off by having these different types of goods in their life.3 A perfectionist theory of well-being argues the point that perfectionist value just is prudential value.4 Plato (1968, pp. 277-304) argued, being morally good is in the self-interest of the individual and thus, moral goods are prudential goods. Some philosophers, such as Kagan (2009) and Parfit (1984), have suggested that a good life is one in which a person desires, obtains, and takes pleasure in, these different goods.

But the truths of the various claims made above are hardly obvious and there are good reasons for rejecting them. Consider a criminal recently jailed (Kagan 1992).5 One might

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1 (Campbell 2016); (Fletcher 2013); (Lin 2014); (Smuts 2013); (Sumner 1996).
2 (Campbell 2016); (Feldman 2004, pp. 7-20); (Sumner 1996, pp. 20-25).
3 Cf: (Finnis 2011, pp. 81-99); (Fletcher 2013, p. 216).
4 Cf: (Aristotle and Crisp 2000); (Hurka 1993; 2011).
5 While Kagan uses a similar example, albeit for different purposes than my own, he does draw the same conclusion.
say it is good the criminal received his deserts because justice has been served. And justice being served is a moral good. Yet from the perspective of prudential good, justice is quite arguably not good, as being incarcerated is bad for the criminal. Being in jail does not improve his life nor does he benefit from his incarceration, as prison is supposed to be a form of punishment. The sentence (holding that justice is retributive) is supposed to reduce his well-being. Justice actually has prudential disvalue and negatively affects the criminal. Prudential value has a personal or perspectival element: prudential good (i.e., well-being) is interested in the perspective of the individual whose life it is.

Importantly, theories of welfare are in the business of identifying basic prudential goods. Unsurprisingly, there are many theories of prudential value and they are often bracketed into particular groups based on shared commonalities. Quite possibly the most intuitive family of theories is hedonism. Hedonist theories share the commonality that what makes life better is happiness, pleasure, or enjoyment. Desire-satisfaction or preference theories stipulate that what makes an individual better off is that their wants and desires are satisfied. Objective-list theories are those theories stating that some things just are good for an individual, whether that individual wants it or even likes it. Perfectionist theories state that what benefits a person is the perfecting of their nature. A person is better off if and only if, and then only insofar as, they come closer to their end. These four families are nearly exhaustive when taken collectively; the majority of theories of well-being can be sorted into one of the above. However, there are other theories that are recognized as distinct from these families. Sumner’s (1996) authentic happiness theory: one is only well-off when, upon an autonomous and unbiased reflection, they approve of or are happy with

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6 I take it that ‘justice being served is a moral good’ is a view most people actually do hold.

7 In fact, a fundamental problem in ethics – ‘why be moral?’ – hinges on the distinction we immediately recognize between prudential and moral value; if there are prudentially good reasons to act against ethical interests, why should I be ethical at all? Historically, this problem has been highlighted by Plato and Bloom (1968, pp. 35-62) in a dialog about the ring of Gyges and by Hume (1983, pp. 63-66) with his discussion of the sensible knave.

8 What these commonalities are, however, depends entirely upon the given taxonomy used. (Stevenson 2015).

9 (Bentham 1907); (Crisp 2006); (Feldman 2004); (Mill & Crisp 1998).


11 (Brandt 1979); (Griffith 1986); (Heathwood 2006).

12 (Arneson 1999); (Fletcher 2013); (Finnis 2011); (Hooker 2015); (Rice 2013).

13 (Aristotle and Crisp 2000); (Hurka 1993); (Kraut 2007); (LeBar 2013).

14 Where their ‘end’ is derived from the subject nature or essential features and not an end set by the subject his or herself. We might also express the central doctrine of perfectionism as an individual high in well-being is performing their function.
their life. Darwall’s (2002) rational care theory: an individual is better off if and only if they take pleasure in the things that they have good reason to care about.

1.2.

The phrasing of the question a theory of well-being is supposed to answer varies from philosopher to philosopher. There are as many variations of the question ‘what is well-being?’ as there are theories. Interestingly, all these different questions are simply thought to be iterations of the same question. Philosophers employ many different terms, phrases, and questions in hopes of elucidating the concept of well-being, believing they are referring to the same one-dimensional concept (Campbell 2016). For example, alternative terms include ‘welfare’, ‘the good life’, ‘prudential good/value’, ‘one’s own good’, and ‘good for’. Phrases used interchangeably include ‘what is good for someone’, ‘what benefits someone’, ‘what is an individual’s own good’, and ‘what benefits a life’. And questions thought to be simply iterations include ‘what is good for people?’ ‘What is good for me?’ ‘What is good for my life?’ ‘What benefits me?’ ‘What is good for the person whose life it is?’ ‘What is the best possible life?’ and ‘what makes a life go best?’

It is often assumed all the above refer to the exact same thing without argument. For example, Sumner (1996, p. 1) says that “our concern will be with welfare in the original meaning still preserved in the term’s etymology: the condition of faring or doing well. [...] what is it for a life to go well (or badly)?”15 Since, for Sumner, these terms refer to the same single dimension, questions about it (e.g., what is it for a person to do well? What is it for a person to go well?) come down to the same thing; they require the same single answer.

Parfit (1984, p. 493) also treats such questions as being merely different iterations of the same question: “What would be best for someone, or would be most in this person’s interests, or would make this person’s life go, for him, as well as possible? Answers to this question I call theories about self-interest”16. The shift between phrases is made uncritically. Parfit simply assumes without argument that, ‘what would be best for someone?’, is the same question as, ‘what would make this person’s life go, for them, best?’. If these truly are different iterations of the same one question, then it stands to reason that only the one same answer is required to answer each.

15 Emphasis added.
16 Emphasis added.
In everyday conversation we use such terms interchangeably and judge ourselves correct in doing so. Consider a person who is homeless with no friends or food. We could describe that person as having a poor level of well-being or welfare, and we would struggle to believe such a person could be living a good life. Alternatively, a person with a home, a loving family and a well-paid job would have a high quality of life. The things in their life are good for them or, differently phrased, benefit them. Intuitively, the changes in words and phrases neither added nor removed anything. In both cases, the language employed in the above examples both make judgments about the same one-dimension.

So, both philosophers and laypersons take all the differing phrases to be interchangeable with one another. ‘What makes someone better off?’ is treated as the same question as ‘what makes a life worthwhile for the individual whose life it is?’ An important entailment of this traditional view is that, if all of these questions are simply different iterations of the same question then (a) the content of the question should be the same, and (b) the same one answer should satisfy each question. While I agree all these terms and questions are about well-being, I am less certain as to whether a single answer can satisfy them all. I think it likely one could ask two of these questions and each would be a substantively different question requiring a different answer to the other.

1.3.

In this chapter, I sketched out a topography of the philosophy of well-being, allowing me to locate a significant problem. This problem was concerned with the phrasing of the question. Both philosophers and laypersons often take it as a given that each question is merely an iteration of the same question and thus only one answer can satisfy them all.
CHAPTER 2
The Bipartite Distinction

The purpose of this chapter is simple. I hope to make a case against tradition. I do so by showing that there are two types of welfare inquiries. Both differ in their content and in the conditions required to satisfy each respective inquiry. Understanding there are two different kinds of questions and criteria will have powerful explanatory force with regard to some welfare judgments we have considering problematic cases.

My claim is this: within ordinary welfare inquiries there is an ambiguity that hides two separate questions. I call these two questions the difference between asking, ‘how are you doing?’ compared to asking, ‘how are you going?’ The first asks how a person is ‘doing’, the second asks how a person is ‘going’.¹⁷ Both questions and the concepts they inquire about are constitutive of a person’s overall well-being. I call them Doing-well and Going-well respectively and the distinction between them the Bipartite Distinction.

The bipartite distinction offhand seems doubtful, especially in light of the traditional view sketched out in chapter 1. However, I believe we have a strong intuition running counter to orthodoxy that can be unearthed when we consider particular linguistic cases. Specifically, this intuition becomes salient when examining cases of everyday conversations when (i) people make welfare inquiries, (ii) how they understand and respond to those inquiries, and (iii) how to judge the answers provided.

2.1.

Tradition holds there is only one question and only one answer (§1.3.). There are many ways one can phrase the question and, according to tradition, all these differing iterations are equivalent. This means that (a) all welfare questions have the same content, and (b) the

¹⁷ To be clear, this is not a linguistic analysis of how people ask questions. Rather, I am trying to unveil a confusion/equivocation in ordinary speech that is shown when people reject certain responses to their questions. The terms ‘doing’ and ‘going’ are labels for concepts, not concepts themselves.
same one answer should satisfy each iteration. I believe there is linguistic evidence which serves as evidence to suggest otherwise. So, I reject both (a) and (b). Consider the following:

**Old-Friends:** Thelma runs into her old friend, Louise. They have not been in contact for years, so after having exchanged the usual pleasantries Thelma asks Louise, “how are you?” Louise tells Thelma that she is now married, has a nice car and recently won the lottery. Thelma responds, “Yes, but how are you?”

This pattern of question and answer can be readily recognized as one that occurs regularly in ordinary life. In asking how Louise is, Thelma is inquiring into the well-being of Louise. Louise lists a number of states-of-affairs that people believe prima facie improve, or are constituents of, an individual's well-being. However, such an answer from Louise leaves Thelma's inquiry frustrated as it insufficiently answers the kind of question that Thelma was asking. How do we explain this? If there is one welfare inquiry with many iterations, Louise’s response describing her current state-of-affairs ought to be a satisfactory response. However in this case, and in cases like it, we can understand Louise to be answering a question distinct to the one asked by Thelma. What Thelma wanted to know is what was happening on the inside; how does Louise feel or how does she interpret the condition of her life. We might say, Thelma was asking ‘how are you doing?’, while Louise responded with an answer to the question, ‘how are you going?’.

Often in life it is not so much what is said, but rather how it is said. Imagine Louise gives Thelma the impression that she was not okay. Realizing this, Thelma uses language to pinpoint what she wants to know and does so by stressing 'how are you?'. In doing so Thelma opens up the conversational space in which Louise can realize there are different dimensions to well-being. Using my terminology, Thelma could say:

‘Don’t tell me how you are going, tell me how you are doing.’

Implicit in Thelma’s question is a particular content. When she feels the reply either avoids or misinterprets the question, she will ask again by using one term (or tone) to contain the mistaken answer (in this case, ‘going’) and contrast it with the requisite term (in this case, ‘doing’). Louise’s reply is, at best, only a partial welfare response. At worst, her response is irrelevant. Since the initial welfare inquiry is misinterpreted, the terms ‘doing’ and ‘going’ can be employed to help draw a distinction between different questions, with
an emphasis on the original term to help highlight the content of the question. More formally:

When subject $S$ asks respondent $R$ a question $X$, $S$ expects answer $X^*$. However $R$ provides answer $Y^*$ instead. To demonstrate to $R$ that $X$ has not been adequately satisfied, $S$ will contrast question $X$ with question $Y$. By doing so, $R$ is expected to understand that $Y^*$ only answers $Y$ (an inquiry not initially asked), and that they $(R)$ have failed to answer $X$ with $X^*$.

Old-Friends highlights some important points. First, we can make sense of what is being established between ‘doing’ and ‘going’. We understand what is being asked, and that both terms are being used to clarify a particular question about an individual’s well-being. Second, we identify both questions as inquiring into welfare even though each differs in its content. Finally, we employ this contrasting-term-tactic when our welfare inquiries have been left unsatisfied. Not only can we divide well-being in two non-trivial ways, but that we in fact already do.

These questions (‘how are you’, ‘how are you doing’, and ‘how are you going’) are legitimate welfare inquiries. In these questions there are two distinct inquiries that differ in their content, thus defeating assumption (a). Both inquiries cannot be satisfied with the same answer, thus defeating assumption (b). The consequence of these points is that the traditional view is mistaken: well-being is actually two-dimensional.

2.2.

I believe greater pressure can be applied by considering welfare judgments. Consider these two cases:

$V_1$

**Peter:** Peter is happy, upbeat, and in a good frame of mind.

**Paul:** Paul has a loving family, job security and lives comfortably.

Who is better off: Peter or Paul? No answer is immediately obvious. It seems reasonable to assume many would be conflicted about describing either as being better or worse off than the other. Even if we were to provide an answer, we would be both hesitant and unsure of it. For that reason, the most obvious thing to do is simply refuse the cases as they stand. The reason we feel conflicted, it seems, is because we do not have all the
relevant facts. If all the relevant facts were in we would be more comfortable in making a comparative welfare judgment:

\[ V_2 \]

**Peter:** Peter is happy, upbeat, and generally in a good frame of mind. Yet events in Peter’s life are poor, e.g., family death, relationship breakup, demotion at work.

