Replies to my Commentators

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I want to start by thanking my commentators for all the time they have spent reading my book and crafting their comments. One oddity of our profession is that, even though we inhabit the same world and are equally committed to rationality, we too often end up disagreeing with each other as though these were the end times, the path to salvation was marked out in great detail, and any deviation from it spelled disaster. I hope that this conversation will show the reader – and us – that there is more than one path to salvation, even if none of us has more than a glimpse of any.

1 Reply to Daniel Haybron

Daniel Haybron argues that a great deal of research suggests that we are like chameleons, “highly sensitive to the environment.” If you go from the suburbs of Phoenix to rural Mississippi, “you may find ... that your personality, outlook, and way of life change deeply,” unconsciously, and that you are unable to do anything about it. This challenges, he thinks, the importance I give to autonomy or independent-mindedness in well-being.

Some of this research is unsettling, but I think what it challenges is only the idea that we can rise above *all* external influences in *every* kind of situation if we so choose. My domain-specific conception of character traits, including autonomy, is a response, in part, to the fact that some sorts of situations can influence us in unwelcome ways without our awareness – as well as in welcome ways. Although

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I've never been to rural Mississippi, I do go from the US to India and back again, and I do adapt unconsciously. For some mysterious reason, as soon as I arrive in India my Hindi comes back to me, whereas here I find it hard to speak to an Indian friend in Hindi. I also automatically adopt the local social customs concerning greeting, eating, and so on. So I'm pretty happy with my unconscious for taking such good care of me. I would be upset only if my character or actions changed for the worse – such as treating my relatives' servants rudely, as some of them do, or believing the stories some of them tell about ragged beggars actually being rich landowners who just want to make easy money begging.

But perhaps Haybron doesn't mean that environments are *that* influential, or our characters *that* weak. Perhaps it's bad enough if, on going from Fairfax, VA to India, I find myself more impatient, yet unable to do much about it. Impatience is certainly a problem if it's manifested in rudeness, or is otherwise uncalled for, or if it spoils my mood, or raises my blood pressure to dangerous levels. But is preventing this from happening repeatedly really beyond my control? Only if I have an impatient character, *and* don't care to change it. In that case, however, the problem is more my character than the situation. If I want to change, I can, not with a snap of my fingers, but with a lot of time and effort. The chaos of India makes it harder to do so, but not impossible.

Haybron wonders if autonomy, in the sense of being independent-minded, is compatible with happiness. More specifically, he asks if extremely independent-minded people, people who, for instance, are “wholly unimpacted by the bystander effect in their willingness to help a stranger, might generally fare worse, and get along worse with others.” Haybron's questions suggest that he thinks my autonomous person is a lone wolf who never takes his cue from others, and that those who are impacted by the bystander effect must lack autonomy. But I reject both assumptions.

The bystander research in question shows that most people fail to help a stranger in dire need when there are others around who could help, especially when the situation is ambiguous. There are several possible explanations. They could be thinking that they are not needed because there are others around and too many cooks spoil the broth, or that the situation is not dire because no one else is acting as though it is.¹ This is perfectly sensible as far as it goes and perfectly compatible with being autonomous. We *ought* to take our cues from others in many, many situations. The autonomous person is neither a rebel without a cause nor a fool. The problem in this situation is that people fail to realize that others are probably also thinking that they are not needed because there are others around, or that the situation is not dire because no one else is acting as though it is. (Paradoxically, if most people realized this and decided to help, then of course it would be true of any given individual that his help was not needed.) But this understandable mistake in reasoning merely shows our fallibility, and not our lack of autonomy. Of course, some people who fail to help might also be thinking that they'll make a fool of

¹ For discussion and references, see my “Reasoning about Wrong Reasons, No Reasons, and Reasons of Virtue,” in *The Philosophy and Psychology of Character and Happiness*, ed. Nancy Snow and Franco V. Trivigno (New York: Routledge, 2014): 35–53, and *Well-being: Happiness in a Worthwhile Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 164–64.

themselves if the situation is not dangerous, and prioritizing this concern over concern for the person who might be in danger *is* opposed to autonomy. But again, after people become aware of this tendency in themselves, if they really care to improve, they can start behaving differently in similar situations in the future – even if they feel concerned about making a fool of themselves. If they continue to prioritize this concern over the stranger’s welfare, the problem is in them rather than the situation.

At any rate, as I will suggest in my response to Valerie Tiberius, environmental influences can support autonomy and virtue as much as they can undermine it.

