

# Mutual Recognition and Well-Being: What Is It for Relational Selves to Thrive?

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## 1. Introduction

Love is important for the quality of human life. Not only do everyday experiences and analyses of pop culture and world literature attest to this; scientific research does as well.<sup>1</sup>

How exactly does love contribute to well-being?<sup>2</sup> This chapter discusses the suggestion that it not only matters for the experiential quality of life, or for successful agency, but that it actualizes our nature as “relational selves” (Chen, Boucher & Kraus 2011). I defend a hybrid or pluralist theory, which sees humans not only as subjects of experiences, or agents, or valuers, but also as relational selves. Expanding from love to other interpersonal

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<sup>1</sup> See e.g. Smuts 2017, who includes loving relationships among the objectively good things in life. See also Mortensen 2017 for whom an ability to sustain optimal human relations is a standard against which the good life can be measured, or Layard 2011, who finds family relationships, community and friends among the seven causes that affect our happiness the most. For the view that quality ties to others are relevant to Eudaimonia, see e.g. Ryff & Singer 2008. See Haybron 2008, Tiberius 2008, and Alexandrova 2017 for philosophical issues in contemporary psychological research on happiness; and see Wolf 2017, Helm 2017 and Gregoratto 2021 on the philosophy of love. Allardt’s 1993 distinction between loving, having, and being has had a great significance in welfare research in social policy in the Nordic countries.

<sup>2</sup> I use “well-being” and “good life” interchangeably as capturing prudential value or personal good or what is (non-instrumentally) beneficial for me or what it is for my life to go well *for me*. Section 5 addresses the question whether there is a plurality of concepts at play here, that are not interchangeable (see Campbell 2016, Kagan 1994, Kagan 2009).

relations, thriving relations of mutual recognition (love, respect, esteem, trust), contribute directly and non-reductively to our flourishing as relational selves.

The paper will start by putting forward the proposal (Section 2), and then discussing it in relation to important alternatives. The focus is on alternatives which hold that love, and other forms of mutual recognition, are important for well-being, but only indirectly.

One kind of challenge against the constitutive role of relations to others for well-being comes from the traditional theories that accommodate relations in some indirect ways (Section 3). A second kind of challenge admits that perhaps love is central to well-being in a direct way, but do we have reason to believe that other forms of mutual recognition are as well? (Section 4) Yet another kind of challenge is that love matters for the quality of lives in some other way than contributing to its *prudential* value: love is good, but is it good *for us*? (Section 5) A fourth kind of challenge concerns what we are, and the nature of “essentialism” involved in the approach stressing relational selfhood: cannot, say, motherhood contribute to one’s good life even if motherhood is contingent and not essential? (Section 6).

In debates on recognition the idea that mutual recognition is also relevant for well-being has been put forward, for example in Axel Honneth’s (1992, ch.9) “formal” theory of good life. Whatever else constitutes good life, relations of recognition form its backbone (cf. Ikäheimo 2014).<sup>3</sup> Surprisingly little however is written about mutual recognition and well-being in detail, or recognition in comparison to traditional theories of well-being. This chapter aims to fill some of that void, and at the same time defend the view that well-

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<sup>3</sup> Since J.G. Fichte (1706) and G.W.F. Hegel (1807, 1821) conceived of ‘*Anerkennung*’ between subjects as essential to what makes human animals into free and rational beings or persons (see Siep 1979; Williams 1992 and 1997; Wildt 1982; Ikäheimo 2007 and 2014), and since Charles Taylor’s *The Politics of Recognition* (1994) and Axel Honneth’s *The Struggle for Recognition* (1992, translated 1995), recognition has been claimed to be central for the existence of not only persons but also groups and institutions, and central not only for their existence, but for their central valuable qualities and aims such as self-realization, dignity, integrity, autonomy, freedom, solidarity and justice. See Ikäheimo and Laitinen (eds.) 2007, van den Brink and Owen (eds.) 2007, Schmid am Busch and Zurn (eds.) 2010, Ikäheimo and Laitinen (eds.) 2011, Laitinen and Pessi (eds.) 2015, and Lysaker and Jakobsen (eds.) 2015. I have touched upon the relevance of recognition to good life in Laitinen 2003.

being is one of the normative notions with which mutual recognition has a constitutive relationship.

## **2. The Thesis: Relations of mutual recognition constitute the thriving of relational selves**

The three traditional theories of well-being arguably each thematize a different aspect of well-being, and we learn something important from each of the theories (Crisp 2017, Fletcher, ed. 2016). *Hedonism* teaches us that the experiential quality of life matters, as we are subjects of experiences, whereas *desire-satisfaction theory* teaches us that the successful pursuit of aims matters, as we are also agents. Objectivist (or “objective list”) theories teach us that it is first and foremost pursuit of *worthwhile* aims that matters, and *worthy, non-illusory* experiences that matter.

None of them alone captures all of well-being, however. Illusory experiences are a problem for views like hedonism for which only experiential quality matters: I may feel good, because I think I am loved and respected, but in fact am not (Kagan 2009, 311-2; cf. Nozick 1974). Arguably it is better to be loved and respected than merely think that one is, at least if one wants to be loved. The other two views can account for why illusory and non-illusory experiences differ, but they seem to allow that alienated pursuits that the agent dislikes or does not enjoy make for equally good life as pursuits that the agent enjoys. Many have rightly concluded that a hybrid or pluralist theory combining several aspects is needed.<sup>4</sup> On the one hand, objective list theories help draw qualitative differences in the value of subjective experiences and pursuits. On the other hand, the focus on our experiences and pursuits helps to distinguish the prudential goodness of a life (*for* the agent or subject) from the objective goodness of a life in some more impersonal way.

