

A Framework for Understanding Parental Well-Being

Abstract: Is being a parent prudentially good for one – that is to say, does it enhance one’s well-being? The social-scientific literature is curiously divided when it comes to this question. While some studies suggest that being a parent *decreases* most people’s well-being, other studies suggest that being a parent *increases* most people’s well-being. In this paper I will present a framework for thinking about the prudential benefits and costs of parenthood. Four elements are central to this framework: (a) affect, (b) friendship (i.e., deep personal relationships), (c) accomplishment, and (d) perspective. In presenting this framework I have two main goals. One is to help us to gain some insight into why the social-scientific literature regarding parental well-being is divided in the way that it is, and the other is to provide those who are deciding whether to become parents with a helpful way of thinking through what is prudentially at stake.

1. Introduction

Though there are a number of important moral considerations that should be considered when one is deciding whether to have children, I will, for the sake of simplicity, bracket morality in this paper and focus solely on the question of whether being a parent is prudentially good for one. This question is one that social scientists have been grappling with lately, but the answers that they have offered have cut in different directions. Indeed, while some studies suggest that being a parent *decreases* most people’s well-being (for summaries of these studies, see Powdthavee 2009 and Gilbert 2005, 242-245), other studies suggest that being a parent *increases* most people’s well-being (e.g., see Nelson, Kushlev, English, Dunn, and Lyubomirsky 2013 and White and Dolan 2009). In this paper I will present a framework – call it *the parental well-being framework* – for thinking about the prudential benefits and costs of parenthood. This framework contains four central elements: (a) affect, (b) friendship (i.e., deep personal relationships), (c)

accomplishment, and (d) perspective. I have two main goals in presenting this framework. The first is to improve our understanding of why the social-scientific literature regarding parental well-being is divided in the way that it is, and the second is to provide those who are deciding whether to become parents with a helpful way of thinking through what is prudentially at stake.

I will proceed as follows. In section 2, I will make some brief terminological points (e.g., about “well-being” and “life-satisfaction”). Then I will discuss some of the social-scientific studies that have focused on parental well-being (section 3), present the parental well-being framework (section 4), consider two objections to this framework (section 5), and shed some light on why the social-scientific literature regarding parental well-being is divided in the way that it is (section 6). I will end by discussing how someone who is deciding whether to become a parent might effectively think through the prudential considerations that are at stake (section 7).

One stylistic note: I have three daughters, ages sixteen, five, and two; and some of what I will say in this paper is anecdotal and grounded in my own impressions concerning parenthood. Though I am well aware of the limited empirical-evidentiary value of personal anecdotes and impressions, I think that they can be helpful in this context, since they can prod a reader to think about parental well-being in ways that are more than simply intellectual and external-seeming. I realize, of course, that some readers will find appeals to personal anecdotes and impressions to be problematic, and so I will say more about this matter later (see section 5).

2. Brief terminological points

As is the case with most philosophers who write about well-being, I use “well-being”, “welfare”, and “prudential value” as synonyms. Though philosophers generally agree that to speak of someone’s well-being is to speak of what is intrinsically (i.e., non-instrumentally) good for him or her, there is a

great deal of disagreement about what theory of well-being is true. Some philosophers are welfare hedonists who construe well-being exclusively in terms of the experience of positive affect (and freedom from negative affect). Other philosophers are desire-fulfillment theorists who think of well-being in terms of the fulfillment of desires. Still other philosophers are objective-list theorists who claim that well-being is constituted by goods such as friendship, knowledge, positive affect, and accomplishment, where these goods are assumed to be desire-independent, that is, are assumed to enhance any given human's welfare regardless of whether this human wants them. And, aside from these three types of welfare theories, there are other types on offer. Unsurprisingly, when we are trying to determine whether being a parent increases or decreases one's well-being, it helps to know exactly how we are construing well-being. Thus the question "Which theory of well-being is true?" matters for this paper.

Turn now to "happiness". Though some philosophers use "happiness" and "well-being" as synonyms, I do not. As for what happiness is, I take it to be constituted by (and only by) certain positive psychological states. Unfortunately, I am not sure exactly which positive psychological states should be singled out here. However, I will say that, whatever happiness is, exactly, it seems that it must at least include positive affect. This claim that happiness must at least *include* positive affect differs from the claim that happiness *just is* positive affect, which is a claim that some accept.

"Life-satisfaction" refers to a complex pro-attitude that is partly a judgment (i.e., a belief) and partly a feeling. To be satisfied with one's life as a whole is (a) to judge that one's life as a whole is going well for oneself and (b) to experience some kind of positive affect; and to be satisfied with some part of one's life (e.g., with one's career) is (a) to judge that this part of one's life is going well for oneself and (b) to experience some kind of positive affect (for discussions of life-satisfaction, see Tiberius 2013, 350-351 and Sumner 1996, 138-183). It is difficult to be perfectly precise about the affective component of life-satisfaction, but the intuitive idea here is this: In order truly to be *satisfied* with one's life (or a part of it), it is not enough for one simply to have a cool, detached belief to the effect that one's life (or a part

of it) is going well for oneself – one must also experience some kind of positive affect (see Sumner 1996, 145 and Haybron 2008, 82). As Haybron has noted, however, it seems doubtful that there is a necessary connection between judging that one’s life (or a part of it) is going well for oneself and experiencing positive affect (84-86). Haybron offers the example of a tortured artist who is depressed and yet who judges that her life is going well for herself – this is possible for her to do because experiencing positive affect is not something that she believes to be important for herself (84). Even if one rejects this specific example (say, because one doubts that it really is possible for a depressed person to judge that her life is going well for herself), Haybron’s general point here seems true: There may well be a fairly high correlation between positive judgmental evaluations of one’s life (or parts of it) and positive affect, but, even so, it is possible for these two to diverge. This point matters with respect to parenthood, for, as Angeles has said, it seems likely that many parents believe that being a parent is, on the whole, going well for themselves, even though their typical everyday experience with their children is, in terms of affect, rather negative (Angeles 2010a, 524).¹

One more point here: Some thinkers claim that happiness and life-satisfaction are one and the same thing (e.g., see Sumner 1996, 149). But in what follows I will not assume that this claim is correct.