2 II

Haybron asks why I think of well-being as the highest prudential good (HPG), that is, as the “most final,” “self-sufficient,” and “most choiceworthy” prudential good, instead of “just plain old well-being” (Section 3). I use the concept of the HPG as a neutral standard for adjudicating between different conceptions of well-being, on the grounds that when people think about their well-being, they think about the best life for themselves, not a so-so life, or a life that’s barely worth living. Haybron objects that the HPG is a good that is “fit to structure *all* our deliberations about how to live, and not merely our deliberations about how to best advance our own best interests.” This way of putting it, however, begs the question by assuming that living a choiceworthy life can’t be among “our own best interests.” It is true that leading a worthwhile life becomes part of our well-being only if we value it and find happiness in it. Till we do, it is only a *potential* value to us, that is, to those of us who are capable of happiness in a worthwhile life. But this potential is a reason to value it and find happiness in it. People who invest themselves in some worthwhile and emotionally fulfilling task or relationship can’t help but find that pursuing it well (virtuously) is not only in other people’s interest but also their own.

Haybron agrees that “well-being over the lifespan requires some substantial degree of virtue,” but not that “virtue is a fundamental, nonderivative element of human well-being.” He thinks that the lives of violent and cruel tribal peoples, such as the Comanches, is a counterexample, because they could be “quite well-integrated, well-adjusted and happy.” Before we decide this, however, let’s ask why they lived like this. I can think of three possibilities. One is that this was the only way they could protect themselves from other violent tribes. Because of mutual distrust, these tribes were all caught in a terrible Prisoner’s Dilemma. Each tribe did the best it could given this mutual distrust, but none did as well as they could have had Thomas Hobbes come along to show them a way out. Their lives were nasty, brutish, and short.

A second, more interesting possibility is that the Comanches thought that killing and torturing people was what real men (and women) do to prove their courage and worth, and that living in a courageous and worthwhile way was in their interest. If so, then they thought that it was in their interest to live a life that was actually worthwhile. But of course they were wrong to think that their lives were actually worthwhile. Even if they never recognized their moral failings, even if, as Haybron

says, they felt pride and satisfaction in their way of life, it doesn't follow that they were not failing in their own terms, given that what they wanted was to live a worthwhile life. So yes, they were happy, but to the extent that their lives lacked worth, they were not living by their own informed values, and therefore to that extent they lacked well-being on any conception of well-being that regards the individual's value-fulfillment as crucial to well-being.

The third possibility is that the Comanches valued being violent not because they thought violence was required by manliness or courage, or for their own survival, but just because. They enjoyed hunting down members of other tribes like animals because they thought it was fun, even though it occasionally led to chopped-off limbs, painful wounds, and early death. Within the tribe, however, they were peaceful, and even had important goods such as deep friendships.

I grant that to the extent that they had such important human goods as deep friendships, they had *some* well-being. But as I argue in Ch. 7, to that extent they also had some virtue.² Virtue and virtuous behavior are not some extra, free-floating goods, but goods that are partly constitutive of many other human goods, and a way of being in the world that enables us to get the most out of what the world has to offer. The Comanches could have had a whole lot more well-being had they found their fun or worth in more worthwhile activities. In order to treat other tribals as playthings, they had to see them as less than fully human, or as inferior humans. (Their name, Numunuh, meaning "The People," suggests that they thought of themselves as superior human beings.) Had they realized other people's equal humanity, they would not have found it fun to hunt them like animals (and they would have been spared-chopped off limbs, painful wounds, and early death, a fate that all human beings abhor – except when they labor under the illusion of a finer life awaiting them in another world). To the extent that their fun rested on their delusion about their own superiority and others' inferiority, they also failed to live up to their own values, and to the extent that they did, they also lacked well-being as the HPG.

Haybron, however, rejects the idea that they failed to live up to their own values because even if they had examined their values, their worldview would have made it impossible for them to see their moral failings and change their values. By contrast, he thinks that the corrupt Wall Street banker does fail to live up to his own values, because with a little more care and honesty, he could have seen that his way of life was worthless. The Comanches certainly have more of an excuse for their violence and cruelty than, say, people who act like them in the 21st C. But this doesn't defeat the claim that if their violence and cruelty was based on the false belief that it was required for a worthwhile life, or on their false belief in their superiority, they were failing to live up to their own values.

