The Value of Cognitive Experience

Preston Lennon

Rutgers Center for Cognitive Science

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Recent debates about consciousness and welfare have focused on whether consciousness is required for welfare subjectivity. There have been fewer attempts to explain the significance that particular kinds of consciousness have for welfare value. In this paper, I explore the relevance of *cognitive experience* for theories of welfare. I introduce *the cognitive zombie intuition*, the idea that an absence of cognitive experience can drastically change one's welfare. I then attempt to explain the cognitive zombie intuition. I first consider and reject the idea that cognitive experience is itself a welfare good. I then argue that cognitive experience plays an *object-expanding role*: it drastically expands the range of objects welfare subjects can desire or be pleased by. This expanded range includes paradigmatic welfare goods such as intellectual achievement, friendship, humor, aesthetic experiences, and existential experiences. I close by showing how cognitive experience's object expanding role is compatible with leading theories of welfare.

Keywords: welfare well-being consciousness cognitive experience cognitive phenomenology value

1 Introduction

Recent debates concerning phenomenal consciousness and welfare value have focused on whether or not consciousness *simpliciter* is a requirement for welfare subjectivity.[1] There have been fewer recent attempts to explain the significance that *particular kinds* of consciousness might have when it comes to welfare value.[2] The goal of this paper is to explore the role of *cognitive experiences* for theories of welfare.

[1] Levy (2014), Hawkins (2016), van der Deijl (2020), DeGrazia (2021), Lin (2021), Siewert (2021), Chalmers (2022), Kammerer (2022), Bradford (2023), Kriegel (forthcoming), Lee (forthcoming), Smithies (forthcoming).

[2] One exception is the debate over the nature of pleasure, and whether all welfare goods have their value in virtue of their pleasant phenomenology (Crisp 2006, Smuts 2011, Labukt 2012, Bramble 2013, Lin 2020).

Cognitive experiences certainly seem to play an important role in our lives as welfare subjects. Consider the following activities: having an intimate conversation with a trusted friend; pondering one's tiny existence relative to the size of the universe; taking delight in a masterful bit of written prose by a favorite author; and reflecting on the clever argument structure of a philosophy paper. These are all experiences, insofar there is something it is like to have them. What's more, they are experiences that seem to involve our cognitive capacities, at least as much as and in contrast with our perceptual capacities. Finally, these cognitive experiences are among the ones that we value highly, according to a long tradition in Western philosophy stretching from Socrates to Mill.[3]

The goal of this paper is to explain why cognitive experience plays such an important role in our lives as welfare subjects. Here is the plan. I start by pumping the intuition that a loss of cognitive experience would result in a drastic change in one's welfare in §1. I call this intuition the "cognitive zombie intuition," and I show how it has been relied on by John Stuart Mill and Galen Strawson in the service of philosophical ends. In §2, I suggest one possible explanation of the cognitive zombie intuition, that cognitive experience is itself a welfare good, and give two arguments against this explanation. This sets the stage for my positive account of cognitive experience's role for our lives as welfare subjects in §3: cognitive experience drastically expands the range of objects our conscious valenced attitudes can take, including many paradigmatic welfare goods. I conclude in §4 by showing how this role for cognitive experience connects with popular philosophical theories of welfare.

2 The Cognitive Zombie Intuition

To begin, let's consider the following case:

[3] For Socrates, see Plato (1992, 580d-588a); for Mill, see Mill (1861/2001). For a more recent explicit statement of the claim that cognitive experience grounds our values, see Paul (2014).

> *The Dinner Party*. You're at a dinner party with close friends, enjoying good food and good conversation. Halfway through the meal, suppose you are "cognitively zombified," and, as a result, lose all of your cognitive experiences. You no longer have experiences of understanding your conversations, comprehending jokes, or having the conscious thoughts that occur to you during the dinner. Because you still have sensory experiences, however, you retain your visual experiences, experiences of taste and smell, other low-level sensory experiences, and proprioceptive experiences.

I take it that, halfway through the dinner party, you go down in welfare in virtue of losing your cognitive experiences. Notably, however, you do not go all the way to zero, as you can still have welfare goods associated with the senses – the pleasant taste of wine, for example.