3. The parental well-being literature

In a famous study on 909 working women in Texas, subjects were asked to focus on specific episodes from the previous day in their life and to rate their own positive and negative affect for each episode on a numerical scale (Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwarz, and Stone 2004). The study provides average positive and negative affect ratings for sixteen different types of activities (e.g., eating,

¹ This study from Angeles claims to find a high correlation between life-satisfaction and parenthood for married parents. However, in an erratum, Angeles has asked us to disregard the results of this study (Angeles 2010b). Notwithstanding this erratum, Angeles’s point that I referenced above seems correct and important.

exercising, taking care of one's children, and working). Taking care of one's children rated rather low in terms of bringing positive affect, with only four types of activities having a lower average positive affect score: being on the computer (e.g., emailing), doing housework, working, and commuting (1777).² Even more strikingly, in terms of bringing negative affect, taking care of one's children ranked *second* on the list, with working being the only type of activity that had a higher average negative affect score (1777). Note the implication: Doing housework and commuting brought with them less negative affect, on average, than watching one's children brought with it.

The authors of this study – I will call it *the Texas study* – note that their findings cut against data generated by studies that focus on *generic* enjoyment ratings of the same types of activities, as those studies “observed that interacting with one's children topped the list of enjoyable activities” (1777). The authors' point here is that, when parents are reporting on how much enjoyment they derive from taking care of their children, it matters whether the parents are thinking of taking care of their children *in the abstract* (in which case a relatively high enjoyment rating will likely be given) or, instead, are thinking in terms of *specific episodes* of taking care of their children (in which case a relatively low enjoyment rating will likely be given). Here is a possible example. If I am asked to think of interacting with my children in general terms, then I might simply focus on how much I love them and in turn might judge that I greatly enjoy being with them; however, if I am instead asked to consider specific episodes of being with my children (e.g., the episode of getting my two-year-old dressed this morning, or the episode of driving my oldest daughter to crew practice yesterday afternoon), then I might take into account the unpleasant details that were involved (e.g., the squirming of my two-year-old, or all of the traffic that I had to combat while driving to the boathouse) and in turn might judge these specific episodes to have been rather unenjoyable. With regard to *why* (in relation to being with their children) parents give higher generic enjoyment ratings than they do specific-episode enjoyment ratings, the authors of the Texas study say:

² The 909 working women were not all mothers (i.e., some were non-parents).

The contrasting results likely reflect the difference between belief-based generic judgments (“I enjoy my kids”) and specific episode reports (“but they were a pain last night”). The task of judging a category of events evokes instances that are prototypical but not necessarily typical, and discourages reports of socially inappropriate affect. These deficiencies are attenuated when respondents describe specific episodes...” (1777).

The claim here, then, is this: When parents give generic enjoyment ratings, they are inhibited from thinking to themselves that being with their children is unenjoyable, since thinking this would be socially inappropriate – however, they are *not* inhibited from thinking to themselves that this or that specific experience of being with their children is or was unenjoyable, since there is nothing socially inappropriate about making specific-episode judgments of this sort.

Overall, the authors of the Texas study hold the following: Generic enjoyment ratings are largely unreliable, whereas specific-episode ratings are largely reliable; and, since the specific-episode ratings that parents offer suggest that parents do not particularly enjoy being with their children, we should conclude that being a parent is not particularly enjoyable. This same view is accepted by Gilbert. In commenting on the Texas study in his best-seller *Stumbling on Happiness*, Gilbert says:

Careful studies of how women feel as they go about their daily activities show that they are less happy when taking care of their children than when eating, exercising, shopping, napping, or watching television. Indeed, looking after the kids appears to be only slightly more pleasant than doing housework (243-244).

Gilbert is aware that most parents believe in the abstract that their children bring them a good deal of happiness (where happiness is being construed entirely in terms of positive affect). He says:

I have a twenty-nine-year-old son, and I am absolutely convinced that he is and always has been one of the greatest sources of joy in my life...When people are asked to identify their sources of

joy, they do just what I do: They point to their kids... Yet if we measure the *actual* satisfaction of people who have children, a very different story emerges (242-243: Gilbert's emphasis).

In italicizing "actual" here, Gilbert is implying that abstract beliefs to the effect that one's children bring one a good deal of happiness (i.e., positive affect) are largely or totally unreliable – that is, they do not have much, if any, grounding in actuality. In order to reach the truth of the matter, we must, in Gilbert's view, see what the specific-episode studies show; and, according to Gilbert, these studies show that children do not bring much happiness (i.e., positive affect) to their parents.

The foregoing remarks raise three questions. One: Is it true that being a parent is, in terms of affect, not particularly satisfying, at least for most people? Two: If this is true, does it follow that being a parent decreases well-being, at least for most people? Three: How reliable are parents' general beliefs about the effect of their children on their own happiness (or, alternatively, on their own well-being)?

Regarding Question One: It does seem that the majority view in the social-scientific literature is that being a parent is not particularly satisfying, affect-wise, at least for most people. The Texas study is commonly cited as supporting evidence here, since this study strongly suggests that positive affect is best gained by eschewing parenthood and, in turn, by spending one's non-working time on non-children-related activities. Another study that might be cited as supporting evidence here is Evenson and Simon's study on parenthood and depression, which found not only that parents with minor children living in the home report significantly higher levels of depression than their childless peers do, but also that empty-nest parents experience just as much depression as their childless peers do (Evenson and Simon 2005, 354).

I should note, though, that there are some extant studies that suggest that being a parent is actually fairly satisfying, affect-wise. Perhaps the most notable studies of this type are the three recent ones that were performed by Nelson and her co-authors (Nelson et al. 2013). Their first study asked

parents global (i.e., whole-life) welfare questions and found, among other things, that parenthood was associated with increased happiness for fathers (4) and that there was no difference in happiness between mothers and women without children (6). In their second study, Nelson and her co-authors (a) had subjects electronically paged at many different moments over a one-week period and (b) had these subjects report on their emotional well-being and sense of meaning in life at each of these moments. Thus this second study employed the experience sampling method, which provides moment-to-moment well-being measures. This second study also asked subjects some more global welfare questions after the one-week period of experience sampling ended. In discussing the results of this second study, Nelson and her co-authors state that fathers scored higher than did childless men on all welfare indicators and that mothers reported fewer depressive symptoms and “marginally more daily positive emotion” than did childless women (7). Nelson and her co-authors do admit, though, that they “cannot rule out possible selection effects – namely, that happier people may be more likely to become parents” (7). In their third study, Nelson and her co-authors asked subjects (all of whom were parents) to focus on specific episodes from the previous day in their life and, for each specific episode, to answer questions about positive emotions and meaning in life (8). Thus this third study was similar to the Texas study, as both studies employed the day reconstruction method. In discussing the results of their third study, Nelson and her co-authors note that they “found that, on average, parents reported more positive emotion when they were taking care of their children” than when they were not (8).