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<sup>4</sup> See Woodard 2019. For a representative hybrid theory, see Kagan 2009 or Raz 2004; and Laitinen 2008b for discussion of the latter.

The novel contribution proposed in this paper is that the best hybrid or pluralist theory will cover the *relational* aspect of well-being as a further aspect on its own, *irreducible* to other aspects: to activities, experiences, or to objectively good features instantiated in our lives. The key idea is that not only loving, respecting and recognizing but *being loved, respected, and recognized*, that is, being the recipient of recognition from others, contributes directly to the quality of our lives, as we are social beings. And yet, getting recognition is not a matter of one's own agency – rather it is something that one undergoes, receives, suffers, or gets: one is a patient rather than an agent (see Ricoeur 1992, ch. 10). Being recognized and recognizing others are aspects of equal standing in relations of mutual recognition. Loving and being loved are the paradigm examples, but other forms include esteeming and being esteemed, being respected and respecting, and being trusted and trusting. In those relationships, both parties both give and get recognition from each other; and it is the passive aspect that has escaped the attention of philosophers. These relationships are intimately tied to our experiences, but the histories and structures of such relationships are not reducible to mere experiences. And finally, being in a valuable relationship oneself explains why it enriches one's own life, while also being impersonally and objectively a good thing in the universe (for anyone to promote).<sup>5</sup> All friendships and good, loving relationships may well be valuable things that even those who are not parties to them have reasons to advance, but the ones in which I am a partner have a more intimate connection to the quality of *my* life, whereas the other relationships enrich the universe, and of course the lives of the others in question.

This theory of well-being conceptualizes the nature of human agents not merely as intentional agents, or subjects of experience, or as valuers and bearers of values, but also *as relational selves*. The central thesis of this article is that love and other relations of mutual recognition actualize our natures as relational selves.

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<sup>5</sup> Those who stand in the relationship express the relationship in their actions, and they acknowledge reasons for action that are constitutive of the relationship. See Scanlon 1998, 147-188.

In contrast, existing theories of well-being tend to slide from acknowledging the importance of relationships to accommodating them merely *qua* feelings, or *qua* activities, or as preconditions or facilitators of feelings and activities, etc. These theories tend to be “atomistic”, “monadic” or “non-relational” and end up endorsing a reduced view of the importance of mutual recognition (love, esteem, respect, trust). An appeal to our natures as relational selves enables a non-reductive appreciation of these relationships: thriving relations of mutual recognition directly enrich our lives as relational selves, and thereby are directly good for us. Relations of mutual recognition constitute the thriving of relational selves.

### 3. Theories of good life

Standing in relationships of love, being loved and loving in return, is commonly considered to be central to how well one’s life goes.<sup>6</sup> The same can be true of standing in relationships of mutual esteem, mutual trust and mutual respect, and other possible forms of mutual recognition, and we will examine these below, but let us first use mutual love as a paradigm case of mutual recognition.

#### 3.1 Hedonism and the experiential quality of life

Standing in relationships of love is experientially deep, and while it comes with a mix of positive and negative situation-specific feelings, it is mainly experienced as something positive overall. In this, it is opposed to relationships of mutual contempt or hatred or one-

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<sup>6</sup> It has long been taken as established that humans thrive on social connectedness (see e.g., Baumeister & Leary 1995), and languish in its absence, and a recent study (Oravec et al. 2020) focuses especially on experiences of being loved. The extensive longitudinal Grant study (from 1938 over 75 years) focused on the lives of 268 white Harvard-educated men, and the conclusion was popularized by the lead researcher as “Happiness is Love. Full stop.” (Vaillant 2012, Stossel 2013). The role of social relationships as the most central factor in subjective well-being has also been criticized as a “myth” (Lucas et al. 2008), although the authors admit that it is important. Feminists and radical theorists are rightfully concerned about how the voices of the dominated are heard in the accounts of the importance of love or social relationships in good life and uncritical “amatonormativity” (e.g. Brake 2012, Gregoratto 2018). Indeed, there is blindness to structures of domination in Vaillant’s comment that in the Grant study “The homogeneity was wonderful for the study of more biologic aspects of human beings.” (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation 2009). That the Harvard-educated group shares the same elite position does not remove the effects of that elite position, and that the effects of biology-plus-position may vary with positions should go without saying.

sided envy, which are experienced as negative, while occasionally giving rise to positive situation-specific emotions. One kind of contribution that being loved and loving makes to one's life is thus via its experiential quality. I will preserve the term *happiness* for the experiential, felt quality of life, but I do not assume that it is all there is to good life.