Four clarificatory remarks are in order. First, by welfare, I mean the kind of value a person's life has for the person living it. A welfare subject is a being capable of having welfare value. Second, the sense of consciousness at issue is phenomenal consciousness. Phenomenally conscious mental states are those states for which there is something it is like for the subject having them. Third, by "cognitive experience," I mean a kind of phenomenal character had by cognitive mental states, for example, thoughts, judgments, wonderings, and so on. While there is a lively debate in the philosophy of mind over the nature of cognitive phenomenology, in this paper I assume that there exists a kind of phenomenal character had by cognitive states and that it is non-sensory (that is, a kind of phenomenal character not had by sensory states, broadly construed to include bodily sensations,

mental imagery, and inner speech).[4] I also assume that this cognitive phenomenology is *intentional*, that is, it is not mere qualia or "raw feels" but that it plays a role in determining the content of cognitive states.[5] Fourth, by "cognitive zombification," I mean becoming a cognitive zombie, a creature who is physically and functionally alike us in all respects but lacks cognitive experience.[6]

The Dinner Party supports the following intuition:

> **The cognitive zombie intuition:** the presence or absence of cognitive experience can significantly change one's level of welfare.

I find the cognitive zombie intuition plausible and assume that it is a genuine datum to be explained rather than debunked.[7] Indeed, it's helpful to note two arguments for substantive philosophical conclusions that use it as a premise. First, it arguably underlies John Stuart Mill's reply to the objection that utilitarianism is a "doctrine worthy only of swine" (Mill 1861/2001, chapter 2). According to the objection, human lives can contain goods that are not pleasures; by adopting hedonism, utilitarianism does not recognize such goods. It is therefore a theory more fitting of pigs than of humans. Mill's response is to say that there are pleasures that human beings are capable of that non-human animals

[4] On cognitive phenomenology, see Strawson (1994), Siewert (1998), Horgan and Tienson (2002), Pitt (2004), the essays in Bayne and Montague (2011), Smithies (2013a, 2013b), Chudnoff (2015), Kriegel (2015), Montague (2016), and Lennon (2023).

[5] Siewert (1998), Graham Horgan and Tienson (2007), Horgan and Graham (2012), Smithies (2013b), and Lennon (2023).

[6] See Chalmers (1996) for the notion of a philosophical zombie. See Horgan (2011) and Kriegel (2015) on the notion of a partial zombie.

[7] For purposes of this paper, the cognitive zombie case thus provides a *prima facie* argument that cognitive experience matters for our well-being, rather than offering a conclusive argument for this view.

cannot have. He writes that "Human beings have faculties more elevated than the animal appetites and that any plausible version of hedonism "assign[s] to the pleasures of the intellect . . . higher value as pleasures than to those of mere sensation" (Mill 1861: 8). The result is that human beings in fact do value these pleasures involving the intellect *over* those that merely involve the senses. If we think that a pig's life with only sensory pleasure is worse than a human life with the same amount of sensory pleasure but with additional intellectual pleasure, then we have the cognitive zombie intuition: our welfare would be significantly lowered without these cognitive experiences.[8]

Second, Galen Strawson relies on the cognitive zombie intuition to argue for the existence of cognitive phenomenology. He gives the following two-premise argument, which he calls "the argument from interestingness":

> Evaluative Premise: Life – experience – is intricately and complexly interesting and various.
>
> Modal Premise: If cognitive experience didn't exist, life – experience – would be pretty boring.
>
> Conclusion: Cognitive experience exists. (Strawson 2011: 299)

Strawson argues from an evaluative premise about life's interestingness and a modal premise about what phenomenal consciousness must be like for it to be so interesting to a metaphysical conclusion

[8] There is textual evidence that Mill had a concept roughly equivalent to the contemporary concept of phenomenal consciousness (what he calls "Feeling") and of cognitive experiences when he wrote *A System of Logic* (1843) nearly twenty years earlier:

> Feeling, in the proper sense of the term, is a genus, of which Sensation, Emotion, and Thought are subordinate species. Under the word Thought is here to be included whatever we are internally conscious of when we are said to think; from the consciousness we have when we think of a red colour without having it before our eyes, to the most recondite thoughts of a philosopher or poet. (Mill, *A System of Logic*, Book I, Ch. III)

about the breadth of consciousness.[9] The modal premise reflects the cognitive zombie intuition: without cognitive experience, our lives would be far less interesting than they actually are. Because it is plausible that interestingness contributes to increasing our welfare, our lives would be significantly lower in welfare.

While both Mill and Strawson rely on the cognitive zombie intuition to argue for substantive philosophical conclusions, my aim in this paper is different. What explains the cognitive zombie intuition in the first place? Why does the presence or absence of cognitive experience significantly change one's level of welfare? Answering these question is my primary goal in this paper.

