Chapter 6
Utilitarianism, Welfare, Children

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6.1 Introduction

Utilitarianism is the view according to which the only basic requirement of morality is to maximize net aggregate welfare. This position has implications for the ethics of creating and rearing children. Most discussions of these implications focus either on the ethics of procreation and in particular on how many and whom it is right to create,[1] or on whether utilitarianism permits the kind of partiality that child rearing requires.[2] Despite its importance to creating and raising children, there are, by contrast, few sustained discussions of the implications of utilitarian views of welfare for the matter of what makes a child's life go well. This paper attempts to remedy this deficiency. It has four sections. Section 6.2 discusses the purpose of a theory of welfare and its adequacy conditions. Section 6.3 evaluates what prominent utilitarian theories of welfare imply about what makes a child's life go well. Section 6.4 provides a sketch of a view about what is prudentially valuable for children. Section 6.5 sums things up.

[1] See, for example, Singer (2011) and Parfit (1984).

[2] See, for example, Sidgwick (1907: Book IV, ch. iii, § 3.), Broad (1971), and Brink (2001).

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6.2 Preliminaries

Utilitarians are welfarists.[3] They believe that welfare is the only thing that one ought morally to promote for its own sake, and that therefore it is the exclusive concern of moral and political thinking. But in what does welfare consist? What makes a life go well for the individual living it? The purpose of a theory of welfare is to answer these questions. A theory of welfare provides us with an account of the nature of welfare. It tells us what characteristic(s) something must possess in order to make someone fundamentally better or worse off. It details what is non-instrumentally good or bad for an individual. More specifically, it measures prudential value: how well or poorly a life or part of a life is going from the point of view of the entity living it.[4]

The acceptability of a theory of welfare depends on its normative adequacy, or how appropriate it is for the purposes of moral and political reasoning, and on its descriptive adequacy, or how well it captures and explains our considered attitudes about welfare and related concepts.[5] The focus here will be on descriptive adequacy.

According to Wayne Sumner, there are four criteria of descriptive adequacy. First, a theory of welfare must be true to our core beliefs about the concept of welfare and our use of these in practical reasoning and in common-sense psychological explanations. Second, a theory must be general in two senses: it must explicate the range of welfare judgements that we routinely make, positive, negative, and so on, and it must cover the core subjects to whom these judgements are regularly applied, including non-human animals, children, and adults. Third, it must be formal: it must not provide merely a list of welfare's ingredients. It must tell us why certain things make us better off. It must give an account of what relation health, for example, must bear to us to be non-instrumentally good for us. Finally, a theory of welfare must be neutral: it "must not have built into it any bias in favour of some particular goods or some preferred way of life."[6]

Sumner is right that if a theory of welfare, whether for children or for adults or whatever, fails to plausibly capture and explain our most cherished pre-analytic convictions about welfare, this is a sign that something is awry. A theory of welfare must aim at fidelity to our core convictions. In addition, a theory of welfare must be general in the first sense: it must capture all of the "categories of judgement [about welfare] – positive and negative, of fixed levels and of changes in level."[7]

But an account of welfare need not be general in the second sense. It need not apply to all core subjects of welfare assessments. It might, for example, be perfectly adequate for children, but be inadequate for animals and for adults or vice versa. This

[3] Brink (1989: 217) and Sumner (1996: 186).

[4] Sumner (1996: 20); see also Griffin (1986: 31).

[5] Sumner (1996: 10–18); see also Haybron (2008: 43–58).

[6] Sumner (1996: 17–18).

[7] Sumner (1996: 13).

does not entail that it is false or deficient. It means only that the domain to which it applies is circumscribed. Yet it may still be true for those to whom it applies: it will depend on how well it fits with our considered convictions. This sense of generality is no constraint on a theory of welfare – *au contraire*. It has, it seems, led us to overlook the possibility that we fare well differently at different stages in life.

A theory of welfare need not, *pace* Sumner, aim at being formal. First, it is by no means obvious that our search for such a theory should, as Sumner puts it, be guided by the "regulatory hypothesis" that "however plural welfare may be at the level of its sources…it is unitary at the level of its nature."[8] The nature of welfare is not obviously the same for all core welfare subjects. Sumner himself denies that it is: he suggests that infants, small children and adults do not fare well in the same way.[9] It might be that a theory must be formal within distinct categories of welfare subjects. However, even this requirement seems too strong. It begs the question against positions making no attempt to deliver formal theories of welfare distinguishing between welfare's nature and its ingredients. That such views lack formality does not alone detract from their plausibility.

Finally, the neutrality requirement is inapposite when applied to thinking about young children's welfare. A theory that makes welfare dependent in part on the possession of particular goods in the case of non-human animals and young children is *prima facie* attractive. *A fortiori*, a theory of welfare needs to explain the fact that it is appropriate for parents to prefer for their children some forms of life over others on the grounds that this is what is prudentially good for them. A view of welfare must make room for the idea that paternalism is apposite in the case of some welfare subjects. Perhaps all Sumner's neutrality requirement amounts to is the claim that a theory of welfare should not presuppose a "concrete form of life", e.g., a life devoted to repose rather than to developing one's talents, to rigorous planning rather than to spontaneity. If Sumner means only to leave room for this variety of variability, there is no quarrel with him. Most reasonable views respect this weak form of neutrality.