**Paul:** Paul has a loving family, job security and lives comfortably. Yet Paul lacks fulfillment. Paul is not happy or satisfied

I do not think this new information makes comparative welfare judgments any easier. And the reason for this is because we assume, mistakenly, that welfare is one-dimensional. Adopting a two-dimensional view of welfare allows us to make plausible and accurate welfare judgments. In this case:

- Even though Peter is *not going well* he is *still doing well.*
- Paul is *going well,* but just *not doing well.*

Such judgments accurately capture our intuitions about what is good and bad for both Peter and Paul. And like inquires, such judgments make sense to us because we comprehend both what is being said and described with ‘doing’ and ‘going’. Our comparative welfare evaluation is that both are better and worse off than the other in different respects. The bipartite distinction gives us the linguistic-framework to make such judgments along two dimensions of assessment.

### 2.3.

Roughly, doing-well and going-well seem to be as follows. Doing-well seems to refer to a *personal report* from the individual about himself or herself. This personal report involves their positive and negative attitudes towards or about events, people, and so on, in their lives. Going-well, I think, refers to the *facts* about the person's life; the facts about their life independent of their thoughts on them:

**Subjective-Objective Account**

**Doing-well:** An individual is doing-well insofar as their subjective experience and their attitudes towards the world are of a particular set or kind.
**Going-well:** An individual is going-well insofar as a particular set or kind of state-of-affairs obtains in the world.

I should stress that doing-well and going-well are *constituents* of welfare. Although we can talk about each individually, we cannot make proper welfare judgments without *both*. This is why welfare is *multi-dimensional*, as mapping out a person’s well-being requires knowing both dimensions.

To be clear, a multi-dimensional phenomenon is any phenomenon that necessarily is subject to more than one variable. In contrast, a one-dimensional phenomenon is any phenomenon that necessarily involves no more than one variable. ‘Length’ is an example of a one-dimensional phenomenon. When making judgments about length only one thing matters: the measurement from one end to the other. No other information is required whatsoever to judge length. Judgments about length – ‘long’ and ‘short’ – are also one-dimensional, as all that is required is comparison between multiple subjects’ lengths to decide who should be labeled as either of these phenomena.

One might be tempted into thinking that all phenomena function one-dimensionally. But consider ‘big’. On the face of it, ‘big’ is a fairly easy concept to understand. Due to this ease one might view ‘big’ as one-dimensional. It also seems fairly straightforward that when placing several objects against one another, we can quickly discern (generally speaking) which is bigger than the other. How big an object is, or whether one object is bigger than another, can be placed on a scale of bigger to smaller. And we might think, again, that this scale, being only a single scale, makes ‘big’ one-dimensional.

But the impression of big being one-dimensional should be recognized as mistaken. Something can be ‘big’ in a multitude of different ways. In fact, we may go so far as to say something can only be ‘big’ insofar as *all* the dimensions involved are scaled towards the larger end. An object might be deemed ‘big’ in terms of its width, depth, length, or volume. It seems most accurate to describe an object as being ‘big’ only when it scales higher on all four of the aforementioned qualities.

The same holds true for well-being as it functions in a similar manner. We saw such evidence in ‘old-friends’ and $V_2$, as each required specific information to make a welfare judgment at all. In these cases, multiple inputs were required to make a welfare judgment of how well off a life was.
2.4.

In this chapter, I motivated and gave evidence for the bipartite distinction. I picked out a core intuition I believe we all share about well-being: welfare inquiries, evaluations, and judgments come in two different forms, and I called them ‘doing-well’ and ‘going-well’ respectively. I argued for their existence by presenting a linguistic case (Old-Friends), where a person might ask how someone is ‘doing’ or ‘going’. Both questions were proper welfare inquiries, yet required different answers to adequately satisfy each. This showed that differing welfare questions were not, in fact, mere iterations of the same question. The fact welfare inquires could differ in content and conditions ran against the traditional view I sketched out in chapter 1. So, contrary to tradition, welfare is not a one-dimensional concept but rather multi-dimensional in nature.

I strengthened my case for the bipartite distinction by examining welfare judgments. Both the Peter and Paul cases ($V_1$ and $V_2$) were difficult to give proper welfare judgments on (let alone comparative judgments) until I invoked the language of the bipartite distinction. Not only did such welfare judgments appear correct, we also intuitively comprehend, and make sense of, such judgments.
CHAPTER 3
The Poker-hand Account

In the previous chapter, I gave preliminary support for the thesis that there is a
difference between how someone is ‘going’ and how that very same person is ‘doing’.
These observations give rise to two important questions about the bipartite distinction.
The first of these is the account problem: what are doing-well and going-well? The second is
the relationship problem: what is the relationship between doing-well and going-well? The
purpose of this chapter is to resolve these problems.

I consider several refinements of the bipartite distinction, each differing in their
significance. I begin with the subjective-objective account, as it is the most simple and (perhaps
for that reason) prima facie plausible refinement. I discard it because it fails to make
sense of bodily/physical changes that, intuitively, appear to be part of what it is to do-
well. I move onto the person-world account, which I reject because it fails to account for a
person’s activity in their life. I end the chapter by arguing for what I call the poker-hand
account. I suggest we think of well-being as similar in interesting ways to poker: while a
person may not control how the cards ‘go’ for them, they can control what they ‘do’ with
the hand (or hands) they are dealt. That is, a person is going-well insofar as certain things
out of their control go their way, and that same person is doing-well insofar as they make
the best of what they are given.

The poker-hand account is the most promising refinement for three reasons. First, it
resolves the account problem. Second, it does not fall prey to the same arguments put
forward against both the subjective-objective and person-world accounts. And third, it
provides an answer for the relationship problem, a problem that neither the subjective-
objective nor person-world refinement could do: doing-well influences - but is not a
necessary condition of - going-well.
3.1.

First, recall the subjective-objective account of the bipartite distinction:

**Subjective-Objective Account**

**Doing-well:** An individual is doing-well insofar as their subjective experience and their attitudes toward the world are of a particular set or kind.

**Going-well:** An individual is going-well insofar as a particular set or kind of state-of-affairs obtains in the world.

The subjective-objective account divides the constituents of welfare between mind (doing-well) and world (going-well). This means any purported constituent of welfare should be captured by either doing-well or going-well. If not, then a proponent of the subjective-objective account is committed to rejecting the purported constituent.

In this section I want to explain how the subjective-objective account falls short of producing a satisfying answer when we consider physical, bodily changes; bodily changes to the person whose welfare is in question (hereafter called, ‘physical states’). I argue that (a) physical states cannot be accounted for by either part of the subjective-objective account, but also that (b) denying physical states, as a constituent of welfare, is counterintuitive. Given (a) and (b), we should reject the subjective-objective refinement of the bipartite distinction.

It seems physical states are constituents of well-being. When people discuss what makes for a good life, or what is good for a person, a common answer (amongst others) is health, both mental and physical. Breaking a leg, contracting a virus, or suffering a terminal illness, is bad for a person, and seems to be (and is often treated as being) intrinsically so. Such claims do not appear controversial or counterintuitive.

Assuming the above, we should consider whether physical states can be accounted for by either doing-well or going-well, as defined by the subjective-objective account. Doing-well is a forgone conclusion given that physical states (e.g., broken leg, contracting HIV) are not mental states. Perhaps instead one might try to account for physical states by suggesting they are only prudentially valuable in virtue of any relevant, accompanying mental states. That is, a broken leg is only prudentially bad for a person if it produces the wrong sort of mental states.
Suggesting that the prudential value of physical states are reducible to mental states yields counterintuitive results, for the argument entails that a physical state is only bad for a person at the time in which the relevant mental state occurs. For example, consider chronic or terminal illnesses, such as cancer or AIDS. Such ailments are often contracted before the person even knows they have the condition, and that person may live the rest of their life not knowing they suffer the affliction.

It seems to me such illnesses are bad for a person (i.e., directly affect their well-being) independent of any mental states. And the explanation that vindicates my intuition is that such conditions affect the person; the condition affects the person’s body (by producing physical states), even if that condition does not affect that same person’s mind (by producing mental states). Yet according to the subjective-objective account, we must say the welfare of a person suffering cancer, HIV/AIDS, etc., is unaffected until (or unless) that person notices. Perhaps more striking is that if the prudential value of physical states were only explained by mental states, then the time of when a physical ailment is bad for a person would be when they noticed and not the actual time they were afflicted. I take the above results to be counterintuitive, and thus grounds for rejecting the thesis that the prudential value of physical states is reducible to mental states.

Another way to go would be by arguing that physical states are constituents of going-well, since such facts are independent of the individual’s thoughts on them, i.e., their mental states. But I fear this move fails to appreciate what kind of facts physical states are and what kinds of facts going-well is concern about. Going-well is concerned with states-of-affairs about a life, but physical states are facts about a person. After all, It is the individual who is afflicted – not their life – and while such events become part of a life story, mental states do not differ in this regard. That is, mental states too can become part of a life story. Yet the subjective-objective account wishes to keep mental states separate from facts about a life, why should our body not be given the same privilege as our mind as being a part of our person? Claiming facts about a body should not be given the same categorization, as facts about a person’s mental-states, should strike us as special pleading.

Since the subjective-objective account (a) cannot find a place for physical, bodily changes on in either part, and (b) rejecting physical-states as a constituent of welfare is counterintuitive, we must conclude the subjective-objective account to be mistaken.
3.2.

We can stay within the spirit of the previous account by modifying the definition of either doing-well or going-well to incorporate physical, bodily states. I think we are best off by broadening doing-well to include physical states. After all, doing-well can be construed as being concerned with the person and, since physical states are changes to the person, changing doing-well seems appropriate.

I think this move is natural and plausible for several reasons. First, since doing-well is concerned about how a person responds, and a person is, in part, a body, there is no reason to think we cannot, or would be mistaken in slightly broadening the definition of doing-well along these lines. Second, it seems correct to say an individual is not doing-well if they have a physical ailment, whether they know of their own condition or not. And third, we have good reason to think that physical ailments affect doing-well: we treat them as so. To see how, first consider the following:

**Car Accident:** Carol was in a terrible car accident that resulted in numerous injuries, all of varying degrees of severity. Besides cuts and bruises, she also broke an arm and a leg and suffered internal bodily injuries. Now, Carol had the proper treatment and undergoes several tests to see how bad her condition really is. Upon meeting her general practitioner, Carol might ask, ‘how am I doing, Doctor?’

While Carol may be conscious of her mental states and attitudes there are other things about herself that she is not conscious of. One such thing is her physical health. Consider two cases where somebody else asks Carol how she is doing. In the first case someone asks before Carol meets her doctor. Carol will respond with what she does know but will also note that she is not able to make a welfare judgment or fully satisfy the inquiry because her information is incomplete. She might say something like, ‘I don’t know, we will have to wait and see what my doctor says.’ In the second case, imagine that Carol is asked after she meets her doctor. Carol will respond to a doing-well inquiry by telling her inquirer about her mental states but will additionally report on her physical state. Both Carol and her inquirer recognize there are some facts that input into Carol’s doing-well which sit outside of her state-of-mind. These facts are about her, they are dependent upon her in some way, but they are not dependent on her state-of-mind.

Perhaps a more accurate formulation of the bipartite distinction would be the following:
Person-World Account

**Doing well:** An individual is doing-well insofar as the person themselves (both mind and body) are well off.

**Going well:** an individual is going-well insofar as the correct kinds of states-of-affairs in the world, concerning that particular individual, obtain.

The person-world account clearly marks out the boundaries of both doing-well and going-well, while taking into account the criticisms of the subjective-objective account. But the person-world account comes into its own problem: it does not make sense of an individual’s activity in the world.

We can do things in two different modes. The first of these is passively: we respond to the world or how we perceive it to be without giving much thought (or making much effort, if any) into the responses given. The second is actively, in which we purposefully form and actively pursue goals in hopes of bringing about those desired results. That is, we do more than simply respond mentally and physically passively – we go out into the world to try and make something of ourselves in it; we _do_ things. The kind of passive doing can best be seen in both the subjective-objective and person-world account.

