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**ANDREW BLOODWORTH**

**PhD**

**Exercise, health and well-being: A philosophical analysis**

**2007**

**Swansea University**

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## **Abstract**

It is commonly thought that exercise improves both our health and well-being. Indeed, prominent psychological researchers argue that exercise which makes us feel good necessarily enhances well-being. Their research employs a subjective conception of well-being, understood in terms of life-satisfaction and affect. Conversely, I argue that pleasure, enjoyment and desire-fulfilment do not necessarily enhance well-being. Subjective judgements of well-being can be mistaken. Exercise is of merely instrumental value in preserving functionings and capabilities that constitute well-being. This understanding of well-being draws extensively upon Nussbaum's capabilities approach.

The biomedical case for the health benefits of exercise excludes subjective valuing, presupposing a dichotomy between objective scientific fact and subjective value. Health is understood in naturalistic terms, focusing upon the absence of disease and illness. In contrast, I argue health cannot be isolated from those functionings and capabilities constitutive of well-being which entangle fact and value. To be healthy is to be in a bodily and mental state that ensures the capability to function in valuable ways.

Rejecting the fact/value dichotomy paves the way for reflection upon those values central to well-being. I argue for an objective list theory of well-being, in which listed constituents, such as affiliation and play, are considered valuable independent of possibly flawed subjective valuations. The human body, however, is not merely a vessel for listed values. Griffin elevates our rational nature over our animality in proposing his theory of well-being. His theory appears distant from some of our most central concerns as embodied human beings.

Ageing, disease and illness mark some of the ways in which our bodies limit our capabilities. The capabilities and functionings proposed in Nussbaum's approach reflect both our animal and rational nature. In conclusion, I argue that exercise offers one important way in which to preserve the physical preconditions of these valuable functionings and capabilities.

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## Chapter One

### INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I argue that well-being is best understood as functioning in a valuable way, and as the capability to function in this way. Prominent psychological research employs a subjective conception of well-being, understood as how one feels, and the subjectively perceived level of satisfaction with life. From this psychological perspective, exercise that makes us feel better necessarily enhances well-being. Conversely, I argue that exercise is of merely instrumental value to our well-being. Exercise preserves those functionings and capabilities constitutive of well-being.

Politicians, physical educators and doctors have long espoused the importance of being physically active to our well-being. Indeed the contribution exercise makes to our well-being appears to have been widely accepted. The aim of the thesis is to critically examine this relationship between exercise and well-being. As part of this concern the thesis addresses the plethora of literature on the health benefits of physical activity. The concepts of health and well-being, often conflated in everyday discourse and policy discussions, are subjected to rigorous criticism. This critique, alongside its concern with the role of exercise in well-being also addresses the relationship between exercise and health. Research within the field of both exercise physiology and psychology, I argue, is hostage to certain theoretical assumptions asserting a dichotomy between fact and value. These assumptions and the resulting conceptions of health and well-being proposed, limit any analysis of the value of exercise to our lives.

In addressing the relationship between exercise and well-being, I critically examine a number of theories of well-being. These theories are often categorised in terms of their subjectivity or objectivity. Sumner, who proposes his own theory of welfare (but recognises that this label is akin to well-being, or what is in our interests), addresses this notion of subjectivity. Sumner (1996) recognises the association of subjectivity with consciousness, but eventually moves to suggest that the primary

understanding of subjective is *from the subject's perspective*. I cannot do justice to Sumner's lengthy exploration of the concept within the confines of this introductory chapter. For our purposes it is sufficient to move to his final characterisation of subjective and objective as these concepts relate to theories of well-being.

A subjective theory would understand my well-being as dependent upon the extent to which I consider my life to be going well. The extent to which I have favourable attitudes to my life as a whole, to which I enjoy it, am satisfied with it, feel happy and experience pleasure more than I experience negative moods. A subjective theory contends that well-being can only be enhanced by that which I view favourably (Sumner, 1996). Objective theories do not make well-being dependent upon these pro-attitudes and allow for something enhancing my well-being in the absence of my having a favourable attitude toward it.

Sumner (1996) makes an important qualification to the general subjective conception of well-being. He says that most subjective theories will not consider pro-attitudes as sufficient for well-being, but as only as necessary (Sumner 1996). My favourable attitude toward a sporting activity, for example, will not suffice for this activity to enhance my well-being. I could be addicted to exercise, or be over-training. For Sumner any defensible theory must be able to account for someone being mistaken as to their well-being.

I argue that favourable attitudes are neither necessary nor sufficient for the enhancement of well-being. An objective list theory of well-being contends that those values, capabilities or functionings on its list are of value independent of the favourable attitudes or pleasure with which they may or may not be associated. Thus these objective goods can improve well-being in the absence of subjective endorsement. Our subjective assessments can be mistaken, based upon poor reasoning. I argue that such flawed judgements should not entirely negate the value of those items on an objective list. This position can be maintained, however, whilst acknowledging that well-being would be better served by both the achievement of a value and subjective appreciation of its importance.

The subjective approaches to well-being prominent in the psychological research are critically analysed in chapter two. Approaches utilising the psychological conception of subjective well-being consider values beyond the realm of objectivity and reason. Well-being is determined by the subject's perspective on how well life is going; conceptualised as a subjective judgement of life satisfaction combined with the extent to which we experience positive over negative affect. This stance fails to accommodate Sumner's recognition that enhanced affect or satisfaction will not necessarily enhance well-being. Yet it is not necessarily the case that the elevated feeling states associated with exercise reflect enhanced well-being. We can be mistaken in interpreting such pleasurable states positively. An individual might be addicted to exercise, or may undertake physical activity on the back of flawed perceptions of their body.

Chapter two concludes with an analysis of quality of life in the mainstream psychological research where the trend towards subjectivity is evident. These subjective approaches are fuelled by a rejection of previous attempts by psychologists to stipulate the constituents of 'quality of life.' Subjective approaches assert the right of the individual to determine what is best for her. These subjective theories of both quality of life and well-being overcome accusations of paternalism, but at the price of their plausibility. We are not always the best judges of what will improve our lives, we can be deeply mistaken, and these accounts fail to recognise this possibility.

The subjectivism inherent in the psychological research reflects a wider philosophical debate concerning the separation of fact and value. Distinguishing between these may at times be a helpful enterprise but the upholding of a fact/value dichotomy is often accompanied by assumptions regarding the objectivity of scientific fact, and the subjectivity of the value domain. That scientific evidence examining the relationship between physical activity and (primarily) health, offers the most authoritative, factual case for the benefits of physical activity is a possibility examined, and ultimately criticised in chapter three.

This scientific evidence base fails to provide an adequate account of the health benefits of exercise because of its endorsement of the very same theoretical assumption that underpins the subjective psychological stances. Both uphold the fact/value dichotomy dear to the philosophy of positivism. The psychological concept of *subjective well-being* suggests that well-being is entirely the domain of individual choice and preference; the individual should be left to decide as to what constitutes his or her well-being. This appears to be based upon an assumption that there can be no objectivity regarding matters of value, and hence no objective judgments concerning well-being. The scientific evidence base aspires to a form of objectivity that is value-free. The health benefits of exercise are conceptualised in supposedly value-free terms, focusing on physiological research.

This scientific literature elucidating the benefits of exercise, encouraging an increase in our activity levels, typically focuses on the contribution exercise has to make to our health. The naturalistic conception of health employed, however, fails to recognise the entanglement of fact and value evident within concepts such as health, disease and illness. Recognising this entanglement encourages us to ask which values are central to these concepts. Being healthy cannot be reduced to physiological functioning. Healthy functioning entails, for example, being able to interact with others, reflect upon a range of valuable options available to us, being able to move without pain and play. These values are also constitutive of our well-being.

The rejection of the fact/value dichotomy central to chapter three paves the way for more extensive reflection upon the values central to a defensible concept of well-being. Thus I turn to two celebrated theories, James Griffin's theory of well-being and Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach proposing the constituents of a fully human life. Both approaches can be broadly described as list theories, stipulating those values or capabilities central to well-being or the fully human life. Griffin's account of well-being certainly overcomes obstacles evident in the psychological research. Mental state accounts of well-being are criticised on the grounds that we

value more than just mental states. Actual desire accounts, in which well-being is conceptualised as the satisfaction of our actual desires, are criticised on the grounds that certain of our desires will leave us worse off on satisfaction. We are not always the best judges as to what is good for us.

These two theories, however, also differ in important respects. Griffin's account, described and subjected to initial criticism in chapter four, has its origins in utilitarianism. Nussbaum's approach (addressed in chapter five) seeks distance from utilitarianism and decides against using the term 'well-being' because of this intellectual heritage. Her reference to the fully and truly human life, influenced by both Marx and Aristotle, is a clear indication of how her specific capabilities approach is fuelled by a conception of the human being itself. When we consider the convergence of the lists provided by both Nussbaum and Griffin, however, it becomes clear that the subject matter of the theories have extensive overlap.

In those chapters that seek to introduce and conduct a preliminary critique of both Nussbaum's and Griffin's approaches, I remain faithful to the original texts. When describing Nussbaum's theory I refer to the fully human life for example. My final conclusions, however, as to the value of exercise are made in terms of well-being. The reason for the use of 'well-being' is best understood having traced the argument of the thesis.

Having compared and contrasted Nussbaum and Griffin's approach, (chapter six) I argue in favour of Nussbaum. I criticise Griffin for certain aspects of his theory that allow too greater credence to potentially flawed subjective judgements, for example his employment of an endorsement constraint (Griffin, 1986). Achieving one of Griffin's prudential values, an accomplishment for example, cannot enhance well-being unless it is endorsed by the subject. Our mistaken judgements, however, are not confined to desiring certain things that will fail to contribute positively to our lives. Our endorsements or failure to endorse certain goods may also be founded on flawed reasoning. In contrast to Griffin (1986) I argue for an objective conception in

which desire and favourable attitudes are neither necessary nor sufficient for well-being.

Nussbaum's capabilities approach begins with the premise that the fully human life is best understood, not by mental states or satisfaction levels, but by what we can actually be and do. Nussbaum suggests that the fully human life is best represented by a list of central capabilities and it is this 'capabilities approach' that is the topic of chapter five. I focus in particular upon the approach presented in *Women and Human Development* (Nussbaum, 2000a) and *Frontiers of Justice* (Nussbaum, 2006a).

Nussbaum's stance resembles an objective theory of well-being, listing the capabilities central to a fully human life, criticising any individual tendency to reject such items based upon flawed reasoning, or indeed as a consequence of adaptation to circumstance. Nussbaum's approach is interesting from our perspective because it is rooted in extensive consideration of what it is to be human, but does not limit such an analysis to the biological or psychological. The capabilities may be described by Putnam's apt phrase as 'entangled.'

Nussbaum employs a list of those capabilities to function necessary for a fully human life. These are considered to have intrinsic value, and Nussbaum, although not dismissive of the role of desire, certainly favours her list as the best indicator as to whether a threshold level of capability has been achieved. Nussbaum's approach is also keenly attentive to our animal as well as our rational nature. Nussbaum recognises both the trajectory our powers take as we age and health problems that may occur at any time as examples of how our animality defines the ways in which we function. The treatment of health within Nussbaum's theory, although brief, assures the reader of its significance, and also lends itself to extension beyond the naturalistic conception criticised in chapter three. Conversely, Griffin contends that health is a mere means to such values and founds his prudential values in our reflective nature, separate from our biological concerns. I criticise this dualistic conception of human nature, arguing that Griffin's approach understands the body merely as a vessel for those values we pursue, without fully contemplating how our embodiment defines both how we pursue and realise such values. Indeed Griffin's



elevation of our rational nature over our animality in proposing his theory of well-being forms my central critique of his approach.

Nussbaum's capabilities approach cannot be applied without adjustment to my ultimate question as to the contribution of exercise to well-being. Nussbaum is concerned with providing a political threshold. Capability is defined as our opportunity or freedom to function. The opportunity we have to engage in play through recreational activities, for example. Functioning is defined as what we actually are, or do. Actually engaging in the playful activity constitutes a valuable functioning. Nussbaum is mainly concerned with promoting capability, although she acknowledges that a life with just the opportunities to do valuable things, without functioning in these valuable ways, would not be fully human. From Nussbaum's political perspective, however, capabilities are more likely to be endorsed by those who may not wish to fulfil the corresponding functioning. Nussbaum justifies her list of capabilities in political terms, as the object of a political consensus on the importance of the capabilities as freedoms that should be afforded to all members of a society. The framework does not insist that the corresponding functionings be endorsed as objectively valuable or central to well-being by every member of that society.

I propose certain adjustments or reinterpretations of Nussbaum's theory. First I argue that the theory's concern with capability does not damage its relevance to my concern with well-being. The functionings that correspond to such capabilities are not difficult to discern, and I recognise that it is these functionings that ultimately constitute well-being or the fully human life. Capability, however, also has a role in well-being. Being free to function in valuable ways and having a range of valuable options is in itself important to well-being. Second, I suggest that Nussbaum's capabilities and corresponding functionings can be understood as of objective value to a life. I argue for Putnam's internalist stance on objectivity as an appropriate understanding of how those capabilities and functionings might be seen as constitutive of well-being, but certainly not beyond further criticism, or as offering a solution independent of the human perspective.

I also criticise the assertion that well-being is confined to the subject's perspective and the sharp distinction between perfectionist and prudential value associated with such a stance. Those aspects of life that are central to our humanity, I argue will also be central to our well-being, regardless as to whether the individual concerned recognises this. This provides one clear justification for contemplation of the value of exercise in terms of well-being, whilst retaining the capabilities approach. We cannot achieve a threshold level of well-being without fulfilling our potential as human beings, without living a fully human life. Referring to well-being rather than retaining Nussbaum's terminology also marks my shift of focus from the political importance of the capabilities, to addressing the value of the capabilities and functionings to a life.

This comparison and ultimate conclusion in favour of Nussbaum moves us to consider the value of exercise in terms of functionings and capabilities constitutive of well-being (chapter seven). The contention that exercise can both preserve and expand our capabilities is examined. I conclude that the role of exercise in capability preservation is most significant for well-being. Exercising may not be necessary for a current threshold level of well-being, but preserves those capabilities to function necessary for a threshold level of well-being throughout life. Exercise is instrumentally valuable through the preservation of those capabilities and functionings central to well-being. It is of special significance, however, because there are few ways in which we might act upon our health, the extent to which our bodily and mental state ensures capability to function in those valuable ways Nussbaum stipulates. Indeed the capabilities on Nussbaum's list, whilst certainly not inferring an athletic interpretation, require a minimal level of physical activity to ensure capability beyond a reasonable threshold. The chances of retaining this level and protecting against capability loss in general, are increased by making the effort to 'take exercise.'

Aware capability preservation is not the only way in which exercise enhances well-being I consider further forms of physical activity, including sports, and suggest how

structured properly they can represent instantiations of those functionings on Nussbaum's list. Again, this argument is instrumental, there are other ways in which we develop relationships, or have pleasurable experiences; exercise is not constitutive of those capabilities Nussbaum stipulates. It is not an insignificant observation, however, to suggest that exercise is one important and effective way of realising those functionings central to an objective conception of well-being.

Exercise is not necessary for our well-being to exceed a threshold level. It is however, an important way in which we can preserve those valuable capabilities to function that constitute our well-being. These capabilities and functionings should not be understood in subjective terms. Their value cannot be reduced to the pleasure or enjoyment with which they are contingently related, and is not dependent upon subjective endorsement of their importance.

## Chapter Two

### SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING IN THE PSYCHOLOGY AND EXERCISE PSYCHOLOGY LITERATURE: A PHILOSOPHICAL CRITIQUE<sup>1</sup>

#### 2.1 Introduction

It is widely held both within and outside the academic community that physical activity enhances our well-being. Psychological research in the area has examined this relationship further, assessing the potential of physical activity to impact positively on a range of psychological outcomes including: mood (Biddle, 2000), self-esteem (Fox, 2000), anxiety, stress (Taylor, 2000) and depression (Mutrie, 2000).

It is the contention here that these psychological researchers are hostage to a particular conception of well-being, typically referred to in the literature as ‘subjective well-being’, and that this has implications for both the research conducted and public policy decisions that spring from it. These implications can be seen in terms of two significant conceptual limitations. The first is that we can be mistaken in our judgements of what is good for us, what we consider to enhance our well-being. Exclusively subjective theories are unable to account for these mistaken judgements. The pleasure or satisfaction associated with an activity or fulfilled desire may be misleading. The short-term pleasure and enjoyment which are often associated with exercise induced well-being, for example, may mask activities that are doing us no good or even harming us (Loumidis and Wells, 2001). Second, focusing on pleasure excludes other ways in which our well-being may be enhanced through physical activity in non-hedonistic terms. Pleasure is, of course, a significant aspect of our well-being, but the status it is afforded within subjective psychological theories can be criticised. This discussion of subjectivity and theories of well-being draws upon the writings of philosophers James Griffin and Wayne Sumner.

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<sup>1</sup> A proportion of this chapter is taken in modified form from Bloodworth and McNamee (2007).

## 2.2 Theories of well-being

The influence of the concept subjective well-being has led to an impoverished rationale for the value of sport and physical activity to our lives. Before detailing this argument, however, it is necessary to articulate both the conceptual distinction between subjective and objective theories of well-being, and the prominent psychological concept subjective well-being.

Understanding the conceptual distinction between objective and subjective theories should enable better understanding of the assumptions that underpin the psychological concept. A subjective theory of well-being suggests ‘that being well-off will depend (in some way or other) on having a favourable attitude toward one’s life (or some of its ingredients)’ (Sumner, 1996: 38). Sumner refers to ‘welfare’ as opposed to well-being, but this need not concern us. Welfare for Sumner concerns ‘the condition of faring or doing well’ (Sumner, 1996: 1), which he acknowledges is ‘more or less the same as her well-being or interest.’ (Sumner, 1996:1). Subjective theories ensure well-being is the dominion of the individual. For something to enhance our well-being we must have a positive attitude toward it.

Objective theories offer an alternative perspective, suggesting certain values or goods are central to an individual’s well-being regardless of her attitude toward them. That something can improve someone’s life, regardless of that individual’s attitude towards it entails, as Arneson observes, ‘that there is a fact of the matter as to what is prudentially valuable for a person, so that claims about what types of things are prudentially valuable are true or false, and thus can be mistaken’ (Arneson, 1999: 116). The ‘agent sovereignty’ (Arneson, 1999: 116) so evident in the subjective theories is absent here, replaced with a clear idea of what enhances a life, independent of the person’s attitudes towards it. Before moving on, however, I must clarify the term prudential value. Prudence, for Griffin (1996) concerns all that makes life good for that person.

Subjective theories, according to Sumner, can recognise the possibility of someone being mistaken over her well-being; indeed for Sumner any adequate theory must be able to recognise such mistakes (Sumner, 1996). Sumner also acknowledges that a subjective theory need not insist that a person's favourable attitude toward something is *sufficient* for welfare to be enhanced.

a theory is subjective if it treats my having a favourable attitude toward something as a necessary condition of the thing being beneficial for me. It need not also treat it as a sufficient condition, and most subjective theories will not do so.

(Sumner, 1996: 38).

That we can be mistaken over what is in our best interests is widely recognised. A further distinction is often made in relation to the nature of desires and their satisfaction. This distinction yields important consequences for the conceptualisation of well-being. Actual desire accounts of well-being, that define our well-being in terms of the extent to which our actual desires are satisfied, are particularly susceptible to the observation that a favourable attitude toward something does not guarantee enhanced well-being. The fulfilment of a desire will not necessarily improve a life.

Some of our strongest desires rest on mistakes of fact. I make my fortune, say, only to discover that I am no better off because I was after people's respect all along and mistakenly thought that making a fortune would command respect. Or I want an operation to restore me to health, not realizing that some pill will do just as well.

(Griffin, 1986: 12).

The most obvious example of our desires going awry is in the case of simple mistaken beliefs. Not all cases of self-harming desires fall under this description. In sport, those who over train may certainly have a favourable attitude to training and believe it to be doing them good, but this is not enough to ensure their enhanced well-being on objective accounts. The potential for mistakes is not confined to instances in which we want or desire things that are not good for us or positively harmful, where upon satisfaction of this desire we recognise this and adjust our

attitude. In exercise addiction there is the potential for the pleasure or satisfaction associated with exercise to be misleading and mask harm on an ongoing basis - such is the nature of addiction or simple self-deception. Loumidis and Wells (2001) discuss just this possibility in 'Exercising for the Wrong Reasons: Relationships Among Eating Disorder Beliefs, Dysfunctional Exercise Beliefs and Coping.' Here positive affect associated with exercise masks deeper problems, the individual is mistaken in considering the activity to enhance well-being; the attendant positive affect is misleading.<sup>2</sup>

The psychological concept of subjective well-being is less cautious as to the role of our subjective assessments. The conceptual tools required to recognise the possibility of such mistakes are absent from subjective well-being research, although within other mainstream psychological research there is greater recognition.<sup>3</sup> Subjective well-being, the psychological concept, offers a bare subjectivity not necessarily reflected in other subjective theories of well-being.

Other subjective theories of well-being such as Sumner's may be able to withstand and indeed accommodate criticisms of the psychological stance. We can clearly be mistaken on matters of well-being, and any plausible theory must account for this. Even limited reflection on this matter it seems, indicates the need for a theory to extend beyond naive subjectivism. Griffin suggests that reflection on the matter leads the terms subjective and objective to become somewhat redundant, he criticises those who place a great emphasis on these categories:

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<sup>2</sup> Further research provides evidence of how our ongoing attitudes toward exercise may be destructive. Davis and Kaptein (2006) found in anorexia nervosa patients who engage in excessive exercise, a condition closely related to obsessive-compulsive disorder. Research conducted by Davis and Woodside (2002) found that those with anorexia nervosa engaging in excessive exercise had a reduced capacity for pleasure. Over-exercising understood as a way of compensating for this 'adhedonia.'

<sup>3</sup> Consider Kahneman's (1999) 'Objective Happiness' where an individual's remembered utility may not match up with the total of the instant utility states accumulated throughout the period in question. 'The individual's own retrospective evaluation of the experience (its *remembered utility*)' (Kahneman, 1999: 5) is deemed fallible. This, of course, is an entirely different form of objectivity to the philosophical objectivity discussed in the preceding passages. The psychologists' objective, instant utility, is still based on subjective reports of good or bad states (Kahneman, 1999).

the dependence of prudential value on desire is much less simple, less a matter of all or nothing than they assume. The best account of ‘utility’ makes it depend on some desires and not on others. So the distinction between objective and subjective, defined in the common way that I have defined it, does not mark an especially crucial distinction. It would be better if these terms (at least in this sense) were put into retirement.

(Griffin, 1986: 33).

Griffin considers the fulfilment of certain ‘informed’ desires to enhance our well-being. This removes from the equation those desires clearly mistaken, harmful to well-being. Nevertheless, Griffin suggests we cannot exclude desire and feeling altogether, indeed any successful account of well-being will need to bridge the subjective and objective.<sup>4</sup>

Moore (2000) questions Griffin’s conclusion that his account can be ‘both’ objective and subjective claiming that the distinction Griffin makes is exclusive. ‘By “subjective”’ states Griffin, ‘I mean an account that makes well-being depend upon an individual’s own desires, and by “objective” one that makes well-being independent of desires.’ (Griffin, 1986: 32). Griffin, Moore (2000) speculates, may consider a successful theory to have subjective and objective parts. Regardless, Moore considers the distinction a useful tool for the analysis of Griffin’s theory. I concur. Any defensible theory is unlikely to be exclusively subjective, or indeed entirely dismissive of the significance of subjective goods such as pleasure, enjoyment and satisfaction. Yet the distinction remains a useful way in which to approach a theory, to pick out where it stands, and indeed how it attempts to resolve conflicts that have long troubled philosophers.

A positive evaluation of sport and exercise, enjoying it, gaining pleasure from participation, is no doubt of great importance to well-being. Beginning and ending an analysis of the benefits of exercise here, as exercise psychologists do through their adoption or promotion of the subjective well being model, does not do justice to the nature of the activities themselves. Are all pleasures associated with physical

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<sup>4</sup> Griffin’s account of well-being is examined in depth in chapter four. Section 4.4 addresses his attempts to bridge the objective and subjective. He argues ‘if the question “Subjective or objective?” is pressed, then the answer has to be “Both”.’ (Griffin, 1986: 33).



activity of equal merit? Are they all contributive to our well-being? Can sport enhance well-being in the absence of a favourable attitude toward it, or in the absence of enjoyment? A full response to such questions requires us to extend beyond talk of favourable attitudes to an analysis of the values associated with sport and physical activity.

Subjective theories consider well-being to depend upon the perspective of the individual. What improves my life, my overall well-being, is something over which I should have the ultimate say. Objective theories deny this agent sovereignty, and it is understandable that psychologists view this denial with some suspicion. In some cases it may entail saying, 'I know what is best for you, and you are mistaken.' This seems paternalistic,<sup>5</sup> and any objective theory must respond to such accusations. Objective theories will not be defended, or even developed to any extent within this chapter. It is hoped that the positive case for a theory recognising the flaws of the psychological concept of subjective well-being, can be discerned from this initial, rather critical enterprise. The task of defending an objective alternative will be undertaken in later chapters of the thesis. I will now move on to address how some psychologists understand a distinction between objective and subjective theories of well-being, and to a discussion of the psychological concept of subjective well-being.

### **2.3 Psychological theories of well-being**

The common distinction between objective and subjective theories of well-being employed in the philosophical domain is not entirely shared within psychology. Kahneman (1999) has cited the growing importance of objective measures of happiness in psychological research, objective here also referring to fallibility. It is recognised that an individual's own judgement of how happy they were at a given time, or in a particular month, may not match up with a more objective assessment of well-being (Kahneman, 1999). It is suggested that the retrospective nature of such

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<sup>5</sup> See Nussbaum (2000, pp. 51-9) for a convincing defence of her capabilities account against the 'argument from paternalism.'

judgements might be flawed, such flaws attributable to errors of both logic and memory (Kahneman, 1999).

Remembered utility<sup>6</sup> is contrasted with objective assessments of happiness.

Objective happiness is formed through a ‘bottom-up approach’ (Kahneman, 1999: 3), assessing instant utility (the good or bad states), and considering this to total up to an objective conception of happiness. This sense of objective does not match the widely shared philosophical sense. It is stated that instant utility is based upon subjective reports of good or bad states. An objective theory in a philosophical sense would not contain this subjective valuation.

The terms ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ are employed in a variety of ways, and this should certainly be noted as I progress through the critique. This is not to say, however, that I cannot conduct a philosophical analysis that spans academic disciplines. For the benefit of later argument it is worth examining the philosopher James Griffin’s (1986) criticism of the bottom-up approach to well-being. This was mainly in response to utilitarian theories, but clearly applies to the psychological approach to objectivity described above. Griffin questions whether a preference between different options is always based upon the amount of pleasurable mental states each option contains, and concludes that this is not necessarily the case. He takes as his example Freud’s preference for clarity of thought toward his life’s end, rather than accept medication that would have reduced pain but simultaneously clouded thought (Griffin, 1986).

Some preferences – Freud’s seems to be one – are basic. That is, preferences do not always rest upon other judgements about the quantity of some homogeneous mental state, found in, or produced by, each option.  
(Griffin, 1986: 8).

Freud’s preference was to be able to think clearly at his life’s end, rather than accept medication that would have reduced pain but simultaneously clouded his thought

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<sup>6</sup> ‘Remembered utility is explained thus ‘The individual’s own retrospective evaluation of the experience’ (Kahneman, 1999: 5).

(Griffin, 1986). Griffin contends that there is not ‘a single feeling or mental state’ (Griffin, 1986: 8) identifiable in terms of both of the alternatives presented. Thus Freud’s preference does not entail a comparison of mental states. His preference is ‘basic.’ What we consider to enhance our well-being may not be the option that has accumulated the greatest total of positive mental states. We value things other than the mere accumulation of pleasure or the absence of pain.<sup>7</sup>

Kahneman (1999) however, is aware of such limitations. Extending beyond a mental state account he suggests that:

experiences such as those of a straining runner or a spectator watching a tragedy call for more differentiated descriptions. Even in such cases, however, it is usually possible to locate the moment on the Good or Bad side of neutral, by applying the additional criterion of whether an interruption would be welcome or resisted. Would the runner be relieved by an announcement that the race is cancelled? Would the spectator welcome the unexpected termination of the performance?

(Kahneman, 1999: 8-9).

It is not just the mental state itself that is important in Kahneman’s objective happiness account, but our attitude toward the mental state, whether we want it to continue. Sumner (2000) notes a similar argument against Griffin’s Freud example. Freud’s clarity of mind, the argument goes, is the mental state he prefers. This argument will be examined in more depth within the critique of the psychological concept of subjective well-being, introduced below. It is sufficient at this stage to recognise how ‘objective well-being’ means different things to the philosophers and the psychologists I have discussed thus far.

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<sup>7</sup> This standard criticism of utilitarian theories encourages Griffin to move beyond mental state theories, to contemplate desire theories of well-being. Having criticised certain of these theories he ultimately progresses to what basically amounts to a list account. Chapter four addresses this development.

### 2.3.1 *Subjective well-being in the psychological research*

'*Subjective happiness*' is assessed by asking respondents to state how happy they are' (Kahneman, 1999: 5). The concept of subjective well-being<sup>8</sup> also retains the sovereignty of the individual in defining her own well-being:

The term "subjective well-being" (SWB) refers to people's evaluations of their lives. These evaluations include both cognitive judgements of life satisfaction and affective evaluations of moods and emotions.

(Diener and Lucas, 1999: 213).

Psychological research has tended to focus on the ends of 'affect' and 'life satisfaction', other factors being deemed contributory to, rather than constitutive of, well-being (Diener, 1984). An emphasis on the importance of experiencing more positive than negative affective states is a clear indication of how 'pleasant emotional experience' (Diener, 1984: 543) or feeling good is central to the concept of subjective well-being. Philosophical theories, by contrast, have included as *constituents* of well-being; friendship, or meaningful relationships of some kind (see for example Finnis, 1980; Griffin, 1986; Nussbaum, 2000a) and bodily health (see for example Nussbaum, 2000a). Those studying subjective well-being have not ignored these factors, but considered them solely in terms of their impact upon affect and satisfaction. Indeed an extensive amount of research has investigated the contribution of various factors to subjective well-being, including health, income, religion, marriage and age to name a few (Diener *et al.*, 1999).

There has been recognition that in certain cases subjective factors may not weigh so heavily. Using the classic example from John Stuart Mill, Diener *et al.* (1998: 35) write 'If we value intelligence and wisdom enough, we might choose to be an unhappy Socrates rather than a satisfied swine'. It would be unfair to suggest that for

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<sup>8</sup> Although this chapter concentrates upon subjective well-being and its use in psychological research, acknowledgement should be made of alternative psychological approaches to well-being that depart from purely subjective accounts. See Ryff and Singer (1998) on positive health, and for a review of research on hedonic and eudaimonic well-being see Ryan and Deci (2001), prominent self-determination theorists, providing ample indication of how well-being is conceptualised from a self-determination theory perspective.

proponents of subjective well-being, these subjective factors are *all* that matters to a good life. Affect and life satisfaction though, certainly retain an elevated status.

Consider the following example:

Although physical health is valued by most of us, we would argue that we want it primarily because we hope that it will enhance our subjective well-being.

(Diener *et al.*, 1998: 37).

Is the value of health really best understood in terms of satisfaction and positive affect? Other conceptions of health suggest its proximity to autonomy,<sup>9</sup> being healthy provides us with more life options, and this enhanced autonomy can be understood as of value to our well-being regardless as to whether our satisfaction or mood remains elevated. This leads us on to consider how the benefits of exercise may extend beyond these subjective factors. The argument does not amount to a dismissal of the subjective aspects of well-being, it is not unimportant to feel happy, or to recognise how good one's life is, or indeed to experience pleasure. The following analysis will, however, question whether the concept of affect in particular does proper justice to the pleasures of physical activity.

## **2.4 Subjective well-being; a critique**

### **2.4.1 *The concept of affect***

Psychologists typically assess subjective well-being in terms of both affect (both positive and negative) and life satisfaction. Griffin (1986) in his critique of mental state accounts of well-being, makes the convincing point that there is not one discernable mental state that runs through all that we consider to enhance our well-being. The psychological research examined below, however, recognises that a *single mental state* is not responsible for enhanced well-being, adopting a more expansive concept of affect.

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<sup>9</sup> See Seedhouse (2001).

Van Landuyt *et al.* (2000) utilised the circumplex model (Russell 1980) in their investigation of the relationship between exercise and affect. The model maps affect according to two dimensions, 1) high or low activation and 2) affective valence – pleasant or unpleasant.

These two dimensions divide the affective domain into four meaningful quadrants: (a) activated pleasant affect, characterized by energy, excitement, and enthusiasm; (b) unactivated pleasant affect, characterized by calmness and relaxation; (c) activated unpleasant affect, characterized by tension and distress; and (d) unactivated unpleasant affect, characterized by fatigue, boredom, or depression.

(Van Landuyt *et al.*, 2000: 214).

The aim of their research was for the broadest possible range of affective states to be assessed, rather than limiting them at the outset by focusing on particular discrete emotions such as anxiety (Van Landuyt *et al.*, 2000). The focus is upon the valence, (pleasant or unpleasant) and activation level of a mental state. In using such a model psychologists do not seem to be claiming that there is one mental state that runs through all exercise experience, but that the affective experience should be mapped more broadly.

Sumner (2000) examines a counter argument to Griffin's criticism of mental state theories, stating that both Mill and Sedgwick did not consider pleasure in terms of a single mental state.

On their view what pleasures have in common is not something internal to them – their peculiar feeling tone, or whatever – but something about us – the fact that we like them, enjoy them, value them, find them satisfying, seek them, wish to prolong them, and so on.

(Sumner, 2000: 5).

Sumner considers this an adequate counter to *part* of the basis of Griffin's rejection of mental state theories.<sup>10</sup> Freud chose what is 'more satisfying or fulfilling' (Sumner, 2000: 5), and this interpretation is the important aspect of the mental states

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<sup>10</sup> As we shall see Sumner is persuaded by Griffin's further criticism of mental state theories. That our desires extend beyond states of mind. We consider our well-being to be more than just how we feel.

experienced, not the type of the states themselves. This debate echoes the development and critique of utilitarian thinking. Utilitarian stances on well-being need not be hostage to the notion of homogeneity of pleasure. They need not claim that there is a single mental state identifiable within activities as diverse as running and reading, in order for such activities to enhance well-being. In understanding how pleasures enhance well-being we are encouraged to look beyond the state itself.

There are, however, two important and related responses to be made to this stance. First, I can make the seemingly convincing point that Freud's preference makes little reference to his states of mind, but more to his desires (Griffin 1986). The upshot of this is recognition of what might be thought plain obvious: we value things other than states of mind. This point will be developed in the following section. Second, I ask if judging something as satisfying or fulfilling necessarily enhances one's well-being, or whether such judgements can be flawed?

#### **2.4.2 *Pleasure and well-being***

Griffin (1986) rejects mental state theories of well-being on the basis that we value things other than just states of mind. It should be acknowledged that the concept subjective well-being does not just concern mental states (affect), its life satisfaction component extending beyond this, representing an overall assessment of how well things are going. Subjective well-being makes no reference to how we might achieve life satisfaction, or maintain affect that weighs on the positive side of the scale. This is no doubt tied in with the understandable reluctance of psychologists to stipulate what the good life consists in for all, maintaining apparent neutrality and avoiding accusations of paternalism. But there does seem to be something missing here. In this section I investigate the possibility that there are other things of value to us, and challenge the assumption that these can be deemed valuable solely because of the pleasure or satisfaction they generate.

Sumner's conclusion that Freud chose the option that he found most satisfying or fulfilling has intuitive plausibility. Thinking clearly itself is a mental state, and this

presumably is the one that Freud found most fulfilling. There are, however, plenty of other examples of preferences for things that cannot be conceived of as mental states: the sort of values that do not seem to be experienced. Griffin refers to authenticity in the realm of friendship:

Even if I were surrounded by consummate actors able to give me sweet simulacra of love and affection, I should prefer the relatively bitter diet of their authentic reactions. And I should prefer it not because it would be morally better, or aesthetically better, or more noble, but because it would make a better life for me to live.

(Griffin, 1986: 9).

The point Griffin makes is that authenticity does not enter experience at all, 'all that can enter is what is common to both my truly having such relations and my merely believing that I do' (Griffin, 1986: 19). The counter argument would be that if we do not know any better our well-being would remain unaffected. Sumner however, considers this defence of the mental state theory flawed.

If what you have treasured as an important ingredient of your well-being – your accomplishments, say, or your deep personal relations – turns out to have been an elaborate deception, you are likely to feel hurt and betrayed. How else to explain this, except to say that, at least in this area of your life, what mattered to you was not merely how things seemed but how they actually were? Your reaction to the deception certainly looks, and feels, like a reassessment, in the light of your own priorities, of how well your life has been going for you. And that seems to place it squarely within the domain of prudential value.

(Sumner, 2000: 6).

Valuing authenticity over deception is what Griffin would deem a basic preference, here there is no comparison of mental states, because authentic friendships would be experienced in just the same way as a successful deception. This supports the point made by both Finnis (1983) and Griffin (1986): we do not just want the feelings that friendship provoke, but genuine friendships themselves. Genuine friendships are most important to us. This seems to extend to other areas as well, we may strive to accomplish something (another of Griffin's examples), but we do not just want to feel we have accomplished (this could perhaps be achieved through the lowering of



one's expectations), but to truly accomplish. Having considered Griffin's examples I suggest that though pleasure is not an inconsiderable good, we may enhance our well-being in its absence, and indeed consider the less pleasurable option to be better for us.

### **2.4.3 *Can we be mistaken in judgements of our well-being?***

The critique so far leaves itself open to following response. We may value a great deal more than just pleasure or positive affect, but subjective well-being is not another name for hedonism (Diener *et al.*, 1998). The appreciation of the relation of pleasure to value, the response would claim, the need to understand how we do not judge our life and the options it provides by the positive/negative affect ratio is entirely encompassed within the domain of life satisfaction. This domain would reflect my want to have good relationships, make the most of myself, and accomplish this or that. It recognises these values and incorporates them.

Criticisms of the concept of 'life satisfaction' strike at the very basis of subjective well-being. Life satisfaction retains agent sovereignty over decisions as to what enhances well-being. Asking whether an individual can be mistaken in such assessments concerns the efficacy of this concept in psychological well-being research.

It does seem that we can be mistaken in judgements of our own well-being. Those living in deprived circumstances, or perhaps suffering abuse or malnutrition may not always recognise their own deprivation; they may even rate their well-being relatively positively. Martha Nussbaum devotes an entire chapter to such 'adaptive preferences' in *Women and Human Development* (Nussbaum, 2000a). Subjective well-being would, with its emphasis on agent sovereignty, be unable to criticise such adaptive preferences. In acknowledging this indifference to instances of deprivation, we must recognise the limitations of subjective well-being as a foundation for public policy. Subjective ratings, it seems, can also be misleading at other end of the scale. Those more fortunate may have adapted to their favourable circumstances and

adjusted their expectations accordingly, wanting more again, and feeling less satisfied at not having it. The crux of the matter seems to be that if we accept purely subjective measures, one can enhance one's well-being just by wanting less. And any account of well-being which accepted this would be on worse than shaky ground.

## **2.5 Subjective well-being in the exercise psychology research**

In this section I will consider two examples of research conducted in the field of exercise psychology utilising the concept of subjective well-being. Following brief descriptions of the studies, some criticisms of the use of a subjectivist conception follow.

A study investigating 'Social relations, physical activity and well-being in older adults' (McAuley *et al.*, 2000) concerned a sustained period of either aerobic activity or stretching and toning for two randomised samples of previously sedentary participants. Subjective well-being was conceptualised through the measurement of two affective states, happiness and loneliness, and the cognitive evaluation of satisfaction with one's life. The six month exercise interventions were found to have positive effects on subjective well-being (McAuley *et al.*, 2000). Interestingly there was no significant difference between the different activity type and impact upon subjective well-being, suggesting that activity need not be aerobic or vigorous to enhance subjective well-being (*ibid.*). Structural analyses found a relationship between social relations and increases in life satisfaction as well as decreases in loneliness. Consistent with the hallmarks of subjective well-being identified earlier, social relations are considered as influences on well-being rather than a constituent of the concept. This could be interpreted as understanding the importance of social relations as a mere means to the end of how they make us feel.

A large scale population study also offered support for the case of exercise in terms of increased subjective well-being through identifying the lower stress and life dissatisfaction found in those who exercise (Schnor *et al.*, 2005). The study

comprised a survey of those participating in The Copenhagen Heart Study, asking about exercise habits and the participants' well-being. Data was taken at two separate points, the first from 1976-8 the second 1981-3. The method employed lead to an acknowledged difficulty in establishing cause and effect (Schnor *et al.*, 2005).: do those of higher well-being (or lower levels of dissatisfaction and stress in this study) engage in more exercise, or does exercise lead to reductions in stress and life dissatisfaction? Schnor *et al.*, however, offer some support for the contribution of exercise to well-being. Sedentary individuals who became more active, (such individuals were considered sedentary in the first study 1976-8, with their increased levels of physical activity reflected in the second assessment of 1981-3) demonstrated reduced dissatisfaction and stress.

Well-being is again understood in subjective fashion, an affective (the stress element) and cognitive (dissatisfaction) component is evident. The measurement of stress and life dissatisfaction fails to assess positive affect in particular and unusually considers life satisfaction in the negative but nevertheless the concept has sufficient similarity to the psychological concept of subjective well-being.

Having described these methodologically different studies utilising a subjective conception of well-being, or aspects of this conception, I can now move forward to the critique, analysing the implications of such a stance in the exercise and sports domains.

### **2.5.1 *The concept of affect***

Despite the conclusion that the concept of affect does not necessarily imply the presence of a single mental state that comprises well-being, there remains a persuasive argument for looking at affect (or more precisely the pleasures of exercise) in greater depth. A qualitative study of the effects of exercise on a depressed sample recognised that whilst participants reported positive mood after activity the effect was short-lived (Faulkner and Biddle, 2004). Certain forms of affect may be somewhat transient. Kupperman (2003) usefully distinguishes among

felt pleasures and has considered the implications for public policy. Certain pleasures, for example, are short term; we adapt quickly through a process he refers to as the ‘hedonic treadmill,’<sup>11</sup> and then the elevated feeling state disappears. Other affects though are less susceptible to this feature. An important conceptualisation of the more extended pleasures is found in the much utilised concept of ‘flow’.

The “flow” experiences (of being caught up in exercise of skills) reported by Csikszentmihalyi’s subjects also can be related to sense of self, especially when there is room to be proud of the skills involved; and these satisfactions too can be largely exempt from the hedonic treadmill.

(Kupperman, 2003: 26).

This forms part of Kupperman’s broader thesis that ‘increased satisfactions (or dissatisfactions) that are related to the sense of self are not subject to the hedonic treadmill in the same way’ (2003: 26). Kupperman’s suggestions here are not firm but they certainly provide food for thought. Attending in greater depth to the different types of satisfaction that exercise may provide may help us to understand those activities that provide a longer lasting satisfaction. The indications above seem to argue for more meaningful activities, perhaps sitting on an exercise bike and the following ‘buzz’ of endorphins rushing around our body upon completion may be short lived and therefore have limited implications for our well-being. A more meaningful activity, the learning of a new skill, mastering something, working with others, may encourage pleasures with greater meaning to our lives and offer greater benefit to well-being. In the mean time of course, as Kupperman indicates, we must be careful in advocating government policies that seek to enhance pleasures, without fully understanding the pleasures that have most relation to our well-being.

### **2.5.2 *Pleasure and well-being***

There is more to well-being than pleasurable mental states. Indeed, a focus on the state itself may be to over emphasise certain trivial or transient pleasures. As Griffin

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<sup>11</sup> The ‘hedonic treadmill’ refers to a process of adaptation to enhanced satisfaction, so even if the circumstances that promote the enhanced satisfaction are maintained, we may not continue to experience this elevated state.

(1986) suggests, we also value things other than mental states and our choices reflect this. Friendship provides an example of something so valuable it should not merely be assessed in terms of the subjective states it promotes. Indeed, many of the things we value most, and presumably consider good for our well-being do not appear ‘pleasurable.’ This philosophical position has found empirical support in recent psychological research (Vittersø, 2004) using quantitative methods to distinguish significantly between subjective well-being (which was associated with pleasantness) and openness to experience (interestingness and challenge). This provides empirical support for my philosophical contention that the methodology of subjective well being research is epistemologically inadequate on the grounds of reducing the latter (accomplishment, challenge, friendship, mastery and so on) to the former (felt pleasure).

Not only is it inadequate to say that our valuing sport and other forms of exercise is dependent on pleasure, there may even be some instances in which physical activity is not pleasurable, yet still enhances well-being. Pleasure may not be necessary or sufficient for physical activity to enhance well-being. Hochstetler (2003) refers to sport and claims that ‘Part of understanding sport, then, is paying attention to the prose, the everyday, the arduous, the repetitive’ (2003: 232). Nevertheless, we continue to participate because we consider our well-being enhanced regardless of this absence of the pleasurable aspects.

A commonly accepted benefit of physical activity is its potential to improve functioning.<sup>12</sup> This may in turn improve one’s abilities to conduct household tasks, getting around the house itself may be easier, gardening, visiting friends, taking a walk, playing with the children or grandchildren may all be easier for the more active individual. This has formed an important aspect of the rationale for physical activity particularly for the older population. It is possible that these daily functionings were so important to an individual that they were miserable when they

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<sup>12</sup> For a detailed philosophical discussion of quality of life conceived of as capability to function see *The Quality of Life* (eds. M.C. Nussbaum and A. Sen), 1993, Oxford: Clarendon Press. Chapters five, six and seven of this thesis make extensive reference to Martha Nussbaum’s capabilities approach.

were less capable to carry them out and retained elevated subjective well-being after becoming more active and thus more capable of certain activities/functionings. Conversely, it is also perfectly feasible that - adaptable as we are - reduced capability to undertake certain activities did not impinge on subjective well-being. Moreover, having become more active it is reasonable to assume that we could simply take for granted the new found functionings and enhanced autonomy. Regardless of the extent to which these changes impacted upon subjective well-being it seems clear that they are not solely valuable in terms of the changes in subjective states they provoke.

The potential that physical activity has to increase our opportunities, not only to conduct daily tasks with greater ease but to learn new skills, get out of the house, meet new people, try new things, challenge ourselves and indeed accomplish feats, cannot be reduced solely to affect or satisfaction. Any policy decisions taken to enhance well-being must recognise the value of the above independently of the pleasure they may or may not be associated with. Kupperman (2003) aware of the transient nature of some pleasures has recognised this:

*If there is any justification for governments or nongovernmental organizations to attempt to change levels of felt well-being in the population, we need to discriminate among the kinds of felt satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) that one attempts to change. Money is better spent on increasing opportunities to acquire and exercise significant skills than on measures designed to increase comfort or improve the general ratio of pleasures to pains.*

(Kupperman, 2003: 26).

Kupperman (2003) has suggested that pleasures associated with learning new skills, with greater relation to one's sense of self, may be longer lasting. It is plausible, however, that in certain instances well-being is enhanced in the absence of pleasure. The relationships, mastery, enhanced freedom to conduct daily tasks, all associated with exercise, may be important to our well-being, without always impacting upon measures of positive affect.

### 2.5.3 *Well-being and mistaken judgements in exercise and sports domains*

Measures of well-being that are entirely subjective do not have the capability to criticise behaviours considered by the individual to enhance well-being, but that appear from the outside to be doing just the opposite. They rely solely on the judgements of the individual concerned. Loumidis and Wells (2001) discuss those who exercise on the back of flawed perceptions of their body, or to enhance mood, covering up deeper problems. This certainly seems ill-informed and I question the relation of such behaviour to well-being. Our own subjective assessments, how we feel, or whether our desires are satisfied, may not always tell the whole picture when it comes to evaluating properly the contribution of exercise to well-being. The ‘shifting goalposts’ effect, evident when body satisfaction and body image fail to improve through exercise, indicates the fallibility of such judgements. A gap is left between the subjective judgement of the physical self and physical condition as determined by fitness and other factors (Fox, 2000). Continued exercise motivated by flawed perceptions of the self, may be seen by the misconceived individual as the route to well-being, but in reality may lead to further frustration and negative health implications.