A theory of welfare for children should, then, aim at fidelity to our intuitions about faring well as a child and at capturing and explaining the central categories of welfare judgement regarding children. It need not aim at being formal or at being neutral except in some weak sense. In what follows, the aim is to ascertain how well particular theories of welfare satisfy the criterion of fidelity.

It is important to note here a difficulty associated with working out a theory of welfare for children. There is a great degree of variability amongst the individuals called children. The average 16-year-old shares very little in common with the average 2-year-old, despite the fact that both are routinely called children. It is not possible therefore to work out a theory of welfare that fits all children. Doing so would ignore the fact that children develop quite significantly over time. A better way to proceed is to make a rough division between young children (e.g., toddlers) and older children (e.g., adolescents), and to work out different views for each. This paper focuses on young children.

[8] Sumner (1996: 17).

[9] Sumner (1996: 145, 146, & 178–179).

6.3 Utilitarian Theories of Welfare

Utilitarians have defended a range of views about welfare, including hedonism, life satisfactionism, objective-list views, and desire satisfactionism.[10]

Hedonism is the view that welfare consists in happiness, which consists in surplus pleasure. On this view, pleasure is non-instrumentally good for an individual, and pain is non-instrumentally bad for an individual. Pain is bad because of its painfulness, and pleasure is good because of its pleasurableness. The more surplus pleasure one has the better one's life is going. The more surplus pain one has the worse one's life is going.[11]

Martha Nussbaum notes that hedonism makes good sense of the "receptive and childlike parts of the personality."[12] The hedonists and especially Bentham understood "how powerful pain and pleasure are for children, and for the child in us."[13] Hedonism has a lot going for it as regards young children. It predicts many of our common-sense attitudes about their welfare, e.g., that alleviating their pain, letting them gain excitement from the prospect of a visit from the Easter Bunny, and the pursuit of their typical forms of disporting, is non-instrumentally good for them. It does seem that a child's life goes well to the extent that she finds her life pleasurable on balance.

One worry about the hedonist view is that it fails to capture the range of experiences that matter to a young child's happiness, and therefore to her welfare. Sumner argues, for instance, that states of mind other than pleasure and enjoyment matter to how happy we are, including everything from "bare contentment to deep fulfilment."[14] This is a persuasive criticism. A child is surely happy when she is merely contented with how things are going but not experiencing pleasure or enjoyment. A child is surely unhappy even though he is neither in pain nor suffering but is instead merely feeling glum or experiencing ennui.

To capture these judgements, Sumner advocates a more expansive notion of happiness that he thinks fits young children, namely, affective happiness: "what we commonly call a sense of well-being: finding your life enriching or rewarding, or feeling satisfied or fulfilled by it."[15] This involves judging that your life feels satisfying or rewarding or enriching to you. Together with the view that welfare consists in happiness, we get the position that welfare for young children consists in surplus satisfaction. What is non-instrumentally good for a young child is finding her life satisfying. What is non-instrumentally bad for a young child is finding her life dissatisfying. A child is faring well when her life is on balance satisfying to her.

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[10] These are at any rate among the most prominent.

[11] On one interpretation, this is the classical utilitarian view; see Bentham (1996: chs. i & iv), Mill (1998: chs. ii & iv) and Sidgwick (1907: Book III, ch. xiv).

[12] Nussbaum (2004: 68).

[13] Nussbaum (2004: 68).

[14] Sumner (1996: 149).

[15] Sumner (1996: 146; also 147).

Like hedonism, this view predicts many of our attitudes about young children's welfare. However, it is more attractive than hedonism, for two reasons. The first, as noted, is that it is broader. It captures the full range of mental states relevant to happiness and welfare. The second is that it leaves room for the child's perspective to play a role in her welfare. We do ask children how various states of affairs would make them feel; and we take their judgement to be relevant to their welfare. Retaining the notion of satisfaction leaves some role in a child's welfare for a child's perspective and her judgement about how things are going affectively for her.

Sumner's view faces two challenges. One is that affective happiness as he characterises it contains several sophisticated concepts, including those of reward, enrichment, and fulfilment. It is not clear that young children have the capacity to judge that parts of their lives are fulfilling or rewarding. Such judgements may well be beyond the capacity of young children, for it is not clear that they possess these concepts.

In reply, Sumner can argue that he needs only a minimal notion of satisfaction, requiring no more than that a child have the capacity for some kind of judgement about the affective conditions of the parts of her life. Such responses might be gained from and confirmed using, among other things, verbal and behavioural evidence. It is not unrealistic to think that even a very young child can make a reasonably authoritative assessment of her affective condition.[16]

A second worry is more powerful. On Sumner's view, how well a young child's life is going depends exclusively on her experience of it. This follows from equating welfare with surplus affective happiness or with feeling happy on balance.[17] The more surplus satisfaction a child has the more welfare she has. But this leaves the view of welfare for young children vulnerable to a version of the experience machine objection. Robert Nozick asks us to imagine that scientists have invented a machine designed to replicate experiences associated with living a vast range of lives that one might desire to lead.[18] By plugging in, a child would experience the most robust and sophisticated satisfaction associated with rich friendships, a supportive, safe, and stimulating living environment, and loving parents. This life would of course not be real. But the child would not know this. Suppose the machine could provide more happiness on balance than life in reality. Would it be best for a child to plug in? If Sumner is right, then it seems the answer to this question is affirmative.

Many believe that the answer is not affirmative. One reason for not plugging a child in is that it would involve parents or guardians in violating a duty they have to care for their children. At least initially it seems wrong for guardians to give the care of their children over to a machine and the scientists running it.[19] Each parent has a responsibility to raise his or her child.