*Hedonism* about well-being and good life is the view that experiential, felt quality of life is the sole determinant of what it is for a life to go well for oneself (Feldman 2004, Crisp 2006). It comes with its well-known pros and cons, but if one for independent reasons supports hedonism, one can account for the role of love in good life by an appeal to the way in which love contributes to the felt quality of life. Hedonism is a very controversial theory however, and one can accept that love tends to contribute to the felt quality of life without accepting hedonism (Crisp 2017, Shafer-Landau 2017)

The first of the three main problems that I discuss here concerns classical hedonism as a sum of pleasures and pains. That view is not rich enough. A richer view would turn from a sum of atomic hedonic experiences (pleasure and pain) to a richer view of happiness. What constitutes happiness is the experiential quality of life on the whole, including the sense of meaning, the sense of being loved, and the appreciation of higher pleasures: poetry, not push-pin (see Mill 1863, Kauppinen 2013). The second problem is in the reductive nature of hedonism. It focuses on the subjective sense of achievement, not achievement itself, and a subjective sense of meaning, not meaningfulness of life itself and on the felt aspects of relationships, not relationships themselves. This raises the question of whether non-experiential aspects of life might also matter. Further, one may ask: do illusory and unfitting experiences really constitute good life? This worry is expressed in Nozick's (1974) famous thought-experiment of an experience machine, in the question of whether drugged sensations are as good as undrugged, and whether illusory or immoral pleasures count with the same weight as non-illusory and appropriate experiences.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Nozick 1974, 42-45; Mill 1863; Crisp 2017; for the drugged experience case I thank Antti Kilpijärvi.

Even though few defend orthodox hedonism, defenders of hybrid or pluralist theories especially can take on board a central lesson: felt happiness is the intrinsic good of our lives *as subjects of experience*.<sup>8</sup>

### 3.2 *Desire-satisfaction theories and valuing*

The lesson from Nozick's experience machine thought experiment is that what really matters is *that my aims are satisfied*, not merely that I illusorily think they are satisfied. Compare for example winning Wimbledon versus it merely seeming to oneself that one has won. Appreciating this difference has led to desire-satisfaction theories of well-being (Heathwood 2006, Nozick 1974, 42-45).

Many people want to be loved, and love itself may come with some desires, such as desire that things go well for the loved ones, desire to spend time with them, desire to share the intimate aspects of one's life with them<sup>9</sup>. Love is thus closely connected to our deepest desires and aims, and to the fulfilment of desires and goals. This is another kind of contribution that loving and being loved makes to our lives. *Desire- or goal-satisfaction theories* of good life hold that desire- or goal-satisfaction is the sole determinant of what it is for a life to go well for oneself. This view comes with its well-known pros and cons as well, but if one for independent reasons supports the goal-satisfaction theory, one can account for the role of love in good life by an appeal to the way in which love contributes to the satisfaction of one's goals.

Again, three major concerns with this view can be mentioned. First of all, it ignores qualitative distinctions between aims. Some aims are more valuable and meaningful than others. In Charles Taylor's words we are not mere "simple weighers of alternatives" but "strong evaluators" (Taylor 1985; Laitinen 2008a). So perhaps what matters to our well-

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<sup>8</sup> Kauppinen 2012, 372. "We are both active agents and passive subjects of experience. Meaningfulness, I claim, is the final good of agents, and happiness the good of experiencers"

<sup>9</sup> On love and desires, see Helm 2017.

being is not success in one's aims indeterminately, but success in the *valuable, worthwhile activities* in one's life (Raz 2004). That point reinforces the importance of objective distinctions in value, which "objective list theories" emphasize. A second worry concerns felt alienation from the aims that one nonetheless pursues (e.g., thanks to social pressures). So perhaps what matters is not merely success in (worthwhile) aims but more precisely, success in *wholeheartedly pursued* (worthwhile) activities in one's life (Raz 2004). This point reinforces the importance of the experiential aspect of our lives, which hedonism has pioneered in stressing. Further, should action-desires (aims) be distinguished from non-action-desires (Mele 2003, 18 and *passim*)? We have aims and intentions that guide our own actions, but we also have desires and wishes about, for example, world peace or biodiversity, which are beyond our individual control. Perhaps then there are two distinct ways of how satisfaction of desires may contribute to good life? The former is captured by the standard aim-satisfaction theory, while the latter may point to the importance of what we care about, or value (Frankfurt 1988; Watson 1975; Taylor 1985a, 15-44).

Thus, there are two possible lessons for hybrid theories of well-being: the more straightforward one is that we are agents, and so success in (worthwhile, wholehearted) *activities* is constitutive of good life (e.g. Raz 2004). The aim-satisfaction theories seem to capture and focus on one's good life *as an agent* (cf. Kauppinen 2012, 372).<sup>10</sup>

The second point is less standard. That is the point that we are evaluators or "carers" in the broad sense of being concerned or caring about issues, while not necessarily caregivers in a narrow sense (Taylor 1985a, Frankfurt 1988). That raises the question of whether the satisfaction of one's (worthy) non-agentive concerns and desires directly constitutes one's well-being, and indeed whether anything else does. Harry Frankfurt's polemical thesis is that one's fate is tied to what one cares about – one is first and foremost

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<sup>10</sup> Alienated or worthless goals do not necessarily contribute even to this aspect of well-being. Thus experiential quality may play a double role: it is itself an aspect of good life (as subjects of experience), and it may be a necessary feature in agential good life. (Cf. Heathwood 2006 who argues that the best versions of desire-satisfactionism and hedonism coincide.)



a carer. My life goes well, when those (valuable) things prosper that I care about. Love or care, on this view, is a tie that links me to other things to my life.