Further examples of how an individual may be mistaken in judgments of how sport or other exercise enhances well-being include over-training (Lehman *et al.*, 1993; Meehan *et al.*, 2004) or even exercise-addiction (for a review see Szabo, 2000). Here participation may be thought to enhance well-being, but in fact be doing damage. Again, the apparent pleasures of exercise, perhaps the rush of endorphins upon completing a hard run or training session, are misleading as to our well-being. The negative health implications aside, there is also the interesting question of balance in a good life. Someone who is addicted to exercise or trains to the exclusion of other activities may be excluding other important values from his/her life. Reference was made earlier to how exercise *may* expand our opportunities, referring amongst other examples to the potential to meet new people. For the exercise addict or the over trainer the opposite seems to be happening. The individual limits the extent to which other values such as friendship; or indeed just enjoying activities in a more playful

manner may play a part in a good life. An objective stance on well-being would claim that certain values are essential to the individual having a good life, or achieving well-being. A further stipulation of some such theories is that all of these values must be present in a life; we cannot get by just by focusing on one or two. Nussbaum's (2000a) list of central capabilities provides one important example of this.

The list is, emphatically, a list of *separate components*. We cannot satisfy the need for one of them by giving a larger amount of another one. All are of central importance and all are distinct in quality. The irreducible plurality of the list limits the trade-offs that it will be reasonable to make, and thus limits the applicability of quantitative cost-benefit analysis.

(Nussbaum, 2000a: 81).

*Subjective well-being*, in its indifference to how we derive positive affect, or how we come to be satisfied with our lives, does not have the tools to criticise behaviours that seem to neglect what matters to us in the round. Exclusively subjective theories suffer in that they have little to say about obviously destructive behaviours such as over training or the types of exercising for the wrong reasons described by Loumidis and Wells (2001), so long as these seem to be satisfying some desire, however ill-informed, or enhancing feeling states, however much these cover up deeper seated problems (Loumidis and Wells, 2001). The extension of this argument, that a life must have some balance to it, containing certain central values, is contrary to the premise of subjective well-being. If one is satisfied with life and has a life characterised by positive emotional experience, it does not matter to the proponent of subjective well-being whether this is achieved through an obsessive focus with, say achieving something, a characteristic of the over trainer perhaps, or through a more balanced life. The notion of balance is based upon an objective theory that asserts the importance of each of its values and indeed details how such values support each other. That it would be better for us if we have a balanced life, rather than pursuing isolated values or goals does retain initial plausibility, and is a conclusion only available within a framework asserting the objective value of each of its constituents.



That we can be mistaken in our judgements of what enhances well-being alludes to previous criticisms of subjective theories of well-being. Both Griffin (1986) and Sumner (2000) agree that well-being cannot be reduced entirely to how life feels on the inside.<sup>13</sup> Loumidis and Wells (2001) also share a suspicion of an emphasis on feeling states, one may use exercise to feel better in the short term, but this might mask longer term problems. In order to conduct a proper assessment of the value of sport and exercise to our well-being, analysis must extend further than an exclusive emphasis on felt pleasure or similar sensations. Our well-being cannot be reduced to how we feel from the inside without distorted results.

It has been argued that the psychological concept of subjective well-being is flawed in important ways. In the many contexts of exercise and sport, it is no doubt central to their engagement with them that people enjoy the activities and find them pleasurable. Nevertheless, the emphasis upon this hedonistic aspect in the psychological research has two main disadvantages. First, short-term pleasure and enjoyment may mask activities that are doing us no good (Loumidis and Wells, 2001). Second, even in instances where the behaviour is not necessarily harmful, an exclusive focus on pleasure or affect excludes the consideration of other ways in which something may enhance well-being. The mastery of new skills and the development of social relationships represent examples of how physical activity might enhance well-being quite apart from the pleasure with which it may be associated.

## **2.6 Psychological theories of quality of life**

Well-being within the psychological literature is, in the main, hostage to a subjectivism, damaging to both our understanding of well-being itself, and to our

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<sup>13</sup> Nozick's experience machine is the classic example of Sumner and Griffin's argument here. Nozick asks if the reader would plug in to a machine that could simulate any experience desired. Realisation that we would not, it is contended, indicates our desire to do certain things and be a certain way, not just have the associated experiences. Plugging in, notes Nozick, also prevents our connection to anything further or deeper than that which is man made. Nozick's concluding remarks of the section sum up. 'Perhaps what we desire is to live (an active verb) ourselves, in contact with reality.' (Nozick, 1974: 45).

understanding of how exercise might improve our lives. Quality of life, another concept used to express how well life is going; has also been addressed extensively within psychological research. This section will comprise of a brief examination of selected psychological theories of quality of life. Criticisms of such theories again refer to how an individual may be mistaken in their judgements. Subjectivism and its related flaws are again apparent within this research.

### **2.6.1 *Psychological Quality of Life; Objective and Subjective***

The terms objective and subjective, so prominent in the analysis of well-being, are also evident with the quality of life literature. Psychologists and philosophers, as we have seen, do not necessarily understand these terms in the same way. This has been noted in the case of Kahneman's 'objective well-being' ultimately still dependent upon subjective judgements. Rapley (2003) also offers a differing interpretation of the terms. A distinction between objective and subjective indicators of quality of life at population level is made (Rapley, 2003). An objective indicator of quality of life may concern unemployment rate (Noll, 2000) for example, a figure intended to exclude subjective evaluations (ibid.). Associating objectivity with supposedly value-free measurements represents an acceptance of a particular metaphysical stance, the fact/value dichotomy.<sup>14</sup> The contention that facts must be value-free, confining objectivity to a particularly narrow domain, dominated by science, has been damaging to both psychological and physiological understanding of health and well-being.<sup>15</sup>

Poverty is often represented in economic terms but such indicators fail to properly represent what matters to human life. Nussbaum and Sen (1993) refer to Dickens' *Hard Times* in making this very point.

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<sup>14</sup> For a critique of this dichotomy between fact and value see Putnam (2002).

<sup>15</sup> The following chapter addresses the fact/value dichotomy and the rationale for physical activity based on physiological evidence, claiming that this rationale is unable to disentangle itself from value judgements.

We need, perhaps above all, to know how people are enabled by the society in question to imagine, to wonder, to feel emotions such as love and gratitude, that presuppose that life is more than a set of commercial relations, and that the human being – unlike the steam engines of Coketown – is an ‘unfathomable mystery’, not to be completely ‘set forth in tabular form’. In short, to think well about Sissy’s problem, we seem to need a kind of rich and complex descriptions of what people are able to do and be - a description that may be more readily available to the reader of Dickens’s novel than to those who confine their reading to the narrowly technical and financial document favoured by Sissy’s teachers.

(Nussbaum and Sen, 1993: 1-2).

It is my contention that the ‘rich and complex descriptions of what people are able to do and be’ required for a full understanding of quality of life must also extend beyond subjective assessments of life satisfaction and pleasure. Psychologists have of course recognised the limitations of objective indicators. They have been less attentive, however, to the limitations of the subjectivity so dominant in their individual level assessments of quality of life.

Psychological approaches are certainly moving toward this subjectivity, this trend in no small part due to the perceived inadequacies of more objective theories. Rapley refers to ‘The problem of objectivity’:

What all of these approaches share in, then, is their adherence to the theoretical (and hence methodological) position which suggests that – in principle – *all* states of being in the world are amenable to objective operational definition, and meaningful description in numerical terms.

(Rapley, 2003: 64).

This represents a second way in which theories claim objective status, but Rapley doubts this status himself. He questions whether quality of life can have the same status as objects or things, contrasting these objects with ‘hypothetical constructs – such as “intelligence”, “QOL” or “schizophrenia”’. (Rapley, 2003: 65). Concern is also expressed at the possibility of the ‘objective’ scores masking the value judgements that influence the development of the universal quality of life instrument, deciding upon ‘which domains should be measured’ (Rapley, 2003: 66) for example. It becomes clear that Rapley considers quality of life as varying

according to individual and cultural differences, a kind of relativism clearly in conflict with theories aspiring to this form of objectivity.

This suspicion of universal measures of quality of life is widely shared within psychology. The individual quality of life movement will be discussed as an example of research intended to improve upon such measures. As I move on to examine the theory behind two selected quality of life measures, it becomes clear, as expected, that the psychological approach to quality of life research is based upon the perceptions of the individual. In terms of the philosophical distinction made earlier, the theories are subjective. Rapley is of course right; we are unable to make judgments concerning quality of life without making value judgements, but I question whether relying upon the subjective perceptions of the individual is the only available option to those of us concerned with quality of life. Can a concept such as quality of life so clearly normative, still retain an objective status? Psychologists advocating an individual or subjective stance seem to indicate that appropriate attention to the individual is incompatible with an objective stance on quality of life.

### ***2.6.2 Psychological quality of life: The WHOQOL***

In further analysing the manner in which quality of life has been conceptualised within the psychological research, two differing approaches will be addressed. As the concern is with the theory and assumptions behind such concepts, this section does not attempt to review the extensive literature on the subject, rather to illuminate the theoretical basis behind the instruments. The development of the WHOQOL is the first topic for discussion. The second the SEIQoL (Schedule for the Evaluation of Quality of Life), an example of a tool founded in the individual approach to quality of life.

The World Health Organisation initiated an international collaboration between researchers intended to develop an instrument to measure quality of life (Skevington, *et al.*, 2004). The resulting WHOQOL, has also lead to the WHOQOL-old, a quality of life instrument for the over 60s, and the WHOQOL-Bref, a shortened version of

the WHOQOL – 100. In line with the move toward specificity evident in the psychological quality of life research there are numerous modifications of the WHOQOL. For example the tool has been adjusted to assess the quality of life of children (Jirojanakul and Skevington, 2000).

The WHOQOL is certainly, within the philosophical framework, a subjective measure. Quality of life is understood as an:

*individual's perception of their position in life, in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live, and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns.*

(WHOQOL Group, 1995).

The measure is concerned solely with the individual's perception. This subjective focus is elaborated upon. Questions concerning *perceived* objective status, 'How well can you walk?' (Skevington, *et al.*, 2004: 4) were not included, creating an instrument 'developed entirely of statements at the subjective self-report level.' (ibid.). The instrument was solely concerned with the levels of satisfaction with such behaviours, rather than the individual's assessment of how well they can do them. Someone may for example, be aware that they lack mobility, but not be particularly dissatisfied or concerned with this.

The WHOQOL is clearly a subjective instrument, but it also strives for the sort of universalism Rapley (2003) is suspicious of. The WHOQOL may well be an instrument 'designed by the users for the users' (Skevington *et al.*, 2004: 3), but it still asks its users to rate their quality of life according to a set of predetermined scales, and claims that 'a high level of agreement among peoples from the most diverse backgrounds about what constitutes a good QoL and well-being' (Skevington *et al.* 2004: 7) provides support for a universalist stance. This suggests that the domains of the WHOQOL (Physical Health, Psychological, Levels of Independence, Social Relationships, Environmental, Spirituality, Religion and Personal Beliefs) are central to all of our quality of life, regardless of cultural differences.

Finally, what of the role of health within quality of life, as conceptualised by the WHOQOL? It is clear that health is considered central to quality of life. Validation for the WHOQOL-Bref for example relies upon its adequately discriminating between ill and well groups. (Skevington *et al.*, 2004). The importance allocated to health is of course unsurprising in light of the WHO definition of health, indicated as the starting point for the project.

We began with the WHO definition of health and took its positive orientation towards health as something that is ‘not merely the absence of disease or infirmity’ as the main principle in the creation of an instrument that transcends the problem-centred boundaries necessitated by the clinical consultation and provides a holistic, more balanced view of QoL.

(Skevington, *et al.* 2004: 7)

The WHO defines health as ‘a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not simply the absence of disease or infirmity.’ (WHO, 1948). The definition refers to well-being and not quality of life, of course, but nevertheless, research influenced by this approach, such as that conducted by the WHOQOL-Group, is left in little doubt that being healthy is central to a good life. This *may* seem somewhat obvious, but in the following section, that concerning the Individual Quality of Life movement, this connection between health and quality of life is questioned.

### **2.6.3 *Individual quality of life: The SEIQoL***

Rapley (2003) is not alone in doubting the universal or generic measures of quality of life. Those researchers keen to retain maximum sensitivity to individual differences have sought to conceptualise quality of life in a different way. The Schedule for the Evaluation of Quality of Life and the theory behind it clearly sympathises with the stance of those such as Rapley. Its proponents describe the initial stages of the assessment:

the interview takes between 30 and 45 minutes to complete. Its first objectives are to clarify the concept of QoL for the respondent and to elicit elements (cues) that the subject considers contribute to his own QoL. As few as three or as many as eight can be accommodated, but if the number is small, he is encouraged to nominate more. Preferably one will fall in each of the generally agreed QoL domains – Cognitive, Affective, Social, Physical, Ecological, and Religious

(Joyce *et al.*, 2003: 277)

The SEIQoL also allows the respondent to decide upon the importance of the elicited areas, through rating the quality of life of 30-50 hypothetical individuals, the profile of which are based on the cues derived from the process described above. The respondent is also asked to rate his satisfaction with those areas deemed central to his/her life.

This measure is subjective at core, although it hopes the respondent's areas match with more generally recognised areas of importance. Basically the individual defines his/her quality of life, decides upon the importance of each area to a life, and indicates current satisfaction with these areas.

Proponents of Individual Quality of Life have also conducted a recent review of literature 'Measuring Health-Related Quality of Life in Older Populations'. (Hickey, *et al.*, 2005) They observe that the 'majority of studies used a generic HR-QOL instrument' (2005: 971), and questioned this approach. The concern is that these generic measures focus on physical function and are likely to elicit low scores of HR-QOL for the older population studied. This may not account for how expectations of physical function adapt with age.

This predefinition of scale items allows little flexibility for respondents, and the item content (although scorable) may be of little relevance to an individual in a particular context. For this reason measures may lack sensitivity to small but significant changes. More importantly, perhaps, such fixed-scale item scales impose an external value system on patients/respondents that may have little meaning for that person at that particular point in time.

(Hickey *et al.*, 2005: 988-9)

Individual Quality of Life measures such as the SEIQoL would overcome this difficulty. The authors also point to the numerous disease and population specific instruments that may overcome some of these problems.

Individual quality of life measures have also indicated that the relationship between health and quality of life is less straightforward than one would expect. They point to Waldron *et al.* (1999), where terminally ill patients with cancer still reported good quality of life, as established by the SEIQoL. This is a particularly interesting area for discussion. Ill health may lead to contemplation of what really matters, clarity previously absent. How one understands the relationship between health and well-being, of course, depends upon the conception of health employed. Adaptive theories of health suggest that with the certainty of chronic illness for many of us, our health is best conceptualised by how we adapt to such challenges. 'On this view then, to be healthy is not to correspond with some fixed norm, but to make the most of one's life in whatever circumstances one finds oneself' (Boyd, 2000: 14). In this sense, being healthy is not incompatible with having one's life impacted upon by disease or illness. There is however, a danger that a conceptualisation of health and well-being grounded entirely in subjective assessments is indifferent to the formation of adaptive preferences. An individual may adjust to poor health, malnutrition for example, and put up with things, rating both their health and quality of life favourably. The need to be respectful of the fulfilment and clarity that some gain during serious illness must be balanced with a need to recognise and indeed question certain adaptive preferences, such as those formed in instances of deprivation and malnutrition. We must be careful that the astounding ability of many to be happy in instances of deprivation does not undermine the necessity to challenge such circumstances as unacceptable. Indeed this discussion serves to indicate the difficulties that surround any theory of well-being or quality of life. Any objective theory must certainly remain open to the diverse ways, and indeed circumstances, in which the values on its list might be pursued.

Quality of life within the psychological literature does not represent a single stance, but a wide variety of sometimes conflicting definitions. I have selected two examples



of quality of life instruments, and focused upon the theory that underpins them. Three themes have come to the fore and warrant further philosophical analysis. The first is the familiar theme of subjectivity. Both of the instruments above focus upon subjective perceptions of quality of life, and this I can safely indicate is representative of the psychological literature. The second theme is that of specificity. Disease specific and population specific measures are common, intended to be more sensitive to those issues salient to the studied population. Third, I will make a start on the analysis of the role health might play in quality of life. This discussion will form an introduction to the topic; continued in the following chapter.

## **2.7 Psychological quality of life: A philosophical critique**

Psychological research has retreated to subjective stances on well-being in response to a previous rigidity that lacked attention to individual difference. Nussbaum recognises this reaction to the ‘simplified mathematical representation of complex human matters’ (Nussbaum, 1993a: 233)

a reaction by now itself well entrenched in the social sciences. This alternative approach insists on restoring human self-interpretations to the sphere of social analysis in all their richness and variety. But its proponents frequently give up on practical reason, holding that there is no way in which reason can really resolve evaluative disputes.

(Nussbaum, 1993a: 233).

Those supporting an individual approach to quality of life should be commended for their attention to individual difference, but these approaches offers no way in which to question or criticise those concepts of quality of life put forward by the individual. We may have a rich picture of what that person says makes up his or her quality of life, but we cannot enter into any form of critical discussion regarding the constituents of someone’s well-being, whether for example they have adapted to be happy with less. The sole emphasis on the individual here seems at odds with how we consider our judgements. It is common for someone, looking back on his/her life to say that ‘I got my priorities mixed up’ at a certain stage. My analysis of subjective well-being indicated how certain desires for goods can be misinformed, their

satisfaction failing to enhance life.<sup>16</sup> The propensity for such mistakes is likely to distort measures such as the SEIQoL. Ratings of importance of certain areas of life may be based on ill-informed desires, or beliefs that success in a certain area would improve a life more than it actually would. There is also the possibility that our preferences adapt to circumstance, we may express satisfaction with very little, even in deprived circumstances, or only be satisfied with extreme luxury. Neither of these preferences should pass without critical comment.

This critical point, however, does not seek to dismiss the importance of subjective judgements altogether. No doubt we vary in the importance we attach to certain domains or values within our lives. Any successful quality of life instrument needs to recognise this, as the SEIQoL does. Enjoying and being satisfied with life are also of great importance. Approaches such as the SEIQoL, however, are so entrenched in the subjective perspective that they are unable to account for mistaken judgements in the domain of quality of life, and for the possibility that quality of life might be enhanced in the absence of favourable attitudes. The latter, I argue is a possibility that should not be dismissed at this early stage. The increased functioning associated with exercise, discussed earlier, may not be accompanied by any increase in pleasure; indeed the individual may be indifferent to this apparent advantage. The possibility, however, that well-being or quality of life might still be said to be improved by the increase in function certainly warrants consideration.

One way of overcoming some of the limitations of generic instruments, particularly if the instrument is being used with certain populations, is to make the measure population specific.

Assessing change over time in health-related quality of life (HRQL) requires instruments capable of capturing any changes that, even if small, are important to patients. This instrument property, referred to as responsiveness, guides researchers' choices of HRQL measures for clinical trials.

(Wiebe *et al.*, 2003: 52).

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<sup>16</sup> Griffin's (1986) rejection of an actual desire account of well-being elaborates upon the ways in which desires can be ill-informed.

Indeed Wiebe *et al.*, (2003) concluded that specific instruments offer this enhanced responsiveness. Does such a conclusion amount to a challenge to universality or objectivity? If an objective theory of quality of life claims that certain values are important to us all, can we reconcile this with the trend toward measures of quality of life specific to a population? This trend certainly, on the face of it, points toward some kind of relativity.

Specificity may not, however, threaten universality, or indeed objectivity, if it is understood in a certain fashion. Griffin argues that certain prudential values are central to all of our lives, but recognises that conceptions of quality of life may vary:

We need the broad conception of quality of life (that is, the list of prudential values) for the reasoning about how to make our lives go best. Doctors need it for decisions about certain patients. But there are many reasons, both moral and practical, to work with a narrower conception of the quality of life in taking certain social decisions. And it may be (I strongly suspect it is) that we need several different conceptions of the quality of life for different sorts of social decisions. That is, we need both the broad conception and also an understanding of the various considerations at work in generating narrower conceptions.

(Griffin, 1993: 139).

The broad conception could still in some way inform other conceptions of quality of life. For example, those concerns that help us generate a disease specific measure may still relate to the general values of the broader conception, but be specified so as to relate to the relevant population. Nussbaum (2000a) suggests that her list of universal capabilities can be realised in a number of ways, context central to how these broad values may be specified.

It is beyond the scope of this brief foray into quality of life measures to argue that this is precisely the manner in which the plethora of disease specific measures operate, i.e. that they are concrete specifications of a universal value profile. Regardless as to whether this applies to the psychological literature, it is clear that specificity of this kind need not contradict an argument for broad universal values constituting quality of life.

Rapley (2003: 67) questions whether ‘any given set of domains identified by the questionnaire designer is itself genuinely representative of QOL’. He points towards earlier research (Rapley *et al.*, 1998) suggesting that enforced sterilization; the denial of adulthood; the absence of autonomy; stigma, belittlement and rejection; and an awareness that these were the results of being identified as an ‘intellectually disabled person’ (Rapley, 2003: 67) are essential to the understanding of the subjective quality of life of those with mild intellectual disabilities. Without questioning the importance of such factors, it is also possible to locate them within Griffin’s broad prudential value profile. This includes the values autonomy, choosing one’s course through life; liberty, and deep personal relationships.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, in criticism of the relativistic argument, there are dangers in suggesting that certain values, commonly perceived as essential to living a good life are not central to certain populations. Nussbaum (2006a) still considers her single list of central capabilities to be important to those with severe mental impairments.<sup>18</sup> There is a danger in an alternative list providing an excuse for policy not delivering on matters central to human life. Nussbaum is anxious that difficult or expensive goals are not avoided on the grounds that good living for those with mental impairments is a different matter than good living for those without such impairments. This would ultimately result in denial of the ‘prerequisites of a good human life’ (Nussbaum, 2006a: 190), on the grounds that flourishing is an entirely different thing for those with mental impairments.

Finally, I move onto discuss the relationship between health and quality of life. Those behind the WHOQOL are clear that they consider health and quality of life closely related, this follows from the WHO’s definition of health, connecting so closely with well-being. Hickey *et al.* (2005) indicate that the relationship is more complex, those in seemingly poor health, rating their quality of life highly. After extensive discussion of well-being and quality of life, it is easy to forget that health itself is a contested concept. The way in which someone understands their health will

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<sup>17</sup> See Griffin (1986: 67) for the full list and an extended discussion of its components.

<sup>18</sup> See Nussbaum (2006a) pp. 186-95.

have a bearing on how one understands such relationships. If one conceptualises health in purely biological terms, quality of life can be seen as operating more independently from health. Certain diseases or conditions may exist without really impacting upon the individual's quality of life. The following chapter considers different theories of health, arguing against the biomedical model in which health, disease and illness are conceptualised in an apparently scientific value-free fashion. These concepts, I argue, entangle fact and value. Health, I contend, cannot be isolated from considerations of those aspects central to our well-being.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

The basis of subjective well-being, that the individual should retain 'agent sovereignty', being the sole judge of his/her well-being has been questioned. We do not always know what is best for us. We may continue with a particular route, as in the examples of over training and exercise addiction, convinced it is of benefit when in fact it is doing us harm. The subjective theories of both well-being and quality of life examined here have no way of questioning such behaviour, having handed over epistemic authority solely to the individual.

The majority of the argument has been in negative terms, setting out the disadvantages of adopting a subjective conception of well-being. A positive argument, for an objective conception, has been implied at best. Support of such a conception while muted, is nevertheless evident throughout the chapter. Reference has been made to the value of sport or exercise in the absence of subjective endorsement, to the importance of expanding opportunities, meeting new people, conducting daily tasks with greater ease, and the claim that these benefits of physical activity cannot be meaningfully reduced to increased levels in satisfaction or positive affect. In addressing the trend toward disease and population specific measures of quality of life, I have also suggested how objective values may retain the ability to account for individual and cultural differences. Any objectivist must develop a theory sensitive to such differences. This chapter has not sought to dismiss the value of pleasure derived from or found in sport or exercise, but to recognise *why* we enjoy

it. I argue that a proper recognition of the values we hold central to our lives may help us to understand and construct physical activity in a way that reflects these values, thus maximising the benefits to our well-being.

## Chapter Three

### HEALTH, WELL-BEING AND THE FACT/VALUE DICHOTOMY

#### 3.1 Introduction

The subjective theories of well-being and quality of life prominent within the psychology and exercise psychology literatures have been examined and criticised. These criticisms have been based upon the subjectivity that these theories presuppose and their inability to accommodate our being mistaken as to what is in our best interests. With this inadequacy of the subjective theories exposed, I turn to a rationale for physical activity, emphasising its health benefits, based on biomedical ‘facts.’ The objectivity that this research claims may overcome certain of the limitations inherent in the subjective theories.

It is argued, however, that *both* the subjective psychological theories of well-being, and the objective biomedical theories of health are hostage to a metaphysical doctrine (Putnam, 2002) affirming a dichotomy between fact and value. The subjective theories assert that any matters of value are entirely down to the individual’s judgment; the agent determines her own well-being and such conclusions are beyond criticism. The biomedical case examined within the third and final section of this chapter understands concepts such as health, illness and disease in value-free terms. The case for the health benefits of exercise appears to be afforded primacy because of its apparent distance from matters of value. This dichotomy between fact and value is untenable. I argue that concepts such as health disease and illness, central to the World Health Organisation’s rationale for physical activity, rely upon ideas of how we as humans need to function in order to live good lives. The entanglement of fact and value within concepts such as health, disease and illness urges us not to dismiss these critical concepts as subjective, but rather to place their scientific, value-free form of objectivity under scrutiny. This paves the way for objectivity within the realm of value, applicable not only to concepts such as health, disease and illness, but also to well-being.

Prior to the critique of the World Health Organisation's rationale, however, it is important to properly frame this debate. The structure of the chapter will therefore be as follows. First (section 3.2) I will provide a brief description of how philosophical theories of health have been classified. The following section concerns the entanglement of fact and value. Putnam's (2002) work helps us understand not only how scientific facts are laden with value, but also how concepts that entangle fact and value can retain objective status. This provides a foundation for the consideration of objective conceptions of well-being in later chapters. In light of the above, I will examine a mainly biomedical case for physical activity provided by the World Health Organisation (section 3.4). The rationale, in its implicit support of the dichotomy between fact and value, affords primacy to the biomedical research associating physical activity with disease prevention. The rationale is unable to afford a proper place to those values entangled with concepts such as health, disease and illness and thus fails to recognise how such values offer alternative ways in which to understand the contribution of physical activity to health and well-being.

### **3.2 Theories of health**

Approaches to conceptualising health have often been distinguished in relation to whether they consider its most basic aspects value-free or not. Theories that consider health at root to be a value-laden concept can be termed normative. Richman (2004) provides a useful explanation of the distinction.

Some theories tell us how things are and imply nothing about whether it is desirable that things be that way. Others tell us how things should be, are supposed to be, or ought to be, how it is best for things to be. They identify certain states of affairs as having positive value, as being better than (at least some) of the alternatives. They are evaluative or, as I say, normative.

(Richman, 2004: 5-6).

Richman goes on to describe the reluctance to accept normative theories of health on the basis that they cannot be scientific and lack objective basis. This stance presupposes an acceptance of a fact/value dichotomy. Decisions concerning values



are deemed to be matters of personal taste, with no objective basis. Conversely the scientific realm of value-free facts offers firm ground for rational decisions.

Nordenfelt (1987) makes a further distinction that is both related to and expands upon that made between normative and non-normative theories of health. This is the distinction between holistic and analytic theories of health. The holistic perspective ‘focuses on the general state of a human being and considers whether or not the person is healthy. This means asking questions such as the following: How does this person feel? What is he able to do? Can he function in a social context?’ (Nordenfelt, 1987: 11-12). The second perspective concerns the structure and function of the body. ‘One asks questions such as: Is this organ normal? What is the pulse rate of this man? What does the tissue of a liver look like? What capacity do the lungs have?’ (Nordenfelt, 1987: 12). The analytic theory seems closer to non-normative, or naturalistic theories, focusing upon the biology of organs, and defining health in this apparently-value free sense. The holistic perspective appears to start from evaluations (and is thus normative) about what a person can do. Nordenfelt refers to the conceptual relatedness of health and disease (Nordenfelt, 1987: 13), and how the choice as to which concept is basic is likely to correspond to the perspective on health that one holds. Defining health in terms of disease fits with the analytic perspective and its emphasis on the organs of the body and whether they are functioning normally. Starting with health fits with the holistic perspective and its emphasis on the more normative factors concerning what one is able to do.

This brief summary offers some insight into how theories of health have been classified. This will be of particular use for the final section of the chapter, an examination of the World Health Organisation’s rationale for physical activity. Here I argue that the concept of health central to the rationale cannot be understood in value-free terms. Nordenfelt’s *‘Holistic Theory of Health’* (Nordenfelt, 2007a: 7) it is contended, starting from evaluations of what we are able to do, offers a more

suitable perspective within which to contemplate health and indeed the health benefits of physical activity.<sup>19</sup>

### 3.3 The fact/value dichotomy

It is the contention of this chapter that health is a value-laden concept. This, however, need not mean that the concept has no objective description, or that it does not connect with fact. On the contrary I argue for an objective conception of health (and indeed well-being) within this thesis as a whole. This objectivity clearly differs to the scientific, value-free form. Health, disease and illness, I contend in the final section of this chapter, are concepts that entangle fact and value. This section focuses upon entanglement itself, understanding its implications, not just for health related matters but also for ethics as a whole.

The significance of Putnam's contention that certain concepts entangle fact and value is best observed having considered the fact/value dichotomy, and its continued support:

The idea that "value judgements are subjective" is a piece of philosophy that has gradually come to be accepted by many people as if it were common sense. In the hands of sophisticated thinkers this idea can be and has been developed in different ways. The ones I shall be concerned with hold that "statements of fact" are capable of being "objectively true" and capable, as well, of being "objectively warranted," while value judgements, according to these thinkers, are incapable of object truth and objective warrant. Value judgements, according to the most extreme proponents of a sharp "fact/value" dichotomy, are completely outside the sphere of reason.

(Putnam, 2002: 1).

Putnam (2002)<sup>20</sup> points out that making a *distinction* between facts and values in certain situations need not have any harmful repercussions.<sup>21</sup> The dichotomy described above, however, accompanies a distinction with 'a highly contentious set

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<sup>19</sup> This perspective is not accepted uncritically, however. The subjectivity inherent in Nordenfelt's approach is criticised later in this chapter.

<sup>20</sup> Following John Dewey to whom he makes extensive reference.

<sup>21</sup> These distinctions may not have 'any implications at all as to whether value judgements can or can not be *true or false, justified or unjustified*' (Putnam, 2002: 61)

of metaphysical claims' (Putnam, 2002: 61) regarding the objectivity of facts and subjectivity of values, banishing a substantial proportion of our language to a sphere beyond reason. An acceptance of the dichotomy 'functions as a discussion stopper, and not just a discussion stopper, but a thought stopper' (Putnam, 2002: 44). This, of course, would prevent any real discussion as to what constitutes our well-being. Our only option would be to conclude that such judgements are purely a matter of subjective preference. The first chapter marked the initial stages in the debate as to how best to understand well-being, rejecting the exclusively subjective psychological approaches. This chapter, and succeeding chapters, rely upon Putnam's criticisms of the dichotomy to justify objective judgements concerning our well-being, as well as to justify more general conclusions on physical activity's contribution to well-being.

Recognising the entanglement of fact and value paves the way for a proper consideration of objectivity in the realm of value judgements. This objectivity has not been contemplated by the psychologists whose assumptions were subject to criticism in the previous chapter; or the physiologists and epidemiologists whose research underpins the scientific rationale criticised in this chapter. That value judgments can achieve this objectivity is of course, good news for anyone hoping to debate the value of exercise to well-being. Entanglement itself encourages thorough reflection upon well-being and other related concepts, with the hope of real progress.

### **3.3.1 *The entanglement of fact and value***

The suggestion that science offers a value-neutral route to objectivity is extensively criticised by Putnam, who argues that epistemic values such as coherence and simplicity are 'presupposed by physical science' (Putnam, 2002: 142).<sup>22</sup>

When a theory conflicts with what has previously been supposed to be a fact, we sometimes give up the theory and we sometimes give up the supposed fact (Putnam, 2002: 141).

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<sup>22</sup> See Putnam (2002) pp 30-3 for a discussion of epistemic values.

These epistemic values are central to making a decision in such a conflict. That science is founded upon these normative judgements must remain at the forefront of our minds as we examine the rationale for physical activity. But perhaps more important for our purposes is Putnam's description of the 'entanglement' of fact and value within 'thick' ethical concepts.<sup>23</sup>

Putnam, (2002) having conducted a rigorous critique of the positivist conception of fact, turns to what have been described (by Bernard Williams (1985)) as 'thick ethical concepts,' in his critique of the fact/value dichotomy. The very narrow realm of scientific fact fails to encompass a great deal of the vocabulary we use in our every day life. Logical positivists had concluded that 'the language of science was the *whole* of "cognitively meaningful" language' (Putnam, 2002: 34), and this lead to some uncomfortable conclusions. Putnam refers to 'cruel', and its normative use, describing someone as cruel for example constitutes a negative evaluation. The word, however, can also be used in a descriptive manner:

as when a historian writes that a certain monarch was exceptionally cruel, or that the cruelties of the regime provoked a number of rebellions. "Cruel" simply ignores the supposed fact/value dichotomy and cheerfully allows itself to be used sometimes for normative purposes and sometimes as a descriptive term. (Indeed the same is true of the term "crime"). In the literature, such concepts are often referred to as "thick ethical concepts."

(Putnam, 2002: 34-5).

Putnam refers to the plethora of terms that would come under this umbrella, and notes a widespread reluctance to deem this important and extensive aspect of our vocabulary as 'cognitively meaningless'. Putnam argues that such concepts entangle fact and value, and in supporting this contention describes and criticises two alternatives; the first that these thick ethical concepts are factual and therefore value-free and second, that these concepts can be understood as separable into a descriptive and attitudinal component.

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<sup>23</sup> See Putnam (2002) pp. 34-45.

### 3.3.2 *Thick ethical terms as factual and non-normative: Putnam's rejection*

First I will trace Putnam's critique of the contention that thick ethical terms are non-normative. Putnam criticises Hare's (1981) contention that 'rude' is descriptive because in certain instances the term may be used without a corresponding negative evaluation.<sup>24</sup> Hare refers to a child (an example from Lawrence Kohlberg (1970)) who accepts that an act is rude, spitting at another class mate, without evaluating it negatively. Hare's argument however rests upon the foundation that a value-laden term requires 'anyone who uses such an adjective without hypocrisy or insincerity must be *motivated* to approve (or disapprove) of it.' (Putnam, 2002: 36).

The criticism of this stance, however, brings us back to our analysis of psychological theories and their assertion that value must correspond with our actual desires. Putnam refers to the response of Elizabeth Anderson to this point. 'One of the functions of value judgements is to note when one's motivational states are deficient because they fail to track what one judges to be good.' (Anderson, 1993: 102). Thick ethical concepts help us integrate our motivations with our value judgements (Anderson, 1993).<sup>25</sup> I have contended that well-being should not be aligned merely with actual desires, but rather should help us to understand when certain actual desires, more exercise for the over-trainer for example, are flawed. I argue the behaviour (over-training) is contrary to well-being, not that the person's well-being is best represented by the subjective satisfaction with (over) training.

That 'rude' is not always evaluated negatively does not imply that it is a purely descriptive term.

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<sup>24</sup> Hare's argument (1981, pp. 74-5) is in response to Philippa Foot's (1958) 'Moral Arguments.' Hare concludes 'I hope this case will convince Mrs. Foot that it is possible to accept that an act satisfied the descriptive conditions for being called "rude" without being committed to evaluating it adversely, even though "rude" is normally an adjective of adverse evaluation.' (Hare, 1981: 74-5).

<sup>25</sup> 'Thus, no evaluative considerations *necessarily* motivate choice, for there can always be a gap between what one judges to be valuable and what one finds oneself actually caring about at a given time. Engaging in objective discussion with others is one of the ways we try to get our attitudes in line with what makes sense.' (Anderson, 1993: 103).

It is because “rude” has evaluative force that the remark that it is sometimes right to be rude is worth making, while the remark that, “It is sometimes right to go to a restaurant” is not.

(Putnam, 2002: 37).

The thick ethical term ‘rude’ entangles fact and value. It is not purely descriptive; that it does not always correspond with disapproval tells us nothing as to its content. There are many instances in which value judgements do not correspond with the anticipated motivation. It is used in a descriptive manner, but this description also entails a certain evaluation.

### ***3.3.3 Thick ethical terms as having two components: descriptive and attitudinal: Putnam’s rejection***

A further response of those unwilling to recognise the possibility of concepts that entangle fact and value is to suggest that certain thick ethical concepts can be split into two separate components. Hare (1981) seems to suggest this in the case of ‘cruel’, but, suggests Putnam, Hare’s understanding of entanglement itself is flawed. Putnam refers to the below as Hare’s ‘motivational requirement’ (Putnam, 2002: 37).

It is being suggested that this kind of action is somehow *inherently* motivative; if it did not motivate us in this way, or otherwise touch our feelings, it would not be *that* kind of action (not, for example, cruel). So there are properties which are in themselves evil, and moral words which are inseparably both descriptive and prescriptive.

(Hare, 1981: 72-3).

First, Anderson’s point that thick ethical concepts are not necessarily motivative in this way applies here. There may be some distance between the thick ethical concept and actual motivation or desires. (Anderson 1993). Hare’s apparent<sup>26</sup> argument for two components is founded upon the rejection of the motivational requirement he himself inserts. Someone can, suggests Hare, accept that someone ‘was caused to suffer deeply’ (Hare, 1981: 74), but not consider it wrong, or undesirable. If an act

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<sup>26</sup> Putnam (2002) is not convinced that Hare intentionally endorses a two component argument.

was really cruel, however, its failure to initiate a negative response in onlookers, or indeed the perpetrator, might say more about them than the concept itself.

Hare is taken to suggest that the descriptive component of cruel is the deep suffering and its evaluative component (that does not necessarily follow) that it is wrong (Putnam, 2002). Putnam refers to his own work, as well as that of McDowell and Murdoch,<sup>27</sup> as effectively criticising this suggestion. This whole idea, he states:

founders on the impossibility of saying what the “descriptive meaning” of say, “cruel” is without using the word cruel or a synonym.

(Putnam, 2002: 38).

Entangled terms, even used in a descriptive sense, require one to ‘identify imaginatively with an *evaluative point of view*.’ (Putnam, 2002: 39) Understanding and using them appropriately requires one to connect with the term in a manner that necessitates evaluation:

That is why someone who thought that “brave” simply meant “not afraid to risk life and limb” would not be able to understand the all-important distinction that Socrates keeps drawing between mere *rashness* or *foolhardiness* and genuine *bravery*. It is also the reason that (as Iris Murdoch stressed in a wonderful book, *The Sovereignty of Good*) it is always possible to *improve one’s understanding* of a concept like “impertinence” or “cruelty.”

(Putnam, 2002: 40)

Attempts to split concepts such as cruel into two parts are likely to lead to a similarly value-laden term, or one without the same meaning. Putnam illustrates how causing great pain does not necessarily mean that an act is cruel, referring to operations prior to the introduction of anaesthesia.

The rejection of these two ways of upholding the fact/value dichotomy ultimately supports the notion of entanglement. Certain concepts, such as cruel, can be clearly normative, but must still connect with facts. This paves the way for the suggestion that well-being might be considered an entangled term; it is not purely nor merely an

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<sup>27</sup> McDowell’s (1998) *Mind, Value and Reality* and Murdoch’s (1970) *The Sovereignty of Good*.

expression of actual desire or preference. It is the contention here that health, illness and disease are also entangled terms. They are, it is argued, concepts bound up with ideas about what we need in order to live good lives.

Indeed, common understandings of well-being seem to indicate its entanglement of fact and value. Griffin (1986; 1996) describes how an individual may criticise their own desires. They may question, having observed someone else's genuine *accomplishment*, whether their own more happy-go-lucky existence is lacking something because of the absence of this value. This reflection over what is good for ourselves and others suggests that reasoning is not restricted to the scientific domain but that the way we think about our well-being reflects our search for some degree of objectivity in the ethical domain as well. This manner in which we speak of our well-being, or indeed our health, begs the question, 'what status does our conclusions regarding these concepts command?' And from this we may more generally ask: 'Do entangled concepts have objectivity?'

### **3.3.4 *Values and Objectivity***

The recognition of entanglement has not prevented other forms of defence of the fact/value dichotomy. Williams (1985), for example accepts the possibility of entanglement, but differentiates between truth and absoluteness. The former being applicable to thick ethical concepts, the latter reserved for scientific knowledge. Thick ethical concepts, Williams indicates, may be truthful from a particular perspective. There may be cultural agreement on the use of ethical terms such as cruel. Absolute knowledge, however, extends beyond this local agreement. For knowledge to be deemed absolute it must correspond to a world independent of our beliefs, indeed independent of the human perspective altogether.



We can select among our beliefs and features of our world picture some that we can reasonably claim to represent the world in a way to the maximum degree independent of our perspective and its peculiarities. The resultant picture of things, if we can carry through this task, can be called the “absolute conception” of the world.

(Williams, 1985: 138-9).

Williams elaborates, clarifying the distinction further.

This notion of an absolute conception can serve to make effective a distinction between “the world as it is independent of our experience” and “the world as it seems to us.” It does this by understanding “the world as it seems to us” as “the world as it seems peculiarly to us”; the absolute conception will, correspondingly, be a conception of the world that might be arrived at by any investigators, even if they were different from us.

(Williams, 1985: 139).

Well-being and health are not independent of the human perspective in the manner Williams requires for absolute knowledge. Putnam doubts that this concept of absoluteness is intelligible at all. He is adamant that the idea of non-perspectival objectivity is a non-starter. The idea that science is independent of perspective is, suggests Putnam ‘just a new version of the old ‘correspondence theory of truth’ (Putnam, 1993: 150), a theory Putnam has argued persuasively against. I will not repeat Putnam’s arguments here,<sup>28</sup> nor attempt to do justice to this vast and complex terrain within the confines of this short section. The idea that scientific statements correspond with mind-independent objects,<sup>29</sup> explaining science’s convergence to a single theory, seems unintelligible in itself, before we even consider Putnam’s more detailed objections. Instead I will end with Putnam’s observation that science is unlikely to converge on one theory:

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<sup>28</sup> see Putnam (1993, 2002) for a full discussion of these matters.

<sup>29</sup> see Putnam’s (1993) pp. 151 explanation of the correspondence theory of truth

It is, indeed, the case that ethical knowledge cannot claim ‘absoluteness’; but that is because the notion of ‘absoluteness’ is incoherent. Mathematics and physics, as well as ethics and history and politics, show our conceptual choices; the world is not going to impose a single language upon us, no matter what we choose to talk about.

(Putnam, 1993: 150).

Putnam carries this dismissal of the absolutist view of the world into his own thoughts on truth:

we need no better ground for treating “value judgements” as capable of truth and falsity than the fact that we can and do treat them as capable of warranted assertibility and warranted deniability.

(Putnam, 2002: 110).

Dewey<sup>30</sup> concludes that for something to have objective value it must have undergone criticism: ‘it is by intelligent reflection on our valuations, intelligent reflection of the kind that Dewey calls “criticism,” that we conclude that some of them are warranted while others are unwarranted.’ (Putnam, 2002: 103). Putnam describes the process by which we can decide on the warranted and unwarranted further:

We do know something about how inquiry should be conducted, and the principle that what is valid for inquiry in general is valid for value inquiry in particular is a powerful one. In this connection, I mentioned the principle of *fallibilism* (do not regard the product of any inquiry as immune from criticism), the principle of *experimentalism* (try out different ways of resolving problematical situations, or if that is not feasible, observe those who have tried other ways and reflect carefully on the consequences)

(Putnam, 2002: 110)

Again, a proper analysis of how value inquiry might result in conclusions of warranted assertibility is beyond the bounds of this thesis. Nevertheless, it has been worth reviewing briefly how entangled concepts such as ‘cruel,’ or indeed well-being and health, for our purposes, might command an objectivity in the absence of an absolutist view of knowledge. My conclusions in this thesis, concerning well-being and health, are best understood as working towards this warranted assertibility.

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<sup>30</sup>Dewey (1939) provides a short statement of his position.

The thesis itself can be understood as engaging in the sort of criticism that Dewey speaks of. There will be no final answers here, indeed both Nussbaum and Griffin, despite adapting quite different views of how their theories might claim objective status, also recognise that their conceptions are initial stages in a long process of reflection.

It would seem wise to maintain this stance on concepts such as health, well-being and the quality of life. The observation that reflection upon such concepts should be infinite seems a wise and humble way in which to understand the conclusions reached within both this thesis and indeed philosophical reflections upon well-being in general. This need not prevent conclusions being deemed objective, but does necessitate a rejection of the absolute knowledge, independent of perspective Williams (1985) attributes to science. Putnam describes how objective conclusions are founded upon discussion and criticism.

But recognizing that our judgements claim objective validity and recognizing that they are shaped by a particular culture and by a particular problematic situation are not incompatible. And this is true of scientific questions as well as ethical ones. The solution is neither to give up on the very possibility of rational discussion nor to seek an Archimedian point, an “absolute conception” outside of all contexts and problematic solutions, but – as Dewey taught his whole life long – to investigate and discuss and try things out cooperatively, democratically, and above all *fallibilistically*.

(Putnam, 2002: 45)

This approach to objectivity contextualises the following discussion of health, illness and disease, as well as subsequent discussion and critique of the philosophical approaches to well-being and quality of life presented by both James Griffin and Martha Nussbaum.

### **3.4 Physical activity and health: naturalistic arguments**

I now move on to the final and more applied section of this chapter. This will entail a critique of the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) rationale for physical activity,

arguing that the concepts of disease, illness and health upon which it is built are entangled concepts.

The leading international agency for health, the World Health Organisation, considers physical activity largely as a means to the ‘prevention of chronic noncommunicable diseases and Health Promotion’ (Puska, 2004: 17). It is contended here that concepts such as disease and illness are only intelligible when considered in association with ideas of human need, what we need to do, how we need to function in order to live a good life. They are not purely natural or physical concepts, but indicate how we want to live our lives and what we require to do this. The analysis of these concepts encourages us to consider further ways in which physical activity might contribute to our lives.

Critical consideration of the concepts of ‘disease’ and ‘illness’ may encourage us to reflect upon the necessary requirements of good living, but we should not be seduced into thinking that an absence of disease or illness, or even being in good health amounts to well-being or a good life. A focus upon disease and illness fails to recognise or appreciate the further ways in which exercise may impact upon our well-being.

### **3.4.1 *What counts as ‘physical activity’ and ‘health’? The WHO position***

The concept of physical activity is interpreted very widely within the WHO’s rationale. When referring to the recommended amount of physical activity per day it is stated:

This level of activity can be reached through a broad range of appropriate and enjoyable physical activities and body movements in people’s daily lives, such as walking to work, climbing stairs, gardening, dancing, as well as a variety of leisure and recreational sports.

(WHO, 2003: 3).

This broad definition of physical activity has its advantages. Those who are less ‘sporty’ have an ample range of alternative activities with which to make up the recommended thirty minutes of moderate physical activity per day. There are however, difficulties with a definition of such breadth. The WHO’s rationale for physical activity makes extensive reference to its physical benefits. It fails to differentiate between activities such as cleaning or walking to work and sport or exercise. Failing to distinguish between these activities leaves it easy to under emphasise the benefits the latter activities offer, extending beyond the physical domain. Recreational sport or exercise may offer social opportunities, challenge, or enhance perceptions of control, benefits less evident in the more basic forms of physical activity, despite the similar energy expenditure.

The WHO defines health as ‘a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not simply the absence of disease or infirmity.’ (WHO, 1948). It is somewhat paradoxical that this definition insists upon the positive aspects of health when the rationale for physical activity is in mainly negative terms. This extremely broad definition of health, also suffers from a reluctance of the WHO to properly conceptualise well-being. The WHO often emphasise the mood enhancing effects of physical activity, in providing evidence for increased well-being, indicating that the concept is interpreted in subjective terms.

### ***3.4.2 The World Health Organisation’s rationale for physical activity***

#### ***Death, disease and physical ailments***

In advocating a ‘Move for Health’ day, The World Health Organisation summarise the benefits of physical activity, of which a large percentage of the bullet points concern the prevention of disease.

Benefits of physical activity (taken from online advocacy material; WHO, 2007a).

- reduces the risk of dying prematurely reduces the risk of dying from heart disease or stroke, which are responsible for one-third of all deaths
- reduces the risk of developing heart disease or colon cancer by up to 50%

- reduces the risk of developing type II diabetes 50%
- helps to prevent/reduce hypertension, which affects one fifth of the world's adult population
- helps to prevent/reduce osteoporosis, reducing the risk of hip fracture by up to 50% in women
- reduces the risk of developing lower back pain
- promotes psychological well-being, reduces stress, anxiety and feelings of depression and loneliness
- helps prevent or control risky behaviours, especially among children and young people, like tobacco, alcohol, or other substance use, unhealthy diet or violence
- helps control weight and lower the risk of becoming obese by 50% compared to people with sedentary lifestyles
- helps build and maintain healthy bones, muscles, and joints and makes people with chronic, disabling conditions improve their stamina
- can help in the management of painful conditions, like back or knee pain.