3 Is Cognitive Experience a Welfare Good?

Why is one's level of welfare significantly changed after cognitive zombification? In this section I present one possible explanation of the cognitive zombie intuition, that cognitive experience is itself a welfare good, and give two arguments against it.

The idea that cognitive experience is itself a welfare good is entailed by the claim that experience simpliciter is a welfare good. To see this, notice that having a cognitive experience is just a determinate way of having an experience. That is, having a cognitive-phenomenal property is just a determinate way of instantiating the determinable phenomenal property of phenomenal consciousness. On this view, phenomenal consciousness is a basic welfare good, such that a being that has it is better off, at least to some extent, than a being that lacks it. We can call this view Sentientism:

Sentientism Every experience has some positive intrinsic welfare value.

[9] The argument from interestingness has not received as much uptake in the literature as has other arguments for the existence of cognitive experience, but see Chudnoff (2015: ch. 4), who critiques and attempts to improve upon it.

Sentientism has many proponents.[10] Here, for example, is Thomas Nagel:

> There are other elements which, if added to one's experience, make life better; there are other elements which if added to one's experience make life worse. But what remains when these are set aside is not merely neutral: it is emphatically positive. Therefore life is worth living even when the bad elements of experience are plentiful, and the good ones too meager to outweigh the bad ones on their own. The additional positive weight is supplied by experience itself, rather than by any of its consequences. (Nagel 1979: 2)

Consciousness is a welfare good, according to Nagel, such that having experiences at all endows a subject with a positive welfare level.

As mentioned above, Sentientism entails the claim that cognitive experience is itself a welfare good. Call this view Cognitive Sentientism:

> **Cognitive Sentientism** Every cognitive experience has some positive intrinsic welfare value.

Why might Cognitive Sentientism initially seem attractive? Having cognitive experiences, like reading a book or doing mathematics, seems to make a subject's life go better for it than if they hadn't had

[10] Nagel (1979), van der Deijl (2020), and Chalmers (2022). For discussion, see Lee (2018, forthcoming), Lin (2021), Kammerer (2022), Bradford (2023), Roelofs (2023), Kriegel (forthcoming), Smithies (forthcoming), and Simon and Kirk-Giannini (forthcoming). Wilfrid Sellars is noted to have told Daniel C. Dennett that "qualia are what make life worth living" (Dennett 1991: 383).

these experiences. One might object that what makes these experiences positive in welfare is that they involve positive affective phenomenology; it's not the cognitive experiences themselves that make one's life go better, but the positive affect they bring in their wake. In reply, however, we can imagine a being without any affective phenomenal character at all but one having cognitive experiences. David Chalmers (2022) appeals to the character of a Vulcan, a creature who lacks affective phenomenology altogether but who has rich inner lives with a "stream of conscious thoughts about all sorts of complex issues (Chalmers 2022: 343). If Vulcans are positive in welfare, as Chalmers thinks, then their cognitive experiences can explain why. Cognitive Sentientism also neatly explains the cognitive zombie intuition: you lose items of positive welfare (that is, welfare goods) during the Dinner Party, so your welfare level is changed.

As we've seen, one motivation for Cognitive Sentientism is that it is entailed by Sentientism: all experiences have positive welfare value, and cognitive experiences are among these experiences; cognitive experiences have positive welfare value in virtue of being *experiences*. But another motivation comes from cognition: even if it's not the case that *all* experiences have positive welfare value, perhaps *cognitive* experiences in particular have positive welfare value by virtue of being *cognitive*. Having introduced Cognitive Sentientism, and canvassed two different motivations for it, the remainder of this section gives two arguments against it.

The first argument relies on a pair of cases, "Sensory Coma Sam" and "Cognitive Coma Kim." I use these cases to undercut the motivations for Cognitive Sentientism. Consider the first case:

> *Sensory Coma Sam.* Sensory Coma Sam is a human being in a coma, but their perceptual system is still intact, including their capacity for perceptual experiences. Like coma patients, Sam is incapable of self-directed movement, lacks any higher cognitive abilities, including the capacity for thought, belief, and desire, and does not have the capacity for pleasure or pain. Sam's

conscious experience is exhausted by random colored items passing through their field of vision.

