



Welfare Subjectivism, Sophistication, and Procedural Perfectionism

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Abstract

Welfare subjectivists face a dilemma. On the one hand, traditional subjectivist theories—such as the desire-fulfillment theory—are too permissive to account for the well-being of typical mature human beings. On the other hand, more “refined” theories—such as the life-satisfaction theory—are too restrictive to account for the well-being of various welfare subjects, including newborns, those with profound cognitive impairments, or non-human animals. This paper examines a class of welfare subjectivism that addresses this dilemma with sensitivity to the diversity in welfare subjects. First, the most-sophisticated-attitude view (MSA) is introduced. MSA holds that an object, x , is good for a subject, S , in proportion to the strength of S 's pro-attitude towards x if and only if the pro-attitude at issue is S 's most sophisticated type. Typically, the well-being of typical mature human beings is assessed in terms of one's authentic whole-life satisfaction, whereas that of human newborns is assessed in terms of something less sophisticated such as pleasure. MSA offers the rationale for this difference based on an underexplored version of perfectionism: procedural perfectionism. Next, provided that MSA may involve an implausibly strong claim, this paper examines two moderate variations of MSA that accept the partial relevance of less sophisticated types of valenced attitude. Finally, it is illustrated how MSA and its variations have plausible implications regarding the well-being of enhanced or dis-enhanced people.

Keywords Well-being · Subjectivism · Desire satisfaction theory · Perfectionism · Disability · Enhancement

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1 Introduction

Welfare subjectivists typically hold that an object, event, state of affairs, etc., x is good for a subject S only if S takes a valuing attitude (of the right sort) towards x (Dorsey 2017b: 687). It is then a principal theoretical question for welfare subjectivists what amounts to “the right sort,” over which various subjectivist theories compete. The discussion in this paper is in this tradition, attempting to offer a promising candidate for “the right sort.”

I start by illustrating a dilemma for welfare subjectivists. On the one hand, various philosophers have argued that traditional subjectivist theories, like the desire-fulfillment theory, are too permissive to appropriately account for the well-being of typical mature human beings (Parfit 1986; Feldman 2004; Crisp 2006). According to their worry, it is implausibly permissive in that it allows for the well-being of someone to be determined by that person’s desire of any kind, including irrational, ill-considered, or base ones. This observation has led to considerable numbers of works that attempt to refine the desire-fulfillment theory of well-being.¹ One of the most notable examples is a theory that refers to idealized desire, i.e., one that would be held in an ideal circumstance (Railton 1986), typically including informed desire (see Sobel 1994 and Rosati 1995 for discussion and criticism thereof). Alternative theories focus on life satisfaction (Sumner 1996; Suikkanen 2011) or value-fulfillment (Raibley 2010; Tiberius 2018).² Thus, here is one horn of the dilemma: *A subjectivist theory of well-being must involve considerably sophisticated attitudes in order to address the well-being of typical mature human beings.*³

On the other hand, these sophisticated-attitude theories are too restrictive to appropriately account for the well-being of various welfare subjects including newborns, those with profound cognitive impairments, or non-human animals. The problem is that a refined view of well-being is cognitively too demanding for such welfare subjects, who lack the requisite cognitive capacity (Lin 2017). To illustrate, a life-satisfaction theory of well-being assumes that a welfare subject has the capacity for considering one’s (stages of) life, which newborns do not have. However, it sounds implausible that newborns are by definition less happy than typical mature human beings⁴ or that their well-being is undefined. We should admit that

¹ Not all subjectivists grant that welfare subjectivism in its plain form is so primitive that it needs some idealization. See, for instance, Dorsey (2017a); Lin (2019).

² Another class of refined theories of well-being is “subjective–objective hybrid” theories. A simple variation thereof goes as follows: an object x is good for a welfare subject S if and only if x is good *simpliciter* and S has a pro-attitude towards x (cf. Woodard 2016: 164). My central focus in this paper is not hybridization in this sense.

³ In principle, a theory of well-being can be less permissive in various ways. For instance, “desiring x while sneezing” is more specified than “desiring x ,” and, accordingly, a desire-while-sneezing-fulfillment theory of well-being is less permissive than an ordinary, desire-fulfillment theory. I set aside such idiosyncratic restrictions and consider genuine cases of refinement that philosophers of well-being have thought of. See also note 9. I owe this clarification to an anonymous reviewer. The same point applies to restrictiveness mentioned in the next paragraph, *mutatis mutandis*.

⁴ It might be the case that, *in reality*, all (or most) newborns are less happy than typical mature human beings, provided that newborns are frustrated by their lack of various capacities to meet their needs by themselves. My point is that it is unlikely that there is a theoretical upper limit in the happiness of newborns just because of their lower levels of cognitive capacity. I thank Anna Smajdor for making me see the need to emphasize this point.

a life-satisfaction theory of well-being is inappropriate for some welfare subjects. The same problem applies to other sophisticated-attitude theories, *mutatis mutandis*. Thus, here is the other horn of the dilemma: *A subjectivist theory of well-being must not involve overly sophisticated attitudes in order to address the well-being of all welfare subjects.*

This observation might lead us to welfare variabilism, according to which it is not the case that a single theory of well-being applies to all welfare subjects. Welfare variabilists will see no dilemma here since there will be two (or more) theories of well-being, one of which involves sophisticated attitudes (suitable for typical mature human beings), and the others involve less sophisticated ones (suitable for other welfare subjects). Notably, it has been pointed out that welfare variabilism appears at least *prima facie* implausible in that “it is difficult [...] to see what could explain why a theory of welfare might be true of some subjects but false of others” (Lin 2018: 324). However, instead of delving into the variabilist–invariabilist dispute further, this article examines the possibility of a single subjectivist view of well-being that applies to any welfare subject and simultaneously addresses the alleged dilemma.

In a nutshell, the task of this paper is to provide a subjectivist theory of well-being that appreciates our daily intuition about the well-being of various subjects, from typical mature human beings to non-human animals. Besides, rather than merely describing the diversity of welfare subjects and their well-being, this article aims to offer a *principled* theory to account for the entire spectrum of well-being. Such a theory must satisfy the following criteria⁵—it should (i) involve suitably sophisticated attitudes to account for the well-being of typical mature human beings; (ii) not involve overly sophisticated attitudes to account for that of other welfare subjects; and (iii) be invariabilist. In particular, this paper examines the following view:

Most-Sophisticated-Attitude View (MSA)

- (1) An object⁶ x is good for a subject S in proportion to the strength of S 's pro-attitude towards x if, and only if, that pro-attitude is among S 's most sophisticated types.
- (2) An object x is bad for a subject S in proportion to the strength of S 's con-attitude towards x if, and only if, that con-attitude is among S 's most sophisticated types.