The potential of physical activity to reduce disease and illness, and control pain, forms the central part of this rationale. The primacy afforded to research identifying the health benefits of physical activity, in both developed and developing countries, is evident in the joint collaboration between the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the World Health Organisation concerning 'Global Advocacy for National Physical Activity Plans.' (CDC/WHO, 2006). The table on page fourteen of the 'Preliminary Workshop Report' provides a summary of benefits of physical activity:

Figure 1. Summary of evidence of the benefits of physical activity – developing and developed countries compared. (CDC/WHO, 2006: 14).

Chronic Disease Prevention	Primary Prevention (Developing nations)	Primary Prevention (Developed nations)
CHD, AMI	+	+++
Other CVD / stroke	0	+++
Colon Cancer	+++	+++
Breast Cancer	++	++
Diabetes	++	+++
Hip Fracture / Falls	+	0/+
Other Cancers	0/+	0/+
Osteoporosis	0/+	0/+
Depression	0	0/+
Anxiety	0	0/+
Well being	0	0/+

Key: 0 no evidence, + some evidence, ++ consistent evidence, +++ repeated strong evidence, ++++ RCT evidence

The report suggests that evidence for the health benefits of physical activity in both developing and developed countries is substantial. It could be suggested, however, that the standard for assessing the strength of research appears to favour a scientific approach to assessing the benefits of physical activity. The sort of values discussed in the previous chapter as possibly constitutive of well-being may not lend themselves to the sort of quantification and replication required for the ‘strong’ or ‘repeated strong evidence’ categories.

The rationale for physical activity provided by the World Health Organisation prioritises scientific research that has focused upon the role of exercise in preventing disease and illness. This scientific research stands apart from other benefits of

physical activity; addressed but less prominent within the rationale. This prominence, however, cannot be justified on the grounds that the scientific research offers a value-free objectivity, and thus a stronger rationale. Indeed this is one way on which the fact/value dichotomy is upheld, conceiving of concepts such as disease or illness in scientific, naturalistic terms.<sup>31</sup> Disease and illness are not, however, natural categories, but value-laden:

What, they will protest, are there no diseases in nature? Are there not infectious and contagious bacilli? Are there not definite and objective lesions in the cellular structures of the human body? Are there not fractures of bones, the fatal ruptures of tissues, the malignant multiplications of tumorous growths? Are not these, surely, events of nature? Yet these, as natural events do not constitute illnesses, sicknesses, or diseases prior to the human social meanings we attach to them. The fracture of a septuagenarian's femur has, within the world of nature, no more significance than the snapping of an autumn leaf from its twig

(Sedgwick, 1982: 30).

If these natural events Sedgwick speaks of, are insignificant in themselves, why do we attribute such significance to them? Sedgwick suggests that we 'consider as "illnesses" or "diseases" those natural circumstances which precipitate death (or the failure to function according to certain values)' (Sedgwick, 1982: 30-1). So we categorise something as a disease or illness, this line of argument suggests, if we associate it with death or the prevention of functions, central functions we could hypothesise bearing in mind the almost universality of certain disease classifications, and the importance that we attribute to them. Disease and illness are understood in relation to certain central ends, they are not simply natural facts.

In summary, the WHO has provided a rationale for physical activity focusing upon its potential to prevent disease. It refers to heart disease, hypertension, osteoporosis and back pain amongst other conditions. These conditions, it is argued, cannot be understood independently of certain central functions, central to our leading good lives or achieving well-being. The WHO rationale for physical activity does not explicitly recognise this entanglement, seeming to presume the apparent obvious

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<sup>31</sup> The World Health Organisation is, of course, not explicit in its affirmation of fact/value dichotomy. I contend that the primacy the rationale affords to scientific research indicating the health benefits of physical activity marks an implicit acceptance of the dichotomy.



nature of the ‘badness’ of the diseases and illnesses discussed. Some may concur with this, perhaps suggesting that these illnesses are so entangled or intertwined with the negative social meaning to which we ascribe them that there is no room for argument. This seems a defensible retort. But recognising this entanglement allows an analysis of the benefits of physical activity in broader terms. It shows how physical activity impacts upon central human needs. Illness and disease certainly reflect the most serious need frustration (von Wright 1996), but an argument for physical activity couched in terms of the needs that it satisfies could investigate a greater range of its benefits, not just in preventing disease and illness but in positively effecting the satisfaction of needs above the illness threshold.

This would expand upon the WHO’s penultimate statement in the bullet points above, referring to healthy bones and stamina. Schramme (2002) speaks of ‘basic abilities’ ‘the very abilities we need to find and realize our own well-being’ (Schramme, 2002: 65) and suggests locomotion as one of these basic abilities.<sup>32</sup> Instead of understanding the benefits of physical activity only in terms of the diseases that frustrate this ability, we could seek to understand how physical activity can promote it. Exercise improves our strength and flexibility, and therefore our ability to conduct daily tasks such as playing with the children, gardening, and having the necessary strength to get out of a chair with ease. This would surely be a worthwhile step, one that would take us from a rationale for how physical activity can stop us becoming ill or diseased, to how it can contribute to the foundations for our living any sort of good life.

### **3.5 Nordenfelt’s theory of health**

Renowned philosopher of health Lennart Nordenfelt understands the concepts health, disease and illness in relation to certain central ends. In examining his theory of health in more depth I will begin with the ‘Reverse Theory of Disease and Illness’ (Nordenfelt, 2007a: 7). Nordenfelt tells a story in which the terms illness and then disease developed from a ‘perceived *problem*’ (ibid.).

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<sup>32</sup> Schramme is anxious that this basic ability includes those with disability ‘I think that it is surely wrong to generally deny a bodily disabled person the basic ability of locomotion’ (Schramme, 2002: 66)

In the beginning there were people who experienced problems in and with themselves. They felt pain and fatigue and they found themselves unable to do what they normally could do. They experienced what we now call illnesses, which they located somewhere in their bodies and minds. Many people came to experience similar illnesses. This led to the giving of names to the illnesses, and hereby the presence of the illnesses could be effectively communicated. This was the phase of *illness recognition* and *illness communication*.

(Nordenfelt, 2007a: 7).

Nordenfelt goes on to explain how ‘connections between certain bodily states and the symptoms of their patients’ (2007a: 7) lead to disease classification. Illness and disease, it bears repeating, arise out of a perceived problem. An illness and the internal state connected with it, the disease, are by definition some sort of problem that ‘quite often concerns pain, other kinds of suffering or disability’ (ibid.).

Nordenfelt, as is well known, also proposes a definition of health. It is worth bearing in mind that within this approach not all health problems would automatically be deemed illnesses. Nordenfelt refers to health as a ‘dimension ranging from a state of complete health to a state of maximal illness’ (Nordenfelt, 2007b: 30). Nevertheless, Nordenfelt’s theory of health helps us understand just what a ‘problem’ or suffering might mean. Nordenfelt understands health thus:

*A is completely healthy if, and only if, A is in a bodily and mental state which is such that A has the second-order ability to realize all his or her vital goals given a set of standard or otherwise reasonable circumstances.*

(Nordenfelt, 2007c: 54).

There are of course a number of pivotal concepts within this definition,<sup>33</sup> but for our purposes I will focus upon ‘vital goals.’ A Vital goal is ‘a state of affairs that is necessary for this person’s long term-happiness’ (Nordenfelt, 2007c: 54). Health is understood with reference to a concept of happiness, or ideas of valuable ends. This would not only enable us to understand disease and illness as a severe frustration of

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<sup>33</sup> I refer the reader to Nordenfelt (2007c) for further explanation of the concepts ‘second order ability’ (pp. 55-6) and ‘standard or otherwise reasonable circumstances’. (pp. 36-7). The latter, as well as Nordenfelt’s reference to bodily and mental state are briefly examined within the final chapter of this thesis.

these ends, but to consider the value of sport and exercise in terms of vital goals, expanding the framework within which the value of physical activity can be contemplated.

This picture of disease, illness and health is persuasive. It provides a more positive conception of health, not limiting it to just the absence of disease or illness. This seems to fit with how we talk about health on a day-to-day basis; we would not conclude that someone is in great health just because they are not ill. Nordenfelt's theory resonates with Sedgwick's observation that diseases, even broken bones are not of natural significance. Putnam's observation that a non-perspectival objectivity is impossible is salient here. Medicine is at core concerned with human interests, those illnesses and diseases that it addresses have been borne out of our notions of human interest. It is surely a misperception to suggest that we can understand these categories independently of any evaluative perspective.

It is central to Nordenfelt's concepts of health, disease and illness, to examine the concept of happiness he proposes. The definition of minimal happiness is, after all, the primary concept, through which we understand the vital goals, and of course the dimension of health. Nordenfelt's concept is at root subjective, although it does overcome certain of the problems inherent in the psychological concept addressed in the previous chapter.<sup>34</sup> Here I turn to Nordenfelt's (2000) explanation of vital goals and happiness, as they are understood within the theory.

For Nordenfelt (2000) happiness is an emotion. This conclusion is justified by Nordenfelt because emotions have objects, and happiness, of course, within this theory is understood in terms of the realisation of certain goals or wants. This, however, appears to take us back toward the mental state account, subjected to heavy criticism in the previous chapter. Not quite, because Nordenfelt does not insist that

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<sup>34</sup> Interestingly Nordenfelt (2000) states that his work in this area has been inspired by, amongst others, James Griffin and his book *Well-Being*, the subject of the following chapter. Griffin's theory of well-being is also criticised for, in certain instances, sliding towards subjectivity. The account, however, clearly recognises the flaws of classical utilitarian stances, and like Nordenfelt, offers a stance that overcomes a number of the problems inherent in the psychological concept of subjective well-being.

emotions such as happiness will be continually experienced, indeed at times happiness may not be associated with any feeling at all (Nordenfelt, 2000). Nevertheless, Nordenfelt accepts that happiness is connected to feeling happy.

Nordenfelt's happiness is ultimately an internal state, an emotion. The theory is, however, sensitive to the potential for certain desires and wants to be flawed, failing to make us happy. Not all wants are associated with happiness, just those vital goals. These vital goals are said to be related to long term happiness. This prevents the identification of destructive wants with happiness, the alcoholic's desire for a drink, for example. Nordenfelt's theory therefore does not offer an unqualified subjectivity. It is not, for example, an actual desire theory of well-being. Instead it focuses upon those goals considered vital; these are in part determined by their association with our long term happiness.

Nordenfelt's theory of health ultimately relies upon his conception of happiness. His definition, however, does allow for the two (health and happiness) to 'come apart', i.e. one can be healthy but not happy. First, someone might have the ability to realise these vital goals but choose not to (Nordenfelt, 2000). Also Nordenfelt acknowledges that someone may be considered healthy, but their external circumstances might prevent happiness, i.e. living through war for example.<sup>35</sup>

After this brief summary of Nordenfelt's position on happiness, I will now turn to Nordenfelt's comparison of his stance with that of Amartya Sen. This is particularly pertinent as Sen is a capability theorist, an approach that will be addressed, and ultimately supported, within this thesis.<sup>36</sup> Nordenfelt defends his theory against a common accusation that subjective theories of this kind cannot account for adaptive preferences, as Nussbaum (2000a) calls them. Someone in extremely deprived circumstances might adjust their expectations and report high subjective levels of

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<sup>35</sup> It is unlikely that war would be deemed a standard or reasonable circumstance, neither it seems does it concern the bodily or mental state that facilitates pursuit of the vital goals.

<sup>36</sup> I however, advocate the capabilities approach as proposed by Martha Nussbaum, which differs significantly from Sen, not least in that Nussbaum proposes a list of those capabilities central to well-being. Sen decides against this move, proposing a conceptual space, what a person can be or do (Sen, 1993), where judgements of quality of life can be made.

well-being. Likewise, someone who enjoys a luxurious lifestyle may report mediocre levels of subjective well-being, an effect perhaps associated with the hedonic treadmill discussed earlier. Nordenfelt makes the valid point that in most instances one would not be satisfied in extreme deprivation, indeed it is more likely that one would be suffering and that these circumstances would be reflected within his theory as a frustration of certain central goals. This, however, is not always the case. Nussbaum (2000a) provides numerous examples of women in deprived circumstances who are not really aware of how things could get better. With the lack of options present they adjust their expectations, although this adjustment is not necessarily a conscious process. Nordenfelt summarises Sen's position and ultimately disagrees:

If I understand him correctly we must still consider this person as severely lacking in well-being. The functionings of nourishment, being sheltered, and having health are so important in themselves (having an absolute value?) that whatever the person's expressed wishes or lack of wishes, it would be absurd to attribute a high degree of well-being to this person. In judging this case, if I understand Sen correctly, he and I part company. I can imagine circumstances when this person has a high degree of well-being. And I would, accordingly, find a theory of well-being which cannot account for this possibility to be a defective theory.

(Nordenfelt, 2000: 102).

Nordenfelt goes on to consider some situations that appear to distort the original point. First, a situation in which the individual is undernourished but can compensate and flourish. Indeed Nordenfelt refers to being able to live the same kind of life of those with more varied nutrition, here the absolutist approach is deemed 'absurd' (Nordenfelt, 2000: 102). The second example refers to a despotic regime in which someone is able to concentrate on the development of certain talents, and maintain a level of happiness despite the harsh circumstances.

In referring to the absurdity of the absolutist approach in the first example, I assume that Nordenfelt would consider it absurd for nourishment to have absolute value. The example, however, seems to infer that the level of nourishment can be compensated by the subject's strength (Nordenfelt, 2000). First, I am not sure that this is the sort

of under nourishment that Sen is referring to. Neither am I sure that nourishment itself is of absolute value, but this does not dismiss out of hand the idea that there might be other values or capabilities deemed important to a life regardless of our attitude toward them. It is my contention that those capabilities of objective value to our lives are the best means by which to understand health, not goals subjectively conceived, as Nordenfelt argues. Under this objective framework nourishment might fit within a broader conception of health (roughly) understood as the extent to which we are capable to achieve those valuable functions stipulated on Nussbaum's list. I develop this argument in the final chapter of the thesis.

With regard to the second example, Nordenfelt refers to the possibility of growth in harsh circumstances. Nordenfelt ultimately argues that Sen cannot account for this growth being important to well-being because of his failure to provide some 'final-end theory of value' (Nordenfelt, 2000: 102). For Nordenfelt it seems that either a lack of shelter, or lack of nourishment be viewed as of absolute value (as he interprets Sen), or we revert to a theory of happiness, where growth in the sense above ultimately refers to being able to be happy (a mental state) within the harsh circumstances. I have some sympathy with Nordenfelt's discontent here. Nussbaum (2006b) argues that Sen's failure to produce a list of those capabilities central to quality of life is the downfall of his approach. In a way this echoes Nordenfelt's dissatisfaction, but the end point Nordenfelt speaks of, need not be a subjective conception of happiness. As we shall see Nussbaum fills the lacuna in Sen's approach through providing a list of those capabilities central to well-being, and it is through such an objective list, I suggest, we might be able to determine whether an individual has grown in a fashion that best supports their well-being or merely adjusted to circumstance. Such a judgement, however, can only be made with use of a substantive list of goods whose value is independent of any positive attitude of the subject.

This is ultimately where Nordenfelt's approach, and the objective theory of well-being supported in this thesis differ. Nordenfelt considers happiness from the perspective of the individual. A certain state of affairs is valuable in that it satisfies

certain goals, and ultimately promotes happiness conceived of as a mental state. Such an approach is of course attentive to the way in which health and social care can help people adjust psychologically, where a change in circumstances is less possible (Nordenfelt, 2000). It should be noted, however, that Nordenfelt does not recommend psychological adjustment as a political strategy. An objective conception of well-being differs at core in arguing that certain values, capabilities perhaps, contribute to a life independent of the individual's attitude toward them. A positive attitude is not necessary for such capabilities to be of value to our lives. Someone can be mistaken in rejecting the importance of those items on an objective list, and we can question the apparent happiness of someone whose life appears to lack certain central capabilities.

The only possible way in which Nordenfelt might be able to accommodate such a stance is through his recognition that our desire for certain vital goals may not always be conscious. 'It is possible that the bearer does not dare to *express* her wants, or that she does not dare to make them *conscious*. But it is hardly conceivable that she does not want any change at all.' (Nordenfelt, 2000: 103). Nussbaum herself acknowledges that our desire for certain capabilities on her list will be less susceptible to adaptation, and may not be completely eroded, even in the harshest of circumstances. Objective lists such as Nussbaum's are often founded in a conception of human nature. This would indicate that desires for central capabilities or goals would be stubborn. This would also suggest that our informed desires and those goods on an objective list ought to converge. Nussbaum certainly places primary emphasis on her list of capabilities, independent of our attitudes towards them. Yet if such capabilities were never desired, the content of the list would be rightly questioned. It would be dissatisfactory if we did not desire, at some level, that which is deemed essential to our humanity.

I remain firmly in the objective camp. There are examples of adaptation to even the most deprived of circumstances. There are also a range of faulty reasons for which we may fail to endorse a good. What appears favourable from the subject's perspective may not reflect well-being. It is of course, and this is a point Nordenfelt

makes, often the case that subjective desires and goals converge with the constituents of an objective list. This is indicative of both an informed set of desires, and of the importance of those goods on an objective list. There are many conditions, however, not conducive to the development of informed desires, deprivation providing an example. There are also further examples of faulty reasoning and ill informed desires, not attributable to poverty, but nevertheless damaging to well-being. In light of this I concur with Nussbaum in relying upon a list of capabilities considered central to well-being or quality of life, independent of our attitude toward them.

In short, I favour Nordenfelt's theory of health, but disagree with the understanding of happiness in terms of vital goals subjectively conceived. The normative approach provides an excellent framework within which to contemplate those values integral to concepts such as health, disease and illness, but the theory of happiness does not get to the core of what is valuable to our well-being. Such a conclusion, in favour of a more objective conception of well-being rejects the fact/value dichotomy; I consider these goals and capabilities in objective terms. What constitutes well-being, and therefore what constitutes being healthy, is not dependent on the goals an individual deems central to his or her life, that would be to slip back into subjectivity and all of its associated problems.<sup>37</sup> I argue that what best represents our well-being is a topic for the kind of rational debate conducted in the remainder of this thesis. After extensive debate and inquiry of the form both Putnam and Dewey recommend, conclusions are entitled to claim objectivity. In the final and penultimate chapters of the thesis I argue for an objective conception of well-being, founded in Nussbaum's central capabilities and functionings, that helps shape the normative concept of health.

Where have we arrived at as a result of the foregoing discussion? We may rely upon a conception of well-being through which to understand health, but must guard against the conceptual inflation of health to encompass the whole of the prudential domain. Rescher (1972) includes health as a central aspect of welfare but insists that welfare is a fairly minimal concept, not reaching the breadth of well-being. Von

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<sup>37</sup> Chapter seven argues for the use of capabilities as the basis for a theory of well-being and health.



Wright has stated that the ‘privative notion of health’ (von Wright, 1996: 62) ‘is conceptually allied to the needs and wants of beings and to the notions of the beneficial and the harmful’ (von Wright, 1996: 62). He goes on to associate pleasure with a more positive concept of health. With regard to our critique of the rationale for physical activity provided by the WHO, the perspectives of both von Wright and Rescher resonate to a degree. Although it seems likely that those factors necessary for a minimal level of well-being will also be important to a more ambitious level of flourishing, we should remain open to the possibility that other values, not implied in this analysis of disease and illness, are important to well-being. Griffin’s prudential value of accomplishment may provide such an example.

Our brief analysis of the concepts of disease and illness may promote a broader understanding of how physical activity contributes to our well-being, how it may help to satisfy certain central needs. These needs, however, may not prove sufficient for a good life, or a life of well-being. Although the question of the adequacy of needs accounts as theories of well-being requires further debate,<sup>38</sup> this need not be resolved here. The WHO have not proposed a theory of well-being, but indicated in some depth the potential of physical activity to prevent disease. The diseases incorporated within the rationale may well be entangled with certain needs, and basic functions, but these will not necessarily encompass all those functions and needs required for a good life, they may be incomplete as far as a needs account of well-being goes, apart from the discussion as to whether needs accounts are suitable theories at all.

Indeed, it seems likely that the WHO have omitted or ignored certain benefits of physical activity, or at least failed to give such benefits adequate emphasis. The rationale for the health related benefits of physical activity recognises some benefits of physical activity that extend beyond both the prevention of disease and illness as well as psychological benefits. These benefits are not included in the bullet points summarising the overall benefits, but mentioned in the discussions of the benefits of

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<sup>38</sup> See Griffin (1986) chapter III for an argument against the basic needs account as an adequate theory of well-being.

physical activity for particular populations. For ‘Children and Young People’ (WHO, 2003: 4) it is recognised that. ‘Engagement in play and sports gives young people opportunities for natural self-expression, self-confidence, relief of tension, achievement, social interaction and integration as well as for learning the spirit of solidarity and fair play.’(WHO 2003: 4).

There is no doubt that the WHO considers these benefits to be valuable. They are not, however, included in the bulk of the rationale that appears to focus upon inactivity, health and obesity. As a result, benefits not fitting within this naturalistic framework are easy to ignore, or fail to appreciate, and one can envisage a policy maker persuaded by the rationale concentrating more upon the physical benefits, and prescriptions for 30 minutes exercise a day without concerning themselves too much with what else physical activity might promote. Physical activity may offer further benefits to both health and well-being including the engagement with others, developing and mastering skills, and offering a challenging environment within which one can achieve. Activities that foster such achievements are surely more likely to be associated with longer lasting benefits and continued participation, than those activities concerned solely with calorific expenditure.

The WHO has not provided a rounded picture of the ways in which physical activity might improve our lives. Benefits of physical activity such as social integration, self-expression, achievement or accomplishment are given little emphasis within a rationale that focuses upon the prevention of disease. There is potential for a more comprehensive and integrated argument for how physical activity contributes to well-being. This would of course require a developed concept of well-being, a concept that extends beyond conclusions that well-being is entirely subjective, a result of desire satisfaction or pleasure,<sup>39</sup> and concludes that certain values are necessary to our leading a good life. These values may include those recognised by the WHO as promoted by sport in its best form; accomplishment, expression and social integration, for example. This would of course require a significant epistemological shift. Not only recognising that values are inherent in disease and

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<sup>39</sup> See Griffin (1986) chapter I for a discussion of the inadequacy of unrefined versions of these theories.

illness but also suggesting that there is scope for an objective conception of value. This stance would be further strengthened by the rejection of an exclusively scientific, non-perspectival objectivity, a rejection that there is a 'view from nowhere' (Nagel, 1986). Value judgements need not be understood as unable to attain a special sort of objectivity reserved for science. For well-being to be objective does not require timeless truths, but an acceptance that we can apply reason within the domain of prudential value, and that conclusions regarding well-being can be warranted having conducted value inquiry that fulfils certain principles (Putnam, 2002). An objective conception of well-being does not seem so far fetched when we consider for example that we are often mistaken in the judgement of our own well-being, and we often question whether people are really aware what is best for them. Understanding the values that inform such conclusions may help us to understand how exercise may contribute to our lives in a significant way apart from its influence upon disease and illness.

A rationale for physical activity that places greater emphasis on those aspects of our well-being less related to the negative sense of health has further implications. Establishing that certain values such as accomplishment or enjoyment (Griffin 1986), or indeed those suggested by the WHO itself (self-expression, achievement, social interaction) are constitutive of our well-being provides a strong case for the forms of physical activity most likely to instantiate these values. This may entail an argument for more meaningful forms of physical activity including but not limited to sporting activities and active types of play that offer more in the way of these values than opting to take the stairs rather than the escalator. The broad definition of physical activity employed by the WHO may have its advantages, as I have discussed, but greater reflection on what makes up our well-being would help us develop ideas about the structure physical activity should take to best enhance our well-being.

The second part of this chapter argued for the entanglement of concepts such as disease and illness (central to the WHO rationale for physical activity) with notions of basic human need and central human functions. The WHO concentrates on

physical activity and prevention of disease, but this necessarily entails considerations of human need, or central functions. Thus there is room for a broader understanding of the value of physical activity, considering its benefits more directly in these terms. The analysis of disease and illness will not encompass the whole of well-being; sport and exercise in its more meaningful forms in particular, are of value to us in further ways. The WHO recognise these ways but are reluctant to incorporate these benefits in a more formal framework. Instead, primacy is given to parts of the rationale with a more scientific leaning. It may be, however, that certain values are integral, indeed constitutive of our well-being, conceiving of well-being in this fashion may help us to suggest ways in which physical activity and sport enhance our well-being beyond disease prevention.

### **3.6 Physical activity and Obesity**

A further benefit of physical activity indicated by the WHO concerns its potential to address an apparent obesity problem. The benefits of physical activity summarised by the World Health Organisation include the below:

- helps control weight and lower the risk of becoming obese by 50% compared to people with sedentary lifestyles.

(WHO, 2007a).

With reference to women in particular we are told

Regular physical activity combined, with adequate diet has shown to be one of the most effective means of controlling mild to moderate obesity and maintaining an ideal body weight in women.

(WHO, 2007b).

The WHO rationale for the health benefits of physical activity appears to embrace the current view of obesity as an epidemic. Such talk surrounding obesity is not unusual; the popular press contains a great deal of reference to the topic and the urgency of the problem.

Evans (2003) has provided comprehensive criticism of this stance, obesity, like health disease and illness is a normative concept:

First, while 'fat' can be considered, at least in part, a physical/visceral condition, 'weight', 'overweight' and 'obesity' cannot. They are each a 'social arbitrary', measured constructions in the thinking of someone (e.g. researchers or the medical profession, or the insurance companies for whom indexes of the body mass index (BMI) type were originally designed).

(Evans, 2003: 88)

Evans argues that the health consequences of obesity are uncertain. Indeed the literature surrounding the whole area seems somewhat uncertain, the criteria for classification of obesity vary, for example (Evans, 2003). Evans does not seek to dismiss obesity as a health problem out of hand, but urges proper reflection on the uncertainties the data presents. The WHO, states Evans, are one of the organisations that fail to recognise this uncertainty.

What is most concerning about this association of physical activity with an 'ideal' body weight (with particular reference made to women), is the consequences for those individuals towards such campaigns are aimed at. The obesity research, with all the doubt surrounding it cannot help us establish what this ideal body shape is, and why exactly this mysterious ideal would be beneficial. The health consequences of 'obese' or 'overweight' remain uncertain (Evans, 2003). Concern should also be expressed at the apparent association between health and an ideal body weight, suggesting that being healthy is confined to a certain shape and size. This again fails to recognise the complexity of the research addressing size and health.

As in the case of disease, the WHO has paid limited attention to the concept of obesity, accepting it and the evidence associated with it at face value. The implications of this inadequate conceptual attention to obesity, though, are very different from those concerning disease. In the previous section I argued that the rationale was incomplete, failing to recognise the range of ways in which physical activity might improve our lives. The implications stemming from the WHO's emphasis on obesity are different. The focus on body shape is misplaced and

potentially very damaging bearing in mind the complexity and uncertainty that surrounds the association between size and health (Evans, 2003). Evans cites that his arguments resonate with the 'Health at Any Size (HAAS) movement' a very different approach to that advocated by the WHO here and its emphasis on weight reduction.

The contention that health is achievable at *any* size may be associated with subjectivity out of keeping with the basic premise of this chapter. I have discussed Schramme's suggestion that mobility is a basic ability it is 'necessary for every way of living your own life' (Schramme, 2002: 64), not so much constitutive of well-being, as necessary for our pursuit of well-being or the good life (Schramme, 2002).

Complete paralysis withdraws our capacity to interact with our surroundings, and, therefore, hinders us in finding out what is good or bad for us.  
(Schramme, 2002: 66).

An individual may adapt their preferences to compensate for an inability to interact with their surroundings due to their size, and report satisfactory well-being. Conversely, an objective conception of well-being may indicate that the person is neither healthy nor able to achieve a certain level of well-being. An objective conception however, must remain independent of both the flawed perceptions of a subject, as well as the misplaced but widespread association of an ideal body shape with health. In certain instances size may only threaten unreasonable society ideals, but not an objective notion of well-being (that in turn enables us to understand what is healthy). A decent test of an objective conception would be that it differentiates between such a case and one in which a certain size threatens that which is central to our lives.

The scientific data on the topic of obesity, or at least the conclusions that have been drawn from it, have been subject to extensive criticism. Recognition that obesity is a value-laden concept would perhaps initiate a more critical look at the evidence and more considered policies resulting from this examination. Again, I should state that to recognise the entanglement of fact and value, and to question scientific

objectivity, need not lead to the abandonment of objectivity or reasoning in the area altogether. Putnam (2002) rejects the possibility of non-perspectival knowledge, but provides ample evidence for how fact and value entangle in the ethical domain, including extensive reference to Sen's capabilities approach to the quality of life. There seems to be no easy way of justifying how certain ethical viewpoints and indeed theories of well-being or quality of life offer something more than just someone's view point. Putnam has dismissed the possibility of metaphysical explanations of objective ethics,<sup>40</sup> but this need not mean we give up on the idea of objectivity altogether.

With reference to obesity and the rationale for exercise, to recognise the concept as shaped by culture need not render it incapable of possessing any form of objectivity. Evans' criticism of the manner in which the concept is commonly employed is a welcome contribution, prompting the sort of critical investigation and discussion necessary for a value judgement to be warranted or capable of objectivity (Putnam, 2002). An extension of this critical thinking would no doubt employ concepts such as 'need', 'well-being' and 'goals' referred to in the last section. This form of debate would provide an interesting way of testing where obesity may genuinely have negative impact on the central functions of our lives, and where its impact upon these areas may be questioned. An objective conception of well-being should help us understand when advocating an 'ideal' body shape has more to do with culturally defined approaches to beauty than with maintaining central human functions and basic human needs.

### **3.7 Physical activity and psychological well-being**

Further benefits of physical activity are recognised by the WHO. Physical activity promotes 'psychological well-being, reduces stress, anxiety and depression' (WHO,

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<sup>40</sup> See Putnam (2002) pp. 44-5. 'Indeed the long history of failures to explain in metaphysical terms how mathematics is possible, how nondemonstrative knowledge is possible (the so called "problem of induction"), and so on, suggests that nothing much follows from the failure of philosophy to come up with an explanation of *anything* in "absolute terms" – except, perhaps, the senselessness of a certain sort of metaphysics.'

2003: 3). This draws upon the work of exercise psychologists such as Biddle and colleagues (2000). Such work is certainly helpful in demonstrating increases in mood and self-esteem as well as decreases in negative symptoms such as anxiety and depression; not only important consequences, but also valued motivation for continued participation.

In emphasising the subjective aspects of well-being, we can again trace an implicit acceptance of the fact/value dichotomy. A focus on the subjective aspects complies with the dominant approach to well-being in the psychological literature, *subjective well-being*, subject to extensive critique in the previous chapter. In short, such accounts are unable to recognise that we can be mistaken as to our own well-being, and how to act in its best interests. Subjective accounts of well-being also rule out rational discussion on the topic, and this seems at odds with how, in fact, we discuss and decide what is in our, and others best interests.

A fully considered rationale for physical activity; how, and in what instances it improves our well-being, must account for the possibility of mistaken judgements. This may require reflection upon certain values central to our well-being, desires for which we could describe as informed.<sup>41</sup> This would require a rejection of the fact/value dichotomy, and in particular a rejection of the subjectivity of value. This would also encourage reflection upon the activities that best instantiate these values.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

An implicit adherence to the fact/value dichotomy, and an uncritical acceptance of scientific data, has limited the attempts of the WHO to provide an adequate rationale for physical activity and resulted in an impoverished understanding of its value. The entanglement of fact and value within concepts such as ‘disease’ and ‘illness’ opens up the possibility of a more expansive rationale for the value of physical activity.

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<sup>41</sup> The process of recognising the fallibility of our actual desires, moving to correct these desires, via a notion of informed desire shaped by a list of prudential values is described in Griffin (1986).



Accepting that values and facts entangle prompts critical consideration of scientific, value-free conceptions of objectivity, apparently independent of perspective. Objectivity is best understood not as an accurate description of the world, independent of perspective, but as possible only after criticism and reflection. The following chapters, addressing celebrated philosophical theories of well-being can be understood as part of this process, striving toward a defensible concept of well-being, sensitive to, but not hostage, to subjective factors.

## Chapter Four

### GRIFFIN'S THEORY OF 'WELL-BEING': A CRITIQUE

#### 4.1 Introduction

The subjective psychological theories of well-being fail to capture adequately all of the ways in which exercise might be of value to us. These theories are also unable to account for instances in which we might think exercise is benefiting us, when it is fact deleterious to our well-being. The scientific rationale for physical activity, embedded in a naturalistic conception of health, also offers a restricted picture of how exercise might enhance our well-being. Research undertaken in both of these fields appears hostage to a metaphysical position that supports a fact/value dichotomy. These researchers are unwilling to undertake any form of debate regarding the values that might be central to our well-being. Values are construed as subjective and beyond rational debate.

The implicit case made in the criticism of these theories has been for an extensive analysis of what constitutes our well-being, an analysis that extends into the value domain. The celebrated philosophical theory of well-being offered by James Griffin conducts a rigorous analysis of the concept. Griffin's main text on the topic *Well-Being* (Griffin, 1986) offers answers to three questions. The first concerns the understanding of well-being itself, the second its measurement, and the third the role of well-being in morality and politics. Griffin recognises the expansive nature of the last question in particular and that the answer is unlikely to be comprehensive. This chapter will focus mainly upon the first section of the text, also referring to Griffin's (1996) *Value Judgement*, again restricting focus to Griffin's theory of well-being.

This chapter introduces and critically analyses Griffin's theory of well-being. The emphasis is on how the theory improves upon those presented in previous chapters. An extensive debate on theories of well-being, continued in the following chapters,

provides the foundations from which to contemplate the relationship between exercise and well-being.

## 4.2 Foundations

Griffin begins with the utilitarian notion of well-being, roughly tied to self-interest.

Utilitarians use our rough, everyday notion of 'well-being', our notion of what it is for a single life to go well, in which morality may have a place but not the dominant one. This does not mean that our job is merely to describe the everyday use. It is too shadowy and incomplete for that; we still have to be ready for stipulation.

(Griffin, 1986: 7).

Nevertheless, Griffin's commencement with this notion of well-being is indicative of his utilitarian leanings. Other theories, such as Nussbaum's Aristotelian conception of the fully human life, sees an individual's good as intertwined with the good of others. (Nussbaum, 2006a). Griffin, however, is not an uncritical proponent of the utilitarian tradition. Classical utilitarian stances that consider utility to be a single psychological state, namely pleasure, are dismissed on the basis that 'we cannot find any one state in all that we regard as having utility' (Griffin 1986: 8). An individual may enjoy playing sports, spending time with friends, and reading crime novels, considering these to enhance their well-being. There does not, however, seem to be a single mental state evident in these diverse activities. This rules out any crude mental state theory of well-being conceived of as a pleasurable mental state found in all that enhances our lives.

One way of overcoming such criticism is to allow for well-being to consist in various mental states tied together by the fact that they are all desired. This has been referred to as Preference Hedonism (Parfit, 1984), but is also rejected by Griffin. The main deficiency of such theories is that we have desires other than those concerning our mental states (Griffin, 1986).

Even if I were surrounded by consummate actors able to give me sweet simulacra of love and affection, I should prefer the relatively bitter diet of their authentic reactions.

(Griffin, 1986: 9)

Here the desire for authentic friendships is clearly more important to Griffin than any particular mental state. Indeed Griffin prefers the less pleasurable authentic relations. We could argue that Griffin's preference consists in, 'a better mental state' (Parfit, 1984: 494). It is clearer though, and employs a less tenuous use of pleasure if we accept that satisfaction of a desire for authentic relationships, is better for Griffin's well-being than 'simulacra of love and affection' (Griffin 1986: 9), despite the latter entailing more pleasurable mental states. This amounts to an acceptance of the 'preference' but rejection of the 'hedonism' inherent in preference hedonism.

We value things other than states of mind. Authentic friendships, despite being experienced in the same way as the simulacra, better serve our well-being.<sup>42</sup> In recognising this Griffin has already extended beyond the subjective conceptions of well-being that reduced such values to the experiences of satisfaction and affect. We want our lives to turn out a certain way, not just to feel as though they have.

Griffin considers well-being to concern more than just how we feel from the inside. Rejecting the idea that delusions of friendship can be of equal value to genuine relationships, Griffin explores desire theories as an alternative. This is a logical step; a desire theory is a 'state-of-the-world theory, since the actual occurrence of a desired state of affairs is one necessary condition of the analysis' (Sumner, 1996: 128). If I desire authentic friendships, the satisfaction of this desire requires me to actually have authentic friendships, not just perceive that I have, or have simulated experiences of friendship.

In examining desire satisfaction and well-being, Griffin begins with actual desire theories, well-being understood as the fulfilment of our actual desires. Actual desire

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<sup>42</sup> Griffin makes this point later in his discussion of the 'experience requirement' discussed in section 4.8 of this chapter.

theories preserve agent sovereignty; it is the fulfilment of our own desires that constitute our well-being. This emphasis upon the individual determining her own well-being has proved an attractive element of actual desire theories. A fatal flaw in such theories, however, is that we can be mistaken as to what is best for us (Griffin, 1986). We might desire and ruthlessly pursue fame, or wealth, but find upon fulfilment of such desires that we are no better off. Our mistaken judgements are not limited to such faults, corrected upon fulfilment however. Griffin (1986) discusses how we may become trapped in cycle of insatiable material desires. He also refers to our desires for the possession of something, and how this focus might be due to a lack of value concepts that might have encouraged greater reflection upon the kind of life we would like to lead (Griffin, 1986). These limitations of actual desire accounts result in Griffin turning to informed desire accounts of well-being which locate well-being within the fulfilment of those desires in some way validated, so mistaken desires such as those above do not enter the equation.

#### **4.3 Griffin's Theory of Well-being**

Griffin, however, does not just move to account for those faults or mistakes in logic associated with ill-informed desires. His standard for informed is much more stringent, referring to 'desires that persons would have if they appreciated the true nature of their objects.' (Griffin, 1986: 11). This places a great deal of emphasis on the objects of desire and their features (Griffin, 2000) and does not seem far away from an objective account, one in which 'certain things are good or bad for people, whether or not these people would want to have good things, or to avoid the bad things' (Parfit, 1984: 499). There is a question as to how much work desire is doing within Griffin's account.

Griffin (2000) has more recently acknowledged that his account progresses to a list account, close to what is often labelled an objective list account. In developing the notion of informed, Griffin emphasises certain objects of desire, prudential values, of general importance to human beings. Well-being is essentially located in these

prudential values, although the account still retains a role for desire.<sup>43</sup> For the purpose of illuminating the basic tenets of the theory, I will trace this progression to a list account of well-being.

The notion of ‘appreciation’ is central to Griffin’s informed desire. Griffin goes some way to explaining what ‘appreciation’ entails in detailing his particularly strong concept of ‘informed.’ He makes the simple but significant observation that the only way we can avoid all faults relevant to utility is by ‘understanding completely what makes life go well’ (Griffin, 1986: 13). It becomes clear at this early stage that Griffin intends to go beyond the correction of faults such as failing to match up what we actually want with what we choose. An individual may seem fully informed of the consequences of continued excessive alcohol consumption, but continue to over-indulge. Just listening and being aware of the disbenefits of excessive consumption is not enough. The individual must ‘realise fully what is at stake’ (Griffin, 1986: 314 n18). A proper realisation of this would necessarily lead to limited alcohol intake. An informed desire is not just one in which all the relevant facts have been considered but one that reflects an understanding of life itself.

Griffin states that “‘utility’ is the fulfilment of informed desires, the stronger the desires, the greater the utility’ (Griffin, 1986: 14), but the manner in which Griffin uses these terms requires clarification. In order to avoid slipping back into mental state theories Griffin sees the fulfilment of desire as rather like a fulfilment of a contract. This prevents desire satisfaction being reduced to the experiences associated with it.

The notion of strength also requires further explanation. Griffin (1986) argues desires have a structure. He differentiates between local, higher order and global desires, the latter for a particular way of life, right the way down to the former for a drink or some food for example. Griffin’s notion of strength relies upon global desires. These desires for ways of life have a greater relevance to our well-being. This makes sense; I may have a local desire at the moment to stop work, watch

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<sup>43</sup> This role will be discussed in more depth in the following section.

television, but resist this desire in favour of pursuing my more global desire to finish this chapter, or indeed thesis in a timely manner.

I will make two final qualifications before examining further Griffin's concept of informed. First, whilst this standard for 'informed' is particularly stringent, Griffin accepts that 'minimally informed' (Griffin, 1986: 348 n19) desires can enhance our well-being. Excluding all but the fully informed would make it difficult for us to enhance our well-being in Griffin's terms, the standard for informed being so high. Nevertheless this footnote could be interpreted as back tracking to a certain extent and warrants the further investigation conducted in the section below (4.9) addressing less informed desires and their role in well-being.

Secondly, Griffin (1986) requires that for something to improve our well-being we must desire it upon satisfaction. Section 4.5 is dedicated to this 'Endorsement Constraint' (Arneson, 1999: 135). It places greater emphasis on the agent and her actual desires than an objective list theory and its contention that something may be valuable for someone regardless of their attitude toward it.

As we have seen in developing his theory of well-being Griffin places emphasis only on 'a certain range of features or qualities' (Griffin, 2000: 282; Griffin, 1986: 67-8) of the objects of desire. These are included in a list of prudential values:

- a) Accomplishment 'We all want to do something with our lives, to act in a way that gives them some point and substance' (Griffin, 1986: 64)
- b) 'The components of human existence' (Griffin, 1986: 67), Autonomy, liberty, 'the minimum material goods to keep body and soul together' (ibid.).
- c) Understanding 'Simply knowing about oneself and one's world is a part of the good life. We value, not as an instrument but for itself, being in touch with reality, being free from muddle, ignorance and mistake.' (ibid.).
- d) Enjoyment 'pleasures, the perception of beauty, absorption in and appreciation of nature' (ibid.).

- e) Deep personal relations ‘deep, authentic, reciprocal relations of friendship and love’ (ibid.).

Griffin has more recently claimed that, with regard to well-being ‘only those desires count the satisfaction of which is subsumable under one or other of the value notions on the list’ (Griffin 2000: 284). This is an attempt to further restrict the informed desire account, that otherwise may be too broad to retain its links with utility. My brother being cured of a disease without my knowledge (Sumner, 2000), will not be considered to enhance *my* well-being because of a failure to correspond to the values on the list (Griffin, 2000). It is not clear whether the list itself can achieve what Griffin wants here. A sibling’s cure may not, as Griffin (2000) indicates, be either pleasurable for me, or reflect my own accomplishment. If I had been close to my brother in the past, however, this relationship may have been important in my life. Does this suggest some significance to my well-being, impacting upon the prudential value deep personal relationships? This possibility needs examining further before concluding that Griffin’s list can perform this function. This argument, concerning well-being and its bounds is closely related to ‘the experience requirement.’ Whether we need to experience something, be aware of it, in order for our well-being to be enhanced. Griffin thinks not, although this leads to some very interesting conclusions, reflective of some quite different understandings of what well-being is on the part of philosophers. Section 4.8 of this chapter addresses Griffin’s rejection of the experience requirement and the implications of this.

Having rejected actual desires as an adequate account of well-being Griffin proposes a strong sense of informed desire. Well-being is enhanced through satisfaction of informed desires for the prudential values. This approach has similarities to an objective or list theory of well-being, a point accepted by Griffin (2000). There are however, important ways in which desire enters into the theory marking differences with standard objective list accounts.



#### 4.4 Bridging the subjective/objective divide

Griffin (2000) accepts that his use of the tag ‘desire account’ in *Well-Being* is misleading. It is essentially the features of certain objects of desire that constitute well-being, the prudential values Griffin lists. In this sense, states Griffin (2000) his account is not far away from those often called list accounts, or objective list theories of well-being. Sumner (2000) has also noted Griffin’s increasing distance from desire accounts. Indeed *Well-Being* refers to the necessity of some sort of endorsement of a value for well-being to be enhanced. I must desire something, upon satisfaction for well-being to improve. That which I do not want will not enhance my well-being, regardless as to whether it is one of those values on Griffin’s list. This endorsement constraint is not mentioned in *Value Judgement*. Despite this apparent change of emphasis, Griffin (2000) certainly does not aspire to a purely objective account. He has continued to reject the subjective/objective dualism.

Griffin (1996) cites the role of desire in explaining his prudential values as a reason not to accept this subjective/objective dualism as well as grounds for rejecting the dualism between reason and desire. He contends that we do not just desire something because it is valuable, but neither does he accept the ‘valuable because desired’ reversal. Griffin argues that well-being is both objective and subjective (Griffin, 1986). Griffin’s list of prudential values certainly articulate what is of value to us (as opposed to reducing such values to mental states) and help us steer clear of the fatally flawed actual desire account. Griffin is also anxious that in employing a list of prudential values he does not ignore the different ways in which we realise our well-being. For example, Griffin considers those values on his list as important to everyone’s well-being, but admits exceptions. Accomplishment may, in an exceptional case conflict with the anxiety it generates, meaning it is not of value for that person (Griffin, 1986). There is scope for personal variation in how (and in some instances whether) it is best that a particular value is realised.

It has been indicated that an important way in which the theory spans the subjective/objective divide is in its explanation of how desire enters into the

explanation of prudential value. At first glance the features of the objects of desire (Griffin, 2000) have sole responsibility for this. Indeed, we cannot just make something prudentially valuable by desiring it, ‘We all have to be able to connect what we value to some generally intelligible desirability feature’ (Griffin, 1986: 27). Griffin accepts that such features make objects valuable but argues desire has an important role in explaining these features. In explaining this role Griffin argues against the recognition/reaction and reason/desire dualisms. This stance endures beyond *Well-Being*; Griffin continues to assert the role of desire in explaining prudential value, the entanglement of recognition and reaction, after dropping the ‘desire theory’ tag. Thus I will take Griffin’s (1986) explanation in *Well-being*, defended in the more recent *Replies* (2000) to articles written in Griffin’s honour, as part of a coherent whole arguing that desire forms part of the explanation of prudential value, that recognition and reaction cannot be separated.<sup>44</sup> As is common in Griffin’s writings, accomplishment is taken as an example. We do not just understand something as accomplishment, recognising its features, and then desire it, argues Griffin. Understanding has no priority over desire the two are inseparable:

It is mistake not only to keep understanding out of all desire but also to keep desire out of all understanding. Some understanding – the sort that involves fixing on certain features and seeing them in a favourable light – is also a kind of movement.

(Griffin, 1986: 29).

In his section ‘Dubious Dualisms’ in *Value Judgement* (Griffin, 1996: 32) we can further discern Griffin’s thinking. Griffin, aims to reject the dualism between reason and desire.<sup>45</sup> We do not just recognise a prudential value and then desire it. To recognise something as accomplishment involves viewing it favourably, desiring it.

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<sup>44</sup> The following section attributes Griffin’s use of the endorsement constraint to his earlier work in *Well-Being* (1986). It is not clear that Griffin continues to favour the presence of the constraint.

<sup>45</sup> See his ‘Replies’ (Griffin 2000: 290) for an explanation of how the role of reason and desire in the explanation of prudential value is not merely intertwined but inseparable. ‘Dancy is wrong that my aim is merely to “blur” the distinction “a bit”, that it is merely to show that in real life recognition and reaction are “mutually intertwined”. On the contrary, I say explicitly that the role of neither can, in itself, be understood without the other (*VJ* 32); the one is essentially involved in the other. “It is not that the recognitional and reactive components are there in this complex mix as separable, still independent parts. That separation itself is what seems impossible to maintain”’ (*VJ* 56).

To recognize the nature of the relevant object is to see it under some desirability characterization, such as 'accomplishment' or 'enjoyment'. These desirability characterizations give reasons for action, and those reasons in turn mesh with characteristic human motivation. So what one recognizes embodies some element of human reaction. That, it seems to me, is the element of truth in desire accounts of value; it is not nothing, but it certainly is much less than what a desire account is ordinarily thought to be.

(Griffin, 1996: 36).

Griffin offers a reduced role for desire in the explanation of prudential value. A prudential value such as accomplishment is not just understood as valuable and then desired, but neither is an accomplishment, or autonomy, valuable because desired.

Moore (2000) has questioned whether Griffin demonstrates a role for desire in making something valuable, or whether he just describes the entanglement of recognition and reaction. It does not follow from this entanglement, that part of understanding something as valuable involves seeing it in a favourable light, (Griffin 1986) that part of what explains prudential value is desire (Moore 2000). Desire may well be involved in the recognition of value, but does it enter into the explanation of value itself? Griffin agrees that the entanglement of recognition and reaction need not infer a role for desire in explaining value. He argues, however, that his explanation extends beyond a mere description of inseparability. Using the example of pain, he illustrates that recognition and reaction are inseparable, *and* that our reaction is in fact central to something being valuable or a dis-value. One of the criteria through which we come to define a sensation as painful is that we don't want it, and try to avoid it, (Griffin, 2000) just as part of what makes something accomplishment is that we view it favourably, as giving our lives a point. This is enough, suggests Griffin, to transform his thesis from being about the inseparability of recognition and reaction, to being an explanation of prudential value.