But passive doing is a particularly broad construal of the notion of ‘doing’ in the first place. To be ‘doing’ in a stronger sense requires _action_. Neither the subjective-objective nor person-world account captures this stronger sense of what it is for a person to be ‘doing’. Instead both accounts exclude it. But, much like before, people take their personal activity in the world as a doing-well input. If we think back to Carol (§3.1.), it would not seem remiss of her to talk about what she is _doing_ to improve her current situation. We often talk about how we are going, and what we are doing in hopes of either fixing what is going poorly for us or exploiting things that are going well.

Perhaps it is here where we can see the closest relationship between doing-well and going-well. A person can be the _reason_ why they have caused their life to go-well, but it is not _necessary_. How one goes can be caused by forces external to the person, such as luck or other agents. For example, an individual born to wealthy parents who simply lives off interest and avoids making something of themselves would be said to be going well in spite of themselves. Doing-well is dependent on the individual’s engagement and improvement of their circumstances. Moreover, with enough time, an individual’s doing-well can lead to their going-well.
The person-world account cannot make sense of this activity in the world and an individual’s influence upon it as a direct input into welfare. The person-world account is inadequate because it is too passive; we are agents in the world who actively do things within it.

3.3.

I want to turn attention towards another approach that does not so strictly attempt to delineate between subject and world. Instead, I want to consider the possibility that doing-well and going-well are a little more intertwined, as I suggested at the end of §3.2. Such intertwining will be in line with our intuitive understanding of the distinction thus far, and still account for all the previous evidence presented throughout this investigation. I refer to this account as the poker-hand account, so called because of the use of an analogy with poker and a popular idiom.

A common folk-wisdom idiom, which motivated the title of this thesis, is to ‘play the hand you’re dealt.’ Life, in some sense, is like poker: while you might not have any control over how the cards ‘go’ for you, you do have control over what you ‘do’ with what you are given. If the cards go-well for you, then this means you will have been given cards that will probabilistically result in higher chances of winning and that you got the right result. But how cards go for you is not enough – you must know what to do with them.

On this ‘poker-hand’ account, you do-well when, regardless of how things go for you initially, you make best with what you have, either by mitigating losses or turning it into a winning hand. That said, you do and go well if the hand you are dealt is advantageous, you play the best you can with what you have, and you get the right result (you win the hand). We can give a rough formulation of the poker-hand account thus:

**Poker-hand Account**

**Doing-well:** An individual is doing-well insofar as, regardless of events and/or states-of-affairs, they respond appropriately and actively make best with their current condition.

**Going-well:** An individual is going-well insofar as an event and/or state-of-affairs out of the considered individual’s direct control is of non-instrumental prudential value.
The idiom to which the poker-hand account is built upon (‘play the best with what you have’) is a particularly strong and well-tested piece of folk-wisdom. I suspect that alone gives it some strong intuitive pull. However, the poker-hand account finds strength in its ability to make sense of the numerous welfare judgments we make. We often admire those that pull themselves up by their bootstraps and improve the condition of their life. The underdog who works hard and succeeds (or even fails) is a trope that many of us are fascinated with. We applaud when we see them rise above their station primarily through their efforts and abilities alone. Such characters are much of the focus of our culture whether in cinema, novel, comics, video-games, or television. We admire these individuals and their efforts; we admire their ability to improve their lives and well-being.

My speaking of our ‘admiration’ might cause some hesitation, as it seems I am using a different metric for measuring the goodness of their lives. That is, their lives are ‘good lives’ if we look at them from an ‘admiration view’, but from the perception of well-being, are they truly well-off? This concern can be remedied if we do a comparative judgment between two different lives:

**Morty:** Morty lives a fairly mediocre life until he wins the lottery. He buys many expensive and society-valued wares but is ultimately left unfulfilled. He decides on a whim to give away the majority of his wares and on his way to the Salvation Army he stumbles across a soup kitchen. He decides to join and finds meaning and happiness in helping those less fortunate than himself.

**Morticia:** Morticia lives a fairly mediocre life until she makes a strategic short sale, resulting in a profit equivalent to lottery winnings. She buys many expensive and society-valued wares but is ultimately left unfulfilled. After significant research she learns of the homelessness problem in her area. She decides to give away the majority of her wares and finds the soup kitchen she intends on joining. She finds meaning and happiness in helping those less fortunate than herself.

Which of these two has the higher welfare? Both lives, in one sense, seem about equal. Life events were about the same: they came into a large sum of money, found nothing satisfying in it, gave away most of their material goods then found meaning and happiness in charity work. Though how they got there is different, we might say that both lives have gone equally well. That is, both lives went well. But I think many would
share my intuition that Morticia’s life is better than Morty’s. Not that her life is more admirable, but her life is higher in welfare. Morty’s going-well was the result of luck, whereas Morticia had to earn it; she did things and was active in shaping her life and thus was doing better than Morty. How much better off this makes Morticia compared to Morty is unclear. She could be significantly or only marginally better off. All that matters, however, is our judgment that she actually is, comparatively speaking, better off than Morty. The poker-hand account captures this better than any previous refinement.

My point here might seem to imply that a person can only do well if their efforts are not in vain. That is, if a person were to consistently try to make something better of their lives, yet fail to do so, then that person did not do-well precisely because they did not go-well. Consider Mortimer who lives a near identical life to Morticia except that events unfold differently. Instead, Mortimer’s short sale backfires and his foray into charity work did not result in any kind of fulfillment. How could we say Mortimer did well when his efforts came to naught? But the objection only succeeds if doing-well were binary (i.e., an individual either does well or they do not). But doing-well is not binary; it scales, allowing for comparative judgments. That is, an individual can be doing better or doing worse comparatively speaking. Recognition of the ordinal nature of doing-well allows for more accurate welfare judgments. We can say Mortimer did as well as he could but could have done better had he succeeded. Conversely, Mortimer could have done worse had the failing been of greater degree, or he had done nothing at all.

All this talk of activity might leave one thinking I have abandoned mental and physical states as doing-well variables. I should stress the poker-hand account does not abandon either as doing-well variables. All the poker-hand account has done is appropriately widen the scope beyond the mind and body of the individual, to also include their actions. But such inclusion of an individual’s actions does not entail the rejection of either mental-state or physical changes to a person. Rather, the poker-hand account incorporates all three. By understanding the poker-hand account in this way, we can actually make better welfare judgments on these cases while additionally having an explanation as to why we draw such judgments.
3.4.

In this chapter, I argued the best understanding of the bipartite distinction is the poker-hand account. I rejected the intuitive starting point of the subjective-objective account because it failed to account for the body. I rejected the reformulated distinction between person and world because it could not make sense of a person’s activity in shaping their life. I ended with the poker-hand account, a refinement of the bipartite distinction emphasizing the individual as an agent who actively responds to the world in hopes of shaping their life (and not just being a passive responder to, or perceiver of, the world). The poker-hand account resolved the account problem, as it provided an explanation of what both doing-well and going-well are, and the relationship problem, as a person can go well precisely because of the things they do.
CHAPTER 4
Separating Friend from Foe

In recent times a small number of philosophers have argued for something like the bipartite distinction. However, the way in which each arrives at their views, and the upshots they draw, vary. The purpose of this chapter is to sort friend from foe; that is to say, which of these views are compatible with the bipartite distinction as I have refined it (i.e., the poker-hand account).

I begin with Kagan, whose account is identical to the person-world account (§3.2.). Kagan believes the upshot of such a distinction reveals that welfare, when properly understood, is limited to only one half of the distinction. I show that Kagan’s account, and the conclusions he draws from such an account, are incorrect. I then move to Kim, who takes the bipartite distinction as something like the subjective-objective account (§3.1.). Kim’s takeaway is that both parts can be plausibly understood as well-being proper. I reject his position because he fails to give a proper account of the bipartite distinction and misunderstands the relationship between the two parts. I end with Ferkany, who correctly identifies ‘going’ and ‘doing’ as two notions that makeup well-being. I identify his account as being a proto-version of the poker-hand account, to which I am indebted, but that it falls short of identifying or offering a principled account of the distinction.

4.1.

Kagan (1992; 1994) has argued welfare talk and related intuitions are actually attaching to two different concepts, which he calls ‘me’ and ‘my life’ respectively. On his view, well-being ought to be limited to only ‘me’, and intuitions/talk referring to ‘my life’ should be discounted. In other words, welfare, once properly construed, should be limited to only those things that affect ‘me’ (conceived as bodily and mental states).\(^\text{18}\)

\(^{18}\) Kagan (2009 fn. 3) has rejected some of these ideas (at least in part).
Kagan arrives at his tentative conclusion by examining a part of the welfare dialectic that can be found in Parfit's (1984) *Reasons and Persons*. This dialectic involves several thought-experiments that are traditionally taken as informing us about what is required for something to count as being good or bad for an individual. By the end of the dialectic, analyzing the *stranger on a train* case, Kagan makes the astute observation that, "my level of well-being is not affected at all by the success of the stranger [...] if something is to make a difference to my level of well-being it must make a difference to me" (Kagan 1994, p. 313). The outcome of Kagan's reasoning is that a change in welfare must involve a change in the person themselves. That is, a change in welfare must involve a non-relational (i.e. intrinsic) change in the person. And a person, according to Kagan (1994, p. 315), is both a mind and a body:

(1) Changes in welfare necessarily involve changes in the person.

(2) A person is a body and a mind.

With this in mind, Kagan (1994, p. 139) notes that while this might be true about 'me', the same cannot be said of 'my life': "a person's *life* seems to be broader and more encompassing than the person himself; it includes more within it". To support his claim he refers back to the deceived husband example (found in the dialectic), for while it is clear that such a life has gone poorly, that does not mean that the husband himself was poorly off:

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. [...] 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? (Kagan 1994, p. 321).

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19 The stranger on a train example runs as follows. Amy is riding a train, strikes up a conversation with the stranger sitting next to her. The stranger explains her hopes of being a successful comedian. Amy forms the desire that the stranger succeed. Amy gets off the train and never thinks or hears from them ever again. Suppose the stranger does succeed in fulfilling their life goal, and Amy never finds out. According to desire-satisfactionism, the fact that Amy's desire for the stranger to succeed has been satisfied means Amy has been made better off.

20 The deceived husband runs thus. A man dies after reflecting on his life. He dies contented thinking he has achieved everything he wanted in his life. However, unbeknownst to him, all his beliefs about his life were based upon lies: his wife consistently cheated on him, his children only acted nice to borrow the car, and his community were only friendly to him in hopes of receiving some of the charitable donations he often made. Cf: (Kagan 1992; 1994).
Note that Kagan uses the same two-dimensional linguistic-framework I characterize as the bipartite distinction in chapter 2 (i.e., doing and going). We can also see that he describes doing-well as a property of ‘me’ whilst going-well is a property of ‘my life’ – his delineation between the two is identical to the person-world account that we outlined, and rejected, earlier in §3.2. So while Kagan correctly identifies a distinction within welfare, he misidentifies what that distinction is. We rejected the person-world account due to it failing to properly account for the activity of an individual: similarly, Kagan’s proposal of narrowing welfare does not account for an individual’s activity as being a constituent of their doing-well. In other words, Kagan takes persons as being responsive only in a passive sense. But an individual is not just a being who has and lets things just happen to them; a person also actively participates in the world, attempting to impress their will upon reality. After all, doing requires activity.

How else does Kagan’s view differ from my own? A more interesting difference between both our accounts is how we understand well-being in light of our respective findings. That is, whilst I take the bipartite distinction as describing two dimensions of welfare, Kagan thinks of it as a distinction between concepts. He posits that welfare, properly understood, is limited to only one of the two, namely ‘me’, i.e., doing-well. His reasoning is quite straightforward:

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. (Kagan 1994, p. 316).

