



Well-Being: Reality's Role

ABSTRACT: *A familiar objection to mental state theories of well-being proceeds as follows: Describe a good life. Contrast it with one identical in mental respects, but lacking a connection to reality. Then observe that mental state theories of well-being implausibly hold both lives in equal esteem. Conclude that such views are false. Here we argue this objection fails. There are two ways reality may be thought to matter for well-being. We want to contribute to reality, and we want our experience of the world to be veridical. Yet, if one accepts that reality matters in either of these ways, one must posit differences in well-being where no such differences exist.*

KEYWORDS: well-being, mental state theory, experience machine, hedonism

Introduction

Theories of well-being attempt to answer the question: What makes a life go well for the person living it?¹ Such theories capture the features that your life must possess in order to be good-for-you. This is not to be confused with other questions one may ask about a life that is good. Theories of well-being do not ask: What makes a life morally good? Nor do they ask: What life is beautiful? They ask: What makes a life noninstrumentally good for its subject? Given what a theory of well-being aims to analyze, we should not assume that questions along these different dimensions of goodness invite the same answer. It is thus no strike against a theory if it fails as an account of what makes a life morally, aesthetically, or impersonally good. Indeed, it may turn out that the life that is best-for-you makes things worse-*simpliciter*.

A central divide among theories of well-being concerns the significance they assign to mental states. All plausible views take mental states to be a necessary component of well-being. But according to the *mental state theory*, they are also sufficient. Your psychological life fully determines how well your life goes for you. For example, hedonism, the chief version of the mental state theory, holds that one's well-being is solely determined by a subset of one's mental states, namely, experiences of pleasure and pain. Varieties of the *nonmental state theory*, by contrast, take into account considerations apart from one's mental states.

Many thanks for helpful comments on earlier drafts to Scott Aikin, Steve Cahn, Jeremy Dickinson, Winnie Sung, and two anonymous referees at this journal.

¹ For an instructive overview of what well-being theories hope to analyze, see Feldman (2004: ch. 1), Darwall (2002: ch. 1), Bykvist (2010: ch. 4), and Kagan (1992: 185).



On desire-satisfaction views, for instance, well-being consists in the actual fulfillment of one's desires. And on objective list theories, well-being requires the actual possession of certain goods, such as accomplishment, knowledge, and friendship.

The mental state theory is intuitively appealing. What else, beyond your mental states, could matter *for you*? But the theory has disquieting implications. For it suggests that your mental life could detach completely from reality, while leaving your well-being unaffected. This is the possibility, made vivid by Nozick's (1974: 42–43) experience machine, that many regard as a decisive refutation of the mental state theory. Life in the machine, even if composed of the best experiences, is widely judged to be unappealing. It lacks an appropriate connection to reality. It is artificial, detached.² If being suitably connected to reality intrinsically matters to your well-being, then the mental state theory is false.

But does reality play this crucial role in determining your well-being? We argue it does not. We proceed in six sections. The first articulates a compelling approach to challenging the mental state theory. We call this the *missing reality strategy*. The opposition thereby produced is animated by powerful intuitions about reality's role in an account of well-being. The second distinguishes two ways reality may be thought to influence well-being. Sections 3 and 4 argue that neither succeeds. Reality can play neither role. The fifth section generalizes the preceding argument, and the final section concludes.

1. The Missing Reality Strategy

If the mental state theory is true, then one's well-being is exhaustively determined by one's mental states. Two lives containing equally valuable mental states, regardless of any other differences, must be assessed as equally good. So if, when considering mental states alone, we find something essential to well-being is missing, the mental state theory should be abandoned. Many believe that something is missing. And that something is reality. This is the lesson of Nozick's experience machine. The thought experiment is not especially clean. But after all of the distorting factors are eliminated, there remains a compelling thought: absent a connection to reality, the life plugged in falls short of the best life. It will help to have a case at hand, so consider:

Accomplishment. Andy is a monomaniac—he cares only about climbing. His sole aim in life is to climb the world's 100 tallest mountains. Reaching each peak fills him with tremendous pleasure, outdone only by the pleasure he feels summiting the next. Today he is to attempt Chhogori (K2), the last on his list. With great fortitude,

²To be clear, we are assuming, following Bramble, that the machine does not merely force an experience upon its occupant, as if 'playing one a video tape of a life' (2016: 142). The experience machine is better modeled by a flight simulator than a film projector.

endurance, and skill, he ascends to the peak. Standing there triumphant, his heart is filled with joy.