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[16] This may not be true of infants, in which case their welfare may consist (at least in part) in some affective state not requiring judgment.

[17] Sumner (1996: 147, 149, & 156).

[18] Nozick (1974: 42–45).

[19] Except perhaps in extreme situations.

This does not refute Sumner's position, for parents might have this reason while it is still true that life inside the machine is better for the child.

There is another reason for not entering a child into an experience machine. It is not just that giving one's child over to a machine involves violating a duty to look after her. There is strong reason to want one's child to fare well. Were there nothing more to welfare than surplus satisfaction, one would feel that there was strong reason for a parent to want a child to plug in. One would feel significant tension between one's duty to look after one's child and one's duty to advance their welfare when confronted with Nozick's experience machine. That there is no such tension except in rare cases suggests that one reason we think it a bad idea for a child to live inside the machine is that there is more to faring well for a child than surplus happiness. The machine is unable to provide in addition to happiness, actual valuable relationships, actual play (physical and other kinds) and so on, things that any loving parent would want for his or her child for the child's own sake.

This argument has not convinced everyone.[20] Those who are unconvinced are keen to defend hedonism. The replies can be modified to defend Sumner's view.[21] There are two lines of defence. The first is to argue that the view can, despite appearances, capture and explain our intuitions.[22] The second is to cast sceptical doubt on our intuitive response to Nozick's thought experiment.[23]

The first line of defence involves noting that there is a strong connection between happiness and, for example, the pursuit of friendships, intellectual activity and play. Young children would be much less happy were they to eschew these things, and we take a dim view of the claim that these things are good for young children in the absence of happiness. The best explanation of this is that these things are good for children because they are instrumental to producing happiness. The defence goes on to note that pursuing these goods as though they are themselves non-instrumentally good is a way to solve the paradox of happiness. Children do better in terms of happiness if they pursue it indirectly rather than directly, by means of pursuing things other than happiness.[24]

In reply, one can argue that the happiness theory has trouble predicting our intuitions in some cases. Suppose your child has two options for what to do this afternoon. Both options involve equal amounts of happiness. In option one, the surplus happiness is taken in active engagement with your child's friends. In option two, the happiness is taken in passively watching TV. The happiness theory says we should be indifferent between these two options. We are not indifferent, however: the former is

[20] It should be noted that the experience machine objection does not show that Sumner's view fails as a theory of illfare. Illusory unhappiness seems to contribute just as much to faring poorly as real unhappiness.

[21] Sumner cannot avail himself of these arguments but this need not concern us here.

[22] For this line of defense, see Sidgwick (1907: 401–406), Crisp (2006a: 117–125) and Crisp (2006b).

[23] For this line of defense, see Hewitt (2010); see also Silverstein (2000) and Brandt (1989).

[24] For these thoughts, see, for example, Sidgwick (1907: 401–406), Crisp (2006a: 119–120), and Crisp (2006b: 637–638).

thought to be better for the child. Suppose further that there is no reason to think that one option is more likely than the other to make a greater contribution to your child's happiness over the long run. We still think that the former is better for the child. We do not have to await the outcome of a felicity calculus to yield this judgement. This suggests that there is more to faring well than surplus happiness.

The second line of defence is to argue that we should not trust intuitions suggesting that things other than happiness matter to welfare. The idea is that in rejecting hedonism we rely on what we want for young children and on intuitions about what is prudentially valuable for them beyond happiness.[25] For the argument to succeed we must be able to trust that such appeals reveal what is in fact prudentially valuable for young children. This, the argument continues, we cannot do, for our desires and our intuitions are shaped by factors (e.g., personal and cultural habits) that undermine their claim to reveal the truth about prudential value.

The best reply to this line of defence is to argue that appeals to what seem intuitively prudentially valuable and to what we desire are operative in arguments for the happiness theory. The traditional arguments for hedonism refer either to desire (Mill) or intuition (Sidgwick).[26] It is not clear what else one could appeal to in order to justify the happiness theory. If such appeals are *verboten*, then we end up with scepticism about prudential value in general.

It might be possible to respond by arguing that we are more directly aware of the prudential value of happiness than we are of the prudential value of other things. Sharon Hewitt, for example, argues that in experiencing happiness "we seem to be, in a very direct way, experiencing *goodness*." This is because goodness is a "phenomenal property of pleasure."[27]

The worry with this reply is that it does not tell us why we should trust what seems to be the case in this experience. Why not think that the appeal here to what seems to be the case is impugned by the same considerations that impugn our intuition that there are things other than happiness that matter to welfare? It may appear to us that happiness is good when we experience it, though this appearance or seeming is the result, as in other cases, of "pre-existing personal and cultural habits" and of a "preference for the familiar, as well as for what those around us are doing and/or approving."[28] Indeed, we might be fashioned to think this way about happiness because of the evolutionary advantages of doing so. We might think that happiness is non-instrumentally good for us because of its importance to the preservation of life and to reproductive fitness. We are in other words fashioned to think that happiness is prudentially good for us merely because of its instrumental importance. It is simply not clear how this seeming is any more reliable than what seems true in cases

[25] For Nozick's appeal to desire, see Nozick (1974: 43 & 45); for his appeal to intuition, see Nozick (1989: 106–107).

[26] Mill (1998: ch. iv) and Sidgwick (1907: 400–401).