One way to test how plausible it is to see them as having well-being is to ask if we can see their lives as enviable. However, it's hard to get a reliable answer to this question, because our attention to their wanton cruelty runs interference from images of handsome actors playing the role of Indian warriors sympathetically, looking noble as they dash across the screen on their virile horses in proud headdresses. So let's look at contemporary examples of Comanche-like people, such

² *Well-being: Happiness in a Worthwhile Life*, *op. cit.*

as ruthless gangsters who, having grown up as victims of police brutality and regulations that make it impossible for them to earn an honest living, are convinced that their only chance at having a life worth living is to become outlaws. They are willing to give up their lives to protect members of their gang, but equally willing to kill them without compunction if they suspect them of treachery. They earn the love and respect of the poor by sharing their largesse with them, and live with pride. They see no reason to be ashamed of killing anyone who crosses their path, be it child or adult. Should something trouble their conscience, they cleanse their souls by confessing to the priest. I expect that most of us would find these benighted folks entirely *unenviable*, and not only because of the dangers they face.

Haybron thinks that by making a worthwhile life central to well-being, I'm changing the subject, because a worthwhile life is essential to the *good life*, not to *well-being*, i.e., what is good *for* us. A good life is a life that has everything that matters: well-being as well as morality and whatever other important value there might be. It is such a life that is a *summum bonum*. But am I changing the subject, or are Haybron and I just disagreeing about words when he calls my view a theory of the good life and I call it a theory of well-being as the HPG? Here's a test: if Haybron thinks that a good life is enviable, and that it makes sense to wish it to others for their own sake, then I think we're just disagreeing about words. And that's not a disagreement worth having. Unfortunately, however, I think Haybron would say that a good life is not necessarily enviable because morality and well-being often conflict, and when they do, morality trumps – always.

There seem to be two reasons why Haybron holds this view, one having to do with his conception of well-being, the other with his conception of morality. The first is implicit in his example of a conflict between moral goodness and well-being: giving up “one's life for one's children, or an important cause,” he says, sacrifices one's well-being for the sake of a good life (Section 5). But this suggests that the alternative – giving up one's children or an important cause for the sake of saving one's life – preserves one's well-being. However, it's possible to believe this only on the assumption that the boundaries of the self are extremely narrow, an assumption that I doubt Haybron or anyone other than a narcissist actually makes in his real life. In the kind of situation Haybron describes, where the choice is between one's life and that which makes one's life worth living, well-being is no longer an option, and giving up one's life is simply the better of two bad choices. (Of course, if one has already lived a long, fulfilling life, giving up one's life in exchange for safeguarding a great value looks like a win-win situation to me. It's not every day that one gets something in return for death.)

The second reason that Haybron thinks that morality and well-being often conflict – or often enough to make the thesis that virtue is partly constitutive of well-being suspect – is that the morality Haybron plugs into the good life is Kantian or utilitarian. But this potential for constant conflict, in my view, is one of several good reasons to reject these theories. As I argue in Ch. 1, the project of showing that virtue is partly constitutive of well-being can succeed only on a certain conception of morality and a certain conception of well-being. The relevant conception of morality must make room for self-regarding virtues and its other-regarding virtues must be in principle conducive to the agent's well-being. On this conception of

morality, there will still be contingent conflicts between virtuous *behavior*, on the one hand, and happiness, even well-being as the HPG, on the other, but not between virtuous *traits* or principles and well-being.

In spite of our continuing disagreement, I appreciate Haybron's attempt to narrow the gap between his view of the good life and my view of well-being as the HPG. In the same spirit, I acknowledge in my book that there is more than one coherent conception of well-being. To paraphrase Phillipa Foot, the idea of well-being is "protean ... appearing now in one way and now in another."³ So perhaps Haybron is right that the Comanches could have had a great deal of well-being – in one sense of well-being. On this conception of well-being, it is enough if one is happy in a life that one sincerely believes is worthwhile, whether or not it is (although it's not clear why the corrupt Wall Street banker also can't sincerely believe that his life is worthwhile.) My only claim is that if we regard well-being as the highest prudential good, then my conception of well-being as happiness in a worthwhile life meets the descriptive and normative requirements of well-being better than subjectivist conceptions can. If a life of well-being need not be worthwhile, then a wasted and pathetic or abhorrent life can be a life of well-being. And then it's doubtful that well-being is worth spending so much time trying to understand and achieve, or wish to those we love. But it seems that Haybron does sometimes feel the pull of the objectivist position, as when he argues that "engaging with them [objective values] in the right way typically benefits us, precisely *because* they matter apart from our own interests" (Section 5). By this, I assume he means "apart from our *ex ante* interests," since after we see that they benefit us when we engage with them in the right way, doing so becomes part of our own interests.