But Kagan assumes too much, misunderstanding a switch of dimensions as a switch between concepts. For surely we can say the switching of standards is simply a matter of looking at a different dimension of the same phenomenon, rather than saying our switching is between different concepts. Suggesting otherwise is taking an unwarranted leap too far. Now, Kagan could counter such an argument by suggesting that a person can actively participate in improving their mind and body. Perhaps this kind of activity is enough to cover the intuitive grounds described. But as Ferkany (2012) points out, such ‘activity’ fails because it results in a person’s welfare being completely insulated from

21 I have left out how Kagan understands ‘intrinsic’ value. He identifies two ways we might think about ‘intrinsic’ – the first being a kind of ‘inherent’ value, the second being ‘for its own sake’. Inherent value finds value in its internal features, independent of things around it, whilst the second is valued for its own sake because of its relation to the world. Cf: (Bradley 2006); (Korsgaard 1983); (Rabinowicz and Ronnow-Rasmussen 2000).
external factors. Stipulating that a person’s welfare is entirely limited to their body or mind fails because it would mean we are invulnerable “to the vicissitudes of the world” (Ferkany 2012, p. 489). Stipulating that well-being is restricted to the limits of the person is clearly problematic because it results in deeply counter-intuitive results, as Ferkany writes:

If we deny the vulnerability of wellbeing to the world outside our minds, we inevitably accept a view according to which even the lowliest slave can be perfectly well off, so long as he is happy or undisturbed by his situation. This is not plausible. Even a happy slave is living a slave’s life. (Ferkany 2012, p. 489).

Ferkany also rejects Kagan’s suggestion that a change in welfare necessarily requires a change in non-relational intrinsic changes in the person, suggesting instead that welfare can be changed due to changes in relational properties. First, Ferkany notes that even if it were true that changes in inherent value necessarily require only changes in the person themselves, it does not follow that this changes a person’s level of well-being: “[...] changes in our intrinsic properties ground changes in our value as persons, not necessarily changes in the value of our wellbeing” (Ferkany 2012, p. 488). Second, Ferkany suggests it is incredibly difficult to understand welfare as being inherently valuable without conceptualizing it in terms of particular kinds of goods, some of those being relational properties, e.g., friendship, achievement etc. But if that is the case, then we are well off only insofar as such relational properties are changed or maintained in our lives. So, while Kagan is correct in identifying a distinction, he misidentifies the nature of what that distinction is between.

4.2.

Kim (n.d.) argues the multitude of ways we attempt to clarify well-being fail because the intuitions elicited are not about a single concept. Rather, the reason test-based strategies fail is because the judgments elicited can be of two different concepts, both of which can plausibly be understood as ‘well-being’.22 He names them narrow well-being and wide well-being respectively. Narrow well-being refers to those things that involve only our mental-states or 'internal' life, while wide well-being refers to things that lie outside this scope, such as certain objective facts about the world (Kim n.d., p. 4). Kim’s conclusion though is quite deflationary: philosophers have been talking past one another when arguing over

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22 Test-based strategies attempt to isolate constituents of welfare by ‘testing’ whether some added or removed feature of a life makes a person better or worse off. Popular test-based strategies include the sympathy test, (Hooker 1996, pp. 149-153) and the crib test (Feldman 2010, pp. 164-170).
theories of welfare. One might propose a theory about narrow well-being, whereas another has a theory of wide well-being. Neither theory is about the same concept even though both concepts can be plausibly understood as ‘well-being’ proper.\textsuperscript{23}

The details of these test-based strategies and the reasons why they fail (according to Kim at least) are not relevant for my purposes here. What is relevant however is Kim’s conclusion: there are two different concepts of well-being and the many attempts at clarifying well-being have failed because each different method can – and does – elicit judgments about different concepts.

While much of what Kim has argued for appears to me correct, his characterization of narrow well-being and wide well-being are mistaken. I am thinking here particularly of narrow well-being, as Kim defines it as being limited to emotional or psychological states. He rejects the physical body as being an input into narrow well-being because people only value their bodies due to the tight instrumental correlation between physical health and positive psychological states. However as we have seen earlier, I rejected such radical definitions of doing-well (which is roughly the equivalent of narrow well-being) precisely because the body is an input into doing-well evaluations. I shall not rehearse those arguments here.

Further still, if Kim does understand narrow well-being and wide well-being as being different \textit{concepts} – not as different aspects or dimensions – then he, like Kagan before, has misunderstood the nature of the distinction. But, if he understands them as different \textit{theories} of welfare, then he once again falls into error. The distinction, when properly understood, is not a distinction between concepts of welfare, strictly speaking. Rather the distinction is between different dimensions of the same concept and thus requires only a single conception – such as the poker-hand account – to describe it. Only one complete theory is required to take account of doing-well and going-well. Single-dimensional theories are inadequate because they fail to make the distinction, whereas Kagan and Kim’s are incomplete because they stop at giving a full account. That a single account

\textsuperscript{23} Kim also cites Daniel Haybron (2008) as making note of the consistent disagreement between Aristotelian objectivists and contemporary subjective theories:

\textit{We should not be surprised, then, that Aristotelians and their critics, notably subjectivists about well-being, so often seem to end up talking past each other, and that they frequently regard each other’s views with bafflement, if not outright contempt” (Haybron 2008, p. 21).}

But, whilst Kim (n.d., pp. 3, fn. 7) takes it that 'narrow' and 'wide' are distinctly different concepts, Haybron takes the narrow sense as being a \textit{subcategory} of the good life, or in Kim's terms, the narrow is a subcategory of the wide.
can be provided that includes both doing-well and going well is evidence for the two dimensional view argued for in chapter 2 of this thesis.

4.3.

Ferkany (2012) has argued doing-well and going-well are evidence for the (at least) partial objectivity of welfare. However the line of reasoning bringing him to the bipartite distinction is different from the others. Ferkany aims specifically at Sumner and his understanding of the differing 'notions' of well-being, pointing out that "there seem to be at least two distinct but equally coherent general characterizations, only one of which is *prima facie* amenable to subjective analysis" (Ferkany 2012, p. 476). Ferkany notes that Sumner himself actually names these different ways: "common sense tells us that a person's welfare, or wellbeing, is a matter of how well she is *doing*, or how well her life is *going*, or how well off she is" (Sumner 1992, p. 4) We can list them as follows: (i) how well a person is doing, (ii) how well a person is going, and (iii) how well off a person is. Ferkany takes (i) and (iii) as being identical, but suggests (ii) as being substantially different as it refers to our lives, while the first refers primarily to our psychological (i.e., mental) states. He appeals to the fact commonsense understanding allows the two to come apart, as "in adversity we can make the best of it; in flush, we sometimes lose sight of how well things are going" (Ferkany 2012, p. 476).

Importantly for Ferkany is that neither sense of well-being (i.e., doing-well or going-well) is *a priori* privileged as the real well-being. And the reason such a claim is important is because it plays a pivotal role in his rejection of purely subjectivist theories of welfare. To that end, Ferkany rejects Kagan's conclusion that well-being is limited purely to the 'doing-well' portion of the distinction, maintaining instead that both doing-well and going-well make up welfare – a fact that also puts him at odds with Kim.

Ferkany reasons that welfare must be partially objective because purely subjectivist theories cannot adequately account for going-well. And he gives two conditions he believes subjectivists fail to meet in order to demonstrate otherwise: “(a) the goods of the going well notion can be adequately explained in terms of goods of the doing well notion or (b) that wellbeing does not concern how things are going for us; if she cannot, the

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24 Griffin (1999), Scanlon (1998), and Velleman (1993) have respectively considered this particular possibility.

25 Emphasis added. In §1.2., I noted Sumner (1996) uses this bipartite distinction language.
case favoring wellbeing’s subjectivity is weak” (Ferkany 2012, p. 477). He concludes the chances of any subjective theory meeting these two conditions are slim.

While Ferkany correctly identifies the distinction as one between different aspects of welfare he mistakes the doing-well dimension as being purely subjective – a view I have argued repeatedly as being fallacious. That said, his view seems in keeping with the poker-hand account I argued for in chapter 3. Ferkany provides a proto-version of the bipartite distinction, for while he claims that welfare has two distinct aspects – one’s doing well and life’s going-well – he gives no substantive account of what, precisely, these aspects are. I have built upon such observations by arguing they are different dimensions, and that each dimension has specific inputs.

4.4.

In this chapter, I argued that Kagan and Kim’s refinements failed, while Ferkany provided a proto-version of the poker-hand account. That said, we should take stock of two important points. First, both Kagan and Kim are most likely correct when they suggest philosophers have been talking past one another – at least, on some level. Second, by examining their respective positions, we have found a variety of reasons independent of my own for thinking welfare is bipartite. The poker-hand account makes sense of the linguistic cases, traditional dialectic schisms, and the failure of methodologies attempting to locate the concept of welfare in limited terms.

We have now reached the half-waypoint of this thesis. For the first half of this thesis I have focused my efforts on building a case for the two-dimensional nature of welfare, and the poker-hand account as providing the most plausible way of capturing that nature. In the second half of this thesis I turn attention to a variety of problems in the literature of welfare and argue how the poker-hand account can illuminate these problems.
CHAPTER 5
Experience Machines

Nozick’s Experience Machine Thought Experiment (hereafter EMTE) is an influential and contentious thought experiment in philosophy. In a relatively short passage, Nozick is thought by many to have given a powerful refutation of all mental-state theories of welfare.26 Roughly, Nozick (1974, pp. 42-45) describes a machine that could give you any experience you wanted (hence, ‘experience machine’). If mental-state theories are true, you would, or should, plug in. But, according to Nozick, many (if not all) would refuse to. Our refusal, according to Nozick, demonstrates that mental-state theories are incorrect. In fact, Nozick’s EMTE has been so influential that it is often only mentioned in passing as a refutation to hedonism.27 But a growing number of philosophers question Nozick’s EMTE, suggesting it not only fails to give a knockdown argument against mental-state theories, but that it provides no argument whatsoever.28 They argue the vast majority of people do not prefer reality, and they often use variant EMTEs to demonstrate their point.

In this chapter, I show how the poker-hand account can resolve a problem I call the conflicting intuitions problem: the problem of explaining why intuitions elicited by Nozick and other EMTEs do not converge. The solution I offer is simple: people are making different cost-benefit analyses about where the potential welfare payoff lies between

26 I use the term ‘mental-state theories’ to capture the vast family of theories that take prudential value to be limited to only a type of, or a family of, mental states. Such an interpretation is supported by the original text: “There are also substantial puzzles when we ask what matters other than how people’s experiences feel “from the inside” (Nozick 1974, p. 42). I take ‘from the inside’ to refer to mental states. Cf: (Barber 2011).

27 Cf: (Brudle 2007, pp. 37-42); (Darwall 1997, pp. 162 & 178); (Feldman 2004, p. 615); (Finnis 2011, pp. 95-96); (Griffin 1986, pp. 9-10); (Haybron 2008, p. 21); (Hooker 2000, p. 39); (Hurka 2011, pp. 68-70); (Jollimore 2004, pp. 333-334); (Kagan 1998, pp. 34-36; 2009, p. 253); (Keller 2009, p. 657); (Kraut 2007, pp. 124-126); (Kymlicka 2002); (Railton 2003, pp. 156-160); (Sobel 2002, p. 244); (Thomson 1987, p. 41); (Tiberius 2004, p. 311, n. 4).

28 (Baber 2008); (Barber 2011); (Hewitt 2010); (Kawall 1999); (Silverstein 2000); (Tännsjö 2007); (Weijers 2014).
dimensions, and where that welfare payoff is depends upon the details of any given EMTE. I conclude that, while experience machines might give us a pro tanto reason to reject mental-state theories, such reasons can be independently arrived at through better arguments and methods, rather than an intuition that only might be elicited by an EMTE.

5.1.

Whilst Nozick is thought by many to have defeated mental-state theories, it isn’t entirely clear how he did. Therefore it would be prudent to begin by outlining the experience machine before filling in the details of how others have understood the thought experiment. Below lies the widely cited passage:

Suppose there were an experience machine that would give you any experience you desired. Superduper neuropsychologists could stimulate your brain so that you would think and feel you were writing a great novel, or making a friend, or reading a book. All the time you would be floating in a tank, with electrodes attached to your brain. Should you plug into this machine for life, preprogramming your life’s experiences? (Nozick 1974, p. 42)

Nozick believes our answer - like his - is an irrevocable ‘No’. But what does this prove? According to Nozick (1974, p. 44), “we learn that something matters to us in addition to experience by imagining an experience machine and then realizing that we would not use it”. Nozick gives three anti-hedonistic judgments that fit with the intuitive rejection of mental-state theories:

First, we want to do certain things, and not just have the experience of doing them […] A second reason for not plugging in is that we want to be a certain way, to be a certain sort of person […] Thirdly, plugging into an experience machine limits us to a man-made reality, to a world no deeper or more important than that which people can construct. (Nozick 1974, p. 43).

