



Enhancement, Adaptive Preferences and Well-being



Master Thesis in Applied Ethics

Elisabeth Späth

Supervisor: Dr. Ineke Bolt

Second Reader: Dr. Joel Anderson

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Summary

In this thesis, I discuss the phenomenon of adaptive preferences in the context of enhancement technologies. Adaptive preferences generally refer to a psychological reaction in which someone unconsciously lowers or heightens his standards and expectations towards the given circumstances in order to feel better. They are problematic when the person has formed them non-autonomously. The substantial issue, however, is that adaptive preferences are deceptive concerning someone's *true* well-being. Two aspects are hereby central: what is well-being actually and whose perspective sheds the most light on the person's well-being?

My aim is to analyze to which extent Sumner's "authentic happiness" theory can be used as a framework to the given problem in the context of enhancement: we adapt our preferences towards the available technologies, assuming they increase our well-being without critically reflect upon our *own* values. Sumner's theory is valuable since the autonomy of a person is central as a condition for true or authentic well-being. Especially, Sumner's notion of life-satisfaction, which implies authentically embracing one's life conditions, appears to be significant in our times of "endless possibilities". The downside of the "authentic happiness" theory, however, is that it disregards the person as interacting with their environment. Furthermore, a most accurate assessment of their well-being remains limited.

Table of Contents

- Introduction** 5
- 1. Chapter 1 - Introduction to enhancement** 9
 - 1.1. Heilinger’s “dynamic minimal-definition” of enhancement 9
 - 1.2. The proponents’ perspective on enhancement and well-being 11
- 2. Chapter 2 – Theories of well-being** 12
 - 2.1. Well-being as prudential value..... 13
 - 2.2. Objective List Theories 14
 - 2.3. Hedonism..... 16
 - 2.4. Desire Theories..... 18
 - 2.5. Sumner’s “authentic happiness” theory in the context of adaptive preferences and the theories of well-being..... 19
- 3. Chapter 3 –Adaptive preferences and Sumner’s “authentic happiness” theory..** 22
 - 3.1. Adaptive preferences 22
 - 3.2. Critical reflections on adaptive preferences as a problem 26
 - 3.3. Sumner’s “authentic happiness” theory..... 29
 - 3.4. Adaptive preferences in the enhancement context: strengths and weaknesses of the “authentic happiness” theory 35
- Conclusion** 40

Introduction

Our times are marked by the rapid development of technologies that are starting to revolutionize the way we live. While a big goal of technology is to improve our daily lives, I want to deal here with a particular type: enhancement technologies substantially differ from other sorts of technologies by changing the conditions of the human body to go beyond its standard or average capacities. Different technologies that have already been developed, such as drugs or brain-machine interfaces, can enhance our cognition, mood, lifespan or even social behavior. Those in favor of enhancement technologies regard emotions and thoughts as something that needs to be controlled, that our biological conditions should be “defeated” (Walker, 2013). It is argued that the technology opens up possibilities for the individuals and society leading to greater achievement, longer lives, improved social behavior, and overall happier lives. In general, the proponents argue that the ultimate premise is that these technologies improve our well-being (Nagel, 2014, p. 1).

Although human well-being is taken as the foundation to support enhancement technologies, the concept of well-being has not been discussed to the fullest in the debate about enhancement technologies. In order to explore whether these technologies can increase well-being, it must first be clarified what well-being actually means. This requires a theory of well-being that investigates what the nature of well-being is and what it constitutes. However, the main theories of well-being, namely the “big three” – objective list theory, hedonism and desire theory (Parfit, 1984, in Tiberius, 2015) – have different explanations. Overall, it should be highlighted that defining a theory of well-being is a normative undertaking. Well-being is identified by Tiberius as prudential value which includes an idea about what is *good for* someone. She gives two criteria that should be expected from a “good” theory of well-being or prudential value. On the one hand, a theory needs to include the subject-relativity criterion, that implies a reference to the individual subject to explain why certain features (e.g. objects, people, experiences etc.) are good for a particular person. On the other hand, it needs to keep a normativity criterion according to which certain features are good for everyone because it is considered essential or corresponding to leading a good or happy life. However, these very criteria are likely to conflict with each other and any theory of prudential value characteristically has a certain focus, which makes a theory rather subjective or objective.

The current research on the topic of well-being centers around questions related to the nature, measurement and moral significance of well-being, which is supported by various disciplines, namely psychology, philosophy and the social sciences (Tiberius, 2006, p. 493). Importantly, this academic debate is of great interest to policy makers and governments, because the research informs governments and policy makers for their decisions, thereby shaping the course of political action. However, the difficulty to conceptualize the nature of well-being is reflected in the challenge how to measure well-being – namely, to which extent objective measures should be taken, rather than subjective evaluations of well-being. To give an example, the *World Happiness Report* measures well-being on broad categories that are based on statistics, such as income and life expectancy (Schleim, 2014, p. 1). In contrast, the *OECD Guidelines*, a more recent attempt to capture the state of well-being, includes elements that are representative for subjective well-being measured by subcategories like affect (e.g. anger, happiness) as well as work and life satisfaction (ibid.). To attain the most accurate picture of how well or happy a society is, the obvious idea might be to turn to individuals and ask them about how they are doing.

In relation to subjective evaluations of well-being, the problem evolves that people's perceptions about their lives have become distorted. This is problematic because their opinions are not a true reflection of their real well-being or happiness. The term "adaptive preferences" defines the behavior that people developed, in which they "automatically adapt their wants to their possibilities without any reflection" (Schermer, 2013, p. 117). This issue is well-known in the debate on well-being (p. 118), especially in the context of development studies: poor people who live under a certain standard of living conditions, report that they are doing well and are happy because they are forced to adapt to the circumstances they live in. First, this poses a problem for public policy application (Tiberius, 2006, p. 502). The consequence is that these subjective evaluations bias the information governments work with, and therefore they do not constitute a firm basis to change living standards for people. Secondly, the deeper problem is related to the nature of well-being. From an objective point of view we would consider their subjective evaluations as problematic because they clash with the objective criteria of well-being, therefore it can be inferred that the person is not truly doing well. Instead, a person's aims and wishes should be directed towards the things that we as human beings appreciate as part of a good life, and happiness (e.g. education).