Sam's conscious experience consists of impoverished sensory phenomenology and nothing more. I can now run the argument against Cognitive Sentientism as the following *reductio*. Suppose Cognitive Sentientism is true because Sentientism is true. Then having any phenomenal properties at all makes a subject positive in welfare. So Sensory Coma Sam is positive in welfare value. But it's not the case that Sensory Coma Sam is positive in welfare value. So sentientism is false. The first motivation for Cognitive Sentientism is undercut.

Sentientism predicts that Sam is positive in welfare because they are having experiences. But this seems to be the wrong result. Sam takes no pleasure in the colors appearing in their stream of consciousness, nor do they have a desire for colors that can be satisfied by their presence. It is unclear, then, that simply instantiating phenomenal properties by themselves should confer positive welfare value on Sam.[11]

Now consider the second case:

Cognitive Coma Kim. Cognitive Coma Kim is like Sensory Coma Sam in being incapable of self-directed movement, desire, pleasure, and pain, but is instead capable of only impoverished cognitive experiences rather than sensory experiences. Their conscious experience is exhausted by random numerals running through their head. They do not have the capacity for visual, olfactory, tactile, auditory, or gustatory experience.

[11] See also Lee (2018), who argues that it is not consciousness as such that is relevant for intrinsic value, and Smithies (forthcoming), who argues that it is *valenced* consciousness that is relevant for intrinsic welfare value.

Kim's conscious experience consists solely of impoverished cognitive phenomenology and nothing more. We can now undercut the second motivation for Cognitive Sentientism with a similar *reductio*. Suppose Cognitive Sentientism is true because having *cognitive* experiences in particular makes subjects positive in welfare value. Then by having cognitive experiences, Cognitive Coma Kim is positive in welfare value. But it's not the case that Cognitive Coma Kim is positive in welfare value. Therefore, it's not the case that having cognitive experiences makes one positive in welfare.

Cognitive Sentientism predicts Kim is positive in welfare, for Kim has cognitive experiences (albeit very diminished ones). But Kim is to numbers as Sam is to colors: they have no desire for numbers to be satisfied or frustrated; they do not take pleasure in the numbers or experience pain when the numbers are absent. There is nothing to break the parity of welfare levels between Sam and Kim, other than it being a brute fact that experiencing numerals is better for you than experiencing colors. The case of Kim casts doubt on this.

Summing up the first argument: one might be pushed to Cognitive Sentientism because having any experiences at all endows subjects with positive welfare value, or because having cognitive experiences in particular endows subjects with positive welfare value. Sensory Coma Sam undercuts the first motivation, while Cognitive Coma Kim undercuts the second. Either way, we lose motivation to believe Cognitive Sentientism .

Now to the second argument against Cognitive Sentientism. Cognitive Sentientism says that every cognitive experience has positive welfare value. But there are cognitive experiences that appear to make welfare subjects go *down* in welfare. Consider chronic pain patients who have undergone prefrontal lobotomies. These patients very often report that their pain is still present, but that it no longer *bothers* them: they have the sensory component of pain, but not the "emotional-cognitive" component of pain that used to accompany the sensory component (Grahek 2007: 31-2).

The cases I have in mind should be distinguished from two others in the literature on pain. First, there are patients with *congenital analgesia*, who lack *sensations* of pain. Second, there are patients with *pain asymbolia*, who are able to perceive their pain but do not have the affectively valenced responses to these painful sensations. The case I have in mind is a third kind of case. Chronic pain patients who have undergone prefrontal lobotomies report feeling the sensation of pain (unlike congenital analgesia), and report that it still *hurts* (unlike pain asymbolia), but that it does not *bother* them. These patients no longer *worry* about the pain, ruminate about it less, and indeed take a carefree attitude towards it. One patient described their condition after their lobotomy as "the big pain without the little pain" (Brand and Yancey 1997: 210-11). Grahek writes that the use of morphine has a similar effect: "Under the influence of morphine subjects also claim that their pain is still there, and *that it continues to be pain*, but that they no longer mind it" (2007: 33).

These worrisome cognitive experiences that are relieved by lobotomies are counterexamples to Cognitive Sentientism, which says that having a cognitive experience thereby makes one positive in welfare. The patients in these cases have cognitive attitudes they take towards their pain – worrying, ruminating, and being bothered by it – that, once removed, make them go up in welfare. This suggests that their earlier cognitive experiences made them *go down* in welfare.[12] The proponent of Cognitive Sentientism may say that it is the "emotional" part of the "emotional-cognitive" component of pain that confers the negative welfare value before the chronic pain patient's lobotomy. In response, it is doubtful that emotional experiences are fully separable from cognitive experiences. Emotions such as fear can have complex contents that are furnished by cognitive experiences. I can't fear global

[12] This is consistent with my positive proposal introduced in §3, that cognitive experience expands the range of a subject's welfare goods (and, germane to this case, welfare *bads*) by expanding the range of objects our conscious valenced attitudes can take.

warming, for example, unless I'm able to think about global warming. In this way, emotion is enriched by cognition.