Griffin argues for a reduced role for desire in explaining prudential value, in comparison with more traditional actual or informed desire theories. There is a role for desire nonetheless. Sumner (1996) considers a theory subjective if it considers

favourable attitudes of some kind necessary for well-being. Griffin suggests that the value of accomplishment depends in some way upon the person viewing it favourably. This favourable attitude is necessary for something to be an accomplishment and thus for well-being to be enhanced. Griffin, however, would not appreciate his account being labelled 'subjective;' he considers this dichotomy to distort the true role of desire in well-being. Indeed, considering the account subjective because of this role for desire would fail to acknowledge the subtlety of the position.

One reason that we should not label Griffin's explanation 'subjective' is provided by his description of how someone may come to understand a value such as accomplishment as being of value to their life, without previously contemplating its value. Reason and desire, Griffin argues, cannot be separated. One does not, however, need to have a pre-existent desire to accomplish to come to understand its value. Griffin details the process by which a 'fool-like person living for day-to-day pleasures' (1996: 24) may come to the conclusion that accomplishment is of value to them. The desire for accomplishment is not already established. Desire enters into the equation as we come to understand what accomplishment is. We do not understand what accomplishment is in a value-neutral way, but in a manner that entails value-laden language. Understanding accomplishment as something that provides a life with point and substance is to view it favourably. Griffin's conclusion as to this reduced role for desire seems some way from subjectivism:

So the final subjective set of desires that you or I happen to end up with seems to play no real role here, while understanding what accomplishment is seems to be playing a large role.

(Griffin, 1996: 25).

Griffin's entanglement of practical reason and desire, his assertion that 'practical reason has to mesh with characteristic human motivation' (Griffin, 1996: 35) does not even need to hold at an individual level. Griffin acknowledges that someone may be so deeply unhappy that they may recognise a prudential reason but not care. Of

course, I am moving beyond a debate as to what explains prudential value and what contributes to our well-being, to the debate about how we recognise reasons for action. The point, however, is that Griffin does not endorse the subjective line, valuable because desired. In certain instances, such as that outlined above, understanding appears to be doing the most work. Thus I am reluctant to criticise Griffin specifically on the grounds that this complex picture of desire and understanding reduces to a subjective explanation of prudential value. Yet Griffin's approach, and in particular his earlier account does offer other ways in which desire enters more strongly into the equation. The employment of an endorsement constraint is one of these aspects. This will be addressed in the following, where it is argued that this constraint does allow too greater credence to potentially flawed subjective judgements.

#### **4.5 The Endorsement Constraint (Arneson, 1999)**

One way in which desires retain a key role in Griffin's (1986) theory is through his employment of an 'endorsement constraint' (Arneson, 1999). It is stated that for something subsumable under Griffin's list of prudential values to enhance well-being, it must still be desired upon satisfaction. There is, however, a broad definition of desire:

Even then we should have to stretch meanings here a bit: I might get something I find that I like but did not want before because I did not know about it, nor in a sense want now simply because I already have it; or I might, through being upset or confused, go on resisting something that, in some deep sense, I really want.

(Griffin, 1986: 11).

There are echoes of Nordenfelt (2000) and his recognition that our desire for vital goals may not always be conscious (Nordenfelt, 2000). This acknowledgement may provide some common ground between my objective line and those with a more subjective stance. To suggest that a desire is necessary for well-being to be enhanced need not suggest that the desire is explicit, and even allows for some resistance provided that there is some deeper endorsement. There are, however, possible

situations in which there is no identifiable endorsement, in which I would still wish to argue that well-being can be enhanced. Here I follow Arneson's (1999) rejection of an endorsement constraint. We can be mistaken in our rejection of certain goods as contributing to a life, for weak or non-existent reasons (Arneson, 1999). Indeed Griffin acknowledges that our judgements concerning our well-being can be faulty. Yet he allows these judgements, with their potential flaws, such a central role through the employment of the endorsement constraint.

Griffin (1986) argues in *Well-Being* that favourable attitudes of some sort are necessary for well-being. If I do not endorse the achievement of a prudential value, it cannot enhance my well-being. This, I think attributes an unjustifiable weight to flawed judgements concerning our well-being:

Suppose Samantha writes a brilliant poem but denies that this achievement has any value or in any way enhances her life. Her ground for this dismissal is a shallow and silly aesthetic theory which she has thoughtlessly embraced. In these circumstances, her failure to endorse her achievement does not negate its value for her.

(Arneson, 1999: 136).

Arneson (1999) acknowledges that life may be improved *further* by endorsement of the accomplishment, experiencing pleasure in succeeding for example. This point is, however, compatible with the idea that well-being can be improved in the absence of endorsement of a value attained (ibid.). Indeed I would certainly contend that life is better if one both fully understands the significance of an accomplishment and enjoys it. These subjective attitudes are not insignificant to well-being; indeed they may have a place within a list theory (both Griffin and Nussbaum make some reference to enjoyment or pleasure). It is not necessary, however, for the achievement of a value such as accomplishment to be endorsed, or enjoyed, in order for well-being to be enhanced.

One contention is that the objective stance illegitimately conflates perfectionist and prudential value. This distinction between perfectionist and prudential value is one that Sumner (1996) takes as being important in the critique of objective theories. I

follow Arneson in rejecting this counter argument. There may be any number of flawed and poorly thought through reasons for failing to endorse a good that need not completely prevent a value enhancing well-being. Using my own (Arneson inspired) example, I do not endorse the completion of my thesis as an accomplishment. I have worked hard, but more out of an obligation to those around me than due to a commitment to its value. The development of knowledge and increased understanding of philosophical issues is not something I value. I have developed these skills, but only because I was too weak of will to stop and pursue something else that fits better with my own values. I have not genuinely valued the process. I argue that my failure to either recognise or endorse those values associated with pursuing the thesis does not entirely negate those values central to it. Examples of such values could be the accumulation of knowledge and understanding. I reject the contention that because from my perspective the values are not important that they can have no impact upon my well-being. An extension of this line of argument would be that attainment of such values concerns something other than my well-being. They may improve the value of my life from a perfectionist perspective, but not from a prudential perspective.

This debate gets to one of the core issues of well-being. The extent to which our attitudes and desires should determine the concept. Griffin's (1986) theory employs an endorsement constraint that leaves his list somewhat hostage to possibly flawed subjective judgements. If a value is not endorsed it will not enhance well-being. I would take a stronger objective line here and conclude that my well-being can be enhanced in the absence of such endorsement. Indeed this represents an unashamed conflation of the perfectionist and prudential that Sumner discusses, understanding well-being as a concept to represent more than just how well life is going from the subject's perspective.

Griffin's theory of well-being moves our understanding of well-being further forward in a number of ways. In recognising the possibility of an individual being mistaken as to her well-being, Griffin follows an argument right through to the proposal of values generally thought to improve the life of a human being.

Nevertheless, the work this list can do, might as Hurka (1988) observes, be limited by the theory retaining an endorsement constraint. I now move on to discuss the list itself, its attempts to attend to individual differences, and the thorny issue of how the goods on the list are justified.

#### 4.6 The prudential values

An important part of Griffin's account is his list of prudential values, 'that are valuable in any life' (Griffin, 1986: 70). These values, according to Griffin provide a 'standard for judging (most) ordinary lives' (Griffin, 1986: 70). Griffin, however, is keen to acknowledge the various manners in which such values can be realised, and indeed that people may be better suited to the realisation of some values than of others. Griffin's acknowledgement that accomplishment may not be of value for a certain person demonstrates a concern with just how these values impact upon a life:

In just the way that we can make a fetish of goods – by using them, and not their effect on our lives, as our index of well-being – we can make a fetish of values: even objective universal values matter only by making individual lives better.

(Griffin, 1986: 55).

Griffin, therefore, is not proposing that such values amount to an ideal form of life. Indeed he rejects that such an ideal exists. The values are general enough to be realised in innumerable ways. Although not stipulating an ideal form of life Griffin does suggest that 'A life with only one or two of them, even in large quantities, would not be the best life.' (Griffin, 1986: 35). This retains some critical force for the list of prudential values. This force, however, could be deemed significantly blunted by Griffin's acknowledgement of exceptional cases, as well as recognition that less informed desires will impact upon well-being, albeit to a lesser extent.

Griffin's acknowledgement of exceptional cases is indicative of his commitment to accounting for individual variation. Again, however, there are question marks over the role of the prudential values in the theory in light of these qualifications.





Generalizing from Griffin's unfortunate accomplisher cases, it is possible to enjoy a life of well-being without any deep personal relations or accomplishments. Furthermore, any instance of a prudential value, considered on its own, makes a contribution to a good life for the individual in question, but, in general, it will not contribute enough on its own to make life as a whole go well. In short, neither accomplishment nor any other prudential value is necessary or sufficient for a life of well-being.

(Moore, 2000: 77).

I have described a range ways in which Griffin has attempted to bridge the objective/subjective distinction. Griffin's (1986) employment of an endorsement constraint and his recognition of exceptional cases, the anxious accomplisher, all reflect ways in which the theory claims to span the objective and subjective. They also, however, threaten the role of the prudential values in the theory. It becomes difficult to question a life in which they be neglected in the absence of a threshold level of well-being, within a framework that acknowledges the utility of less informed desires, and still places high emphasis upon the endorsement of such values by the individual. In most cases a life without those prudential values on Griffin's list is less valuable than a life with that includes their achievement. But the strength of this conclusion is perhaps a little disappointing bearing in mind the strong conception of informed Griffin proposes.

We can learn a great deal about Griffin's theory of well-being by clearly demonstrating what the approach rejects. As we have seen, the account does not prescribe an ideal form of life. Neither does it consider utility to be a substantive value. Utility is not a super value to which the other values on the list are reduced, but rather a formal analysis of how these values combine to give an overall idea of prudential value for that person. Well-being is essentially a label for the contribution the combination of prudential values make to a life. Thus we do not talk of achieving well-being, but only of more or less well-being.

The form of judgement is, *this* combination makes a more valuable life than *that*. And the notion 'a valuable life' used here does not serve to summarize

further, more substantive notions; judgements about more or less 'valuable life', in those terms are basic.

(Griffin, 1986: 36)

This reckoning of value, working out which combination of prudential values best serves our well-being, is still achievable in the absence of a single value that places all prudential values on the same scale (Griffin, 1986). This approach is in line with Griffin's discussion of incommensurability and his contention that we often compare quite different values in terms of their value to our life.

Griffin rejects a totting up approach to well-being in which pleasurable experiences for example are 'totted up'. Griffin is concerned with informed global desires for a particular way of life. He acknowledges that such a desire might entail, for example the maximisation of daily pleasures, but the final assessment is ultimately the comparison of this approach to life with the alternatives (Griffin, 1986). This approach also applies to the prudential values, although Griffin acknowledges that certain values such as pleasure may lend themselves to some short term addition, the final assessment of well-being requires an assessment of all the prudential values together.

So the amount of value cannot be decided by attaching a value to each separately and then adding. There is a notion of the amount they contribute to a life that is independent of anything we can say about each end on its own.

(Griffin, 1986: 36).

Short-term pleasure or local desire satisfaction may not reflect what is in our best interests over the longer term. The values on Griffin's list concern how well *a life is going* and are not concerned with isolated periods of time. Griffin's theory considers well-being in terms of more and less, rejecting the notion of a substantive value we achieve. As I have said we do not achieve well-being, our life is just improved or worsened, as success with which we pursue the prudential values varies. There is a potential problem here, however. Well-being conceptualised in this fashion, without talk of threshold levels of well-being, alongside acknowledgment of special

situations in which the values may not improve a life, may leave the theory somewhat lacking in critical power.

The prudential values themselves require further elaboration. Again, some sort of threshold level may be useful. Moore makes this point with reference to accomplishment.

his prudential value profile leaves a large gap between non-accomplishments, such as goldfish swallowing and flagpole sitting, and accomplishments, such as poetry that expresses deep understanding, major research breakthroughs, and giving children good starts in life. He does not specify the thresholds good enough for accomplishment, and it is no easy task for him to do so.

(Moore, 2000: 86).

Moore is concerned with what constitutes an accomplishment, and whether something slightly below the standard indicated above would impact positively on our well-being, but to a lesser degree. Griffin's position on desires that are not fully informed but still enhance well-being to some extent would indicate the feasibility of this. Although he acknowledges that the establishment of thresholds is a difficult enterprise Moore, suggests greater detail is required.

The pleasure associated with deep personal relationships, accomplishments and the other prudential values is not discussed in depth. That Griffin considers enjoyment and pleasure to be important to well-being is clear, enjoyment appears on his list of prudential values. Yet it is not discussed in terms of its relationship with the other prudential values. This is in contrast to other approaches that consider pleasure to complete those goods that make up well-being (see for example Finnis, 1980). Both Griffin and Finnis would understandably be opposed to such goods being reduced to the pleasure they generate, but neither would they wish to dismiss the value of a pleasurable experience. Such a position is not inconsistent with Griffin's; it is just that he does not often discuss the pleasures of such goods. His criticism of mental state accounts certainly illuminates the difficulties in emphasising pleasure, both authentic and non-authentic friendships may be equally pleasurable, but authentic

friendships are of more value. Alternative conceptions of pleasure and how they relate to an activity may prove beneficial here. MacIntyre, by contrast, notes that:

in the Aristotelian view pleasure supervenes upon activity successfully carried through; it cannot be the end of activity. And moreover in the Aristotelian view since pleasure is specified in terms of successful activity and not vice versa, pleasure cannot be a criterion for choosing among ends.

(MacIntyre, 1971: 175)

Pleasure is not understood in isolation but as supervening upon successful activity. The pleasures of sports participation supervene upon the activity, and one could hypothesise are often associated with certain inherent goods of that activity, the mastery of one's body, the interaction with others, the joy of movement. In understanding pleasure in this fashion the activity itself and the values with which it is associated are understood as the primary goods. Indeed, one can understand pleasure as supervening upon the valuable activity in this sense, without requiring that in order for well-being to be enhanced pleasure, or indeed endorsement of some kind, must necessarily accompany the valuable activity. This understanding of pleasure also has the advantage over approaches that would conceive of pleasure in isolation from the activities themselves, the affect discussed in the psychological research for example that fails to differentiate between that pleasure central to our well-being, and that which is transitory and of lesser significance.

Griffin considers his values to be of general importance, and seems to consider instances in which they are not as isolated exceptions. Thus Griffin remains convinced that his theory, and the values central to it enable the judgement of 'most (ordinary) human lives.' (Griffin, 1986: 70) I have observed, however, that this critical power not be as strong as first appears. This contention seems to be of particular relevance to earlier incarnations of Griffin's theory that employ an endorsement constraint. Any defensible theory must recognise that its goods should be the object of desires and be associated with pleasure and enjoyment. Objective lists, however, should also help us understand when the attitudes and desires of the individual have gone awry. It is because of the potential for unreasonable and

mistaken judgements that I argue in favour of an objective conception of well-being, one that unequivocally expresses the centrality of certain values to a life independent of our attitudes toward them.

#### **4.7 The explanation of value and the role of human nature**

The justification of the values on any list theory of well-being is an integral, yet notoriously problematic, aspect of such theories. As we have seen from Griffin's remarks on desire, whilst it has a role in explaining prudential value, this role does not fully explain what makes something good for us or prudentially valuable. If desire is not sufficient for the justification of the values on the list, how else do we explain them? This question moves us onto difficult philosophical terrain that Griffin explores with admirable clarity.

In his book *Value Judgement*, Griffin (1996) devotes considerable time to exploring issues concerning the good life and the nature of prudential value. As we shall see from a brief description of the arguments presented, a great deal of the explanation of prudential value utilises a particular conception of human nature.

Prudential values, suggests Griffin, meet human interests,<sup>46</sup> interests grounded in our human nature:

Suppose, then, that I am right in thinking that non-biological interests, such as accomplishment and deep personal relations, are as firmly embedded in human nature as biological ones are. To put it roughly, biological ones are embedded in our animal nature, and non-biological ones in our rational nature.

(Griffin, 1996: 55).

The prudential values are, suggests Griffin, the result of us being reflective beings. Griffin's speculations in his previous chapter give us an idea of where he is heading:

Suppose that prudential values – cases of meeting interests – should earn their way into the world of facts. Suppose, that is, that we found a place for them in

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<sup>46</sup> See Griffin, (1996) pp. 59.

our everyday world, without resorting to anything remotely like a ‘value realm’. That would then be to accept what seems to me immensely plausible about naturalism. In talking about prudential values, we are not talking about entities in such an other-worldly realm – detectable, say, by intuition – but, rather, about certain things that happen in the only realm that values need: mainly, what goes on in human lives, that *this* or *that* meets an interest, and so makes a life go better.

(Griffin, 1996: 50).

Griffin wants to expand naturalism<sup>47</sup> to a point at which it includes prudential values. Prudential values, ingrained in our reflective human nature, are cases of interests being met. Meeting an interest is considered similar to the notion of soothing. Griffin thus asks whether the property of meeting an interest and hence the prudential values are real. In arguing that they are real he proposes a rough test for reality<sup>48</sup> (Griffin, 1996).

We attribute reality to some kind of thing – any kind at all, including values – in assigning a certain explanatory role to it. One sort of explanatory role that would seem to have these existential implications – sufficient for them, but perhaps not necessary – is causal. This gives us a test of realism in terms of the best causal explanation: realism about a kind of thing is the view that things of that kind must appear in the best account of what happens in the world. The test is quite general; it is not confined to causation in which humans as experiencers or perceivers are involved. If entities such as electrons appear in the best account of what happens in the world, then there *are* electrons; if properties such as electrical charges appear in the best account of what happens in the world, then there *are* electrical charges. But we are interested in prudential values, and they are unlikely to interact with things other than persons (and animals).

(Griffin, 1996: 61)

Accomplishment provides an example of how the prudential values can play this explanatory role. The absence of the value accomplishment is said to explain a vague dissatisfaction with life. This is not merely a belief that life is empty for Griffin (1996) argues that this dissatisfaction has its similarities to an irritation that might be soothed by an ointment. For Griffin both the irritation and the dissatisfaction at the

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<sup>47</sup> See Griffin (1996) pp. 51.

<sup>48</sup> This test is considered by Griffin to be ‘the best available’ (pp. 63), having cited some problems it may contain (see pp. 62-3).

absence of accomplishment, are attributable to our human nature, a human interest has not been achieved (Griffin, 1996).

Prudential values are real and part of the natural world in the expanded sense of 'natural' that Griffin suggests. The way they meet our interests has been related to the way in which an ointment may soothe. At the core of the explanation is the conception of the person as a reflective human being. It is this potential to reflect that is said to ground values such as accomplishment and deep personal relationships. Griffin does not spend much time explaining how the profile of prudential values follows on from this reflection. He describes our natural tendency as reflective beings to form 'second order desires' (Griffin, 1996: 54).<sup>49</sup> 'These course-of-life desires open a space for a certain range of prudential values.' (Griffin, 1996: 54). There may be a question as to whether only those values on Griffin's list would follow on from reflecting in this way. Or over the extent to which our being reflective explains the presence of these prudential values on Griffin's list rather than others. There may be gap in Griffin's explanation here but surely any such theory is likely to be open-ended and tentative. These values satisfy our interests in the same manner that nutrition satisfies our interests (Griffin, 1996). Nutrition may be ingrained more in the animal nature, the values in our reflective (Griffin 1996), but all this forms the explanation of what we are and what is in our interests.

Griffin is concerned with whether prudential values are real of because this may have implications for their reliability. Can our judgements regarding these values be reliable or true? His attempt to expand naturalism would indicate the reliability of judgements concerning prudential value. Griffin, however, recognises that any such conclusions are provisional. He suggests his grounding prudential values in human nature indicates 'reasonable prospects of our being able to add some judgements about non-core prudential values to the list of especially reliable beliefs.' (Griffin, 1996: 66). Moreover, he goes on to say 'I speak merely of reasonable prospects, rather than of solidly bankable assets, because we have not got far with the necessary

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<sup>49</sup> Following Frankfurt (1988).

work' (Griffin, 1996: 66) urging us to 're-focus attention on the good life' (Griffin, 1996: 67).

The prudential values, central to Griffin's well-being meet our interests as reflective human beings. There is a concern here that Griffin's concept of well-being is insufficiently attentive to our animal nature or indeed to our physical form as human beings. Admittedly Griffin is proposing a fairly rough picture here but the picture of two distinct natures, one concerned with the biological and the other with the reflective, the latter grounding the values that make up our well-being, can be questioned. We are animals and this surely has implications for our well-being. Griffin is anxious that the prudential values are considered in terms of their impact upon a human life, but fails to recognise that a human life is that of an animal. A plausible conception of well-being must understand how our animality impacts upon that concept, not just through the contemplation of biology and nutrition, but recognising that all those values we pursue, indeed all we do, we do as embodied human beings.<sup>50</sup>

#### **4.8 The boundaries of a theory of well-being: The experience requirement**

The experience requirement contends that in order for something to enhance well-being it must be experienced. Griffin's position is that the satisfaction of informed desires need not enter into the experience of the individual in order to increase well-being. This is an important aspect of Griffin's theory because it clearly distances the account from those mental state theories that locate well-being 'on the inside.' What exactly is meant by something entering into my experience is not entirely straightforward. It does not mean, according to Griffin, that something is experienced as a mental state. Consider Griffin's test definition of enjoyment, used to assess whether the concept represents an adequate account of well-being. Enjoyment is defined as 'not anything so narrow as experiencing a single mental state, or one of a range of states' (Griffin, 1986: 18) but within the same definition it

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<sup>50</sup> The critical point is central to my eventual rejection of Griffin's account as an adequate theory of well-being, and will be developed in chapter six.



is stipulated that ‘all the objects of enjoyment fall within our experience’ (ibid.). Sumner (1996) perhaps offers a more straightforward definition of the experience requirement, equating experience of something with awareness of it. Sumner argues that something has the potential to increase my well-being if I am aware of it, if I am not aware of it, this potential is lost.

Griffin rejects the idea that something needs to enter into my experience in this way for it to enhance well-being. I need not be aware of something in order for it to have an impact upon my life. In explaining why enjoyment does not offer an adequate account of well-being we get an indication as to why:

My truly having close and authentic personal relations is not the kind of thing that can enter my experience; all that can enter is what is common to both my truly having such relations and my merely believing that I do.

(Griffin, 1986: 19).

The difference between authentic friendships, and ones in which I am deceived or deluded, is significant to well-being but does not enter my experience. Griffin is concerned that the experience requirement, as it stands in this particular conceptualisation of enjoyment as well-being, brings us too close to a mental state account. There is little emphasis on the value itself (in this case authentic relationships). Conceptualising well-being as enjoyment and suggesting that enjoyment needs to enter into your experience does not distinguish between the well-being of someone who has authentic friendships and someone who is deluded by those around her into thinking that they are her friends. Both of these instances are *experienced* in the same way. Griffin wants to conclude that actually having authentic relationships would lead to greater well-being than merely being deluded into thinking so. An experience requirement does not allow primacy to this value.

The focus on the experience appears to ‘distort’ (Griffin 1986: 19) the value, precisely what Griffin aims to avoid. Take accomplishment, ‘If I want to accomplish something with my life it is not that I want to have a *sense* of accomplishment’ (Griffin, 1986: 19), states Griffin. The enjoyment account offered above would offer

no means of distinguishing between someone who is aware of their accomplishment and someone who wrongly believes that they have accomplished. The crucial difference between these two does not enter in to the experience of the individual.

Sumner, (1996) however, has argued that an experience requirement can be employed successfully within a desire theory, without being susceptible to the same criticisms levelled above.

A state-of-mind theory treats veridical and illusory experiences which are phenomenologically indistinguishable as equally valuable. Adding an experience requirement to the desire theory has no such implication. Any version of a desire theory is a state-of-the-world theory, since the actual occurrence of a desired state of affairs is one necessary condition of the analysis. An experience requirement makes awareness of this occurrence a further necessary condition. In doing so it does not, and cannot, convert the theory into a mental state theory.

(Sumner, 1996: 127-8).

Sumner's point is that we would desire for example, to accomplish, but that we must be aware of this accomplishment in order for well-being to be enhanced. This incorporation of the experience requirement would not distort the value accomplishment. Our desire is for a state of the world; that I accomplish, not just for a sense of accomplishment. The desire for a state of the world differentiates between the alternatives of an authentic and non-authentic friendship in the same way. Authenticity does not enter my experience, I am not aware of the difference between someone who is deceiving me into thinking I am his friend and someone who is truly my friend. But the desire is for a state of the world, my having true friendship, not being deceived. Thus the desire is only satisfied by authenticity despite the alternatives entering into experience in the same way.

This is a difficult matter, and whilst Sumner's response does seem to have some plausibility, it certainly does not go to the heart of the matter. The experience requirement may not necessary entail returning to a mental state account of well-being. Griffin, however, is not just concerned with protecting against this, but with

the general point that we do not need to be aware of something in order to enhance our well-being.

If either I could accomplish something with my life but not know it, or believe that I had but not really have, I should prefer the first. That would be, for me, the more valuable life.

(Griffin, 1986: 19)

Griffin (1986) does not just consider this to be the more valuable life, but the more prudentially valuable life. Griffin even extends the recognition that the enhancement of well-being does not necessitate awareness to include posthumous accomplishments, the ultimate example of something enhancing well-being without impacting upon experience. Griffin contends that something can enhance your well-being after your life has ended. 'But what we *have* done may not have fully worked itself or fully have emerged into the light of day until after our deaths' (Griffin, 2000: 284) This particularly difficult conclusion appears to have been fuelled by previous, less radical examples, arguing against the necessity of experience for well-being.

It is worth, however, making a short qualification here. These claims are not, perhaps, as strong as at first glance. Griffin, of course, does not stipulate a threshold level of well-being, neither does he consider well-being a substantive value that is achieved or not achieved. He refers only to more or less well-being. The claim is not that a flourishing life or a life of well-being does not require awareness of our accomplishments, or indeed of any other prudential value. Griffin is making a weaker claim that experience is not necessary for the enhancement of well-being. This claim is compatible with an argument that experience of a prudential value would *further* enhance well-being. Indeed the better life for the person would clearly be that in which the values are experienced and enjoyed.

Having criticised Griffin in previous instances for diminishing the critical power of his list, by the employment of an endorsement constraint, for example, I cannot level this criticism here. On the issue of experience Griffin stands staunchly by his list,

insisting that those items are of such value that they can improve our lives without impacting upon experience. He differs with Sumner (2000), on the issue of experience. Sumner acknowledges that improvement of a life from a perfectionist perspective may not necessitate experience, but rejects the idea that from a prudential perspective this can make us better off. This has lead Griffin to consider the possibility that the two philosophers are actually getting at different concepts, in developing their theories of well-being and welfare respectively.

Perhaps my list account and Sumner's own happiness account are not clear-cut competitors, but accounts of somewhat different things. Perhaps we are not clear precisely what either is meant to be an account of. The terms 'well-being', the 'prudential value of a life', 'the quality of life', and so on do not pick out a known subject about which we then turn out to agree or disagree. What we say about 'well-being' (and the rest) will partly fix the subject we think important to elucidate as well as offer an elucidation of it.

(Griffin, 2000: 284-5).

For Griffin experience is not necessary for well-being to be increased. He does, however, accept Sumner's (2000) contention that one cannot be 'made better off' after death. For Griffin the latter expression points to an experience that well-being does not. Others may seek to adjust the boundaries, suggesting 'the good life' is a term that would not necessitate experience, with well-being incorporating an experience requirement.<sup>51</sup> Of course, those accounts which reject the experience requirement are left with a very broad account of well-being, and as we have seen above (as in the case of the brother cured of a disease without my awareness) there are difficulties in trying to limit these boundaries.

Griffin seems to be saying that Sumner's concept of welfare might be an attempt to conceptualise something different to his well-being, something more tightly related to the subject's perspective. This is an excellent point. Brower (1998) questions Sumner's presumption that well-being must be from the subject's perspective, arguing this begs the question against objective theories. 'It seems an "open question" whether an individual's life could be going well even though he or she

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<sup>51</sup> I thank Steve Edwards for this observation.

does not have the “perspectival” view that it is going well.’ (Brower, 1998: 311). I too have indicated dissatisfaction with both Sumner’s tightly subjective definition, and with the subsequent sharp separation between perfectionist and prudential value. Griffin (1986) employs an endorsement constraint, allowing an undeserved authority to flawed desires and mistaken judgements, damaging the critical power of his list of prudential values. Well-being, as I understand the concept, need not be anchored in the subject’s perspective. It is quite feasible that well-being might be enhanced without endorsement of an attained value, or indeed awareness of its achievement. Griffin’s appreciation that achieving certain values would improve our lives even without our knowledge seems to at least restore some of the power to those values, after all considered to be the ends of life. I see nothing inconsistent, however, in acknowledging that the primacy of the values in this context must be balanced with a recognition that it is more desirable to both accomplish for example, and be aware of the significance of the accomplishment, deriving pleasure and satisfaction from it.

Sumner’s stark separation of prudential and perfectionist value, and his anchoring of the concept welfare within the subject’s perspective is evident in the development of his own account. Sumner employs a ‘justification requirement’ (Sumner, 2000: 17) to an account of happiness, as happiness may reflect a flawed perception of the world. Sumner is anxious, however, that this requirement is not so strong as to distance his concept from the perspective of the individual. He makes the familiar move of utilising ‘informed’ as a criteria for an individual’s judgement. The standard of informed, however, remains subjective. It is the extent to which further information would ‘make a difference to a subject’s affective response to her life, given her priorities’ (Sumner, 2000: 18). Nozick’s experience machine provides an example:

A subject who recognises the illusion, in retrospect, may respond by regretting having passed that period of her life floating in a tank or, alternatively, may embrace the experiences that were artificially induced for her (‘Too bad it wasn’t real, but it was a gas’). The extent to which the illusoriness of the experiences matters for an individual’s well-being therefore depends on the extent to which she decides (or would decide) to make it matter.

(Sumner, 2000: 18fn10).

This account is unable to question those decisions that are counter to the very essence of our being human. Nozick (1974) indicates how ‘plugging in’ leaves the person an ‘indeterminate blob’ (1974: 43) indeed not really a person at all. I would argue that it is nonsensical to talk of the individual’s well-being in this respect, and question Sumner’s suggestion that the extent to which we discount such experiences should be anchored in the subject’s own perspective. Plugging in is contrary to the core of our being human, someone floating in a tank, plugged into a machine is no longer living a life we would associate with a human being, and thus it makes no sense to talk of their well-being, regardless as to the subject’s endorsement of the machine. This conclusion, of course, rests upon an objective conception of well-being, in which certain values are understood as constitutive of both a human existence, and of our well-being. It is a conclusion unavailable within Sumner’s approach that takes for granted the subjectivity of well-being. The example does, however, serve to illustrate the uncomfortable conclusions associated with this subjectivity.

#### **4.9 Desires and well-being: which desires should count?**

Griffin’s (1986) concept of well-being is utilitarian at root. Recall that Griffin begins with the utilitarian notion of well-being ‘what it is for a single life to go well’ (Griffin, 1986: 7). Griffin’s approach, however, is designed to overcome some common criticisms of utilitarian theories of well-being. Partially stemming from his rejection of mental state theories of well-being, Griffin does accept that other regarding desires form a part of our well-being. We do not just want ‘pure states’ (Griffin, 1986: 24) for ourselves, a lot of what we want, and indeed our happiness, concerns the success and happiness of others. Griffin moves on though, and accepts more unpalatable desires as part of our utility. These include a ‘hater’s *schadenfreude*’ (Griffin, 1986: 25), described as a ‘slight’ pleasure (ibid). Irrational desires are not subject to across the board restriction either. ‘A misogynist might be put off his food by a woman’s sitting next to him in the Senior Common Room’ (Griffin, 1986: 25). Such desires, states Griffin should count. One may object to this

on moral grounds, Griffin though does not want to include all moral restrictions within his concept of utility.

So since irrational desires cannot be excluded wholesale, why not let them in, and if their fulfilment is sometimes morally intolerable, look to other moral matters besides utility to block it.

(Griffin, 1986: 25).

Irrational or morally flawed desires that may be accepted as contrary to the development of the individual from a perfectionist perspective, can still impact positively on well-being. One would think that Griffin's (1986) understanding of well-being in terms of the satisfaction of informed desires might provide a means of excluding irrational desires. Griffin, however, holds that such desires do count because 'there is a utilitarian value at stake.' (Griffin, 1986: 25). The utilitarian value referred to is the upset stemming from frustration of such desires. Griffin's allowing a utilitarian value to the upset of the misogynist at having to eat in the presence of women, can be extended to other cases. The frustration of many irrational desires might entail upset. The acceptance of irrational desires here, if not threatening to the notion of informed desire, certainly leaves an account of reduced force.

There are further examples of Griffin accepting less informed desires.

Acknowledging that normally someone with sadistic desires would be best served, in prudential terms, pursuing something better, he concedes, however, that 'Perhaps there is someone for whom sadistic kicks are all he has, who is incapable of better.' (Griffin, 1986: 26). For something to enhance well-being it need not meet Griffin's most stringent standards of informed, 'minimally informed' desires may suffice.

Thus for a satisfied desire to have some positive impact upon well-being, one must:

know enough about what one is getting to rule out one's ending up no better off or even worse off. But it does not have to be a fully informed desire, that is, one such that if one knew more one would not want anything different. Desires that are minimally informed will at least register on the positive scale.

(Griffin, 1986: 348 n19)

It is understandable that Griffin is keen to accept enhancements to well-being are possible without meeting the strongest of his requirements. After all it is unlikely that any of us understand fully what 'makes life go well' (Griffin, 1986: 13), and thus our desires are unlikely to be fully informed in Griffin's sense. The final sentence indicates that desires that are more informed will be further up the positive scale than those that are minimally informed. We may get minor utilitarian value from less informed desires, but a better life for the person would be one in which the focus was upon those values on the list, for significant relationships with others, for accomplishment. This may allay the fears expressed above that the accepting less informed desires reduces the critical powers of the theory. Informed desires remain central to the theory; well-being will always be better served through the pursuit of the prudential values, rather than by the satisfaction of irrational or morally dubious desires.

But are we happy with these pleasures and upsets registering on the positive scale at all? Those from an alternative standpoint could convincingly argue that Griffin's account must tighten its boundaries; that those irrational and immoral desires are to the detriment of the individual's well-being. Is the pleasure or upset of the misogynist contributive to well-being? Philosophers proposing Aristotelian conceptions of pleasure refuse to consider it in isolation, as an end in itself, but propose that it supervenes upon the activity with which it is associated (MacIntyre, 1971). Considering pleasure in these terms moves us to consider the activity itself, and perhaps question the value of the activity and thus of any associated pleasure. Annas illuminates the Aristotelian position, a more objective conception of pleasure:

For Aristotle, one cannot pursue pleasure regardless of the moral worth of the actions that are one's means to getting it. Rather it is the other way round: it is one's conception of the good life that determines what counts for one as being pleasant.

(Annas, 1980: 288).

This statement clearly rejects the hedonic position in which pleasure is considered an end apart from any conception of the good (Annas, 1980). Griffin does however, in line with the utilitarian roots of the theory, consider pleasure in isolation. For Griffin



the enjoyment of irrational or immoral activities is accepted, but not, it seems, as serving well-being to the extent of satisfied informed desires. Griffin is aware that we may have other reasons for criticising such desires, but feels that we need not incorporate such concerns within a concept of well-being.

Griffin, in his attempts to understand well-being, continually strives for a balance between the subjective and objective (although he would dislike the categorisation). This is reflected in his incorporation of pleasure, frustration or upset within utility, whatever their source. Enjoyment itself is incorporated on the list of prudential values without restriction. Certain such pleasures, however, may threaten other values on the list, accepting their ability to enhance well-being appears to limit the critical power of the account altogether. Pleasure in someone else's misfortune, a friend's perhaps, fuelled by jealousy, would threaten one's ability to achieve deep personal relationships. Do we want to accept such pleasures as even minimally impacting on the positive side of the scale? Loumidis and Wells (2001) speak of those undertaking exercise with seriously flawed perceptions their body. If the pleasure of the activity is attributable to the supposed impact upon the body, this does not seem to have any positive value for well-being at all. This criticism of course goes to the core of utilitarianism and the understanding of pleasure as an end in itself.

#### **4.10 Conclusion**

Griffin's rigorous examination of the concept of well-being proposes ways of overcoming problems inherent in radically subjective accounts. That we can be mistaken as to what is in our best interests and that we desire more than just pleasurable experiences. The list account offers an improvement upon these subjective accounts but Griffin appears concerned with the problems of moving toward an unqualified objective account. Any defensible theory of well-being must be sensitive to individual differences, to the entanglement of desire and reason, and to the plethora of ways in which we as human beings pursue the good life. This sensitivity, however, must be balanced with an account that does as it intends, and

remains capable of criticising those behaviours that threaten values at the core of well-being. Griffin offers an account that challenges certain dualisms. He remains adamant that his account does not leave his prudential values dependent upon one person's desires. The subtle explanation of the role of desire in explaining prudential value is compatible with this stance. His employment of an endorsement constraint in *Well-Being*, however, as well the flexibility of the theory to account for instances in which a value may not enhance the life of an individual, threaten the critical powers of his list. Within Griffin's theory such values are neither necessary nor sufficient for well-being (Moore, 2000).

Griffin's theory grounds the prudential values in our reflective human nature, but fails to adequately address how our embodiment, our being animal human beings, also impacts upon a conception of well-being. Griffin has proposed a list of prudential values but not paid enough attention to how we as embodied human beings pursue and realise such values. We are not just vessels for prudential values, we can only accomplish, be autonomous, enjoy things, engage in relationships in a human way. Our animal nature also shapes these prudential values and how we realise them.

## Chapter Five

### NUSSBAUM'S CAPABILITIES APPROACH

#### 5.1 Introduction

Theories of well-being (and indeed health) from a number of disciplines have been the subject of philosophical critique. The subjective theories of well-being and quality of life prominent within the psychological research were criticised and argued to be inadequate on a number of grounds, not least their inability to account for the possibility that we can be mistaken in our judgements of well-being.

Griffin contends that an informed desire theory of well-being, one that attempts to account for those mistaken judgements fatal to actual desire theories, must eventually progress to a list theory.<sup>52</sup> His original proposal, however, employs an endorsement constraint and thus (Griffin, 1986) can still be criticised for affording too much respect to potentially flawed subjective judgements. Griffin has since distanced himself from a desire theory of well-being, with the endorsement constraint notably absent. Thus more recent versions of the account appear closer to the list theory that Griffin himself labels it, and that I favour. Griffin's account, including more recent versions, however, offer a conception of human nature in which the rational is elevated over the animal. This grounding of the prudential values in our reflective nature is no doubt connected to understanding health as a mere means to well-being.

I have argued throughout, with the use of examples from the sports and exercise arena, that well-being can be enhanced in the absence of desire and other favourable attitudes. We may not endorse the enhanced capability with which exercise might be associated. Indeed, we may take our improved capacity to move around for granted. Yet we can still understand such a benefit of exercise to have improved our well-being. This approach, however, is not dismissive of the importance of enjoying our

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<sup>52</sup> See Griffin (2000) 'Replies.'

life, having a positive attitude toward our achievements and experiencing pleasure. It is compatible with the contention that endorsing the achievement of those values central to our well-being, enjoying them, further enhances well-being. It seems likely that an otherwise objective theory must stipulate a certain level of subjective satisfaction. A life that includes objective values, but without enjoyment, pleasure, or the individual endorsing these goods would not reach a threshold level that we would generally associate with well-being. It would, however, be better than a life without such goods, or a life in which one merely was deluded into thinking that certain goods had been achieved.

Martha Nussbaum, in defending her own list of central capabilities, also proposes a list account. Those capabilities and functionings on the list are used to criticise preferences that reflect adaptation to deprived circumstances. Nussbaum argues that a list is essential in this process, that such criticism is only possible through reference to a substantive theory that offers insight on those aspects central to a human life (Nussbaum, 2000a).

I certainly concur with this progression toward a list theory of well-being that takes a clear stance on those matters central to human life. There is, however, a great deal of philosophical terrain to be covered in assessing the defensibility of such theories. The previous chapter described Griffin's theory; illustrated its advantages over previous theories discussed, and was subject to some initial criticism. I will follow a similar pattern here, deferring more substantial and methodical criticism until the following chapter that entails a critical comparison of the two theories.

This critique of theories of well-being, however, should not be understood as progressing to a definitive or objective account in the sense that we would have reached our final destination. Prudential knowledge may be as such that we will never reach a final answer (indeed this statement seems applicable to all knowledge). Both Griffin and Nussbaum seek to provide initial conceptions, prompting further reflection and deliberation. My own conclusions could be understood as the beginnings of a process that strives for the sort of objectivity Putnam discusses the

warranted assertibility feasible after extensive criticism. The conclusions of this thesis are best understood as part of the reflection and criticism that Nussbaum and Griffin seek to initiate, rather than claiming objectivity that would require reflection and criticism beyond that offered here.

An indication of the content of these conclusions may enable a clearer understanding of the following chapters. Ultimately, after the comparison and criticism of both Griffin and Nussbaum's accounts it is argued that the latter offers a theory sufficiently attentive to both the reflective and animal aspects of our human nature. Griffin is not oblivious to the implications of our being human for those prudential values on his list, but Nussbaum is more attentive to how our embodiment shapes the kind of life we as human beings can lead.

## **5.2 Nussbaum's capabilities approach: a description**

The capabilities approach, a method of conceptualising quality of life and ultimately assessing human development, represents a confluence of economic and political thought (Jayawardena, 1995). Capabilities refer to what people are able to 'do or be in leading a life' (Sen, 1993: 31), as opposed to their levels of satisfaction, or the resources they have at their disposal. Subjective ratings of satisfaction, as we have seen, are a flawed indicator as to how well a life is going.

Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum have been at the forefront in the development and application of the capabilities approach. Nussbaum differs from Sen in stipulating a list of those capabilities deemed to represent 'what all citizens are entitled to by virtue of being human' (Nussbaum, 2000a: 33). The reference to 'entitlements' demonstrates Nussbaum's primary concern with justice, not with the defence of a comprehensive theory of human flourishing. As we shall see, however, in deciding upon these entitlements Nussbaum probes questions relevant to our prime concern with well-being. Nussbaum spends considerable time justifying her list of 'Central Human Functional Capabilities' (Nussbaum, 2000a: 78), capabilities 'of central importance in any human life'. (Nussbaum, 2000a: 74). The list is not

dissimilar to other list theories of well-being, indeed the similarities with Griffin's list are noted in the following chapter.

An important distinction, made by both Sen and Nussbaum, is that between capability and functioning. Sen describes this distinction in more formal terms:

Perhaps the most primitive notion in this approach concerns 'functionings'. *Functionings* represent parts of the state of a person – in particular the various things that he or she manages to do or be in leading a life. The *capability* of a person reflects the alternative combinations of functionings the person can achieve, and from which he or she can choose one collection.

(Sen, 1993: 31).

Functioning represents what we actually do, whereas capability refers to our opportunities to function. Nussbaum exemplifies the difference referring to health:

When we think of health, for example, we should distinguish between the capability or opportunity to be healthy and actual healthy functioning: a society might make the first available and also give individuals the freedom not to choose the relevant functioning.

(Nussbaum, 2000a: 14)

This distinction is important not least because the capabilities approach is intended for political application. One way of overcoming accusations of paternalism<sup>53</sup> levelled at such a theory is to argue that governments provide opportunities to function without insisting upon the actual functioning. The political goal in the most is capability not functioning.<sup>54</sup> Nussbaum, in fact, offers a primary and supporting reason for this strategy. The main reason for promoting capability rather than

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<sup>53</sup> Nussbaum (2000a, pp. 51-5) defends her theory against the *argument from paternalism*.

<sup>54</sup> Although Nussbaum acknowledges that in certain instances a government may be justified in insisting upon the functioning itself. See Nussbaum (2006a) pp. 172 'Only in the area of self-respect and dignity do I think that actual functioning is the appropriate aim of public policy. 'Political principles should treat all with respect, argues Nussbaum, not offer individuals the opportunity to be treated without such respect, in exchange for say, financial gain. (Nussbaum, 2006a). Nussbaum continues in saying that for children, functioning may be aimed at in more instances. 'Thus I have defended compulsory education, compulsory health care, and other aspects of compulsory functioning' (Nussbaum, 2006a: 172). This promotion of functioning is justified on the basis of 'the child's cognitive immaturity and by the importance of such functioning in enabling adult capabilities' (ibid.) Nussbaum also recognises how this may, in some instances, justify the promotion of functioning for those with severe mental impairments.

function is a ‘respect we have for people and their choices’ (Nussbaum, 2000a: 88). The supporting reason recognises that choice is an important constituent of certain functions, ‘Play is not play if it is enforced, love is not love if it is commanded.’ (Nussbaum, 2000a: 88).

The capabilities approach provides an alternative to crude measures of human development such as GDP that fail to account for how such wealth may be distributed, and fail to adequately establish the quality of life of those individuals for whom development initiatives are most crucial. Nussbaum is keen to retain an emphasis upon the individual. The ‘*principle of each person as an end*’, (Nussbaum 2000a: 56) maintains:

the food on A’s plate does not magically nourish the stomach of B; that the pleasure felt in C’s body does not make the pain experienced by D less painful; that the income generated by E’s economic activity does not help to feed and shelter F; in general, that one person’s exceeding happiness and liberty does not magically make another person happy or free.

(Nussbaum, 2000a: 56)

Contrary to the aggregation strategies employed in utilitarian thinking, Nussbaum situates her stance ‘squarely within the liberal tradition’ (Nussbaum, 2006a: 216). The conception of the person Nussbaum employs draws extensively on Aristotle, although it remains Nussbaum’s intention that the list of central capabilities offers an opportunity for political consensus, as a ‘*freestanding moral idea*, not one that relies on a particular metaphysical or teleological view’ (Nussbaum, 2000a: 73). This Aristotelian conception of the person, along with claims that the approach stands alone from any metaphysical stance will be subject to scrutiny in the following.

### **5.3 Nussbaum’s ‘Central Human Functional Capabilities’ (Nussbaum, 2000a: 78-80).**

The list below represents those capabilities Nussbaum considers central to our quality of life. Further explanation of the capabilities has been added where necessary.

- 1) Life ‘not dying prematurely, or before one’s life is so reduced as to be not worth living’ (Nussbaum, 2000a: 78).
- 2) Bodily Health
- 3) Bodily Integrity – ‘Being able to move freely from place to place; having one’s bodily boundaries treated as sovereign.’ (Nussbaum, 2000a: 78)
- 4) Senses, Imagination and Thought ‘to imagine, think and reason – and to do these things in a “truly human” way, a way informed and cultivated by an adequate education, including, but by no means limited to, literacy and basic mathematical and scientific training.’ (Nussbaum, 2000a: 78-9).
- 5) Emotions – here particular reference is made to attachments and their importance to the development of emotions (Nussbaum, 2000a).
- 6) Practical Reason ‘Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s life.’ (Nussbaum, 2000a: 79).
- 7) Affiliation including ‘the social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation’ (Nussbaum, 2000a: 79), illustrating Nussbaum’s concern with the ‘external conditions for the exercise of the function’ (Nussbaum, 2000a: 85). This reflects the practical and political emphasis of *Women and Human Development*. Governments cannot point to an innate or internal capability to affiliate as an indicator of quality of life, if a state does not facilitate such affiliation by ensuring policies that protect against discrimination, for example.
- 8) Other Species; concerns our relationship with nature.
- 9) Play
- 10) Control over one’s environment – both 1) Political and 2) Material – ‘Being able to hold property’ (Nussbaum, 2000a: 80).

The absence of a central capability may be so severe that a life cannot be described as human at all. Here Nussbaum refers to ‘severe forms of mental disability or senile dementia’ (Nussbaum, 2000a: 73). Nussbaum’s primary concern, however, is with a higher threshold, ‘the level at which a person’s capability becomes what Marx called “truly human,” that is, *worthy* of a human being.’ (Nussbaum, 2000a: 73). The



capabilities listed above, are, for Nussbaum, essential to the living of a fully, or truly human life (Nussbaum seems to use these terms interchangeably). Within this framework two capabilities in particular are thought to be especially important, they are said to ‘organize and suffuse all the others making their pursuit truly human.’ (Nussbaum, 2000a: 82).