Would our assessment of Andy's well-being change if *Accomplishment* were the product of an experience machine? It is tempting to answer: Yes. All other things being equal, between *actual* accomplishment and the mere *experience* of accomplishment, it is better that Andy's accomplishment is actual. Yet according to the mental state theory, Andy-in-the-machine and Andy-in-the-world, because they enjoy the same mental states, enjoy the same level of well-being. If we were in a position to pick a life for Andy, the mental state theory would counsel indifference. We could flip a coin. But surely this is mistaken. Capturing this potent intuition Nozick writes, 'The connection to actuality is important... and the experience machine is inadequate because it doesn't give us *that*' (1989: 106).

The missing reality strategy supplies a straightforward recipe for generating counterexamples to the mental state theory. Describe a good life. Present a variation, identical in mental respects, but lacking a suitable connection to reality. Then observe that the theory implausibly holds both lives in equal esteem. Since, intuitively, the life properly connected to reality is preferable, conclude that the mental state theory is false. It fails to account for the way one's well-being is influenced by considerations apart from one's mental states. An appropriate connection to reality, it seems, is an important element of well-being.

There is undoubtedly something compelling about this line of reasoning. Yet, as will be shown, it in no way undermines the mental state theory.

2. Reality Cast in Two Roles

Before turning to the argument, a point of clarification is in order. Reality, on the mental state theory, matters because real events can produce real changes in mental states. When Andy heaves his body to the top of K2, the exhilaration he feels is the product of real events in the world. These events cause mental states that, in turn, influence Andy's well-being. The difference, then, between the mental state theory and the nonmental state theory is the importance each assigns to reality. The mental state theory holds that reality matters to well-being insofar as it brings about certain mental states. But it matters only *instrumentally*. The nonmental state theories, by contrast, typically grant reality *intrinsic* significance. The success of the missing reality strategy thus hinges on reality playing more than a merely contingent, instrumental role. Reality must be shown to make an essential contribution to well-being.

What intrinsic role might reality play in determining one's well-being? Two possibilities suggest themselves. Both hold that agents must enjoy a suitable causal connection to reality. On the first, what matters is our contribution to reality. We want to do things. We want to write books and save lives and climb mountains. We want to make a real impact, not simply experience making one. This suggestion drives the set of purported counterexamples to the mental state theory

that lean heavily on the importance of actual accomplishments for one's well-being, regardless of whether one learns of their realization—for example, consider Parfit's successful parent (1984: 494). On the second, what matters is genuine experience. We do not want to be dupes. We want our experience to reflect reality accurately. What matters, on this second suggestion, is reality's role in generating genuine and not counterfeit experience. This second suggestion thus drives the set of purported counterexamples that turn on the mental state theory's inability to capture the badness associated with cases of systematic deception—for example, Kagan's business man (1998: 34).

To succeed, the missing reality strategy must supply reason to think well-being is enhanced in either of these two ways. In what follows, we take up each suggestion and find both wanting.

3. My Contribution to Reality

If Andy merely experiences *Accomplishment*, then he contributes nothing to reality. When judged from the outside, Andy's life is thus lacking. It inspires pity, not admiration. Nozick captures the thought nicely: 'We want to *do* certain things, and not just have the experience of doing them' (1974: 43). On this suggestion, reality matters intrinsically because our contributions to reality may affect our well-being. Call this the *real contribution requirement*.³

The real contribution requirement, we argue, has implausible implications. This is demonstrated through a series of cases. As we show, if one accepts the requirement, one must posit differences in well-being where no such differences exist. A life meeting the requirement can be made not to meet it without being made worse. One's contribution to reality does not enhance one's well-being.