I conclude that Cognitive Sentientism is false: cognitive experiences are not welfare goods. Cognitive Sentientism cannot, then, explain the cognitive zombie intuition, that our welfare is significantly changed without cognitive experiences. Drawing on lessons from the case of Cognitive Coma Kim, I present a positive account of the role of cognitive experience that explains the cognitive zombie intuition in the next section.

4 Cognitive Experience Expands the Range of Objects Our Desires Can Take

Despite having cognitive experiences, Cognitive Coma Kim does not seem to have a life worth living. Why not? What was the crucial ingredient they were missing? In this section, I suggest that what Kim lacks are *conscious valenced attitudes*. This paves the way for a positive account of cognitive experience's role in our lives as welfare subjects: cognitive experiences greatly expand the range of objects our valenced attitudes can take, including many paradigmatic welfare goods, such as friendship and intellectual achievements.

Recall that Cognitive Coma Kim's conscious life consists only of conscious thoughts about numbers. Despite this capacity for cognitive consciousness, we are left with the intuition that Kim is not positive in welfare. For Kim is not *pleased* by the numbers that appear in their stream of consciousness, nor are they displeased by them. They do not desire the numbers, nor are they averse to them. They have complete indifference to the thoughts about abstracta popping in and out of their stream of consciousness. Nothing goes well for Kim because nothing matters to Kim.

In short, the kind of experience Kim lacks that would make them positive or negative in welfare are:

Conscious valenced attitudes Attitudes that represent their object positively or negatively, where there is something it is like to have this attitude.

Valenced attitudes are those whose object (that is, what the state is directed towards) is presented in a good or bad way. When I have a desire to visit the new craft brewery opening in town, I have an attitude (desiring) towards some content (visiting the brewery). What's more, this state is positively valenced, as a visit to the new brewery is presented *positively*. Pleasure admits of a similar treatment: when I feel pleasure at a brilliant sunset, I take an attitude (being pleased) towards some object (the experience of viewing the sunset), where this experience is presented positively.[13] And when I feel the pain of a headache and wish to no longer be at the party, I am in states that present their objects as negative (the dull throbbing of my temple, remaining at the party).

What Kim lacks, then, are conscious valenced attitudes – they do not desire, like, care, favor, or feel pleased about anything. And it is the possession of these attitudes that seems to make things matter *for them*. This coheres with the idea that any putative welfare good must *resonate* with the welfare subject if they are to make the subject's life go better (Railton 1986, Rosati 1996). If we stipulate that I do not have any valenced attitudes one way or the other towards, for example, my climbing Mt. Everest, then it is hard to see how climbing Mt. Everest would make my life go better. To hold otherwise, it seems, would be to maintain an objectionably alienating conception of well-being.

So, conscious positively valenced attitudes are of vital importance when it comes to welfare subjectivity. Where does this leave us with the cognitive zombie intuition? Return to the Dinner Party case. With the importance of conscious valenced attitudes in mind, we are now in a position to

[13] Here I assume that *sensory pleasure* is a species of attitudinal pleasure (Feldman 1988, Heathwood 2007). Against this view, see Bramble (2016).

appreciate the following: without cognitive experience, there is an enormously vast range of objects that one can no longer take these attitudes towards. Cognitive experience thus plays an object-expanding role:

Object-expanding role Cognitive experience expands the range of objects a welfare subject can take conscious valenced attitudes towards.

For one cannot simply have an intentional attitude simpliciter; one must have an intentional attitude *towards some intentional object or content*. I am suggesting that cognitive experiences determine the content of some of our conscious valenced attitudes (recall that one of our starting assumptions is that cognitive experiences are intentional rather than mere brute feelings). Cognitive experiences don't determine all of the contents of our conscious valenced attitudes, however, because some of these contents will be determined by sensory experiences.