In Marx’s example, a starving person doesn’t use food in a fully human way – by which I think he means a way infused by practical reasoning and sociability. He or she just grabs at the food in order to survive, and the many social and rational ingredients of human feeding can’t make their appearance. (Nussbaum, 2000a: 72)

The example above refers to both practical reason and affiliation. It is perhaps, however, easier to understand the organising role for practical reason. For Nussbaum being capable of practical reason is ‘Being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s life.’ (Nussbaum 2000a: 79). Planning one’s life itself seems very close to the organisation of the other goods within one’s life. Affiliation might be easier understood in terms of its suffusing, rather than organising the other goods, suggesting, for example that the fully human use of the senses or emotions, two of Nussbaum’s capabilities, will be in some way social.

The *principle of each person as an end* effectively serves as a critique of crude social measures of quality of life such as GDP. The approach also offers a strong critique of utilitarian thinking, questioning the focus on satisfaction as a basis for quality of life or well-being assessment. Nussbaum acknowledges that we might be interested in levels of satisfaction but questions theories within which it is dominant. First, Nussbaum observes, we may be satisfied having adapted our preferences to meet our circumstances. ‘Women and other deprived people frequently exhibit such “adaptive preferences,” formed under unjust background conditions.’ (Nussbaum, 2006a: 73). Nussbaum also considers the utilitarian focus on satisfaction as demonstrating a ‘deficient regard for agency.’ (Nussbaum, 2006a: 73). Nussbaum refers to Nozick’s

experience machine in arguing for the importance of ‘active striving’ (ibid.) not just levels of satisfaction.

Nussbaum’s capabilities approach is concerned with what people can be or do, rather than their utility or resources. She proposes a list of central capabilities and intends these capabilities to be universally applied. Policies should aim for citizens to have a threshold level of capability without exception. Without being capable in these central areas a life cannot be deemed fully human. In this sense Nussbaum likens her approach to that focusing upon human rights.<sup>55</sup>

The focus of this chapter, in keeping with the ultimate objective of addressing the contribution of exercise to well-being, will be upon Nussbaum’s approach to the related ideas of dignity, flourishing and the ‘truly human’ (Nussbaum, 2000a: 73). It should be recognised, however, that in putting forward a conception intended for political application, the shape of the capabilities approach reflects that purpose to a significant extent. It is intended as a ‘partial, not a comprehensive, conception of the good life, a moral conception selected for political purposes only.’ (Nussbaum, 2000a: 77). It will be shown however, that this mainly political focus, and partial conception, still offers real insight into human well-being.

This will be the objective of my first section, after which I will move to address Nussbaum’s list and the familiar problem objective theories face, how such a list is justified. Nussbaum’s justifies those items on her list as having a ‘political objectivity.’ She accepts that there are a range of conceptions of flourishing but attempts to provide a conception that can be endorsed by those holding different views on the constituents of a fully human life. Agreement on the constituents of a fully human life is not required, just agreement that those capabilities on the list be endorsed as important opportunities to be guaranteed to all, even if some do not actually value the associated functioning. This particular type of objectivity and the implications of its use for the theory will be addressed. Finally I move on to consider the role of human nature in Nussbaum’s capabilities approach. I aim to critique

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<sup>55</sup> See Nussbaum (2006a) pp. 78.

Nussbaum's capabilities approach, addressing both its limitations and where it offers opportunities for progress in the debate as to what best reflects our well-being. The two chapters describing and criticising the theories of both Nussbaum and Griffin are essential to chapter six, the comparison of the two theories. This comparison is intended to enable progression toward a defensible theory of well-being within which the value of exercise can be assessed. It is only after proper extensive debate upon well-being and its constituents that we can begin to consider the role of physical activity.

#### **5.4 Dignity, the good and justice: Nussbaum's approach and its relevance to well-being**

Nussbaum does not intend to provide a comprehensive theory of human flourishing. Indeed Nussbaum refers extensively to concepts of dignity, justice and the social minimum. This section investigates the possibility of disregarding the approach as having limited relevance to my enterprise of exploring well-being and the role of exercise within our lives. Let us consider those aspects of Nussbaum's capabilities approach that seem distant from concerns with how well a life is going. This distance, it will be demonstrated, is somewhat illusory.

First, I consider Nussbaum's explicit refusal to conceptualise the whole of the prudential domain. Nussbaum does not stipulate one conception of flourishing for which we should all aim.

Insofar as a highly general idea of human flourishing and its possibilities does figure in the approach, it is not a single idea of flourishing, as in Aristotle's own normative theory, but rather an idea of a space for diverse possibilities of flourishing. The claim that is made by the use of this single list, then, is not that there is a single type of flourishing for the human being, but, rather, that these capabilities can be agreed by reasonable citizens to be important perquisites of reasonable conceptions of human flourishing

(Nussbaum, 2006a: 182).

Nussbaum, in aspiring to a universally applicable approach, recognises that we can flourish in many ways. A focus upon certain central capabilities, opportunities to function in valuable ways, is one way in which plural specifications of the good life might be realised. There will be many valuable functionings that correspond to a capability. The capability play for example, allows for a wide range of ways of playing. The capabilities provide a space for functionings, and it is indeed functionings that Nussbaum considers to get closer to what makes a life fully human:

It is perfectly true that functionings, not simply capabilities, are what render a life fully human, in the sense that if there were no functioning of any kind in a life, we could hardly applaud it, no matter what opportunities it contained. Nonetheless, for political purposes it is appropriate that we shoot for capabilities, and those alone.

(Nussbaum, 2000a: 87)

Nussbaum's list of capabilities, encourages provision for the space to flourish, it does not stipulate the specific ingredients of a flourishing life. Any objective theory would need to recognise how we can pursue values in many ways. Nussbaum's approach has a greater distance from flourishing, or the domain of prudential value, because its list only insists on our being free to pursue those functionings that make a life fully human. It retains clear relevance to our concern with flourishing or well-being, however, because it is pretty straightforward to discern functionings related to those capabilities on the list. There is also the further question as to whether the opportunity to function, capability, has a role in well-being itself. It is to this question I now turn.

### **5.5 Why Capabilities over functionings: human flourishing or facilitating political agreement?**

Nussbaum indicates that her approach suggests prerequisites for flourishing (Nussbaum, 2006a) rather than attempting to stipulate flourishing itself. Nussbaum (2000a) has also referred to her approach as offering the nature and contents of a partial theory of justice, concerned as it is with those capabilities governments are obligated to ensure its citizens can achieve. A focus upon capability rather than

functioning eases political implementation, but the relevance of capability to well-being has not gone unnoticed by philosophers such as Sen, Putnam, and indeed Nussbaum.

The reasons offered by Nussbaum for the primacy of capability have been described above. To recap, the main reason is ‘the respect we have for people and their choices’ (Nussbaum 2000a: 88). A supporting argument being that certain functionings would not retain their central characteristics if this element of choice were removed. Prior to providing these two reasons, Nussbaum suggests the promotion of capability is best understood when we consider the centrality of practical reason ‘as a good that both suffuses all the other functions, making them human rather than animal.’ (Nussbaum 2000a: 87).

There seems to be room here for the justification of the promotion of capability for reasons related to human well-being. We must promote capability to promote the use of practical reason. Putnam (2003) in defending a more comprehensive conception of the capabilities approach works along these lines:

However, to say that functionings connected with the capacities on Nussbaum’s list are each and everyone important and valuable for vast numbers of people is not to deny that each person must have the right to choose which ones to exercise or not to exercise. This too I would defend *not* by arguing that we need a ‘political conception’ on which we can get an ‘overlapping consensus’ of the voters, but by saying that, in the democratic conception of human flourishing, autonomy is a central – in many respects, *the* central – value (Putnam, 1989: 46-9). At least from the time of Kant, liberal conceptions – *comprehensive* liberal conceptions – have defended the right of individuals to make choices, including choices that are mistaken from the point of view of those conceptions themselves, not as a grudging concession to political realities, but as something essential to our collective life conceived of as a venture in learning.

(Putnam, 2003: 404).

Of course, as an aside, these issues of ‘freedom’, ‘choice’ and ‘autonomy’ are conceptually complex themselves. On freedom, Nussbaum differs with Sen. Freedom for Nussbaum (2006b) is not a good in itself, and we must utilise a list of

capabilities in order to understand which freedoms warrant protection and promotion and which do not. Nussbaum argues that Sen's account understands freedom as a more general good, and that this may result in a distortion of an approach intended to help the least well-off. Protecting the freedom of the disadvantaged may require limiting other freedoms 'the freedom of big business to make large campaign contributions: the freedoms of industry to pollute the environment.' (Nussbaum, 2003: 417), ultimately saying that 'those freedoms are not good' (Nussbaum, 2003: 417).

Despite their agreement on the 'evaluative space' (Sen, 1993) of capabilities and functionings, I favour Nussbaum's employment of a list of capabilities deemed central to a fully human life over Sen's reluctance to articulate such a list. I concur with Nussbaum's stance on freedom and the corresponding conclusion that we require a *list* of capabilities central to the fully human life in order to successfully criticise adaptive preferences and behaviours that threaten aspects central to our humanity.

Nussbaum certainly defends the promotion of capability over functioning in terms of practical reason. Nevertheless one must be careful in elevating freedom and choice in isolation over the other values. Nussbaum instead advocates a normative notion of practical reason.

To some extent, the list avoids those problems of paternalism by insisting that the political goal is capability, not actual functioning, and by dwelling on the central importance of choice as a good. But the notion of choice and practical reason used in the list is a normative notion, emphasizing the critical activity of reason in a way that does not reflect the actual use of reason in many lives.

(Nussbaum, 2000a: 112).

Nussbaum (2000a) devotes a whole chapter to the critique of adaptive preferences, where those in the most deprived of circumstances put up with what they have got while thinking that they are living a good life. This suggests Nussbaum, is not a choice that should go unnoticed, but should be subject to criticism. Nussbaum's practical reason is informed by those other capabilities on the list.

The defence of capability-promotion (in Putnam's terms), in terms of autonomy, seems initially plausible when we consider Nussbaum's justification, and draws directly on what enables flourishing. It is of particular relevance to our concern with exercise and its contribution to well-being. This way we can see capability-promotion not as a concession to politics, ensuring some form of consensus between those who do not want to function in this way themselves, but as better serving our well-being. Understanding Nussbaum's theory in this way would reaffirm what I have already suggested. The theory demonstrates ample concern with issues of human flourishing and well-being, and this is not diminished through its political aims. We must note, however, that this is Putnam's defence of a more comprehensive capabilities approach, not Nussbaum's defence of her partial conception. For Nussbaum the issue is confused by her use of a normative notion of practical reason, through which certain choices can be criticised, if they threaten the capabilities. Nussbaum would be uncomfortable with any elevation of choice or freedom over those capabilities on her list.

Nussbaum's disinterest in the prudential implications of a failure to play despite having the capability to do so reflects the political leanings of the theory, rather than a stance on the importance of capability to well-being.

A person may prefer to work with an intense dedication that precludes recreation and play. Am I declaring, by my very use of the list, that such lives are not worthy of the dignity of the human being? And am I instructing government to nudge or push people into functioning of the requisite sort, no matter what they prefer?

It is important that the answer to this question is no. Where adult citizens are concerned, *capability, not functioning, is the appropriate political goal.*  
(Nussbaum, 2000a: 87).

It is quite difficult to fully evaluate this quotation. To which question is Nussbaum answering with a resounding 'No'? Whether we should push people into functioning, or whether a life neglecting play (by choice) is that of a dignified human being?

Keen to retain the political relevance of her conception, Nussbaum seems to verge between rejecting that the absence of the *function* ‘play’ diminishes a life and avoiding the issue altogether, sticking to the *for political purposes* line. Nussbaum’s decision not to enter into this debate cannot be founded solely in respect for choice and practical reason, and its importance to flourishing. The concept of practical reason Nussbaum uses is one tied to the goods on the list. Other choices have been criticised as neglecting certain central capabilities, why not the choice not to *function* in a certain way?

The answer, it seems, concerns the political application of the list. Putnam succinctly describes Rawls’s influence on Nussbaum, particularly relevant here:

I have heard Martha Nussbaum explain this point using the Rawlsian notion of a ‘political conception’, that is, a conception on which the ethical theorist hopes to get an ‘overlapping consensus’ from holders of very different standpoints – not a consensus on the *value* of all these capabilities, indeed, but a consensus on the desirability of a *democratic society*’s providing the means and prerequisites for the exercise of the corresponding functionings to all its members, even though some individuals and some groups of individuals (including some religious groups) will not wish to exercise them themselves and will not even value them in principle.

(Putnam, 2003: 403)

It seem more likely that the sort of consensus Nussbaum is after will be achieved through an emphasis on capability, governments should focus on opportunities to function, rather than the functioning itself. On Putnam’s reading, the focus on capability reflects the political leanings of Nussbaum’s approach. Putnam himself defends capability-promotion in more comprehensive terms. Nussbaum, in the above, offers reasons of a more political nature. In the following, however, Nussbaum does recognise that being capable is itself central to a fully human life. In demonstrating this I will trace Nussbaum’s argument in defending her list of capabilities and their relevance to those who do not endorse corresponding functions.

First let us consider an example of the sort of disagreements relevant to this topic:



Do we ask the Amish citizen to state that human flourishing and a life compatible with human dignity are not possible without the right to vote? This she may well not believe. Do we ask the ultraorthodox citizen to affirm that human flourishing and a life compatible with human dignity are not possible without free press?

(Nussbaum, 2006a: 183).

The distinction between capability and functioning is again central. The capabilities, Nussbaum contends are important to everyone, even those who do not endorse the corresponding function. ‘These people’ states Nussbaum, ‘have chosen to live in a pluralistic democracy and to show respect for its values’ (Nussbaum, 2006a: 184). Those who do not endorse the functionings, Nussbaum states, do not just put up with the corresponding capability:

The citizens in question may also believe that choice is good *for them*: to be a nonvoter in a nation that has no elections expresses nothing much about human values; to pursue nonreligion in a state that persecutes religion expresses nothing much about the values of the nonreligious person. If we place the accent firmly on capability rather than functioning, it is a not impossible reconstruction of their thinking to ascribe to them the thought that a dignified life for a human being requires these *capabilities* – which include, of course, the right not to use them.

(Nussbaum, 2006a: 185).

The universality of such options ensures an equality of capability, dismissing this equality in favour of, as Nussbaum puts it, ‘plural lists for plural conceptions’ (Nussbaum, 2006a: 185) would diminish the ‘social bases of self-respect’ (Nussbaum, 2006a: 185). If it was decided that I do not warrant the same opportunities as others because I do not endorse the same functionings, any equality, (and the respect for persons this entails) would be threatened. In this sense capability itself is important to ensuring a fully human life, a life with dignity. She writes:

There are, then, good reasons why the capabilities list is single, even though the conceptions of flourishing are plural. Nor does it seem that the appeal to a notion of the human causes difficulty for the type of pluralism that the approach is committed to respecting. We can accept without profound metaphysics the idea that human life has a characteristic shape and form, and that certain abilities, meaning certain spaces for choice, are generally agreed to

be very important to its success – even if for personal or religious reasons one will in some cases renounce the actual functioning in question.

(Nussbaum, 2006a: 186).

Nussbaum's capabilities are not only indicators of the functionings that make a life fully human, or are central to our well-being, but *capability itself* is important. A fully human life, Nussbaum seems to be saying, requires certain opportunities, even if those holding a different conception of the good do not endorse the corresponding functions. It is not just that the capabilities make space for the function, even if we do not function in this way, it is important to our lives that we have those same opportunities as others.<sup>56</sup> Being free to function in a valuable way, being capable, may be of direct relevance to well-being, not just indirectly through enabling central functions. In this way we can see those capabilities on Nussbaum's list as important to concepts such as well-being. Indeed Sen indicates that 'Acting freely and being able to choose may be directly conducive to well-being, not just because more freedom may make better alternatives available'. (Sen, 1993: 39). Nussbaum has indicated that for certain functionings, for example love and play, choice is constitutive. Neither functioning can be forced and retain its form, they must be voluntarily entered into. Well-being would also be better served, Sen (1993) has argued, if one remains free to choose, rather than just being guaranteed the functioning by 'the actions of others' (Sen, 1993: 44). These interpretations of the relationship between capability and well-being further reinforce conclusions that Nussbaum's account, and its emphasis on capability, remains directly relevant to my ultimate concern with well-being.

I have already noted Nussbaum's criticism of Sen for failing to stipulate those freedoms, or capabilities that are of value and those that are not. Nussbaum's contention that only certain freedoms warrant political protection also has relevance to well-being. Just being free to choose from a range of options will not necessarily

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<sup>56</sup> Nussbaum is also keen to point out that it is not just equality that is important here 'for I think it is fair to say that they value not just any old sameness, but *this* sameness. That is, these citizens would not consider themselves as well off in a benevolent dictatorship that denied all people the right to vote. They have chosen to affirm the public culture as more than a convenient *modus vivendi*: so it is not after all so implausible to say that they hold that these capabilities are prerequisites of a decent human life in a political community.' (Nussbaum, 2006a: 186).

enhance well-being. Within that range of choices there may be a number of insignificant options of no value. I argue that it is the freedom to achieve valuable functionings that is important to our well-being. We understand which functionings are valuable not through consulting subjective preferences, because of the potential flaws in this process, but by consulting an objective list such as that proposed by Nussbaum.

The above suggests that capability is important to our well-being in a number of ways. First, capability is constitutive of certain functionings. Play and love, the examples offered by Nussbaum, both by definition require freedom of choice, we cannot be forced into either. Second, to deny someone, or entire sections of the community, capability, on the grounds that they do not endorse the functioning fails to treat everyone with equal respect. Better to afford everyone the respect that allows them to pursue their own conception of flourishing having been guaranteed the same opportunities as others. Even this argument, for how universal capabilities ensure a respect central to a fully human life does not quite exhaust why capability itself might be important to someone who does not endorse the corresponding function. Nussbaum suggests that such individuals do not ignore the importance of such a capability to their own life, but that the person affirms a culture within which such capabilities are deemed prerequisites of a good human life. Thus the individual recognises that in order to flourish within the society in which we live, we must be afforded such capabilities, even if we do not use them. They value the choice to live a certain way, and would not value to the same extent a community that was equal in the sense that it offered no choice at all. Finally, and more generally, our being free to choose from a range of valuable options makes a contribution to our well-being independent of the resulting valuable functioning.

## **5.6 The capabilities approach and basic needs approaches to quality of life and well-being: a comparison**

Nussbaum's focus on capability, however, is not the only facet of the approach that requires further analysis to illuminate the continued relevance to well-being. How do

we reconcile this continued relevance with Nussbaum's commitment to establishing a 'social minimum?'

I shall argue that the best approach to this idea of a basic social minimum is provided by an approach that focuses on *human capabilities*, that is, what people are actually able to do and be – in a way informed by an intuitive idea of a life that is worthy of the dignity of the human being. I shall identify a list of *central human capabilities*, setting them in the context of a type of *political liberalism* that makes them specifically political goals and presents them in a manner free of any specific metaphysical grounding. In this way, I argue, the capabilities can be the object of an *overlapping consensus* among people who otherwise have very different comprehensive conceptions of the good.

(Nussbaum, 2000a: 5).

Nussbaum here refers to the capabilities approach as the best way to understand a social minimum, the similarity of the approach to basic needs accounts has been recognised by Ian Gough (2003). The idea of a social minimum seems some way from human flourishing, yet Nussbaum seems to refer to both. Gough considers her overall concern to be with the former:

Thus, on the one hand, Nussbaum continually speaks of 'a fully human life', of 'a life truly worthy of a human being'. On the other hand, she identifies a lower threshold level of capability, a basic social minimum which should be secured for all citizens (WHD 73, 75). Much of the detailed argument focuses upon this minimum rather than on a comprehensive list of human flourishing.<sup>57</sup>

(Gough, 2003: 17).

It is easy to emphasise Nussbaum's intention to provide a threshold for a certain minimum level of life. Some of those items on the list may be taken for granted by many of us in a more fortunate, secure position, as necessary for any sort of life, rather than relating to ideas of flourishing or well-being. Nussbaum's list, is however, intended to be universal, and it would be an oversight to ignore capabilities that for example refer to education, freedom of expression, and bodily integrity, because they seem to relate to a minimum that some are fortunate enough to have exceeded.

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<sup>57</sup> Gough is, as the abbreviation indicates referring to Nussbaum's *Women and Human Development*.

The contention that Nussbaum's concerns are with a minimum that has little relevance to the well-being of those in more developed economies is an oversight. Nussbaum (2006a) has pointed out that a satisfactory level of capability has not been achieved for all citizens in any nation. An examination of the items on Nussbaum's list also demonstrates a convergence with other theories such of well-being.<sup>58</sup> Nussbaum has items on her list such as play, affiliation, self-expression and pleasurable experiences (the latter two under Senses, Imagination and thought). A life with opportunities of this sort certainly seems relevant to our living flourishing lives.

Finally, I move on to discuss the possibility that Nussbaum's capabilities are better considered a reflection of human dignity rather than the human good. The quick response is that it is impossible to disentangle these concepts. Dignity is indeed central to Nussbaum's capabilities approach:

The capabilities are not understood as instrumental to a life with human dignity: they are understood, instead, as ways of realizing a life with human dignity, in the different areas of life with which human beings typically engage. The guiding idea behind the list is to move through these different areas (life, health and so on) and to ask, in each of these areas in which we live and act, what would be a way of being able to live and act that is minimally compatible with human dignity. Dignity is not defined prior to and independently of the capabilities, but in a way intertwined with them and their definition.

(Nussbaum, 2006a: 161-2).

A life with dignity for Nussbaum represents a life worthy of the human being.<sup>59</sup> Nussbaum's capabilities approach is intended to capture just that, what it is for a life to be fully human. In her writing, Nussbaum moves very easily between the terms 'dignity' and the 'fully' or 'truly human.' There is no significant conceptual loss in this; a good or dignified life is a good or dignified life of the human kind, a life worthy of the human being. Defensible concepts of well-being must also draw upon

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<sup>58</sup> See the following chapter and comparison of Griffin and Nussbaum's lists.

<sup>59</sup> 'The basic intuitive idea of my version of the capabilities approach is that we begin with a conception of the dignity of the human being, and of a life that is worthy of that dignity – a life that has available in it "truly human functioning," in the sense described by Marx in his 1844 *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*.' (Nussbaum, 2006a: 74).

ideas of the fully human; well-being concerns our potential as human beings. After all, as Nussbaum indicates we have no choice but to attempt to flourish as human beings.<sup>60</sup>

Nussbaum, we must acknowledge, is concerned with a minimum below which a life cannot be conceived as having the dignity worthy of a human being, or below which a life cannot be deemed fully human. This however, need not be interpreted as a limitation of Nussbaum's account. First, Nussbaum does not aim to include within her conception all that is of value in a life. Nevertheless, those capabilities necessary for a life with dignity, or for a life to be fully human will also be necessary for a threshold level of well-being; we cannot achieve this without dignity, or with anything less than the fully human use of our capabilities. Nussbaum may well be more concerned with ensuring a threshold level of capability for all, a minimum level of which dropping below it is construed as a tragedy. It could be suggested however, that those values and capabilities central to such a minimum encompass more of the prudential domain that Nussbaum herself recognises. The similarity with Griffin's list noted in the following chapter would certainly indicate this. Indeed when we consider a list such as Nussbaum's it is difficult to stipulate other capabilities and values that we would need in our lives to push well-being beyond the 'fully human' threshold. Having exceeded a threshold level of well-being, it may help if we spend more time with friends and family, or have greater opportunities to express ourselves in work. I am unsure, however, that a direct concern with well-being rather than a more minimal threshold would result in a different conception altogether.

Nussbaum's capabilities approach is not really designed to assess individual lives, as Wolf (1995) has observed. The approach is intended to conceptualise the entitlements of human beings, suggesting that a life worthy of a human requires a certain level of those central capabilities stipulated. I have indicated, however, convergence with more comprehensive theories of well-being, and described how

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<sup>60</sup> Nussbaum makes this point in arguing against the employment of a separate list of capabilities for those with severe mental impairments. (See Nussbaum, 2006a pp. 186-95).

Nussbaum's focus on capability can be understood as more than just a concession to political considerations, when we consider how being capable itself may impact upon well-being. Nussbaum herself has recognised how capability may be important in this respect; as has another major proponent of the capabilities approach, Amartya Sen. In light of this I contend that Nussbaum's approach, rather than being confined to issues concerning a social minimum offers important insights into the well-being of human beings.

### 5.7 Nussbaum's Political Objectivity

Nussbaum, in aspiring to universalism, is conscious of the grounds upon which her conception is defended. Defence of the theory is based upon political objectivity, rather than relying upon potentially divisive metaphysical ideas.<sup>61</sup> Nussbaum's approach, however, is still founded in intuitions regarding the fully human and has some way to go to achieving the political objectivity she speaks of. The distance from political objectivity need not trouble us in our main enterprise of ascertaining the contribution of physical activity to well-being. A convincing picture of human well-being may be discerned from Nussbaum's approach, a picture 'objective' in a different sense altogether.<sup>62</sup>

Nussbaum's account, intended for political application, seeks to recognise the conflict and disagreement surrounding metaphysical matters today, and is thus anxious that politics is not based upon a potentially divisive metaphysical standpoint.

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<sup>61</sup> Rawls' (1985) 'Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical' addresses in depth how a justification of political principles might seek to avoid potentially divisive metaphysical foundations.

<sup>62</sup> Nussbaum offers an explanation of these different senses of objectivity in 'Political Objectivity' (Nussbaum 2001). She actually favours Putnam's internalist approach to objectivity, (see pp. 886) stating that 'we do have available to us a quite robust conception of objectivity both in science and in ethics' (Nussbaum 2001: 886), but does not seek to justify her capabilities approach in this fashion, aiming for a more political objectivity, as we shall see. As I begin to contemplate the capabilities approach as a framework within which to understand the value of physical activity I suggest that a defence of the capabilities approach as objective in Putnam's terms is available to us, and indeed not ruled out by Nussbaum. This seems more in line with my ultimate concern with the role of physical activity in well-being.

we ought not to build our fundamental political principles around a particular contested conception of objectivity, for example Allen Wood's conception, or the conception of self-evident truth used in the U.S Declaration of Independence. On the other hand, we are not entirely at a loss: for we can articulate and defend a specifically political conception of objectivity that can itself be the object of an overlapping consensus among comprehensive doctrines.

(Nussbaum, 2001: 887).

This Rawlsian notion of political objectivity is that advocated by Nussbaum. O'Neil (1996) describes how Rawls responded to claims that his conception of the person, and hence his theory of justice relied upon metaphysical assumptions by emphasising that the basis of such principles are founded in liberal democratic society, they are justified politically, not in metaphysical terms. Nussbaum's '*freestanding moral idea*, not one that relies on a particular metaphysical or teleological view' (Nussbaum, 2000a: 83), endorses this political justification, although it strives for application beyond the bounds of liberal societies.<sup>63</sup> This viewpoint does not claim that there is no objective truth to be got at on such matters, there is no affirmation of relativity here. Indeed, as Nussbaum points out, asserting relativity would certainly alienate many who believe they have arrived at an objective truth, in denying that one exists. Instead, this liberal stance accepts disagreement and attempts to produce a conception that would be endorsed by those of conflicting views on the basis that 'it protects spaces in which they, like everyone else, can live by what they hold deepest and most important.' (Nussbaum, 2001: 892). The distinction between capability and functioning is again at the forefront here. Nussbaum (2006a) considers those central capabilities to be endorsed, not just put up with by those who would not endorse the corresponding functioning (Nussbaum, 2006a). Nussbaum's capabilities are intended as political principles, justifiable without reliance on contested theories of value or indeed human nature.

Of course, Nussbaum still needs to justify those political principles she puts forward. The principles need to be respected as 'principles reasonable for all' (Nussbaum, 2001: 894) and not just the 'putting forward of our own opinion' (Nussbaum, 2001:

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<sup>63</sup> This extension is questioned by Kamtekar (2002), a point discussed in the following.



894). Rawls (1993) in *Political Liberalism* defends criteria for a form of political objectivity, comprising of five main 'requirements' (Nussbaum, 2001: 895).

These five elements – a public framework of judgement, an account of correctness in judgment, a ranking of ordering of reasons, a distinction between the merely local or personal and the politically objective, and finally, an account of reasoning toward agreement – are necessary and sufficient, Rawls believes, for a conception of political objectivity. These five elements in place we are able to distinguish mistaken from correct political claims; to distinguish sincere but misguided recommendations from genuinely reasonable recommendations, and so forth.

(Nussbaum, 2001: 895-96).

In her paper 'Political Objectivity' (Nussbaum, 2001) Nussbaum refers to *Women and Human Development* and its attempts to 'follow Rawls' (Nussbaum, 2001: 901) in detaching itself from metaphysical views. The list of central capabilities is described thus:

The list represents the result of years of cross-cultural discussion, and comparisons between earlier and later versions will show that the input of other voices has shaped its content in many ways. Thus it already represents what it proposes: a type of *overlapping consensus* on the part of people with otherwise very different views of human life.

(Nussbaum, 2000a: 76)

This notion of consensus again draws on Rawls's *Political Liberalism*, as Nussbaum recognises. There have, however, been questions raised about the extent to which the work represents a genuine consensus.

More importantly, Nussbaum has not in practice utilised the method she advocates. She has made some revisions to her earlier approach in response to discussions in India, the work of Martha Chen (1986) and other writers. However, this does not amount to systematically confronting her conception of the good with the values and experiences of the poor, as Clark (2003), for example, attempts to do in his study of South Africa.

(Gough, 2003: 16)

Kamtekar (2002) provides a more detailed critique of Nussbaum's apparent consensus, suggesting she has over stretched the notion.

Rawls himself is very restrictive about the content and scope of the overlapping consensus: with respect to content, the consensus is about political justice, and is derived from a consensus on the political conception of persons as free and equal, reasonable and rational; with respect to scope, the consensus is among (representatives of) the many conflicting but reasonable comprehensive doctrines that exist in a modern western industrialized democratic society. For these societies already have a well-established liberal political culture (not itself the result of moral argument alone) in which persons are conceived, for political purposes, as free, equal, reasonable and rational.

(Kamtekar, 2002: 264)

Nussbaum, as Kamtekar points out, extends the content of the consensus to that of the capabilities, and its scope to something truly universal, rather than that confined to western democratic society. Kamtekar also shows that ‘consensus on the value of a capability is not necessary for it to be on the list’ (2002: 265), referring to the disagreement Nussbaum acknowledges on the importance of the ‘Other Species’ capability. Kamtekar’s overall argument seems to be that an overlapping consensus of the sort Nussbaum puts forward is unlikely; disagreement is likely to prevail on these issues of the good, and even in this age of globalisation any agreement is likely to be upon more minimal criteria (Kamtekar, 2002).

Nussbaum draws on Rawls’ *Political Liberalism* in justifying her conception in terms of political objectivity and aiming for a consensus. This aims to distinguish her theory from other notable theories of flourishing, well-being or quality of life that may have more contested foundations and offer a list based on particular metaphysical view. Of course Nussbaum’s theory is a proposal for further discussion,<sup>64</sup> any consensus, if achievable at all, would be some way off. Important questions have, however, been raised about whether Nussbaum is aiming a bit too high, in hoping for a more expansive consensus than Rawls (Kamtekar, 2002). I will not address these questions further, as this would entail a detailed critique of the

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<sup>64</sup> ‘Since the intuitive conception of human functioning and capability demands continued reflection and testing against our intuitions, we should view any given version of the list as a proposal put forward in a Socratic fashion, to be tested against the most secure of our intuitions as we attempt to arrive at a type of reflective equilibrium for political purposes.’ (Nussbaum 2000a: 77).

concept of political objectivity itself beyond the bounds of this thesis. My concern here is whether Nussbaum can advance our knowledge of well-being further.

## **5.8 Nussbaum's capabilities approach and intuitions of the fully human life**

Nussbaum's conception is better understood in terms of initiating discussion across cultural boundaries, rather than the result of such discussion. The cross cultural discussion that has taken place has provided Nussbaum with further insights into the good life but the optimism behind the capabilities approach as an apparent framework for consensus seems to be based on intuitions as to what constitutes a fully human life. Indeed, Nussbaum herself acknowledges the major justification of her conception:

I shall argue that this fact about the how the list has evolved helps to justify it in an ancillary way, although the primary weight of justification remains with the intuitive conception of truly human functioning and what that entails.  
(Nussbaum, 2000a: 76).

The basis of the inquiry is formed by intuitions regarding what makes us human, and what defines a fully human life. Ideas on these matters are put forward for further reflection and hopefully some form of consensus.

Nonetheless, I do hold out some hope that a much more modest and realistic goal can be achieved by appeal to the concept of the human being: namely, that of setting forth a very basic level of ethical judgement about ourselves that is likely to lie deeper and to command a broader consensus than do many of the troublesome questions we are actually discussing. In other words, to put matters in Rawlsian language, we are trying to get clear about some of the "provisional fixed points" in our judgements, before testing the theories we examine against them.

(Nussbaum, 2000b: 120).

The optimism regarding the potential for cross cultural consensus is likely to be influenced by Nussbaum's view that there is 'a deep and broad consensus on the concept of the person as Aristotle articulates it.' (Nussbaum, 2000b: 121).

Nussbaum's ideas about what it is to be fully human play a substantial role in the development of the conception. Nussbaum, it seems, considers these intuitions regarding the person to be widely shared, and therefore not potentially alienating, but providing a sound basis for potential consensus. Kamtekar (2002) disagrees, questioning this level of optimism. The extent to which these basic intuitions may inhibit the political objectivity of the conception depends largely upon the content of the intuitions and any potential controversies surrounding them. Any difficulties with the idea of the human that underpins the proposal would also go to the heart of the suitability of Nussbaum's capabilities approach for our purposes. The political objectivity of the conception is secondary; my ultimate concern is with exercise and its contribution to well-being. If, however, the idea of the human proposed by Nussbaum is not convincing, the picture of the fully human life proposed will not only be unsuitable for political purposes but for any analysis of the contribution of exercise to a life. We will begin the analysis of Nussbaum's concept of the human and its implications here. This discussion will be extended in the subsequent comparison with Griffin, more directly concerned with the strength of the respective theories and their application to my ultimate question.

## **5.9 Human nature and Nussbaum's capabilities approach**

In further investigating the foundations of the theory and justification of the list of central capabilities, the role of human nature in Nussbaum's theory will be discussed. The Aristotelian leanings of the theory will be clear as we progress through the description of the theory and the critical analysis that follows.

Nussbaum's acknowledges that the development of her conception has been fuelled by intuitions regarding what constitutes a truly human existence.

The intuitive idea behind the approach is twofold: first, that certain functions are particularly central in human life, in the sense that their presence or absence is typically understood to be a mark of the presence or absence of human life; and second – this is what Marx found in Aristotle – that there is

something that it is to do these functions in a truly human way, not a merely animal way.

(Nussbaum, 2000a: 71-2).

Nussbaum's main interest is in 'the level at which a person's capability becomes what Marx called "truly human," that is, *worthy* of a human being.' (Nussbaum, 2000a: 73). Thus the concern is not just with the level of capability required for an existence to be defined as human, but this higher level of truly or fully human. A fully human life is defined by reaching this higher threshold level of the central capabilities and their corresponding functionings.

If we are to describe the foundation of the theory in terms of human nature, as we have hinted at earlier, does this mean that these intuitions stem from considerations of human biology? The answer to such questions is a very definite no. Nussbaum asserts in *Women and Human Development* that the account is 'not one that is deduced from natural teleology or any non-moral source' (Nussbaum 2000a: 76). Nussbaum also considers herself to be following Aristotle in this sense.

And it was my controversial contention that Aristotle already saw this point; he was not doing what many, including Williams and MacIntyre, have thought him to be doing – that is, deriving ethical norms from metaphysical biology – but rather deriving ethical norms from some more basic and more generally shared ethical judgements. If he had been doing the other thing, I argued, we would be right to reject his conception, as Williams did; but what he is really doing, deriving ethical value from ethical value, makes sense and should hold our interest.

(Nussbaum, 2000b: 118)

Examples of how Nussbaum derives these capabilities from an evaluative procedure, deciding upon the central aspects of human existence by asking whether we would continue to be human in their absence is provided in the chapter the above quotation refers to.<sup>65</sup> More recently Nussbaum has referred to a species norm; the capabilities list being informed by 'A notion of the species and of the characteristic activities of a

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<sup>65</sup> See Nussbaum, M.C. (1995a) 'Aristotle on human nature and the foundations of ethics' in *World, mind and ethics: Essays on the ethical philosophy of Bernard Williams*, J.E.J. Altham and R. Harrison (eds), Cambridge, Cambridge University Press. pp 86-131.

species'. (Nussbaum, 2006a: 180). Again, however, looking at the species norm in this way is an ethical process at root:

The capabilities approach does not urge uncritical nature-worship: instead, it urges evaluation of the basic powers of a creature, asking which ones are of central importance for its good.

(Nussbaum, 2006a: 94)

This sort of deliberation has resulted in Nussbaum's concluding that the key aspects of our human nature (Nussbaum, 1995a) are sociability and practical reason, both of which are considered central aspects to a human existence. These two concepts play a prominent role in the list of central capabilities, considered to 'organize and suffuse' (Nussbaum, 2000a: 82) the other capabilities.

The importance of practical reason and sociability to a fully human life is emphasised throughout *Women and Human Development*. Nussbaum's intuitions regarding the centrality of practical reason (Nussbaum 1995a) provide firm indications as to the way politics should progress.

The focus on practical reason as an essential necessary condition of humanness, and, therefore, a basis for political assessment, provides political thought with a direction strikingly different from that provided by a focus on wealth and commodities as primary objects of the legislator's concern. For it tells the legislator that these commodities have their place in a *human life* as means to the activities of practical reason. No good is done by giving people food, money and medical care, unless government also promotes the truly human use of these objects, in a life governed by personal choice of the good.

(Nussbaum, 1995a: 119).

Nussbaum, although aiming for a political objectivity, utilises intuitions of what constitutes a fully human existence as a basis for her conception. These intuitions are ethical in nature, i.e. they are not rooted in human biology. The capabilities practical reason and sociability ('affiliation' in *WHD*) are afforded special status within the approach. The following chapter includes an examination of the lists of both Griffin and Nussbaum; therefore I will not offer further explanation of the role of practical reason within the approach here. That reason and sociability are central to well-being

appears a widely shared intuition, it is a contention made in numerous list theories of well-being, although terminology may differ.

Nussbaum's capabilities approach may appear overly reliant upon her (shared) intuitions. These intuitions do not amount to *justification* of the approach itself, relying upon intuitions indicates the absence of adequate justification. Nussbaum is, however, quick to respond that her theory is no more guided by intuitions than other theories of justice.

The appearance of a difference in the role of intuitions stems, I believe, from the more general difference between procedural and outcome-oriented approaches, which I discussed in Chapter 1. Devotees of procedural approaches typically feel squeamish about the naked appeal to the idea of human dignity in the capabilities approach, in a way that they do not feel squeamish about the similar role of an idea of human inviolability and a related intuitive idea of the respect for persons in Rawls' theory – simply because there are so many moving parts in between that intuitive idea and the output that one can fail to notice how much work these intuitive ideas are doing.

(Nussbaum, 2006a: 174).

Nussbaum is, of course, defending her approach as a partial theory of justice here, rather than as a theory of flourishing or well-being. The approach may not be any more based on intuition than these alternatives, but this does not really allay our fears that Nussbaum has not yet found an adequate justification for the central capabilities. The capabilities are, essentially, the result of an Aristotelian influenced reflection upon human nature, combined with further (but by no means comprehensive) testing of the approach. This justification may not be satisfactory, but reflects a widespread difficulty of objective lists. Reference to the human or human nature seems to defer the issue of justification rather than solve it, human nature may be just as contested as well-being itself. Nussbaum, however, has to start somewhere, and is willing to continually test and modify the conception. There are also, as we shall see below, some advantages of this distinctly Aristotelian picture of the human, and the fully human life.

Practical reason and sociability do not exhaust the manner in which the conception of the human being impacts upon Nussbaum's capabilities approach. Neither should this focus on practical reason be interpreted in Kantian fashion as contrasting with our animal nature. Nussbaum asserts that 'The capabilities approach, by contrast, sees rationality and animality as thoroughly unified.' (2006a: 159). Nussbaum explains further.

And bodily need, including the need for care, is a feature of our rationality and our sociability; it is one aspect of our dignity, then, rather than something to be contrasted with it.

(Nussbaum, 2006a: 160).

This perspective is embedded in an Aristotelian conception of the human being.

The Aristotelian conception sees the human being as a "political animal", that is, not just a moral and political being, but one who has an animal body, and whose human dignity, rather than being opposed to this animal nature, inheres in it, and its temporal trajectory. Humans begin as needy babies, grow up slowly, and require lots of care as they grow. In the prime of life they have the "normal" needs that the social contract model typically incorporates, but they also have other needs, stemming from accidents or illnesses that put them in a position of asymmetrical dependency for a shorter or longer time.

(Nussbaum, 2006a: 88)

Nussbaum's approach to the fully human life encompasses our whole nature as both rational and animal. Understanding our well-being requires us to understand how we live as humans, within human bodies, our needs, and how they vary with age and illness. Nussbaum's reliance upon the Aristotelian conception of the person has been advantageous here, providing a conception sensitive to the human condition.

Wolf (1995) has commended Nussbaum for achieving such an understanding, and rightly so. Referring to an earlier version of Nussbaum's capabilities approach, Wolf endorses its recognition of the physical aspects of our humanity:

Human flourishing is, then, more naturally suggestive of a complex, organic ideal, in which the ability to exercise physical powers and realize physical



capabilities is not artificially separated from or denigrated in comparison with intellectual and spiritual ideals.

(Wolf, 1995: 106).

This recognition stems from, Wolf suggests, Nussbaum's focus upon the human being, and the biological element this focus incorporates. Wolf reviews an earlier version of Nussbaum's work that produces two lists. An examination of these and subsequent lists exemplifies Nussbaum's continuing concern with all aspects of being human. '*Level One of the Conception of the Human Being: The Shape of the Human Form of Life*' (Nussbaum, 1995b: 76) includes a section on the human body its 'possibilities and vulnerabilities' (Nussbaum, 1995b: 76). In earlier work Nussbaum indicates that this concern with the human body includes 'the need for food and drink, a need for shelter, sexual need and desire, the ability to move and delight in being mobile, the capacity for pleasure and the aversion to pain' (Nussbaum, 1993b: S55-S56). This list concerns the human life, and addresses how the human body shapes our understanding of what a human life is. Nussbaum's second threshold concerns a good human life (Nussbaum, 1995b). It draws upon the first conception, as one would expect, particularly when the onus on the development of a human function into a good human function remains with the individual as opposed to government support (for capabilities such as practical reason and affiliation (Nussbaum, 1995b)).

Of course, Nussbaum's account is 'neither a biological account nor a metaphysical account' (Nussbaum, 1995b: 74). We have noted how her account of the human being is ethical at its core. Therefore a value-free consideration of biology and physiology as a justification of physical activity is unavailable within Nussbaum's framework. The capabilities on Nussbaum's list cannot be explained by a value-free consideration of our physiology or biology. Nussbaum's conception of the good life has at route an ethical basis, whilst remaining interested in our embodiment and what this entails. This attention to the human body paves the way for inquiry into the value of exercise. Earlier versions of Nussbaum's account, for example, speak of delight in mobility, stemming from considerations of the human body.

*Women and Human Development* does not employ two lists, a level one conception of the human, and level two of a good human life, but provides one list of 'Central Human Functional Capabilities' (Nussbaum, 2000a: 78), similar to level two of previous lists. The first three capabilities in *WHD* relate to the human body, Life, Bodily Health, and Bodily Integrity. The latter refers to 'Being able to move freely from place to place' (Nussbaum, 2000a 78), but omits the previous reference to 'the ability to move and delight in being mobile.' (Nussbaum, 1993b: S56). The mobility referred to in the capability bodily integrity appears to be of a more political nature. The approach, however, still retains its recognition of our embodiment, and the limits and potential this brings. There is reference to the threat of premature death, and to health.

### **5.10 Conclusion**

Nussbaum's conception of the human being in which our animal nature is not separated or denigrated, enables a conception of the fully human life sensitive to the potential and indeed frailty of human existence. Any defensible concept of well-being must incorporate such sensitivity. We can only function as *human beings*, and our embodiment will inevitably impact upon such functions, through, for example aging or illness.

Nussbaum embraces both the animal and rational aspects of our human nature. Our bodies are not understood as mere means to the pursuit of those values on the list, this is reflected in Nussbaum's contention that human dignity inheres in our animal nature. We cannot understand those values constitutive of well-being independent of our embodiment. Our embodiment not only determines certain of the listed constituents of well-being, Nussbaum acknowledges capabilities such as health and life, but also the way in which we can pursue and achieve values. We must understand the constituents of well-being as the constituents of human well-being, and recognise how our embodiment shapes such constituents. Nussbaum in recognising the trajectory of our powers, how health concerns leave us dependent unexpectedly, is clearly attentive to the whole of our human nature. Griffin's

conception of well-being, by contrast, appears to connect those ‘ends of life’ with our reflective nature, with less attention paid to our animal nature. Any defensible list theory of well-being, however, must address how we actually pursue such values, the role they play in our lives. We can only pursue such values as embodied human beings, and Griffin has failed to pay adequate attention to this in developing his theory.

The main focus of this chapter has been *Women and Human Development* (Nussbaum 2000a) although in order to fully describe and examine Nussbaum’s capabilities approach it has been necessary to refer to other articles and texts both before and after its publication. The basic aspects of the capabilities approach have been presented, and some critical themes discussed. The first section demonstrated how Nussbaum intends her conception to be applied in the development arena, but argued that the theory is ultimately still relevant to our concern with well-being. The distance of the theory from the political objectivity it strives for may inhibit political application to an extent, but reinforces our conclusions in the first section. Indeed Nussbaum herself acknowledges its roots in her intuitions of the fully human, intuitions evaluated in the final section.

This chapter has made limited reference to my overall aim of understanding the contribution of exercise to well-being. It has been intended more as an examination of Nussbaum’s approach in its own terms, addressing the theory’s strengths and weaknesses. This process should itself offer insights as to the role of exercise, is its omission from Nussbaum’s list both glaring and indefensible, or is it better understood in terms of supporting or being enabled by those items on the list? The following comparison of Nussbaum’s and Griffin’s approaches offers further discussion on the theories, eventually arguing that Nussbaum’s capabilities approach offers a more defensible account within which to contemplate the value of exercise.

## Chapter Six

### GRIFFIN'S WELL-BEING AND NUSSBAUM'S CAPABILITIES APPROACH. A COMPARISON

#### 6.1 Introduction

The celebrated philosophical works of both Martha Nussbaum and James Griffin were examined in some depth in the previous chapters. The aim of this chapter is to offer a comparison of Nussbaum's capabilities approach and Griffin's theory of well-being. This comparison will further illuminate the strengths and weaknesses of the respective theories and provide a platform from which to assess the relationship between physical activity and well-being. Despite their differences, there is extensive overlap between the two approaches. Their convergence is desirable states Nussbaum:

as we should expect, there is and should be a good deal of convergence between an intelligently normative proceduralism and a substantive good theory of a non-Platonist kind, sensitive to people's actual beliefs and values.  
(Nussbaum, 2000a: 158).

There are indeed clear similarities in the lists proposed by Griffin and Nussbaum. It is my contention here, however, that the theories also differ in important ways. Nussbaum's capabilities approach clearly recognises how our being embodied, animal human beings, must have implications for any concept of the fully human life or well-being proposed. Griffin is less attentive to our animal nature, and how our being embodied impacts upon a conception of well-being. This approach, focusing upon the reflective but not the animal aspects of the human being also neglects to include health within the list of prudential values. Health, of course, refers to how our being embodied might impact upon our lives, thus it is unsurprising, but damaging to Griffin's theory, that he omits it from his list.

The theories of both Nussbaum and Griffin are list theories. They propose prudential values or capabilities considered central to well-being or the fully human life.

Griffin's theory develops from an informed desire account of well-being to a list account (Griffin, 2000). Actual desires are dismissed as unreliable indicators of well-being, and informed desire is ultimately given its content by the prudential values Griffin stipulates.<sup>66</sup> Nussbaum also devotes considerable time to the criticism of certain preferences, those that damage or threaten the central capabilities.

Despite the critique of adaptive preferences and actual desires conducted within the work of Nussbaum and Griffin respectively, the importance of an individual choosing the life that is best for her is central to both approaches. Griffin considers autonomy to be one of his prudential values, indeed the core of our humanity.<sup>67</sup> Nussbaum's theory has a particularly central place for the capability practical reason. For Nussbaum this role does not entail that choosing in and of itself is a constituent of the fully human life. A normative concept of practical reason is employed, what is a good choice is shaped by the list of central capabilities. Neither does Griffin accept, without qualification, that autonomous choice enhances well-being. Suggesting this would threaten his critique of certain decisions and desires that upon satisfaction leave us no better or worse off. The success with which the respective theories achieve the balance between retaining the critical power of the substantive list within a framework attentive to the autonomy of the individual will be analysed here.