Barber (2011) points out that it is difficult to see how these anti-hedonistic judgments fit in to the overall argument. Such judgments could simply be anti-hedonistic reasons for not getting in the machine by themselves, thus rendering the elicited anti-hedonist intuition as non-substantial. However, the most pervasive interpretation of Nozick’s argument is that our intuition does play a substantial role. That is, the intuition elicited by the experience-machine is itself supposed to count as evidence towards the falsity of mental-state theories. Indeed, when turning to the literature those who both accept or

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29 For the purposes of this chapter I will assume that we can understand ‘mental state theories’ as primarily hedonistic, as hedonism is often what is being aimed at by those invoking the experience-machine.
reject Nozick’s conclusion do so with only the anti-hedonist intuition in mind, paying no heed to the three anti-hedonist reasons provided above.  

Yet even after accepting the intuition as evidence against mental-state theories, there is some division as to how to construct the argument around it. According to Weijers & Schouten (2013), we can interpret the argument as being either deductive or abductive. In either case, both interpretations take it to be a consensus of intuitions that gives the experience-machine its strength. If the vast majority of reasonable people report preferring reality to a life in an experience machine, then mental-state theories of welfare are false (deductive version) or, it is rational to believe that mental-state theories of welfare are false (abductive version). The deductive version, however, is particularly problematic but for reasons that fall outside the scope of this thesis.  

5.2.

In understanding the anti-hedonist intuition as the linchpin to Nozick’s argument, one particularly blunt way hedonists have responded is by simply denying the intuition altogether: choose to plug in. One philosopher who has flatly rejected the ‘normal’ intuition is Tännsjö, who claims he would choose to plug in to the experience machine over staying in reality:

If this is how we are to understand Nozick’s thought experiment, then I have to confess that I do not share Nozick’s intuition about the case. I have already indicated that many people seem to be prepared to plug into Nozick’s experience machine. I’m personally no different from them. (Tännsjö 2007a, p. 95).

Tännsjö (1998, p. 112) additionally points out that many people take drugs to avoid or escape reality, describing them as the ‘pharmacological equivalent’ of connecting to the experience machine. The abductive argument as described in §5.1., resists such a challenge. The reason for such resilience is found in the clause, ‘vast majority of reasonable people’. Such a clause avoids outliers, since those who do not personally share the intuition (such as Tännsjö) have ‘incorrect’ intuitions.

30 For a comprehensive list, refer to footnotes 27 and 28.
31 Baber (2008) and Tännsjö (2007) both accuse the deductive version of presupposing some form of desire-satisfaction theory of welfare, and thus begs the question against hedonism. Feldman (2011) and Hewitt (2010) criticize the move from ‘matters to us’ to ‘has value,’ as what people value has little to no consequence to questions about what has intrinsic value. Barber (2011) and Feldman (2004) suggest we could be mistaken in thinking that hedonism is mistaken. Finally, “no careful philosopher should believe that widespread agreement between reasonable people of value deductively proves any particular conclusion” (Weijers and Schouten 2013, p. 471).
But do the ‘vast majority of reasonable people’ really choose to not plug-in? Nozick assumes our intuition will be like his, but whether we actually do have this anti-hedonist intuition or not is clearly an empirical claim. As such, a number of philosophers have conducted several surveys in order to see whether (at least according to sample size) Nozick’s assumption maps reality. Unfortunately for Nozick (and those who share his position), the results are not those desired. Rather than finding consensus that can be plausibly understood as a ‘vast majority’, intuitions actually conflict. Because there is such conflict amongst people’s intuitions, I call this the conflicting intuitions problem.

Surveying how people respond to Nozick and EMTE variants brings about the conflicting intuitions problem. The reasoning for variant EMTEs is straightforward:

If other versions of the experience machine thought experiment can equally or better isolate this prudential value comparison, and people’s judgments about them significantly diverge, then either AP2 or AP3 [the proposition in the argument that stipulates that the vast majority affirm a single intuition] might be false. (Weijers and Schouten 2013, p. 478).

Kolber (1995), De Brigard (2010), and Weijers (2014) have all created EMTE variants in their attempts to demonstrate the failure of Nozick’s argument. For example, Kolber (1995, p. 15) revises the ‘experience machine question’ (i.e., would you plug into an experience machine?) by asking, “would you get off an experience machine to which you are already connected?”. De Brigard, along the same lines, describes a reverse experience machine in which a Mr. Smith tells you that you have been mistakenly plugged into an experience machine, meaning that:

All your experiences thus far have been nothing more than a computer simulation designed to give pleasurable experiences. You are then given a choice: you can either remain plugged into the experience machine or you can opt out and return to your old life. (De Brigard 2010, p. 47).

But De Brigard does not stop there. He offers several vignettes that offer different information about life outside the experience-machine. The negative vignette is that outside the machine you are in a maximum-security prison in West Virginia. The positive vignette is that outside the machine you are a multimillionaire living in Monaco. The neutral vignette you are given no information about life outside of the machine, whilst the second neutral vignette you are only told life outside the machine is nothing like life inside the machine. The reported results were as follows:

- Negative: 87% remained (13% disconnected).
- Positive: 50% remained (50% disconnected).
• Neutral: 46% remained (54% disconnected).
• Second Neutral: 59% remained (41% disconnected).

Weijers (2014) gives a significantly detailed EMTE variant that I call the\textit{ abstable experience machine}. Here, Weijers explains that throughout Boris’ life he has been switching between a real and computer simulated reality, spending half of his life in the machine and the other half outside of it. All the \textit{bad times} that have occurred in Boris’ life have happened while he was in reality, and all the \textit{good times} happened inside the experience machine.

Boris is then offered a permanent spot in an experience machine. Weijers explains:

\begin{quote}
If Boris accepts the spot, then he would stay in an Experience Machine permanently. If he rejects the spot, then he would never be offered a spot again. Boris’ life would be the same length in an Experience Machine as it would otherwise have been. Ignoring how Boris’ family, friends, any other dependents, and society in general might be affected, and assuming that Experience Machines always work perfectly, what is the best thing for Boris to do for himself in this situation? (Weijers 2014, p. 523).
\end{quote}

Weijers reports that 55\% of participants (42/77) thought Boris ought stay connected to the experience machine for the remainder of his life (2014, p.526). The reports from both De Brigard and Weijers demonstrate there are conflicting intuitions amongst groups. Since there is no consensus of intuition, let alone a consensus large enough to be described as a ‘vast majority’, conflicting intuitions really are a problem for Nozick and his anti-hedonist sympathizers.\footnote{De Brigard (2010) and Kolber (1995) take conflicting intuitions as a defeater for Nozick’s anti-hedonist position, Weijers takes a modest approach, suggesting experience machines “should no longer be considered to provide conclusive or even strong evidence that hedonism and all other internalist mental state theories of well-being are false” (Weijers, 2014, p. 529).}

5.3.

With the conflicting intuitions problem outlined I can now demonstrate several ways in which the poker-hand account can resolve the problem. Let us begin by employing the same linguistic framework I used earlier in §2.2., which is available only through the bipartite distinction. With that in mind, we can capture (a) what both intuitions map onto, and (b) what is correct about both pro-hedonist and anti-hedonist intuitions in a single sentence:

\begin{quote}
Those who get into the experience machine will be doing well even if they aren’t going well, while those who refuse to enter the machine have a greater chance of going well, even if they might have sacrificed how well they do.
\end{quote}
Such an expression offers a welfare judgment that neatly captures both pro-hedonist and anti-hedonist intuitions while maintaining the integrity of each. When we say a person in an experience machine will be doing-well, we are saying they will have the right mental-states while in the machine. And when we say they won’t be going-well, we are admitting that, contrary to their personal perception, the person in the experience machine will only be experiencing as if states-of-affairs obtained, even when in reality they do not. After all, these are the reasons people choose to plug in (i.e., they want to do well) or not (i.e., to go well).

The fact we are drawing a distinction between two different dimensions in welfare is enough evidence to demonstrate we are considering multiple data-points when making welfare judgments about EMTEs.

So, if both parties are having genuine welfare intuitions then what explains the disagreement of those intuitions? I suggest the argument that results from conflicting intuitions is not a problem concerning the nature of well-being itself, but rather an uncertainty about where the greater welfare payoff lies. That we weigh trade-offs between dimensions is given credit when we consider how sensitive welfare evaluations are to contextual factors, such as what is happening, or is most likely to happen, in the life outside of the experience machine (or even in it). In welfare contexts in which we calculate a projection of increased welfare along both dimensions we will, in all likelihood, choose to stay unplugged. But in circumstances where such increases are unlikely or likely to go worse in the future, we will most likely plug in.

While Nozick’s EMTE lacks detail about the welfare context, he does seem to be sensitive to the possibility of a simulated life being preferable to particular kinds of lives in reality (for example, a life of torture). And that a simulated life can be better than a real life, depending on contextual factors, seems true. We can easily imagine circumstances that would dictate pro-hedonist judgments. Belshaw (2014) points out cases where a person might be suffering a terminal illness or that their remaining years look somewhere between incredibly dull or excruciatingly painful, might connect to the experience machine. He concludes that, in such circumstances, it does not seem unreasonable to do so.

33 It should be noted that Nozick (1989, p. 105) does not think that the question he is posing is “whether plugging in is preferable to extremely dire alternatives”, but rather, “whether plugging in would constitute the very best life, or tie for being best, because all that matters about a life is how it feels from the inside”.

34 Weijers & DiSilvestro (2017) have also argued for this point at length. I thank an anonymous reviewer for bringing this to my attention.
Conversely, we can easily motivate anti-hedonist intuitions when considering a person whose welfare looks particularly bright in the future. Suppose someone is about to marry the person of their dreams, and get a promotion with their current employer. Under such circumstances, why would they get in at all? The poker-hand account provides a principled explanation due to its two-dimensional nature. If chances of increasing welfare along both dimensions are high, our intuitive judgment in all likelihood will be to not plug-in. When chances are low, we see in experience-machines an opportunity to increase one dimension, and so our intuitive judgment in all likelihood is to plug-in.

But there is a third option that is constantly ignored in the literature: indecision. By ‘indecision’ I mean those who cannot choose (whether they ought to, or even would) one way or another. Such indecision often results in one of three outcomes: 1) abstain, 2) reluctantly choose, or 3) choose at random. Why this group is ignored I do not know, so I can make no empirical claims about what kind of percentage might fall into this third category. Yet it seems to me the indecisive category exists and quite plausibly would take numbers away from the two primary options.

The poker-hand account offers two explanations as to why people might choose this third position. First, people can be unsure as to what those estimated welfare projections might be, resulting in our intuitive judgments stalling. Second, EMTEs ask us to increase one aspect of our welfare at the cost of another; in an experience machine we will do well but we will not go well. But if increasing welfare results in only increasing one dimension and curtailing the other, then it isn’t clear that our welfare is increasing at all if we plug-in. Remember that, like size (discussed in §2.3.), well-being is multi-dimensional. Analogously, being asked to increase welfare by plugging in would be the same as asking us to increase the size of an object, but being told we can only increase that size along one dimension at the expense of the other.

If the height of an object is increased at the cost of its length, and another height for length, which of these is the bigger of the two? Which is larger? They are the same size just in differing ways.

So too, I suggest, is the same with welfare. If we increase our doing-well at the expense of going-well, and have the option of increasing our going-well but not our doing-well, then both options result in approximately the same level of well-being. So indecisiveness exists because, in some cases, there is no right answer (or if there is one, it is entirely unclear what it is). The conflicting intuitions problem is resolved once we understand (i)
the nature of welfare judgments and, (ii) how those judgments map onto the two-dimensional nature of welfare. Our welfare evaluations are context sensitive and their outcomes will be dependent upon how we calculate our future welfare gains (or loses) depending on those same contexts.

Additionally, my two-dimensional proposal can explain comparative welfare judgments between individuals. Recently, Lin (2016a) has argued contra Kolber, De Brigard, and Weijers, that the experience machine, while not definitively ruling out hedonism, at least gives us a pro tanto reason to reject it. He reasons that comparative welfare judgments about experientially identical lifetimes can demonstrate this:

Consider a case in which two lives are experientially and thus hedonically identical instead of a case in which the experience machine life is hedonistically superior […] A spends his life in the real world, whereas the subject of B is plugged into an experience machine for his entire life […] do A and B contain the same total amount of welfare? (Lin 2016a, pp. 320-321).