[27] Hewitt (2010: 333n7; italics in original). Hewitt defends hedonism but the account of pleasure that she accepts makes her view essentially equivalent to Sumner's happiness view. See Hewitt (2010: 333n8).

[28] Hewitt (2010: 345).

where we have judgments that run contrary to the happiness theory. If the happiness theorist is to fend off this worry, they will rely on tools no less effective in defending the claim that things other than happiness matter to welfare.

There is no trouble free way around the experience machine objection. We should reject the claim that welfare for young children consists in happiness alone. However, we should concede that happiness is a necessary condition of faring well as a child. There are indeed good reasons for doing this. First, doing so captures the intuition that a child's perspective is at least partly relevant to her welfare at a time. Second, it provides us with a clear criterion for determining when something makes a difference to a child's welfare. Third, it explains why hedonistic and happiness theories have appeared compelling when thinking about young children's welfare. Fourth, it explains why books written for consumption by young children consistently focus on their happiness together with other things, e.g., friendships and play.[29]

Happiness is not the only thing that matters to welfare for young children. What more is required? In his discussion of the experience machine objection, Sumner notes that a view according to which only mental states matter to welfare is "too interior and solipsistic to provide a descriptively adequate account of the nature of welfare."[30] He thinks that this is true of hedonism. He does not notice that this is true of his own view of welfare for young children. He provides an account of welfare for adults that he thinks avoids this worry, which involves appeal to information and autonomy.[31] He rightly notes that appeal to these will not work in the case of young children.

How might one avoid this solipsism in the case of young children? One strategy is to impose a value requirement on welfare. A child's life goes well when her satisfaction or happiness is taken in something that is worthy of satisfaction, such as valuable relationships, intellectual activity, and play.[32]

Sumner is sceptical of such views.[33] His first worry is that it is difficult to determine which values matter to faring well. Whose views do we rely on? This worry is not insurmountable. He has encouraged us to take account of the most cherished of our common-sense attitudes about faring well. This puts us in danger of endorsing erroneous or biased views of welfare. The view we arrive at on the basis of this method may well turn out to be parochial. To avoid this, Sumner would presumably insist on relying on a broad set of views and sober reflection and on exposing one's views to analysis by relevant experts. There is no reason why an exponent of a value requirement on welfare for children could not avail themselves of the same tools in articulating their position.

[29] See, for example, Jeram (1999) and Clarke (2002).

[30] Sumner (1996: 98; also 110).

[31] Sumner (1996: 171–183).

[32] These things are described as "worthy of satisfaction" to avoid claiming that they are by themselves good for a child. The phrases "worthy of satisfaction" and "worthy of happiness" are to be treated as synonymous.

[33] Sumner (1996: 163–164).

A second worry that Sumner raises is that "a value requirement…seems objectionably dogmatic in imposing a standard discount rate on people's self-assessed" welfare.[34] He thinks that it is up to the individual to determine how well he or she was faring in the past, something an individual does when her values change over time. His view is that there is no right answer as to how an individual was faring previously: it is up to her to decide now. Things are different with happiness: there is a right answer to how happy one was. When thinking about some prior point in your life, he says: "You do not, and should not, reassess your level of happiness during that earlier stage of your life."[35]

There are three problems with Sumner's claim. First, his view equates children's welfare with their happiness, thereby imposing a "standard discount rate" on it. Second, his discussion is conducted in terms of changes in values and in terms of judgements and capacities that are well beyond young children. Third, it is certainly not obvious that one's adult self is in a position, normatively speaking, to determine one's welfare as a child on the basis of one's adult values. It might be that how well a child fares is fixed by the facts in the same way that everyone's happiness is.

Sumner is wrong to think that happiness is all that matters to children's welfare. One generates a more attractive view by endorsing a value requirement on children's welfare. On this view, a young child's welfare consists in taking satisfaction in activities that are worthy of satisfaction, that is, activities in which it is good for her to take satisfaction. Sumner has given us no reason to reject such a view. Providing it with a defence in part involves saying something about the sort of activities that are worthy of satisfaction for young children. A good place to begin such a defence is a discussion of the objective-list theory of welfare.

The general idea behind the objective-list view is that what is good for an individual does not (necessarily) depend on what satisfies her or her desires. What is non-instrumentally good for an individual is the possession of objectively valuable goods; what is non-instrumentally bad for an individual is the possession of objectively disvaluable evils and/or the lack of possession of objective goods. One's life is going well when one has on balance more objective goods than objective evils.

The most prominent utilitarian exponents of this view are David Brink and Richard Arneson.[36] Brink has the most developed version. He describes it as "objectivism about welfare."[37] According to Brink, what is non-instrumentally good for an individual "neither consists in nor depends importantly on…psychological states," e.g., desires.[38] There are in particular three primary components of welfare: development, pursuit and realization of an agent's admissible projects, certain personal and social relationships.[39] These are good for an individual in part because they involve the exercise of certain desirable traits and capacities. Pursing and realizing

[34] Sumner (1996: 165).

[35] Sumner (1996: 165; also 157).

[36] See also Hooker (2000: 43).

[37] Brink (1989: 231).

[38] Brink (1989: 221 & 231).