3 Reply to Nancy Snow

Nancy Snow's comments concern my conception of realism, my conception of virtue, and their connection. Snow argues that it is possible for realism to go hand-in-hand with "deficits in practical wisdom as well as bad motives" (Section I). As I conceive of it, however, someone is realistic to the extent that she is disposed to seek truth or understanding about important facts of her own life and human life in general (i.e., to the extent that she is reality-oriented and autonomous), succeeds in achieving truth or understanding, and is disposed to acting on it when circumstances permit. To be disposed to act on her understanding she needs to be motivated by it. This is also what virtue (including the virtue of practical wisdom) requires. Virtue requires an understanding of what matters in life and what matters less or not at all, a disposition to choose the right ends and the right means to them, and to be "reliably and appropriately responsive to the morally relevant features of the situations we find ourselves in," where being appropriately responsive is being motivated by the relevant features.⁴

³ Phillipa Foot, *Natural Goodness*, (Oxford: Clarendon, 2001), p. 97. Foot makes this claim about happiness.

⁴ *Well-being*, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

Snow thinks that the case of Francis Crick and James Watson presents a counterexample to my claim, because they were realistic in their search for the truth about the structure of DNA, but lacking in virtue because they cheated by using the work of Rosalind Franklin without giving her credit for it. I'm not in a position to evaluate this latter claim, but will accept it for the sake of argument. My response is simple: if they cheated, they faked the extent of their own achievement and failed to acknowledge Franklin's achievement. These actions were not motivated by their desire for the truth, but by their desire to capture all the plaudits for themselves. Hence these actions were dishonest and not realistic. But how should we characterize their search for the truth about the structure of DNA if their dishonesty helped them in their search? For an action or project to be expressive of virtue, or even only in accord with virtue, both the end and the means must be right. At least one of the means they took was not. But in a multi-year project that requires many decisions and many actions, this one wrong act cannot taint everything they did. If they were motivated by the desire to discover the structure of DNA, and behaved with integrity and justice the rest of the time, then they did act virtuously in their scientific work the rest of the time. Depending on the details, this is either just another example of the fact that people's virtues – and vices – can be compartmentalized, or of the fact that people can sometimes act out of character.

Snow's next comment concerns the connection between realism and well-being. Some recent research evidently supports Shelley Taylor and Jonathan Brown's view that mild positive illusions about ourselves are inevitable and evolutionarily adaptive (Section II). How does this bear on my claim about the importance of realism for virtue and well-being? I would say that if some positive illusions are inevitable (and I suspect there are some even if they are not as enduring or global as Taylor and Brown surmise), then it's as futile to try to get rid of them as to try to get rid of perceptual illusions. But just as an understanding of perceptual illusions, such as the illusion of water on the road on a hot day, enables us to reject the verdict of our eyes, awareness of our positive illusions can also enable us to reject their verdict. Do they, however, promote well-being? This can't be decided simply on the basis of the fact that they were once evolutionarily adaptive. Tribalism was also once adaptive, but now is chiefly maladaptive and destructive. Moreover, as Snow states, there is other research that supports the view that positive illusions *don't* promote well-being.

Can more research settle the issue, as Snow hopes? I don't think research alone can do this. My objection to the Taylor- Brown thesis is four-fold: (i) their thesis is that mildly deluded people are happier and nicer than realistic people, who tend to be depressed, but the evidence for depressed realists is weak or non-existent, leaving their comparative thesis bereft of a comparison; (ii) the figures Taylor and Brown give don't show that most students, leave alone most people, are subject to mild positive illusions; (iii) even if most people are subject to such illusions, why suppose that their claim to be happier than most people is not also an illusion?; (iv) and finally, it's hard to come up with a plausible explanation of why positive illusions are good for us and realism, properly understood, bad, but easy to come up with an explanation for the contrary hypothesis. Anyone who wants to defend

Taylor and Brown needs to overcome these objections – or show that they are beside the point.

Snow asks helpful questions about two concrete cases to see whether they are compatible with my conception of realism. In one, she's been diagnosed with cancer, and has only a 5% chance of survival if she undertakes the rigorous treatment prescribed by her doctor. Her hope motivates her to undertake this treatment. Yet, "given that the survival rate is so low, it seems unrealistic to think I can beat the odds" (8). The thought here seems to be that Snow has a better chance of survival if she has unrealistic hope, and so unrealistic hope turns out to be better for her. But if she strongly desires to live, and there are no countervailing reasons not to undertake the treatment, then her realistic hope that she has a 5% chance of survival is enough to lead her to undertake the treatment. Unrealistic hope in this case is just as good as, but not better than, realistic hope. I address a similar case in Chapter 5 with reference to AIDS-related optimism (pp. 135–38).

