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Ben Bramble, *The Passing of Temporal Well-Being*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 64 pages. ISBN: 9781138713932 (hbk.). Hardback/eBook: £46.99/17.00.

Temporal well-being is someone's well-being at a moment or during some period of time shorter than their whole life. According to this book, it is an idea whose time is come. Bramble defends an "error theory" about temporal well-being: there is no such thing (p. 15). There is only lifetime well-being: "how well off someone was, or how she fared, in her life considered as a whole" (p. 1). The book has two main arguments, which Bramble labels The Normative Significance Argument and The No Credible Theory Argument.

The Normative Significance Argument (chapter 2) is a combination of two claims labeled The Significance of Genuine Well-Being (SNOG) and The Singular Significance of Lifetime Well-Being (SSLW). According to SNOG, anything which genuinely deserves the label of well-being must matter intrinsically and provide us with an ultimate source of reasons for action. This is why your well-being and your cat's well-being matter, but the rock's well-being and a car's well-being don't. The latter two are metaphorical, rather than genuine, well-being.

Next is SSLW, according to which only a contribution to lifetime well-being can make a normative difference to the value of outcomes and serve as an ultimate source of reasons. Bramble provides seven brief arguments for SSLW. Some examples:

1. Imagine wanting your newborn child's life to go as well as possible: you want their life as a whole to go well, not merely for periods of their life to go well (p.16).
2. When we debate whether historical figures led fortunate lives, we only judge their lives as a whole, rather than also adding the value of periods in their lives (pp. 16-7).
3. If the value of moments is part of our overall well-being beyond their contributions to lifetime well-being, our level of overall well-being is vastly higher than our lifetime well-being, because our overall well-being includes our lifetime well-being plus our well-being at every moment in our lives, and our lives have lots of moments. But it is implausible to think our overall well-being and our lifetime well-being diverge this much (p. 17).

SNOG + SSLW entail Bramble's central thesis, which is that temporal well-being does not exist. Temporal well-being can't make a normative difference or be an ultimate source of reasons given SSLW, and thus it can't be genuine given SNOG.

One might object that temporal well-being is normatively significant because it constitutes lifetime well-being. Bramble replies that if things were otherwise and temporal well-being didn't constitute lifetime well-being, only lifetime well-being would be the source of reasons, and this shows that normative significance attaches to something insofar as it affects lifetime well-being and never to something insofar as it affects temporal well-being. A defender of temporal well-being may reply that things could not have been otherwise, since by definition lifetime well-being is constituted by temporal well-being, but Bramble does not address this possibility. He does revisit the argument that temporal well-being makes up lifetime well-being in chapter 4, where he argues that the three main theories of well-being can go without temporal well-being.

This is good news for those theories, Bramble thinks, because in the No Credible Theory Argument (chapter 3), he argues that the three main theories of well-being cannot give coherent accounts of temporal well-being. Hedonists think well-being is pleasure. Objective list theorists think well-being consists of getting things that are objectively good. Desire-satisfaction theorists think that well-being consists of satisfying desires. All three of these theories allegedly cannot explain temporal well-being. Moments are not the sort of thing that can contain well-being for hedonists, because pleasures stretch over time. If we broaden our scope from moments to periods of time, other issues arise (pp. 29-33). Moments also cannot contain knowledge, achievement, or fulfillment of one's nature, and so objective list theorists (who think that well-being consists of things like these) and desire-satisfaction theorists (who must admit that we have desires for things like these, and for other things that cannot exist at a moment) also cannot explain momentary well-being (pp. 33-38).

Chapter 5 raises some implications of Bramble's arguments for what we should think about childhood well-being (it matters only insofar as it affects our lifetime well-being), public policy and national prosperity (both of which should focus on lifetime well-being, not momentary well-being), how we should live our lives (with an eye towards our entire lifetime, not merely the moment), and whether to replace quality-adjusted life years, which measure the value of a year of life by adjusting for health concerns, with well-being-adjusted life years (WELBYS or WALYS), which measure temporal well-being (no). The general thought is that if we think in terms of temporal well-being, "we are liable to get the wrong answers" (p. 56).

Bramble's overall thesis is a bold one that strikes at the conceptual heart of well-being. There is much of interest in the book for theorists of well-being, like Bramble's sketches of how the three main theories of well-being can be formulated such that they do not rely on any notion of temporal well-being. He argues that hedonists about momentary well-being can't give a coherent account of pleasures that occur over a period of time, like a kiss (pp. 31-3). He also claims that both objective list theorists and desire-satisfaction theorists of momentary well-being must endorse "internalism," the thesis that "temporal well-being is determined just by the intrinsic state of the world at the time in question" (p. 34). These are interesting arguments in themselves, regardless of temporal well-being.

The book's concision and narrow focus make it an easy recommendation for anyone interested in the topic. Its brevity also means it may fail to convince those who are inclined to defend temporal well-being. Arguments are often very brief. A believer in temporal well-being may find themselves objecting to more or less every argument, and only rarely does the book have space to anticipate and respond to such objections. Bramble does discuss objections throughout the book, and chapter 4 is devoted to replies six objections, but that chapter is 10 pages long, so even there it may not put to rest the objections that one might have.

This concision also precludes the book from exploring in depth some of the deeper conceptual issues which it might be useful to investigate insofar as one wishes to get to the bottom of what exactly to say about temporal well-being's nature and existence. One thread that surfaces at various points is the distinction between total well-being (or as Bramble typically puts it, our "overall fortunateness" (p. 17) or "overall level of fortunateness" (p. 20)) and lifetime well-being. Bramble thinks the two are equivalent (as he must, because if there is no temporal well-being, the two are the same). Therefore, much work is done by claims about what total well-being must or must not look like, and how this picture rules out temporal well-being. This is the case for instance in the third argument for the SSLW described above. But, it is not always clear what considerations or intuitions are substantiating these claims.

For instance, when Bramble claims the two measures cannot “diverge too greatly,” I am not sure why his opponent must grant this, nor am I sure what amount of divergence would be acceptable in Bramble’s eyes, and why (especially given that he thinks the two must be not just similar but equal) (p. 17). Unless we beg the question against temporal well-being by assuming that overall and lifetime well-being must be equal, I am inclined to accept that they can diverge greatly, and I don’t see what is unintuitive about this in the first place. But the book does not address this worry, let alone defend the approach Bramble takes beyond adverting to intuitions all are assumed to share. Since I do not share the intuition, or other related intuitions like the one that I should not be willing to trade too much of my lifetime well-being for some arbitrarily large amount of temporal well-being (p. 19), I’m not sure what I ought to think about these arguments.

Another potentially important topic is personal identity, which the book discusses once (briefly) and otherwise ignores. Defenses of temporal well-being might come from approaches to prudence, well-being, and personal identity which Bramble dismisses without argument as “implausible” (p. 26). These theories of personal identity hold that our lives do not display the sort of unity which would make lifetime well-being the only conceivable sort. Similarly, theorists interested in the well-being of non-human animals might think that they lack the unity required for us to speak of their well-being only in terms of a lifetime, rather than also (or perhaps only) in terms of periods shorter than their lifetimes. Debate about these topics goes entirely unmentioned. Thus temporal well-being may have grounds to claim that rumors of its demise have been somewhat exaggerated.

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