As I said above, it seems that the majority view in the social-scientific literature is that being a parent is not particularly satisfying, affect-wise, at least for most people. So these claims from Nelson and her co-authors about positive affect for parents – and, in particular, about *moment-to-moment* and *episode-by-episode* positive affect for parents – are surprising. Of course, it might be true (for all we know as of now) that the affect-related results of the studies from Nelson and her co-authors are simply outliers that can eventually be dismissed. Only time and the performance of more studies will tell

whether this is so. For now, it seems best simply to say this: The majority view in the social-scientific literature is that being a parent is not particularly satisfying, affect-wise, at least for most people; yet this majority view is not accepted by everybody (e.g., Nelson et al. reject this majority view).³

Regarding Question Two: Suppose for the sake of argument that the majority view is true – suppose, that is, that being a parent is not particularly satisfying, affect-wise, at least for most people. Does it follow from this that being a parent decreases well-being, at least for most people? The answer here seems to be “yes” if we assume that well-being consists solely in the experience of positive affect (and freedom from negative affect). Or, at any rate, what seems clear is this: If the majority view is true and being a parent is not particularly satisfying, affect-wise, at least for most people, and if, in addition, well-being consists solely in the experience of positive affect (and freedom from negative affect), it follows that one would very likely be better off not being a parent – that is, one would very likely be better off eschewing parenthood and, in turn, spending one’s non-working time on non-children-related activities. However, if we assume that there is (or at least can be) more to well-being than the experience of positive affect (and freedom from negative affect), we thereby open ourselves up to the possibility that being a parent might lead to affect-related losses in well-being while nonetheless leading to appreciable gains in well-being overall. Suppose, for instance, that positive affect, friendship (i.e., deep personal relationships), and accomplishment all count as components of Kendra’s well-being; and hold all else equal. In that case, even if Kendra is saddled with affect-related losses in virtue of being a parent, she still might appreciably gain in well-being overall in virtue of being a parent, for she might gain enough in terms of friendship (i.e., deep personal relationships) and accomplishment to allow for this.

³ I should emphasize that these studies from Nelson and her co-authors are controversial and that there has already been a rather sharp critique of them (Bhargava, Kassam, and Loewenstein 2014), one to which Nelson and her co-authors have quickly responded (Nelson, Kushlev, Dunn, and Lyubomirsky 2014a).

It is worth stressing, moreover, that there are empirical studies that suggest that parents view their time with their children as providing them with benefits that are distinct from the experience of positive affect. Here are two examples. (1) Nelson and her co-authors emphasize that, across all three of the studies that they performed, “all parents reported higher levels of meaning than did nonparents” (Nelson et al. 2013, 9). Though talk of meaning in life can be somewhat vague, it seems reasonable to assume that the subjects in these three studies were thinking of increases in meaning in terms of the gaining of benefits that are (at least to some extent) distinct from the experience of positive affect. For instance, it seems reasonable to think that a fair number of these subjects who were parents were probably thinking of gains in meaning partly in terms of the deepening of their relationships with their children, where this deepening is not reducible to an increase in the experience of positive affect. (2) White and Dolan performed a day-reconstruction-method study that, like the Texas study, asked subjects to report on specific episodes from a previous day in their life (White and Dolan 2009). Whereas the Texas study focused only on the affective experience that each subject had for each episode, this study from White and Dolan focused on *both* the affective experience *and* the judgmental-evaluative experience that each subject had for each episode. This allowed White and Dolan to capture a judgmental-evaluative sense of benefit that is (at least to some extent) distinct from the experience of positive affect. For this judgmental-evaluative sense of benefit, White and Dolan use the term “reward”. In discussing their results, White and Dolan note:

[P]hysical activity, watching TV, resting, eating, socializing, and reading were all significantly more pleasurable than time with children, whereas housework and work were significantly less pleasurable than time with children (1005).

The results for reward, however, show that only work was seen as significantly more rewarding than spending time with children, whereas watching TV, resting, eating, self-care, commuting, shopping, and housework were all significantly less rewarding (1005).

The addition of thoughts-based components of SWB [i.e., subjective well-being] makes a difference in understanding time spent with children. If one looks only at pleasure, one could come to the same conclusion as Kahneman et al. [i.e., the authors of the Texas study] that this is relatively “bad time,” but when reward is also considered, time spent with children is relatively “good time.” Perhaps the statement that “I enjoy my kids” is not so wrong after all, if enjoyment is interpreted in a broader sense that includes reward in addition to pleasure (1006).

Thus White and Dolan’s study suggests that, even though parents often experience reduced affect while spending time with their children, they often, at the very same time, believe that they are obtaining considerable non-affective rewards for themselves – for instance, considerable non-affective rewards having to do with friendship (i.e., with the deepening of the parent-child bond) or with accomplishment (i.e., with raising one’s children well).

Regarding Question Three: We know that parents often make general claims to the effect that they greatly enjoy being with their children, or that their children are their greatest sources of joy. And we also know that the authors of the Texas study and Gilbert believe that these general claims are largely unreliable. Presumably they believe this not only because the specific-episode reports provided in the Texas study suggest that parents do not much enjoy being with their children, but also because they worry about the reliability of *any and all* general judgments that people make about their own life-satisfaction, happiness, well-being, etc. And there are, in fact, good reasons for worrying about the reliability of any and all general judgments of this sort. It is well known, for instance, that people’s life-satisfaction judgments, as applied to their whole lives, can be significantly impacted by irrelevant factors such as their own present mood and the current state of the weather (on this point, see, e.g., Tiberius 2008, 37). Also, even psychologists who are willing to appeal to general judgments of the sort in question worry about their reliability. For example, in discussing the results of their first study, which posed very general (i.e., whole-life) welfare questions to subjects, Nelson and her co-authors worry about the possibility that

parents in this study overestimated their well-being “because of recall biases, dissonance reduction, or beliefs about the desirability of parenting” (Nelson et al. 2013, 6). Still, there is presumably *some* validity (i.e., a non-negligible amount) that attaches to people’s general judgments and reports concerning their own life-satisfaction, happiness, well-being, etc. And, in line with this, there is presumably *some* validity (i.e., a non-negligible amount) that attaches to parents’ general claims to the effect that they greatly enjoy being with their children, or that their children are their greatest sources of joy.

Above I quoted White and Dolan as saying: “Perhaps the statement that ‘I enjoy my kids’ is not so wrong after all, if enjoyment is interpreted in a broader sense that includes reward in addition to pleasure” (1006). I think that White and Dolan are generally on the right track here. But construing enjoyment in a way that includes non-affective rewards seems to me to stretch the ordinary understanding of the term “enjoyment” a bit too far. Thus, instead of saying what White and Dolan have said, I think we should say this: Perhaps the truth is that, although most parents do not gain much, if any, net affective satisfaction from being with their children and therefore do not (in net terms) much *enjoy* being with their children, they nonetheless do gain a significant amount of net *well-being* from being with their children and are imprecisely gesturing toward this when they say that they greatly enjoy being with their children. Of course, in order for this to be the case, it would have to be true that well-being includes not only positive affect, but also items such as friendship (i.e., deep personal relationships) and accomplishment.