To have an intuitive grasp of the point of MSA, let us assume that the well-being of typical mature human beings should involve stable and well-considered pro-attitudes upon reflection rather than myopic, impulsive, and hasty ones. Suppose further that such a sophisticated attitude is beyond the capacity of human newborns.

⁵ This paper does not delve into the question concerning the *measurement* of well-being. From the viewpoint of empirical research, a variabilist but manageable “model” of well-being might be preferable to an invariabilist, complicated theory (Alexandrova 2017: Chaps. 2–3). Bognar (2008) and Rodogno (2014) discuss related issues.

⁶ One could have a valenced attitude toward an event or a state of affairs. The argument below applies to an event or a state of affairs, *mutatis mutandis*.

In this case, the well-being of typical mature human beings and that of newborns is assessed in different ways, and MSA accounts for how and why. On the one hand, the well-being of typical mature human beings might be assessed in terms of, say, authentic whole-life satisfaction—i.e., the life-satisfaction theorists of well-being are partly on the right track—when and because such a form of pro-attitude is the most sophisticated type of pro-attitude *available to typical mature human beings*. On the other hand, the well-being of newborns might be assessed in terms of pleasure when and because, again, it is the most sophisticated type of pro-attitude *available to newborns*. In short, MSA is an attitude-based theory of well-being that is sensitive to the differences in the capacity of welfare subjects. This capacity-sensitive nature is what distinguishes MSA from other subjectivist theories, enabling MSA to overcome the dilemma mentioned above.

Section 2 illustrates the basic ideas of MSA in more detail. Section 3 elaborates on MSA's theoretical features. After distinguishing two forms of perfectionism, I argue that MSA is a theory of well-being that is substantially non-perfectionist and procedurally perfectionist. Section 4 introduces more moderate variations of MSA. Section 5 demonstrates the theoretical relationship between MSA and neighboring theories of well-being before addressing possible objections to MSA.

2 The Basic Idea of MSA

There are various types of *pro-attitude*. Typical cases of pro-attitudes towards x include (to name a few) being psychologically attached to it, being pleased with it, desiring it, judging it as valuable, being authentically satisfied with it, and regarding it as a component of one's conception of the good.⁷ In the same vein, there are various types of *con-attitude*. Let us use *valenced attitudes* as an umbrella term for pro-attitudes plus con-attitudes. That is, a pro-attitude is a shorthand for a positively valenced attitude, and a con-attitude is for a negatively valenced attitude. For simplicity, I will sometimes focus only on the positive side, but the argument is meant to apply to the negative side (i.e., negatively valenced attitude and ill-being), *mutatis mutandis*. Notably, each valenced attitude indicates a value-wise relationship, positive or negative (or neutral), between the attitude's holder and its target. Valenced

⁷ In this paper, I use the term “attitude” in its broadest sense, even denoting valenced psychological states in general. While I acknowledge that this terminology may differ from ordinary usage, it calls attention to the point that MSA is a generalized version of the class of pro-attitude-based theories of well-being, a typical member of which is the desire-fulfillment theory. An alternative name for such a broad class of valenced mental states may be “valuing” (Dorsey 2012; Taylor 2012: 73). At any rate, I use “attitude” hereafter for simplicity. Another worry with this terminology, raised by an anonymous reviewer, is the potential exclusion of non-conscious welfare subjects. See Shepherd (2023) and Bradford (2023) for recent discussion on the well-being of non-conscious subjects. Two notes are in order. First, my framework might address the well-being of non-conscious *sentient* subjects, for attitudes include non-doxastic psychological states like pleasure. Second, if non-conscious, *non-sentient* subjects have well-being (which I find quite unlikely), that might pose a challenge against welfare subjectivism. However, this paper aims to offer a coherent subjectivist theory without defending subjectivism as such.

attitudes are contrasted on this point with other psychological states lacking evaluative relationships, like ordinary beliefs.⁸

Philosophers often think that, intuitively speaking, there is a significant difference among the various types of pro-attitude in terms of sophistication. For instance, it is not unreasonable to see “regarding x as a component of one’s conception of the good” as more sophisticated than merely desiring x . This kind of comparison, even a crude one, is a necessary presupposition of the oft-heard claim that (say) the well-being of typical mature human beings is assessed in terms of something *more sophisticated than* pleasure or desire. Hereafter, I assume that such a comparison based on sophistication is allowed and, more importantly, has been shared by philosophers, whether implicitly or explicitly,⁹ with possible but negligible disagreement about what is more sophisticated than what.

What does such a ranking of sophistication consist in? It is beyond the purpose of this paper to offer a conclusive view on this matter because, again, my point here is simply to reformulate the sophistication-based comparison that is relevantly common in the philosophical discourse on well-being. With this caveat in mind, one suggestion is that a valenced attitude is sophisticated to the extent that it presupposes an advanced cognitive capacity of the relevant subject. For instance, the pro-attitude of “regarding something as a component of one’s conception of the good” presupposes the cognitive capacity for making a rational life plan (Rawls 1999: Sects. 63–64), while merely desiring something does not.¹⁰

To clearly restate the comparison of sophistication in terms of cognitive demandingness, I stipulate several binary relations between valenced attitudes as follows. One type of valenced attitude, A_1 , is *at least as sophisticated as* another type, A_2 , if and only if having A_1 is at least as cognitively demanding as having A_2 . A_1 is *more sophisticated than* A_2 if and only if (i) A_1 is at least as cognitively demanding (viz. at least as sophisticated) as A_2 and (ii) it is not the case that A_2 is at least as cognitively demanding (viz. at least as sophisticated) as A_1 . One possible interpretation of the relation of cognitive demandingness goes as follows: A_1 is at least as cognitively

⁸ Thus, even if a metaethicist believes that nothing instantiates the purported value of well-being (cf. Kelley 2021), welfare subjectivism does not entail that nothing is good/bad for her. Such a theoretical belief does not amount to her *valenced* attitude and is irrelevant to her well-being, no less than her belief that (say) metaethics is a subdivision of ethics. In contrast, *if* she lacked valenced attitudes and remained apathetic to anything, that could mean that nothing is good/bad for her; however, this is due to the absence of her valenced attitude instead of the philosophical outlook she subscribes to.

⁹ I stipulate that the basic comparanda in this context are individual (types of) valenced attitudes, like desire or psychological attachment, instead of their combinations. Thus, for instance, I do not consider whether “desiring x ” is more sophisticated than “desiring x and being psychologically attached to x .” Such a sophistication-based comparison of combined attitudes seems not to be meant by subjective–subjective hybrid theorists (see Sect. 5). In like manner, I ignore valenced attitudes combined with other psychological states like beliefs, such as “desiring x and believing that x is true,” and valenced attitudes with idiosyncratic specification, such as “desiring x while sneezing” (see also note 3). Again, this stipulation does not deviate from the philosophical literature on well-being.