[39] Brink (1989: 221).

worthwhile projects involves practical reason: "the capacity to evaluate courses of action and decide what to do."[40] Forming, pursuing, and maintaining personal and social relationships involves our capacity for sociability and in particular our capacities "for sympathy, benevolence, love, and friendship."[41] These relationships express such capacities because they involve "mutual concern and respect" and "treating others as people whose welfare matters."[42]

Brink's view does not help us determine the nature of children's welfare. The problem with the view is that it relies on and emphasizes capacities and traits that young children typically do not possess in any reasonable and stable degree. This is especially true of Brink's understanding of practical reasoning. Children even at an advanced age seem incapable of engaging in the sort of practical reasoning that Brink describes, which involves, among other things, deep reflection, life plans and long-term projects.[43] The same is true of the other goods, for children do not realise and pursue the kind of personal and social relations that assume pride of place in his view. Young children do not for example engage in relationships that involve developing shared intentions, long-term planning, agreement, and bargaining (especially over how to solve conflicts between the principles governing mutual interaction), among other things. These are the relationships on which Brink focuses; they involve "agents" and "persons".[44]

Brink's objective-list view does not fit children. In addition, it is missing something that all agree matters to children's welfare, i.e., happiness. Arneson's list is more promising. He notes that love, accomplishment, friendship, pleasure and desire satisfaction would be on any plausible objective list.[45] Some of these fit children (pleasure and friendship); whether others do depends on how they are interpreted. In his discussion of love, for example, Arneson focuses exclusively on romantic love.[46] This is not the sort of love that appears to be worthy of satisfaction for young children. His discussion is at any rate conducted entirely with adults in mind.[47]

However, that advocates of the objective-list theory of welfare fail to develop views that fit children does not entail that their position is false. Arneson notes that some versions of the objective-list view accept that "there are different types of persons and a distinct list for each type."[48] He might be open to the idea that there is a distinct list for children, in which case all he needs to do is draw up a list of goods

[40] Brink (1989: 232).

[41] Brink (1989: 233).

[42] Brink (1989: 233; also 234).

[43] "The formation and pursuit of projects should be reflective; an agent's decisions should reflect a concern for her entire self. This requires that she attempt to integrate projects into a coherent life plan, one that realizes the capacities of the kind of being that normative reflection on human nature tells her she is." Brink (1989: 232).

[44] Brink (1989: 231 & 234).

[45] Arneson (1999: 119, 136, 140, & 141).

[46] Arneson (1999: 140).

[47] This is true of Hooker's view, which has a "central" role for "autonomy". See Hooker (2000: 43).

[48] Arneson (1999: 118). We can assume that "persons" here refers to "individuals".

that is specifically geared toward children. This requires no more than that he modify the list of the goods that he thinks form the nature of welfare.

What would such a list look like? An answer to this question will be provided in the next section. The view of young children's welfare that appears defensible to me includes a list of activities that are worthy of happiness. As some of the foregoing suggests, the possession of such things is part of the nature of children's welfare. It will suffice to maintain that the things most worthy of happiness for children are intellectual activities, loving and valuable relationships, and play, involving enjoyable mental and physical activity engaged in for its own sake.

The main difficulty with the objective list view is that it holds that one can fare well at a time without experiencing any happiness. This element of the view is dubious in the case of children. There are good reasons to think that happiness is necessary for faring well as a child. Hedonism and the satisfaction view appear to be too solipsistic and interior to be adequate views of children's welfare; they leave no room for things other than experiences to play a role in a child's welfare. The objective-list view has the opposite problem. It leaves too little room for the individual child. In particular, it leaves too little room for the seemingly important role that a child's own affective responses play in a child's welfare at a time. Of course, proponents of the objective-list view can and do include happiness and pleasure on their lists, but this seems insufficient to support the compelling idea that it is only when a child is happy that a child is faring well.

There is, however, a formidable challenge to the idea that happiness is necessary for well-being. Arneson claims that an experience requirement on welfare is refuted by the following case. Suppose that an individual desires strongly to write and publish a good novel and that this state of affairs obtains, but that it involves no "experience of any sort on the part of the desiring agent."[49] Arneson says that it is plausible to say that one is better off as a result of having this desire satisfied.

This is not persuasive. Suppose the state of affairs obtains while the person is an irreversible comma. Does the satisfaction of this desire really make the individual better off? It seems very hard to believe that it does.

This might be a strange example. Here is another, better one. Suppose that your child works hard to gain proficiency in ice hockey and that she takes great satisfaction in doing so. She acquires the skills of skating, puck control, stick handling, efficient passing, and so on. She gains these skills to such a degree that she is able to play hockey at a very high level thereby satisfying a desire of hers to do so. Suppose, however, that once she achieves her goal of earning a spot on the top team and is able to play with the best players, she experiences no happiness. The happiness she felt before is gone: she is left, as Arneson puts it, with no affective "experience of any sort."[50] It is highly plausible to think that up until she played with the top team she was faring well. It is less attractive to claim that she is now faring well. There is some reason to regard her current situation as less desirable. A reasonable explanation is that she is no longer faring well.

[49] Arneson (1999: 123).

[50] Arneson (1999: 123).

One might insist that what we really think is that the child is faring less well than she was. But there seems little basis for this claim: she is left absolutely affectively flat by the experience. The victory, we might say, is hollow. Suppose she wants to abandon playing, and I encourage her not to do so. When I do so I cannot really credibly claim to be doing so in order to promote her welfare if I know that she will gain no happiness. If I really thought she'd gain welfare in doing so I would try to find ways to get her to see that she will enjoy it either now or shortly with some effort. I might point to the fact that the other kids are enjoying it (if they are) or I might tell her to take a break and reconsider. If I really think that no happiness will be had, I might still, using a different tone, encourage her to continue. But in this case I might say that there is an important moral consideration to continue – you ought to finish what you started, your teammates are counting on you – or that it is important to pursue non-welfarist values, e.g., achievement.