4. The parental well-being framework

There are, as I have said, four elements that are central to the parental well-being framework: affect, friendship (i.e., deep personal relationships), accomplishment, and perspective. Let me begin, then, with affect.

Affect: Parents of newborns are often painfully short on sleep due to night-time feedings. Further, parents of newborns change an endless succession of dirty diapers; they hear a great deal of crying, much of which arises for no apparent reason and is impossible to stop; and they often find themselves *worrying* – for instance, about Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, or about whether they will have enough money to take care of their baby for the next twenty-plus years, or about whether their baby is hitting all of the appropriate developmental markers concerning height, weight, the ability to roll over, and so on. And all of this assumes that nothing unusually bad has happened, such as the baby’s having colic, which, in severe cases, is an affective nightmare for parents.

Things do typically get better as the baby progresses past the newborn stage (e.g., the baby wakes up less often in the middle of the night). But even toddlers are a great deal of work: They are messy with their food and their toys; they cannot dress or bathe themselves; they still have dirty diapers; and, even if they can play by themselves some, parents cannot leave them alone for very long (e.g., until children are about two-years-old, parents frequently have to check on them to make sure that they have not put anything in their mouths that they might choke on).

All things considered, the physical demands and worries involved in having a newborn or a toddler are considerable; and, though there are plenty of wonderful moments, affect-wise (e.g., being greeted with hugs and smiles from your baby that has just woken up for the day can feel very good), I strongly suspect that the affective experience for most parents of children who are roughly two-years-old or younger is, on the whole, negative. Children of roughly ages two to six are still a good deal of work and still a considerable source of worries (e.g., financial worries), but these children are, for obvious reasons, typically much less physically demanding and time-intensive than children of roughly ages zero to two; and children of roughly ages six to thirteen are typically even less physically demanding and time-intensive than children of roughly ages two to six.

Of course, once children become teen-agers, their parents often find themselves worrying in new ways – for instance, “Is my child drinking, or doing drugs, or having sex?”, or “I hope my child goes to college, but how will I pay for that, or even help to pay for that?”, or “Why is my child so moody?”. These worries can seriously reduce the affect levels of parents of teen-agers. One further point about teen-agers bears mentioning: The *driving* of teen-agers (who cannot yet drive, or who can drive but do not have a car) can be endless and is, for many parents of teen-agers, a source of a good deal of negative affect. Moreover, it is not as though parents of teen-agers who *can* drive and who *do* have a car are free from negative affect; indeed, it is precisely when teen-agers begin to drive that their parents start worrying most about drinking, drugs, sex, and late-night partying.

Also, the above remarks do not capture the fact that many parents raise multiple children at once. Doing this can be physically stressful. My mother says that, when her children were little, she felt as though she was perpetually playing one of those whack-a-mole games that arcades have. (If you go to Chuck E. Cheese’s, you will likely find some version of whack-a-mole; the point of the game is to use a mallet to knock down little puppets that pop up in unpredictable ways, and often in bunches.) Also, there can be, and usually is, a substantial increase in emotional stress for parents who have multiple children – after all, the more children you have, the more that must be done and the more that can go wrong. With regard to things going wrong, just think of your own life and how, on any given day, something might go wrong (e.g., your computer might crash, or your car might break down, or you might get the flu). Now add another person (e.g., a spouse), and do the same. And now add still another person (e.g., a first child), and do the same. Finally, add one more person (e.g., a second child), and do the same. This might give you a sense of just how large and pressing the threat of something going wrong can be for parents with multiple children.

Do things get better for parents, affect-wise, once their children leave home? Earlier I referenced Evenson and Simon's study that found that empty-nest parents experience just as much depression as their childless peers do. Elaborating on this point, Evenson and Simon note:

Although the demands associated with parenthood subside as children age and become independent – freeing parents to reap the rewards of having children – most parents are probably involved in their adult children's lives and continue to be concerned with their well-being, which can also be emotionally costly (Evenson and Simon 2005, 354).

Though I am speculating here, it could be that empty-nest parents actually worry *more* about their children than parents with minor children living in the home do. After all, the children that empty-nest parents are worrying about are adults and thus have adult problems (e.g., relationship/marriage problems, or financial problems, or drug/alcohol problems), which are often considerably more serious than the problems that minor children have.⁴

I realize that the above comments do not sufficiently capture the positive affect that comes with being a parent. For instance, watching my two young daughters dance (they often have “dance parties”) is hilarious and makes me feel positively giddy, and, in a calmer but still powerful way, I always feel something positive when my older daughter tells my wife and me about what she is studying in school (e.g., about the books that she is reading in her English courses). Still, it is not for nothing that the majority view in the literature is that being a parent is not particularly satisfying, affect-wise, at least for most people. To be clear, I am not *certain* that this majority view is correct (and recall that some have

⁴ In their latest article on parental well-being, Nelson and her co-authors discuss how child age affects parental well-being (Nelson, Kushlev, and Lyubomirsky 2014b, 879-880), and they claim that, in general, parents of younger children are affectively worse off than parents of older children. This may be true, but I have some doubts about this claim as it applies to adolescent and adult children. For, while it is far more *physically* demanding to raise young children, the *worrying* about older children (with older-people problems) can be, and often is, far worse.

disputed it, e.g., see Nelson et al. 2013). I do think, though, that there are good reasons for thinking that it is correct.

Friendship: In here using the word “friendship”, I am using it broadly, so that (a) it refers to any and all deep personal relationships that might be had either between family members and or between non-family members and (b) it refers to something that is prudentially beneficial in a way that goes well beyond whatever positive affect it involves. With regard to the relationship between friendship and parental well-being, I think that most people would agree with Overall’s claim that the “best reason to have a child is simply the creation of the mutually enriching, mutually enhancing love that is the parent-child relationship” (Overall 2012, 217). In expanding on this claim, Overall says:

In becoming a parent, one creates not only a child and a relationship, but oneself; one creates a new and ideally better self-identity. To choose to have a child is to take on a life-changing project. This is the case even with subsequent children; each child opens up a new world of experiences and challenges and changes the existing configuration of relationships of parent to parent and parent to child. The parent grows the child (and the child will eventually outgrow the parent), but, just as important, the child also grows the parent (218).

Though all healthy friendships involve some kind of mutual enrichment, growth, and love, there is, as Overall’s quote suggests, something special about – and also significantly prudentially rewarding about – the mutual enrichment, growth, and love that can be, and standardly is, provided in the case of the parent-child bond.