¹⁰ Perhaps in a similar spirit, Chris Heathwood argues that there are two senses of “desire” in the (desire-based) theories of well-being. In a nutshell, desire in a behavioral sense involves being disposed to get something, while desire in an affective sense involves being genuinely attracted to something (Heathwood 2019).

demanding as A_2 when all who can have A_1 can also have A_2 . When A_1 is at least as cognitively demanding as A_2 but not vice versa (i.e., all who can have A_1 can also have A_2 , but someone who can have A_2 cannot have A_1), A_1 is cognitively more demanding than A_2 . Suppose that all who can judge something as valuable (e.g., typical mature human beings) can also be psychologically attached to something. Suppose further that someone who can be psychologically attached to something (e.g., newborns and non-human animals) cannot judge something as valuable. In this case, judging something as valuable is said to be cognitively more demanding—and hence more sophisticated—than being psychologically attached to something.¹¹

Finally, and most importantly, A_1 is S 's *most sophisticated* type if and only if A_1 is at least as sophisticated as anything in the set of types of valenced attitude that is possible for S ; that is, A_1 is S 's most sophisticated type if and only if (i) A_1 is in the set of types of valenced attitude that is possible for S and (ii) nothing more sophisticated than A_1 is in that set. For instance, the well-being of typical mature human beings can be determined in terms of their authentic satisfaction when (i) “being authentically satisfied with x ” is in the set of types of valenced attitude that is possible for typical mature human beings, and (ii) anything more sophisticated than it is beyond human capacity. As my definition suggests, two or more types of valenced attitude can be among the most sophisticated for a given welfare subject. Suppose that “being authentically satisfied with x ” and “regarding x as a component of one’s conception of the good” are equal in cognitive demandingness. If nothing more sophisticated than the two is possible for typical mature human beings, then both types of valenced attitude are the most sophisticated for them.

3 Theoretical Features

Concerning typical mature human beings, the implication of MSA is similar to that of many other sophisticated-attitude theories of well-being, such as those appealing to authentic whole-life satisfaction or value-fulfillment (Sumner 1996; Raibley 2010; Dorsey 2012; Tiberius 2018). It is a reasonable stipulation that the well-being of typical mature human beings requires a type of valenced attitude with stable and long-term plans rather than myopic, impulsive, and hasty ones. Another essential feature of their well-being may be a fair degree of autonomy.¹² In contrast, MSA has quite different implications regarding welfare subjects other than typical mature human beings. Let us assume that “being psychologically attached to x ” is the most

¹¹ I mentioned this superset-based interpretation not to argue for it but to give an impression of what the cognitive demandingness relation could be like. Again, welfare theorists have made intuitive comparisons of this sort and I assume such a comparison, avoiding the precise characterization of what cognitive demandingness amounts to. Indeed, my superset-based interpretation might not work when, say, someone who can have A_1 cannot have A_2 and someone who can have A_2 cannot have A_1 . In this case, neither attitude is more demanding than the other, while it may sound stretched to say they are equally demanding. I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing out the need for this clarification.

¹² “Autonomy” in the relevant sense does not require that an agent autonomously conducts any single action, but that an agent autonomously chooses what kind of life to live (Dorsey 2015).

sophisticated type of pro-attitude of non-human animals.¹³ In this case, MSA determines their well-being in terms of psychological attachment, without requiring, say, authentic whole-life satisfaction or value-fulfillment. That is because such “oversophisticated” types of valenced attitude are beyond their cognitive capacity. The same applies to other welfare subjects as well, *mutatis mutandis*.

MSA offers a coherent explanation of how and why various welfare subjects can fare as well as typical mature human beings. (As a common practice in philosophical discussion of well-being, I simply assume the interpersonal comparability of well-being.) Let us suppose, contrary to MSA, that the well-being of any welfare subject was determined in terms of authentic whole-life satisfaction. The welfare level of those who lack the requisite cognitive capacity (such as newborns, those with a profound cognitive impairment, or non-human animals) would be *necessarily lower* than that of typical mature human beings, or even *undefined*. I find this upshot implausibly high-minded as an understanding of well-being, far deviating from our ordinary discourse about happiness and well-being.¹⁴ There is nothing strange about thinking of their well-being and imagining that, say, a newborn is as well-off as a typical mature human being. We might even hold that, say, a newborn can be better off than a typical mature human being when both enjoy the same amount of pleasure in the same way. MSA is compatible with this intuition. If “being pleased with *x*” is the most sophisticated type of pro-attitude of a newborn, then pleasure contributes to the well-being of a newborn. On the other hand, it does not contribute to that of a typical mature human being because she is capable of something more sophisticated than feeling pleasure.

Here I hasten to mention a possible objection to MSA briefly. The last claim—pleasure is entirely irrelevant to the well-being of typical mature human beings because they are capable of more sophisticated types of valenced attitude—might sound extreme and thus implausible. Some might concede that typical human well-being is *largely* determined by sophisticated attitudes such as authentic satisfaction, yet maintaining that other “less sophisticated” types of valenced attitude should also be relevant, even to a lesser degree. I find this objection reasonable, and Sect. 4 addresses it in more detail.

At its face value, MSA might appear a variabilist theory of well-being in admitting that different types of valenced attitude are relevant to the well-being of different welfare subjects.¹⁵ To illustrate, a typical interpretation of MSA goes as follows:

¹³ It is largely an empirical question of who is capable of which type of valenced attitude. Moreover, it may be a questionable assumption that all non-human animals are equal in terms of cognitive capacity (and hence their most sophisticated type of valenced attitude).

¹⁴ John Stuart Mill’s well-cited passage that “[i]t is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied” (Mill 1969: 212) is sometimes understood as supporting such a high-minded view of well-being. According to this thread of interpretation, Mill is arguing that a pig cannot be as well-off as a human being because a pig can enjoy only less cultivated kinds of pleasure while a human being can enjoy more cultivated ones. This view, whether or not it truly reflects Mill’s own thought (cf. Gray 1996: Chap. 4), appears so high-minded and human-centered that it is hardly compatible with our understanding of the nature and axiology of well-being.