At any rate, it is not obvious what is problematic in saying a young child cannot fare well in the absence of happiness. One can argue that some value other than welfare is being promoted when happiness is absent. However, saying that one can fare well in the absence of happiness is problematic. It involves ignoring a child's perspective about what matters to her. It ignores what resonates with her. It involves ignoring what all agree is salient to a young child's welfare.

I have been suggesting thus far that the most enticing view of welfare for young children is a hybrid view, combining elements of both the happiness view and the objective-list view. Before outlining it, it is important to note that the view stands in stark contrast to what is by far the most popular view of welfare amongst the utilitarians. This is the desire theory of welfare. On the desire view, the satisfaction of a desire makes one non-instrumentally better off; the frustration of a desire makes one non-instrumentally worse off. One's life is going well when one has on balance more of one's desires (adjusted for strength) satisfied than frustrated.

There is some dispute over which desires matter to welfare. Some believe that welfare consists in the satisfaction of one's actual desires.[51] In *Intelligent Virtue*, Julia Annas appears to suggest that this view fits young children.[52] The problem with the actual preference view, however, is that there may be too few actual desires to capture the range of things that matter to young children's welfare. Nozick suggests that one reason we might not think that one fares well inside the pleasure machine is that it fails to fulfil the range of one's desires. He is thinking in particular of the desire to be a certain person, the desire to do certain things and the desire to have contact with reality.[53] The problem is that children may not have these wants. They may not have in particular any clear desire for contact with reality or the desire to do certain things. If they failed to have these desires, we would not think that they would be better off plugging in. The problem is not that the set of desires that a child has is in some way corrupted or inauthentic. The problem is that the set of desires is not robust enough to capture all of what matters to a

[51] For a defense of this view, see Heathwood (2005).

[52] Annas (2011: 134).

[53] Nozick (1974: 43 & 45).

young child's welfare. This might be due to the fact that the set of desires is not mature or developed enough. That we think this is presumably why we encourage children to develop desires for certain things.

Some of the worries about the actual desire satisfaction view might be deflected by adopting the view that welfare for children consists in the satisfaction of the desires one would have were one fully rational, i.e., informed and free of logical errors. R. B. Brandt's version of the view is that a desire is rational when it survives cognitive psychotherapy; otherwise, it is irrational. A desire survives cognitive psychotherapy when one possesses it after one has at the right time repeatedly and vividly exposed one's desire to all of the available empirical facts that are relevant to its formation.[54]

The purpose of relying on cognitive psychotherapy is to discover what one truly wants or what is truly good for one. It has its greatest attraction in cases where one is making a decision about what to do with one's life.[55] The idea seems to be that one has an evaluative profile, and that all one needs to do to find out what it truly dictates is to undergo cognitive psychotherapy. The problem is that in the case of a child we have no reason to think that the outcome of this process – in the event that it is (a) possible and (b) consistent with treating a child properly – is one we have reason to think will reveal a robust evaluative profile. The problem with this position is that it assumes that the individual in question has a reasonably developed value-system. The aim is to find out what of the things you value is really good for you from your perspective. The function of cognitive psychotherapy, according to Brandt, is to help the agent in question "find his [her] ideal value-system."[56] But do young children have reasonably developed or "ideal" value-systems? The answer seems to be negative. This is because a child's value system is still under development. Even were some value system to emerge it would lack the characteristic that such a system of values possesses in the case of adults, namely, a presumption of authority.[57]

Peter Railton's version of the desire theory might be more suitable. He maintains that what is good for one is what one's fully informed self would want one to want in one's actual situation. This is referred to as the ideal advisor view, for the advisor is an ideal version of you. She is more informed and therefore more authoritative. She tells you what is good for you, rather than what is good *sans phrase*. The idea is that

[54] Brandt (1979: 110–129).

[55] See, for example, Brandt's discussion of the professor deciding where to work. Brandt (1979: 125–126).

[56] Brandt (1979: 114).

[57] Brandt may be willing to grant that this view does not fit young children. In an article, he suggests that some individuals might not be "sufficiently mature to engage in the reflective evaluation characteristic of 'cognitive psychotherapy'." Brandt (1989: 40). In Brandt (1979), he argues that happiness consists in net or surplus enjoyment, and that "obviously in the case of children, animals, and mental defectives we want to make them happy and avoid distress." He is clear that he thinks that this is all we want for them. His position seems to be that this is a closed question in the case of children, though not in the case of adults. Brandt (1979: 146, 147, & 252). It's not clear how he squares these claims with his account of the concept of welfare.

one's good is determined not by what one's fully informed self wants for herself in her position. The satisfaction of such wants might not be good for one in one's actual situation. Instead, as Railton puts it, "an individual's good consists in what he would want himself to want, or to pursue, were he to contemplate his present situation from a standpoint fully and vividly informed about himself and his circumstances, and entirely free of cognitive error or lapses of instrumental rationality."[58]

This is not a plausible view about what is good for young children. How do we inform a child so that she is in a better to position to judge what is good for her in her actual situation? The trouble is that informing a child to the right and proper degree seems to involve turning her into an adult, for, it seems, being vividly informed in this way is inconsistent with what it is to have the perspective of a child, which is the relevant standard for determining a child's welfare. This suggests that there is something incoherent about thinking of a child's good as consisting in what a more fully informed version of a child would recommend to herself in her actual circumstances. Even if this worry were avoidable, it is still meaningful to ask whether the ideal advisor's desires would be a normatively adequate standard for a child. Why think that we should trust that this informed version of a child is the right standard for the child? After all, what the ideal advisor might want is for a child to do things that are good for the future adult the child will become rather than the child herself. Indeed, since there is no requirement that the advisor care about the individual in question there is a real possibility that the advisor may (arbitrarily) discount the child's good relative to the future adult's good.