Another example of adaptive preferences, as discussed by Schermer (2013) evolves in the context of the enhancement debate: people might adapt their preferences towards the promises and possibilities offered by enhancement technologies, hoping that they will increase their well-being and make them happier. However, as enhancement represents one example of our today's culture of endless possibilities and promises, people could become more easily dissatisfied with what they already have. By comparing the two given examples of adaptive preferences, a paradox concerning the subjective and objective evaluation of well-being seems to evolve: in the former case people report subjective well-being although their living conditions are objectively low; the latter example shows that well-being and happiness, although measured as high by the same standard, could be further increased, making individuals feel more easily unsatisfied with themselves. The common characteristic of both types of adaptive preferences is that they are formed unconsciously and are therefore non-autonomously adapted.

My aim is to contribute to the current debate on the nature of well-being and its assessment in order to improve the understanding of the problematic dimension of adaptive preferences in the particular context of enhancement technologies.¹ I build upon Schermer's analysis to investigate how the issue of autonomy and well-being relate to each other. Sumner's "authentic happiness" theory of well-being might be the most useful analytical framework for this problem, since autonomy and authenticity represent the core ideas in his theory. According to Sumner, it is the individuals themselves who can offer the best explanation of their well-being. Importantly, the evaluation of their well-being should be only considered to be authentic, if the person is informed and autonomous.² With Sumner's approach, it may be possible to distinguish between autonomous and non-autonomous preferences, which is important because only the latter are problematic for a person's well-being (cf. Schermer). Furthermore, Sumner identifies authentic happiness with life-satisfaction, which means that the person has a positive attitude towards the conditions of their life. This latter aspect proves especially relevant in the enhancement context.

¹ This is important to contrast with, for example, well-being as an ethical value. Welfarism, a crucial part of Sumner's theory, places welfare in the centre of ethical theory.

² Although Sumner mostly uses the term welfare, he identifies it with more or less the same as well-being: "It is in this sense that welfare attaches pre-eminently to the lives of individuals, and a person's welfare is more or less the same as her well-being or interest or (in one of its many meanings) her good" (Sumner, p. 1). I will therefore use the term welfare and well-being synonymously.

In my thesis, I want to answer the following research question: *What is the problem with “adaptive preferences” and to what extent can Sumner’s “authentic happiness” theory on well-being be taken as a framework to respond to this problem in the context of enhancement technologies?* This question will be answered on the basis of a selection of literature that is needed to clarify the main theories and concepts. The sources that are of particular importance are Sumner’s “Welfare, Happiness and Ethics” (1996) and Schermer’s discussion of adaptive preferences in the enhancement debate.

The argumentation is structured in three chapters. In Chapter 1, I will use Heilinger’s definition to give a short introduction to enhancement. Since his definition is relatively unassuming concerning the potential merits and risks of enhancement, it suggests an adequate starting point for the issue at hand. To include potential benefits on well-being, I will very briefly describe some arguments made by the proponents of enhancement. In Chapter 2, I will explain Tiberius’ definition of well-being as a prudential value and why it is necessary for a “good” theory of well-being to integrate both, subject-relativity and normativity. I will then introduce the three main theories and their modified versions. These theories differ in their explanations of the nature of well-being and in the ways in which they aim to consolidate the criteria. This analysis is necessary as Sumner positions his theory in the context of these. He uses elements specifically from hedonism and the informed desire theory that are crucial to respond to the problem of adaptive preferences. In the first part of Chapter 3, I will discuss with help of Schermer’s investigation into the topic what adaptive preferences actually mean and why they are problematic. I will reflect upon the analysis by further delineating adaptive preferences as an issue. In the second part of Chapter 3, I will present Sumner’s “authentic happiness” theory. Since well-being is only authentic when the person is informed and autonomous, the presentation of his theory systematically responds to adaptive preferences. Finally, I will explore how his theory can serve as a framework to solve this issue.

Key concepts: enhancement, well-being, prudential value, happiness, autonomy, authenticity, adaptive preferences, normativity, subject-relativity, subjective, objective, attitude, endorsement, life-satisfaction

Chapter 1 - Introduction to enhancement

For the following discussion, it is important to clarify what is meant by enhancement. There exist various kinds of definitions as well as numerous descriptions of its potential benefits or risks. Heilinger tries to offer a more neutral definition of enhancement that includes as few normative assumptions as possible by focusing on the intervention itself (Heilinger, 2010, p. 59). On the one hand, I want to make use of a relatively neutral definition, that stays modest about what kind of impact enhancement technologies have. It avoids opposing the different viewpoints within the debate, and does not take sides in whether enhancement technologies should be supported. This is especially important in the light of analyzing why enhancement could play a role in contributing to well-being. On the other hand, it is important to at least acknowledge the proponents' perspective on enhancement and to be aware of their main argument how enhancement might alter a person's well-being. To do this, I will very briefly introduce Savulescu's so-called welfarist definition of enhancement and Walker's argument why "happy-people-pills" should be supported.

1.1. Heilinger's "dynamic minimal-definition" of enhancement

As a philosopher interested in the anthropological perspective on enhancement technologies, Heilinger analyzes what we as human beings are and what sort of normative ideas influence our view on what we are. He explains two well-developed strategies to define enhancement. First, a common approach is to contrast enhancement with therapy. Enhancement could be therefore defined as "interventions designed to improve human form or functioning beyond what is necessary or restore good health" (Juengst in Parens, 1998, p. 29). Secondly, Heilinger considers that enhancement could be interpreted from and defined by different perspectives on what is part of human nature (e.g. "homo faber", p. 88). Heilinger resumes, the efforts to define enhancement can be distinguished from *therapeutic* interventions or *natural* states. Although they both deal with a "border crossing", it is far from clear where the line between therapy vs. enhancement and natural vs. un-natural should be drawn. Crucially, both types of definitions are problematic as their interpretations are based on assumptions. The former tries to set standards on health and disease that include certain implicit

prejudices upon a state of a human being (p. 92). The latter is problematic as determining what is an unnatural or natural intervention:

“Yet, ultimately, any exclusive enhancement definition must fail, in part because concepts such as disease, normalcy, and health are significantly culturally and historically bound, and thus the result of negotiated values” (Wolpe, 2002, p. 390, in Heilinger, p. 61)

Since these definitions are based on normative assumptions, they cannot be neutral and provide a “starting point” for leading an ethical discussion about the “moral legitimacy of any enhancement technology” (p. 59). As an alternative, Heilinger develops a neutral definition of enhancement (ibid.), namely the so-called “dynamic minimal-definition” of enhancement.³ The *dynamic* aspect of his approach implies that the relation between health and disease, and human nature as such should not be understood in a static way. Instead, the focus should be on the changes that are aimed at to avoid the reliance on certain normative standards (p. 92). The *minimal* aspect implies that the definition of enhancement should have “as least conditions and additional assumptions as possible” (ibid.). Very importantly, Heilinger explains that his description of enhancement should serve as “starting point, not fix point” for the discussion. He explains the “dynamic minimal-definition” of enhancement follows:

“Enhancement is an intentional intervention that aims at certain changes in the - physically organized and mentally represented - human functional context, which is evaluated positively by the subject” (Heilinger, p. 92).⁴

Therefore, there are three important elements that essentially describe enhancement. First, it is about an intentional act. The fact that it is intentional implies that the act is aimed at a goal (“Zielgerichtetheit”). Secondly, the human context (“menschlicher Zusammenhang”) is central. This is especially important because it excludes the idea that something is being changed in the human’s environment (p. 93). Besides, Heilinger points out that the human is understood as a physical creature with consciousness to emphasize that the individual stands in a relation with the way he lives

³ Freely translated from German: “Eine dynamische Minimaldefinition von Enhancement“ (Heilinger, p. 1).