Consider first an ordinary version of *Accomplishment*,

Unity. When Andy experiences pulling himself to the top of K₂, he is pulling his body to the top of K₂, an actual mountain.

Next, suppose Andy's body has been damaged in an accident. His brain is fitted with a lifelike prosthetic body. His appearance and abilities are no different after the accident than before. Neither friends nor family discern a difference. The prosthetic thus results in a mere cosmetic variation of *Unity*,

Prosthetic Unity. Things are just as described in *Unity*, but Andy's ascent occurs after his accident. He wears a prosthetic body, which relays information between his brain and the environment. If Andy experiences facing a bitter cold gust of wind and turns his back to blunt its force, this causes the prosthetic, in reality, to turn its back to blunt

³ The real contribution requirement is widely held: see Adams 1999: 84; Kagan 1994: 311; Nozick 1997: 263; and Kymlicka 2002: 14.

its force. And when the prosthetic, in reality, turns its back, this causes Andy to experience the turning of his back.

The difference between *Unity* and *Prosthetic Unity* is philosophically innocuous. Like eyeglasses or an artificial limb, Andy's prosthetic body simply mediates. It relays information between his environment and brain. In both of these versions of *Accomplishment*, whatever one's theory of well-being, Andy's life should be given the same assessment.

The missing reality strategy has us compare cases like *Unity* or *Prosthetic Unity* with

Experience Machine. Andy's experience of pulling himself to the top of K2 is produced by electrodes attached to his brain, which is floating in a tank.

Andy's experience is exactly like that of actually summiting K2. We may suppose that his brain states in both cases are the same. On the mental state theory, his well-being should also be the same. But this, we are invited to conclude, is wrong. We should judge that *Experience Machine* is worse-for-Andy than *Prosthetic Unity*. And so we should judge that the mental state theory is false.

Notice that this strategy, as traditionally deployed, contrasts cases where one's experience and one's contribution to reality are unified with cases involving only experience. Yet, a life can have both experience and contribute to reality without unity. Consider another variation of *Accomplishment*,

Remote. Things are just as described in *Experience Machine* except that the electrodes attached to Andy's brain relay information to his prosthetic body, which, in reality, enacts his experiences on K2. That is, while Andy's brain is located elsewhere, his prosthetic body actually climbs K2 in exactly the way he experiences himself climbing it.

Andy's experience in *Remote* perfectly matches his experience in *Prosthetic Unity*, but it is not caused by his prosthetic interacting with the environment on K2. It is caused by electrodes stimulating his brain. Yet, because the environments match, the actions Andy experiences performing in the machine are in fact successfully executed by his prosthetic on K2. So the following counterfactual is true: were the prosthetic to malfunction, this would change nothing in Andy's experience, but if Andy's experience were different so too would be the prosthetic's movements. Thus, Andy has an experience, and he contributes to reality, but the two are not spatially unified. Nevertheless, the virtues Andy displays in *Prosthetic Unity* are equally evident in *Remote*. Both feats require the same fortitude, endurance, and skill. It is only because Andy devises and carries out a plan to summit K2 that his prosthetic body summits K2. That his brain happens not to be on the mountain in no way diminishes his accomplishment.

In *Prosthetic Unity*, Andy contributes to reality. His is an accomplishment. In *Experience Machine* he does not, and according to the real contribution requirement, his life is the worse for it. But what of the comparison between *Experience Machine* and *Remote*? There is, of course, a difference between the two. If *Experience Machine* obtains, then, in reality, one fewer climbers will summit K2. Yet, does this difference make a difference to Andy's well-being? Should we assess Andy's life differently if, as in *Remote*, his prosthetic body enacts his experience and thereby contributes to reality? If the real contribution requirement is correct, then we should think so. We think not.