Lin (2016a, p. 321) believes that many would share his comparative judgment that “A is at least somewhat higher in total welfare than B”, and that such an intuition is corroborated by other concepts that link up with welfare, such as pity.\(^{35}\) Remember in chapter 1 I described pity as an attitude we have towards someone we feel sorry for, and thus feel bad for them. So, if B warrants more pity than A then we believe B must have lower welfare.

While I agree with Lin’s assessment, using pity as corroborating evidence will not do, as pity is an unreliable tracker of welfare. On one hand it is possible for us to pity someone who might not actually be missing a constituent of well-being. On the other, it is possible for us to not pity someone who actually is missing a constituent of welfare. Worse still, Lin provides no substantive reason as to why we have this comparative judgment. But the poker-hand account provides a principled explanation as to why we judge A as having greater overall welfare compared to B: A has higher welfare because his welfare increases along both dimensions, whereas B has sacrificed one dimension for another.

5.4.

In this chapter I argued the poker-hand account does serious explanatory work by showing why people have different intuitions on what they would do, or ought to do, with regards to EMTEs. I argued these differing positions exist because of (a) where

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\(^{35}\) Pity is corroborated by Campbell (2016) and Hooker’s (1996) sympathy test.
individuals see the greater welfare payoff, (b) how we calculate welfare outcomes, and (c) the welfare context in which welfare evaluations are made. The conflicting intuitions problem was deflated, as it was not a conflict about the nature of welfare but rather a conflict on how people calculate welfare payoffs.

On a final note, I think my arguments here can give a more informative reading of Nozick’s rhetoric. For example, take Nozick’s second explanation as to why we do not plug into the machine: “that we want to be a certain way, to be a certain sort of person” (Nozick 1974, p. 43). Here, he described a person in the experience machine as an ‘indeterminate blob’, and that plugging in was “a kind of suicide” (Nozick 1974, p.43). We can now understand Nozick’s lavish remarks in light of the poker-hand account, because a person who does get into the machine isn’t doing much at all except being a passive responder to stimuli which is force-fed to them.

If the arguments of this chapter are correct, then plugging in really is a kind of giving up on the life a person now leads (as well as ending their possible future life). This kind of giving up on life outside the machine is, without hyperbole, a type of suicide. That is because the person has calculated their life outside of the experience-machine as not worth maintaining and that starting over – giving up what one might have in the future – is a better option than staying in reality. Furthermore, we do not know who the person is, as the personal identity of the person in the machine – and the personal identity of the one who plugged in – are most likely not the same. Since we do not know who the person is (in or out of the machine) their personal identity is, in some sense, indeterminate.\(^\text{36}\)

I conclude experience machines do not, in and of themselves, decisively rule out any theory of well-being. The belief that EMTEs demonstrate any kind of ‘vast majority’ group-consensus with regards to our intuitions (one way or the other) was found to be false. But once we look at the data concerning actual intuitive reactions, EMTEs provide indirect evidence (i.e., the data that is explained by two-dimensions) for the view that well-being is two dimensional. While EMTEs might give pro tanto reasons for rejecting mental-state theories (such as hedonism), I suggest such reasons can be independently arrived at through better arguments and methods, rather than an intuition that only might be elicited by an experience-machine thought experiment.

CHAPTER 6
The Shape of a Life

Perhaps the most basic evaluative tool we use is quantitative measurement – the more good the better, the more bad the worse – and appeals to quantity are natural because they seem obviously correct. Yet aggregate principles produce counter-intuitive results when we consider the distribution of an individual’s welfare over their lifetime. For even when the welfare in two lives come to the same additive total, we intuitively hold that a life improving over time is better than a life that deteriorates. The distribution of welfare over a life results in that life having a ‘shape’, which is often referred to as the shape of a life. The shape of a life seems to be a valuable feature of a person’s lifetime well-being and is often thought to threaten aggregate principles. How are we to account for the significance of shape?

One family of theories – story theories – claims that narrative-relations, or the story of a life, is what gives shape significance. Story theories are deflationary as shape, in itself, is of no prudential importance. But story theories do not agree about the relationship between narrative-relations and welfare. Velleman (1993) believes the story of a life resists calculation whereas Dorsey (2015) argues narrative-relations do help determine synchronic well-being. Both views, however, give rise to a number of counter-intuitive results.

I argue the poker-hand account generates a promising story theory, which I call the forward-looking view. On this view, narrative-relations help determine the value of synchronic welfare, but only at times after the narratively relevant event.38 The forward-

37 Dorsey (2015, p. 306) describes these principles as “standard principles of prudential axiology/rationality”.

38 I recently discovered Lin (forthcoming) just sketched out something akin to my forward-looking view. He develops the view that the relationship between desire satisfaction and time is asymmetrical. Asymmetrisism is comprised of two claims: (i) an individual benefits from the satisfaction of a past-directed desire at the time when that individual has the desire (Time of Desire
looking view is comprised of three different claims. First, I reject Velleman’s position and explain how narrative-relations can be calculated into synchronic well-being. Second, I argue contra Dorsey that retroactive welfare changes are implausible. Third, I argue the most plausible account of dispersion is at later times, those times after the relevant-narrative events. I conclude the shape of a life and narrative-relations do not threaten intralife aggregation, nor should they be counted independently of aggregate totals, for to do so would be double counting.

6.1.

There seems to be something valuable about the direction a life goes:

One life begins in the depths but takes an upward trend: a childhood of deprivation, a troubled youth, struggles and setbacks in early adulthood, followed finally by success and satisfaction in middle age and a peaceful retirement. Another life begins at the heights but slides downhill: a blissful childhood and youth, precocious triumphs and rewards in early adulthood, followed by a mid-life strewn with disasters that lead to misery in old age. Surely, we can imagine two such lives as containing equal sums of momentary well-being [...] yet even if we were to map each moment in one life onto a moment of equal well-being in the other, we would not have shown these lives to be equally good. (Velleman 1993, p. 331).

Call the first of these lives upward and the second downward. Velleman believes upward is better than downward and he is not alone in thinking so. The explanation for our collective intuition is that shape is prudentially significant; the temporal sequence of states-of-affairs appears to contribute to lifetime welfare. Shape is thought to be incompatible with two commonly held views about prudential value (Dorsey 2015). The first of these being intralife aggregation: the welfare of a life is determined by an additive function of the welfare of all synchronic moments of that life. The second being temporal neutrality, which claims the temporal location of a prudential good/bad does not, in itself, contribute or detract from a life’s overall welfare.

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39 (Bigelow, Campbell, and Pargetter 1990); (Brännmark 2001); (Chisholm 1986); (Frankena 1973, p. 92); (Glasgow 2013); (Lewis 1946); (Slote 1983). Even though Feldman (2004, pp. 124-141; 2008) rejects shape, he still treats it as a threat to aggregation.

40 Both Dorsey (2015, p. 307) and Temkin (2012, pp. 96-127) point out that temporal neutrality features in numerous works on welfare, prudential value and ethics from various philosophers. For example, Sidgwick (1981, p. 381) writes: “We might express it concisely by saying ‘that Hereafter as such is to be regarded neither less nor more than Now”. Rawls (1971, p. 369) agrees: “The intrinsic importance that we assign to different parts of our life should bear the same at every moment in time”.

43
Prima facie, shape threatens both intralife aggregation and temporal neutrality. First, intralife aggregation produces the counter-intuitive judgment that upward and downward are equally good lives, yet the intuition held throughout the literature is that upward is better than downward. Second, temporal neutrality is questioned by the simple fact that good times coming later in life appears to be the very thing that makes an upward life better than a downward.

6.2.

Attempts to explain the significance of shape are numerous. However, I shall focus exclusively on story theories. Velleman best illustrates story theories:

An event’s place in the story of one’s life lends to it a meaning that is not entirely determined by its impact on one’s well-being at the time. […] the event’s meaning is what determines its contribution to the value of one’s life. The meaning attached to a quantity of momentary well-being is determined only in part by its place in the overall trend. The meaning of a benefit depends not only on whether it follows or precedes hardships but also on the specific narrative relation between the goods and evils involved. (Velleman 1993, pp. 335-336).

But story theories disagree as to how we should understand the role of the story and its relationship with time and aggregate measurements. Velleman, as seen above, resists calculating narrative-relations into synchronic welfare:

No facts about quantities of first-order goods can fully determine the facts about second-order value […] facts about a life’s value are not even reducible to this extent. Some of the value judgments considered above are incompatible with any reduction of diachronic well-being to synchronic well-being, no matter how sophisticated an algorithm of discounting and weighing is applied. (Velleman 1993, pp. 342-344).

Dorsey (2015, p. 325) contra Velleman argues, “the relation between intrinsically valuable, but temporally discrete, events can be reflected in the contribution of these events to per se synchronic welfare”. The outcome of their respective positions is stark: Velleman believes the life story itself resists aggregation. Dorsey argues an event’s input into synchronic welfare is jointly determined both by the event’s temporally discrete features as well as its relation to other events (i.e., narrative-relations). Since Velleman’s position rejects aggregation, call his the anti-additive view. Since Dorsey believes narrative-relations can be figured into synchronic welfare, call his the dispersal view.

41 Cf: (Feldman 2008); (Glasgow 2011); (Kamm 2003); (Slote 1984).
42 I assume without argument that shape in itself has no intrinsic prudential value; such arguments fall outside the scope of this paper. Cf: (Dorsey 2015).
6.3.

In this section I argue for three separate claims that form the forward-looking view. The first claim is that the anti-additive view is incorrect. The second claim is that the dispersal view, as is, is partly incorrect because it entails the highly counter-intuitive notion of retroactive welfare changes. The third claim is that events are narratively relevant add to, or subtract from, the synchronic welfare value of some later time (or times) that happen after those narratively relevant events.

First Claim – reject anti-additive view

I believe Dorsey (2015) gives a fairly robust rejection of the anti-additive view. Consider winning the Tour de France. While winning the Tour de France is “surely important for synchronic well-being” (Dorsey 2015, p. 326), its prudential value can be altered depending upon other events. Dorsey suggests the synchronic welfare value of winning the Tour de France increases if the events prior to winning were great work and sacrifice or success proved a stepping-stone to greater success, or decreases if the events prior involved being a drug cheat, or the success was followed by a fall from grace. While I shall dispute that the future can affect past well-being – it certainly seems plausible to suggest narrative-relations can help determine the synchronic welfare of some given time. I actually think the dispersal view quite obvious, especially when we consider how context sensitive our welfare evaluations are. When we evaluate the welfare value of winning the Tour de France, much depends upon the details of the person’s life, i.e., the story or narrative-relations. I take this simple example as providing strong grounds for both rejecting the anti-additive view and adopting the dispersal view.

Velleman (1993, pp. 337-339), attempts to block such a maneuver by suggesting different narrative stories, all other things equal, alter our value judgment. He asks us to consider two cases, each having marriages in which the first ten years are filled with marital strife while the ten years following are of marital bliss. However, in the first case both periods of marital strife and bliss are with the same partner, whereas in the second case the ten years of marital bliss are with a new partner. Suppose in the first case the marital bliss occurred because of the previous marital strife; they learned from their mistakes and fixed their marriage. In the second, suppose nothing was learnt nor taken away from the marital strife. Velleman reasons that the first of these timelines is prudentially better than the second, as the marital strife no longer mars the life story since the strife serves an important function in the rest of the narrative. Yet learning from those bad times does
not increase the synchronic welfare of said times, nor does it add any extra prudential value to the following good times.

I do not share Velleman’s intuition. To me, both lives are equally good; they are good for different reasons. My intuition, which I hope is shared, seems reasonable and fair; suggesting otherwise strikes me as a bad kind of elitism. But that is only if they do share the same shape or additive total. If we want to say the first is better than the second, it would seem to be because the first did better than the second by salvaging the marriage – which would mean that the 10 years of marital bliss in the first actually is of higher synchronic well-being than the second. I shall discuss this in greater detail in the third claim.

Second Claim – reject retroactive welfare changes

The dispersal view, as proposed by Dorsey, entails that synchronic welfare can be retroactively altered depending upon future events. Since we often take the past to be fixed and immune to change, I find the dispersal view highly counter-intuitive. But dismissing retroactive welfare adjustments out of hand is too quick. Before I reject retroactive welfare changes, let me sketch out why some find retroactivity attractive.