⁴ Freely translated from German: “Ein Enhancement ist ein auf bestimmte Veränderungen zielender, intentionaler Eingriff in den – materiell organisierten und mental repräsentierten – menschlichen Funktionszusammenhang, der subjektiv positiv evaluiert wird“ (p. 92).

his life. With the human functional context, Heilinger means biological (such as cognitive) conditions or capacities. Thirdly, the intervention is positively evaluated by the subject. This last element implies the most crucial element for the debate at hand.

Heilinger emphasizes that it is not clear what the positive evaluation of the individual exactly entails and how it can be interpreted. He acknowledges that, on the one hand, enhancement could signify an “augmentation”. This is a quantitative-descriptive concept because the effects are defined by measurements (e.g. thinking faster, memorizing more). On the other hand, the effect of the enhancement could be read as an “improvement” in the sense of a qualitative-normative concept: “In terms of human functioning, an enhancement is by definition an improvement on what went before. If it wasn’t good for you, it wouldn’t be enhancement” (Harris, 2007, in Heilinger, p. 94). Since the expression “certain changes” is open for interpretation, the nutshell of enhancement is that the evaluation is “substantially individual” (“wesentlich individuell”).

I conclude that Heilinger’s “dynamic minimal-definition” is quite a “technical” definition of enhancement. It is valuable as a neutral definition, as it avoids an explicit border crossing and has a very narrow focus on what enhancement actually does. In contrast to other definitions of enhancement and its relation to well-being, Heilinger thus gives an idea about what enhancement implies, without arguing what exactly is changed to the positive.

1.2. The proponents’ perspective on enhancement and well-being

The proponents of enhancement technologies see a great potential in science to change human lives for the better. Following this line of thought, enhancement is understood as a means to improve well-being and to achieve greater happiness (Nagel, p. 1). Although enhancement technologies focus on a specific target within the body (e.g. cognition, mood), one of the most prominent proponents, Savulescu, argues that we should talk of “*human* enhancement” because the central idea is to make one’s life as a whole better (Savulescu, Meulen & Kahane, 2011, p. 1).

More precisely, Savulescu suggests a welfarist definition of human enhancement, that highlights well-being as its central value (Savulescu et al., *ibid*): “Any change in the biology or psychology of a person which increases the chances of leading a good life in the relevant set of circumstances” (p. 7). This definition of enhancement implies the

notion of well-being as something that can be altered, in particular by the means of enhancement technologies. A crucial argument used by Savulescu is that enhancement technologies support the so-called “all-purpose goods”, such as self-discipline, patience, empathy, memory (p. 11). According to him, these are goods that are appreciated by everyone and are useful irrespective of the “kind of life a person chooses to live” (ibid.). Cognitive enhancement is of particular relevance in the current societal context, in which achievement and competition plays a crucial role (p. 12). Savulescu suggests that enhancement technologies bring the individual the advantage of supporting their abilities (p. 7). He argues that enhancement becomes interesting for everyone since all of us are “disabled in some way” in respect to the abilities and talents each of us has.

The idea to use enhancement technology to compensate our shortcomings also finds resonance in Walker’s line of reasoning. He explains that our biological or genetic conditions represent a “hindering factor” to happiness (Walker, 2013, p. 164). As example of an enhancer, his idea is that “happy-people pills” should be supported; since they make people happier, which eventually results in greater achievement and well-being (p. 184). Although Walker mentions that there are other ways to increase happiness and well-being, such as psychological techniques (p. 164), he highlights that enhancement technologies give us the possibility of “having more control over our emotional states” (p. 190). Perhaps more than Savulescu, he highlights that we should “no longer be passive” because enhancement can really empower us to go against our biological destiny or the “genetic lottery” (p. 191).

So, Savulescu and Walker both appreciate enhancement technologies because they can help to increase our abilities and thereby also foster happiness and well-being. Nonetheless, the substantive question concerning what well-being is and what it constitutes still needs to be clarified. This will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 2 – Theories of well-being

In this chapter, I want to explore the three main accounts that conceptualize well-being. I hereby employ Parfit’s division into the objective list theory, hedonistic theory, as well as desire theory, which is discussed in detail by Tiberius. In general, I will stay in line with Tiberius’ analysis, as she offers a valuable overview of the classical theories and their modified versions. First, it is important to point out the explanatory aspects of a

“good” theory of well-being or prudential value, namely the criteria of subject-relativity and normativity (cf. Tiberius). After having presented the three main theories and their modified versions, I will explain Sumner’s authentic happiness theory as his account on well-being needs to be understood in the context of the previous theories. Importantly, he has a specific approach to apply the criteria of subject-relativity and normativity, which makes his theory adequate to respond to the issue of adaptive preferences; in particular, he uses the elements of hedonism and the informed desire theory, that partly allow well-being to be “authentic”.

2.1. Well-being as prudential value

According to Tiberius, prudential value is what constitutes the “good for a person” (Tiberius, 2015, p. 1) and thereby identifies well-being as prudential value. She points out that there are different prudential goods that can be associated with a contribution to well-being. Crucially, depending on the different theory of prudential value or well-being that is used, different prudential goods are emphasized. Tiberius highlights that any account of well-being should overall be able to systematically explain why something is good for a person (ibid.). A good theory of prudential value should “ideally” (ibid.) incorporate the aspects of subject-relativity and normativity, which I will now explain.

First of all, well-being understood as prudential value includes an idea about what is “good *for* the person whose well-being it is” (p. 2). Therefore, a theory of well-being needs to explain the relationship between the subject and some prudential good. In contrast to other kinds of values, such as moral or aesthetic value, the “subject” of the value is the person himself: “what distinguishes welfare from all other modes of value is its reference to the proprietor of the life in question” (Sumner, 1996, p. 42, in Tiberius, p. 2).⁵ Secondly, a theory of well-being as prudential value needs to explain why something is “good *for* the person whose well-being it is” (p. 2). Crucially, since this feature tries to capture what is universally considered to be good for human beings, Tiberius defines this as “normative significance” of well-being.