Griffin considers health valuable only to the extent that it provides a means to the prudential values on his list. This seems to suggest that we can isolate health; and consider its contribution to a life. I reject this, pointing to the entanglement of fact and value within concepts such as health, and argue, following Nordenfelt, that

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<sup>66</sup> Griffin writes: 'My account seems to shift the real explanatory weight from the mere occurrence of a desire and of its satisfaction onto the features or qualities of the objects of desire. Then I give prominence to only a certain range of features or qualities (for example accomplishment, enjoyment, certain kinds of understanding, and so on – the list of prudential values that I later compiled)' (Griffin, 2000: 282).

<sup>67</sup> 'Choosing one's own course through life, making something out of it according to one's own lights, is at the heart of what it is to lead a human existence. And we value what makes life human, over and above what makes it happy.' (Griffin, 1986: 67).

health reflects our ability to achieve that which is central to our lives. I differ, however, with Nordenfelt's subjective understanding of that which is vital or central to us.

Nussbaum is more forceful with respect to the importance of health to a fully human life, holding that health has intrinsic worth. A detailed analysis of how health is understood within the two approaches will be conducted. The lowly status of health within Griffin's account, it is argued, represents inadequate attention to our embodiment and this impoverishes the conception of well-being advanced. A more general assessment of how each theory accounts for the inevitable interaction between goods and capabilities will follow, examining their potential to support each other, and how in certain instances utility values accepted by Griffin as part of well-being may in fact undermine other central values.

The second section of this chapter (6.3) also considers, albeit briefly, the nature of desire and how its role in each theory might contribute to an understanding of those values and capabilities on the respective lists. The discussions on how each philosopher justifies their list will not be extended further within this chapter, or indeed within this thesis as a whole. I note, however, that neither Griffin nor Nussbaum offer satisfactory justifications of their lists. Griffin's reliance on human nature is inadequate; a different view of human nature could be used to justify a quite different list of prudential values.<sup>68</sup> I have also questioned how Griffin moves so easily from one's being reflective to those prudential values present on his list. There are a number of important steps missing here. Moreover, his employment of a rationalistic conception of human nature, elevating and separating the reflective from the animal, is inadequate. Despite their protestations to the contrary both philosophers seem to have relied on the manner of justifying these goods employed by Finnis (1980); that they are values which are simply self-evident. Nussbaum has

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<sup>68</sup> Indeed Griffin recognises how lists will vary according to 'one's metaphysical views' (Griffin, 1996: 150n19). 'My own list is very much out of a particular tradition: modern Western, and atheist. But take someone with a radically different list: instead of enjoyment, the mortification of the flesh; instead of deep personal relations, cloistered solitude; instead of autonomy, submission to the will of God.' (Griffin, 1996: 150n19).

certainly not achieved any consensus as yet, her starting point grounded in intuitions as to what constitutes a fully human life. Griffin conducts a detailed foray into metaethics, but his conclusions would certainly not be self-evident to those with competing views of human nature.

It should be recognised that such manoeuvres are typical within the literature. It is beyond the bounds of this thesis to offer a comprehensive justification for a theory of well-being. Nevertheless, Putnam's objectivity, best understood as warranted assertibility offers scope for a framework within which to consider theories of well-being and how they might be justified. Within such a framework a theory of well-being would certainly not be considered justifiable in terms of its convergence upon some predefined correct picture of the world. Instead the theory could be justified in terms of the criticism that it has undergone in order to for its conclusions to be warranted. For a theory to achieve this, however, would surely require extension beyond that offered by Nussbaum and Griffin so far (although we must note that neither philosopher appears to aspire to this form of objectivity). Understanding our judgements to be objective or warranted in this way opens the way for justification of an objective theory on these grounds. It is not that we cannot justify an objective theory of well-being. We must however, not equate justification, or claims of objectivity, with a final, once and for all, conclusion, but with a recognition that these conclusions are the best available, and the result of the sort of extensive criticism Dewey recommends.

First, it is necessary to discuss the aims of Nussbaum and Griffin in proposing their theories. Nussbaum, as we have seen, does not speak of well-being, preferring the 'fully human life', and describes her theory as both a partial conception of the good life and a partial theory of justice. The theory is shaped, from the very beginning, by political *and* moral concerns. Griffin's *Well-Being* is clearly concerned with the relationship between prudence and morality, and how certain of our central interests may justify certain moral conclusions. The development of an account of well-being however, is conducted prior to addressing such matters.

## 6.2 What are the aims of Nussbaum and Griffin in proposing their respective conceptions?

I propose that Griffin and Nussbaum are best understood as being concerned with different ‘scales’ in developing their respective conceptions. Griffin states that principles ‘especially plausible on the large social scale’ (1986: 51) may not be of relevance at an individual level:

Perhaps much of what is appropriate on the social level is not essential to a principle’s being a moral principle and so will not appear on the small interpersonal scale. We are trying to establish *moral* principles, principles that are relevant – perhaps in different forms – on any scale. Certainly what matters on the social scale (chance factors such as degree of knowledge and agreement) is often irrelevant on the small scale. So we have to try to get behind these differences of scale as well.

(Griffin, 1986: 51).

By contrast, Nussbaum is primarily concerned with the social scale and the development of a framework suitable for political application. *Women and Human Development*, for example, proposes a ‘partial’ (Nussbaum, 2000a: 96) conception of the good. Nussbaum’s contrasts her own approach with more comprehensive accounts that consider individuals ‘as leading substandard lives insofar as they neglect one of the items on the Aristotelian list, or devote themselves to something that is not on the list.’ (Nussbaum 2000a: 95). The capabilities approach proposed in *WHD* does not stipulate the whole of the good life. The capabilities are intended to facilitate the pursuit of a good life, but not to represent all that is valuable.<sup>69</sup>

Nussbaum acknowledges that her capabilities have similarities to:

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<sup>69</sup> ‘In my own approach, by contrast, the use of the list is facilitative rather than tyrannical: if individuals neglect an item on the list, this is just fine from the point of view of the political purposes of the list, so long as they don’t impede others who wish to pursue it. And if they pursue an item not on the list, that is to be expected, and exactly what the list is meant to make possible. It is in this sense that the list is, emphatically, a partial and not a comprehensive conception of the good.’ (Nussbaum, 2000a: 96).



primary goods in Rawls's recent (political liberal) theory: they have a special importance in making any choice of a way of life possible, and so they have a special claim to be supported for political purposes in a pluralistic society. (Nussbaum, 2000a: 75).

Along with this emphasis on this facilitative role of the capabilities, Nussbaum, at various points acknowledges their own value. 'The central capabilities are not just instrumental to further pursuits: they are held to have value in themselves, in making the life that includes them fully human.' (Nussbaum, 2000a: 74). This '*Argument from Intrinsic Worth*' (2000a: 144) is utilised as a critique of considering capabilities solely in terms of their impact upon utility. It is important to be free to form relationships, express oneself, be healthy, not merely because of these capabilities' relationship with some higher good, or because they impact upon utility conceived subjectively, but because they have value in themselves. That capabilities are of intrinsic worth, suggests Nussbaum, need not require a Platonic approach, but can be aligned with an approach that 'would make at least a qualified reference to choice and desire.' (2000a: 144). The *Argument from Intrinsic Worth* and how desire helps ground the conception, avoiding the Platonic justification of these capabilities will be further discussed in the section 6.3, 'Desire and justification' below.

The aims of Nussbaum's and Griffin's theories clearly differ. Nussbaum's aim is that governments ensure a threshold level of capability for their citizens, providing a foundation from which an individual can pursue their own idea of the good life. The theory is aimed at this level of social development, not for the judging of individual lives. In line with this Nussbaum sees little of relevance politically if someone 'neglects an item on the list' (Nussbaum, 2000a: 96), and does not focus on the prudential implications of this. Griffin's concern with the prudential is more direct, contending that his theory is suitable for the judging of individual lives. The values on the list being the ends of life, not just a means to well-being, allow us to judge (although only roughly as Griffin acknowledges) a life, and how it might be better.

Nussbaum is concerned with political principles; her capabilities approach is intended to shape political activity, and ensure a threshold level of quality of life. A

partial conception of the good is also proposed as a partial conception of justice.<sup>70</sup> Does this concern with justice leave Nussbaum's concept at a greater distance from concerns over human well-being? Are we clear on the centrality of the capabilities for political life, but less so on the role of the capabilities in a flourishing life? Nussbaum's account may be limited in its reluctance to address prudential matters, to specify how a life would be better or worse in instances of capability neglect, or indeed failing to function in a certain way. This reluctance is founded in an attempt to provide a conception that avoids alienating those with diverse ideas of human flourishing.

The claim that Nussbaum's capabilities are less suited to the assessment of an individual life than Griffin's prudential values (and therefore of less significance for our enterprise of assessing the contribution of exercise to well-being) warrants further consideration. That Nussbaum's account is *less* suited than Griffin's to the judging of an individual life does not mean that it lacks relevance to issues of human flourishing. In chapter five I argued that Nussbaum's account as a whole retains relevance to these matters. Here I consider the appropriateness of Nussbaum's approach for addressing the questions of this thesis.

### ***6.2.1 Is Nussbaum's theory relevant to our concern with the contribution of exercise to well-being?***

Griffin's more comprehensive account has been contrasted with Nussbaum's partial conception. Indeed Nussbaum is often indifferent as to whether the individual actually chooses to function in a certain manner, despite recognising the importance of functioning to a fully human life. Recall her example of play, in which she does not address the implications for well-being of over working and neglecting the functioning play, despite having the capability.

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<sup>70</sup> 'The primary task of my argument will be to move beyond the merely comparative use of capabilities to the construction of a normative political proposal that is a partial theory of justice.' (Nussbaum, 2000a: 6).

Capabilities are best understood as opportunities to function. Referring to health, Nussbaum indicates how a society might provide opportunities to be healthy, providing sports or exercise facilities for example, without insisting on the 'actual healthy functioning' (Nussbaum 2000a: 14) of individuals in the form of sports participation or increased physical activity, in this instance. The political application of the theory dictates that capabilities are the main focus of the theory, distancing the conception from the pure interests of the individual or paternalistic concerns.

It would seem to follow from this that Griffin's conception has more relevance to our project of assessing the contribution of exercise to individual well-being. This question has so far been taken to ask, how does being exercise, or failing to exercise impact upon my well-being? Such questions seem to require the sort of judgements Griffin seems willing to make, suggesting that the prudential values help us judge a life. Nussbaum, in some instances, does not remark on whether a life would be better or worse, preferring to focus on the political obligation to ensure capability in central areas, rather than an individual's use of this capability and its impact upon an individual life.

At first glance Nussbaum's account seems better suited for assessing government obligation to provide *opportunities* to exercise, and less relevant to questions concerning the importance of physical activity to well-being. It has, however, been argued in the chapter above that Nussbaum successfully bridges its focus on politics with a concern for issues of human flourishing. Indeed Nussbaum's reliance upon intuitions of what constitutes the fully human life perhaps situates her account more closely to a particular view of human flourishing than she would like. There would of course be difficulties in utilising certain aspects of the theory to analyse the relationship between exercise and well-being. Certain physical activities for example can be conceived of as play, but Nussbaum does not really address whether failing to play diminishes a life, preferring to emphasise the importance of having the capability. Recall Nussbaum's reluctance to debate whether someone who chooses to work, deciding not to play even though (s)he has the opportunity to do so, can still have a fully human life. The ambiguity here, no doubt present because of

Nussbaum's political ambitions for her approach, leaves us on rather uncertain ground if we are to contemplate the value of being physically active to well-being via the capability of play. Nussbaum does not at any point say must actually play in order to live a fully human life.

Nussbaum, however, is not indifferent about certain capabilities, and their corresponding function. Health retains a special importance within Nussbaum's conception.

My own view is that health and bodily integrity are so important in relation to all the other capabilities that they are legitimate areas of interference with choice up to a point, although there will rightly be disagreement about where that point is in each area.

(Nussbaum, 2000a: 95)

Let us first address the interference with choice. Nussbaum does not insist upon the individuals functioning in a healthy way without qualification. In *Frontiers of Justice*, she disagrees with Arneson's contention that 'it is appropriate for political planning to promote actual health as a social goal rather than merely to promote the capability to choose a healthy life' (Nussbaum, 2006a: 171).

I myself take a more libertarian line here: that is, I do not favor policies that would make unhealthy activities such as boxing, unsafe sex, football and smoking illegal, although education about risk seems to be highly appropriate.

(Nussbaum, 2006a: 171).

Nussbaum elsewhere, (2000b) refers to modern nations regulating 'food, medicine and the environment' justifiably because of 'the difficulty of making informed choices in the areas and because of the burden of inquiry such choices would impose on citizens.' (Nussbaum, 2000b: 130). There may be some tension within Nussbaum's justification of interference in certain areas, and opposing it in others. We could ask what makes the domain of food, medicine and the environment different to boxing, sex and smoking; that justifies interference in one but not the other? Reference to the burden of inquiry offers an incomplete argument, for in

certain contexts it may be difficult to make an informed choice in those areas that Nussbaum opposes interference.

Nussbaum's suggestion that health impacts upon the other capabilities, might provide us with some insight into how exercise impacts upon well-being. For health to be important to the other capabilities we must be talking of actual health, rather than just the corresponding capability. There is, however, a difficulty in speaking so easily of health's importance in supporting the other capabilities. Health, it has been argued, cannot be understood in isolation from those values and indeed capabilities central to our lives. Health's relation to the other capabilities may be best understood in reverse. We cannot discuss how our being healthy supports our being capable. This seems to suggest a somewhat naturalistic account of health, in which we understand it in isolation from those values central to our lives. I argued in chapter three that health itself is better understood in a more holistic fashion, following Nordenfelt.<sup>71</sup> Applying this stance to the capabilities approach, health itself would be understood with reference to the capabilities. Indeed, having rejected Nordenfelt's vital goals as an appropriate conception of happiness, I will ultimately argue that to be healthy is to be in the bodily and mental state that ensures the capability to function in valuable ways. The capabilities are the primary concept. Within this holistic framework health cannot be understood as a foundation that is distinct from the capabilities themselves, but as the extent to which we are capable. This is a normative approach in which the capabilities constitutive of well-being determine those bodily and mental states defined as healthy. This discussion will be advanced further in the final chapter of thesis, as I move to consider the best account within which to understand the contribution of exercise to well-being.

Nussbaum's theory is not really designed to judge individual lives but she is clear on the centrality of capabilities, indeed functionings such as health, bodily integrity, practical reason and affiliation to a fully human life. Indeed it is important to recognise that many capabilities and values situated within an objective list theory are likely to interact and support each other, a point that Nussbaum is acutely aware

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<sup>71</sup> But not accepting his overly subjective conception of happiness.

of. I have resisted the temptation to argue for the contribution of exercise to well-being through its impact upon health, conceived of as a foundation for other capabilities. We must take exercise, to achieve a level of health necessary for a threshold level of the other capabilities, the argument would suggest. Nussbaum's approach to health, however, in particular her apparently understanding health to support the other capabilities, may be at odds with the normative perspective on health advocated earlier. From this perspective health is not understood as supporting the capabilities, but as reflective of our ability to achieve certain central ends. I have already criticised Nordenfelt's basically subjective vital goals.

Our ultimate concern is with the contribution of exercise to well-being. Nussbaum's approach seems at greater distance from the purely prudential. Consider for example her emphasis on the capability 'play', and not its function. Nussbaum does not address questions as to whether the absence of a function would diminish a life. Nevertheless there is the potential to depart from Nussbaum to a degree, and suggest certain functionings and indeed capabilities as constitutive of well-being. The extensive similarity between the two lists the philosophers indicates the feasibility of such a transition. Nussbaum herself recognises that her partial conception remains based upon intuitions as to what constitutes a fully human life. These origins offer an explanation as to how the theory retains its relevance to issues of human well-being despite its explicitly political motivations.

### **6.3 Desire and justification**

Both Nussbaum's capabilities approach and Griffin's theory of well-being can be categorised as list theories, although there remain important differences between the approaches. In proposing such a theory care must be taken to ensure the theory remains grounded, and sensitive to the different ways in which the values may figure in our lives. Griffin retains an emphasis throughout *Well-Being* and in later work on providing a theory sensitive to such individual differences. Desire plays a significant role in the explanation of prudential value and in earlier work an endorsement constraint is employed. Well-being cannot be enhanced by the achievement of a

prudential value if the individual does not endorse such an achievement. I have questioned these more subjective leanings of Griffin's approach, and in particular the employment of an endorsement constraint. An individual can be flawed in failing to endorse or desire a value, but this need not prevent the achievement of such a value making a positive contribution to well-being.

Nussbaum also retains a place for desire in her account. She attempts to balance the importance of the items on the list with a respect for people's desires. The Aristotelian conception of desire provides a route toward this balance. We can briefly trace the development of this argument.

Nussbaum devotes considerable space to adaptive preferences, illustrating how unreliable desire can be as an indicator of quality of life.

But there was a time when Vasanti did not think this way – especially before her husband's vasectomy, when she thought she might still have children. Like many women, she seems to have thought that abuse was painful and bad, but still part a of women's lot in life, just something women have to put up with as part of being women dependent on men, and entailed by having left her own family to move into a husband's home. The idea that it was a violation of rights, of law, of justice, and that *she herself* has rights that are being violated by her husband's conduct – these ideas she didn't have at that time, and many women all over the world don't have them now.

(Nussbaum, 2000a: 112-3).

Nussbaum is thus moved to put great emphasis on the value of those items on her list, regardless as to whether they are desired. This is reflected in *The Argument from Intrinsic Worth* that Nussbaum seems persuaded by:

even if we could engineer things so that people were reliably adapted to a very low living standard – and, as Mill says, the “masters of women” have in many areas done exactly that – this would not be the end of the issue of what is good or right. These failures themselves have importance, and just the bare fact that human beings are undergoing them should be enough for us.

(Nussbaum, 2000a: 144)

Nussbaum though, is keen that her conception remains grounded, the values in the list need not be conceived of in a Platonic fashion. Nussbaum is after all concerned with the political justification of goods and thus cannot be indifferent to choice and desire. Nussbaum (2000a) asserts that the principle of respect dictates that we take note of desire in proposing such a conception.<sup>72</sup> Nussbaum also criticises a sharp distinction between desire and reason. This distinction can be contrasted with Nussbaum's own approach in which desire is understood:

as reaching out for "the apparent good", and thus as involving, even at the level of appetite, a high degree of selective intentionality and responsiveness, one will have in that very picture of desire some strong reasons not to bypass it, for it seems to be a part of our humanity worthy of respect and voice.  
(Nussbaum 2000a: 147).

Indeed Nussbaum considers desires for 'food, for mobility, for security, for health, and for the use of reason' as 'permanent features of our makeup as humans, which culture can blunt but cannot altogether remove.' (Nussbaum, 2000a: 155). Desire is deemed to be part of what explains the goodness of the capabilities for political purposes. Nussbaum's capabilities are justified on political grounds, thus she need not enter the debate as to whether the value of the capabilities to a life is also partly constituted by their being desired. There are indications however, that her acknowledgement of the importance of desire does not entail subjectivity. Nussbaum's argues for the intrinsic worth of the capabilities, and insists that the norms proposed are not understood independently of history, human choice and desire. Nussbaum does not state that they are partly constituted by actual desire:

The platonist will indeed say that these eternal intrinsic values have the value they do altogether independent of human history, human choice and human desire. But one might adopt a different account of justification, one that would make at least a qualified reference to choice and desire. Rawls's Socratic account of justification proceeding toward "reflective equilibrium" may be one

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<sup>72</sup> Disagreeing with Scanlon's (1993) rejection of desire within his approach to quality of life. Nussbaum states 'Scanlon fails to consider a very strong reason we have for giving desire at least some role in our process of justification: the reason of respect I have already endorsed. The fact that human beings desire something does count; it counts because we think that politics, rightly understood, comes from people and what matters to them, not from heavenly norms.' (Nussbaum, 2000a: 146).



such account; Aristotle's use of the person of practical wisdom as normative criterion is another; Dewey's pragmatism offers another  
(Nussbaum, 2000a: 144-5).

Nussbaum also remarks that certain norm-laden proceduralist approaches offer a qualified incorporation of desire. I have argued for an objective approach to well-being, in which desire is neither necessary nor sufficient for the enhancement of well-being. Yet I consider this compatible with an approach in which the formulation of the list itself is not indifferent from the human perspective. After all, from what other perspective can we understand our well-being? Those items on an objective list can only be justified after the sort of inquiry into their value both Dewey and Putnam recommend. Such inquiry would of course attend to human history and desire. It would certainly be strange if such goods on an objective list were never the objects of desire, such a finding would certainly prompt further investigation. Do the goods belong on the list? Have we lost track of what is valuable in a life? My concern, in advocating an objective conception of well-being is not that we remain independent of the human perspective, but that the value of those capabilities and functionings that might be contained on a carefully considered objective list is not entirely negated by an individual's poorly reasoned failure to endorse or desire them.

Nussbaum herself acknowledges that because of the potential for the distortion of desire, we rely primarily on the list of substantive goods. That coupled with her suggestion that the capabilities are of intrinsic worth clearly indicates an approach more in line with the objectivity I have advocated. Both Griffin and Nussbaum agree that there must be some role for desire, but I understand Nussbaum as standing more firmly by her list of substantive goods. This I think safest in light of the flawed reasons for which we may fail to endorse a good. Those items on both lists, I argue, are so important to human lives, that they should not be reduced to subjective perception. Well-being should not be entirely reduced to subjective perspective, our lives can be improved through our being capable, or achieving a value, in the absence of favourable attitudes or endorsement.

## 6.4 The 'lists' of Nussbaum and Griffin: A comparison

### 6.4.1 *Dangers of over-specifying well-being or the fully human life*

Nussbaum and Griffin both stipulate a range of values or capabilities that constitute a flourishing life, but must remain aware of the dangers of over specifying. List theories, in order to achieve their aims must resonate universally, although there are some qualifications to this I will arrive at shortly. Achieving this appeal requires the philosopher to recognise the variety of ways in which people pursue the good life, without losing the critical capabilities of the theory. Griffin certainly aims to provide a list theory of prudential values in most instances important to all of us. I have argued, however, that in aspiring to account for individual difference and provide a theory both that is both objective and subjective the list is deprived of some of its critical powers.

Nussbaum in proposing a conception for universal application, across a range of cultures must retain an acute awareness of the different ways in which people live their lives.

Indeed, part of the idea of the list is its *multiple realizability*: its members can be more concretely specified in accordance with local beliefs and circumstances. It is thus designed to leave room for a reasonable pluralism in specification.

(Nussbaum 2000a: 77).

Neither theory insists that life must take a particular form to enable the individual to flourish. General values or capabilities are proposed; the manner in which they feature in the lives of an individual is a matter for them. It remains important, however, that they do feature (although Nussbaum, 2000a in the majority of cases does not insist on the actual functioning). Having examined the lists in more detail, particular attention will be paid to health and its role within each conception. I will also address instances in which certain goods may not be realised and the

implications of this. It is perhaps unsurprising that Griffin is more willing to accept that there are exceptional circumstance in which well-being will not be diminished in the absence of say, accomplishment. Nussbaum, on the other hand, understandably insists on the importance of all her capabilities, the list is after all intended as providing obligations for governments; any concessions may well weaken the power of the theory in this respect.

Figure 2. A comparison of Griffin and Nussbaum’s lists

<p><b><i>Nussbaum’s ‘Central Human Functional Capabilities’ (Nussbaum 2000a: 78).</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Life</li> <li>▪ Bodily Health</li> <li>▪ Bodily Integrity</li> <li>▪ Senses, Imagination and Thought</li> <li>▪ Emotions</li> <li>▪ Practical Reason</li> <li>▪ Affiliation</li> <li>▪ Other Species.</li> <li>▪ Play</li> <li>▪ Control over one’s environment</li> </ul>	<p><b><i>Griffin’s ‘ends of life’ (Griffin 1986: 64; for list of these see page 67).</i></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Accomplishment</li> <li>▪ The components of human existence; autonomy, ‘minimum material goods to keep body and soul together’ (Griffin 1986: 67), liberty.</li> <li>▪ Understanding</li> <li>▪ Enjoyment</li> <li>▪ Deep personal relations</li> </ul>
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**6.4.2 Similarities – deep personal relations**

The categories of deep personal relations (Griffin) and affiliation (Nussbaum) are extremely similar. Griffin focuses upon the positive value of ‘reciprocal relations of friendship and love’ (1986: 67). Nussbaum recognises this positive side of relationships in both the categories of emotions (‘to love those who love and care for us’ (2000a: 79)), and affiliation, where, in keeping with the political dimension to the theory, great emphasis is also placed upon the ‘social bases of self-respect and non-humiliation’ (ibid.) and ensuring ‘protections against discrimination.’ (ibid).

Both philosophers recognise that the value of such relationships extends beyond the mental states with which they may be associated. Griffin distances himself from classical utilitarianism, emphasising the value of these relationships ‘apart from the pleasure and benefit they give’ (Griffin, 1986: 68). Nussbaum would of course agree; her reason for conceptualising the fully human life in terms of capabilities is to avoid such reduction to experienced states. Griffin suggests that deep personal relationships:

fit Aristotle’s model of the human *ergon* better than even his own candidate, rationality; they in themselves go along way towards filling and completing life.

(Griffin, 1986: 68)

Nussbaum offers a more formal description of affiliation and indeed practical reason’s elevated status within her capabilities approach:

Among the capabilities, two, *practical reason* and *affiliation*, stand out as of special importance, since they both organize and suffuse all the others, making their pursuit truly human.

(Nussbaum, 2000a: 82).

Practical reason is more clearly an organiser, it is perhaps less clear how affiliation would organise the other capabilities on the list so we will move straight to address how affiliation suffuses the other goods. Nussbaum is saying, it seems, that the truly human functioning of the goods on her list will be alongside others, perhaps in some cooperative task. This follows on from Aristotle’s account of our social nature. We may at times value solitude, but a flourishing life requires participation in certain central values with others. When we consider Nussbaum’s list this seems fair; play, the use of our senses, imagination and thought, the contemplation of nature, all these seem more *complete* if they incorporate some social element. Perhaps we will not require the presence of others at all times, but certain ‘practices’ suggests MacIntyre (1985), such as bird watching, science and sport, even if pursued alone, seem to require others in some sense.

To enter into a practice is to enter into a relationship not only with its contemporary practitioners, but also with those who have preceded us in the practice, particularly those whose achievements extended the reach of the practice to its present point.

(MacIntyre, 1985: 194)

This may be extending far beyond Nussbaum, but the point remains an interesting one. For such activities to significantly improve lives, making them fully human, do we need to recognise and embrace this inherent social component? This indeed seems to be part of the beauty of sport. This requires further analysis, the main point here though, is that the fully human life requires affiliation of some kind, and the fully human pursuit of capabilities entails some form of affiliation. This is not say that we do not value solitude in some situations, but that in central areas of our lives, the presence of others enhances life.

Affiliation suffuses the other capabilities central to a fully human life. Nussbaum's explicitly stating this relationship provides more detail as to what a fully human life is, what the activities or practices that comprise it involve. Griffin, however, seems aware of the importance of deep personal relationships to the other prudential values. In *Value Judgement* he states that his prudential values imply a certain relationship with others, recognition of the value of others. In demonstrating the closeness of prudence and morality Griffin says of accomplishment:

Perhaps there are accomplishments whose weighty value does not come from benefiting others. Solving some puzzle in pure mathematics might be an example. Still, the more one doubted that the situation met any substantial human interest; the more one would suspect that it failed to give any life much point or weight. In any case, one would have no grasp of the very largest class of accomplishments that human life affords if one did not introduce the value represented by other persons. Most accomplishments, and the sorts of accomplishments accessible to most of us, involve benefit to others.

(Griffin 1996: 70)<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Further examples of how the moral may penetrate the prudential are provided in Griffin (1996, pp. 70-1) referring to both deep personal relations and understanding. For Griffin deep personal relationships will be ones of 'love and friendship (1996: 70), recognising, of course, the value of others. Griffin's 'understanding' entails not just 'passive contemplation' (1996: 71) of values, but an appropriate response to them. Among these will be 'certain moral values.' (Griffin 1996: 71).

Accomplishment appears largely dependant on the presence of others, and recognition of their value. Griffin does not *formally* state that the value ‘deep personal relationships’ penetrates the others, but is aware that his values are ultimately dependent on recognising the moral worth of others. ‘The more one tries to explain these prudential values, the more one finds a huge whole in them that has to be filled by the value represented by other persons.’ (Griffin, 1996: 69). This does not seem far away from Nussbaum’s recognition that the capability affiliation is central to other capabilities. Deep personal relations, for Griffin, entails recognising the worth of others.<sup>74</sup> In turn the recognition of the value of others is central to the other prudential values.

A useful way of further examining this issue is to take skill as an example. That a skill is difficult is not enough for its execution to constitute an achievement, suggests Tasioulas:

some other value must appropriately characterize a difficult activity before it can be an achievement. Activity that amounts to an achievement is always a difficulty-overcoming mode of participation by an agent in some value, such as deep personal relations, knowledge, justice, beauty, and so on, one that rightly commands our admiration.

(Tasioulas, 2006: 255).

This other value that helps decide what constitutes an achievement is referred to as the ‘framing value’ (ibid.). Griffin agrees that the execution of a difficult skill is not in itself sufficient to deem it an accomplishment (differing in terminology with Tasioulas) he states that ‘walking on one’s hands from Oxford to London is a remarkable deed, of the Guinness Book of Records sort, but itself lacks the worth that is part of an accomplishment’ (Griffin, 1986: 65). Our extension of Griffin’s position here, following Nussbaum, (and in part Tasioulas<sup>75</sup>, although he does not

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<sup>74</sup> see Griffin (1996) pp. 70

<sup>75</sup> Tasioulas is more directly concerned with the intrinsic goods of game playing, although this of course has implications for well-being. Tasioulas’ summarises his argument thus: ‘the primary intrinsic good internal to game-playing – a good worth pursuing for its own sake and so capable of making one’s life go better in so far as one participates in it – is that of play itself.’ (2006: 237). This

directly address well-being), is to suggest deep personal relationships, or affiliation, must always be present as a framing value for the achievement of a genuine accomplishment, or indeed for other values on the lists, such as play, to fully realise their contribution to a life. Griffin's insistence of the centrality of recognising the worth of others to his prudential values gets close to this conclusion, without formally stating it.

Nussbaum and Griffin both accept that centrality of meaningful relationships to a flourishing life. Nussbaum offers a formal recognition of how the capability affiliation suffuses other capabilities. Griffin, in addressing the relationship between prudence and morality, clearly states how prudential values are intertwined with adequate recognition of the worth of others.

### 6.4.3 *Enjoyment*

Griffin's prudential value 'enjoyment' is not neglected within Nussbaum's account. 'Senses, Imagination and Thought' contains 'Being able to have pleasurable experiences, and to avoid non-necessary pain.' (Nussbaum 2000a: 79). Nussbaum also includes 'Play' in her list, 'Being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.' (Nussbaum 2000a: 80). A persuasive argument for this inclusion is provided:

We may suppose that children naturally play and express themselves imaginatively in play. This, however, is not precisely true. In many cultures, little girls never get encouragement to play, and in consequence they really don't know how to play.

(Nussbaum 2000a: 90).

Griffin does not consider 'play' to warrant a category in its own right preferring to include it within the broader category of enjoyment. The idea that enjoyment entails play in this fashion warrants further examination. Earlier chapters have sought to illustrate how physical activity can be of value apart from the satisfaction or

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argument is a response to Hurka's (2006) account of the good of games, following Suits, in which achievement of a difficult skill is the primary intrinsic good.

enjoyment with which it is often associated. A similar analysis could be conducted with respect to play. Its contribution to well-being is not reducible entirely to the enjoyment with which it is associated. Playing games (for example, football or chess) may not always be enjoyable but may be of broader value to our lives. Having earlier rejected the contention that difficulty or skill may provide sufficient criteria upon which to define accomplishment, I cannot conclude that the technical aspects of play enhance well-being.

Tasioulas rejects this role for complexity in explaining the value of games arguing that play is more characteristic of games than the overcoming of difficulty. He goes on to elaborate upon certain aspects of Huizinga's study of play:

Summing up the formal characteristics of play we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside "ordinary" life as being "not serious", but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained from it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means.

(Huizinga, 1950: 13).

In elaborating upon Huizinga's assessment of the play mood as 'one of rapture and enthusiasm, and is sacred or festive according to the occasion' (Huizinga, 1950: 132), Tasioulas (2006) is keen to point out that certain types of play, especially sports have at their core a tension, and require exertion both physically and mentally. In certain instances this might mean that enjoying them during participation is particularly difficult.

Many types of play are enjoyed, and that enjoyment, for games without a challenging component, would be the main reason for participation. In certain instances, however, and sports provide a good example, certain other characteristics may take precedence. Time and space prevent my elaborating further on the value of play to a good life, but Huizinga's characterisation offers a starting point from which to examine the features of play, and how they might be of value to a life, even when



the activity is not enjoyed. Griffin's account of well-being, I argue, is deficient in not including play within his account. The reduction of play to enjoyment does it a disservice and overlooks these important characteristics.

A further reason for Nussbaum's inclusion of play as a central capability and Griffin's preference for the more general value 'enjoyment' relates to the intentions of each theory. If enjoyment was proposed as a central capability within Nussbaum's approach the government obligation would be somewhat unclear. The capacity to enjoy is universal, those in power might respond, but we all enjoy different things. What policies can such a capability initiate? The capability play may offer potential for greater stipulation, encouraging the provision of facilities for physical activities as well as for other games for those of a range of ages. Play seems to suggest a certain range of activities, it certainly does not encompass all that we enjoy, but stipulates a type of activity central to a fully human life, in Nussbaum's eyes. The capability refers to our laughing, playing and enjoying recreational activities (Nussbaum 2000a). Although certainly not specific as to what we enjoy or laugh at, the capability play, as opposed to enjoyment, gives us some idea of those activities that form a part of the fully human life, and assert the importance of a government providing scope for these activities. Griffin's theory need not concern itself with such practicalities, how the value 'enjoyment' might be interpreted by those in power, is not the primary concern as his theory of well-being is developed.

As I have stated, despite my opposing Griffin's reduction of play to enjoyment, I am happy for an otherwise objective list to require a certain level of enjoyment, pleasure and satisfaction. In advocating an objective conception of well-being I claim that well-being can be enhanced in the absence of these subjective goods. I do not assert that a life without any form of subjective satisfaction or enjoyment could reasonably be associated with well-being. Both Griffin and Nussbaum make reference to these subjective goods, and I contend that a certain level of these subjective goods must be required for a life to achieve a satisfactory level of well-being.

Of Griffin's list of five, three have fairly direct counterparts in Nussbaum's capabilities approach, deep personal relations, enjoyment, and the components of human existence (to be examined later in section 6.4.6, Autonomy, liberty and practical reason). This provides strong evidence that Nussbaum has successfully found a balance between an account sufficiently basic so as to ensure potential for application (particularly in developing countries), but with a strong sense of what is central to our well-being. The prudential values that have not yet been addressed directly are Griffin's accomplishment and understanding.

#### **6.4.4 *Understanding***

'Understanding' for Griffin requires 'Simply knowing about oneself and one's world' and 'being in touch with reality, being free from muddle, ignorance, and mistake.' (Griffin, 1986: 67). Griffin does not include practical rationality within his account, claiming that it is better understood as the capacity to organise those constituents of well-being. First, I will address parallels in the Nussbaum account with Griffin's understanding, and secondly, I will discuss 'practical rationality' and its absence in Griffin's list.

Although 'Understanding' is not considered to include practical rationality (Griffin, 1986) there does seem to be a resemblance to Nussbaum's 'Practical Reason'. The latter is elaborated upon as 'to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life' (Nussbaum 2000a: 79) closely resembling Griffin's reference to living a life without muddle. When we consider that Nussbaum also refers to 'Being able to search for the ultimate meaning of life in one's own way' (Nussbaum 2000a: 79), related, one would think to knowing about one's world, there is a reasonable argument to suggest that Griffin's prudential value 'understanding' is sufficiently accounted for in Nussbaum's list. Of course, it is not necessary that the two lists converge entirely; they may just reflect different ideas of what the good life is. This convergence, however, does support my earlier conclusion that Nussbaum's capabilities approach is of relevance to my concern with well-being, not just with the establishment of political principles to ensure a social minimum.

#### 6.4.5 *Griffin's account of practical rationality*

Practical rationality, for Griffin is 'the practical weighing and balancing of the elements of a good life' (Griffin, 1986: 58). The overall view seems to be of practical reason as an organiser, but not as part of the content of the good life. There is evidence, however, of deviation from this line. Griffin also remarks that practical reason may form part of the good life,<sup>76</sup> but does not give us a good enough idea of its whole. Despite this ambiguity Griffin is certainly more dismissive of practical reason as a constituent of the good life than Nussbaum. Within Nussbaum's capabilities approach practical reason is said not only to organise but also to suffuse the other goods: 'To use one's senses in a way not infused by the characteristically human use of thought and planning is to use them in an incompletely human manner.' (Nussbaum, 2000a: 82).

Nussbaum's conception of practical reason is not as a mere organiser; rather it is central to what make us truly human. Practical reason encompasses choice and 'critical reflection' (Nussbaum 2000a: 79), this seems to incorporate a great deal of the characteristics involved in Griffin's components of human existence, 'choosing one's own course through life' (Griffin, 1986: 67). Indeed Griffin considers these to be 'what makes life human' (Griffin 1986: 67). He appears unsure as to whether practical rationality is a constituent of well-being, but accepts the centrality of the components of human existence, components that have a great deal of overlap with Nussbaum's practical reason. Nussbaum, however, goes further in describing how her practical reason suffuses the other goods on her list, and as we shall see how her notion of practical reason is in part shaped by her substantive list.

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<sup>76</sup> 'Practical rationality – for example knowledge, autonomous choice – is part of its content, but only along with, for instance, enjoyment, accomplishment, and deep personal relations.'(Griffin, 1986: 58).

#### 6.4.6 *Autonomy, liberty, and practical reason*

Nussbaum clearly states that although practical reason forms a central part of her conception of a fully human life, this does not mean that any choice is a good choice. Nussbaum employs a normative notion of practical reason. She writes:

To some extent, the list avoids those problems of paternalism by insisting that the political goal is capability, not actual functioning, and by dwelling on the central importance of choice as a good. But the notion of choice and practical reason used in the list is a normative notion, emphasizing the critical activity of reason in a way that does not reflect the actual use of reason in many lives.

(Nussbaum, 2000a: 112).

Many people make choices that damage those capabilities on Nussbaum's list. These, in the main, warrant criticism. Nussbaum's account of practical reason is tied to her list of substantive goods. Practical reason suffuses and infuses those capabilities on the list; a life would not be fully human if the capabilities did not involve practical reason in this way. For Nussbaum practical reason and affiliation are afforded a special status within the approach, however, this does not seem to amount to a formal hierarchy, so much as a recognition of how these capabilities interact with others on the list. Indeed, the fully human use of practical reason, within Nussbaum's conception, is also informed by those capabilities on Nussbaum's list. Being free to make any choice is not central to Nussbaum's conception of the fully human life, in the way that practical reason is. In certain instances it is accepted that choice can be justifiably limited, i.e. a government can seek to promote the function health and not just its capability, within the limits set by liberty.<sup>77</sup> For Nussbaum, it is the space for valuable choices protected by her substantive list that is so important to a fully human life, not choice or freedom *per se*.

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<sup>77</sup> Nussbaum (2000a: 91) talks of how health may be of value 'independent of choice, and that it is not unreasonable for government to take a stand on its importance in a way that to some extent (though not totally) bypasses choice.' Although, again, we should acknowledge Nussbaum's (2006a) noted earlier. Nussbaum certainly **does not** advocate the promotion of the function health in general.

A look at some of Nussbaum's earlier work enables further understanding the role of choice in the good life. In contrast to *Women and Human Development*, earlier examples of Nussbaum's work offered a more comprehensive theory of the human good. Rather than aligning herself with Rawls, as she does in *Women and Human Development*, Nussbaum has in the past contrasted her stance with that of Rawls, stipulating both the ends and shape of the good life (Nussbaum, 1993b: S54). Within this earlier work Nussbaum was more willing to discuss the role of autonomy within a conception of the good life, or flourishing.

Finally, the Aristotelian insists that choice is not pure spontaneity flourishing independently of material and social conditions. If one cares about autonomy, then one must care about the rest of the form of life that supports it and the material conditions that enable that form of life. Thus the Aristotelian claims that her own comprehensive concern with flourishing across all areas of life is a better way of promoting choice than is the liberal's narrower concern with spontaneity alone, which sometimes tolerates situations in which individuals are in other ways cut off from the fully human use of their faculties.

(Nussbaum, 1993b: S61).

Earlier I referred to Annas (1980) and her description of an Aristotelian position on pleasure, in which it is not conceived in isolation but in terms of the ends of a good life. This concern with all areas of a life is also evident in the understanding of autonomy. *Women and Human Development* has moved away from the comprehensive conception advanced within Nussbaum's earlier work. Nevertheless, Nussbaum's assertion that choice and autonomy must be considered alongside those other constituents of a fully human life seems relevant to *Women and Human Development*, when we consider how the list proposed there helps us understand which choices can be deemed reasonable.

Griffin's inclusion of autonomy within his '*components of human existence*' indicates how his concept extends beyond a crude subjective sense of happiness or well-being.

Now, on the face of it, the values that back rights – for example, the three values that I have singled out, autonomy, liberty, and equal respect – seem clearly to fall outside the ambit of well-being. However, sometimes that is because the notion of well-being in use is too narrow quite apart from the issue.

(Griffin, 1986: 236).

Griffin argues there may come a point in certain instances that a reduction in autonomy might be justified as better serving well-being, such a point may be reached in the case of a psychiatric patient, he suggests. In general though, he argues that autonomy is central to our well-being. ‘We value what makes life human over and above what makes life happy (Griffin, 1986: 67), and Griffin considers both liberty and autonomy central to our humanity. Griffin’s account of well-being has been criticised for its subjectivism, but the account also offers a clear improvement upon those that tie well-being to subjective experiences.

Griffin certainly does not elevate either autonomy or liberty over those other prudential values on his list. This can be seen in his situating liberty within a broader conception of well-being. ‘So, in the real world, power at the centre of one’s life matters immensely. But its value derives from the value of the whole way of life at stake.’<sup>78</sup> (Griffin, 1986: 237). A successful objective list theory must be committed to all those values it stipulates as constitutive of well-being. Both of these approaches recognise that certain choices and desires may at times threaten those values on a list, and rather than elevating values such as liberty, autonomy or even practical reason, recognise for a life to flourish, our choices must be informed by all of those values or capabilities on the list.

#### **6.4.7 *Accomplishment***

It has already been established that *Women and Human Development* provides a partial conception of the good, and despite including a great deal of Griffin’s ends, it

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<sup>78</sup> For the distinction between autonomy and liberty see Griffin (1986) pp. 374-5n9. ‘the early stage of choosing one’s path through life (autonomy) and the latter stage of not then being stopped by others from going down it (liberty).’

is not intended as a comprehensive theory of all that is valuable. Thus accomplishment, that sort of genuine achievement that gives life ‘point and substance’ (Griffin, 1986: 64), does not have an explicit counterpart in Nussbaum’s list. The central capabilities presented in *Women and Human Development* are intended to provide the foundations within which such projects could be conducted without interference. It could perhaps be argued that a range of the goods on Nussbaum’s list would provide this point of life, our relationships for example (affiliation) or the self-expressive works we produce (Senses, Imagination and Thought). The absence of accomplishment is not enough for us to conclude that Nussbaum’s theory is only of interest in the political sense of what governments are obligated to ensure their people have. The theory provides genuine insights into the human good, demonstrated by its convergence with informed desire, a convergence that Nussbaum anticipates and welcomes.

#### **6.4.8 Health**

The role of health within the respective theories offers an area of substantial difference. Nussbaum includes ‘bodily health’ as a central element of her conception, Griffin, on the other hand, does not consider health an appropriate candidate for his prudential values.

Health on its own is not valuable; it is necessary for a life, out of which each of us in his own case can make something valuable. But then what moral status has a necessary condition of the good life, in a case where achieving it will not allow one, and may prevent one, from having a good life?

(Griffin 1986: 46-47)

This stance on health should be placed within the broader context of his critique of basic needs accounts. Griffin accepts that governments will generally seek to promote needs such as health, paying less attention to desires, even going so far as to say that ‘needs generally trump desires’ (Griffin, 1986: 47). He is reluctant, however, to conclude that needs must have greater moral importance, suggesting that the trumping that seems to occur in a political context indicates only the elevated

political importance of needs. Indeed Griffin considers the elevation of needs over desires in a moral sense a mistake.

Not all basic needs are morally important; some mere desires are. What we need are deeper categories. We have to get behind talk about needs and desires to their deeper significance in our lives. This, then, becomes a serious threat to need accounts, for if prudential value turns out to be that deeper category we shall be back with the informed-desire account.

(ibid.).

Basic needs discussed by Griffin include education, 'interesting work', (Griffin, 1986: 43) and health. Griffin recognises that needs are required to at least some level or threshold. 'They all involve a norm falling below which brings malfunction, harm or ailment.' (Griffin, 1986: 42). In terms of health, certain isolated behaviours, having a takeaway meal with high fat levels, for example, do not seem to constitute harm to well-being, or indeed a significant harm to health. Griffin makes the observation that it is very difficult to ascertain just where the line falls that indicates a significant harm to a basic need such as health. He continues on to say that even if we can make the notion more determinate, it does not overcome the problem that some harms are trivial, and advocating the inclusion of health within an account such as Griffin's may elevate such trivial harms over other significant values:

Some harms are trivial. This is not just again the point that the notion of 'harm' is indeterminate. Even if we take the notion at its tightest and least disputable – for instance, we are certainly harmed if our health is damaged, particularly if the span of our lives is reduced – some harms are still minor, some reductions in span still insignificant, compared to other things, not harms according to need accounts, that can blight a life.

(Griffin, 1986: 46).

Having made this observation Griffin amends the basic needs account: '*well-being is the level to which basic needs are met so long as they retain importance*' (Griffin, 1986: 52). Griffin's ultimate argument is that this notion of importance relies upon that of prudential value. Minor stresses; or indulgences in rich or 'fast food' may be construed as harmful to health (within a certain definition of health). To understand whether such harms are important, however, we rely upon some conception of the



ends of life. Is this harming my ability to pursue those values that allow me to lead a full and rewarding life? Many of us decide that isolated instances do not threaten these central ends. More regular indulgences, leading to illness or disease, may however force us to reconsider the importance of the harm. Again this would be in terms of the prudential values. As an aside, for the analysis of these health harms, Nussbaum's capability 'Life' – is relevant here. Certain harms, smoking, drugs, excessive alcohol indulgence, (or a combination of the three) for example, may not threaten our capability to pursue central values in the short term, but reduce the time span within which we could pursue them, a 'live fast, die young' mentality.

Griffin concludes that the possibility of minor harms to health indicate that there are deeper categories that relate to our well-being. The prudential values are considered to be this deeper level of analysis. This observation, in particular the contention that there can be minor harms to health, point to an implicit commitment to a certain theory of health. The notion of minor harm relies upon the idea of something that has limited if any implication for our overall well-being. These harms would not frustrate those ends central to life. Yet if health is understood as I have suggested in a normative sense, with reference to valuable ends, the whole notion of minor harm to health would be in doubt.

Nussbaum includes Bodily Health on her list of central capabilities. At first sight this seems to contradict Griffin, who seems less convinced of its importance. Griffin, for example, cites scholars who 'with full understanding, prefer an extension to their library to exercise equipment for their health.' (Griffin, 1986: 45). These scholars, however, (presumably) have reached a certain threshold in terms of their health. We may presume that the scholars are 'adequately nourished' (Nussbaum 2000a: 78) and have 'adequate shelter' (ibid.), part of the bodily health Nussbaum speaks of. If not, then perhaps we could question their desire for a library at this stage. The point is that health promotion for these individuals may not be of the same urgency as those who are malnourished and without shelter. Those whom the capabilities approach is intended to ultimately help, through the establishment of government obligations.

Griffin's example of the scholars, whose life is apparently no worse for the decision not to utilise the equipment on offer hides too many assumptions. A certain level of physical activity is presupposed just by being able to fulfil one's academic duties, getting up the stairs, moving around, and sitting with comfort. Even this level of physical activity might be threatened by continued failure to exercise for an extended duration, or a complete neglect of one's body. One might for example develop a bad back through poor posture while being regularly slouched at a desk. The only way to alleviate such an ailment may be through exercise of some sort. We do not know enough of Griffin's scholars to really advance the case against health as a constituent of well-being. Indeed the whole argument offers no real insight as to the value of health. The scholars may value health, but just not as much as the intellectual aspects of life. They may value their health to the extent that it allows them to pursue the academic life. Despite this, Griffin, as we have seen, does not consider health an appropriate candidate for his list.