If I desire world peace, and there is war, does the non-satisfaction of my desire directly lower the quality of my life (independently of its felt quality, or even knowledge about it)? Analogously, if I deeply care about someone, and their life goes badly, does it adversely affect my life (independently of whether I know about that, and independently of how I feel – which is already captured by the experiential quality of my life)? Or if I am being cheated on by my partner, unbeknownst to me, does it affect my life? Possibly the answer to all of the above is affirmative. The suggestion can then be made that if the world satisfies (and does not frustrate) one's central non-agential evaluative concerns, this directly constitutes one's intrinsically good life *as a carer*: when such-and-such is making progress, it makes sense to say that things are going well, and looking bright, for someone who cares about such-and-such.<sup>11</sup> Thus a hybrid theory, which distinguishes between being an agent and being a carer, can build both these aspects to a theory of well-being. Alternatively, this aspect of caring can be reduced to the experiential and agential (and relational, see below) aspects of life, in which case worldly satisfaction of central concerns figure in the quality of one's life only when they figure in one's agential aims or make one happy.

My agential aims and non-agential concerns (say, my finding a cure for cancer) can in principle be realized without me knowing (and one may want to add a constraint that they do affect one's well-being unless there is suitable epistemic access to them). Some *worldly facts* can then constitute or facilitate my well-being because they satisfy my agential aims, or non-agential desires etc.<sup>12</sup> Despite acknowledging the reality principle in this way, this

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<sup>11</sup> Again, an objectivist proviso can be added: to the extent that the loved thing is worth loving. Cf. Hurka 2003 on the view that loving what is intrinsically good is intrinsically good.

<sup>12</sup> Can worldly facts then be constitutive aspects of my life? What sort of things, ontologically, can constitute "my life"? On this view, it is the desiring and pursuing that is part of my life, and the facts merely function in the role of a "realizer of a desire". Cf. Kagan 1994 on the distinction between me and my life.

is still a subjectivist view: what matters for my well-being is up to my subjective desires or aims. By contrast, the “objective list” theories start from non-subjective starting points.

### *3.3 Objective list theories*

The third standard group of theories of well-being or good life is formed by objectivistic theories, which focus on what is desirable, rather than what is desired.<sup>13</sup> If anything is valuable or desirable, arguably love is; it is among the less controversial candidates. So one way in which love can contribute to one’s good life is that the presence of love in one’s life is a paradigm case of there directly being something good, something of value, something desirable in one’s life. The so-called “objective list” theories also come with their well-known pros and cons, but they can account for the direct contribution that love makes to one’s life going well by pointing to the intrinsic, objective desirability of love as a final, non-instrumental value.

One main question is that even if one accepts that there are objectively good, desirable things, whose value is not contingent on them being desired, should we not distinguish between one’s life being good in the impersonal sense of containing a lot of value, and being good for oneself, prudentially? One appealing strategy is to say that the “life-goods” that make a life good are worth pursuing in themselves, but that good life is good over and above that, both “for me” and as such.<sup>14</sup> We will look at that more closely in subsection 3.4 below.

Another question to the classical objective list theory, i.e. holding that life is good if it contains intrinsically good things, is whether that is sufficient. What if one feels alienated, and cannot enjoy the presence of these as such worthwhile things? It may be that a hybrid theory is needed that sees both as necessary: having any old worthwhile things take place

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<sup>13</sup> E.g. Griffin 1986 and Finnis 2011 defend different objective lists.

<sup>14</sup> On life-goods, see Taylor 1989 and Laitinen 2008a.

in one's life is not sufficient (say, that social equality is increased because one does not get a place at a university, but someone from an underrepresented group does; and one does not happen to care about social equality), but only worthwhile *pleasures* and *success* in worthwhile *activities* and *satisfaction* of worthwhile *concerns* is constitutive of well-being.

Are there any other ways in which objective worthwhileness contributes to one's life? Do intrinsically good things in life feature in one's life only *as experiences*, *as pursuit of activities* or *as objects of non-agential concern*?<sup>15</sup> Instantiating valuable, praiseworthy features (such as a virtuous character) or possessing capabilities seem to go beyond these – do they contribute to good life?

On most views, capabilities (including health and need-satisfaction) seem to be merely *preconditions*, not constituents of good life.<sup>16</sup> However, a certain type of perfectionist essentialism can hold that developing capabilities and acquiring skills is in itself valuable (they are not mere preconditions to their valuable exercise). The developed capabilities can be seen as achievements, as actualizing human potentials that humans are objectively "meant" to actualize, given their nature (say, learning to walk upright and to speak some language). There may be a problem with the status expressed by the phrase "meant to actualize": what exactly is being stated here? Presumably the claim is that certain capabilities are constitutive of the very form of life of that animal or agent, and therefore possessing and perfecting those capabilities is central to the good life of members of that species.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> A closely related notion is that of *meaningfulness* (Wolf 2010, Kauppinen 2016). A further way, then, in which love might contribute to good life is via *making life meaningful*. It is again a commonly held view, for good reason no doubt, that loving relationships are at the core of meaningful life. Aristotle (2000 [c.350B.C.E]) famously asked what all the world's riches would be worth without friends. The debate on the relationship between meaningful life and good life is not yet very mature; Raz 2010 has pointed out that Wolf's definition of meaning in life is more or less the same as Raz's (2004) definition of good life, combining subjective elements, worthwhileness and success; but Raz holds that success might be less relevant for meaningfulness.