Snow's second question is whether, given my conception of realism, I can agree with Phillip Pettit that sometimes we do better to put certain potentially depressing information off-line, as it were, in order to muster the wherewithal to pursue our goals. I do agree, and address a closely-related case in my book, where I argue that, "Like surgical procedures, unpleasant truths may need a long prep time. Recognizing this and preparing oneself psychologically for a potentially devastating revelation before proceeding with one's investigations is the better part of realism—of wisdom about one's human and individual limitations. And such wisdom—practical wisdom—after all, is what genuine realism is about, not a mechanical harvesting of all truths, with nary a care for the how, when, or what for" (p. 121).

I also argue that "some important truths, like some grave dangers or physical pains, are beyond our capacity to bear: far from providing an opportunity to make a courageous or ennobling response, they crush us under their weight" (p. 122). In such cases, we are better off remaining ignorant. I acknowledge that a reality-oriented person is more likely to stumble upon such destructive truths. But acknowledging that sometimes reality-orientation can harm us, and harm us much more than "unreality-orientation," does not undermine my claim that being a reality-oriented person is characteristically good for us, and better for us than its contrary. Every good trait, policy, or practice can be bad for us in some situations. For example, exercise is good for us and lack of it bad, even though sometimes exercise can injure us beyond repair, or even kill us, as the recent tragic, freakish death of Dave Goldberg illustrates.⁵ Virtue is good for us (I argue), even though a particular virtuous act can destroy us and a non-virtuous act can save us.

Daydreaming and fantasizing are also compatible with realism – so long as one is aware that one is actually just daydreaming or fantasizing, and doesn't allow it to take over one's life. But what about make-believe, whereby we pull ourselves up by our bootstraps by imagining, for example, that we are calm or courageous, when in fact we are anything but, in order to meet a difficult challenge? Isn't this unrealistic? It depends. Make-believe is realistic so long as it expresses, activates, or develops a capacity that already exists. Thus, if courageous action can be brought about by

⁵ http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/05/technology/dave-goldberg-cause-of-death.html?_r=0.

making believe that we can act courageously on this occasion, or if we can become courageous by continually thinking and acting like a courageous person, it's because it is within our capacity to do so. In realistic make-believe, we no more lose sight of the fact that we are not *feeling* calm or courageous, or that we are not *yet* courageous, than we lose sight of the fact as actors on a stage that we're not really enraged Othello or poor dead Desdemona.

Snow takes issue with my claim that global virtue, understood as Aristotle understands it, is psychologically impossible (Section III). She states that if I had addressed studies that show that the development of virtue is similar to the development of expertise, as well as her argument that "we can strive for global virtue by deliberately seeking to develop local virtues into global ones," I would have come to a different conclusion. But nothing I say implies that we can't *strive* for global virtue or that virtue development isn't similar to the development of expertise. What globalists need to show is that some people actually *succeed* in acquiring global virtue – and explain how they do it in spite of the epistemic and emotional obstacles I identify in Ch. 6. I agree with Snow that the situationist experiments don't all by themselves show that global virtue is psychologically impossible, contrary to my suggestion in a careless footnote (p. 157, n. 26). Elsewhere in the book as well as previous work I make it clear that this conclusion is supported by a range of considerations: the demanding nature of Aristotelian virtue, everyday experience, history, literature, the nature of moral education, and social and cognitive psychology.⁶ Global virtue asks too much of human beings with finite powers in a finite life – as, indeed, does global theoretical wisdom, global craft wisdom, global medical wisdom, and so on. Snow's expertise analogy actually supports *my* position, not the globalist position. Just as it's beyond the capacities of even the best surgeon (already a sub-specialty of the specialty of medicine) to be best at all kinds of surgery, so it's beyond the capacities of even the most virtuous person to be virtuous in every domain of his life. (Perhaps one day we'll have apps that can improve our moral behavior, but it's doubtful that we'll ever have apps that enable us to become globally virtuous.)