We might add here that the worry that arises for Brandt also arises for Railton. The problem is that Railton's view seems to presuppose that there is some set of authentic desires or some set of desires that truly reflect one's autonomous self that the process of informing and freeing from error terminates in. But there is no such set of desires in the case of children and there is no presumption that this set of desires, even if it did exist, would be worthy of respect. To put the point another way, the desire view aims to preserve the individual's authority to determine what is good for her. But there is no such authority to be preserved in the case of a child, suggesting that this view is applicable only to adults, where the presumption of authority makes sense. We should therefore reject the desire theory as an adequate account of children's welfare.

6.4 Welfare as Satisfaction in What Is Worthy of Satisfaction

It was suggested above that a child's welfare consists in being happy in what is worthy of happiness. A child is better off when she is both happy and her happiness is taken in something that is worthy of it. This is a hybrid theory of welfare. Some utilitarians defend this sort of position, though none has applied it to children.[59]

[58] Railton (1986a: 16); see also Railton (1986b).

[59] See, for example, Parfit (1984: 500–501) and Kagan (2009). For a similar view that is explicitly applied to children, see Kraut (2007: 131–204). Kraut is not a utilitarian. For a critical evaluation of Kraut's view, see Skelton (2014).

Something has already been said about the nature of the happiness that is integral to this position. It is plausible to follow Sumner in holding that happiness consists in something like satisfaction.[60] But what things are worthy of a child's happiness? It was suggested in the previous section that it is possible to draw up a list of activities worthy of happiness for children. A promising list includes intellectual activity, loving and valuable relationships, and play. It is important to say more about these activities.

One can do so by dwelling on Thomas Scanlon's view of welfare. He argues that welfare consists in success in one's worthwhile projects, valuable personal relationships, and desirable consciousness.[61]

The last of these fits the case of children. It is captured in the claim that happiness is a necessary condition of welfare.

The second of Scanlon's goods also fits children. However, the relationships or friendships that matter to how well a child's life is going are different from the ones on which Scanlon focuses. The sorts of friendships and relationships that are worthy of satisfaction for children are not the same as those that Scanlon thinks are good for adults, because the latter seem to presuppose attitudes (reciprocity) and abilities (mutual and shared cooperation over time) that are beyond young children.[62] Scanlon also claims that the prudential value of valuable relationships *depends* in part on the fact that they constitute the achievement of a worthwhile goal. A happy and loving monogamous marriage is prudentially valuable both because it is a valuable relationship and because it is the concrete realization of the goal that two people share of living together happily. In the case of children, it is not possible to make this kind of dependency claim. This is due to the fact that success in one's worthwhile goals has to do with the desirability of one's "choices and reactions" and with "how well…[one's] ends are selected and how successfully they are pursued."[63] There are no such standards that govern young children for they cannot make the sort of sober choices and take the actions that seem to matter to the pursuit of worthwhile goals. They cannot be held responsible as adults can for making certain choices or for pursuing certain ends.

The relationships that are worthy of satisfaction for children are, first, loving, engaging relationships with adults with whom the child is closely bonded, socially speaking (e.g., a parent or grandparent). These should take on a particular shape. They need not be based on reciprocity or on robust attitudes of equal concern and respect. They should involve the child being loved by a caregiver or parent where this involves a life-shaping desire on the part of the caregiver to nurture and guide the child by means of reasonable moral and other principles. It should involve a deep desire to engage and support and love the child for her own sake and to provide the child with the environment in which to express him or herself honestly

[60] For a different view of happiness, see Haybron (2008: 105–151).

[61] Scanlon (1998:120–123); see also Scanlon (2011).

[62] For what appears to be Scanlon's view of friendship, see Scanlon (1998: 88–90).

[63] Scanlon (1998: 125).

and in which the child can develop the skills for success in adulthood. It should, however, not necessarily include complete candidness on the part of the adult. Finally, the child should recognize the adult as someone to whom she or he should defer and as someone who he or she can trust and from whom he or she can seek assistance or care.

Another, second set of relationships is worthy of satisfaction for children, namely, valuable friendships with other children, including siblings (if any). It is hard to characterize these in any detail. They can take on myriad forms. Generally, they are worthy of happiness when they involve at least some form of cooperation, effective communication and the use of skills to create situations that are to the mutual benefit of the children in question. These seem to be worthy of satisfaction even if they last only for a short period and even if they are pursued largely at the discretion of a child's parent(s).

In addition to desirable consciousness and valuable relationships, Scanlon argues that success in one's worthwhile aims or goals makes one better off. As suggested above, this seems not to fit young children. However, it is possible to argue that there is something in the vicinity of this item that does fit children, namely, the development of the sorts of capacities and the activities that are integral to and that enhance success in one's rational aims in the future. One such good is that of intellectual activity, the use and development of one's intellect or intellectual powers. This should not simply be equated with the acquisition of knowledge, which may be entirely passive, or simply with what is required for success in one's goals in adulthood. What matters is something like intellectual striving and growth. This encompasses a broad range of things, including curiosity, learning, artistic activity and creation, understanding, appreciation, reasoning, and so on. It is important that we do not think that intellectual activity is worthy of satisfaction only because it is relevant to/connected with success in one's rational aims in the future. It can be good for a child to happily develop his aesthetic appreciation and abilities even when this has little or no impact on his abilities in later life.