¹⁵ This variabilist-appearing view of well-being is sketched by Lin (2018: p. 337). Perhaps in a similar spirit, Benjamin Yelle argues that there are various “levels” of being a welfare subject, such as being a human being, being a person, and being an experiencing subject (Yelle 2016).

value-fulfillment is relevant to the well-being of typical mature human beings, while the well-being of newborns is determined in terms of pleasure. This observation notwithstanding, MSA is an invariabilist theory of well-being because it provides a unified explanation of what type of valenced attitude is relevant to who's well-being: according to MSA, for *any* welfare subject S , the well-being of S is assessed in terms of S 's most sophisticated type of valenced attitude.

Notably, MSA is a perfectionist theory in a sense. Perfectionism about well-being, in a nutshell, holds that "human well-being consists in the development and exercise of one's natural or essential capacities" (Dorsey 2010: 59). We should cautiously distinguish between two sorts of perfectionism. In its ordinary sense, a perfectionist theory of well-being indicates what particular object (e.g., courage and knowledge) is good for a welfare subject. Call it *substantial perfectionism*. Clearly, MSA is no more compatible with substantial perfectionism than, say, the desire-fulfillment theory of well-being is. According to the desire-fulfillment theory in its pure form, whether an object x is good for S is determined entirely by S 's desire. In the same vein, according to MSA, whether x is good for S is determined entirely by S 's most sophisticated type of valenced attitude. That said, MSA involves a different sort of perfectionism, which I call *procedural perfectionism*.¹⁶ A procedurally perfectionist theory of well-being indicates not what particular object is good for a welfare subject, but *what determines* what particular object is good for a welfare subject. Put differently, procedural perfectionism holds that a good life consists in a certain sort of valuing and the appreciation of that value.¹⁷ If a typical mature human being, S_1 , judges something as valuable, perhaps it is good for S_1 . However, that is not only because S_1 has a pro-attitude towards it but also because of the excellence that S_1 's relevant pro-attitude exhibits. Otherwise, S_1 's valenced attitude alone does not convey any prudential value to its target. For instance, if S_1 is merely pleased with another thing, it does not contribute to S_1 's well-being. This observation does not imply that pleasure is always irrelevant to well-being. Suppose another welfare subject, S_2 , whose cognitive capacity is limited compared to that of S_1 , can feel pleasure but cannot have any more sophisticated valenced attitude. If S_2 is pleased with something, it may well contribute to S_2 's well-being, given that the mode of valuing exhibits S_2 's excellence.

One of the most prominent features of MSA is that it is *substantially non-perfectionist* (or, more strongly, *substantially anti-perfectionist*) and *procedurally perfectionist*.¹⁸ This theoretical feature frees MSA from some typical shortcomings

¹⁶ This term is taken from John Gray's reformulation of Mill's partially perfectionist theory of well-being (Gray 1996: 88). I admit that procedural perfectionism is partly inspired by Mill's and Gray's works, but it is not meant to reflect Mill's and Gray's own views.

¹⁷ Darwall (1999) argues that the human good, or *eudaimonia*, consists in our activity of valuing valuable things and appreciating that value. Procedural perfectionism gains its theoretical motivation partly from such a broadly Aristotelian outlook on valuing activities, barring the important complications that it is subjectivist on well-being and is applicable to non-human subjects.

¹⁸ MSA could be seen as a combination of non-perfectionism as the first-order substantial theory and perfectionism as the second-order explanatory theory. I owe this terminology to Prinzing (2020). That said, note that procedural perfectionism in MSA not only explains, but also substantially determines, what valenced attitude is relevant to one's well-being.

of welfare-subjectivist views. A common challenge against the desire-fulfillment theory appeals to its unduly permissive nature, purportedly indicating the need for refinement. One might have irrational, ill-considered, or base desires, which (according to the objection) are irrelevant to the well-being of typical mature human beings. Notably, as to the well-being of this segment of human beings, MSA may have a similar implication to other sophisticated-attitude theories of well-being, such as life-satisfaction theories and value-fulfillment theories, given that life-satisfaction and value-fulfillment are among the most sophisticated types of valenced attitudes available to them. As long as such sophisticated-attitude theories overcome the inappropriate-desire-based objections, MSA is immune to that line of criticism.

Suppose that an intelligent person, S_3 , has a pro-attitude towards the activity of counting blades of grass (Rawls 1999, Sect. 65). Let us assume that the most sophisticated type of valenced attitude of S_3 includes “having something as a component of one’s rational plan of life.” If grass-counting is a component of S_3 ’s rational plan of life, then that activity contributes to S_3 ’s well-being even if that activity does not reflect anything objectively desirable or excellent. In contrast, we need not see grass-counting as contributing to S_3 ’s well-being just because S_3 has *some* pro-attitude towards grass-counting—e.g., S_3 is pleased with this activity—without this activity being a component of S_3 ’s rational plan of life.¹⁹ However, it is not the case that “being pleased with something” (and some other types of valenced attitude, for that matter) is inherently irrelevant to well-being. Let me highlight the following point: according to MSA, the welfare-relevant type of valenced attitude is determined by the cognitive capacity of the welfare subject at issue. That is a non-negligible difference between MSA and other sophisticated-attitude theories. To see the difference more vividly, let us assume (deviating from the original thought experiment of Rawls) that S_4 is a human toddler, whose most sophisticated type of pro-attitude is “being pleased with something.” Suppose that S_4 is beginning to learn numbers and that S_4 is now interested in counting the number of anything. Suppose, finally, that S_4 is pleased with the activity of counting blades of grass. In this case, there is nothing wrong to think that the grass-counting activity contributes to S_4 ’s well-being. That is because being pleased with something is the most sophisticated type of valenced attitude available to S_4 .

A similar point applies to adaptation. From the perspective of MSA, we should determine S ’s well-being in terms of S ’s most sophisticated type of valenced attitude, regardless of whether they are adaptive or not. That is, it is not true that adaptation as such makes any difference to the assessment of well-being (see also Baber 2007). Suppose that a subject S has an adaptive pro-attitude towards an object x , where the (adaptive) pro-attitude in question is among S ’s most sophisticated types. This is not an unrealistic situation; indeed, our innocuous desires or life plans are

¹⁹ Hedonists would disagree about this observation. Be that as it may, the argument for MSA started by assuming the theoretical motivation of sophisticated-attitude theories of well-being such as life-satisfaction theories and value-fulfillment theories. Replying to hedonists’ challenge (if any) departs from this assumption, hence going beyond the scope of this paper.