<sup>16</sup> On capabilities, see Nussbaum 2016; on being alive as a mere precondition, see Raz 2004.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Finnis 2011, Nussbaum & Sen (eds.) 1993. One option is to make a conceptual distinction between well-being of a person (as a particular entity) and the goodness of the life (as a process), along the lines of Kagan

Virtues are another candidate.<sup>18</sup> Aristotle (2000 [c.350B.C.E]) held that virtues are worth pursuing both for their own sake, and because of their contribution to *Eudaimonia* or good life. That is, while virtues are good in themselves and worth pursuing, they also contribute to the goodness of one's life. Section 5 below will address the worry that this may however not be *prudential* goodness of life, but may be for example moral goodness.

### 3.4 Hybrid theories of good life

Above we have already encountered hybrid theories as attempts to combine the best parts of all theories, while escaping their downsides or one-sidedness. Joseph Raz (2004) has put forward a theory where good life consists of a) wholehearted and b) successful c) pursuit of d) worthwhile aims. It is an attempt to combine three of the best-known theories in ways already outlined above. In addition to these, possibly e) valued (and worthwhile) worldly events, and f) having further good things (such as capabilities and virtues) in one's life constitutes well-being. Importantly for our topic, love and other mutual relationships can be relevant to several of these, but the thesis of this article suggests that relationships may constitute a separate, irreducible layer that directly partly constitutes our well-being or good life. Adding a further aspect to a hybrid theory is conceptually easier, as the theory's basic nature as a hybrid theory remains the same.

One way to defend a pluralist, or hybrid, theory is by appeal to the plural aspects of human existence: only a pluralist hybrid theory can remain true to the different central human aspects. The hedonist appeal to the experiential quality of life and Raz's appeal to wholeheartedness reflect the fact that we are *subjects of experience*. Desire-satisfaction theories and Raz's appeal to successful pursuits reflect the fact that we are also *agents*. Kauppinen (2012, 372) has defended such a dual view of good life, appealing to both of

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1994, and hold that well-being consists in having the capabilities, in having one's needs satisfied, and being in good condition, whereas good life then consists in the functionings and actualizations of the capabilities.

<sup>18</sup> They, too, are features of a person rather than that person's life.

these. But arguably there are further aspects to our existence: as discussed above, we are also *valuers* and our fates as valuers are tied to how well things go for the things we care about. The wager in this chapter is to extend this further to our nature as *relational selves*: taking part in good relationships, as givers and receivers, amounts to our thriving as relational selves. Whatever other indirect mechanisms there are via which relationships contribute to the quality of our lives (as agents, subject of experience, or valuers), the suggestion is that standing in (successful, worthwhile, wholehearted) relationships *is* what it is to be a (successful, admirable, wholehearted) relational self. By contrast, objective worthwhileness does not constitute a separate dimension, but it poses the demand that in any of the dimensions, objectively worthwhile features make a (greater) contribution to the quality of one's life.

#### 4. The importance of relationships

##### 4.1. Do relationships reduce to activities?

Do relationships reduce to activities? Often an imperceptible slide takes place in the literature. For example, what is first discussed as "goals and relationships" is soon understood as "activities" by Joseph Raz (2004, 269, 274). Theories stressing agency stress the active aspect (me doing my share) in relationships, but what about the passive aspect that is in the hands of others? Cannot it also directly constitute well-being? Cannot *being loved* be relevant and not merely *loving*?

Similarly, Kauppinen (2012; 2013) defends a dual theory where pursuit of valuable aims (as agents) and happiness (as passive subjects of experience) matter. He also slides from "activities and relationships" to efforts, and to a pursuit of objectively valuable activities and projects:

It borders on the trivial to say that for most of us the deepest satisfaction we have felt in our lives is associated with meaningful *activities and relationships*. Conversely, in

our darkest hours life seems pointless or shallow and our best *efforts* seem to lead nowhere (Kauppinen 2013, 161).

*The Teleological View of Meaningfulness: S's life is meaningful to the degree it is defined by identity-shaping engagement in challenging projects that build on the past in successful pursuit of something objectively valuable.* (Kauppinen 2013, 168)

Because it takes two to have a relationship, and because both are active *and* passive, it makes sense to drive a wedge between relationships and activities. My activities are in a sense only one side of the coin of one half of the relationship (alongside your activities, and my and your passive episodes). Joseph Raz (1999, ch. 1) defends the view that we are ourselves when we are active, but that view seems to be based on focusing only on carefully selected cases where that may well be the case.<sup>19</sup> Further, in compulsive behavior or in some mental disorders when we experience having alien thoughts in our mind it may well be the case that passivity and alienness go together. But if one's paradigm examples are relationships, it becomes more obvious that we are ourselves also as recipients and not merely agents. Relationships may add to the meaning or quality of our lives and be very central to ourselves – far from being alien.<sup>20</sup>

#### **4.2 *The highest good as relational selves: relationships***

The view put forward here is that just as successful pursuits in worthwhile ends are our highest good as agents, and happiness our highest good as subjects of experience, there is something else that constitutes our highest good *as relational selves*: relationships of love, mutual esteem, mutual respect, and mutual trust.

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<sup>19</sup> Raz (2004, 274) distinguishes cases in which a person is passive (being photographed in secret; passing out drunk and keeping a fire-door shut) from cases in which a person is active (making art of a photographic self-portrait, saving lives intentionally by keeping a fire-door shut), and explains: "She is active in the episodes of the second list, while passive in those of the first. That difference explains why neither episode in the first list can be good for her, whereas those in the second list can be. Episodes in which we are passive, as well as ones in which we do not feature at all, can be good for us only indirectly, through their contribution to another valuable aspect of our activities. Only active episodes can be directly good for us."