A final item is that of play. This is missing from Scanlon's list. It seems integral to faring well as a child. What is of particular importance is the sort of play that is unstructured and spontaneous, and which might involve playing with friends, animals, or one's parents, or playing a game. The basic idea is that what is worthy of satisfaction for a child is to be free from what Moritz Schlick describes as purposes. This is, in his view, the essence of play: "free, purposeless action, that is, action which in fact carries its purpose within in itself."[64] This is a pursuit that is distinct from that which connects with success in one's future goals or aims. There is also another form of play that is worthy of happiness. This is the sort of thing that John Stuart Mill says he lacked in his childhood: "the accomplishments which schoolboys in all countries chiefly cultivate." Mill is referring primarily to physical activities involving "feats of skill or physical strength" and "ordinary bodily exercises."[65] The free use of one's physical abilities for no purpose or goal by, for example, playing

[64] Schlick (1979: 114).

[65] Mill (1981: 39).

in a park, swimming on one's back, swinging on a swing, or riding a bike, is an activity that is worthy of satisfaction for a child.

My view, then, is that when these activities are objects of satisfaction or when a child finds herself happily engaged in one of these activities, this is prudentially good for her. When a child has a surplus of satisfaction or happiness in an activity that is worthy of happiness her life is going well for her.

This account has virtues that are worth highlighting briefly. First, it is attractive on its face and avoids some of the errors of the views discussed above. Second, it seems to possess the kind of weight or importance that a normatively adequate view of welfare should possess. The account makes it clear why children's welfare is worth promoting. Third, it is a view of welfare that involves the engagement of the full range of a child's capacities, active and passive, intellectual and physical. Fourth, it is not obviously in tension with views of welfare that seem to be plausible in the case of adults.

This view does, however, face some objections, three of which will be addressed here. The first is that it fails to capture the fact that sometimes happiness appears by itself to enhance a young child's welfare. Surely, when a child enjoys a sweet drink or laughs at a mindless joke, the happiness she receives from this makes her to some extent better off. It is certainly better for a child to plug into an experience machine in cases where all other options lack happiness or produce only suffering. It is hard to deny that there are cases in which happiness in the absence of things worthy of happiness is sufficient for welfare. But the sort of welfare that this happiness forms is going to be of a low form, compared to the welfare represented by the hybrid view defended above. It is low welfare or low fare. Thinking of it this way explains the intuition that being in a machine and eating sweets are not as good for a child as are situations in which the same quantity of happiness gained from these is taken in things worthy of happiness. The view of welfare defended here is full welfare or full fare.

The second objection targets the account of full welfare. Roger Crisp argues that it is mysterious that the activities worthy of happiness do not count towards welfare in the absence of happiness but that they do count when they are found with happiness.[66] This does not, however, strike me as especially mysterious. Some of the mystery is dispelled by noting that the hybrid view captures many of our intuitions about what it means to fare well (fully) as a young child, and by noting that it involves the unity of things that we think are in some way independently desirable.

The third objection claims that the view defended here cannot capture important intuitions about the following kinds of situations. Suppose a child believes that her classmates love her when in fact they do not. They routinely mock her when she is not present. She derives a lot of (surplus) happiness from her mistaken belief. One might think that since the account of welfare defended here denies that the possession of things worthy of happiness in the absence of happiness make one better off, the account cannot accommodate the judgement that this child's life is going less well than it would be were she not being mocked.

[66] Crisp (2006a: 123) and Crisp (2006b: 640).

The account given here does capture this judgement. It claims that while the happiness makes a positive contribution to welfare, the fact that it is not taken in something that is worthy of happiness means that it counts for much less welfare value than it would were it to be taken in something that is worthy of happiness (e.g., loving friends).

It is important to end by emphasizing that the view developed here is an account of welfare for young children who are not properly autonomous. It may not, then, be suitable for older children who have developed at least some capacity for agency and autonomy. A theory of welfare for older children who possess more robust forms of agency should include some space for that in the core elements of the position. This is not to suggest that the view defended here leaves no room for choice and for exercises of proto-agency. Because a child fares well when she takes happiness in intellectual activity, which involves choice and the articulation of some limited aims, and in play, which often involves at least primitive thoughts about the desirability of various pursuits and the need to make choices, faring well as a young child seems to involve the acquisition of just those skills that are necessary for the execution of agency and autonomous decision making in the future.

6.5 Conclusion

This paper discussed a number of theories of welfare to which utilitarians have been attracted. Some imply a view about what it is to fare well as a child, including hedonism, Sumner's happiness view, and the actual desire satisfaction view. I have argued that these views are not descriptively adequate. Some views fail to imply anything about children's welfare, including fully informed desire views. Some views fit children but only with modification. This is true of objective-list views. But, it was argued, even with modification these views are not acceptable. A hybrid view of welfare for young children according to which welfare consists in happiness in activities worthy of happiness appears most defensible. In some cases, however, happiness is sufficient for welfare, though this welfare is inferior to the welfare that results when a young child takes happiness in activities worthy of happiness.[67]

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