Snow thinks that recommending that we strive for an ideal that is psychologically impossible of attainment is a recipe for frustration, not well-being. But if we keep in mind that we can't reach it, and why we can't, we will be less likely to judge ourselves too harshly for our moral failings, and likewise with others. Global virtue serves as an ideal to aspire to. Most of us need ideals to aspire to – ideals of well-being, of virtue, of good philosophy, of physical fitness – and there doesn't seem to be any good reason to suppress this tendency if we stay tethered to the facts. Further, I agree with Daniel Russell that because virtue, like rationality, is a vague concept, we need an ideal or model of virtue to serve as a standard for judging whether or not a certain trait is close enough to the ideal to be a virtue.⁷

⁶ *Well-being*, *op. cit.*; "The Limited Unity of Virtue," *Nous* 30, no. 3 (1996): 306–329; "The Milgram Experiments, Learned Helplessness, and Character Traits," *Journal of Ethics* 13, no. 2–3 (2009): 257–289 (<http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10892-009-9052-4>, June 3, 2009).

⁷ Daniel C. Russell, *Practical Intelligence and the Virtues* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), Ch. 4.

Finally, let me turn to Snow's question why, on my view, the unconscious biases and propensities that prevent us from attaining global virtue don't prevent us from attaining domain-specific virtue. This way of putting it suggests that our minds come ready-made with domains or compartments, independently of any innate or environmental factors, and we want to know how some of these compartments are able to shut out unconscious biases and propensities. But this is misleading, because it is precisely these biases, propensities, and other innate and environmental factors that lead to compartmentalization in the first place. Given our limited time, energy, and cognitive and emotional powers, the unevenness of our moral education, and an environment that is often hostile to virtue, on the one hand, and the demanding nature of Aristotelian virtue, on the other, it is hardly surprising that we are unable to become globally virtuous. Accepting this fact is, in my view, the better part of wisdom, both practical and philosophical.

4 Reply to Valerie Tiberius

Valerie Tiberius asks: "If subjective theories have serious problems that Badhwar's hybrid objectivism solves, and if her form of objective theory does not have the main problem that objective theories have been thought to have, why bother with subjective theories?" Her answer is that some subjectivists about well-being are subjectivists because they are skeptical about the existence of the kind of objective values that I need for my theory: "mind-independent values that transcend the moral-prudential distinction."

It's not clear, however, that the objective values I'm talking about are mind-independent, if that means: "values that no human mind under any conditions ever has or ever could recognize as values." Such values may be values for other beings, but not for us. But if mind-independent values are values that no particular individual, or even any individual, necessarily currently appreciates, but would come to appreciate under the right conditions, then, yes, my objective values may be seen as mind-independent. My argument is also consistent with the kind of constructivist realism that Christine Korsgaard defends, on which moral values are solutions to the practical problems that beings like us face.⁸ An example of an objectively "false value" – that is, a disvalue – is wars of conquest. For centuries, many human beings believed (and too many still believe) that wars of conquest were inherently fine and noble because they showed courage, brought glory upon the ruler and country, and rewards in the hereafter. Even Aristotle seems to have fallen for this view. But it was as false then as it is now that there is anything fine and glorious about wars of conquest, both because such wars are unjust and because cooperating and trading with others makes for a far richer life, materially and psychologically,

⁸ See Christine Korsgaard, "Realism and Constructivism in Twentieth-Century Moral Philosophy." In *Special Issue: Philosophy in America at the Turn of the Century*. *Journal of Philosophical Research* 28, APA Centennial Issue Supplement (2003): 9–122. Republished in Korsgaard's *Constitution of Agency: Essays on Practical Reason and Moral Psychology*, 302–326. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, and my *Well-being*, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

than war. Wars of conquest were both morally and prudentially bad, and peaceful cooperation both morally and prudentially good.

At any rate, I tried to avoid the metaethical jungle in my book by stating at the outset that my argument was addressed to those who believe that there are some values that are objective, even if they don't believe that they are relevant to well-being. And most subjectivists about well-being, including most of the ones I address, do believe that there are at least some objective moral values.

Tiberius argues that even people who believe that there are objective values are skeptical that "objective values give rise to prudential reasons independently of the attitudes of the person in question." Now I agree that not *all* objective values give rise to prudential reasons independently of the attitudes of the person in question. Such are the "external goods" that people build their lives around: art, cooking, medicine, and so on. The objective value that I claim gives everyone capable of achieving well-being as the HPG a reason to incorporate in their lives is the moral-prudential character trait I call realism, and that, I argue, entails the virtues of integrity, justice, courage, and so on. The arguments I've seen against an objective value requirement show only that such values are not sufficient for well-being, not that they are not necessary.⁹ The objective value requirement rules out as candidates for well-being both morally unscrupulous lives and wasted lives, such as a life of pleasure on the experience machine – or, if you prefer, hallucinogenic drugs. Yet subjectivists about well-being are committed to accepting that these can be lives of well-being.