<sup>20</sup> See Paul Ricoeur (1992, ch.10) on how selfhood, otherness, activity and passivity can be related.

Here, theories of recognition will be relevant: *relationships* of mutual recognition do not reduce to experiences, activities and concerns. Mutual recognition is constitutive of our lives *qua* relational selves: being loved, being esteemed and being respected can be directly constitutive of good human life, *over and above* the instrumental effects on our health, capabilities, or agency, and *over and above* contributing to our happiness and success as agents and carers. We are not only agents, we are also patients, and we are relational selves in ways that combine activity and passivity.<sup>21</sup>

By contrast, loving, holding in esteem and respecting others can perhaps be reduced to other aspects, and there is no reason to double-count their significance for well-being, unless they have a double significance. But arguably they do have double significance. As activities, they are on a par with the pursuit of other worthwhile aims. But as relationship-constituting activities, they contribute to a subclass of their own. They matter not merely as activities, but as aspects of relationships: they contribute to a good life in two ways.

Here the same move is available, as discussed in the context of capabilities above. The constitutive role of these can be given an essentialist or perfectionist backing: human persons "are meant to", by their nature, to stand in these relations of recognition.<sup>22</sup>

Whatever else happens in human life, one irreducible aspect of (self-)evaluation can concern thriving in relationships, when one is wondering how well one's life is going, for oneself.

#### ***4.3 Does this generalize from love to esteem, respect and trust?***

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<sup>21</sup> This is also a case of being connected to something larger than one's own life. A dyadic interpersonal relationship, membership in a larger community or a political state, having a place in a tradition or history, feeling at home in the universe are all forms of belonging. There are many ways to account for how these relationships contribute to one's good life, basically via the conceptual distinction between something being good for me, good for you, and good for us.

<sup>22</sup> cf. Ikäheimo 2011 on the kind of normative essentialism at stake.

One possible objection is that all that is fine concerning love, but what about other forms of mutual recognition. Do they have a similar place in theories of well-being?

The most important point is that once relationships pose no conceptual or constitutive challenges to theories of well-being, no major theoretical challenges come with either including or excluding other forms of mutual recognition: they can be had at the same theoretical cost as it were. It is a substantive question whether, on reflection and after careful research, they are also found to be important for the quality of life. No doubt, in pop culture, there are fewer songs about mutual respect, esteem or trust, (or self-respect, self-esteem or self-confidence that go with them), but the hypothesis is credible that they also are irreducibly relevant for well-being.

Given the importance of mutual respect, and the importance of distinguishing relationships of esteem from both love and respect, and of distinguishing forward-looking trust from backward-looking esteem, there is a *prima facie* case for claiming that these forms of mutual recognition play structurally similar roles for well-being as that played by mutual love.<sup>23</sup>

#### ***4.4 What about vertical relationships?***

Recognition can encompass not only horizontal or interpersonal relations but also vertical, institutional relations.<sup>24</sup> An additional aspect of “relational selfhood” comes with belonging to larger communities. It consists in belonging, being included, taking part in communal life, being recognized by social, institutional, or political groups as a member in

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<sup>23</sup> Esteem is a backward-looking and trust is a forward-looking attitude covering the same field. One can be esteemed for a job well done, and one can be trusted with a job, expecting it will be done well.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Siep, Ikäheimo 2014, cf. Ricoeur 1992 on the ethical aim of living a good life *with and for others, under just institutions*.



good standing, for example a citizen.<sup>25</sup> If we are social and political animals, having this aspect integrated in one's life is to live a fuller human life (Smith 2002, Taylor 1985b). Citizenship may have instrumental value to health, capabilities or to virtue; it may enable worthwhile pursuit of activities or rich experiential life – but is it directly constitutive of well-being or good life? It is directly constitutive of social freedom (Honneth) or one's standing as a co-authority (Ikäheimo) perhaps, but what about well-being?

Again, the hypothesis poses no conceptual hurdles for a hybrid theory incorporating our nature as relational selves, so it can be left for substantive debate. Nothing in principle prevents vertical relationships from entering the picture, but when the debate is had, there may be reasons for and against having vertical relationships directly constitute one's well-being. This chapter rests content with showing that there is conceptual room for it, and that the hypothesis is meaningful.

#### *4.5 Summing up*

One way to sum up the hybrid theory of well-being towards which this paper is moving is to see it as having several aspects:

(1) As subjects of experience, the central prudentially good thing of human beings consists in the experiential quality of life, that is (non-illusory, worthy) happiness.

(2a) As agents, our thriving consists in successful and wholehearted pursuit of worthwhile goals.

And (2b) as carers or valuers, our flourishing is tied to the world satisfying our (worthy) non-agential concerns and valuations.

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. Hegel's 1821, §153: "When a father asked him for advice about the best way of educating his son in ethical matters, a Pythagorean replied: 'Make him the citizen of a state with good laws.' (This saying has also been attributed to others.)".

There may possibly be (3a) other objectively valuable features in our lives, e.g. possessing capabilities that as such realize our potentials, or possessing virtues or other valuable features.

The central phenomenon that the hybrid theory can accommodate (3b) concerns our flourishing as relational selves: the horizontal relationships of mutual love, esteem, respect, trust, or mutual recognition for short.