Still, just because there is a significant gain in friendship that accrues to the vast majority of parents in virtue of their sharing in the parent-child bond, it does not follow that there is a significant *net* gain in friendship for most parents. Here consider two sets of points. First, even though divorce rates among couples with children are a good deal lower than divorce rates among couples without children,

the consensus among social-scientists seems to be that marital satisfaction among couples with children is lower than marital satisfaction among couples without children (e.g., see Twenge, Campbell, and Foster 2003). Common wisdom might rebel against the thought that couples with children are less satisfied with each other, since they have something important to work on together, namely, the project of raising a child. However, what often happens is that one member of the couple ends up doing more of the child-rearing work than his or her spouse, which can lead to resentment (e.g., “It is not fair that he exercising for over an hour while I am here watching the kids”, a mom might think to herself while her not-so-helpful husband is exercising). Moreover, when one considers (a) that relationships suffer when time and energy is not invested in keeping them up and (b) that couples with children have to spend much of their time and energy on their children and thus often have much less time and energy to spend on each other, it is perhaps not so difficult to see why marital satisfaction might be lower among couples with children. In sum, then, even if a parent is gaining in friendship in relation to the parent-child bond, this parent might at the same time be losing in friendship in relation to the romantic-couple bond. Second, parents are often socially involved with the parents of their children’s friends, and they do tend to gain in friendship in this respect. But, once one is a parent, one has to drop things such as going out at night with friends and traveling to different cities to see friends – or, at any rate, one has to cut down significantly on these kinds of things. And that can result in substantial friendship-related losses for parents.

Accomplishment: Accomplishments involving *people* are sometimes the most gratifying kinds of accomplishments (though here “most gratifying” should not necessarily be understood to mean “most affectively satisfying”). For instance, if someone gets two fighting people in an academic department to make peace with each other, this might be an exceptionally gratifying instance of accomplishment. This point about how gratifying accomplishments involving people can be is one that applies with full force to the case of raising children. My oldest daughter is kind to her sisters and her classmates, works hard in school, and is courageous in the face of disappointments and setbacks. And I know that, although most of

this is due to the combination of her own efforts and my wife's efforts, I have had *something* to do with this. That is gratifying, and I am convinced that I am better off in virtue of this accomplishment. One more example: Over the last two years, my wife has been teaching my now-five-year-old daughter how to read, and the progress that has been made is striking; I was floored recently when, while sitting next to my daughter as she was reading, I heard her sound out the word "announcement" without any help. This is a large accomplishment on the part of my wife, and I believe that my wife is better off because of this accomplishment. My general point here, then, is simply that there are significant accomplishment-related gains in well-being that are open to parents.

Of course, the above remarks make no mention of the accomplishment-related losses that one might suffer as a result of being a parent. Accomplishment-related losses having to do with one's career stand out here. Consider an example. My mom (who is now 68 years old) went to medical school in the late 1960's. Her goal was to become a pediatrician, but, due to marriage and children, she stopped at being a general practitioner, as the residency for being a pediatrician was too long. Further, there were various stretches while raising her children where she could not work full-time (i.e., where she had to work part-time). Though my mom always kept her career and still works as a physician today, there is no denying that she suffered enormous accomplishment-related losses in terms of her career, that is, because she spent so much time raising her children. Historically, of course, it is women who have suffered most when it comes to career setbacks due to the raising of children. And still today a great many women – and also plenty of men (though in lesser numbers than women) – suffer career setbacks due to the raising of children. Moreover, it is not entirely clear how best to deal with this problem. While it is obvious that both parents (in the case of two-parent families) can stay in the workforce, the pressure for one of the two parents to cut down significantly on his or her hours (e.g., to become a part-time worker) is substantial. This is so because (a) children have to be watched by somebody and (b) good daycare is very expensive.

Perspective: Having perspective is (to borrow from Tiberius) a matter of bringing one's "thoughts and feelings in line with what is really important" (Tiberius 2008, 92).⁵ To fail to have perspective, then, is (a) to have one's thoughts or feelings focused on things that are not truly important or, as is probably more common, (b) to have one's thoughts or feelings focused on things that are truly important, but in a way that is out of proportion to their real value. (Admittedly, it might be better to use "right perspective" instead of "perspective" here, since even a distorted perspective is still a kind of perspective; that said, I will, for brevity, persist in simply using "perspective".)

One question that might be asked here is that of how *what is truly important* (i.e., *what is really important*) is fixed. I am inclined to think that this is fixed at least partly by objective evaluative facts, where "objective" signals that these facts obtain independently of individuals' own actual or hypothetical desires, evaluative beliefs, and so on. Yet it could be true (for all I know) that what is truly important can convincingly be fixed in a wholly subjective way (e.g., by appealing to the positive evaluative judgments that individuals would make if they were well-informed with respect to non-evaluative information and were carefully reflecting on what they care about).⁶ In any case, in discussing perspective I will assume that there is *some* convincing way in which what is truly important is fixed, and I will leave open the question of how, *exactly*, the fixation process works.

With regard to the relationship between perspective and parental well-being: Many parents claim that having children altered their thoughts and feelings in a positive way. For instance, many parents claim that, before having kids, they spent too much time on frivolous things (e.g., drugs and alcohol) and that, after having kids, they matured. Or again, many parents claim (a) that, prior to having children, they

⁵ To be clear, when Tiberius discusses perspective, it seems that her main point is simply that having perspective is an element of being *practically wise*, and it does not seem that she is claiming (as I am) that having perspective is (at least for most people) an element of *well-being* (e.g., see Tiberius 2008, 93).

⁶ When Tiberius discusses perspective, she seems to take a wholly subjective approach, that is, an approach that makes no appeal to objective values (e.g., see Tiberius 2008, 99-101).

were overly self-absorbed and spent too much time worrying about success in their career or their own social standing and (b) that, once they had children, their focus shifted such that they no longer cared *too much* about success in their career or their own social standing. I know that, in my own case, there are moments when interacting with my children brings my thoughts and feelings back in line with what is (or at least with what I take to be) really important. For instance, there are occasions when I find myself worrying a great deal about what my publication record looks like to others and when, even though I am aware that I am being somewhat shallow and excessively self-focused in worrying in this way, I cannot make myself stop; however, if I interact with my children at these times, this worrying does tend to go away, or at least to become less intense.