To see why, consider two variations on *Remote*. First,

Lag. Things are just as described in *Remote*, but Andy's prosthetic body will enact his experiences in the future. The experience machine is able to perfectly predict weather patterns, erosion, and so forth on K2.

Just as in *Remote*, the task is a challenge. Success requires fortitude, endurance, and skill. And, just as before, Andy's prosthetic body will only summit K2 on account of his efforts. The fact that, as in *Remote*, Andy's brain is not inside his prosthetic does not detract from his accomplishment. Nor does the fact that his contribution to reality is not simultaneous with his experience of it. Insofar as one's contribution to reality matters, *Remote* and *Lag* are on a par.

Nonetheless, it is implausible to hold that for the purpose of assessing Andy's well-being *Lag* is different from *Experience Machine*. The connection between Andy and what happens in reality is too tenuous. This is supported by

Glitch. Things are just as described in *Lag*, but before Andy's prosthetic body climbs K2 something goes wrong: there is a glitch, and the connection is severed. Andy's prosthetic body never makes the climb.

The difference between *Lag* and *Glitch* results in a difference in reality. One fewer climbers summit K2. But recall what theories of well-being aim to capture. Although climbing a mountain may, in reality, influence others' well-being, this is not what is at issue. We should not confuse overall levels of well-being with Andy's level of well-being. We are concerned with the question: Is *Lag* better-for-Andy than *Glitch*? According to the real contribution requirement, we should answer: Yes.

We should not accept this answer. The difference between the two cases does not justify differing assessments of Andy's well-being. It is implausible to hold that an empty prosthetic body climbing K2 in the future benefits Andy. We do not feel sympathy for him when we compare *Lag* to *Glitch*.⁴ Andy's life is not improved (or worsened) on account of what his prosthetic body does (or doesn't) do in reality. What is good-for-Andy about his accomplishment has already been accounted for. Its benefit to him is fully present in his experience in *Lag* prior to his prosthetic's ascent. In each case, Andy demonstrates fortitude, endurance, and

⁴ Here we follow Hooker's (2015: 25) proposal that judgments of sympathy track levels of well-being.

skill. And this, by virtue of his mental states, improves his well-being. As *Glitch* makes vivid, no contribution to reality is required. We are not tempted to revise our assessment of Andy's well-being when *Lag* becomes *Glitch*. Hence, the real contribution requirement posits a difference in Andy's well-being where no such difference exists. The requirement should be rejected.

We have introduced a series of cases, which we now summarize. *Unity* and *Experience Machine* stand at two extreme ends. They are the traditional contrast cases. But this contrast is misleading. To allow for the possibility that one's experience comes apart from one's contribution to reality, we introduce *Prosthetic Unity*. *Remote* illustrates how the cause of one's mental states may be spatially removed from one's contribution to reality. *Lag* widens this gap. It demonstrates how the cause of one's mental states may also be temporally removed from one's contribution to reality. In both cases, the real contribution requirement is satisfied, but particularly in *Lag* it's difficult to see how this enhances Andy's well-being. *Glitch* makes this difficulty acute. The requirement is no longer satisfied. Accordingly, if the requirement holds, Andy's well-being should be diminished. But we know intuitively that it isn't.

If the foregoing is correct, then one powerful consideration initially thought to count against the mental state theory, namely, the real contribution requirement, lacks force. Not because one's contribution to reality is unimportant, but because one's contribution may not redound to one's well-being.

4. Reality's Contribution to Me

Even if our well-being is not enhanced by our contributions to reality, perhaps our well-being is enhanced by reality's contribution to us. Perhaps we should assess Andy's well-being differently in *Prosthetic Unity* and *Experience Machine* because, in the latter case, his experience is not genuine. His mental states are caused, most proximally, by an experience machine. This suggests a different way in which the missing reality strategy might succeed. On this proposal, what the mental state theory fails to capture is the importance of genuine experience. As Hurka writes, 'It's vital... to be properly connected to facts about how you relate to your environment, and the fact that you're not so connected is one reason why life on the experience machine isn't best' (2011: 90). On this suggestion, it matters that one's experience is suitably caused. Call this the *no-counterfeits requirement*.⁵

This requirement has much intuitive appeal. If we asked Andy, he would tell us that he does not merely want the experience of climbing K2. He wants the experience of climbing K2 *as a result of his climbing K2*. The associated mental states may be a necessary component of his well-being, but to suggest that they are sufficient is to misunderstand Andy's passion. This sentiment is nicely captured by the no-counterfeits requirement.