more likely than not to be adaptive, at least partly (Bruckner 2009).²⁰ In such a case, it is implausible to insist that the pro-attitude is irrelevant to S 's well-being simply because the attitude is adaptive. On the other hand, if S has an adaptive pro-attitude towards x and the (adaptive) pro-attitude in question is *not* among S 's most sophisticated types, then x is unlikely to contribute to S 's well-being. This is what happens in typically troublesome cases of adaptive preferences. However, as is mentioned above, it is not the fact that the relevant pro-attitude is adaptive that makes it irrelevant to one's well-being. In this situation, x (or the pro-attitude towards it) is irrelevant to S 's well-being because the pro-attitude in question is not among S 's most sophisticated types of valenced attitude.²¹

4 Variations of MSA

Some might object as follows; MSA is implausibly high-minded in that it completely ignores less sophisticated types of valenced attitude. For the sake of argument, let us suppose that the life-satisfaction theorists of well-being are on the right track and that "being authentically satisfied with x " is the most sophisticated type of valenced attitude available to typical mature human beings. Even in that case, as the objection goes, it might be inappropriate to *completely* ignore less sophisticated ones such as desire, psychological attachment, and pleasure (Hawkins 2010; Hooker 2015: 19–20). In the same vein, even if desiring is the most sophisticated type of valenced attitude available to children, less sophisticated ones such as psychological attachment and pleasure may have at least partial relevance to their well-being.²² As a response to this challenge, let us consider the following view.

²⁰ Mitchell (2018) introduces an interesting distinction in terminology as follows. *Adaptive* preference refers to what we usually imagine from this technical term, which is in some way detrimental or problematic. In contrast, *adapted* preference is the result of an ordinary and unproblematic process to respond to one's environment, which should be suitably respected in assessing the well-being of the relevant person. When I say that adaptation as such is not problematic in terms of welfare assessment, I have in mind the process of adaptation in the latter sense.

²¹ Nor is it because x is objectively bad as such. Some authors argue that adaptation is problematic concerning one's well-being because the target of an adaptive pro-attitude is often objectively undesirable (e.g., Nussbaum 2000). That is a substantially perfectionist view of adaptation in my terminology. Remember, however, that MSA is a theory of well-being that is subjectivist and substantially anti-perfectionist. It does not indicate what particular object is good for S independently of S 's valenced attitude. MSA admits that some cases of adaptation are problematic, but the problem lies not in the target but in the type of (adaptive) valenced attitude.

²² This worry of high-mindedness may be especially legitimate when we acknowledge we do not always have our most sophisticated attitude in everyday life. For instance, I may be capable of having long-term life satisfaction but rarely exercise such a capacity, indulging myself in fulfilling my trivial desires most of the time. However, it is implausible that I rarely have well-being, nor that my welfare level almost always equals zero.

Rank-Discounting Most-Sophisticated-Attitude View (Rank-Discounting MSA)

- (1) An object x is good for a subject S in proportion to the strength of S 's pro-attitude towards x . Within the boundary of S 's capacity, the more sophisticated the pro-attitude in question is, the larger the goodness of x for S is, other things being equal.
- (2) An object x is bad for a subject S in proportion to the strength of S 's con-attitude towards x . Within the boundary of S 's capacity, the more sophisticated the con-attitude in question is, the larger the badness of x for S is, other things being equal.

Like the original MSA, its rank-discounting version is motivated by procedural perfectionism. Indeed, assuming that perfection comes in degree so that different prudential value is ascribed to different levels of perfection (Bradford 2016 : 124–25), Rank-Discounting MSA is an ecumenical amendment of the original MSA. Again, procedural perfectionism ascribes perfectionist goodness to valuing attitudes and activities that exhibit one's excellence. A natural corollary of this view is that, say, an item supported by one's most excellent attitude is *ceteris paribus* better for her than one supported by her second most excellent attitude, which in turn is *ceteris paribus* better for her than one supported by her third most excellent attitude, and so forth.

Rank-Discounting MSA can be instantiated in various ways, depending on how to "discount" less sophisticated types of valenced attitude. As a typical illustration, consider a geometric view.²³ Let $\{A_{S1}, A_{S2}, \dots, A_{Sn}\}$ be the set of types of valenced attitude available to S . Let $A_{S[i]}$ represent the i th item in the rearrangement of that set based on the binary relation "at least as sophisticated as." That is, $A_{S[1]}$ is at least as sophisticated as $A_{S[2]}$, $A_{S[2]}$ is at least as sophisticated as $A_{S[3]}$, and so forth. Let $W(x, S)$ denote the goodness of x for S and let $A_{S[i]}(x)$ denote the strength of $A_{S[i]}$ (i.e., S 's i th most sophisticated valenced attitude) towards x . The basic idea of the geometric Rank-Discounting MSA is represented as follows,

$$W(x, S) = \alpha^{i-1} \cdot A_{S[i]}(x), \quad (1)$$

where α is a real number such that $0 < \alpha < 1$. Notably, MSA is a special case of the geometric Rank-Discounting MSA as represented in (1), since $W(x, S) = A_{S[1]}(x)$ when $i = 1$. However, MSA and its Rank-Discounting counterpart have different implications concerning less sophisticated types of valenced attitude. While MSA does not count them at all, Rank-Discounting MSA admits some relevance of less sophisticated types of valenced attitude.

Perhaps one can have two or more distinct types of valenced attitude towards a single object simultaneously. Suppose that S_5 has a pro-attitude towards x in three ways (e.g., S_5 is authentically satisfied with x , desires it, and is psychologically attached to it). Suppose, in contrast, that S_5 has a pro-attitude towards x' in only one

²³ The basic idea of the geometric Rank-Discounting MSA is inspired by geometric rank-discounting views in population ethics (Sider 1991; Blackorby et al. 2005: 134–35). There are also non-geometric variations of rank-discounting population principles. In the same way, Rank-Discounting MSA may take non-geometric forms as well.

way (e.g., S_5 is authentically satisfied with x' as much as x , but S_5 neither desires it nor is psychologically attached to it). In this case, it seems natural to hold that x is better for S_5 than x' is. Hence, the following theory, although provisional, is not unreasonable when we have n types of valenced attitude in mind.

$$W(x, S) = \sum_{i=1}^n [\alpha^{i-1} \cdot A_{S[i]}(x)] \quad (2)$$

To see an intriguing implication of (2), suppose that S_6 has a pro-attitude (A_{S1}) and a con-attitude (A_{S2}) towards x , simultaneously. Let us assume that A_{S1} and A_{S2} are equal in their strength and that A_{S1} is more sophisticated than A_{S2} . For instance, imagine that a philosopher is authentically satisfied (upon reflection) with having her draft exposed to an honest and intense discussion, but she is psychologically frustrated to get her draft criticized. She is satisfied with her career as an academic philosopher, so she by no means denies that sincere criticism is good for her, all things considered, accepting the frustration as the legitimate cost to improve her draft. However, she also believes that it would be better for her if, unrealistically, she could bypass criticism (and frustration involved) and still improve her draft as productively as through criticism. I find such an ambivalent attitude not unreasonable and suggest that (2) accounts for the situation. To the extent that S_6 has a pro-attitude (A_{S1}) towards x , it is *pro tanto* good for S_6 , whatever type the pro-attitude is. Likewise, to the extent that S_6 has a con-attitude (A_{S2}) towards x , it is *pro tanto* bad for S_6 , again, whatever type the con-attitude is. It is a matter of comparison whether (and to what extent) x is good or bad, all things considered, for S_6 . If A_{S1} is more sophisticated than A_{S2} as we have assumed, (2) will hold that x is more likely than not to be good for S_6 , all things considered and other things being equal, while conceding that x is still *pro tanto* bad for S_6 .²⁴