Nussbaum's assertion of the importance of health and bodily integrity to the other capabilities can be interpreted as alluding to the idea that health cannot be pursued in isolation. The idea of being healthy is entangled with other values central to well-being. Practical reason would be one of those values entangled with our ideas of what it is to be healthy. Nussbaum recognises how practical reason helps set the political threshold she is concerned with.

We are not saying, for example, that health is a mere means to freedom of choice. But we are saying that a government that makes available only a reduced and animal-like mode of an important item such as healthy living, or sensing has not done enough. All the items on the list should be available in a form that involves reason and affiliation. This sets constraints on where we set the threshold, for each of the separate capabilities, and also constraints on which specifications of it we will accept.

(Nussbaum, 2000a: 82-3).

The emphasis on nutrition and shelter in Nussbaum's bodily health, infer a fairly minimal conception of health. Recognising the concept's being suffused by practical reason allows for a more expansive interpretation. I support this more expansive

stance. I have argued in favour of Nordenfelt's definition of health, but questioned the concept of happiness that informs it. Nussbaum's capabilities approach offers an alternative to the vital goals. Health can be understood not just as the absence of disease, but in terms of our capability. Nussbaum's account though, should not be immune to criticism. Within Nussbaum's capabilities approach health may be understood as a support, or even (although Nussbaum does not say so explicitly) a foundation for the other capabilities. In speaking of health in this way, we must be careful not to resort to a conception of health disentangled from the capabilities themselves, a disentanglement that has been argued impossible in previous chapters.

This manner of incorporating health within the account resonates with Griffin's section on rights. Here he discusses autonomy and its reliance upon a 'some minimum health and leisure' (Griffin, 1986: 226).

Autonomy has a value on its own. But autonomy, on its own, is not enough. It is not enough being able to choose one's path through life if one cannot move. One needs limbs and senses that work, or something to take their place. But that is not enough either; it is no good being able to choose and having the capacity to act, if one is so racked by pain or by the need to keep body and soul together that one cannot spare a thought for anything else. We surely also need some minimum of health and leisure.

(Griffin, 1986: 226).

Earlier Griffin had concluded health as having only instrumental value, the above is not quite so clear. Griffin's reference to 'limbs and senses that work' 'pain and anxiety' 'material goods to keep body and soul together' within his list of prudential values, under (b) the components of human existence (Griffin 1986: 67), confuses matters further. Does Griffin consider health to be only of instrumental value or constitutive of those prudential values incorporated under the components of human existence?

A resolution could be provided if we take Griffin's response to Mackie (1978 in Griffin, 1986), on the value of liberty. Mackie considers liberty the basic value, Griffin 'the valuable life, *on some conception or other.*' (Griffin, 1986: 238).

But it is that we have goals, that we have the chance of making our life valuable, which gives value to the right of liberty.

(Griffin, 1986: 238).

Griffin earlier had indicated that control over our life is valuable because of ‘the value of what can be controlled’ (Griffin, 1986: 237), and that ‘liberty’s being “central” in this sense is compatible with its being derivative.’(1986: 237). Griffin’s overall view on liberty is unclear, here it seems to derive its value entirely from the valuable ways of life we are at liberty to pursue. Below he seems more willing to acknowledge its intrinsic value, but anxious not to elevate it above the other values within his conception of well-being.

We value our status as persons and want to live recognizably human lives, and liberty is a central component of that. But then liberty, like autonomy, can be fitted into the scheme of preferences, and its value explained by its place there. So there is more than one kind of link with well-being. It is a mistake to move from liberty’s being valuable in itself to the conclusion that well-being does not encompass it.

(Griffin, 1986: 238).

It is important to note Griffin’s final remark here. Griffin’s concept of well-being does not represent an ‘over-arching value’ (Griffin 1986:31), to which the prudential values are reduced. Nevertheless, his earlier remarks indicate that liberty can remain central to well-being, without necessarily being of intrinsic value. We could extend Griffin’s account to include health in this fashion, if this is not what he means already by hinting at it in his components of agency. On this reading we have a strong association between health and well-being.

This representation of Griffin, however, may not be accurate. Despite his inclusion of certain minimal requirements, I contend that Griffin does not adequately address the related roles of both health and our embodiment within his conception of well-being. Having the minimal physical requirements that enable one to choose one’s course through life is of course an essential aspect of our autonomy. Yet, as we shall see in the following section Griffin does not consider in any depth the relationship (what I describe as entanglement) between our embodiment and the prudential

values that he considers to arise from our reflective nature. The significance of our embodiment for our well-being does not end once we have the necessary physical attributes to pursue a life plan. We can only pursue well-being as embodied human beings. This embodiment has further implications, not least in terms of our health, and how this enables or limits not just the pursuit of prudential values, but exactly how we can achieve such values and in what form they figure in our lives.

Griffin's reference to minor impairments to our health further illustrates his separation of the prudential values thought to arise from our rational nature from our embodied animal nature. Those aspects that relate to our embodiment are only considered to the extent that they allow us to pursue the prudential values. Given that minor harms to health do not impinge upon these values, argues Griffin, it follows that the values must somehow be a deeper level of significance. Again, I question this separation of health from the values that constitute well-being. Indeed the real philosophical issue at stake here, it seems to me, is the way in which health is understood within each approach. Griffin, in placing health in opposition to his prudential values, fails to recognise the entangled nature of health. Health reflects our ability to make valuable choices. It is also tied to our bodily and mental faculties. In this sense the inclusion of health on a list, conceived of in this normative fashion, is a timely reminder that those values or capabilities central to a flourishing life are human values. These values are pursued within the confines of our being embodied, mortal human beings, with the all vulnerabilities that this entails.

Even if we conceive of health as constitutive of the fully human life this does not require that it be conceived of in a purely biological function. Rather it may be viewed as a capability infused with practical reason, as Nussbaum has suggested. We can elaborate this further; a fully human specification of health involves our ability to plan and reflect upon issues of the good life, and to be able to make valuable choices.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> This latter point reflects Nussbaum's normative use of practical reason, not just to form any conception, but a valuable conception, shaped by Nussbaum's substantive list.

For Nussbaum certain abilities exert a ‘moral claim’ (Nussbaum, 2000a: 83) to be developed. Instances in which the development of these abilities does not take place are described as tragic. These ethical conclusions are derived from an argument ethical at base, evaluating the ability itself as one of moral importance. Health, or the absence of, does not imply raw physiological capability. A better explanation is that a bodily or mental function exerting a moral claim to be developed fully, central to living a fully human life; is compromised. We can see how capability in Nussbaum’s sense relates to potential; our potential to live a fully human life; how our human capabilities are meant to develop. Genuine harms to these capabilities and functionings threaten both our potential to live a fully human life and our present actual functioning.

Griffin eschews this entanglement perceiving health as a mere means to well-being. This underestimates the extent to which our concept of health has at its core some of those values central to Griffin’s conception. Health is not just a means to those values central to our well-being, but a reflection of the extent to which our bodily and mental faculties facilitate the pursuit of such values.

## **6.5 Embodiment and well-being**

These differing stances on health indicate a further difference between the theories; the importance the theories place upon our being physical, embodied human beings. Griffin, despite his reluctance to include health within his ends of life, acknowledges that any explanation of a value such as autonomy must recognise our human nature and existence. This can be seen within his approach to rights, grounding them in personhood, and a concern with what aspects of being human entail special protection (see Griffin, 2001).

Autonomy should be explained, therefore, as we find it in the phenomenal world, and we find it there deeply embedded in the causal network. So the kind of autonomy we are interested in will reflect the peculiarly human way of experiencing and conceptualizing the world; it will be shaped by characteristic human concerns and sense of importance. We do not know what it is like to be

a Great Ape or a deity. Our aim must be the more modest one of understanding, not the autonomy of a spare, abstract self, but the autonomy of *homo sapiens*. So by the word ‘human’ in the phrase ‘human rights’ we should mean, roughly, a functioning human agent. And human rights cannot therefore be ahistorical or asocial.

(Griffin, 2001: 312).

Here Griffin recognises that our being human has clear implications for any concept of human rights and indeed the good life. Griffin continues, explaining that his concept of human nature is essentially normative<sup>80</sup> – like Nussbaum’s. It is within the conception of human nature that gives rise to these interests (the prudential values on Griffin’s list) that Griffin places less emphasis on our embodiment and its importance to a theory of well-being. Griffin considers the prudential values to arise from our reflective human nature,<sup>81</sup> but interestingly offers a somewhat dualist picture of human nature:

Suppose, then, that I am right in thinking that non-biological interests, such as accomplishment and deep personal relations, are as firmly embedded in human nature as biological ones are. To put it roughly, biological ones are embedded in our animal nature, and non-biological ones in our rational nature.

(Griffin, 1996: 55).

Now Griffin intends this as a rough account, so it would be wrong to hang too much upon this. Nevertheless, for Griffin the prudential values derive from our capacity to reflect. When he talks about grounding his account of rights in being human, he means the rational aspect of human nature; our animal nature seems to be of limited importance here.

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<sup>80</sup> ‘the conception of the “human” that I am proposing is not natural. I single out functioning human agents via notions such as their autonomy and liberty, and I choose these features precisely because they are especially important human interests.’ (Griffin, 2001: 313).

<sup>81</sup> ‘These large-scale, course of life desires emerge with the move from a merely biological being to a reflective intentional one. Human nature is both biological and intentional; all these interests are part of *human* nature.’ (Griffin 1996: 54)

This of course, leaves Griffin open to a similar criticism as in the previous section. The good life is in part dictated by our embodiment; health for example, represents how biology is entangled with value judgements about what we need to live a good life. There are certain physical limits we accept as part of being human, and there are certain frustrations or problems (Nordenfelt, 2007a) that we consider as illness or disease. Values go all the way down – we are not starting with biology here, but recognising that certain of Griffin’s values, autonomy was the subject of our last discussion, may be embedded in our ideas of how the human body functions and to what ends. Griffin himself recognises certain biological aims:

Particularly deeply embedded in us are certain biological aims – for food, health, protection of our capabilities – and certain psycho-biological aims – for company, affection, reproduction.

(Griffin, 1996: 54).

It is the contention here that these biological aims, entangled as they are with values such as autonomy and our need to form deep personal relationships, are impossible to separate from our rational nature. Ideas of health, illness and disease have developed through the exercise of reason, by *reflecting* upon certain central human interests, and their frustration. Those second order desires that Griffin argues have given rise to prudential values are the same sort of desires that help us to decide when we are healthy, when we are fulfilling our potential as human beings. This tidy separation between rational and biological is not tenable. Our reflections upon the good life are grounded in our being human, not just rational human beings, but embodied animal human beings.

Nussbaum, as we have seen in chapter five, is anxious that our animal nature is not set apart from an elevated conception of rationality.<sup>82</sup> Nussbaum’s approach:

sees the rational as simply one aspect of the animal, and, at that, not the only one that is pertinent to a notion of truly human functioning. More generally,

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<sup>82</sup> See also Mary Midgley’s *Beast and Man*, illustrating the continuity between other animals and humans for discussions relevant to this topic.



the capabilities approach sees the world as containing many different types of animal dignity, all of which deserve respect and even awe. The specifically human kind is indeed characterized, usually, by a kind of rationality, but rationality is not idealized and set in opposition to animality; it is just garden variety practical reasoning, which is one way animals have of functioning. Sociability, moreover, is equally fundamental and equally pervasive. And bodily need, including the need for care, is a feature of our rationality and our sociability; it is one aspect of our dignity, then, rather than something to be contrasted with it.

(Nussbaum, 2006a: 159).

Truly human functioning is not for Nussbaum entirely dictated by the rational, the approach as a whole encompasses a greater recognition of our animal nature and how this impacts upon a notion of the fully human life. This can be contrasted with Griffin who situates his profile of prudential values within the related conception of a reflective nature.

At first glance it seems that Nussbaum's (2000a) list provides a mixture of values constitutive of the fully human life, and those items that should be included for political reasons, specifying that upon which governments must aim to improve, but are really reducible to the sort of prudential values Griffin indicates. Rejecting this contention, I have argued that Nussbaum better recognises how our being embodied shapes what our conception of the good life can feasibly be. To reduce health or bodily integrity to the category of means to prudential values is to view the human body as merely a vessel, subservient to our reflective nature, and those values this reflection deems important. But our embodied nature is more important in shaping our conception of the good life than this allows. Autonomy and the related ideas of freedom, practical reason and liberty, are shaped by our embodiment as human beings. Included in a richer account would be such items as bodily health and integrity. This is not including capabilities which are not just mere means to well-being or the fully human life, but illustrative of those capabilities that are truly valuable for *human beings*. Including health on the list, for example, acknowledges how our capabilities are shaped by our embodiment, and the varying impact of our embodiment on our conception of well-being, evident in periods of illness.

## 6.6 Trade-offs

Nussbaum and Griffin have quite different stances on the possibility of trade-offs between those goods stipulated in the lists. Nussbaum aims to conceptualise a threshold level of capability, ‘required by human dignity itself’ (Nussbaum, 2000c: 1023), a level intended to prompt political action. Griffin, on the other hand, only refers to well-being in terms of more or less, and does not stipulate a level or threshold, his account is not intended to facilitate political action in the way that Nussbaum’s is.

Although Nussbaum does not stipulate the threshold, leaving this open for the threshold to be set at a more local level, she states that a certain level of *all* of the capabilities is required for a life to be described as fully or truly human. If a central capability drops below this threshold, this tragedy cannot be avoided by the increase of another (ibid). Nussbaum also indicates how the capabilities help support each other, if women can be employed outside of the home, this provides greater options to leave, if for example bodily integrity is threatened within an abusive home environment. (Nussbaum, 2000a).

Nussbaum, in proposing a threshold level of capability required by human dignity, combined with recognition of the interdependence of the capabilities, leaves little room for trade-offs that might result in capabilities dropping below the threshold level. Griffin, as we know, considers well-being in degrees, not as a substantive value itself. In speaking of more or less well-being, and not making reference to a threshold level, Griffin is more flexible with regard to the absence of a value in someone’s life. He accepts, for example, that in special circumstances accomplishment may entail too much anxiety for an individual to make it valuable for them (Griffin, 1986). His contention is that in most cases these prudential values will enhance well-being, but that there are exceptions. The exception above seems reasonable; accomplishment in this instance is not valuable for the anxious individual. Perhaps elaboration is required. Life would be improved further, not by

avoiding instances of challenge that may entail anxiety, but by addressing the anxiety itself. Nussbaum must be more forthright in her insistence upon all of her *capabilities* being achieved, designed, as they are to represent a social minimum.

Nussbaum's recognition of the relationship between her capabilities, however, offers a dimension to her account less explored within Griffin's *Well-being and Value Judgement*. Griffin's account offers flexibility not reflected in Nussbaum's capabilities approach, but at times this flexibility opens up difficulties. We can be less firm as to the universal importance of the prudential values, as there are certain exceptions. This admission of exceptions along with the employment of an endorsement constraint and the role of desire in explaining prudential value leaves the account proposed in *Well-Being* in particular, heavily influenced by possibly flawed subjective judgements. Despite the account's progress from an actual desire to an informed desire account, Griffin still offers reasons for why irrational desires should weigh in the calculation of utility. Within his section '*Why we should resist restricting it more*' (Griffin, 1986: 24) Griffin accepts as contributing to well-being in some way, (often to a minimal extent), a 'hater's *schadenfreude*' (Griffin, 1986: 25), sadistic desires, and the misogynists desire not to sit by a woman.

In attempting to overcome the rigidity of the informed desire account, Griffin may have let in too much. The theory remains consistent. Griffin's discussion of morality and prudence, illustrating how many of the prudential values require recognition of the worth of others does not represent a requirement for well-being to be enhanced, but an ideal, requiring extensive moral education (Griffin, 1996). But do these desires really improve a life, even in a minimal way? Nussbaum's insistence upon the relationship between her capabilities offers us a route to concluding in the negative.

These minimal enjoyments seem to be masking damage to other prudential values, central to well-being. Does any pleasure or enjoyment enhance well-being, however dubious its origins? A compulsive hand washer is not free to choose his/her course through life because of this condition. It would be more informative to understand

the hand washing as threatening autonomy, rather than enhancing utility in some small way. The hater's *schadenfreude* (Griffin, 1986: 25), or the misogynist, may both, (although to different extents), fail to recognise the moral worth of other people. This is an important aspect of the prudential values, within the ideal case, Griffin acknowledges. The less ideal desires seem to be afforded too much credence. It does not seem impossible that these desires promote some form of utility, but further emphasis on how this small pleasure prevents the achievement of a level of well-being associated with a better understanding of the prudential values would surely improve the account.

Griffin rightly recognises that any theory of well-being must be sensitive to individual differences, the trade-off between accomplishment and anxiety in the special case providing an example of this. Nussbaum is in a position to make stronger conclusions on this issue, due to her employment of a threshold level of capability in order for a life to be fully human. Griffin does not stipulate a threshold level at which well-being is achieved, although he does contend that in most instances informed desires will aim at those prudential values he stipulates, and that this will best serve well-being. Still the absence of a threshold level, combined with an acceptance of minimally informed desires, leaves the account overly accommodating of pleasures of dubious value to a life. Recognising the manner in which these desires, their pursuit and satisfaction, may damage the prudential values central to the conception would provide a more rounded picture. Nussbaum's account reflects a greater understanding of and reflection upon how the values or capabilities constituent of a fully human life interact.

## **6.7 Conclusion**

Griffin's theory of well-being overcomes many of the problems associated with mental state theories and the crude subjectivism evident in the psychological concept of subjective well-being. Despite acknowledging that the theory is best described as a list theory of well-being, there remains an important role for desire, and in *Well-Being* an endorsement constraint is employed. Griffin considers the

objective/subjective dualism to misrepresent the role of desire in well-being, and proposes an account that spans this dualism (Griffin, 1996). I argue, however, that his earlier account in particular allows too greater credence to the potentially flawed judgements of the individual.

Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach also employs a list of those capabilities and functionings deemed central to the fully human life. I endorse Nussbaum's argument that these are of intrinsic worth, and agree that this stance need not infer Platonism, but can be coupled with an understanding of the role of human history and desire in the formation of such a list. It is not unimportant that we desire such goods on an objective list. It is however, important that the value of such goods is not dependent upon the subjective judgements of an individual. I favour Nussbaum's conception as more clearly recognising how certain capabilities and functionings are necessary for a life to be called fully human.

Griffin's rejection of the fact/value dichotomy in expanding naturalism should be applauded, although his assertion that the prudential values follow from our *reflective nature* should be questioned. This perhaps represents one of Griffin's greatest failings, his failure to recognise the importance of our physicality in his explanation of the prudential values. Nussbaum's account places more emphasis on our being embodied, animal, human beings, exemplified by her inclusion of health and bodily integrity in her list of central capabilities. Indeed, we can only function as embodied human beings. This brings certain limitations to the manner in which we can pursue well-being. Our powers alter according to the stage of life we are at, and according to our health status. The manner in which we pursue any valuable functioning is dictated by our animal as well as our rational nature. Any successful conception of well-being, and human nature from which this is drawn, must have, at its core, both the rational and animal aspects.

## Chapter Seven

### THE CONTRIBUTION OF EXERCISE TO WELL-BEING<sup>83</sup>

#### 7.1 Introduction

Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach, it has been argued, offers insights into well-being sufficiently attentive to our being embodied. The capabilities approach is founded on a conception of human nature that embraces both the animal and rational aspects of our humanity. We can only be capable, and indeed function as embodied human beings, and this has significant implications for both the capabilities and functionings proposed as central to a fully human life or well-being. Our powers alter according to our age, and health may impact upon our capability at any time. Griffin is less attentive to the animal aspect of our human nature, as a result the values on his list appear somewhat disconnected from our concerns as animal as well as rational human beings.

The main reason provided in support of Nussbaum's capabilities approach as the best available framework within which to contemplate the value of exercise to well-being is its attention to both animal and rational aspects of our human nature. I have also questioned, however, certain elements of Griffin's approach that appear to place too great an emphasis on the possibly flawed judgements of the subject. This criticism has been directed in particular at Griffin's (1986) employment of an endorsement constraint. Nussbaum, although not dismissing altogether the role of desire within her conception, relies more strongly on her list of substantive goods. The potential for distorted and adaptive desires is recognised and hence the list provides the prime means for judging the success of those in power in ensuring a level of capability for its citizens.

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<sup>83</sup> I have used the terms physical activity and exercise interchangeably until now. In this chapter I differentiate between physical activity and exercise. Physical activity refers to levels of activity that all of us apart from the bed-bound engage in as part of our daily routine. Exercise is intended to indicate a more strenuous level, most likely (although not necessarily) associated with those who make some special effort to 'take exercise.'

Nussbaum, of course, intends her theory to be applied in a political context and not for the assessment of individual lives; hence the political objectivity the theory aspires to, as well as the focus upon capability rather than functioning. Neither does Nussbaum consider her approach to incorporate all that is of value to a life. At this stage, however, the approach remains grounded in intuitions as to what constitutes a fully human life, and these intuitions clearly connect the theory with the prudential domain. In defending an objective conception of well-being I have rejected both the stark separation of prudential and perfectionist value, and the contention that well-being is confined to the subject's perspective. This approach conflates notions of the fully human life, those aspects that are central to our being human, and concepts of well-being. As an example of this I have criticised Sumner's (2000) approach to the experience machine, in which plugging in is not necessarily seen as detrimental to well-being, if it is the individual's preference. I reject this, following Nozick in arguing that that to plug in is to abandon the most central aspects of our humanity. Such a decision would directly threaten my objective conception of well-being, but the issue is less clear cut for Sumner's conception tied, as it is, to the subject's perspective.

Thus the terms well-being and the fully human life as I understand them, need not be sharply separated. Indeed there are similarities between Nussbaum's and Griffin's approach. I have chosen to use well-being as the final concept with which to examine the contribution of exercise to a life. The use of the concept helps indicate that Nussbaum's account is not being used in exactly the fashion it is intended. I indicate a justification of Nussbaum's conception in terms of Putnam's approach to objectivity in the realm of ethics. My concern is with the contribution the capabilities and functionings stipulated make to a life, a marked difference from Nussbaum's approach. My ultimate concern after all is with the role exercise has to play in well-being, not a justification of its provision in political terms. There is no conceptual loss in exchanging fully human for well-being. I retain the central aspects of the conception, its recognition of our embodiment, and the potential for adaptive preferences.

In using Nussbaum's conception in this fashion certain of Nussbaum's capabilities may appear out of place. Am I looking to judge contribution of exercise to well-being in terms of our ability to vote, our political environment, or our ability to hold property? First, I should note that all such lists are provisional, intended to promote further discussion rather than represent the final objective constituents of our well-being. Second, the capability 'Control over One's Environment' would be the only capability, I argue, that appears unusual within a conception of well-being. Our political environment is of course of relevance to our well-being. Yet its inclusion in an objective list is somewhat unusual. It is possible that such control is subsumable under another of Nussbaum's capabilities. Practical reason, the use of our Senses Imagination and Thought, Affiliation encompass a great deal of what is valuable within this capability: Our ability to govern our own life, speak freely, having equal property and employment rights. Indeed being afforded equal respect in these domains, directly relevant to our having the social basis of self respect, is central to Nussbaum's conception of affiliation.

Nussbaum's capabilities, it has been stated on numerous occasions, are not intended to encompass the entirety of what is of value to us. When we extend the capabilities to consider the actual functionings with which they might be associated, however, the account seems to encompass a great deal of the prudential domain. Indeed, the similarities with Griffin's list provide support for this contention. Nussbaum's threshold may be for some too low, intended to ensure an acceptable political level, but this need not overly concern my own use of the account. Griffin's accomplishment offers one example of a value not included explicitly on Nussbaum's list. I will make two observations here. Providing life with point and substance (accomplishment as Griffin understands it), might be achieved through a range of Nussbaum's capabilities and functionings. Nussbaum refers to expressing oneself, planning and reflecting upon life, searching for the meaning of life. All such functionings certainly relate to Griffin's accomplishment. Thus even this value has its counterparts. The capabilities and functionings form a defensible conception of well-being, and similarity with other lists suggests that it provides an adequate conception within which to judge the value of exercise.



Nussbaum's political justification of the central capabilities has provided a challenge, in terms of my ultimate concern, the relationship between exercise and well-being. This challenge, I have suggested, can be overcome. One way in which to achieve this would be to suggest that the political objectivity Nussbaum aspires to is unobtainable, perhaps even incoherent, and to seek to defend the conception on more perfectionist grounds. Putnam (2003) for example, suggests that the political justification of the theory confuses political principles with moral principles and moves to provide a justification of the capabilities in more comprehensive terms. Putnam may have a point, but I need not concern myself overly with such questions. Nussbaum herself states:

On the question of objectivity in science and ethics, my sympathies (and arguments in so far as I have them) lie basically with Putnam: we do have available to us a quite robust conception of objectivity both in the science and in ethics, and we do not need to rely, in articulating this notion, on any problematic notion of the given, or unmediated access to reality.

(Nussbaum, 2001: 886).

Nussbaum is not opposed to the notion of objectivity in ethics, it is just that her political motivations behind the capabilities approach discourage a consideration of the capabilities in these terms.

But ethics is one thing and normative political thought is, or may be, another. And what interests me in this essay is the particular form the search for objectivity takes, or should take, when a pluralistic democratic society seeks to justify its basic political principles.

(Nussbaum, 2001: 559).

Nussbaum leaves open the possibility that a version of the capabilities approach could be defended in more comprehensive terms, without recourse to political principles. Indeed, my question as to the relationship between exercise, health and well-being requires this stance, drawing upon Putnam's conception of objectivity rather than Rawls's political objectivity, for its foundation. Ultimately my concern is with the contribution of exercise to well-being. Whether exercise should be endorsed

as a capability, or a constituent of a capability in Nussbaum's political sense, with its resulting political significance, is not a primary concern.

This latter point requires further elaboration. My commitment to the objectivity of well-being does not entail a commitment to Nussbaum's framework as an absolute truth, or even as a correct description of the world independent of perspective. I am committed to objectivity in the realm of values, and, although I have not developed this line of thought in any depth, discussed Putnam's picture of objectivity as an adequate stance on how values and concepts such as well-being and health might retain objective status in chapter three. Putnam, however, does not offer a final 'once and for all' answer. He does, however, suggest that reasoned discussion on topics such as well-being can bring us to some insightful, objective, but nevertheless fallible conclusions.

My commitment to objective theories of well-being extends to a claim that the capabilities approach represents the best available conception of our well-being, rather than it just representing a basis for political principles. I make this claim whilst of course accepting, as Nussbaum does, that the approach remains in its infancy, requiring continued discussion and revision. Claiming that a theory of well-being can be objective in this sense, however, neither entails nor justifies paternalistic action. Supporting an objective theory of well-being is a separate matter from acting upon one to promote one's own conception of the good for one's self or others. It should also be noted that action of any kind based upon an objective theory of well-being would need to attend to the whole theory, in the cases of both Nussbaum and Griffin this would involve the centrality of autonomy (for Griffin) and practical reason (for Nussbaum) to living a life worthy of a human being.

What of the conclusions of this chapter and indeed the thesis as a whole? Having decided upon the most defensible theory of well-being, how do we understand the contribution of exercise to it? First, I posit that the nature of the relationship between exercise and well-being is merely instrumental. Exercise that makes you feel good does not necessarily improve well-being. Exercise that does not result in enhanced

mood may still impact upon well-being. In short, exercise preserves those capabilities and indeed functionings constitutive of our well-being. It preserves those capabilities to function in a valuable way, those capabilities that, as Nussbaum indicates, are of intrinsic value. That exercise is of merely instrumental value to our well-being may disappoint some who would prefer a stronger argument as to its benefit. This conclusion, however, is not insignificant. Although instrumental, exercise is of *special* significance in that it represents one way in which a number of valuable functionings may be both instantiated within one activity, and preserved for later life. The manner in which we function is also, of course, limited and enabled by our embodiment. Exercise represents one of a restricted number of ways in which the physical precondition of our capability to function in certain valuable ways can be preserved.

This argument for the value of exercise to well-being will be developed in three sections. The first (7.2) will address how the normative conception of health advanced in chapter three can be incorporated within Nussbaum's capabilities approach. This represents a development of Nussbaum's account that, understandably, does not address the capability health in great detail. The second (7.3) section will consider the importance of exercise to well-being. In line with the normative stance taken throughout the thesis, the value of exercise is contemplated in terms of the primary concept well-being, rather than health. The prior elaboration of health within Nussbaum's account, however, helps us to understand one of the most significant ways in which exercise improves our lives, through its impact upon the bodily aspect of capability. The final, shorter section emphasises that certain 'thicker' forms of exercise are more likely to impact directly upon the other capabilities.

## **7.2 Health within Nussbaum's capabilities approach**

Nussbaum has indicated that health (and bodily integrity), are important to the other capabilities. Nussbaum's stance on the implications of this for public policy is not entirely clear. In *Women and Human Development* health's importance and intrinsic

value is used to justify governments, in certain instances, bypassing choice in order to preserve this central function. The stance in *Frontiers of Justice* is more protective of choice. Regardless of this discrepancy, Nussbaum's recognition of the importance of health to the other capabilities is a useful place to start assessing the value of exercise to well-being. If we were to follow the naturalistic argument a straightforward way in which to understand the value of exercise is available. The naturalistic argument suggests illness and diseases can be identified through value-free means. These in turn can be interpreted as having a negative impact upon a life. The physiological research on physical activity, that the WHO rationale (criticised in chapter three) is based upon, associates exercise predominantly with disease reduction. This scientifically verifiable 'fact' can in turn be evaluated as positive. Exercising promotes a bodily state free of disease, and (here evaluations enter), this state is positive in facilitating the pursuit of well-being.<sup>84</sup>

Chapter three, however, argued that health and indeed disease are not value-free but concepts that entangle fact and value. Underpinned by Putnam's work on entanglement and initially fuelled by Nordenfelt's normative theory of health, it was suggested that health is best understood in terms of a further concept such as well-being or happiness. Nordenfelt's philosophy of health, however, was not accepted without criticism. In particular it was noted that his subjective conception of happiness threatens the plausibility of the theory. An objective list theory of well-being offers a more defensible framework within which to understand the concepts of health, disease and illness. This conception is less susceptible to the adaptive preferences and flawed reasons for failing to endorse a good that might distort subjective conceptions. Having worked through a number of alternative theories, I consider Nussbaum's capabilities approach as the best available framework within which to understand both well-being, and therefore the concept of health.

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<sup>84</sup> A special issue of *Medicine, Health Care and Philosophy* (2007) 10, offers a more elaborate and refined discussion of naturalism and normativism; see especially Nordenfelt (2007a) 'The concepts of health and illness revisited'.

### 7.2.1 *A Normative theory of health and Nussbaum's capabilities approach*

Nussbaum does not clearly indicate the theory of health she embraces. It does, however, seem a rather minimal conception when we consider her definition of the capability.

**Bodily Health.** Being able to have good health, including reproductive health; to be adequately nourished; to have adequate shelter.

(Nussbaum, 2000a: 78).

Nussbaum, however, does not reduce bodily health to the purely physical, endorsing the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) definition of reproductive health, included within her bodily health capability. This echoes the WHO in stating 'Reproductive health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity in all matters relating to the reproductive system and its processes.' (Nussbaum, 2000a: 78). This definition also includes reference to being free to decide on matters of reproduction.

Further evidence that Nussbaum does not consider the capability bodily health in value-free, physiological terms is provided by the description of how practical reason suffuses other capabilities:

All the items on the list should be available in a form that involves reason and affiliation. This sets constraints on where we set the threshold, for each of the separate capabilities, and also constraints on which specifications of it we will accept.

(Nussbaum, 2000a: 82).

Bodily health, to be the sort of health enjoyed within a fully human life, will involve these two capabilities. But what is it for health to be suffused by practical reason? Health constitutive of the fully human life must involve thought and planning in a manner that allows 'concern and reciprocity with other human beings' (Nussbaum, 2000a: 82).

Being healthy necessarily entails being able to reason in such a way as ‘to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one’s life’ (Nussbaum, 2000a: 79). That practical reason is closely connected with freedom of choice can be discerned from Nussbaum’s comments.<sup>85</sup> Being able to critically reflect upon one’s life, forming a conception of the good, requires, it seems, freedom of choice (informed of course by the substantive list, not any choice is endorsed within this framework). There would be little to critically reflect upon if one was forced down a particular route. A fully human specification of health must be suffused by practical reason. Health, on this understanding is not just bodily function, but being able to reflect upon our life, and the options we have available to us. It will be my contention later that this is one way in which some diseases impact negatively upon a life. They reduce the options we have, we may be left just trying to get over the pain, get through each day, and find pleasure in whatever way we can. This surely represents a limitation to the way one can employ practical reason.

Nussbaum does not suggest that health as a concept can be reduced entirely to natural scientific description. The sort of bodily health Nussbaum considers central to a fully human life is suffused by practical reason. This role for practical reason takes us much closer to a normative stance. We are not just concerned with the biological indicators of health but with what we are able to do, the life we have available to us, that we can reflect upon and plan. This apparent normativity could be seen as at odds with the argument for promoting the function health.

My own view is that health and bodily integrity are so important in relation to all the other capabilities that they are legitimate areas of interference with choice up to a point, although there will rightly be disagreement about where that point is in each area.

(Nussbaum 2000a: 95).

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<sup>85</sup> ‘When we make practical reason and affiliation central in this way, we are not saying that these are the two ends to which all others can be reduced. We are not saying, for example, that health is a mere means to freedom of choice.’ (Nussbaum, 2000a: 82).

Here Nussbaum advocates promotion of the function health because of its importance for all the other capabilities. Recall the distinction between functioning and capability; functioning represents the actual being or doing, if we are talking of play, actually playing. Capability refers to the opportunity to function. Nussbaum's supporting the promotion of the function health *seems to suggest* (although Nussbaum does not go so far as to say) that health is a foundation for the other capabilities. If we are not healthy we will struggle to be capable. The arguments of chapter three favoured the direction of Nordenfelt's argument, but not the conception of happiness employed. I argued that health should be understood in terms of well-being (best understood in terms of functionings and capabilities) and not vice versa. Nussbaum's approach offers a defensible, objective conception of well-being within which to understand health. Those functionings and capabilities central to Nussbaum's fully human life should provide the primary concepts for the understanding of health, rather than health itself being understood as an independent foundation for the capabilities. To understand health as a foundation of that which defines it would reduce the argument to a damaging circularity.

### **7.2.2 *Health and Capability: the relationship examined***

Both Nussbaum and Nordenfelt refer to that which is vital or central to our lives, without intending to cover the whole of prudential value. Nordenfelt refers to goals, the achievement of which would improve our lives but would not be deemed as 'vital'. A pay rise, or good weather on holiday, for example. But, Nordenfelt continues:

Not all such things are prerequisites for our continuing to live a tolerable life, for ensuring our minimum happiness.

(Nordenfelt, 1997: 70).

Nussbaum may well take exception to 'tolerable life', she is after all concerned with a 'fully human life' and ensuring that domestic abuse, poverty, poor education etc. are not tolerated. Nussbaum considers dropping below her threshold level of capability to be a tragedy, again indicating that the theory is concerned with that

which is vital, not peripheral to an individual's life. The capabilities approach she advocates understands those capabilities as central to a fully human life. She illustrates in numerous examples the ability of human beings to adapt and 'tolerate' the worst of circumstances. The capabilities and functionings are understood to be of intrinsic value, significantly limiting the force of subjective judgements such as adaptive preferences within the account. Nordenfelt's reference to a 'tolerable life' thus will be rejected in favour of Nussbaum's characterisation of how the capabilities and functionings are central to living a fully human life, and indeed I have argued, essential for any reasonable level of well-being to be achieved.

The capabilities are conceived as perquisites for well-being. Nussbaum's use of a substantive list protects the concept of health itself from being distorted by ill-informed subjective goals. Nussbaum's arguments for how freedom must be understood in terms of a substantive list seem to apply to health. Not all freedoms are valuable, and indeed not all goals considered vital by an individual warrant that status.

Conceptualising health in this manner, however, begs certain questions. Where do we draw the boundaries, that is to say, does this normative concept of health swell to incorporate too much of well-being. What is the difference between having those central capabilities and being healthy? Health may indeed be a less expansive concept, but it would surely extend health beyond its use in everyday language to suggest that it can be defined as a lower threshold of capability or well-being.

The accusation that the normative conception of health encompasses too much relates to Schramme's (2007) concern that Nordenfelt's concept of illness is also too expansive. Nordenfelt's response suggests that he is quite happy with a broad concept of health, but he urges caution equating health reduction with illness, as this need not be the case. Schramme argues that an athlete, Lily, unable to fulfil her lifelong ambition of jumping higher than two metres, must not be considered ill or even in reduced health. Nordenfelt's theory would be inadequate in classifying her as



so. First Nordenfelt is quick to point out that he would not classify Lily as ill – but in reduced health.

To me, and I think Schramme also agrees, although he does not focus on this matter here, health is a dimension ranging from a state of complete health to a state of maximal illness. So when Lily does not achieve what she has striven for so intensely, and this goal qualifies as a vital goal in my sense, the assessment is not automatically that Lily is ill. The result is only that Lily's complete health is somewhat reduced.

(Nordenfelt, 2007b: 30).

Nordenfelt considers Lily's health reduced because of what he calls 'unrealistic or even dangerous goal setting', cases of which he says are 'more common in psychiatry than elsewhere'. (Nordenfelt, 2007b: 30).

In utilising a substantive list of central functionings and capabilities to define the concept health, subjective goals such as Lily's can be given less credence. Nussbaum, although anxious to criticise those adaptive goals that denigrate those capabilities on her list, is not entirely critical of adaptation. Adaptation in certain areas is a positive thing, states Nussbaum (2000a), who wanted to be a famous opera singer. She also takes as an example the striving for a sports career without having the necessary physical attributes. We adapt our preferences having recognised that these desires are unrealistic. These desires, states Nussbaum, should not be encouraged. Nussbaum utilises her list of central capabilities to distinguish goals such as Lily's from those wants for what 'people as people have a right to have.' (Nussbaum, 2000a: 138). Lily would not be in reduced health according to Nussbaum's objective conception. Neither is her well-being affected in a manner that has any political significance. The capabilities are not there to protect such desires.

My intention, however, is to extend Nussbaum's account, not just to talk of political significance, but of an impact upon well-being. The capabilities approach, with its clear stance on those capabilities and functionings central to a fully human life certainly indicates that Lily's frustration comes low down, even when we consider

Lily's well-being. Lily is unhappy that she cannot achieve a goal she deems central to her life, this surely has some impact upon well-being, and Nussbaum's account can accept this. The capabilities are not intended all that is of value, and frustration in certain ends, however misconceived are likely to have some significance. We may also understand Lily's goal setting as unreasonable, as the poor planning of one's life. The fully human use of practical reason should be informed by those other capabilities on the list, striving for that which is not on the list, reducing time spent on the pursuit of more central values, is detrimental to well-being. The advantage of an account of the good such as Nussbaum's, grounded as it is in ideas of the fully human, is that it encourages us to prioritise, to recognise those capabilities and values central to life and those that are not. Lily's concern, although it may seem central to her, is not of the significance that she attributes it, when we consider those capabilities central to us as human beings. An objective conception encourages Lily to accept this and adapt her goals, not just because they do not relate to health, or they hold no political sway, but because there are more important things in her life. If I had held on to my childhood ambition to be a footballer, and claimed to this day that my life is worse because I am not, those around me would encourage me to alter my desires, to adapt, and indeed to recognise what I do have and have achieved. An objective conception encourages us to contemplate those central values, and their pursuit and protection.

Nordenfelt, (2007b) of course, would also encourage Lily to modify her goals. Where we differ is in the credence we allow such goals in the meantime. I am willing to accept that the frustration of a goal not on Nussbaum's list may impact upon well-being to some extent. This impact however, being distinct from those aspects of life central to a human existence, is of limited significance. Most likely our pursuit of an unrealistic goal will reduce our chances to concentrate upon those functionings more central to a good life. I am not willing to accept that such goal frustration impacts upon health, Nussbaum's list, tied as it is to those capabilities and functionings central for a fully human life provide a welcome restriction.

This use of Nussbaum's list to restrict those goals that might be said to impact upon health, does not fully answer Schramme's argument. Nussbaum's list includes many items that seem to extend beyond health as it is commonly conceived. Is health impinged if our political rights are inhibited? Political rights being subsumed under Nussbaum's Control Over One's Environment capability. A concern that this may amount to an unjustified inflation of the concept can be contrasted with Nordenfelt's equally valid concern that concepts such as illness are not too restricted:

If medicine, or the enterprise of health enhancement in general – I do not want to let medicine have all the say here – should be confined to dealing only with such illness as is clearly due to malfunction in a strict biological sense – then we could miss a lot of suffering and disability that ought to be taken care of. What should we do about people who are burnt out or depressed and cannot perform their jobs or even take care of themselves. In many of these cases we cannot detect any biological malfunction in the Boorse/Schramme sense. Should we say that these people do not belong to medicine or psychiatry? Should we say that they belong to some other part of societal welfare, not yet invented?

(Nordenfelt, 2007b: 30).

Being burnt out, over worked, or depressed seems to have more identifiable counterparts in Nussbaum's list of capabilities. Nussbaum refers to 'being able to work as a human being, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers' (2006a: 78). Nussbaum also refers to play, emotional development and pleasurable experiences, all of which relate to Nordenfelt's examples. Is this where our argument must end, with an acceptance that any reduction of the central capabilities below a certain threshold must necessitate impairment to our health? I am certainly willing to acknowledge that conditions such as burn out may be associated with both reduced health and illness, but I remain slightly anxious that accepting 'capability' as the primary concept does not stretch health too far beyond common usage of the concept.

If we return to Nordenfelt's theory of health there are two main ways in which we might seek to differentiate between health and capability. Nordenfelt (2007c) proposal is that

*A is completely healthy if, and only if, A is in a bodily and mental state which is such that A has the second-order ability to realize all his or her vital goals given a set of standard or otherwise reasonable circumstances.*

(Nordenfelt, 2007c: 54)

It is not essential to the argument to conduct a rigorous examination of Nordenfelt's concept of health, but merely address that which might enable better understanding of the concepts of health and capability. First I will take Nordenfelt's reference to standard or reasonable circumstances. Standard circumstances refer to one's surroundings being as they would normally be. Nordenfelt (2007c) takes John's ability to walk as an example, John is able to walk in the case that nothing unusual such as bad weather blocks the execution of this ability. The qualifier reasonable circumstances, seeks to overcome instances in which standard circumstances may still prevent the exercise of a capability. Someone is trained to be a teacher but is unable to function as a teacher because of the political climate, the closure of schools in Chechnya provides Nordenfelt's example. These circumstances may be strictly defined as standard, but are considered unreasonable.

We would not, under this interpretation, consider someone unhealthy if they are unable to teach because of an unreasonable political environment. This offers one way in which to ensure that health does not inflate to encompass all of capability, for Nussbaum would certainly argue that the teacher does not have the capability to teach. Nussbaum is, after all, concerned with the political obligations her list generates. Nordenfelt's reference to bodily and mental state also offers an interpretation of health that has clear differences from capability. One's bodily and mental state facilitating the pursuit of certain values, such as friendships, political involvement, interaction with nature, is not entirely what Nussbaum means by capability. For one is not capable to pursue these valuable functionings just because the bodily and mental preconditions of capability are in place, Nussbaum is also concerned that external conditions facilitate the pursuit of the valuable functionings on the list.

I suggest that anchoring health within bodily and mental states provides a way of preventing undesirable conceptual inflation. Capability becomes the wider concept requiring both the mental and physical state associated with good health, as well as the external conditions that facilitate the pursuit and achievement of those functionings on the list. This understanding of health retains the origins of the concept:

Health has always had to do with a person's well-being and ability related to his or her internal somatic and mental conditions. If we change that supposition, then we are changing our basic language.

(Nordenfelt, 2007b: 31).

Health, as I have argued, is best understood with reference to the bodily and mental. This of course does not solve the argument as to the boundaries of health. There is a range of ways in which internal somatic and mental conditions may be affected and therefore this recognition may not restrict the concept to the extent some would like. Indeed, we must be careful not to anchor the definition so much within the internal conditions, that we lose sight of the primary concept for understanding health – in my view capability. If we cannot find a clear internal cause of one's capability loss this does not seem to prevent it per se from being a health matter. The internal causes of chronic fatigue syndrome may be unclear but yet we rightly accept it as pertaining to health, not just a matter for well-being. The holistic theory of health remains true to common usage through its reference to bodily and mental conditions. There may be instances, however, in which bodily and mental states are less clear but we accept that condition as one pertaining to health and illness. The primary concept of capabilities helps illustrate the debilitating nature of such illnesses, even in the absence of a clear internal cause.

I am willing to leave the issue of the boundaries of health somewhat unresolved. I am happy to suggest the capabilities as the primary concept with which to understand health, but also accept its association with our bodily and mental state. Indeed, Nordenfelt's recognition of this indicates that taking a normative stance need not require reduced attention to how our being embodied affects our lives.

Nussbaum's capabilities approach itself is keen to recognise how our embodiment affects any conception of well-being or the fully human. My concern is with the relationship between exercise and well-being, and this normative stance together with recognition of health's continued association with our bodily and mental state provides ripe ground for discussion. Exercising is one of the few ways in which the physical aspect of capability may be impacted upon. Many of the capabilities require a certain minimal level of physical activity and use of our bodies, and exercise represents one of a restricted number of ways in which this physical aspect of capability might be impacted upon. This, however, is to move ahead of the argument. First I must continue in my analysis of the role of health within Nussbaum's capabilities approach.

### **7.2.3 *Capable yet unhealthy – thresholds and freedom***

Nussbaum and Nordenfelt both refer to thresholds. They are central to Nussbaum's theory; the approach relies upon a threshold level of capability below which a life cannot be described as fully human. We should acknowledge, however, that although Nussbaum is concerned with capability, she also acknowledges that functioning itself is central to a fully human existence. For if we do not function in the valuable ways she indicates a life cannot properly be described as 'fully human.'

Having the innate capability to function would not satisfy the requirements of Nussbaum's list. Indeed Nussbaum (2000a) differentiates between three different types of capabilities. 'Basic capabilities' refer to the innate basis for our capabilities. Functioning does not necessarily follow a basic capability, we may, at birth, have the innate capability say for speech, but this requires development before we can actually exhibit the functioning (Nussbaum, 2000a: 84). 'Internal capabilities' refer to 'developed states of person herself that are, so far as the person herself is concerned, sufficient conditions for the exercise of the requisite functions.' (Nussbaum, 2000a: 84). The person can function in the desired way immediately, if the external circumstances allow. Finally Nussbaum refers to 'combined

capabilities', 'internal capabilities' combined with the 'suitable external conditions for the exercise of the function' (Nussbaum, 2000a: 85).

Let us take a capability on Nussbaum's list as an example. If we are born with the innate capability for some form of communication, and with the capability to love, and develop relationships with those around us, one could presume that we have the basic capability for affiliation. The internal capability would require the development of these capacities. This development would ensure our present ability to communicate, to love, to form attachments to those significant others around us. This internal capability, however, may be threatened in the absence of the appropriate external circumstances. A loving family, free from abuse, with adequate interaction with others during childhood provide examples of how such a capability could be supported. Yet the combined capability would require more than this. The capability of affiliation and the related capability of emotions would also require, as Nussbaum (2000a) indicates, being afforded equal respect, being treated as having equal worth to others, being able to speak freely, and to work in an environment that encourages meaningful attachments and mutual respect.

The list of central capabilities we have discussed throughout this thesis are combined capabilities. Nussbaum insists that governments ensure that we can all function in these valuable ways if we desire. Nussbaum is not seeking to promote the internal or innate aspect of capability. The first very basic point is for our capability to exceed the threshold Nussbaum speaks of, we must have the combined capability to function.

Nussbaum's list is intended to facilitate our pursuit of well-being, to be capable in the fully human sense requires more than just being able to in its most raw sense. Recall that health constitutive of the fully human life must be suffused by practical reason. This represents another way in which the threshold may be developed, with reference to the special capability of practical reason. For the capabilities to be constitutive of a fully human life, they must instantiate the capability practical reason.

Nordenfelt's conception of health also relies upon the notion of threshold, 'health is a dimension ranging from a state of complete health to a state of maximal illness' (Nordenfelt, 2007b: 30). This helps Nordenfelt indicate when health but not illness can be impaired. Nordenfelt elsewhere talks of a 'bottom line that people declared to be healthy must have reached' stipulated for the purposes of healthcare (Nordenfelt, 2007b: 31). He suggests that this may 'for good reason change over time and place' (ibid.).

This all demonstrates that health and well-being, understood here, are not something we have or do not have, they are not substantive concepts. Nussbaum is not particularly forthcoming in as to the details of where the thresholds should be laid down. Neither will I undertake this difficult task in any great depth, but I will make certain observations I feel necessary for the overall argument.