⁵ The *no-counterfeits requirement* is widely held: see Hurka 2011: ch. 4; Bykvist 2010: 36–37; and Hawkins 2015.

Though tempting, the appeal of the no-counterfactuals requirement is illusory. As before, we demonstrate this with a series of cases. We show that if one accepts the requirement, one must posit differences in well-being where no differences plausibly exist. For a life meeting the requirement can be made not to do so without being made worse. A suitable connection to reality does not enhance one's well-being.

The no-counterfactuals requirement holds that it matters if Andy's experience of *Accomplishment* is suitably caused. The etiology of his experience is claimed to influence his well-being. Thus, although his experience in *Prosthetic Unity* is identical to that enjoyed in *Experience Machine*, the no-counterfactuals requirement holds that because suitably caused, Andy's well-being is thereby enhanced. Yet, does this difference in cause make a difference to Andy's well-being? If the no-counterfactuals requirement is correct, we should think so. We think not.

To see why, consider three variations on *Prosthetic Unity*. First,

Uneventful Ascent. Things are just as described in *Prosthetic Unity*, except for the addition of an emergency protocol. The output from Andy's brain to the prosthetic is known to be reliable. But technicians worry that the prosthetic may fail to transmit input from the environment. A solution has been devised. At all times the output from Andy's brain is sent not only to his prosthetic, but also to an experience machine, which generates a counterfeit but identical experience to the one Andy is currently enjoying. When Andy's prosthetic is functioning properly, the counterfeit duplicate is preempted by the genuine experience his prosthetic suitably causes. If the prosthetic's inputs ever were to fail, the counterfeit inputs from the experience machine would be transmitted to Andy, and he would continue his experience none the wiser. Today, Andy's prosthetic functions properly. The emergency protocol is not initiated.

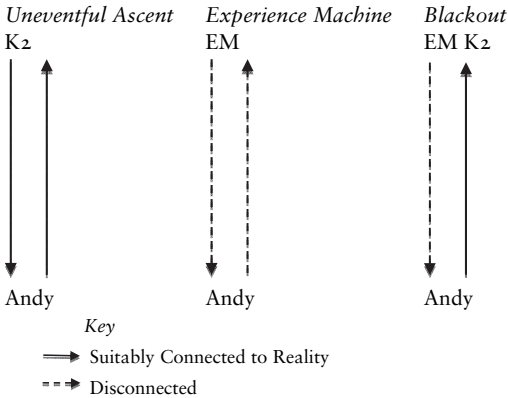
Insofar as reality's contribution to one's life matters, *Prosthetic Unity* and *Uneventful Ascent* are on a par. In both cases Andy's experience is the same, and in both cases it is caused by a suitable connection to reality.

Nonetheless, it is implausible to hold that for the purpose of assessing Andy's well-being either of these cases is different from *Experience Machine*. This is supported by a second variation,

Blackout. Things are just as described in *Uneventful Ascent*, but Andy's prosthetic malfunctions. The emergency protocol is initiated. Andy's experience is thus not caused by his environment, but it does perfectly match it.

Blackout is instructive as a test case for the no-counterfactuals requirement. It isolates the relevant feature of Andy's experience. Recall what initially made the requirement intuitively appealing. If asked, Andy would explain that he wants his experience of climbing K2 to be the result of his climbing. But this explanation is

infelicitous. Andy may want his experience to be the result of his climbing because he wants to make a real contribution. In ordinary cases of counterfeit experience, such as *Experience Machine*, one fails to contribute to reality. But this is not so in *Blackout*. The cases are illustrated below.