Dorsey (2013) and Bruckner (2013) have both defended retroactive welfare changes. Their argument, roughly speaking, is that someone can be made better (or worse) off at a past time depending on that person’s desires and whether, at some later time, those desires are satisfied. Consider the following:

**Graduate Student:** A graduate student meets a professor from an esteemed university with the hopes such a meeting will result in becoming a PhD candidate at that esteemed university and supervised by that very professor. Later that day the graduate student arrives home and explains the events of their day to their housemate. Their housemate asks, ‘so today went well?’ The graduate student pauses then replies, ‘it depends.’

The reply – ‘it depends’ – does not seem just intelligible but also true. The goodness of that day for the graduate student does seem to depend upon whether the meeting pays

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I want to flag here that I am only opposing retroactive changes to synchronic welfare. So far as I can tell, I am not committed to denying retroactive changes to overall lifetime well-being. More compelling examples of retroactive changes to welfare, namely posthumous harms (or benefits), fall under the latter category, rather than the former. I am not denying the possibility of changes to lifetime welfare, I am merely denying a more specific kind of retroactive change, as posited by Dorsey.
off, and such payoffs are to be determined at a later time. If at some later time events play out how the graduate student hopes, then we can say that that day went very well for the graduate student. But until such a time, the goodness of the day for the graduate student is left indeterminate until it is decided they were accepted into the PhD program at that university (or rejected).

Bruckner (2013) argues the future can affect past well-being when we consider a ‘present’ desire that is stretched across time. There are two types of cases: temporal thickness and temporal distance. Temporal thickness is what Bruckner describes as an activity that happens over some period of time; “the persistence of the continuing present” (Bruckner 2013, p. 24). Suppose Jim wants to play cricket in the morning (t₁ to t₁₀). The truth of whether Jim plays cricket in the morning depends upon what happens at all times during time interval T (where T = t₁-t₁₀); if it starts raining at t₇ then Jim fails to play cricket during T. So whether Jim’s desire is satisfied at any time depends upon all times of T: “the present has earlier portions and later portions, and what happens during the later portions can have some effect on the status on the status of what happens during the earlier portions” (Bruckner 2013, p. 18). Temporal distance is when some desire is to be satisfied at some later time; “the difference in time between an earlier present and at a later, distinct, present” (Bruckner 2013, p. 24). If the graduate forms the desire to ‘submit her essay no later than t₁₀’ at t₁, then she is made better off at t₁ only if she does submit the essay by t₁₀.

Yet, given all the above, such a view is still highly counter-intuitive. Velleman rejects retroactivity on the grounds that it makes little to no linguistic sense:

Nor do we say of a person raised in adversity that his youth was not so bad, after all, simply because his youthful hopes were eventually fulfilled later in life. We might say that such a person’s adulthood compensated for an unfortunate youth, but we would not say that it made his youth any better. Because the belief in retroactive welfare effects would entail such judgments, it strikes me as highly counterintuitive (Velleman 1993, p. 340).

Here, I agree with Velleman. To suggest an abusive childhood would be made better because of future success is highly implausible. In defence, Bruckner (2013) has argued the counter-intuitiveness of retroactivity is due to false assumptions about the view itself and of welfare. The one relevant to this paper is the following: retroactivity is still compatible with the view that the person’s youth is still low in well-being, as it might be that past desires being satisfied are simply lower in welfare than present desires being satisfied.
I think we should reject Bruckner’s response because, according to this theory, it is possible to construct a life high in welfare only because of later events. Consider Vincent, who consistently forms desires or goals that, for the majority of his life, are left unfulfilled. At the end of his life all the conditions required to satisfy these previously formed desires occur. According to retroactive welfare changes, Vincent’s welfare is increased at all past moments in his life to such that his is a life high in welfare simply in virtue of the quantity and/or quality of past desires and goals that are fulfilled. This outcome should strike us as counter-intuitive. Surely, Vincent’s life is not high in welfare nor is his life good for him.

Third Claim – disperse at later times

My final claim is that the value of narrative-relations can be dispersed, but only at times after the relevant-narrative event. That is, events that are narratively relevant add to, or subtract from, the synchronic welfare value of some later time (or times) that happen after those narratively relevant events. Consider again the poker analogy.

Welfare, like poker, is not just a matter of how things go for you, but what you do with what you have. We aim to make ourselves better off, and we do so by investing our resources into projects we believe will increase welfare. Having limited chips, a player chooses to sacrifice some (or all) of their chips during a current hand in order to increase their future chips. But we increase our chips at the time of winning and not at the time of betting. What is at stake in later events is not the value of the past itself (i.e., the past time’s synchronic welfare), but how that previous success (or failure) is used or carried over to these later times. When we form future goals we are putting our previous success (or successes) at risk, and we do not want those successes to count for naught. The person who chooses to compete in the Tour de France has decided that investing their welfare leading up to the event is worth risking because, if they win, such success will give (it is hoped) a great return on investment. Their success does not increase past well-being, but rather significantly increases their welfare at the time of winning the event because of those past sacrifices.

This forward-looking view can explain much of the common turn-of-phrases and idioms used when discussing well-being and successful (or unsuccessful) increases or decreases of it. We often describe those who pursue goals with slim chances of success as being ‘foolish’, as their effort and self-sacrifice will most likely be wasted. People described as ‘playing it safe’ are those who take the least risk with their well-being as possible – in
comparison to the risk-taker they prioritize the possibility of success over the possibility of a higher overall payout.

Suppose a politician named Margaret considers the candidates of her party and sides with an unusual candidate, Michael. Michael is often looked at as a joke and not a serious contender. But suppose Michael not only succeeds in winning the candidacy for the party – but the presidential election itself. Margaret’s welfare has significantly increased; her bet has paid off. Her previous efforts in her political career were on the line; all her carried over well-being was well invested. The success vindicates the sacrifices of the past but does not increase the welfare of those past times. Rather, it seems more accurate to say that ‘such sacrifice was worth it in the end,’ as Margaret’s welfare significantly increased the moment Michael won. Of course, had Michael lost, Margaret would be, in a sense, prudentially bankrupt.

Portmore (2007) has argued self-sacrifices are redeemed through future success; an individual gets back at some later time what they gave up at past times. I want to build off Portmore’s observation by suggesting his account helps explain the relationship between shape and temporal neutrality. When we pursue some goal we often self-sacrifice, and those sacrifices reduce our welfare at the time, or times, in which those sacrifices are made. We do not want our self-sacrifices to be merely redeemed by breaking even but to substantially pay off with dividends. If the likelihood of success is poor we often take this as grounds for abandoning the project – we cut our losses to reduce the damage to our well-being.

But even when we foresee success as merely breaking even, we too take this as grounds for abandoning the project. After all, what is the point of self-sacrifice if we end up in the same place had we sacrificed nothing at all? These ideas of ‘paying off,’ and ‘breaking even’ point to temporary low welfare being worth it only if there is high welfare at some later time – and that high welfare must be additively greater than the welfare which was sacrificed. This extension of Portmore’s view demonstrates that our welfare decisions are guided by both quantitative measurements and temporal neutrality. We are guided by increasing our welfare and we do not care when those welfare moments occur. The upward ‘shape’ a life takes is merely a byproduct of these principles. Welfare is increased later; efforts are redeemed, compensated, or vindicated, at later times.

I have only explained how welfare sacrifices payoff later in time. What about failures, such as Velleman’s marriage example? Recall that Velleman believes the first life is better
than the second because the reason for the ten years of marital bliss was due to the life lessons learnt during the marital strife. While I agreed with Velleman that later success does not retroactively increase the value of the past, I disagreed said value is found above-and-beyond momentary welfare. I suggested that if we were to maintain that the first life is better than the second we must commit to the first life as having a higher additive total. Why think the first life is higher in momentary welfare? Because the first did better because they successfully applied life lessons learnt from past failure. Recall the poker-hand account:

**Doing-well:** An individual is doing-well insofar as, regardless of events and/or states-of-affairs, they respond appropriately and actively make best with their current condition.

**Going-well:** An individual is going-well insofar as an event and/or state-of-affairs out of the considered individual’s direct control is of non-instrumental prudential value.

When we ask how someone is ‘doing’ or ‘going’ we are not merely asking about states-of-affairs as they are – we form our welfare evaluation based upon the context in which that evaluation is being made. We consider how events have unfolded up until the point of inquiry, and we judge doing-well and going-well based upon how these current state-of-affairs relate to these past events. To put it bluntly: the poker-hand account has narrative-relation built into its conceptual framework. When we consider how well off the first life is, and we judge the well-being of those ten years of marital bliss, we can say that they have both gone and done well – and they have done well with the poor state-of-affairs they were in, that being the marital strife, and they did the best with what they were given.

In making my case, I have only considered cases where prudentially valuable events happen after prudentially disvaluable ones – what does my forward-looking view say of bad times following good times? When considering the life of O.J. Simpson, Dorsey says that Simpson’s “… Heisman victory was, in fact, less synchronically valuable given what we now know: that it helped to frame his ever-so-public downfall” (Dorsey 2015, p. 326). What Dorsey is suggesting here is that the synchronic welfare value of this good time in Simpson’s life was not so good after all; that it’s synchronic value is reduced because of events that happen after it.

But this, I think, has the order in reverse: it is not that Simpson’s downfall reduced the significance of his Heisman victory, rather, the fact he was at such heights makes the fall so much
His downfall was worse for him because of preceding events. In the language of the poker-hand account: Simpson was given *winning hands* and threw it all away on making a very bad, and stupid, *play*.

The poker-hand account provides a principled explanation as to why we (if we even do) judge the first life as better than the second. More importantly, it provides a principled account of how past failures, once redeemed, can be calculated into momentary well-being. If one stipulates both lives come to the same additive total, then both lives really are equally good lives. The first life did not *go* as well as the second, but they still *did better* than the second, how it did made up for the lack of how it went. So, on my account, they are still equally good lives, but they are *good for different reasons*.

6.4.

In this chapter, I argued that the poker-hand account generated a highly plausible story theory – the forward-looking view – because it incorporated narrative-relations as an essential component in assessing how a person is ‘doing’ or ‘going’ at any given time. My view claimed narrative-relations could be accounted for at temporally discrete times within a life, but only at times after the relevant narrative events. In siding with story theories I denied that shape, in itself, is prudentially valuable. Whatever we believe shape is tracking can be accounted for in the numbers, so including shape in our welfare assessments would be double-counting. Shape is *defeasible* - an upward life is *most likely* better than a downhill one, but this is not a guarantee.

With that said, neither the shape of a life nor narrative-relations threaten intralife aggregation or temporal neutrality. But this does not mean that intralife aggregation is the best, or only, way to assess the prudential value of a life. There might be other reasons to reject aggregate principles. All I have shown here is that shape and narrative-relations are not those reasons.
CHAPTER 7
A Better Kind of Objective-List Theory

To efficiently recognize implausible or false theories, philosophers deploy taxonomies to partition the theoretical landscape. In doing so, groups of theories are ruled out by identifying problems with the category-trait itself, rather than going over each theory piecemeal. These category-specific arguments take the form of fundamental problems for any theory of welfare classified as belonging to that category. Any theory belonging to that category will be vulnerable to these fundamental problems and should provide answers to resolve them. As of yet, I have not identified the poker-hand account as belonging to any particular category, and have thus neglected addressing any fundamental problems. Now is the place to do so.

In this chapter, I identify the poker-hand account as an objective-list theory, and explore how my account might resolve two fundamental problems for such theories. The first is the problem of arbitrariness. Since list theories give no principled account as to why some things are prudentially valuable, there is no reason to include some items while excluding others. I suggest my account can produce at least one prudential good: achievements. Second is the problem of elitism. Objective-list theories are often understood as being elitist. This is because, (a) such theories claim to know what is good for someone whether they like it (or even want it) or not, and (b) only those lives containing these listed goods will be good lives. I argue the poker-hand account is actually quite liberal because putative goods can be content-independent.

While this chapter is more exploratory than the others, I hope it provides grounds for those already attracted to objective-list theories to find my account a particularly enticing candidate. For those who reject objective-list theories, I hope my suggestions here provide reason for reconsidering objective-list theories.
7.1.

The most intuitive way of carving up the theoretical landscape is by the subjective-objective and monist-pluralist taxonomy.\(^4^4\) Monism states there is only a single basic prudential good, while pluralism states there is more than one basic prudential good. The difference between objective and subjective is thought to pivot on attitude-dependency (Scanlon 1998, p. 113; Sumner 1996, p. 38-39). Fletcher (2016, p. 48) gives the following definitions:

**Attitude-Dependence:** G is non-instrumentally good for S only if S has a pro-attitude towards, or about, G.

**Attitude-Independence:** it is *not* the case that G is non-instrumentally good for S only if S has a pro-attitude towards, or about, G.