Tiberius responds: not if well-being consists of "satisfying your preferences or fulfilling your values," because you can't do this simply by *believing* that you're "satisfying your preferences or fulfilling your values." But there's no reason why your overarching preference or value cannot be to have a life of pleasant experiences on drugs or the experience machine. If the improvements we are seeing in drugs or robotics continue apace, there may soon be no downside to such a life – other than its worthlessness. Or consider a severely retarded person who finds his fulfillment in making the same doodles on a sheet of paper, or listening to the same songs, day after day. Whereas we should all be happy that there is something that he finds fulfilling, most of us would also feel sad that he wasn't capable of a richer and more worthwhile life. The subjectivist, however, would have no reason to feel sad for him on prudential grounds, since he is happily fulfilling his values. Yet, I think it is fair to point out, Tiberius herself sometimes can't resist the objectivist pull, as when she argues in her co-authored paper, "Well-being," that stressed-out Jim, working long hours with irritating co-workers on developing an AIDS vaccine, has more well-being than easygoing Will who, on inheriting some wealth, has given up his career as a physician to paint mediocre paintings.¹⁰

I can also agree with Tiberius that her Mormon cousins are thriving in spite of their false beliefs about their transcendental purpose in the world, that is, their lack

⁹ See *Well-being*, *op. cit.*, pp. 58–59.

¹⁰ Valerie Tiberius and Alexandra Plakias, "Well-Being," in *The Moral Psychology Handbook*, edited by John Doris and the Moral Psychology Research Group (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 403–432, at 222.

of realism in this respect, because this is compatible with their earthly goals and their pursuit of them being sound in many respects. On my view, a test of good values is that they are compatible with true metaphysical and empirical beliefs; if they are, then it doesn't matter if they are also compatible with false beliefs. For example, the belief that we ought to be just is compatible both with the false metaphysical view that it's Zeus who has made justice important for leading a worthwhile life, and with the true metaphysical view that it's our nature and the nature of human societies that has made justice important for leading a worthwhile life. (In general, I don't give much importance to people's beliefs about gods or other worlds – except insofar as these beliefs corrupt their attitudes or actions in this world.) By contrast, bad values, such as jingoism, are incompatible with true metaphysical or empirical beliefs or theories, or with valid inferences from true beliefs.

More important for my theory is Tiberius' claim that her cousins have well-being even though they are subservient to their husbands on important issues of culture, politics, or religion. If by this she means that they mouth their husbands' opinions on these matters just because they can't be bothered to think for themselves, then yes, they are lacking in autonomy (and reality-orientation) *in these respects*. Why not opt for not having any views on these matters? At the same time, however, if these views don't occupy an important place in their lives – if they are only material for chit-chat rather than political action or teaching – then it matters relatively little that they don't think for themselves about them. No one is autonomous in every important respect and, as I noted earlier, some important matters are not important to every individual's well-being. Another possibility, however, is that these Mormon cousins agree with their husbands because they have good reason to believe that their husbands' views are sound on these matters, and that they would disagree if they found reason to do so. In this case, even if their husbands and thus they themselves are mostly wrong, Tiberius' cousins are autonomous vis-à-vis their husbands, not subservient.

However, even if these cousins are subservient in this area of their lives, they can be highly autonomous and realistic in many others. In the words of the psychologists Jacqui Smith and Paul B. Baltes, they can have “rich factual knowledge about life matters” and “extensive procedural knowledge about ways of dealing with life problems.”¹¹ They can be honest and generous, tolerant of small faults in others (and themselves), be strong and loving parents, have good will towards people in general, be lacking in envy or spite, and so on. But these qualities can't be acquired or (especially) exercised unthinkingly or blindly: they require being perceptive and understanding, and this is possible only insofar as her cousins are autonomous, that is, insofar as they think for themselves. So if Tiberius' cousins have the qualities I've just described, then they are realistic – that is, autonomous, reality-oriented, and right – in a whole lot of important ways.

¹¹ Jacqui Smith and Paul B. Baltes. “Wisdom-related knowledge: Age/cohort differences in response to life-planning problems,” *Developmental Psychology* 26, no. 3 (May 1990), pp. 494–505, and *Well-Being*, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

Tiberius suggests that we academics are more realistic, presumably because it's our job to think and talk and write. But I actually didn't have anything very intellectual in mind by realism. Owen Flanagan has argued that countless "intrapersonal and extrapersonal feedback mechanisms, by way of feelings of coordination, integration, and integrity, of fit with the social world mediated by the body language of others, and so on," can provide a person with self-understanding.¹² I suggest in my book that the same mechanisms can also help us to achieve understanding of others, and even of the natural world. In both the practical and the theoretical realm, insight often seems to be "the result of a sustained implicit training of our senses, emotions, and intellect by experience—akin, perhaps, to the navigational and kinesthetic training of the mind and body as we learn to make our way in the physical environment."¹³ But whatever the explanation, it is undeniable that people's grasp often exceeds their ability to articulate what they know, and that such grasp is not limited to intellectuals.