After cognitive zombification, I am able to take conscious valenced attitudes towards the things represented by my sensory experiences. For example, I can have a pro-attitude towards the ambient lighting of the restaurant, or the taste of the wine. But the range of objects towards which I can take these attitudes will necessary be limited with only sensory phenomenology but not cognitive phenomenology. For it is plausible that sensation, but not cognition, is stimulus-dependent (Beck 2018). So after cognitive zombification, I can no longer take conscious pro-attitudes towards objects that do not rely on some proximal stimulus. What I lose after cognitive zombification is the ability to have pro-attitudes towards objects determined by cognitive experiences, namely, my own thoughts and what they represent. For example, I won't be able to take delight in the fact that the bottle of wine was presented to me as a gift to thank me for my contributions to teaching.

Thought is also famously *productive* (Fodor 1987), so I can not only have a desire for my son to be in good health, but I can also desire my son's son to be in good health, and desire my son's son's son to be in good health, and so on. In this way, I can in principle take conscious valenced attitudes towards an *infinite* number of objects before I am cognitively zombified. Strawson is quite right in saying that life without cognitive experience would be boring.

This seems to be an adequate explanation for the cognitive zombie intuition. Before cognitive zombification, I can take conscious valenced attitudes towards objects like my understanding of supervenience, or the sense of being on the same page in conversation with a friend. After cognitive zombification, I can only take conscious valenced attitudes towards things like the taste of my pasta dish or the ambient lighting of the room.

I now give four clarifications about cognitive experience's object-expanding role. First, one might wonder whether there is a hard and fast line between the objects that are determined by sensory-phenomenal character and cognitive-phenomenal character. This is a variant of drawing the perception-cognition border, a notoriously difficult problem in the philosophy of mind and cognitive science. But this is everyone's problem.[14] It is worth noting that there will be objects determined by cognitive experiences that are closely linked causally and nomically to those determined by sensory experiences. Savoring the taste of a dish involves bringing thought to it, and so this event will involve cognitive-phenomenal character; the same is true of appreciating a work of art that you are perceiving before you.

Second, one might wonder why, on my proposal, the objects of our conscious valenced attitudes must be determined by cognitive *experiences*. Why do the objects of our conscious valenced attitudes have to be determined by consciousness? If what is necessary for well-being – what Cognitive

[14] For a recent monograph-length treatment of this issue, see Block (2023). For an attempt to determine the perception-cognition border in terms of phenomenal character, see Kriegel (2019).

Coma Kim lacked – is conscious valenced attitudes, then these conscious attitudes must have an object determined by consciousness. Otherwise, they would just be conscious valenced attitudes not directed towards anything: mere feelings of undirected wanting, which are impossible. If you consciously want, then you consciously want *something*. Why must the valenced attitude types themselves be conscious? Here I am following others (Heathwood 2019, Siewert 20121, Smithies forthcoming) in holding that the kind of valenced attitudes that are relevant for well-being are *conscious* valenced attitudes. Consciously desiring or feeling pleased are attitudes we are all phenomenologically familiar with – the kind of attitudes that Heathwood (2019) calls "genuine attraction." Even if unconscious valenced attitudes exist and do contribute to well-being, when conscious their contribution to welfare is significantly increased (Bradford 2023: 914). My proposal is that sometimes these conscious pro-attitudes require cognitive experiences to determine their objects.

Third, one might wonder whether cognitive experience's object-expanding role is ambiguous between a quantitative claim (i.e, cognitive experience expands the *number* of objects that subjects can take conscious valenced attitudes towards) and a qualitative claim (that is, cognitive experience expands the number of *kinds* of objects that subjects can take such attitudes towards).[15] I intend the quantitative claim, as I'll explain. Some of the objects that cognitive experience enables subjects to take conscious valenced attitudes towards are different in kind than the objects sensory experience enables subjects to take such attitudes towards. For example, only cognitive experiences allow me to be pleased by the elegance of a logical proof. But not every object determined by cognitive experience is different in kind than objects determined by sensory experience: I can visually perceive and think about, for example, a sunset, and both enable me to feel pleased by the sunset. What's more, the difference in *kinds* of objects cognitive experience enables need not entail a difference in *welfare value*

[15] Thanks to an anonymous referee for prompting me to clarify this point.

for the subject. A relaxing massage might make me go up in welfare more than understanding a dumb joke told by a friend despite the latter involving cognitive experience.