We should understand *subjectivism* as theories accepting attitude-dependence, and *objectivism* as theories accepting attitude-independence. Our taxonomy is thus:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjective theories</th>
<th>Objective theories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monist theories</td>
<td>Subjective-monist theories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pluralist theories</td>
<td>Subjective-list theories(^4^5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since the poker-hand account takes it that welfare is two-dimensional, this immediately rules out monism. I also take myself to have argued that some (if not most) prudential goods are independent of the considered agent’s attitudes. This means my account, according to the above taxonomy, is an objective-list theory.

All objective-list theories do is enumerate a number of items and claim them to be the constituents of welfare. For example:

**Fletcher (2013, p. 214):** Achievement, Friendship, Happiness, Pleasure, Self-Respect, Virtue.

**Finnis (2011, pp. 86-89):** Life, Knowledge, Play, Aesthetic experience, Sociability (Friendship), Practical reasonableness, ‘Religion’.

\(^4^4\) While I think the described taxonomy is the most intuitive, it is not the only, or even the most popular, taxonomy. Parfit’s (1984) tripartite taxonomy (i.e., hedonism, preference theories, and objective-list theories) is arguably the most popular.

\(^4^5\) (Lin 2016b).

\(^4^6\) (Fletcher 2013); (Finnis 2011).
Rice (2013): Loving relationships, Meaningful knowledge, Autonomy, Achievement, Pleasure.

Sarch (2012): Enjoyment and Achievement.

If the trend of enumerating holds, then the poker-hand account is unlike any objective-list theory. This is because the poker-hand account has not, as such, enumerated what is good for a person, whether that be how they do or how they go. What I think my account does, however, is allow us to construct a list of prudential goods. The poker-hand account has potential to be both enumerative and explanatory. In what follows I shall try to demonstrate how this novel construction of an objective-list theory can resolve two fundamental problems for any objective-list theory.

7.2.

There are several fundamental problems cited in the literature against objective-list theories. I have only space to deal with two. These are the problems of arbitrariness and elitism.

The Problem of Arbitrariness

A shared belief amongst critics is that pluralist theories simply enumerate what is prudentially valuable rather than explaining why any of those listed items are prudentially valuable.\textsuperscript{47} Since pluralist theories give no principled explanation as to what goes on the list of prudential goods, it means anything can go on the list. If this is true then the list is arbitrary. Sumner writes: “recall the distinction […] between the nature of welfare and its source. We are seeking an explication of the former, not merely a list or inventory of the latter. Yet such a list is all that most objectivists can give us” (Sumner 1996, p. 45).\textsuperscript{48} Scanlon agrees:

This list of fixed points does not amount to a theory of well-being. Such a theory would go beyond this list by doing the following […] It might provide a more unified account of what well-being is, on the basis of which one could see why the diverse things I have listed as contributing to well-being in fact do so […] I doubt that we are likely to find a theory of well-being of this kind. (Scanlon 1998, p. 125).

It seems to me the poker-hand account can (i) produce at least one non-arbitrary basic prudential good, and (ii) provide a principled account of why that item is listed. I claim

\textsuperscript{47} Crisp (2006, pp. 102-103) makes this distinction between enumerative and explanatory theories. Cf: (Lin 2017b); (Rice 2013).

\textsuperscript{48} Cf: (Murphy 2001, p. 95).
that one basic good to be achievements. We have already seen that achievements are a popular candidate, (e.g., Fletcher, Rice, and Sarch). Yet none have given a principled reason for accepting achievements as a basic prudential value. I think the poker-hand account can do the theoretical legwork required.

First, recall that the bipartite distinction makes a distinction between, roughly, facts about the world (going-well) and facts about the person (doing-well). These facts – whatever they might be – are basic prudential goods. The poker-hand account refined this distinction as the following:

**Poker-hand account:**

**Doing-well:** An individual is doing-well insofar as, regardless of events and/or states-of-affairs, they respond appropriately and actively make best with their current condition.

**Going-well:** An individual is going-well insofar as an event and/or state-of-affairs out of the considered individual’s direct control is of non-instrumental prudential value.

To add an item on the list of prudential goods, we need to figure out what the constituents of doing-well or going-well are. Instead, however, of looking at each dimension individually, consider what it would look like for the two dimensions to come together. I think achievements are that place. To see why, consider the following cases:

**Archie:** Archie the archer has formed the goal of hitting the bulls-eye of a target on the practice range. He draws his bow, fires the arrow, and hits the desired target. But Archie only hit the bulls-eye because a powerful gust of wind blew the arrow on course. Archie’s success was primarily due to luck.⁴⁹

**Daria:** Daria the darter has formed the goal of hitting the bulls-eye of a target on the dartboard. She steadies her aim, throws the dart, and hits the desired target. Daria only hit the bulls-eye because of her skill. Daria’s success was primarily due to her own abilities.

All other things being equal, success, in and of itself, is prudentially good for a person. In this sense, both Archie and Daria are well off because both succeeded. Yet, the reason for their success differs: Archie’s success is primarily creditable to luck, while Daria’s

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⁴⁹ (Pritchard 2010, p. 28).
success is primarily creditable to her. Success means they have *gone well*, because success would best be considered a state of the world (rather than the person). But Daria *did better* than Archie because her success was brought about through the exercise of her significant level of ability, whereas Archie just lucked out. And we call a success primarily brought about by an individual exercising the relevant skill an achievement. An achievement, roughly seems something like the following:

**Achievement Thesis:** Achievements are successes that are because of ability where the success in question either involves the overcoming of a significant obstacle or the exercise of a significant level of ability. (Pritchard 2010, p. 70).

The achievement thesis limits what things constitute achievements in an intuitive fashion.⁵⁰ When, for example, an athlete makes a task look effortless, that person is exercising a proficiency in a skill that allows the task to *seem* easy. And, when a task is formidable (i.e., not trivial), then succeeding due to the agent’s own efforts (even if that person is not particularly skilled) will count as an achievement. So for example, while walking across Spain might not require any particularly interesting or exciting skill the task is *formidable*. Hence succeeding in this goal will count as an achievement (if the reason for success is primarily creditable to the agent).

To be clear: success, other things equal, appears to be a constituent of going-well. This means when a person succeeds they are better off than before because they are going-well. But this means success, in itself, is only a constituent of one-dimension of welfare. Achievements are a special kind of success. They are special because they are successes primarily caused by the agent themselves, meaning the person has responded appropriately and made the best of their given situation – and this means, according to the poker-hand account, they are doing-well. So, achievements may be added to the list of prudential goods because achievements are a combination of both doing-well and going-well: to achieve a goal means to change the direction of how one *goes* precisely because of what one *does*.

My theory provides the principled explanation we seek. We have at least one item on the list – achievements – and that item has both an explanation and is non-arbitrary. While producing only a single basic good might seem unimpressive, giving a principled account of why any item should appear on the list is enough to address the problem of arbitrariness.

⁵⁰ Pritchard (2010, pp. 70-73) gives a defence of this conception.
The Problem of Elitism

Consider Fred:

**Fred**: On her deathbed, Fred reflects upon her life and feels regret. While Fred has all of the objective-list goods, she did not the life she wanted to live. She neither did the things she wanted to do nor became the person she wanted to be. Fred has always felt this way; if she could do it all again, she would have made very different choices.

Is she living the best life? Suppose the objective-list theorist bit the bullet and said ‘yes’. They might claim Fred just does not know what is good for her – she did live the best possible life. Such a response seems overly paternalistic and elitist.

To emphasize the problem, we should reconsider the related emotion connected to welfare: pity. We pity people because we do not think they are well off. Supposing ‘health’ is a basic good would mean we should pity those who are not, nor capable of being, healthy. Such individuals would arguably include persons with atypical-attributes (e.g., depression, autism, paraplegics, deafness, blindness, etc.). Further, if caring for a person means caring about their welfare, we should aim to ‘help’ persons with atypical-attributes by ‘fixing’ them. Such attitudes and behaviors are elitist, paternalistic and intuitively unacceptable.51 It seems we collectively hold that elitism about prudential goods is bad because it does not reflect our intuition that there are a multitude of good lives to live – and the goodness of a life for the person living that life can vary greatly from one person to the next.

Elitism can be avoided if prudential goods are content-independent. That is, *anything* goes as long as it satisfies counting as a prudential good in some way. I defined achievements as success because of ability where the success in question either involves, (a) the overcoming of a significant obstacle, or (b) the exercise of a significant level of ability. But note this a formality and says *nothing* about the content of what the achievement is. It is ‘content empty’ and not content-specific – it is not saying what *kind* of achievement counts – just that *any* achievement does.

However, content-independence leaves my account vulnerable. If a person tries to reduce their welfare and they achieve this goal, then they have paradoxically increased and decreased their welfare. I think we can reasonably reduce the amount of counter-

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51 Not to mention, of course, incredibly demeaning, condescending, and disrespectful.
intuitive or paradoxical types of achievements by limiting achievements to things that do not conflict with other constituents of our welfare. That said, my achievement thesis allows for numerous things to count as achievements just so long as it satisfies (a) or (b).

And, arguably, what constitutes a ‘significant’ obstacle is agent dependent – if we are thinking of a small child who has used nothing but Velcro shoes, then tying their laces will be an achievement as the obstacle was significant for them. The tying of shoes will require the exercise of a significant ability relative to the age of the child. Even something as seemingly mundane as going outside; while going outside might not be an achievement for neurotypical persons (all other things being equal), for a person with agoraphobia, leaving the house is a significant obstacle and thus an achievement for them.

My observations also leave open the possibility that even if the theory is elitist, lives can be equally good but simply in different ways. The prudential value of different lives can be equal yet differ in composition. I don’t see anything prima facie objectionable to such a view, nor is it a priori ruled out. After all, that we can have equally good lives of differing compositions has been a theme throughout this thesis. First in §2.2., with the discussion of Peter and Paul. Second in §5.3., when discussing the experience machine (as life in a machine could be equally good as a life outside of depending upon the welfare context). Finally, in chapter 6, I opened up the possibility that differing lives in terms of shape, temporal location of high and low points, and order of good and bad times, could still be equally as good as each other.

7.3.

In this chapter, I identified the poker-hand account as belonging to the category called objective-list theories. I then turned my attention towards two fundamental problems for objective-list theories – arbitrariness and elitism – that I believed the poker-hand account was uniquely equipped to handle.

I dealt with the problem of arbitrariness by demonstrating how the poker-hand account can provide a principled explanation for at least one basic prudential good: achievements. Second, I explained how the poker-hand account was not elitist in any problematic way and, additionally, quite liberal. Yet even if elitist, my theory can still incorporate our liberal intuitions about well-being. That was because lives can be equally good but with differing prudential-good compositions.

To conclude, I want to make one final observation. More often than not, objective-list theories are adopted, or arrived at, only as a last resort. Often in the dialectic, objective-
list theories are nothing more than *remedial* – appealed to only when all other theories of welfare (such as hedonist theories or preference theories) fail in some way or other. The fact such theories are treated as a last resort is particularly unappealing, as it seems all we are left with is a consolation prize.

The novel contribution I make to this part of the dialectic is the following. By rejecting the traditional one-dimensional picture of welfare, and adopting the more plausible two-dimensional structure, objectivity and plurality are put first. That is, objective-list theories are a natural consequence of the bipartite distinction. In doing so, it is monists and subjectivists who are put on the proverbial back foot, as their position is no longer assumed to be the *a priori* correct starting point. Monists and subjectivists must, instead, demonstrate why we ought to reject the new status-quo.
CONCLUSION

The aim of this thesis was to advance a novel theory of well-being which I called the poker-hand account. I did so by arguing that such a theory was both robust and highly plausible. I explained that the poker-hand account was highly plausible because it was the best refinement of the bipartite distinction (chapter 3), and provided better explanatory power than the other refinements found in the relevant literature (chapter 4). I then showed how robust the poker-hand account was by how it straightforwardly handles disputes about Nozick’s experience machine thought experiment (chapter 5), disputes about the shape of a life (chapter 6), and offered unique ways of answering two fundamental problems for objective-list theories (chapter 7).
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