As Tiberius points out, the criteria of subject-relativity and normativity conflict with each other so that “we are pulled in both directions” in a theory of well-being (p. 3).

⁵ Tiberius clarifies that subjectivity should not be equalized with subject-relativity, which will be further explained in 2.5.

An example, similar to the one Tiberius uses, would be: a woman is training very hard for going to the Olympic games; she finds the exercise fulfilling and enjoys tough training that goes a long way beyond the average. Therefore, from her personal, subjective evaluation of well-being, she is doing well, she is happy with her life. Coming from an outside perspective, her friends and family might be concerned that she could be “mistaken about what is good for her” (p. 3) and urge her to adopt a more “physically healthier lifestyle” (ibid.). Another example Tiberius employs is as follows: an extremely introverted boy does not like to interact with other people, he is not interested in creating friendships and just prefers to be on his own. These examples show the conflict that from the subjective point of view, the person is doing well, but from an objective point of view, their behavior or activities they like are not good for them.

Tiberius concludes that “good” theories of prudential value or well-being need to consider “different aspects of the good for a person”, which derive from various different intuitions that establish them (p. 4). On the one hand, the subject-relativity criterion assumes what is good for a person “cannot be something alien to her” (ibid.). On the other hand, according to the normativity criterion, what is good for someone needs to stand in a relation with what we consider to be part of leading a “good” life. As the following analysis will show, the different accounts on well-being take the criteria of subject-relativity and normativity to a differing extent into consideration. Depending on the explanatory focus on either of these criteria, a theory might be called either subjective or objective.

2.2. Objective List Theories

Objective list theories characteristically define well-being as possessing a certain set of basic goods, such as achievement, education and friendship. Importantly, these items are not explained by referring to the individual subject who might be interested in them by “liking them, desiring them” etc. (Tiberius, p. 4), but rather what people intuitively count as being part of leading a good life. However, this theory cannot meet the criterion of subject-relativity because it misses to explain the link between certain items and the individual person. Tiberius points towards Fletcher who suggests that other goods should be included. By considering, “subjective attitudes”, for example, one could create a broader picture of what kind of items need to be added; however, the goodness per se remains unexplained by attitudes (p. 5). A second problem is that these theories are

rather enumerative, and not explanatory or justificatory (Fletcher in Tiberius, p. 5). According to the definition of a “good” theory of prudential value, the objective list theory has therefore an important lack.

Eudaimonist theories, inspired by Aristotelian philosophy, provide an explanation of why certain things are good for someone by taking human nature as a reference point: “what is good for humans is to fulfill our natural telos” (p. 5). The challenge for eudaemonist theories is to explain what this human telos exactly is (ibid.). Since living a good human life is central to Aristotelian philosophy, our natural telos considers living “a rational activity in accordance with virtue” (p. 6). Importantly, part of human nature is seen as “inherently evaluative”. Consequently, human beings need to explain to themselves what “well functioning” means, and subsequently take the kind of action that belongs to leading a good life. This idea, according to Tiberius, is espoused by defenders who rely on reflective equilibrium as a method to explain the “goodness of a paradigmatically human life” (ibid.).⁶

In this context, Nussbaum should be mentioned as one of the main defenders of Aristotelian eudaimonist philosophy. The capability approach which is mainly influenced by Nussbaum and Sen, highlights the relationship between well-being and “human functioning”, including items on the list such as health, imagination, emotions, practical reasons etc. (Nussbaum, 2001, in Schermer, 2013, p. 6). In respect to the criteria of a “good” theory of prudential value, Nussbaum rejects the idea to explain the value of functioning by relying only on an “intrinsic normativity of our biological nature” (ibid.). Instead, Nussbaum considers that these functions gain their normative significance from an “overlapping consensus among people across the globe about what central human capacities make life go well for us” (Nussbaum, in Schermer, p. 7). The capability approach can meet the subject-relativity criterion to a certain extent because practical reasoning, which is highlighted by Nussbaum, leaves “room for people to fulfill their functions in various different ways” (ibid.). This means that in practice an individual continues doing what makes his life fulfilling.

According to Tiberius, Kraut established a well-reasoned eudaimonist approach to well-being. Kraut calls his approach “developmentalism”, arguing what is good is dependent on our biological set-up: “A flourishing human being is one who possesses, develops and enjoys the exercise of cognitive, affective, sensory, and social powers (...)”

⁶ Reflective equilibrium is a method in which different beliefs and common sense morality are balanced out in order to arrive at a justified and coherent judgment on a case.

(Kraut, 2009, in Tiberius, p. 8). In contrast to Nussbaum, who emphasizes the consensus among people and different cultures, Kraut takes a different route to explain why certain components are necessary for well-being. He uses intuitions of particular cases in terms of what might be “regrettable in human life” of not having (ibid.), by taking nature only partly as justification to for human flourishing. For example, he takes into account why impairments are “bad for people”, although those who are disabled do not reflect this evaluation (e.g. they are not interested in being different). This notion clearly conflicts with the subject-relativity by defining items as crucially valuable for everyone. However, Kraut tries to meet the subject-relativity requirement by saying that one needs overall to enjoy the capacities one has (p. 9).

In conclusion, the objective list theory lacks to explain the subject-relativity criterion, namely why certain things might be good *for* a particular person; eudaemonist theories, such as the capability approach, try to bridge this gap by referring to human nature to stress that the value of certain things is shared by everyone. Although Kraut takes a very different approach, he ensures in his theory that the capacity one has or pursues should be enjoyable for that person. His idea represents a suitable transition for the next theory of well-being.

2.3. Hedonism

Hedonism as a theory of well-being places enjoyment or pleasure into focus: “what is good for a person is pleasure and the absence of pain” (Tiberius, p. 9). There are two views concerning the nature of pleasure in hedonist theory: the sensational theory and the attitudinal theory of pleasure (ibid.). Bentham mainly inspired the sensational theory, and Crisp is its well-known current defender. According to Crisp, pleasure is a “distinctive sensation that is shared by all pleasant experiences” (ibid.). In contrast, the attitudinal theory, which is supported by Feldman, “identifies pleasure with an attitude” (ibid.). Calling a person “being pleased” with something basically means that he shows a kind of affirmative attitude towards it (Feldman, 2004, in Tiberius, p. 9).