As for *how* children are sometimes able to bring adults' thoughts and feelings back into an appropriate (or at least more appropriate) state, presumably at least part of the explanation is this. Children, especially very young children, are almost never caught up in the shallowness that sometimes enters the world of adults; and, when adults interact with children, they are able, by contrasting themselves with children, to recognize their own shallowness and how negative it is.⁷

Two last sets of points about perspective are in order. (1) Plenty of non-parents have perspective, and it obviously false to say that one must be a parent in order to have one's thoughts and feelings in line with what is really important. (2) Some people actually regress in relation to perspective when they are parents. This is fairly rare, but it does happen. Think, for instance, of parents who become all-consumed with their children's being successful in academics or athletics. Surely this constitutes a certain loss of perspective. Also, some parents focus so heavily on their own family and children that they lose sight of

⁷ Children are every bit as prideful, stubborn, and selfish as adults are. However, children, especially very young children, are almost never *shallow* in the way that adults sometimes are (e.g., they are almost never preoccupied with money or their own social standing in the way that adults sometimes are).

the fact that there is a whole society of people out there – that, indeed, the world contains billions of people, all of whom are fundamentally equal in value. This, too, constitutes a certain loss of perspective.

One final point here in section 4: In advancing the parental well-being framework, I have centrally focused on four general items, namely, affect, friendship, accomplishment, and perspective. However, there might be other general items that should be included within this framework (e.g., perhaps *freedom* should be included, since many people claim to experience a significant reduction in freedom upon having children). In any case, I will simply leave open the question of whether there are any other general items that should be included within the parental well-being framework.

5. Considering two objections

I will now consider two objections to the parental well-being framework. Call them *the provincialism objection* and *the welfare hedonist's objection*. Here is the provincialism objection: “In presenting the parental well-being framework, you have often appealed to personal anecdotes and impressions. However, it seems problematic to draw heavily on personal anecdotes and impressions while presenting a framework that is intended to apply to parents generally. Indeed, one cannot help but worry that the framework you have presented really only applies to a small subset of parents (i.e., to parents like you).” And here is the welfare hedonist's objection: “The framework that you have presented assumes that positive affect is *not* the only element of well-being. However, it *is* the only element of well-being. The other general items that you have referenced (i.e., friendship, accomplishment, and perspective) are ordinarily *instrumentally* good for people in that attaining them or sharing in them ordinarily leads to experiences of positive affect. Yet it is wrong to think that these other general items are of *intrinsic* (i.e., *non-instrumental*) prudential value.”

In reply to the provincialism objection: There is no denying that parental experiences vary widely, depending on the nation in which one lives, one's marital status, whether one is a custodial parent or not, one's financial situation, etc. Further, there is no denying that I am a parent of a particular sort – for instance, that I am a parent with one adopted daughter and two biological daughters and that I am a parent who is married, male, American, and economically middle-class (by American standards). Still further, there is no denying that the particulars in question have played a role in shaping my views of parental well-being. Nevertheless, I think that, if readers consider the general items that are central to the parental well-being framework (i.e., affect, friendship, accomplishment, and perspective), they will admit that these general items apply not only to parents who are similar to me, but indeed to parents generally. Granted, the particular ways in which these general items enter into different parental lives will inevitably differ, and often substantially so. For instance, succeeding in helping my five-year-old learn how to ride a bike might be an instance of accomplishment that enters into my parental life, but a poor teen-age mother in a developing nation might not be able to afford a bike and so might not be able to obtain this sort of accomplishment for herself. Still, it would be wrong to doubt that there *are* accomplishments of various sorts that *would* enter into this poor teen-age mother's parental life, and, more generally, it would be wrong to doubt that the general items that are central to the parental well-being framework are applicable to parents generally. Lastly, with respect to my advancing of personal anecdotes while presenting the parental well-being framework, I think that readers will be able to adapt most (or perhaps even all) of these anecdotes to their own (actual or at least possible) experience of parenthood. For instance, I earlier mentioned gaining positive affect from watching my two young daughters have “dance parties”, and I assume that most readers can adapt from this anecdote in such a way as to think of something that they find (or at least would find) affectively rewarding about raising children.

In reply to the welfare hedonist's objection: If one is an objective-list theorist about well-being, one can say that positive affect, friendship, accomplishment, and perspective are of intrinsic prudential

value for all humans, no matter what. Further, if one is a desire-fulfillment theorist about well-being, one can say that positive affect, friendship, accomplishment, and perspective are of intrinsic prudential value for all humans who (non-instrumentally) want these items; and one can add that, as it happens, the vast majority of humans do (non-instrumentally) want positive affect, friendship, accomplishment, and perspective. Still further, if one is a hybrid theorist about well-being, one can say (a) that positive affect, friendship, accomplishment, and perspective are objectively valuable in some non-prudential way, (b) that these items are of intrinsic prudential value for those humans who (non-instrumentally) want them, and (c) that, as it happens, the vast majority of humans do (non-instrumentally) want these items. In this way, then, the parental well-being framework is something that welfare theorists of rather different stripes can accept and find useful. Still, it is true that welfare hedonists cannot accept the parental well-being framework, for they cannot accept that friendship, accomplishment, and perspective are of intrinsic prudential value for anyone. And, naturally, welfare hedonists will insist that their position is correct.

I think, though, that welfare hedonists are mistaken in maintaining that items such as friendship, accomplishment, and perspective cannot be of intrinsic prudential value for anyone. Consider an example involving accomplishment. Suppose that an academic has just had a bad, early-morning fight with her spouse and that it is clouding her day. She goes to work feeling very low, but she says to herself, “I want (for its own sake) to make some headway on my research, and so I am going to spend the next few hours charging ahead.” Now suppose that she *does* make some headway on her research – that, indeed, there is an appreciable gain in accomplishment that takes place. But suppose that, because of how low she feels (due to the fight), there is no positive affect that accompanies this gain in accomplishment. Should we deny that she has gained in well-being here? The welfare hedonist will answer “yes”. But, given that she has gained in something that seems on its face to be a positive thing (namely, accomplishment), and given also that she has a positive attitude (i.e., a non-instrumental desire) that is directed toward this gain in accomplishment, it seems intuitively (i.e., pre-theoretically) wrong to deny that she has gained in well-

being here – certainly the appearances suggest that there has been a gain in well-being here, and unless one has a firm antecedent commitment to welfare hedonism, one will presumably accept the appearances here.

Something similar might happen with an athlete who wants for its own sake to improve at her sport. She might labor at practice with the aim of improving at her sport, and she might succeed in improving; and yet she might, in the process, exert herself too much to experience any positive affect. Again here, it seems intuitively wrong to deny that a gain in well-being has taken place.⁸

Welfare hedonists might reply that they simply do not share my intuitions about these kinds of examples. Notice, though, that even if my comments from just above do not sway welfare hedonists, the fact remains that the parental well-being framework is something that objective-list theorists, desire-fulfillment theorists, and hybrid theorists can accept and find useful.⁹

6. Why is the parental well-being literature divided in the way that it is?

I indicated in section 3 that there is some disagreement among social scientists about the correct answers to empirical questions concerning parental affect. However, I also indicated in section 3 that it seems that the majority view in the social-scientific literature is that being a parent is not particularly satisfying, affect-wise, at least for most people. So, to a large extent, there seems to be agreement on what the empirical facts say about parental affect.