One might see the situation differently, however. When a philosopher is authentically satisfied upon reflection with receiving sincere criticism, is it bad for her, even *pro tanto*, to get her draft criticized? Rank-Discounting MSA replies affirmatively to this question. Some, in contrast, may answer negatively. More generally, they claim that a more sophisticated type of valenced attitude “trumps” the welfare-relevant power of the less sophisticated ones. A typical illustration goes as follows (cf. Hooker 2015: 19–20). Suppose that there are two relevantly comparable lives, L_1 and L_2 , each of which involves some degree of value-fulfillment. Suppose next that L_1 involves less amount of pleasure than L_2 . If the degree of value-fulfillment is the same between L_1 and L_2 , then a subject can be better off in L_2 than in L_1 . On the other hand, if L_1 involves more degree of value-fulfillment than L_2 , then a subject is better off in L_1 than in L_2 , no matter how much pleasure L_2 contains and no matter

²⁴ The same point holds when the relevant pro-attitude (A_{S1}) is *less* sophisticated than the relevant con-attitude (A_{S2}). For instance, one may find it detestable to hear a discriminatory joke while (accidentally) being amused by it. In such a case, according to (2), that joke is more likely than not to be bad for him, all things considered and other things being equal, while it is still *pro tanto* good for him.

how small the marginal degree of value-fulfillment in L_1 is. The basic idea behind this view can be represented as follows.

Lexical Most-Sophisticated-Attitude View (Lexical MSA)

Assume a subject S can have only two types of valenced attitude, either $A_{S[i]}$ or $A_{S[j]}$ ($i < j$), towards objects. An object x_1 is at least as good for S as another object x_2 if, and only if,

- (a) $A_{S[i]}(x_1) > A_{S[i]}(x_2)$, or
- (b) $A_{S[i]}(x_1) = A_{S[i]}(x_2)$ and $A_{S[j]}(x_1) \geq A_{S[j]}(x_2)$

Unlike the two variations discussed so far, the explanandum of Lexical MSA is the binary relation of “is at least as good for S as” instead of the unary attribute of “is good for S .” For simplicity, let us set this complication aside and assume that the essence of MSA can be recast in terms of binary relations as follows: x_1 is at least as good for S as x_2 if, and only if, $A_{S[i]}(x_1) \geq A_{S[i]}(x_2)$. (Remember that $A_{S[i]}$ denotes S 's i th sophisticated type of valenced attitude and, in particular, $A_{S[1]}$ refers to S 's most sophisticated one.) Thus, Lexical MSA is equivalent to MSA in effect when $A_{S[1]}(x_1) > A_{S[1]}(x_2)$. The two diverge when $A_{S[1]}(x_1) = A_{S[1]}(x_2)$; the original MSA finds x_1 and x_2 as equally good for S without referring to less sophisticated attitudes, whereas its lexical counterpart turns to the second and subsequent sophisticated ones until finding the “tie-breaker” between x_1 and x_2 .

Lexical MSA is also backed up by procedural perfectionism discussed above, just like original and rank-discounting variations. It also shares the degree-sensitive nature with Rank-Discounting MSA, attributing different perfectionist goodness to varying levels of sophistication. However, Lexical MSA is different from Rank-Discounting MSA about the condition under which less sophisticated types of valenced attitude are relevant to one's well-being. Suppose that S has a pro-attitude (A_{S1}) and a con-attitude (A_{S2}) towards x , simultaneously, where the two attitudes are equally strong and that A_{S1} is more sophisticated than A_{S2} . While x may well be good for S , all things considered, Rank-Discounting MSA admits that it is *pro tanto* bad for S as long as S has a con-attitude towards x .²⁵ In contrast, in Lexical MSA, more sophisticated types of valenced attitude have a *lexical* priority over the less sophisticated. Hence, x is not even *pro tanto* bad for S by virtue of A_{S2} , provided that x is the target of S 's more sophisticated types of pro-attitude (i.e., A_{S1}).

I introduced Rank-Discount and Lexical versions as more moderate variations of the original MSA. Admittedly, MSA might be over-demanding and sometimes counterintuitive because of its sole focus on one's most sophisticated type of valenced attitude. Indeed, I must confess that I am inclined to find the rank-discounting

²⁵ Relatedly, according to Rank-Discounting MSA, less sophisticated attitudes may jointly override more sophisticated ones. Suppose S has three types of valenced attitude—a con-attitude (A_{S1}), a pro-attitude (A_{S2}), and another pro-attitude (A_{S3})—towards x simultaneously, where the three attitudes are equally strong, and A_{S1} is more sophisticated than A_{S2} , which in turn is more sophisticated than A_{S3} . In Rank-Discounting MSA, represented in (2), it could be the case that the sum of the rank-discounted value of $A_{S2}(x)$ and $A_{S3}(x)$ outweighs the rank-discounted value of $A_{S1}(x)$, meaning that x is *good* for S , all things considered. An anonymous reviewer pointed out this possibility. This upshot contrasts with Lexical MSA, in which A_{S1} trumps the other two attitudes.

version more plausible than its original or lexical counterparts. For simplicity, however, the remainder of my discussion will focus on the most straightforward variation—the original MSA.

5 Neighboring Theories and Possible Critics

This section compares MSA with its neighboring theories of well-being. MSA combines several welfare-subjectivist components, so it possibly belongs to the class of subjective–subjective hybrid theories (Hawkins 2010; Woodard 2016: 169–70) or subjective list theories (Lin 2016; Heathwood 2021: 71).