One objection against the sensational theory is that there cannot be a certain sensation that is shared by all experiences that are enjoyed. In response, Crisp argues that this sensation or pleasure might be better explained with a “feeling tone” ⁷, as a

⁷ Since it is difficult to pin-point how exactly an experience feels like, Crisp perhaps turns to a more “artistic” expression.

certain kind of feeling is shared by different kinds of experiences (Crisp, 2006, in Tiberius, p. 10). Tiberius points out that the attitudinal theory does not have this kind of problem because there is “not something intrinsic to the experience of pleasure as such” (p. 10). Instead, the feeling of pleasure shares the “pro-attitude” of being pleased by something. However, the attitudinal theory is criticized for taking the very feeling of pleasure out of the experience, for example, “being glad to be in a state that doesn’t feel good” (Haybron, 2008, in Tiberius, p. 10).⁸

Tiberius explains that the sensation theory explains the normativity aspect better; this theory implies that something is enjoyable by capturing different kinds of experiences. Nonetheless, this purported advantage of the sensational theory in particular and the focus on pleasure of hedonist theories in general also mark their biggest disadvantage as they cannot explain subject-relativity. Interestingly, Tiberius highlights that hedonism only seems like a subjective theory as “pleasure is a psychological state” (p. 10). The problem is that hedonism assumes pleasure or enjoyment to be the most important, regardless of “whether we want it or not” (ibid.). Tiberius therefore concludes that hedonist theories can be associated rather with objective list theories, in which pleasure is the most important item (p. 10).

Nozick has pointed out this lack of the subjective point of view with his prominent “experience machine” thought experiment: if we were connected to a machine through which we would constantly experience a feeling of pleasure, this would not really contribute to our well-being because we “value other things such as being in touch with reality” (e.g. doing things instead of only thinking of them) (p. 11). He highlights that by focusing on pleasure, classical hedonists miss out considering other experiences that are good for us, which again are related with other values than pleasure. In response, Crisp criticizes that Nozick’s example gained too much emphasis. He puts forward the idea that the aspects of the hedonist theory can be backed up by reflective equilibrium.

In sum, hedonist theories, like objective list theories, have difficulties with the subject-relativity criterion. On the one hand, the experience of pleasure can be seen as an attempt to capture what is generally considered as contributing to people’s well-being. On the other hand, hedonist theories have a too limited focus on what prudential value constitutes, as the experience of pleasure seems to be the only valuable factor. One

⁸ I want to remark here that the attitudinal theory then seems to end up in a kind of absurd explanation on well-being.

relevant contribution I signalize is Feldman's response to the experience machine. He suggests that a condition of "truth-adjustedness" should be added. This requirement is meant to make sure that "pleasures are not based on false beliefs count more than deceptive pleasures" (ibid.). Feldman's idea can thus be located near a particular form of the desire theory.

2.4. Desire Theories

According to the definition in the desire or so called preference satisfaction theory, well-being essentially means "getting what you want" (Tiberius, p. 11).⁹ The main advantage of desire theories consists in their strong connection with the subject. A main objection that is raised against the desire theories is that the desires may lead to something that is harmful (p. 12). To overcome this issue, the full information theory or informed desire theory has been developed: the idea is that the desires would change if the person was "fully informed of all the relevant non-normative facts" (ibid.). Tiberius explains that the requirement of "full information" demonstrates the attempt to prove the normative significance of the desire (Tiberius p. 13). Griffin, who thoroughly elaborated such an account, explains that desires are informed when "they do not rest on a lack of information, mistaken facts or mistakes in logical reasoning, nor on the use of the wrong concepts" (Griffin, 186, in Schermer, 2001, p. 120). The down side of having "full information" is that a discrepancy could develop between "a person's actual self and her fully informed self" (ibid.). Tiberius notes the paradox that this would create issues for explaining subject-relativity as well as normativity: the person with the "full information" and the "actual person" could alienate from each other and therefore not act on the knowledge they have. Consequently, the desire by the purported informed person would probably result in an action that would not be considered to be good (ibid.).

Another approach represents so-called actual desire theories that focus on the "satisfaction of intrinsic desires" (Heathwood, 2006, in Tiberius). Actual desire theories stress the subject-relativity criterion by accentuating that desires that "are not likely to seem alien to us" (p. 15). Thus, Tiberius highlights that desires can be considered to be "the defining feature of subjectivity" (ibid.) because they directly connect to an individual's needs and wants. Nonetheless, the actual or intrinsic desire

⁹ Tiberius points out that these kinds of theories are famous in philosophy and have a dominant position in economics.

theory lacks an explanation of the normative dimension of well-being (p. 16). Tiberius argues that even if desires are intrinsic/ actual and informed they can still be not good for us in the end because they can be directed towards something unworthy of desire or even immoral (ibid.), e.g. they would contradict the good life in the Aristotelian sense.

To summarize, the main advantage of desire theories is that they can explain why something is good for someone. To circumvent that the person might desire something that is actually not doing good for them, it is argued that they should have the information of the facts. Apart from knowing the facts, the theory of actual desire in particular has shown that the object of the desire needs to be taken into account by the normative significance. This idea is furthered by Griffin's hybrid theory on well-being, as his theory attempts to align the value of desires with the value of objects that are desired (Griffin 1986, in Tiberius, p. 16).¹⁰ His approach is thus very similar to Sumner's framework, which I will introduce in the following section.

As the previous discussion has shown, all mentioned theories of prudential value have difficulties in perfectly capturing both, subject-relativity and normativity and therefore to give a complete and coherent picture on the nature of well-being. This ambiguity is reflected in the assessment of well-being and the question whether objective or subjective measures should be used. Overall, determining what is *good for* someone shows that explaining well-being is a normative undertaking.

2.5. Sumner's "authentic happiness" theory in the context of adaptive preferences and the theories of well-being

Adaptive preferences, which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3, imply an obstacle for a true reflection of people's well-being. Sumner's authentic happiness theory on well-being is well-suited to deal with the problem of reflecting one's true well-being by applying the criteria in a different way. First, Sumner sticks to the self-assessment of the person because he argues that no matter which indicators are taken "they will correlate only weakly with individuals' perceptions of the quality of their lives" (p. 151). Secondly, the self-assessment needs to be authentic, which means that their evaluation truly belong to them. These two aspects should be analyzed in more detail.

¹⁰ A hybrid theory can be characterized by the combination of aspects deriving from different theories.