⁸ Though I have here only focused on examples involving accomplishment, similar examples involving friendship and perspective could be provided.

⁹ Some readers might wonder why I have not appealed to Nozick's experience machine in arguing against welfare hedonism (Nozick 1974, 42-45). My thinking here is that, since the experience machine is fanciful, and since appeals to fanciful cases are controversial, it is best to refrain from appealing to the experience machine.

Some influential social scientists – for instance, the authors of the Texas study (i.e., Kahneman et al.) and Gilbert – seem to be thinking as follows: “*Since* being a parent is not particularly satisfying, affect-wise, at least for most people, and *since* positive affect is the only component of well-being, it follows that being a parent is not particularly good for one and that one would probably be better off not being a parent.” I should here stress that Kahneman, the famous lead author of the Texas study, holds that well-being consists solely in the experience of positive affect (Kahneman 1999). And I should also here stress that Gilbert thinks that well-being consists solely in the experience of positive affect.¹⁰ In short, both Kahneman and Gilbert are welfare hedonists.

But, of course, many social scientists reject welfare hedonism – that is, they reject the claim that positive affect is the only component of well-being. Indeed, many social scientists believe that, at least for the vast majority of people, there are components of well-being such as friendship, accomplishment, and perspective that are not merely affective in nature.¹¹ Further, many of these same social scientists believe that parenthood often brings with it substantial non-affective gains in well-being. Here, for instance, we might think of White and Dolan’s talk of the non-affective rewards that accrue to parents.

This, then, is one major, and perhaps *the* major, source of division within the parental well-being literature: On the one hand, we have thinkers (e.g., Kahneman and Gilbert) who hold that well-being

¹⁰ In his book on happiness, Gilbert explicitly defends the view that *happiness* consists solely in the experience of positive affect (Gilbert 2005, 31-59). Moreover, in the section where he argues that being a parent does not bring much happiness (242-245) – and, more generally, throughout his book – Gilbert never says that there can be non-affective gains in well-being. This omission suggests that Gilbert does not believe that there can be non-affective gains in well-being.

¹¹ This belief could be filled out in an objective-list-theory way, with the idea being that friendship, accomplishment, and perspective are components of all people’s well-being, no matter what. And this belief could also be filled out in a desire-fulfillment-theory way or a hybrid-theory way: A desire-fulfillment theorist might claim that, for the vast majority of people, friendship, accomplishment, and perspective are components of well-being, since the vast majority of people non-instrumentally desire these items; and a hybrid theorist might claim that, for the vast majority of people, friendship, accomplishment, and perspective are components of well-being, since these items are objectively valuable in some non-prudential way and the vast majority of people non-instrumentally desire these items.

consists solely in positive affect, that parenthood brings with it reduced affect, and that it follows that being a parent brings with it reduced well-being; and, on the other hand, we have thinkers (e.g., White and Dolan) who deny that well-being consists solely in positive affect and who hold that, even if being a parent brings with it reduced affect, it does not necessarily follow that being a parent brings with it reduced well-being, since the non-affective gains that accrue to parents may well be enough to offset the affective losses that parents suffer. More can be said here, though. In particular, two further sets of points are worth noting.

One: Presumably part of what motivates the view of those such as Kahneman and Gilbert who believe that parenthood brings with it a reduction in well-being is the thought that, *even if* friendship, accomplishment, and perspective count as intrinsic welfare goods, at least for most people, it by no means clearly follows that being a parent is typically welfare-enhancing. As noted in section 4, while parents do often gain in large ways in relation to friendship, accomplishment, and perspective, they also often lose in large ways in relation to two of these items, namely, friendship and accomplishment (e.g., the spouse-spouse bond often considerably weakens due to a married couple's having children, and many people suffer substantial career-related losses in accomplishment after becoming parents). Once these large losses in relation to friendship and accomplishment are accounted for, it may no longer be clear that parents typically gain in *net* terms in relation to friendship and accomplishment, in which case it may seem dubious to claim that parents typically gain enough in relation to friendship, accomplishment, and perspective to offset the affective losses that they suffer.

Two: Gilbert and others have argued that parents often engage in an illusion in that they convince themselves that they are better off in virtue of being parents, when in fact the reduced affect that comes with being a parent ensures that this is not so (see Gilbert 2005, 244-245; Powdthavee 2009; and Eibach and Mock 2011). This parental "illusion" argument comes in different versions, but the main thrust of all of these versions is that, whether it be due to evolution or culture or whatever, parents have a strong

tendency to over-idealize (i.e., unjustifiably inflate) the rewards that come with parenthood. This over-idealizing tendency leads parents to believe what is false, namely, that being a parent is quite rewarding on the whole.

While welfare hedonists might find this parental “illusion” argument convincing, I doubt that non-welfare hedonists will find it convincing. Here consider that the order of thought in which Gilbert and others who advance this argument seem to go in is this: First, they accept welfare hedonism; second, they find (through empirical studies such as the Texas study) that parenthood typically brings with it reduced affect; third, they conclude that parental well-being is typically rather low; then, fourth, they find themselves puzzled as to why most parents falsely believe that being a parent is quite rewarding on the whole; and so, fifth, they come up with a hypothesis as to why parents have this false belief, namely, the hypothesis that parents are engaging in an illusion that involves their over-idealizing (i.e., unjustifiably inflating) the rewards that come with parenthood. But, of course, if welfare hedonism is rejected at the start of this sequence, then the claim that parental well-being is typically rather low doesn’t follow from the empirical finding that parenthood typically brings with it reduced affect and (in turn) steps four and five of the above sequence of thought do not arise. To take my own case, I know that my affective experience with my children is often negative (or, at any rate, not particularly positive), and yet I have convinced myself that being a parent is, for me, quite rewarding on the whole. In particular, I have convinced myself that the non-affective rewards that redound to me in virtue of my being a parent, especially those having to do with friendship, accomplishment, and perspective, are so substantial that they considerably outweigh the affective losses that redound to me in virtue of my being a parent. If welfare hedonism is true, then it seems clear that I must be engaging in an illusion here. But, if welfare hedonism is false, and if friendship, accomplishment, and perspective really are of intrinsic prudential value for me, then it does not seem right to say that I am engaging in an illusion here. In sum, my point here is that the parental “illusion” argument seems to be sound only if welfare hedonism is true.