“Subjective–subjective hybrid” (or “subjective list”) is the name of a *class* of theories of well-being, not that of a particular theory.²⁶ At least two specifications are in order. First, what subjectivist components are in question? This question is about the kind of pro- and con-attitudes that is relevant to well-being. Second, how should we “combine” them? To see the second question more vividly, let us assume that A_1 and A_2 are the two types of valenced attitude to be combined. A subjective–subjective *conjunctive* theory holds that x is good for S if and only if (i) S has A_1 towards x and (ii) S has A_2 towards x . Alternatively, a subjective–subjective *disjunctive* theory holds that x is good for S if and only if (i) S has A_1 towards x or (ii) S has A_2 towards x . Still alternatively, some might hold a more moderate view that x is good for S (i) to the extent that S has A_1 towards x and (ii) to the extent that S has A_2 towards x .

Some might classify MSA as a special case of subjective–subjective hybrid theory, which I would hardly dispute. However, we should carefully distinguish MSA from other variations of such a hybrid, like conjunctive or disjunctive theories. The central feature of MSA is that it answers the two questions in terms of the cognitive capacity of each welfare subject. At the outset of this paper, we saw why one’s capacity is relevant; an overarching theory of well-being, when insensitive to the difference in one’s capacity, cannot apply to a broad range of welfare subjects with diverse levels of cognitive capacity. That is, a considerably sophisticated type of valenced attitude may be beyond the scope of newborns, while a less sophisticated type of valenced attitude may be too permissive to assess the well-being of typical mature human beings. This observation also applies to subjective–subjective hybrid theories. Suppose that A_1 is more sophisticated than A_2 . Also suppose that A_1 is the most sophisticated type of valenced attitude available to typical mature human beings and A_2 is the most sophisticated one available to human newborns. Consider a subjective–subjective conjunctive theory, according to which an object x is good for a subject S if and only if S has both A_1 and A_2 towards x . Such a theory is under-inclusive in that it requires a newborn to be able to have A_1 to be faring well. Next, consider a subjective–subjective disjunctive theory, according to which x is good for S if and only if S has either A_1 or A_2 towards x . Such a theory is over-inclusive in

²⁶ Recall that “subjective–objective hybrid” is the name of a class of theories, including not only a subjective–objective conjunctive theory but also a subjective–objective *disjunctive* theory (van Weelden 2017).

that it allows as much relevance of A_2 to the well-being of a typical mature human being as that of A_1 . I conjecture that the same problem can be raised against any subjective–subjective hybrid theories without any capacity-dependent feature, *mutatis mutandis* (see also Lin 2016; 2017: p. 373).

The point applies to a complicated variation of subjective–subjective hybrid as well. Jennifer Hawkins provides a “sketch” of an interesting class of subjective–subjective hybrid theories (Hawkins 2010), which could be restated as follows: there is a threshold welfare level, θ , such that x is good for S in proportion to either (i) the strength of S 's A_1 towards x when S 's level of well-being is above θ , or (ii) the strength of S 's A_2 towards x when S 's level of well-being is at or below θ , where A_1 is considerably sophisticated and A_2 is fairly primitive. I suggest that such a theory is under-inclusive; it is implausible to assess the well-being of a newborn by A_1 , even if he is extremely happy. Moreover, if θ denotes the upper limit of the well-being of newborns (without a capacity to have A_1), that would be implausibly high-minded as an understanding of well-being. Similarly, such a theory is over-inclusive as well; it is inappropriate to assess the well-being of a typical mature human being by A_2 , even if her level of well-being is below the relevant threshold.²⁷

Indeed, Eden Lin has it that this kind of problem shows the drawback of welfare-subjectivism in general as follows:

Nearly all extant subjectivist views face a dilemma: either they have implausible implications about the welfare of newborns, or they exclude newborns from their scope but cannot plausibly explain this exclusion. (Lin 2017: 373)

Note, however, that the range of the “extant subjectivist views” Lin has in mind is quite limited. He assumes just three possibilities; judgment-based, desire-based, and value-based theories (Lin 2017: 356).²⁸ All three types of valenced attitude are highly sophisticated, about which Lin is correct. The problem is that there are other types—in particular, *less sophisticated* types—of valenced attitude as well. Although newborns might be incapable of some types of valenced attitude like judgment, they can be pleased with or psychologically attached to something.²⁹

²⁷ That said, the Hawkins-inspired subjective–subjective hybrid can be salient in some context. Consider the problem of unequal distribution of “cognitive bandwidths.” It has been widely acknowledged that people in a socially disadvantaged group often have smaller cognitive bandwidth to spare than those in a socially privileged group (Schmidt and Engelen 2020, Sect. 4). Assume that A_1 is cognitively highly demanding and A_2 is not. Suppose that S belongs to a socially disadvantaged group, making it difficult for her to deliberate or rely on long-term decision-making procedures. Let us assume that she is an intelligent person in nature, so she would have no difficulty in having A_1 if only she would have belonged to a socially privileged group. However, she cannot exercise the advanced capacity under her actual situation, so it is difficult for her to have A_1 in reality. In this case, it could be implausible to assess S 's well-being by A_1 , since that would make the level of S 's well-being extremely low or even undefined. In my conjecture, we should assess her well-being in terms of A_2 and, after the situation improves and it gets possible for her to exercise her “real” cognitive capacity, we can recourse to A_1 .

²⁸ In Lin's terminology, “valuing something involves having a favorable conative attitude toward it that is more psychologically complex than desire” (Lin 2017: 356).

²⁹ Again, it is an empirical question what kind of valenced attitude newborns can have (see note 13). His alleged dilemma would fade out if (say) newborns *do* have desires, although Lin provides some

Welfare-subjectivism, with a sufficiently broad range of attitude-types in mind, need not “have implausible implications about the welfare of newborns.”

Some might claim that pleasure and psychological attachment are kinds of *psychological state* rather than *attitude*. Hence, goes the objection, it might be a misnomer to call them valenced attitude. In response, I am happy to use “valenced psychological state” instead of “valenced attitude” (see my note 7). It is largely a terminological issue. However, there are some points worth highlighting. Let us start with a natural assumption that well-being is such a kind of value as characterized by the expression of “value *for S*.” It is important not to confuse it with “value *from the viewpoint of S*.” Having a viewpoint presupposes a decent level of cognitive capacity, which means that something can be good/bad from the viewpoint of *S* only if *S* has a considerably advanced cognitive capacity. This observation may constitute a reason not to understand well-being as a kind of value characterized by “value *from the viewpoint of S*,” given that subjects without the requisite capacity can fare well or badly.³⁰ Perhaps this is what Lin established in effect. The problem is, welfare-subjectivism is not the claim that *S*’s well-being (or something’s value *for S*) is assessed in terms of something’s value *from the viewpoint of S*. The gist of welfare-subjectivism, as I understand, is that *S*’s well-being (or something’s value *for S*) fits or resonates with *S* in the right way (Dorsey 2017a: 198–99; 2017b: 686–87; cf. Railton 1986). Whether the fit or resonance presupposes the *viewpoint of S* is a substantial question. The answer can be negative when *S* is a welfare subject without the relevant cognitive capacity, where *x* positively resonates with *S* when *S* is, say, pleased with or psychologically attached to *x*.³¹

Still, even such a tolerant view of “valenced attitude” might not convince the sceptics like Lin. He also rejects a variabilist view of well-being, according to which the well-being of a newborn is a matter of pleasure and that of a typical mature human being is a matter of value-related beliefs. His rationale for this rejection is, quite roughly, as follows. Suppose *S* is high in terms of pleasure. If hedonism is true for *S*’s well-being, the level of *S*’s well-being is high. Suppose next that *S* newly acquires the cognitive capacity to have value-related beliefs, with *S*’s hedonic status unchanged. In that case, says Lin, it is implausible that the level of *S*’s well-being must drop to zero simply because *S* acquired the capacity (Lin 2017: 360).