It seems certainly feasible that we can function in a valuable way yet be unhealthy. There is marked difference between struggling through pain and discomfort to function in those ways central to a life, and being truly capable, in the sense that Nussbaum requires for a life to be fully human. This is again an indication of the ability of humans to adapt and overcome obstacles.

That someone can be wracked with pain and yet function in these valuable ways need not threaten either our theory of health or well-being. It can be suggested that such an individual may have great difficulty achieving the desired threshold level of capability central to both our concepts of health and well-being. If capability is restricted this may be enough to argue for impaired health status and even illness. Diseases reduce our freedom to function in valuable ways. Being ill may not mean we are unable to, for example affiliate, but it may affect the quality of our relationships. The pain we feel may make it difficult to interact and indeed to get around, making it more difficult to visit people, restricting forms of contact to phone and e mail. The individual only has certain options open to them; they are forced into certain functionings.



The thresholds for well-being and the related concept of health, I argue, concern more than just whether we can function in valuable ways. Of course, having reduced opportunity to function in valuable ways is likely to lead to reduce our actual functioning, and this is one clear way in which well-being would be reduced. A further related way is through reduced quality<sup>86</sup> of a given functioning, our example of affiliating in some sort of restricted way because someone is house bound. Finally, and moving away from the actual functioning, I contend that having a reduced capability to achieve valuable functionings is relevant to both the health and well-being threshold. Well-being and indeed health concern not just being able to do something, but our freedom to choose that option.

This contention seems to fit with our common usage of health. A skin condition may not prevent forming relationships, or engaging in recreational activities, but if the individual is conscious of how they look, they may be distracted and the quality of actual functioning may be reduced. The individual may consider their freedom to engage in certain activities restricted, seeking activities with reduced human contact. The condition may also become uncomfortable in extremes of weather, of course not preventing interaction with nature, or indeed expressing oneself, but perhaps reducing the ways in which this could be achieved. This provides a clear example of how health can be reduced, to something we would generally call illness, without a certain valuable functioning being prevented altogether.

This normative approach, of course, retains its prime concern with capability to achieve valuable functionings. If we take our example of a skin condition again, we can demonstrate how in other instances, this bodily state may not impact upon our lives at all, indeed an individual may not even know we have it. A small patch of eczema or psoriasis that the individual pays little attention to, may not frustrate functioning, or even reduce freedom to function in a valuable way. We would not consider the person ill or unhealthy, although there is the potential within

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<sup>86</sup> For the suggestion that there may be some variation of quality of function I am indebted to Thomas Schramme.

Nordenfelt's account to accept there are 'trivial variants of a disease' (Nordenfelt, 2007b: 29). In line with his Reverse Theory of Disease and Illness, (although of course with significant differences) I understand impairment to health in terms of impact upon capability below a certain threshold. A particular bodily state we have come to recognise as often impacting in this manner need not necessarily inhibit an individual's health if they have rather minor or trivial variant of the disease in question. The disease itself can be identified, on the basis of its implications more generally.

The threshold for health is affected by our actual functioning, our freedom to pursue valuable functionings, as well as some indicator of the quality of functioning. There is, however, one more matter to which we should turn our attention prior to examining the role of exercise in our well-being. This is the future-orientated nature of health. Our actual level of functioning, or even our freedom to function, *at the present time*, may not always be the best indicator of health. Human beings are forward looking and there is a question as to whether we would deem someone healthy who engages in behaviours that, whilst not reducing functioning now, are likely to have a negative impact upon function, and freedom to function in the future. Someone who is sedentary, drinks too much alcohol, consumes an excessive amount of fatty foods, may not be someone often referred to as healthy in everyday discourse. This, however, is likely to be referring more to the future consequences of such a lifestyle than current impact upon functioning which may be insignificant. Thus, I conclude that whether one has reached a threshold level to be deemed in good health, concerns not just present functioning, and freedom to function, but likely future functioning, and freedom to function in valuable ways. It is not an over-extension of Nussbaum's capability to suggest that the concept itself has a future, or forward-looking element. Nussbaum is, after all, concerned with the fulfilment of human potential. I suggest that health also concerns future capability and likely impairment.

We may wish to conclude that someone who engages in behaviour that does not seem to affect the relevant thresholds now, but we can reasonably state there is a

good chance it will later, is unhealthy, but not ill. The whole issue, however, of future health implications is one that will be discussed in more depth in the following section. For now we should acknowledge that the uncertainty of the future urges caution in making such judgements. We cannot guarantee that ‘unhealthy behaviours’ will have a negative impact upon later functioning and capability.

### **7.3 The relationship between exercise and well-being: A philosophical analysis**

The conclusions generated from earlier chapters in this thesis were of a more critical nature, concerned with the inadequacies of psychological stances on well-being and naturalistic approaches to health. Nussbaum’s capabilities approach, it is argued, offers a more defensible framework within which to consider human well-being, and indeed health.

The purpose of this pivotal section of the thesis is to apply these conclusions to the central problem, examining the relationship between exercise and well-being. In light of my contention that well-being and health are not substantive values but should be understood in ‘degrees’ this question requires some adjustment. I am concerned with whether exercise is necessary for the achievement of a threshold level of well-being. Exercise might well improve a life but is it constitutive of a certain threshold level of well-being where dropping below this threshold would mean well-being is significantly impaired?

In answering this question much would depend on where such a threshold is set. Determining thresholds is a lengthy and complex task, and a process influenced by a range of factors including for example context and a society’s history (Nussbaum, 2006a). The task of setting thresholds is beyond the scope of this thesis, but I will follow Nussbaum in understanding a threshold level of well-being to be set as such that the individual has not had their potential as a human being stifled. The threshold, as I have indicated earlier, however, should not be held hostage to subjective considerations. We should not accept that if someone is happy with their

level of capability and functioning they exceed a threshold level of well-being. This would be to diminish the critical powers of a substantive list. The task is rather to assess what level of capability and indeed functioning is required for it to be said that human potential has been fulfilled. This requires further understanding of those capabilities and functionings on the list, and the threshold below which we can question whether well-being objectively speaking has been achieved. Considerations may, for example, be the extent to which each capability facilitates the use of practical reason, an observation that Nussbaum makes in considering when a person can be deemed healthy.

There are other conceptual issues that require clarification before the relationship itself is considered. First, the distinction between functioning and capability, a distinction so central to the thesis it bears a reminder. A functioning is the actual 'being or doing', engaging with friends, owning property. Capability concerns the *opportunity* to fulfil these functionings. One can have the opportunity to own property, or form meaningful relationships, but decide against functioning in these valuable ways. Nussbaum's main focus is with capabilities, understandably, bearing in mind the political focus of her work. The promotion of functioning rather than capability would entail paternalistic intervention disrespectful of personal autonomy.

One cannot achieve a threshold level of well-being through capability alone. Nussbaum recognises this stating 'functionings, not simply capabilities are what render a life fully human' (Nussbaum, 2000a: 87). One may have the capability, for example, to form significant friendships, produce self-expressive works, to play and interact with nature. Nevertheless, if an individual fails to function in these ways, despite such opportunity, we would not wish to conclude that a threshold level of well-being has been achieved, only that the individual has the opportunity to achieve this threshold and that the failure to do so is not a matter for government intervention.

This is not, however, to say that the capability or the freedom to function in these valuable ways is not important to well-being itself. Nussbaum recognises that certain

capabilities require choice, play ceases to be play if it is coerced or forced in some way. Practical reason is central to Nussbaum's approach, and this form of reflection surely requires a number of valuable ways of life to reflect upon. Sen is more forthright in his contention that freedom of choice makes an independent contribution to well-being.

For people who are in a position to choose in a reasoned way and value that freedom to choose, it is hard to think that their well-being achievement would never be affected if the freedom to choose were denied, even though the (unrefined) functioning vector (or midfare) were guaranteed by the actions of others.

(Sen, 1993: 44)

As we have seen Nussbaum (2006b) suggests Sen considers freedom a good *per se*, and criticises this understanding of freedom on the grounds that only certain central freedoms warrant political protection. This point seems to me to be relevant to the prudential domain. In defending an objective conception of well-being, I suggest that it is only the freedom to achieve certain valuable functionings that is important to well-being.

Exercise may instantiate certain functionings. This is one clear way in which exercise can be said to improve well-being. Sporting activities provide opportunities for social engagement and the forming of relationships, central to Nussbaum's capabilities of both Emotions and Affiliation. There are, however, a number of other ways in which such relationships can be developed. Sport or physical activity, structured in the appropriate way, instantiates those valuable functionings Nussbaum stipulates. This will be addressed further in the final section (7.4) of this chapter.

There are numerous ways in which exercise might instantiate a certain functioning. These activities are likely to instantiate a number of valuable functionings, and also, bearing in mind the longer term benefits of being physically active, preserve the capability for future use, in non-active pursuits. Thus part of this investigation will be to address the extent to which the capabilities on the list imply a certain level of fitness or physical activity, and whether our continued capability requires a

deliberate effort to exercise, as opposed to the minimal levels of physical activity we may maintain throughout a routine associated with someone often labelled 'sedentary'. I will now work through a range of ways in which exercise might be construed to improve well-being, asking whether we would drop below a threshold level of well-being if our physical activity levels dropped below a minimum, to use common discourse, if we failed to 'do some exercise.'

### **7.3.1 Exercise expanding present capability to function**

Does a satisfactory level of capability and indeed functioning necessitate exercise? Investigating the relationship between exercise and well-being requires attention to actual functioning. Being physically active may enable one to function in a valuable way more often, and indeed improve the quality of the functioning itself. The first point regarding actual functioning is distinct from the enhancement of well-being through improving our choice, or freedom to function in valuable ways. This increase in the capability set is, suggests Sen, (1993) valuable quite apart from any increase in actual valuable functionings that might result.

These observations regarding the ways in which well-being might be enhanced lead us to three related questions. First, does a threshold level of functioning, below which the level of well-being is deemed unsatisfactory, require exercise of some sort? This also relates to the quality of function. Secondly, can I achieve a threshold level of quality of function without taking any exercise? Finally I have spoken of how capability itself or freedom to pursue a range of valuable functionings might help set the threshold for well-being. In instances of disease and illness, one may still be able to fulfil a function on Nussbaum's list, but a reduced freedom to function in this way will not only impact upon well-being through the likely reduced number of instances in which one can achieve this functioning. The actual foreclosure of options diminishes well-being. Exercise it seems expands the capability set, offering us a greater range of ways in which we might fulfil those functionings on Nussbaum's list. But does this expansion directly relate to a threshold below which someone cannot be said to be fulfilling their potential as a human being?

The concern in this first section is with one's present capability to function. The contention of this section is that a sedentary person need not take up exercise in order to achieve a satisfactory level of capability in Nussbaum's sense. It follows from this conclusion that one can function in valuable ways, exceeding a threshold set to indicate the fulfilment of human potential, without making the effort to 'take exercise.'

Examining each of the capabilities enables a clear demonstration of how they do not require anything above a minimal level of physical activity. Nussbaum's first capability is 'life' itself. This capability, however, mainly concerns life span and the prevention of premature death. I will not discuss this capability now; it belongs in the next section concerning the preservation of capability. The second capability on Nussbaum's list is bodily health. I have, however, argued that health is better understood in reverse, starting from the capabilities, and therefore will not discuss this capability in isolation.

Bodily integrity refers to freedom of movement from place to place, to the respect of bodily boundaries, sexual satisfaction and reproductive autonomy. This movement, I presume, is intended in a political sense, to counter the sort of segregation seen in apartheid in South Africa rather than referring to locomotion *per se*. Freely moving between regions, states and countries of course is likely to require some sort of physical activity or mobility. This level however, could be minimal, and certainly achievable by someone who only engages in a very minimum level of physical activity. Nussbaum's bodily integrity might indicate in most cases a certain minimal level of physical activity, being able to get around in some way or another. To conclude, other things being equal, that being physically active, as opposed to bed-bound, improves a life, however does not seem particularly interesting from the point of view of the thesis. I am certainly not asking whether we need to participate in sport to achieve a threshold level of well-being, but neither am I concerned with the bare minimum achieved by those who would be considered sedentary according to other criteria.

Thus, as I have indicated, I seek to differentiate between physical activity and exercise. Exercise is understood as any form of activity above the minimum level of physical activity we require to go about our daily routines. The World Health Organisation (2003) detail the breadth of activities that ‘exercise’ might entail, from walking to work and climbing stairs to sports. This enables those who dislike formal exercise or sports to still achieve recommended activity levels. Engagement in certain activities, taking the stairs rather than the escalator, for example, may only be motivated by the publicised benefits, rather than any goods or values associated with the activity itself. Nevertheless, someone who chooses to walk over a mile to work and back each day is undertaking a certain level of exercise, and what started out as a chore motivated by the opportunity to burn calories may end up an enjoyable and relaxing walk, a chance to interact with nature, or even socialise if the individual walks with someone else.

Thicker activities, those that will be discussed in more depth in the final section are understood not just in terms of calorific expenditure but in terms of their internal goods (MacIntyre, 1985). Those who participate in certain sports or exercise regularly may enjoy the challenge, the sense of progress, mastery, and social interaction. These goods may serve as important motivators for continued participation. Examples of such activities are often within the sporting domain, but this need not always be the case. Some who attends the gymnasium, circuits, aerobics, or yoga classes may enjoy and embrace a range of internal goods, social aspects, the joy of mastering one’s body, learning new skills, immersing oneself in the activity, without taking part in competitive sport.

I argue that Nussbaum’s capabilities imply only a bare minimum of physical activity; achievable by someone who would typically be called sedentary by the healthcare profession. The capabilities I suggest can be sustained in the short term by a level of physical activity below that of, for example someone who chooses to walk rather than drive to work. How long someone can sustain a sedentary lifestyle without significant threat to capabilities is the topic of the next section. Prior to this I



will continue in examining the other capabilities on Nussbaum's list, demonstrating their decidedly unathletic nature.

The fourth capability 'Senses, Imagination and Thought' includes 'Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing self-expressive works' (Nussbaum, 2000a: 78). In explaining this capability further Nussbaum also refers to freedom of expression and searching for the meaning of life in one's own way, as well as to pleasurable experiences and the avoidance of 'non-necessary pain.' (ibid.). Nussbaum considers education essential for the truly human use of these faculties. Sport and thicker forms of physical activity could certainly represent one way of functioning in this valuable way. Players in games such as football speak of expressing themselves, many find mastering one's own body and moving gracefully a joyful and pleasurable experience. These activities could also be understood as educating in the use of the senses, imagination and thought. These physical activities certainly represent one way in which the whole person, mind and body can be understood as expressing oneself, as in dance, tai chi or yoga for example.

Exercise and sport, however, do not represent the only instantiation of these functionings, or even the only way in which one might encourage the use of the mind and body together in producing self-expressive works. Playing a musical instrument includes the mastering of both physical and mental skills, can encourage self-expression, and be experienced as pleasurable. It requires, however, no more than a minimal level of physical activity. There is nothing to suggest that the sedentary musicians' life will be improved in a meaningful way if their capability set is expanded to more rigorous activities. The musician, disinterested in exercise, is free to express him/herself, and this person seems perfectly capable of achieving a threshold level of well-being. The functioning associated with Nussbaum's capability 'Senses, Imagination and Thought' may be both instantiated and cultivated by exercise and participation in sports, but this does not offer the only way in which this may be achieved. Nussbaum's capabilities can be realised in multiple ways, exercise may not suit everyone's disposition.

This, however, should not be taken to indicate that exercise is merely one among an infinite number of means to pleasure or self-expression, where its exchange for another means would be insignificant. First, this would be to adapt a utilitarian conception of pleasure, understood in isolation from the activity with which it is associated. The pleasures of exercise are different from the pleasures of playing a musical instrument. The utilitarian understanding of pleasure as an end in itself, that can be isolated from the activities with which it is associated has already been criticised. Conceiving of pleasure in this fashion seems to devalue the activity enjoyed or found pleasurable. It is more than just a means to pleasure. Exercise should not be understood as just one of many means to those values, including pleasure, on Nussbaum's list, but as a unique way in which such values are instantiated.

Many are not motivated by the pleasure, or indeed the potential exercise may have to expand capabilities. We should not understand sport or exercise solely as instantiations of Nussbaum's capabilities. This is perhaps a danger of focusing upon an objective list stipulating the goods of well-being, we begin to look for these goods in certain activities, without really analysing the activities any further. Sport and exercise do not just represent any way in which the functionings associated with the capabilities might be realised. Midgley (1974) insists upon this point, we should not understand games and indeed love in terms of general needs, disregarding the form they take.

The restraining rules are not something foreign to the needs or emotions involved, they are simply the shape which the desired activity takes. The chess player's desire is not a desire for general abstract intellectual activity, curbed and frustrated by a particular set of rules. It is a desire for a particular kind of intellectual activity, whose channel is the rules of chess. (Similarly human love is not a general need, curbed and frustrated by the particular forms offered to it. It is a need for a specific kind of relation – say a permanent one – with a particular person, and for this purpose only some kinds of behaviour will do.)  
(Midgley, 1974: 243).

Midgley's insistence that games should not be understood as merely a vessel for the realisation of general values is borne out of her dismissal that games are closed off from the rest of society. For Midgley (1974: 337) games are 'continuous with the life around them' and the needs these games represent reflect our context. Our motives for participating are not general, but for the satisfaction of a very particular need for a very particular type of game.

In the case of football or chess, to treat the traditional concern as accidental would mean that it could just as well be attached to something else; that the pattern of life surrounding them demands some game, but is quite indifferent what game it is. Well then, we will try substituting halma for chess and lawn tennis for football. Will there be any difficulties? There will. These rituals *will not be suitable forms for the conflicts they are designed to ritualize.*

(Midgley, 1974: 237).

We will not concern ourselves here with whether ritualized conflict is the only or indeed the best way in which to understand the development of games such as football. Midgley speaks of needs but let us now bring the discussion back to capabilities and functionings, needs in the sense that they are necessary, Nussbaum states, for a life to be fully human. Exercise and sport are not just a means to a general sort of capability or functioning, but a very specific way in which we might realise a very specific form of a capability or function.

Indeed Nussbaum intends her list to be more fully specified, she refers to its 'multiple realizability: its members can be more concretely specified in accordance with local beliefs and circumstances.' (Nussbaum, 2000a: 77). The capabilities and functionings on the list are very general categories, that do not exhaust the ways in which we should understand the activities that instantiate them. Sport and exercise may not be the only ways in which we find pleasure, joy, or indeed feel able to express ourselves. They do, however, represent special ways in which to achieve a very specific form of such values, ways developed from the context and history within which they are situated.

With regard to our emotions, and our ability to have attachments to others, again this may imply a certain minimal level of physical activity. Some level of mobility would facilitate the being able to meet and visit others. The related capability of affiliation may also require some sort of minimal level of physical activity, although this would not be necessary in all instances. If someone is housebound they may struggle to keep up the relationships that they had previously maintained. They may remain able to engage with others, but their capability to do so may be restricted to the extent that we might consider life diminished, reliant as they would be upon the visits of others. Nevertheless, upon examination of these capabilities my original observation stands. Someone would be perfectly capable of affiliating and developing the emotional attachments Nussbaum considers central to a fully human life, whilst only undertaking the minimum in terms of physical activity.

The same can be said of the capability and corresponding function practical reason. Our ability to reason and form a conception of the good may be reliant upon a minimal level of physical activity. As Schramme indicates 'Complete paralysis withdraws our capacity to interact with our surroundings, and, therefore, hinders us in finding out what is good or bad for us.' (Schramme, 2002: 66). This level of physical activity, however, would again need to be no more than the minimum. Neither does exercise seem especially important to the capability Control Over One's Environment, referring to political choice and ability to hold property.

The capabilities 'Play' and 'Other Species' may, in some instances, imply a level of physical activity beyond a minimum. Physically active ways of playing certainly encompass a broad range of activities, that are often enjoyed and also instantiate other functionings, such as 'Affiliation', and the use of our 'Senses, Imagination and Thought.' Midgley has insisted that playing games should not, however, be understood as merely a means to such valuable functionings, replaceable by other non-active forms of play without loss. It is better to recognise that active forms of play reflect a very specific need in the individual for a particular form of those values it instantiates, a need likely to be related to the social context in which the game or activity has arisen.

To argue that active forms of play are merely one means of fulfilling certain values does not do justice to the activities and the needs they fulfil. It is questionable however, whether playing in an active way is necessary for the threshold level of well-being we are concerned with. Those who engage in and enjoy more sedentary pursuits, playing computer games for example, may miss out on the range of benefits associated with more physically active forms of play, mastery of one's body, the joy of movement, greater social interaction (although computer games may prompt social engagement, in certain contexts). These sedentary pursuits, however, may represent the preferred way of playing for a sedentary individual, within a balanced life, in which a threshold level of all the capabilities is achieved with minimal physical activity. There seems no need to insist that active forms of play are essential to a threshold level of well-being.

Finally the 'Other Species' capability 'Being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature' (Nussbaum, 2006a) may require exercise in certain instances, if one for example imagines taking a long walk in the woods. There are doubtless, however, less active ways of engaging with nature. A musician, essentially sedentary in that she makes no effort to be physically active, may have the *current* fitness to both play and interact with nature in a way that ensures these capabilities exceed the threshold for a fully human life, or a threshold level of well-being.

The capabilities and functionings on Nussbaum's list do require a certain minimal level of physical activity in many instances, in order to reach a threshold level of well-being after which one can be said to be fully human, or be fulfilling human potential. It does not follow from the significance of this minimal level, however, that the kind of exercise discussed in this thesis is necessary for a threshold level of well-being, or would even offer current improvements to a life if undertaken immediately. More physically active ways of playing, or expressing oneself may be important ways in which the functionings can be instantiated, but exercise will not

necessarily improve the lives of those who engage in play, or use their senses and imagination in different ways.

### **7.3.2 The Preservation of capabilities**

We can reach a threshold level without ‘taking exercise’. We have, however, ascertained that certain lesser levels of physical activity are required for capability to exceed an acceptable threshold. This section investigates the extent to which inactivity might threaten our capability over a longer term view.

We have spoken both of the potential of human beings, and of the future-orientated nature of health. Does a failure to exercise impact upon our potential in some way? This line of argument suggests that physical inactivity now risks later loss of capability, and a corresponding threat to achieving one’s potential throughout life. This stronger argument for the value of exercise relates to its ability to preserve capability.

This argument draws upon Nussbaum’s (2000a) distinction between basic, internal and innate capability. In referring to an internal capability to be physically active, I refer to a level of physical activity that one is capable of functioning at currently. Nussbaum’s framework does not require this internal capability for physical activity to be particularly high in order for a threshold level of well-being to be achieved. But what of continued inactivity? This would reduce our internal capability to be physically active, threatening our way of life, our ability to function in valuable ways that we had previously taken for granted.

The most obvious way in which the level of physical activity would be threatened is through the onset of disease and illness, and pain associated with inactivity. Conditions such as heart disease, osteoporosis, and back pain, (all referred to in the WHO rationale) all reflect serious capability frustration. When we consider Nussbaum’s central capabilities, one may still manage to function in these valuable ways with a bad back, or chronic pain, but our capabilities will be diminished below

a certain threshold, suggesting ill health. An individual may only be able to work for short periods because of chronic pain; interaction with others may be more difficult, so might engaging in recreational activities. The time spent in such valuable functionings would be reduced if one is left just trying to get through the day, the quality of the function itself is impaired, and the capability set diminished.

Disease not only represents a reduction in actual functioning in many instances, it reduces the number of ways in which we may function valuably, our capability. Disease and illness seem to narrow our options, a routine developed to alleviate symptoms such as pain may restrict opportunities to function in other valuable ways. Diseases may reflect significant impairment of the central capabilities, as well as a threat to the capability Life.

These diseases and illnesses impact upon our internal capability to be physically active. Movement without pain may be difficult, working, previously not considered an exertion at all may become tiring. It may be more difficult to maintain relationships because of immobility. These diseases and illnesses will also impact more directly upon capability and functioning, not just reducing our activity levels. They threaten the capability life. If we are in pain may cloud thought, and reduce our capacity to experience pleasure. The fear and anxiety associated with serious illness may affect our relationships in a range of ways. This more direct impact upon capability and functioning, however, may still be associated with earlier inactivity, suggests the sort of rationale provided by the World Health Organisation earlier.

There are a range of ways in which our capability, indeed our internal capabilities are threatened by disease and illness. The impact of course is upon the mental and bodily aspect of our capability, these are health concerns essentially. Our being embodied human beings can limit our capability, and such limits need not be confined to the reduction in capacities associated with old age, or indeed disease. Children who engage in no exercise whatsoever may threaten an internal capability to be physically active, and as we have discussed a low level of physical activity underpins many capabilities. The concerns over childhood obesity must be viewed

with a critical eye, especially bearing in mind the uncertain association with health alluded to earlier. Nevertheless, if someone in their late teens is incapable of even the lowest levels of physical activity they are likely to have their options reduced to a significant extent. If getting to work, or getting upstairs becomes an effort, if one is constantly tired, then functioning will be diminished to an unacceptable level. 'Use it or lose it' might be the slogan, indicating that if we do not make the effort to be physically active we threaten that level of capability and functioning we might take for granted. Again, even in younger age inactivity might be associated with illness and disease that impact more directly upon the central capabilities and functionings, not just via the internal capability to be physically active.

The idea of an individual, participating in exercise and sport in a prudent fashion, valuing its ability to preserve capabilities, may paint a somewhat conservative picture. McNamee (2007) expresses some concerns with such prudence, associating it with a time neutral approach to well-being. I recognise that the future is uncertain, we cannot plan with certainty for the future, neither will we know how our projects and goals might change as we age. The purpose of Nussbaum's list of central capabilities is to illustrate that being free to function in these valuable ways is central to any conception of well-being. A wholehearted engagement with those activities considered central to one's well-being is not precluded by this argument for the value of exercise. Instead I question those activities that threaten, beyond a reasonable point those capabilities central to living any form of good life.

Neither do I encourage the idea that we should carefully plan our lives, so as to maximise the goods we achieve throughout their duration. This recognition of how exercise preserves central capabilities need not follow from even a conscious awareness of this on the part of the exerciser. Indeed some of the best things in life are unexpected.<sup>87</sup> Again this is not precluded by an approach that understands exercise as preserving those central capabilities. To take advantage of the most unexpected goods fully, we must surely be capable in Nussbaum's sense.

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<sup>87</sup> Larmore (1999) makes this point forcibly. McNamee (2007), having referred to Larmore speculates that adventure sports mark an alternative to our often predictable, cautious lives.



Whether we should value each point in a life equally in relation to our well-being requires a more extensive discussion than that required here. It would, however, be an interesting and valuable area for further research. One could argue, as McNamee (2007) does, that the natural arc of life might question the time neutrality of well-being. During the latter parts of our life we may be less capable of experiencing the joys and thrills that would be more fully attended to at one's peak. We could allow a certain amount of time preference within a conception for well-being, a life might be better for the person who lived it if goods were secured at one's peak, through for example, a wholehearted engagement with one's sport, even if impacted negatively upon later life.

A rejection that we should value all time periods of our life equally need not necessarily entail a rejection of my argument. I argue that the most significant way in which exercise contributes to our well-being is in the preservation of those functionings and capabilities necessary for a threshold level of well-being. This in turn allows us to function in those ways valuable to well-being. This, of course, does not just apply to the preservation of capability in later life; we have discussed the possibility of children's capabilities dropping below a threshold level as a result of inactivity. There is definitely, however, a forward thinking element to this argument, a prudence that suggests ensuring one's capability is retained throughout life. Slote (1983: 23) has suggested that 'what comes later in life' is of special significance in assessing the goodness of a life. Evidence for this, suggests Slote, is provided by the language we use in describing lives.

We may say that later political success can 'compensate' or 'make up' for (someone's) years in the political wilderness; but it would be an abuse of language to describe early successes as 'compensating' or 'making up' for later failures or miseries. And lest someone reply that this is merely a fact of linguistic convention, can it not be said further that the very fact that we have expressions for the way later goods can counterbalance earlier evils, but none at all for the counterbalancing of later evils by earlier goods, is a rather good indication of our common belief in the greater intrinsic importance (value or disvalue) of what comes later in life?

(Slote, 1983: 25).

A full discussion of well-being, and whether we consider it to be time neutral, or whether there are certain times periods that make a greater contribution to a life overall is beyond the scope of this thesis. I have introduced the above to indicate the *possibility* that a criticism of time neutral approaches to well-being may not damage my own argument. Slote's comments suggest that how we view a life overall, and indeed how we might view our own lives, as we live them, may reflect preference for later time periods.

The objective stance on the importance of the stipulated capabilities and functionings to a life I take allows me to criticise a similar set of preferences for a certain period of life. Consider the prudent athlete who regrets this choice in later life. Wishing he had been more impulsive as a youth, and sacrificed later capability to a significant extent in order to prolong sporting success during his twenties. The individual does not value his capabilities now; he thinks that he could put up with ill health, pain, perhaps arthritis, if he could look back with fondness at his sporting achievements. He wishes perhaps that he had played through injury, not retired early because of the long-term damage continuing to play might do. The value of the functionings and capabilities to the individual's life is not negated by his apparent failure to endorse their continued importance. A certain threshold of the capabilities is required for the pursuit of any conception of the good life. The individual has perhaps not fully contemplated the consequences of capability dropping below such a threshold. There are of course also other questions. Would, in a state of ill health, with reduced opportunity to enjoy life, engage with others, experience pleasure, the individual in question view the past sporting successes with such fondness. Older players in the football team I play for often remark 'you are a long time not playing.' But to turn this observation on its head, could those few years of athletic excellence compensate for the extended capability loss in later life. I point to Slote's recognition of the importance of later times in life as evidence that such capability loss cannot be compensated by earlier sporting achievement.

Exercise, I argue, is central to the preservation of our capabilities. If we fail to exercise, our capabilities may shrink, indicative of the sort of diseases spoken of in the WHO rationale, and indeed reduced muscle strength and flexibility as a result of ageing. Exercise can help preserve our capabilities as best we can, of course allowing for the natural aging process. Being physically active, above a minimum, can be understood as preserving our capabilities, and thus, through its impact upon the body, as central to health. Indeed, we have referred to health being associated with the bodily and mental processes (Nordenfelt, 2007c), and indeed this aspect of our capability seems closely aligned to how we understand our health. Exercise appears to be one of a limited number of ways in which we might preserve capability through the body. This argument remains instrumental, but does suggest an important role for physical activity, exercise and sport, as one of few ways in which to preserve the bodily aspect of capability.

In a sense this argument retains the focus of the naturalistic rationale for the value of physical activity in terms of health. Embracing the normative conception of health, however, I am primarily concerned with the impact of physical inactivity might have on capability and functioning. Disease and illness, it is argued, are entangled concepts, representing a frustration of those capabilities central to a threshold level of well-being.

### **7.3.3 Exercise and capability: some examples**

I will conclude this section with range of examples to illustrate the argument presented above. First, alluding to a point made throughout the sections above, someone who is bed bound and unable to achieve any level of physical activity. This person will be unable to achieve a threshold level of well-being, or in Nussbaum's terms live a fully human life. Those capabilities on Nussbaum's list would be severely diminished. First one would have reduced opportunities to function in valuable ways, reducing actual functioning. Being bed-bound would, other things being equal, mean less interaction with others, and limited ways in which one could reason, plan and enjoy one's life. Second one's quality of functioning may be

severely impaired. Those items on Nussbaum's list such as play or interacting with nature may be pursued in very restricted ways. Finally, freedom to function, capability would be severely impacted upon. Capability reduction below a certain threshold is significant to well-being in itself, quite apart from the functioning with which it is associated.

Now let us take Griffin's example of a scholar who rejects the value of exercise to well-being. Extending this example I understand the scholars as arguing they need not take any exercise in order to achieve and indeed maintain a threshold level of well-being. To elaborate upon this, such individuals may only value their intellectual activities.

With regard to present levels of capability and functioning, the 'sedentary person' who does not 'take any exercise' may well be capable of functioning in a valuable way to the extent that she can be said to have achieved a threshold level of well-being, or be living a good life. Let us take a fictional scholar, who makes no effort to be physically active. This person has no problems forming relationships, can move around as they wish without pain, there is no reason that being physically inactive now means capability reduction to the extent of disease or illness now, i.e. the scholar may be able to sit at a desk all day with no current back pain. If their capability set were presently reduced to the point that they can only work for short periods because of back pain, or they struggle to begin a lecture after a long walk up the stairs they may consider taking more exercise. Many, however, perhaps through eating well, adequate relaxation, or indeed through no special effort whatsoever, manage to maintain current capability without being at all active. The scholar seems to have a level of capability that Nussbaum would be satisfied with; able to pursue their own conception of well-being, from a range of valuable options.

The stronger argument for the value of exercise, I have already indicated, is that it preserves capabilities and functionings. Exercise is of instrumental value to well-being. It offers one of a restricted number of ways in which we might preserve the

bodily aspect of those capabilities essential for the pursuit of any conception of well-being.

The individual who rejects the value of exercise, focusing exclusively upon her intellectual pastimes will not necessarily suffer from significant reduced current capability because of this physical inactivity. Continued inactivity, however, as evidenced in chapter three, increases the likelihood of capability loss, possibly to the extent of illness and disease. An almost exclusive focus on sedentary intellectual work, sitting at a desk, perhaps even in poor posture, with no significant exercise undertaken may threaten the individual pursuing this very same life plan in later life. The scholar may, for example, later suffer from back pain, inhibiting concentration over long periods of work. Some exercise undertaken previously may have prevented this reduction in capability; indeed some exercise undertaken now may alleviate it.

This argument need not only apply to the impact of physical inactivity on older age. Exercise in childhood may also ensure the ability to function as an adult. Capability in adulthood may to some extent have been influenced by activity at a younger age. Compulsory physical education in the young may develop strength that prevents pain and enables easy movement in adulthood. This not only enables a lifetime of physical activity, but the ability to pursue a range of non-active life plans, without physical symptoms. Of course, over activity at a young age (or indeed at any age), or pursuit of an activity with scant regard for the capability loss it may result in may have a long-term negative impact upon well-being.

The argument that an intellectual who rejects the value of exercise outright can reach the threshold level of well-being relies upon certain underpinning assumptions. The individual at this stage must be in good health, i.e. they must be capable in Nussbaum's sense and the maintenance of such capabilities must not require exercise. For example I must undertake certain stretches and other exercises, even during busy times at work in order to prevent back pain. That the individual enjoys this level of capability without making any exercise provision may, although not

necessarily, indicate some exercise undertaken at a younger age ensuring easy movement as an adult. Thus the rejection of the value of exercise is much easier when the minimal levels required to pursue any conception of the good life are not under threat. The individual does not suffer from health problems or weight problems for example.

Arguments regarding the preservation of capability are complicated by the uncertainty of the future. I have noted how a failure of the intellectual, for example, to exercise now, may inhibit the range of valuable life plans open to them later. The implications of their inactivity, the capability loss they may suffer, may entail the diseases associated with physical inactivity in chapter three, threatening not only alternative active ways of life, but pursuit of intellectual achievements. All we can say is that physical inactivity increases the chances of capability loss below a threshold with which we would associate with well-being. The ability of that individual to fulfil their potential would be inhibited.

Exercise preserves those capabilities and functionings central to well-being. The contention that exercise is constitutive of well-being cannot be justified. Well-being and health may well be future-oriented, i.e. being inactive may be said to be unhealthy because of its likely impact upon capability later. The forward-looking nature of this argument, however, suffers from the obvious uncertainty of the future. We cannot *guarantee* that failing to exercise now impacts upon capability at some stage, and thus we cannot conclude that failing to exercise results in well-being dropping below a threshold level, that exercise is constitutive of well-being.

Neither can it be concluded exercise offers the only way in which to preserve or indeed expand capability. Indeed, there are numerous ways in which we preserve or expand internal capability; through education for example. It should also be noted that Nussbaum's list of capabilities central for a fully human life are 'combined capabilities' requiring the external environment to ensure these central freedoms. Activities that act upon our internal capability will not ensure well-being exceeds a threshold in the absence of the appropriate external environment. Ultimately for the

capabilities to constitute a threshold level of well-being, the internal must combine with the external. Exercise, however, represents one of very few ways in which we might impact upon our capability via our bodies. The health benefits of exercise in this respect indicate the strongest argument for its value. Exercise preserves the central capabilities throughout life. There are not many ways in which we can help our body retain such capability, accounting for, of course the natural aging process. Other ways in which we might seek to ensure our bodies allow a certain threshold level of capability may be through eating well, and by taking medication. Allowing adequate time for relaxation and meditation are also thought to impact favourably upon the body and mind, facilitating the pursuit well-being.

The bodily and mental precondition of capability is impacted upon via a restricted number of ways, including exercise. It may be too strong to suggest that exercise is constitutive of a certain threshold level of capability throughout life. These other ways, good diet for example, combined with the normal activities of everyday life may be enough for some to maintain the threshold level of capability under discussion. Again we are struck by the sheer unpredictability of certain aspects of the argument. Some individuals may be able to retain capability over a life, without taking exercise; some may suffer for such inactivity, despite eating well and looking after themselves in other ways. Of course, exercise and good diet, cannot guarantee against ill health. Thus I think it permissible to stipulate the relationship in only instrumental terms. Exercise preserves those capabilities central to well-being over a life time. Exercising represents one of a restricted number of ways in which we can impact upon health, and in particular that part of our capability which relies upon the body.

This apparently limited conclusion offers, however, a genuine extension of previous work in the area. The naturalistic argument for the value of physical activity failed to recognise the entanglement of fact and value inherent in concepts such as health, disease and illness. Having argued for an objective conception of well-being, and then Nussbaum's capabilities approach as the best available conception, I have suggested the capabilities as the primary concept for the understanding of health,

illness and disease. This extends upon Nussbaum's understanding of health within her account, an area not fully explored by her. The approach of course, also extends Nussbaum's account in a different direction, asking about the role of exercise in a life – its contribution to well-being. This argument shifts focus away from the political objectivity the capabilities approach aspires to, suggesting the capabilities and functionings are constitutive of our objective well-being, objective being understood in Putnam and indeed Dewey's sense.

As promised in chapter three, recognising the entanglement of fact and value inherent in concepts such as health, disease and illness enables a more positive, integrated rationale for the value of exercise, as preserving those capabilities central to well-being. I understand the value of exercise directly in terms of the constituents of a threshold level of well-being. Failing to exercise is likely to result in a drop below the threshold. This significant capability loss may sometimes, but not always be attributed to disease.

I have also elaborated upon the role capability may play in both well-being and health. It is not enough to just be able to function in the valuable ways. A life above the threshold level of well-being must entail a certain choice over valuable functionings, not just because this increases the likelihood of achieving valuable functionings, but because the freedom to function in valuable ways is important to well-being in itself.

The above indicates the value of exercise in preserving capability. It resonates with the WHO and its consideration of physical activity in broad terms. Any form of exercise could be said to preserve capability in these ways. Health enhancing exercise, that which preserves the bodily and mental aspect of our capability, could include climbing the stairs rather than taking the lift or the escalator for example. Exercise and particularly sport, however, is important to our well-being apart from its influence on the body. Ways in which sport may provide instantiations of those functionings central to our well-being will be addressed in the following.



#### 7.4 Exercise, sport and the capabilities approach. How else might physical activity enhance well-being?

Sport and exercise are not necessarily participated in because of their potential to preserve capabilities, indeed some may not be concerned with the apparent health benefits, or indeed disbenefits. Nevertheless, the above provides a strong argument for the value of exercise that is quite distinct from the issue of what motivates those who participate in sport. This section perhaps gets closer to those values that attract those who participate in sport, the social element for example. The individual, however, need not be aware of the general value category, included for example on an objective list theory of well-being. They may, as Midgley (1974) has suggested be more concerned with the specific form of the value provided by the activity itself. The individual may of course, not contemplate the inherent values in the activity, merely remarking that they enjoy participating. All of these justifications for participation can be incorporated within an analysis of exercise that suggests it enhances well-being by instantiating specific forms of those values on an objective list.

Health has played an integral role in this argument for the value of exercise to well-being. Earlier sections, however, arguing for an objective conception of well-being also have direct implications for how we might understand exercise to improve our lives. The first, and perhaps most obvious way in which an acceptance of an objective conception of well-being improves our understanding of the role of exercise in our lives is through its recognition of mistaken judgments. Ferrand *et al.* (2007) found signs of disordered eating in adolescent synchronised swimmers, who perceived themselves to be overweight and engaged in a number of weight reducing strategies including excessive exercise, fasting and skipping meals. Such behaviours, despite their satisfying desires, or at times even being experienced as pleasurable, can be criticised with use of an objective conception of well-being. Nussbaum's list of central capabilities can also be used to question satisfaction expressed in the absence of those capabilities and functionings essential to our well-being.

Nussbaum's capabilities are also understood to be of value quite apart from the satisfaction or pleasure with which they may be associated. Again this has implications for how we understand the value of exercise to well-being. Exercise does not only enhance our lives because we enjoy it, or because it is pleasurable. The capabilities and functionings Nussbaum stipulates are central to our lives apart from these subjective factors. Affiliation, or play, for example, ought not be reduced entirely to the subjective states they promote.

It is in this way that the insights into well-being achieved through this inquiry can help us to understand how sport and exercise might be structured to best promote well-being. Subjective conceptions can say little more than that sport and exercise should be enjoyable, or satisfying. This is no doubt important, but to repeat questions asked earlier, are all the pleasures and enjoyments of sport and exercise of equal merit? And are there instances in which sport and exercise might enhance well-being in the absence of such enjoyment? The following provides some examples of how sport can be seen to instantiate those functionings central to our well-being. An objective conception would make the promotion of such functionings central to any sport or physical activity intended to enhance well-being. Bearing in mind the convergence with informed desire that Nussbaum expects of her list of capabilities (Nussbaum, 2000a), we can hypothesise that sport or exercise structured in this way would be enjoyed as well.

It is not my intention here to work through the entirety of Nussbaum's capabilities list and highlight some of the no doubt infinite ways in which sport and exercise may help us achieve those functionings central to well-being. It will suffice to provide some examples of how an objective list helps us to understand how sport and exercise can be structured to best promote well-being.

Practical reason is, of course, central to Nussbaum's conception of the fully human life. Activities that promote this critical reflection and enable planning of one's life would be in the best interests of our well-being. The list could be used to criticise sport or exercise that fails to encourage the use of the function, and this criticism

could apply even if those partaking in the activity still report levels of satisfaction or enjoyment.

Practical reason, and encouraging its use, has special significance for youth sport. Within this domain coaches and parents may, even with the best intentions, inhibit the decision-making role of the young athlete. David (2005) citing the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, has illustrated the importance of increasing the decision-making power of young elite athletes. It is interesting that an objective conception of well-being in which practical reason is central, does not justify paternalistic action, but questions it, on the grounds of it failing to properly respect the agency of the young athlete.

My own experience of football coaching with young soccer players may contribute to this discussion. It is of course central to the well-being of the young player that they learn to think and reflect upon the game itself, make their own decisions, and take responsibility for these decisions. This promotes the use of practical reason both within and outside sport throughout life. Many coaches, however, employ a fairly authoritarian stance with young football players. On the pitch they may effectively talk them through the game, instructing upon passes as the game progresses. The decision-making powers of the young players are not promoted either on or off the pitch. This authoritarian stance is often justified by result. The players ultimately enjoy winning and that is what we are here to do, the argument goes. Now it is not entirely clear that the young players want to win quite as much as their respective coaches and parents, but nevertheless, even if this were the case, we could question this enjoyment if it comes at the expense of certain central functionings such as practical reason. A longer term view, in the interests of the young player, would be to promote agency, enable a role in decision making both on and off the pitch, perhaps facilitating a different but more valuable type of enjoyment.

Sport structured appropriately may provide opportunity for athletes to retain control over decision making, with relation to their training schedule, diet, and performance for example, and thus experience sport as empowering. The importance of practical

reason to exercise ultimately intended to enhance well-being cannot only be seen in these elite settings. An exercise intervention for inactive older adults (Hardcastle and Taylor, 2005) refers to how exercise may for some entail taking 'control of one's body' (Hardcastle and Taylor, 2005). The quote below shows how exercise may promote feelings of control, when life appears to be somewhat spiralling out of control.

As your family grow up and move away all of a sudden you're hit with this sort of who am I...I have to re-invent myself...I hit crisis point about two years ago when everything seemed to be disappearing from me...I was way out of control before I started the exercise programme. I mean nothing seemed to matter really. There was no motivation for anything. When you've got kids you've got to look after them and that's your motivation. When you've got a family that's your motivation. When you've got a job that's your motivation and I seemed to lose the whole lot...It's gaining control of something. You have to gain control of something...I had no control over anything least of all myself so I had to get something back so that's what I went for. I got myself back. (Belinda, four months post exit)

(Hardcastle and Taylor, 2005).

Sport may in some instances provide a greater number of 'uncontrollables', (team mates, opponents etc.) than the exercise environment, but this example serves to illustrate the value of an appropriately structured exercise intervention in enhancing perceptions of control. Such perceptions may provide a starting point from which to build, and enhance one's control over other domains in one's life. Neither is it just the perception of control that is important to well-being, although this no doubt has a role to play. The individual above sounds as if they were lost; they had no focus, direction or life plan. The exercise intervention provided something that they could get their teeth into; employ some critical thinking and planning. This is valuable quite apart from the satisfactions or feelings of control it may provoke.

The second capability afforded special status within Nussbaum's approach is affiliation. The sports and exercise arena has long been associated with its capacity to build relationships. Hardcastle and Taylor (2005) have illustrated the capacity of an exercise programme to overcome social isolation:

It's a different environment. You see different faces...more of a social thing besides it gets you out and probably at this time of day I'd be sitting around doing nothing or reading (Margaret aged 57, week 10)

(Hardcastle and Taylor, 2005).

Again, a lot will depend on the particular sport and exercise environment. The intervention above had obvious success, but examples are rife (David, 2005) of how sport and in particular the coach athlete relationship can entail manipulation, pressure and humiliation. (David, 2005). The capabilities approach, and in particular a recognition of how the sports and exercise environment may promote or denigrate a number of interdependent capabilities, provides a starting point for anyone concerned with how sport and exercise can best serve the well-being of its participants.

I have provided examples of two capabilities, affiliation and practical reason, and suggested ways in which the sports and exercise environment may promote or indeed frustrate these functionings. It is appropriate that I have focused on the two capabilities that Nussbaum's affords a special status within her account. That these capabilities are said to 'organize and suffuse all the others making their pursuit truly human.' (Nussbaum, 2000a: 82), not only reminds us of their centrality to our well-being but of the connected nature of all the capabilities. A coach failing to properly encourage the decision making of a young athlete will not only impact upon the ability of the individual to reason, but to use their Senses, Imagination and Thought. This capability entails 'Being able to use imagination and thought in connection with experiencing and producing self-expressive works' (Nussbaum, 2000a: 79). The role of affiliation and practical reason within the approach means that any activity that denigrates these capacities cannot be suitable for a fully human existence. We could question whether a life within which such activities are prominent could be seen to have reached a threshold level of well-being.

## 7.5 Conclusion

The argument for the value of exercise to well-being provided here has two main parts. I have suggested that exercise preserves those capabilities central to our well-being, ensuring not just that we can continue to function in valuable ways, but that we have a freedom to function in these valuable ways. Achieving a threshold level of well-being requires not just functioning, but also a certain level of capability. Indeed one cannot be deemed to have achieved a threshold level of well-being solely on the basis that an individual is capable of some specification of the functionings on Nussbaum's list. The threshold must be set higher than that, to ensure that an individual has not been forced into certain functionings through a particular illness, for example.

The second part of the argument draws on earlier chapters in the thesis criticising subjective theories of well-being. Subjective judgements of well-being can be flawed. That which we desire may not be good for us and our failure to endorse a good we have achieved may indicate nothing more than the flawed reasoning of the individual. Subjective theories also fail to offer a guide for public policy because of their inability to reason over matters of value. If I claim that something enhances my well-being, subjective theories accept this at face value, with all sorts of difficult consequences. This thesis has not been intended to address public policy directly, but an argument for an objective conception of well-being does offer greater interest for those involved in exercise and sport through coaching, education or policy making. An objective conception, or more specifically the capabilities approach advocated here, suggests how sport and exercise could be structured to best serve our well-being, and offers a firm critique of those activities that fail to respect those goods on Nussbaum's list. Arguments that certain sporting or physical activities are not 'fully human' or do not genuinely enhance well-being, may seem, to those in the grip of the fact/value dichotomy, somewhat unfounded, or no more than strong opinion. The rejection of the fact/value dichotomy however, and a defence of both objective theories of well-being, and Nussbaum's capabilities approach specifically, offers an alternative standpoint from which such conclusions look reasonable. This offers

policy makers an alternative to rationales for exercise grounded in either the psychological concepts of affect and satisfaction, or the naturalist focus on disease prevention.

## 8. References

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