And possibly (3c) relationships of vertical, institutional or communal standing add to our flourishing as relational selves and social and political animals.

## **5. Prudential goodness**

Let us now turn to a challenge: that even though love and other forms of mutual recognition are valuable, their goodness is not prudential goodness; they are perhaps good things in themselves, but not good *for us*. A standard pattern of history of ethics holds that in ancient theories, ethics and morality were conceived of as lessons in how to live well. Good life, *eudaimonia*, was the aim of ethical instruction, and so moral goodness was automatically also prudential goodness. Over time, a tension has been more and more apparent between what is good for me, prudentially, and what is good for others or good impartially or morally. By the time of Sidgwick (1907), it made sense to defend a strict dualism of incomparable points of view: what is good for me is one thing, and what is good or right morally or impartially is another thing altogether. Let us take a closer look at prudential goodness to assess whether love and mutual recognition in general could credibly be a direct constituent of it, as the thesis of this chapter states.

### ***5.1 Prudentially good lives vs good lives in other ways***

In contemporary debates on well-being, something being good for me “prudentially” has been cashed out as being good *for me*.

The most popular method for clarifying the topic of well-being is to highlight a range of associated terms and phrases. Well-being is often discussed under the heading of *welfare, self-interest, one’s interests, one’s advantage, one’s good, prudential value, quality of life, flourishing, or the good life*. Things that make a positive contribution to your level of well-being are things that are *good for you, benefit you, have prudential value for you, and make you better off*. Things that have a negative impact on your well-being are *bad for you, harm you, have prudential disvalue for you, and make you worse off*. Your well-being is a matter of *how well you are doing, how well things are going for you, or how well your life is going for you*. It is what you attend to when asking yourself ‘What’s in it for *me*?’ (Campbell 2016, 401)

G. H. von Wright (1963) distinguishes helpfully between “one’s good” (one’s well-being, good life) and what causally contributes to one’s good (i.e. what is beneficial for or “good for” someone). Eating wholesome food is good for you in that it contributes to your health, and being in good health enables you to act successfully and feel good, and these in turn may constitute your “good” (and the different substantial theories debate about what exactly is it that constitutes your good: hedonic states, success in one’s aims, desirable features etc.).<sup>26</sup>

What is good for me must be distinguished from what is good simpliciter: what is desirable and what makes the world better. Two people can agree that biodiversity is good in itself, and disagree on whether it is (prudentially) good for me, or for anyone for that matter. It is fully consistent to think that other things equal, a more biodiverse world is better (it ranks higher in terms of a genuine valuable feature) even when it is not better for any individual’s well-being. But it is also fully consistent (albeit more reductive) to think that the only thing that matters is individuals’ well-being, but to the extent a more biodiverse world facilitates or partly constitutes individuals’ well-being, it has indirect significance. If we non-reductively allow that there are various goods other than individuals’ well-being, we can end up with a view that these goods constitute several

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<sup>26</sup> One must of course further distinguish what is good “according to me” (what I value as it were) and what is good “for me, for my life, for me as the beneficiary” (what benefits me).

classes. In that case, we can think of individual human lives as instantiating several of these goods.

Stephen M. Campbell (2016) writes that a prudentially good life can be distinguished from other types of “good lives” such as:

*an impersonally good life*: a life that directly or indirectly contributes much good *simpliciter* to the world; *a morally good life*: a life that exemplifies moral virtue and behavior;

*a spiritually good life*: a life in accordance with a religious ideal or in which one achieves deep connection with a spiritual reality; *an aesthetically good life*: a life of artistic achievement or aesthetic appreciation;

*a perfectionistically good life*: a life in which one successfully develops or perfects one’s nature; *an admirable life*: a life in which one merits admiration;

*a choiceworthy life*: a life that is worth choosing or aiming to have. (Campbell 2016, 403).

Rival theories will disagree on whether some of these are reducible to some others, and how the different categories are related: for example *admirable lives* might be ones which are impersonally good lives thanks to the agent’s virtuous efforts, and morally good lives might always be admirable lives and so on. The question that this chapter is pursuing is not merely whether relationships of mutual recognition can make the lives in question better, but whether they make them *prudentially* better. This can be done in two steps: first by delineating what a life rich in “recognitional goods” would be (so that whatever counts as well-being, there is the recognitional way of assessing a life) (5.2), and second, whether that could count as an aspect of well-being (5.3).

## 5.2 *Recognitional goods*

The goods inherent in relations of mutual recognition could be introduced as “recognitional goods”, to be added to the list of kinds of goods. One way to approach them would be to say that loving, esteeming, trusting and respecting are appropriate responses to love-worthy, esteem-worthy, trust-worthy and respect-worthy features that

persons instantiate. Those features would be “recognitionally significant features”, which do make recognition fitting, but are not in themselves yet recognitional goods. By contrast, the appropriate responses by others (love, respect, trust, esteem) can be conceived as recognitional goods proper. The distribution of such recognitional goods can be approached as a question of recognitional justice (Walzer 1983, Laitinen 2014).

These goods can figure in one’s life in two ways: When A respects B, this figures in the life of B *qua* B “being respected”, and in the life of A *qua* A “respecting”. It is natural to see B as receiving a “good” but it is equally natural to think of A as engaging in a valuable activity. That there is a valuable relationship between A and B figures in both the lives of A and B, but also in the world more broadly. That there is, say, a friendship between A and B can be impersonally good: it can be a valuable thing that everyone has reasons to promote. But for A and B the value is different – and they have reasons to express the relationship in their conduct; the relationship reshapes their normative situations (Scanlon 1998).