7. Thinking through the prudential benefits and costs of being a parent

In her well-known article “What You Can’t Expect When You’re Expecting”, Paul says that a person ordinarily decides whether to have a (first) child (a) by considering what it would be like for himself or herself to have a child and also what it would be like for himself or herself to remain childless, then (b) by estimating, for each of these two possibilities, how much prudential value it would bring to himself or herself, and then (c) by choosing the possibility with the higher expected prudential value. But, says Paul, a person cannot know ahead of time what it would be like for himself or herself to have a child, and so, prior to having a child, there is no rational way for a person to estimate how much prudential value having a child would bring to himself or herself – thus, though the ordinary way of deciding whether to have a child is widely believed to be rational, the truth, says Paul, is that it is not rational at all. In my view, what Paul says is correct inasmuch as it is true that people cannot *fully* know, prior to having a child, what it would be like to have a child – for instance, prior to having a child, people can know in an *outsider’s* way what it would be like to be on parental duty without end, but that is not the same as knowing this in the *full* way that parents know this, which is in the *insider’s* way. Still, Paul seems to go too far, for, against what she says, it seems that people can *to a large extent* know, prior to having a child, what it would be like to have a child. This partial but nonetheless substantial knowledge can be derived not merely from being around children (e.g., friends’ children), but also from social-scientific studies. One point worth emphasizing here is that people can certainly know, prior to having a child, (a) what general parental categories they would fall into if they were to have a child (e.g., they can know they would fall into the category of *married parents who have an annual household income of \$50,000*), (b) what the experiences of parents who fall into these general categories have typically been like, and (c) that, if they were to have a child, their own parental experiences would likely resemble the typical experiences of parents who fall into these general categories. In any case, I will assume in what follows that the decision of whether to have a child *can* be made in a *largely* prudentially rational way.

Age and marital status: Nelson and her co-authors found in one of their studies (a) that young parents (i.e., those who are 25 or younger) and single parents “were significantly less happy than their childless peers” (Nelson et al. 2013, 6) and (b) that parents who are 26 or older and married generally experience as much or more positive affect than their childless peers (4-6). Though point (b) here seems to cut against the majority view among social scientists, point (a) here seems fairly uncontroversial. Accordingly, it is probably prudentially best to refrain from having children if one is single or young (say, under 26). To be clear, I am definitely not saying that it is impossible for a person who is single or young (say, under 26) to have a prudentially rewarding parental life. Indeed, I am sure that there are many exceptions to the general rule here. Also, with respect to the cut-off age of 26, I should note that the participants in the study in question from Nelson et al. were all from the U.S.A., and perhaps a different cut-off age would be more appropriate in a nation very different from the U.S.A. (e.g., in a developing nation where the average marrying age is much earlier than it is in the U.S.A., 23 might be a more appropriate cut-off age). In short, when one is determining what a young parent is, one should consider both the biological age and the cultural surroundings.

Money: Though money is the paradigm example of a *merely instrumental* good, it often impacts people’s welfare (e.g., by causing them to experience negative affect in the form of *anxiety*). Some who have argued that having children is prudentially irrational have highlighted financial considerations in making their case (e.g., see Harrison and Tanner 2011, 120). And surely those with children are burdened with much greater financial worries, all else equal, than those without children. For instance, it is common for parents to have thoughts such as these: “We want to move to neighborhood X, which has a much better public school than our current neighborhood. But we cannot afford either the housing or the property taxes in neighborhood X. We will feel guilty if our child remains in the sub-par school in our current neighborhood, but financial realities are forcing us to accept this option. This is very frustrating.” Naturally, one way to avoid having to deal with any of this sort of frustration is simply to refrain from

having children. Still, it is important not to make *too much* of the point that children are expensive. One reason I say this is that having more money can only improve one's emotional well-being (i.e., positive affect) up to a certain point. Indeed, as one famous study found, there is a pattern of emotional well-being increasing as yearly household income increases, but this pattern caps out once a yearly household income of \$75,000 is reached (Kahneman and Deaton 2010).¹² Granted, most people in the world are not close to having a yearly household income of \$75,000; so this income figure may seem largely irrelevant. But perhaps the deeper point to register here is simply that money may not matter as much for emotional well-being as people ordinarily think it does; and, once this deeper point is registered, it will be seen that it does not clearly follow from the fact that children are *financially* costly that they are *prudentially* costly.

Affect, friendship, accomplishment, and perspective: It is certainly possible (for all I know) that my previous comments in this paper have gone too far in the direction of claiming that parents experience reduced affect. However, even if my previous comments in this paper have indeed gone too far in this direction, it still seems clear that it would be a mistake to decide to become a parent because one believes that being a parent will bring one substantial net gains in terms of affect. In short, if it is typically prudentially rational to choose to have children, then, in my view, this is so because there are substantial net gains in friendship, or accomplishment, or perspective that typically come with being a parent.¹³ Of course, in considering friendship, accomplishment, and perspective, one should consider not only how one would likely *gain* in relation to these items by having children, but also how one would likely *lose* in relation to these items by having children. Though there are many parents who, like me, believe that they have gained far more than they have lost in relation to friendship, accomplishment, and perspective in virtue of their having children, I take it that there are also many parents who do not have this same belief

¹² This study did find that “life evaluation”, which “refers to the thoughts that people have about their life when they think about it”, keeps improving as income improves, without ever capping out (16489).

¹³ In keeping with what I noted at the very end of section 4, there might be other general items – that is, ones distinct from friendship, accomplishment, and perspective – that should be mentioned here.

– for instance, presumably many parents who have suffered substantial accomplishment-related losses in terms of their career (i.e., due to their having children) do not have this same belief.

In deciding whether it is prudentially good for one to have children, one should also consider whether one even believes that items such as friendship, accomplishment, and perspective are intrinsic welfare goods for oneself. In all likelihood, some readers of this paper will side with Kahneman and Gilbert in thinking that positive affect is the only intrinsic welfare good. Naturally, if positive affect is the only intrinsic welfare good (i.e., if welfare hedonism is true), and if (as the majority view in the social-scientific literature suggests) being a parent is not particularly satisfying, affect-wise, at least for most people, then it follows that choosing to become a parent is prudentially irrational, at least for most people.

Moral reasons as also being relevant: In deciding whether to have children, prudential reasons are not the only reasons that are relevant, for moral reasons are relevant as well. Since I have bracketed moral reasons in this paper, my discussion of the reasons that one should consider in this context has been incomplete. Nevertheless, I hope that what I have said about the prudential considerations that bear on the decision of whether to have children has been helpful.¹⁴

¹⁴ [Acknowledgments]

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