Sumner's starting point is that a theory of well-being needs to be subjective because well-being is "mind-dependent". This can be explained in two steps. First, Sumner defines subjective as "proceeding from or taking place within the subject; having its source in the mind; belonging to the conscious life" (Oxford Dictionary in Sumner, p. 31).¹¹ Secondly, to explain that well-being is dependent on the mind, Sumner draws an analogy between welfare and perceptual properties. Primary qualities represent everything outside of the subject's mind such as properties like color, shape or motion. Secondary qualities refer to the way the primary qualities are perceived by the individual person, therefore they have their source in "our own subjective make-up" (p. 34). Sumner's explanation is then that welfare could be taken as a kind of secondary quality: "a power or disposition on the part of some conditions of our lives" (ibid.). The important point is, according to Sumner, that the nature of welfare is different since the point of reference is not something in the outside, but in the person. Therefore, Sumner proposes that a subjective theory needs to connect a subject's well-being with his psychological processes. He proposes from there that our well-being is dependent on the attitudes we have towards the conditions of our life: "being well-off basically means having a favorable attitude towards one's life" (p. 38).¹²

The "authentic happiness" theory is categorized as a hybrid theory. Sumner explains that his theory is in between hedonism and desire theory by "exploiting their strengths and avoiding their weaknesses" (p. 141).¹³ First, Sumner adopts the idea of experiencing something as a condition of well-being from the hedonist theories. Nonetheless, Sumner critically points out that the division into experiences of pleasure and pain is too simplistic because well-being would then seem to depend only on quantitative measures, such as duration and intensity (p. 148). Furthermore, Sumner finds hedonism as a "mental-state theory" problematic, since the sensation of the experience alone is central, and misses a reference to the outside world (p. 138). This represents a vulnerable point in hedonist theories since the experience could be a mere illusion or a deception (p. 175). Sumner highlights that an information requirement,

¹¹ Consciousness hereby broadly refers to the "representation of the world" inhibited by the subject, including cognitive processes such as perception, sensation emotion, memory, desire etc. (McGinn in Sumner, p. 32).

¹² Sumner makes use of Perry's definition of attitude as "psychological processes". Attitude in the psychological sense is a reflection of what it indicates in the physical sense, e.g. "being directed towards or away from something" (p. 36).

¹³ Sumner himself identifies his theory of happiness as a hybrid theory but his exact explanation is that the hybrid version differs from other subjective theories "by virtue of adding an independent value condition" (Sumner, footnote, p. 163 f.).

taken from the informed desire theory, circumvents the danger of deception that the hedonist theory is prone to. Sumner calls the desire theory also a “world-state theory” to stress the relation between the person and the outside. The problem with the desire theory, however, is that it loses touch with the experience itself (ibid.); in effect, the desires that are satisfied might in the end have little to do with your *personal* fulfillment (p. 149).

Crucially, Sumner seems then to use the criteria of subject-relativity and normativity differently as proposed by Tiberius. According to Sumner, a theory of prudential value needs to be subjective, which means that it needs to capture the “psychological process” of a person. The former criterion is explained by the concept of attitude: something is good or bad for a person depending on his attitude towards the object. However, Tiberius clearly points out that “subjectivity in the sense of attitude dependence is not the same as subject-relativity” (Tiberius, 2015, p. 2).¹⁴ Subject-relativity seeks to explain why something is good for a particular person, whereas attitude just describes someone’s reflection about the circumstances one is in. Attitude per se cannot explain why something is good for a person. In order to meet the normativity criterion, to ensure that something is good for someone, Sumner mentions the experience requirement and the information requirement. Combining these requirements is Sumner’s way of justifying someone’s attitude; it meets someone’s own priorities (cf. normative significance) as it corresponds to the personal mind and ideals they might have.

To conclude, the advantage in Sumner’s account is that subject-relativity and normativity do not pull into different directions since both criteria derive from the individuals themselves. For Sumner, it is clear that to have an authentic or true reflection of well-being starts with the person’s evaluation. Apart from the condition of information, however, the idea of autonomy needs to be discussed. Before that, adaptive preferences will be described in detail.

¹⁴ In a footnote Tiberius remarks that a theory like Sumner’s should be rather re-named into “subject-dependent”.

Chapter 3 –Adaptive preferences and Sumner’s “authentic happiness” theory

This chapter will deal more in-depth with the research question itself. In the first half of this chapter, I will focus on adaptive preferences. I first want to explain with the help of Schermer’s analysis what lies behind this concept. I will continue with some critical reflections to delineate adaptive preferences as a problem. In the second half, I present Sumner’s “authentic happiness” theory. I propose that his approach is adequate to respond to adaptive preferences since the criteria for authenticity, being informed and autonomous, help to solve the problem that a person is “mistaken” about his well-being. In particular, this means that with his conception of autonomy, one might be able to distinguish between autonomous and non-autonomous preferences. Importantly, true well-being or life-satisfaction is defined by Sumner as a positive attitude by authentically endorsing all conditions in one’s life. Finally, I analyze in which way his account might be useful as a framework to deal with the problematic implications of adaptive preferences in the context of enhancement. To do this, I highlight a selection of both strong and weak points in Sumner’s “authentic happiness” theory.

3.1. Adaptive preferences

Schermer introduces the phenomenon of adaptive preferences by referring to Elster’s analysis of Aesop’s fable “The Fox and the Grapes”. In the story, a fox tries to get to the grapes that are hanging high on a vine. When he noticed that he could not reach them although trying hard, he decides that the grapes were sour anyway and goes away. According to Elster’s interpretation, what is important to acknowledge is that the fox unconsciously adapts his preferences when he notices that he cannot reach them (Schermer, 2013, p. 119), changing his opinion or interest. The behavior of adapting one’s preferences can be seen as a cognitive or mental response to the circumstances one is in:

“Adaptive preferences are preferences that we have formed unconsciously, as an adaptation to the situation that we find ourselves in, in order to avoid the pain and suffering associated with the dissonance between our actual situation and the situation we would prefer” (Schermer, p. 118).

Elster evaluates the cognitive dissonance causing an “unconscious U-turn of preferences” as problematic since the adaptive preferences are formed in an irrational and therefore non-autonomous manner. The important point is that although the fox seemingly gained back his well-being, he lost his autonomy, his capacity to critically reflect upon his needs and actions. As Schermer explains, the purportedly gain in well-being or happiness at the cost of losing one’s autonomy is a trade-off that is not desirable in Elster’s view (Schermer, p. 119). This is described as the autonomy problem of adaptive preferences.