According to the no-counterfeits requirement, *Blackout* is worse-for-Andy than *Uneventful Ascent*. When the emergency protocol is initiated, Andy's experience is caused by an experience machine. Reality is thus denied its proper role in the formation of Andy's mental states, and his well-being is thereby reduced.

This verdict is hard to believe. Andy's experience is counterfeit. His agency is not. His accomplishment is real. If he were a less talented mountaineer or less committed to reaching the summit, he would have failed. In both cases Andy displays fortitude, endurance, and skill. A further reason to regard Andy's well-being as unchanged is supplied by looking to the level of sympathy we have for Andy. Compared to *Uneventful Ascent*, is there any reason to think that in *Blackout* Andy deserves sympathy? Is his accomplishment meaningfully different? It seems not. In both cases, it is by dint of Andy's efforts that his prosthetic summits K2. The etiology of his experience is, by design, different. But this supplies no reason to think that his well-being is different. All that is good-for-Andy is fully present in *Blackout*.

A final case highlights the implausible implications of the no-counterfeits requirement:

Flicker. Things are just as described in *Blackout*, except Andy's prosthetic malfunctions intermittently. Input from the environment cuts out, the emergency protocol is initiated, and moments later input is restored. Seconds pass, and the prosthetic malfunctions again; the emergency protocol is initiated again, and again, moments later, input is restored. Andy summits K2 none the wiser, but his achievement is a random mix of genuine and counterfeit experience.

To accept the requirement one would also have to accept that, compared to *Blackout*, Andy enjoys a higher level of well-being in *Flicker*. As the proportion

of genuine over counterfeit experiences increases, so too should Andy's well-being. This strains credulity. Return to the sympathy test. Is there any reason to think that Andy deserves somewhat more sympathy in *Blackout* than in *Flicker*? It seems not. Nor does the contrast between *Uneventful Ascent* and *Flicker* invite more sympathy. Our sympathy, across these cases, is not modulated by the proportion of genuine over counterfeit experiences. The cases differ, but not in ways that warrant differing assessments of Andy's well-being.

We have presented many cases, which we will now summarize. *Uneventful Ascent* introduces the emergency protocol. Since uneventful, the case is, by the lights of the no-counterfeits requirement, identical to *Prosthetic Unity*. *Blackout* illustrates how one's experience may be counterfeit while still being an achievement. The case isolates what the no-counterfeits requirement takes to be a component of well-being: genuine experience. According to the requirement, we should think that Andy's well-being has been diminished and that he deserves sympathy. But we don't think that. To make this vivid we consider *Flicker*, in which Andy's experience is a mix of genuine and counterfeit. According to the no-counterfeits requirement, if compared to *Prosthetic Unity*, *Flicker* should be worse-for-Andy. And if compared to *Blackout*, it should be better-for-Andy. This seems mistaken. Andy's well-being remains constant.

If it's implausible to hold that Andy's well-being varies across these cases, then the etiology of his experience does not have the significance the missing reality strategy supposes. The no-counterfeits requirement posits a difference in well-being where no such difference exists. It should be rejected.

5. The Superfluous Reality Strategy

If the forgoing argument is sound, then neither our contribution to reality nor reality's contribution to our mental states plays an essential role in determining our well-being. We have focused on a case involving accomplishment, but our reasoning may be generalized.

Many purported components of well-being take reality to play an essential role. Candidates include, in addition to accomplishment, such things as knowledge of important truths and relationships with other people. Such views hold that well-being is enhanced by knowledge or friendship *realization*. These forms of realization have a nonmental component. To develop meaningful friendships, for example, requires real persons. For these realizations reality plays an essential role.

But we should not accept that realizations are components of well-being. To generalize the foregoing argument, we employ the *superfluous reality strategy*. The reasoning is straightforward. Describe a good life, one suitably connected to reality. Isolate the features of that life that influence its subject's well-being. Present a variation, identical in mental respects, but lacking a suitable connection to reality. Then observe that the two lives are equally good-for-their-subjects. Conclude that one's suitable connection to reality is superfluous. Realizations are not components of well-being.