So, we can distinguish lives that are rich in terms of goods of relationships: a person with loving relationships with their near and dear, with generally good relationships of mutual esteem unhindered by low self-esteem or by bad fortune, and good relationships of mutual respect is leading a rich or full life in terms of relationships of mutual recognition. That person’s life is a rich or a full life relationwise, just like some other peoples’ lives may be rich in the categories distinguished by Campbell (impersonally, morally, aesthetically etc.), and yet there may be differences in how good these people’s lives are *for them, prudentially*.

### ***5.3 How does the proposed view fare as a theory of well-being?***

So should we distinguish, after all, the goodness of someone’s life prudentially from the goodness of their lives as relational selves? Hedonists certainly would say so, and argue

that the prudential goodness of one's life is to be cashed out in terms of its experiential qualities (and so love and other relationships would figure as experiences, or as preconditions of experiences), desire-satisfaction theorists would also say so, and argue that the prudential goodness of one's life is to be cashed out in success in the pursuit of one's central aims (which may include the "agential" aspects of relationships, but not directly the aspect of receiving: being loved, esteemed and respected). The objective list-theorists would accommodate the value of relationships alongside other valuable features (ranging from beauty to capabilities and virtues), but they face a challenge: even if we admit in a hybrid way worthwhileness and desirability as a necessary features of experiences and aims if those are to count as contributing to well-being, are there any reasons to think that the other ways of instantiating value in one's life (e.g. beauty, capabilities, virtue, or relationships of mutual recognition) are prudentially good, good for me, or a matter of my thriving, as opposed to good in more impersonal, moral or recognitional manner that I just happen to instantiate? What's in it *for me*?

And here, the appeal to relational selfhood becomes relevant. Just as happiness is the highest good of us *as subjects of experience*, and success in the pursuit of worthwhile goals is the highest good of us *as intentional agents*, thriving or flourishing *as relational selves* takes the form of rich relations of love, esteem, trust and respect; that is, relationships of mutual recognition.<sup>27</sup> Thus, the relational features (me-in-a-relationship) are equally aspects of me as me-as-an-agent or me-as-a-subject-of-experiences.

This suggestion has a perfectionist undertone: we are social animals, or social beings, or relational selves, the fulfillment of whose nature requires horizontal relationships of love, esteem and respect, and possibly vertical, political relationships as well. These fulfilments

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<sup>27</sup> The same perfectionist strategy could be applied to ourselves *as valuers*, as possessors of *capabilities* (which already can count as actualizing personhood, as opposed to the particular functionings, which go on to constitute one's particular identity), and as socio-political animals whose nature is to be *members of socio-political communities* characterized by vertical relations of recognition.

or actualizations can come in degrees, and so our lives can go better or worse from the viewpoint of our nature as relational selves or social beings.

## **6. Are we essentially relational selves?**

The final challenge that we can briefly take up tackles precisely that assumption: should we have essentialist-perfectionist readings of these aspects of ourselves?

On at least one metaphysical reading of “essential”, if we are essentially something, we cease to exist when we lose that feature. If a human person can cease to be a student, and yet remain in existence, then that person is not essentially a student. Also, someone can remain the same person after becoming a mother. Being a mother can be central (and so “essential” in an evaluative sense) for someone, and yet not provide conditions for numerical identity. Is it not hopeless to think that human beings are essentially not only agents and subjects of experience, but also relational selves, because a human being can live as a hermit, or have a condition which prevents flourishing as a relational self while not preventing agency or subjecthood? And is it not unnecessary and irrelevant anyway, because as the example of motherhood shows, something can be central to one’s happiness and well-being, and thus “essential” in an evaluative sense, without being essential in the metaphysical sense?

To answer these questions, one may first note that humans can also stay alive in a vegetative state, where they are not subjects of experience, or their agency can be paralyzed in a state where it may be hard for others to know whether the person remains a sentient subject of experience. So a similar challenge concerns the aspects of agency and subjecthood, not merely relational selfhood. Thus, if it turns out that we are essentially living organisms, but not agents, subjects, or relational selves, then the “irrelevance point” above can come handy: metaphysical essentialism can be separated from evaluative essentialism or significance for well-being.

But, further, the counter-examples do not suffice to show that subjectivity, agency or recognitive relationships are not metaphysically essential. They can be inescapable dimensions in human existence, and one can realize them more or less fully. Even the hermit is a relational self, has the intentional intersubjective structures at play – it is just that no-one else is plugged in, and the hermit is as it were permanently “between relationships”.<sup>28</sup>

## 7. Conclusion

This chapter has defended the view that love is important for human lives not only indirectly via its contributions to our experiences or successful pursuits, but directly. Love and other forms of mutual recognition are directly constitutive of the well-being or flourishing of those who stand in such relationships. That such relationships are not merely valuable aspects of the universe, but good *for us*, can be appreciated by focusing on our nature as not merely agents, subjects, or valuers, or as relational selves.

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<sup>28</sup> See Ikäheimo 2011 for gradual realizations. Or in another metaphor, one can measure the value in some dimension (say, loudness of sounds), but the value can be zero: it does not show that the dimension is not there.



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