This aspect, however, is only one part of the story. Only from a short-sighted or short-term perspective, the fox felt better or happier. The second problematic aspect of adaptive preferences is related to the notion of well-being. Critics pointed out that adapting oneself to the given circumstances might not reflect one’s true well-being or happiness. The assessment of well-being itself implies two elements. First, it should be questioned what exactly constitutes well-being. Although the fox’s change of opinion about the grapes allowed him to feel happier at that particular moment, it does not change the fact that he is hungry. Secondly, his mere opinion did not change the fact that the grapes were probably sweet. This leads to the second question, namely from which perspective well-being should be evaluated. From an outsider’s perspective, he would be evaluated as not doing well because he could not reach the grapes and therefore remains hungry. These two questions, the nature of well-being and the evaluation of it, are related when it comes to one’s “true” well-being.

The insight in respect to the well-being problem of adaptive preferences is found in two distinctive contexts. A first example considering the well-being problem of adaptive preferences arises in the context of human development: people living under low living conditions are reported to consider themselves happy. As critical capability theorists might explain (cf. 2.2 Objective list theory), their reports could be explained via the necessity for them to adapt themselves to their circumstances, therefore becoming easier satisfied with what they have. Still, from an outsider’s and more objective perspective, their well-being would be evaluated as low because they are basically being forced to arrange themselves with these conditions. Instead, they should aim for what constitutes “real” well-being, e.g. what we consider to be intrinsic for leading a good life (e.g. access to basic needs, education, equality). Another example that questions the

constitution and evaluation of well-being comes from the context of medicine and healthcare. Here as well, well-being is reported by patients who live with a disability or chronic disease. However, as the patients are hindered to live life to the fullest, their quality of their life might be evaluated as not very good by healthy people, who perceive the disability as an obstacle for leading a fulfilled life. Since this pattern is a common one, it has been labeled as the so-called “disability paradox”.

A crucial observation Schermer makes is that adaptive preferences can go in a downward or upward direction. The fable of the fox is an example of downward adaptive preferences because they are rooted in a “lack of options” (p. 121). What is characteristic about downward adaptive preferences is that the output of behavior is a “relief and increase of the subjective well-being” because one is satisfied easily. As highlighted in the context of the autonomy problem, this reaction happens unconsciously because one does not critically reflect upon the situation. As an example of upward adaptive preferences, Schermer mentions the fairy tale of “The Fisherman and His Wife”. In this story, a fisherman caught a fish which turns into a prince who could fulfill any wish the fisherman had. He first wished a cottage for his wife but soon she was not content anymore with that and wanted to have a villa, then a palace etc. She becomes increasingly dissatisfied with what she already has and instead wants more.¹⁵ The crucial difference to the previous example is that it deals with an “opening up for possibilities” because the woman can have everything she wants. The paradox is that she does not become happy although she is “better off” in the sense that she does not suffer from a lack of goods. The crucial point is, as Schermer suggests, her upward driving adaptive preferences are as irrational and non-autonomous as downward adaptive preferences.

Here, Schermer proposes an analogy of downward and upward striving adaptive preferences and the arguments employed within the enhancement debate. Schermer argues that a rejection of enhancement technologies would reflect a kind of downward striving adaptive preference. Similarly like the fox took the grapes hanging high on the vine for granted, it could be argued that opponents of enhancement want to keep the status quo; they take the situation as something which cannot be changed and therefore our lives as “sour”. In contrast, the proponents of enhancement seem to embrace

¹⁵ Schermer points out that her reaction of easily unsatisfied again is known as “hedonic treadmill” or hedonic adaptation (p. 121).

upward adaptive preferences. Schermer suggests that they adapt their desires to the enhancement possibilities, which triggers a “supply creates demand” reaction (p. 125).

From a broad perspective, human development and enhancement seem to be opposed to each other: while the capability approach defines well-being with a set of minimum conditions, the proponents of enhancement argue that well-being can be maximized assuming that “human flourishing is open-ended” (p. 133). As the story of the fisherman’s wife showed, the main problem of upward adaptation is that people will never be happy, despite being objectively better off: *“how well-off someone objectively is in light of ever greater possibilities, this will never be enough to complete subjective well-being”* (ibid.).¹⁶ Schermer concludes that in the enhancement discussion, the values of subjective and objective evaluations are “turned upside down” (p. 124). Theories stating that conditions can and should be improved indefinitely are problematic (p. 134) because they implicitly articulate that human beings should be improved since they cannot and should not be happy with their current biological set-up. A paradox relationship is thereby created, in which the human being is never at peace with himself as he is.

To conclude, although the phenomenon of adaptive preferences evolves in different contexts, the fundamental problem seems to be the “truth representation” of the actual well-being of people. The problematic aspect of adaptive preferences implies two components. First, it is questionable from which perspective well-being needs to be evaluated to attain the most faithful reflection. The paradox is that both types of adaptive preferences imply a discrepancy between the subjective and objective evaluation: the case of the person who is adapting his preferences towards a lower standard of well-being seems to save his happiness; in contrast, the person striving towards increasing well-being might never be happy with what he has. Secondly, based on Elster’s analysis, Schermer has pointed out that adaptive preferences are problematic since they arise from an irrational and non-autonomous reaction (cf. cognitive dissonance). Autonomy thus reflects the “pivotal point” because one’s well-being and happiness depend on the extent to which one is conscious about one’s real living conditions. This becomes evident in Schermer’s analysis of being mistaken to believe that something contributes to one’s well-being or makes one happier. Transferred to the enhancement context, on the one hand, we might wrongly believe that we are well-off or

¹⁶ Own emphasis.

satisfied with the current conditions: “we could argue that such satisfaction with the state-of-affairs is non-autonomous because we have unconsciously adapted to the limits our nature poses” (downward adaptation, p. 124). On the other hand, “we could be equally mistaken by thinking that enhancement will makes us better off and happier, although they might in fact rather renew frustration” (upward adaptation, *ibid.*).

3.2. Critical reflections on adaptive preferences as a problem

In this section, I want to further delineate to which extent adaptive preferences constitute a problem. To do this, I will critically reflect upon Schermer’s examples and arguments to explore what the problems with autonomy and the evaluation of well-being imply exactly.¹⁷ Finally, I will touch upon the relevance of the problem of adaptive preferences in the light of enhancement.

Adaptive preferences are considered to be problematic in the first place because they are not formed autonomously. In general, I want to remark that Schermer’s analysis builds upon Elster by offering a more in-depth perspective on the problem. In his analysis, Elster seems to take an alteration of well-being for granted, arguing that they are created at “the cost of autonomy”. As Schermer’s analysis illustrates, however, it should be questioned whether well-being was really gained. Due to his focus on rationality and autonomy, Elster’s investigation does not allow to unravel the consequences that adaptive preferences implicate for well-being: Schermer’s investigation demonstrates that adaptive preferences can be equally irrational and non-autonomous, irrespective of whether one is “doing well” by having more , or less.