It is, of course, true that a life containing realizations may be good for the person living it. Consider, for instance

Life Well-Lived. Becky is an amiable scientist at a prestigious university. The research she is conducting, upon completion, will reveal the cure for cancer. She is also committed to the development of her friends' virtues and is a loyal spouse in a rewarding marriage.

Surely Becky enjoys a high level of well-being. Her life is filled with accomplishment, important knowledge, and personal relationships with real people. And undoubtedly she will leave the world a better place. Her life is good-*simpliciter*. Now consider

Simulacrum. Things are just as described in *Life Well-Lived*, but Becky's experience is the product of an experience machine.

In *Simulacrum* cancer is not cured. Becky has no friends. Her life contains no realizations. But we should not assess her well-being differently. For it is not the realizations in *Life Well-Lived* that determine Becky's well-being, but the underlying mental states alone, and those are equally present in *Simulacrum*.

In *Life Well-Lived* Becky contributes to reality. The cure for cancer she is soon to know will save countless lives. Her friends are more virtuous and her spouse greatly comforted by her company. To be sure, Becky improves the well-being of many others. Her contribution to reality is positive and significant. This is not so in *Simulacrum*. Many more lives are lost to cancer. No one benefits from a personal relationship with Becky. Her contribution to reality extends only to the causal interaction between her brain and the electrodes that stimulate it. So the cases are different. But the difference is not one that would justify differing assessments of *her* well-being. Becky's contribution to reality, though it may make a difference to many, need not redound to her. Just as Andy's contribution to reality in *Remote* does not redound to him.

In *Life Well-Lived* Becky's experiences are suitably caused by reality. Her experience of attaining important knowledge and developing meaningful relationships is the product of her pursuit of certain truths and of her real interactions with others. She truly understands her place in the world. Her experience is genuine. This is not so in *Simulacrum*. When Becky thinks she's standing in her lab, in fact, her brain is floating in a tank. She believes that her work might save lives. This is false. She believes that she is in a rewarding marriage. There is no beloved. And what Becky thinks is reciprocated affection is traceable to electrodes made to stimulate her brain. Her experience is not suitably caused by reality. It is counterfeit. So the cases are different. But the difference is not one that would justify differing assessments of well-being. How Becky's experience is caused need not affect her. Just as the etiology of Andy's experience in *Blackout* has no effect on his well-being.

In both *Life Well-Lived* and *Simulacrum* Becky's well-being warrants the same assessment. One life contains realizations. But their reality is superfluous. Realizations are not components of well-being.

6. Conclusion

The missing reality strategy proceeds from a powerful intuition about the importance of living a life properly connected to the world. But what independently attractive rationale exists for thinking the intuition correct? Two plausible candidates present themselves: our contribution to reality and reality's contribution to us. Neither vindicates the intuition. If appeal is made to our contribution to reality, then we can detach the contribution from the agent's experience of it. Once the two are prised apart, the conviction that reality matters in this way loses its grip. If appeal is made to reality's contribution to us, then we can point to the possibility of counterfeit experiences whose content is identical to that of a genuine experience. This possibility erodes confidence in the thought that reality's contribution to us enhances well-being. Locating a plausible rationale to undergird the missing reality strategy thus proves elusive.

It is unsurprising that the missing reality strategy fails. Its structure misleads. The trouble with relying on contrast-cases such as *Unity* and *Experience Machine* is that we usually have strong reasons, other than those provided by reality's intrinsic significance, for treating *the real* differently from *mere experience*. Accomplishments, important knowledge, and personal relationships usually have propagating implications for others—these realizations influence the level of good-*simpliciter*. But we must guard against fetishizing: mistakenly treating the instrumental significance of reality as if it is an essential component of well-being. Reality matters for well-being because reality causes changes in mental states. That, in the end, is reality's only role.

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