

REPLY TO LOXTERKAMP

Steven M. Cahn and Christine Vitrano

Max Loxterkamp correctly attributes to us the view that people are living well if they act morally and find long-term satisfaction, regardless of the pursuits they choose. He disagrees with us, however, and suggests that lives are better if they benefit society, and he offers as examples a charity worker, a courageous soldier, and a philosopher of genius.

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Nevertheless, the question that concerns us is not whose life is more useful to others. If importance to the life of the community were the criterion for living well, few would rank above those who maintain piping for water, repair electrical equipment, make goods from raw materials, and grow and prepare food. Life will go on in the temporary absence of philosophers, but could we survive even a month without plumbers, electricians, and those who labour on farms, in factories, or in kitchens? Are the lives of such workers better than those of philosophers? We don't believe so. And what of philosophers whose writings attract little, if any, attention? Are they failing to live well? Again, we don't believe so. For such reasons we do not judge living well in terms of meeting societal needs.

As to our not defending a specific moral theory, we assume that any moral person cares about others, treats them with respect, and seeks to minimize their suffering.

So long as a person acts in this way (even if not going beyond the call of duty), whether that person is living well depends on the person's finding long-term satisfaction.

We criticize the views of Ronald Dworkin, Susan Wolf, Richard Kraut, and Stephen Darwall for not providing criteria for a good life that enable us to distinguish those who live well from those who don't. The problem we see is not that the theories of these philosophers cannot resolve hard cases; rather, they cannot consistently resolve simple cases. If, as Wolf believes, riding horses can make a life worthwhile, what activities, if any, would not make a life worthwhile?

Incidentally, the individuals whose cases we discuss in detail are named 'Pat' and 'Lee'. Loxterkamp assumes that they are male. We make no such assumption.¹

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Note

¹ For elaboration, see our book *Happiness and Goodness: Philosophical Reflections on Living Well* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).