Finally, recall Mill's response to the swine objection: does the fact that typical mature human beings are capable of cognitive experiences entail that beings without such capacities (for example, pigs) are necessarily worse off than humans? The proposal on offer need not have this consequence. Cognitive experiences expand the range of objects our conscious valenced attitudes *can* take, such that beings capable of cognitive experiences can instantiate a broader range of welfare goods. But, just because beings with cognitive experiences are capable of instantiating welfare goods that require such experiences, this does not mean that they always do. A pig and I might be identical in sensory pleasure, and though I am capable of instantiating a broader range of intellectual pleasures, we are equal in well-being if I don't in fact instantiate any intellectual pleasure. What's more, cognitive experience also expands the range of welfare *bads* that typical humans can have. So, if a pig and I are equal in sensory pleasure, but I have the cognitive pain associated with breaking up with a long-term friend, then the pig will have the better life, all else equal.[16]

In §4.1-4.5, I give a non-exhaustive list of welfare goods that we could not take pro-attitudes towards without cognitive experience. The general pattern of reasoning for each listed welfare good is that instantiating the welfare good in question requires *cognitive*, rather than perceptual, capacities, such as the capacity to have a concept or thought. Cognitive experience, therefore, rather than perceptual experience, will be required to take conscious valenced attitudes towards the object constituting the welfare good.

[16] Thanks to an anonymous referee for raising this issue.

4.1 Intellectual achievements

Achievements make welfare subjects go up in welfare; as Gwen Bradford writes, "achievements are, if anything is, on the 'objective list' of the things that can make a life a good one" (Bradford 2013: 204). Certainly many of our achievements count as *intellectual* achievements, involving the deployment of our distinctly cognitive, rather than perceptual, capacities. Writing a paper, solving a math problem, passing a class: these achievements all involve cognitive experiences. If we take conscious valenced attitudes towards these achievements, our doing so is enabled by cognitive experiences. If one were cognitively zombified, intellectual achievements could not serve as the object of our conscious valenced attitudes.

4.2 Friendship

Friendship is a significant element of a good life. It is widely agreed that a necessary condition of friendship is mutual caring: for two people to be friends, they both must care about each other for their own sake (Helm 2021). And to take this attitude of caring towards another person, one must have certain cognitive capacities in place: minimally, one must have some understanding that their friend is the same person over time (Spelke 2022). To care for someone for their own sake, one must recognize that friends are agents with their own beliefs, desires, interests, preferences, and so on. In other words, full recognition of these states of our friends requires one having a "theory of mind," an ability to attribute mental states to others, which is a distinctively cognitive capacity.[17] I cannot really be said to be friends with Daniel, for example, if I *never* recognize and care for what Daniel thinks and wants. Taking conscious valenced attitudes towards our friends for themselves will thus require cognitive experiences. We could not care about our friends in the way that we do, and so could not

[17] The philosophical and psychological literature on theories of mind is vast. For simulationist theories, see Goldman (2006). For theory theories, see Stich and Ravenscroft (1994) and Gopnik and Meltzoff (1997).

have the welfare good of friendship, without these experiences. Sensory experiences alone are not plausible candidates for determining the objects of our desires when we care about our friends for their own sake.

4.3 Humor

A promising account of what it is to find something funny is for a thing or event to violate standard patterns and expectations – that is, for the thing or event to be *incongruous* (Clark 1987). Recognizing many incongruities will require cognitive experiences. For example, grasping the punch line of a joke requires one understand the set-up of the joke and how the punch line is incongruous with one's expectations given the set-up. Noticing this incongruity is not a matter of perceptually discriminating the incongruity; rather, it's a kind of recognitional capacity that involves the deployment of concepts. When a friend purposely subverts expectations in a social setting to humorous effect, it is funny (if it is) because you recognize it as incongruous, and this recognition is a matter of judging that something is incongruous. When we find things funny, we take conscious pro-attitudes towards incongruities of this sort. And much of what we do in fact find funny, I suggest, will involve recognizing incongruities that require cognitive experiences.

4.4 Aesthetic and interpretive experiences

Meaningful engagement with art is another cherished part of the good life, as evidenced by our valuing and seeking out aesthetic experiences (see Peacocke 2023 for an overview). Many philosophers have argued that *conceptualization* is necessary for having aesthetic experiences of this sort (in particular, see Wollheim 1968, 1990). Purposeful engagement with the arts involves interpretation: what is it that the art or artist is trying to *say*? This will involve, at least in part, attributing intentions to the artist, which

requires conceptualization. The experiences we have when engaging meaningfully with art and art criticism, then, will be cognitive experiences.