Surprisingly, even Aristotle notes that there are people who reliably do the right thing, at the right time, from the right desires, but cannot say why they do it, or don't make much sense when they try to say it.¹⁴ His explanation for their success is that they are naturally lucky: they lack understanding of virtue but act from naturally good desires, like naturally good singers who sing without understanding music. They are inspired. I say these people have understanding, but lack the words to express it. Like philosophers before and after, Aristotle is biased against people who are not very articulate.

In short, being an intellectual is not necessarily an asset as far as realism or virtue is concerned, and we academics are as likely to be conformists as anyone else in some areas of our lives. Consider, for example, that just as most people are born into their parents' religion, most people are also born into their parents' political affiliations – and academics are often born again to conform to their colleagues' political views. Of course, this doesn't automatically show that they don't acquire them or hold them autonomously. But if they avoid reading material that challenges their views because they are afraid of their colleagues' disapproval should the challenge undermine their views, or if they read challenging material only to find weak spots in the opposition's position instead of their own, they can safely be called heteronomous in their political commitments. And research supports the common observation that most people do avoid being challenged in at least some of their commitments. In short, it's not only Mormon wives who can be and are heteronomous in some areas of their lives, but all and any of us.

To clear up a misunderstanding, I do not question Sumner's epistemic condition for authentic happiness (or any subjective theory's information constraint) on the

¹² Owen O Flanagan, Jr., "Identity and Reflection," in *Self-Expressions: Mind, Morals, and the Meaning of Life*, edited by Flanagan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 142–170, and *Well-Being*, *op. cit.*, p. 113.

¹³ See *Well-being*, *op. cit.*, pp. 114–115.

¹⁴ Aristotle, *Eudemean Ethics*, trans. J. Solomon, in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: the Revised Oxford Translation*, edited by Jonathan Barnes (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1247b 18ff., and *Well-Being*, *op. cit.*, pp. 115–116.

grounds that it sneaks in objective values, but rather, on the grounds that it is too weak to rule out wasted lives, such as a life spent largely on the experience machine.

Tiberius rightly questions my statement that it would be odd for an autonomous (and reality-oriented) person to be vicious. My statement is misleading, because all I end up ruling out is that insofar as someone is autonomous, he cannot be indifferent or opposed to what he recognizes as the relevant normative considerations. This is because, by my definition of autonomy, if the autonomous person recognizes these considerations, he must be motivated by them. But as I argue, autonomy need not characteristically result in understanding or right action, whereas moral virtue must, hence autonomy is not sufficient for virtue. Perhaps some people who supported the drug war before its devastating effects and its violations of liberty became clear were people who considered the arguments against it with an open mind, but still mistakenly concluded that it was justified.

In closing, I'd like to suggest a partial reconciliation between my objectivist theory and certain subjectivist theories. I think these theories try to do justice to one of two opposite intuitions, both of which I share and suspect that most people share, regardless of the theory they subscribe to. Most subjectivist theories take as central the intuition that if someone is happy in a life that meets her own standards, she has everything her own good can require. But subjectivism is then committed to admitting that if someone values spending his life as a couch potato, or doing drugs, he has everything his own good can require. And this is hard to see as enviable, or as something the rest of us should wish for him. Neo-Aristotelian objectivist theories take as central the intuition that if well-being is the *summum bonum*, the highest prudential good for an individual, then it is something enviable and worth wishing for ourselves and others, hence only someone who is happy in a worthwhile life has everything her own good can require.

If I'm right that extant arguments against the claim that virtue is partly constitutive of well-being as the HPG fail, then the disagreement over the nature of well-being revolves around which of two contrary intuitions should be seen as more important. In my book, I try to accommodate both intuitions (although, unfortunately, not entirely consistently) by distinguishing between well-being as the HPG, and mere well-being. The happy individual with a worthless life that meets her own standards can be said to have mere well-being, well-being that is neither enviable nor something that others ought to wish her. But only a happy individual with a worthwhile life has well-being as the highest prudential good, and only well-being conceived thus is enviable and something others ought to wish her.