Footnote 29 (continued)

rationale to assume that newborns are unlikely to desire something (Lin 2017). Without delving into this issue further, I will be satisfied with the modest assumption that newborns are capable of at least *some* valenced attitude, like psychological attachment.

³⁰ T. M. Scanlon offers a similar distinction between what is “good from *S*’s point of view,” which *S* has reason to aim at, and what is “good for *S*,” which makes *S*’s life better (1998: 133). He assumes the former to be a broader notion covering the latter. However, as sketched below, something can be good for *S* without being good from *S*’s viewpoint when, for instance, *S* is a welfare subject without the capacity for having a viewpoint.

³¹ The same problem applies to Daniel Haybron’s argument (2008: Chap. 9). According to him, *S*’s well-being is a matter of *S*’s self-fulfillment (which in turn is a matter of *S*’s psychic affirmation). He contrasts this view with the claim that *S*’s well-being is assessed in terms of value *from the viewpoint of S*, which he (misleadingly) calls subjectivism.

In response, I suggest that biting some bullets is a plausible way out. To see this point, consider Charlie, a person with a profound cognitive impairment.³² Let $Charlie_n$ denote Charlie at the time t_n . Suppose that, at t_1 , Charlie's most sophisticated types of valenced attitude include "being pleased with something." In that case, we focus on what $Charlie_1$ is pleased with to assess his well-being. For instance, getting a slice of cake is good for $Charlie_1$ if he is pleased with it; being made fun of by his colleagues is bad for $Charlie_1$ if he is frustrated with it. Now suppose that Charlie underwent cognitive enhancement. As a result, Charlie's cognitive capacity at t_2 is in no way inferior to that of typical mature human beings. Suppose that $Charlie_2$'s most sophisticated types of valenced attitude include "being authentically satisfied with something." In that case, we assess his well-being in terms of his authentic satisfaction rather than his hedonic status. Perhaps the well-being of $Charlie_2$ depends on whether he keeps a good relationship with his romantic partner or whether his academic paper is published in a prestigious journal, rather than whether he has a slice of cake. It is because the authentic satisfaction of $Charlie_2$ consists in a successful romantic relationship or academic achievement, while he is merely pleased with having a slice of cake.

If we resort to the Rank-Discounting version of MSA instead of the original one, the implication would be even more plausible. Arguably, it might be an implausibly strong claim that a slice of cake makes no contribution to $Charlie_2$'s well-being; he may well like sweets. Rank-Discounting MSA does not deny this possibility, while holding that (a) other things being equal, the goodness of a slice of cake for $Charlie_2$ is smaller than the goodness of academic achievement for $Charlie_2$ is, and that (b) other things being equal, the goodness of a slice of cake for $Charlie_2$ is smaller than its goodness for $Charlie_1$.

Let us return to MSA in its original form. The relevant point mentioned above applies to when Charlie's cognitive capacity is *diminished* as opposed to enhanced.³³ Suppose that the cognitive enhancement Charlie underwent has a substantial side effect, due to which the cognitive capacity of Charlie at t_3 (i.e., $Charlie_3$) is at the same level as that of $Charlie_1$. In that case, we assess the well-being of $Charlie_3$ roughly in the same way as that of $Charlie_1$. Let us further suppose that the level of $Charlie_4$'s cognitive capacity is even lower than that of $Charlie_1$ and $Charlie_3$. Suppose that the only possible type of valenced attitude of $Charlie_4$ is "being psychologically attached to something." In that case, we will assess his well-being in terms of what he is psychologically attached to. If $Charlie_4$ can be as well-off as other Charlies with higher cognitive capacity (which I find plausible), we cannot assess the well-being of $Charlie_4$ and that of other Charlies appealing to the same type of valenced attitude.

³² Although inspired by Keyes (1966), the details are modified for argument's sake.

³³ Whatever the implication for well-being, diminishing one's capacity might be morally problematic in terms of *perfectionism as a moral theory*. We should not confuse it with *perfectionism as a welfare theory*, which is the central focus of this paper. For the question of "Perfectionism of what?" and an answer to it, see Couto (2014: Chap. 1).

In short, the level of S 's cognitive capacity is relevant to how to assess S 's well-being. To think otherwise is incompatible with the view that various subjects, whose levels of cognitive capacity vary, can be equally well off. This observation makes MSA (and, for that matter, its Rank-Discounting or Lexical variations) worthy of serious consideration. Interestingly, the gist of MSA discussed so far has a broader relevance than it may appear. Some might find it unnatural that a single theory of well-being applies to all Charlies and prefer to say that different theories apply to (say) $Charlie_1$ and $Charlie_4$. However, for such a welfare-variabilist description to be principled and well-founded, it needs to be supplemented by a further *criterion* to determine which theory of well-being applies to whom. This is where the capacity-sensitive view of well-being supported by procedural perfectionism kicks in.

6 Conclusion

This paper suggested and examined the most-sophisticated-attitude view of well-being (MSA) with its two variations. I find it one of the most plausible subjectivist theories of well-being, worth of serious consideration. The appeal of MSA is that it is sensitive to the fact that various welfare subjects have different levels of cognitive capacity, so it applies not only to typical mature human beings but also to other welfare subjects. Moreover, MSA is an invariabilist theory of well-being, providing a unified explanation of what type of valenced attitude is relevant to the well-being of a given welfare subject and why.

It is one thing that MSA is the best form of subjectivist theories of well-being; it is quite another that welfare-subjectivism is plausible at all. That said, "in arguing for subjectivism, the first step is to find the most plausible articulation of its main themes" (Dorsey 2012: 442). Thus, by illustrating MSA as a candidate theory of welfare-subjectivism, this paper effectively contributes to the argument for welfare-subjectivism itself.

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