We thus need cognitive experiences in order to like, want, or find pleasing our engaging with art and art criticism. Discussing the merits of an episode of prestige television, explaining why the opening song of an album didn't quite work for you, or finding a bit of prose from an autofictional novel especially gratifying: these all involve interpretation and so conceptualization, and thus our conscious valenced attitudes must be directed towards objects that are enabled by cognitive experiences. Bare sensory experience is again not a plausible candidate for determining what I enjoy when, for example, I rewatch season two of HBO's *The Wire*.

4.5 Existential experiences

It is part of the human condition to grapple with things like one's own mortality, or one's place in the universe given its immense comparative size (Kierkegaard 1849, Kahane 2013). To the extent that we have a grip on these experiences, and that they constitute a unified kind, we can call them *existential experiences*.

Sometimes we have positively valenced attitudes towards the objects represented by existential experiences. For example, sometimes I have experiences which seem to greatly enrich my life, as in when I am struck by wonder at the fact that for a long time I did not exist but get to, if ever briefly, now. Other times, we have negatively valenced attitudes towards objects that are enabled by existential experiences, as in when am overcome with fear at the prospect of my own death. In having existential experiences, one must instantiate certain abstract concepts, for example, "death", "existence", or "universe." No perceptual experience seems to be a suitable candidate to determine these objects of our valenced attitudes: cognitive experiences must do the trick.

The list of welfare goods in §4.1-4.5 is not intended to be exhaustive. It is, rather, a partial list certain items that human beings like, desire, are pleased by, and so on. What unifies these welfare goods is that without having cognitive experiences, we could not take these valenced attitudes towards them or what they represent. The reason why the Dinner Party case is so tragic is because, after cognitive zombification, you can no longer instantiate these and (in principle) infinitely more welfare goods, as you can no longer desire or be pleased by them.

5 Cognitive Experience and Theories of Welfare

This section concludes by discussing how cognitive experience's object-expanding role intersects with leading theories of welfare.

First, cognitive experience's object-expanding role is consistent with hedonism (Feldman 2004, Crisp 2006, Bramble 2016). Hedonism says that pleasure is the only welfare good and that pain is the only welfare bad. The hedonist can say that, in the Dinner Party case, you go down in welfare because you lose the capacity for many *attitudinal* pleasures, that is, the capacity to be pleased that something is the case. Before cognitive zombification, you can be pleased that your dinner companions are getting along. After zombification, the objects of your pleasures are restricted to the sensory realm, for example, taking pleasure in the chocolate dessert.

Second, cognitive experience's object-expanding role fits neatly with desire-satisfactionism (Heathwood 2016). Desire satisfaction theories say that the satisfaction of our desires is what makes our lives go well. The desire satisfactionist can say that you go down in welfare in the Dinner Party case because there are many objects you can no longer desire – those that engage our cognitive capacities. Because you can no longer desire objects involving cognition, there will be a relatively low ceiling on the total amount of welfare you are capable of after cognitive zombification.

Third, cognitive experience's object-expanding role is compatible with hybrid theories (Wolf 1997, Kagan 2009), according to which satisfying your desires makes your life go well only when the objects of your desires objectively merit being so desired. On these views, your welfare is drastically altered after cognitive zombification because there are some objective goods that you can no longer take conscious valenced attitudes towards.

Fourth, and finally, cognitive experience's objective-expanding role is compatible with objective list theories (Parfit 1984) *if* it is necessary for the welfare goods on the objective list to be the objects of your conscious valenced attitudes (see Lin 2021). You go down in welfare during the Dinner Party according to the objective list theorist because you can no longer instantiate certain objective goods – friendship, intellectual achievement, existential experiences, and so on – that require cognitive experience for you to desire, be pleased by, and the like.

Cognitive experience's object-expanding role appears to fit most naturally with desire satisfactionism, as the hedonist, hybrid theorist, and objective list theorist will have to take on more assumptions than the desire satisfactionist. But, to the extent that these assumptions are reasonable, cognitive experience's object-expanding role is compatible with all of the leading theories of well-being, and all resources in the literature are available to defend any one of them.

In sum, I have offered an explanation of the cognitive zombie intuition, the intuition that life without cognitive experience drastically changes one's welfare. In doing so, I have given a *positive account* of the role of consciousness for theories of well-being. A particular kind of consciousness, cognitive experience, is not itself a welfare good. But, because it expands the range of objects our conscious valenced attitudes can take, it is necessary for instantiating certain kinds of welfare goods: those that involve our cognitive capacities.

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ORCID

https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6314-7825

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