Furthermore, I argue that it is worth underlining that adaptive preferences might not be an issue per se. The phenomenon of “cognitive dissonance” (cf. Elster) can be understood as a psychological mechanism. It is important to grasp the notion that preferences can refer more broadly to everything belonging to the psychological nature of human. Adaptive preferences take place on different levels of consciousness because the person inhibits a mental “reality” that organizes his thoughts and experiences with the world. Therefore, adapting our preferences can have “harmless roots” such as habituation or up-bringing. Interestingly, the idea of different psychological levels, on which adaptive preferences take place, resonates in the examples Schermer employs.

¹⁷ As Schermer explains, she focuses rather on the autonomy problem than on the well-being problem of adaptive preferences.

The kind of adaptive preferences appearing in the two stories are a reflection of human behavior in a concrete situation, whereas the different types of “behavior” in the enhancement debate represent different viewpoints on the topic. I suggest that these examples logically represent different levels of reflection.¹⁸ Consequently, it could be questioned whether these examples demand for autonomy in the same way, as autonomy plays an important part in becoming conscious about needs and possibilities.

As highlighted earlier, adaptive preferences are problematic because they bias the subjective evaluation of one’s actual well-being. But how exactly does this happen? In her investigation, Schermer does not distinguish between the conditions of “perceived options” and “actual options”. It would be valuable to make this distinction here in order to stress the different perspectives, namely subjective or objective.¹⁹ This is important because if the person would have the knowledge about their options, they might change their preferences. It seems, then, that apart from autonomy, having knowledge or information about the outside world plays an important role as well for the reflection upon well-being. Schermer proposes that sometimes it might be “good” that adaptive preferences are striving downward, as a kind of resilience (p. 121). However, she does not go into detail under which circumstances the person decides or should decide for resignation or resilience. In the light of evaluating well-being, it is important to judge upon whether it is good or bad for the person to resign. This evaluation appears to be dependent on how autonomous their decision is, but also on the degree of knowledge they have about their options (cf. “lack of options” and “closing down of options”).

Understanding adaptive preferences on a spectrum of downward and upward striving is something that should be further analyzed. I suggest that this spectrum could be taken as a kind of “normative entity”. In contrast to the former focus on autonomy alone, this spectrum offers an insight into the problematic aspect of evaluating well-being. More precisely, I would identify the “ends” of the spectrum as the earlier mentioned opposed criteria of subject-relativity and normativity (cf. Chapter 2). The issue of adaptive preferences requires a “theory of the good” because well-being needs to be evaluated (Khader, 2009, in Schermer, p. 132). Hereby, the issue of balancing out the criteria of subject-relativity and normativity appears again: by relying completely on the subjective evaluation (cf. downward adaptive preferences) or on the objective

¹⁸ At the beginning, Schermer also points towards Clark (2012) who maps adaptive preferences in the broader context of different types of human behavior, such as indoctrination or false expectations.

¹⁹ I use the terms subjective and objective as they are commonly employed, namely by referring to them as the first-person perspective or second-person perspective.

evaluation of well-being (cf. upward adaptive preferences), one does not get a complete picture on how happy or well-off someone is.

Thus, I distinguish between the insights gained from the context of development studies and the disability paradox: the former refers, generally speaking, to people who need to adapt themselves towards the circumstances that are below a certain standard (“sub-minimal”). To change the conditions under which people live is urgent and can be considered to be a continuing problem for social-political development. The latter case is different as people need to cope with a “disability” as part of their body rather on an “individual basis”. Schermer’s point that the subjective well-being under circumstances of “sub-maximal objective well-being” (p. 134) should be re-considered and appreciated.²⁰ Related to this, I suggest that there should be made a positive evaluation directed towards upward striving adaptive preferences. For example, being ambitious or motivated to change oneself could be understood as a “good” upward striving adaptation. Comparing oneself to others could be stimulating to change something, standing in direct opposition to resignation, as long as the motivation does not evolve from duty or societal pressure per se.

Adaptive preferences describe a psychological reaction happening in any individual in which they adapt their preferences to the possibilities to feel better. The subjective evaluation of one’s well-being can be biased by our surroundings and by the reaction or manner in which we deal with these conditions. It is important that one characteristically adapts oneself without a critical reflection, neither upon the conditions one finds oneself in, nor the fact that one adapts oneself. On the one hand, this is problematic for oneself in the long-run because one cannot detect what makes oneself unhappy or worse off. On the other hand, this is problematic for the assessments because the subjective reports are biased and cannot be taken as criteria. Autonomy, as pointed out by Elster and Schermer, represents a key aspect in reflecting upon one’s well-being.

In the following sections, I want to approach this problem of adaptive preferences with Sumner’s “authentic happiness” theory on well-being. By this, I will explore under which circumstances adaptive preferences lose their “problematic dimension”. First, in respect to the autonomy problem, what needs to be investigated is how to distinguish between autonomous and non-autonomous preferences (Schermer, p. 128). For this, it is

²⁰ Even the definition of “disability” is often referred to a socially constructed “problem”.

necessary to look at the definition of autonomy Sumner works with. However, as the previous sections have shown, autonomy is not the only issue for representing well-being. Secondly, some knowledge about the circumstances and conditions seems to be necessary, reflecting about how well one is doing. Both, namely autonomy and information, are criteria for a “true” reflection of somebody’s well-being. Importantly, even when preferences are autonomous, they might not “reflect a person’s true well-being as most of us would see it” (Khader in Schermer, p. 132). This leads to a third consideration, which is that Sumner’s approach could be adequate as a normative framework, that corresponds to the lessons drawn from the disability paradox: when and why is it “good” to be happy with what is objectively regarded as worse-off? According to him, the subjective reports on well-being come closest to a “true” reflection of one’s well-being. In the light of the enhancement discussion in particular, the tension between the subjective and objective perspective needs to be reconsidered.

3.3. Sumner’s “authentic happiness” theory

In Sumner’s view, well-being consists of “authentic happiness”. This is based on two important ideas. First, Sumner argues that the subject himself represents the most faithful source when it comes to assessing his well-being. Due to the possibility of having one’s preferences adapted to the circumstances, one needs to know whether the person’s subjective evaluation on his well-being is authentic. Therefore, secondly, he bounds happiness to the criterion of authenticity according to which “true happiness” and true well-being is reached only when the subject is informed and autonomous.

Sumner raises the question when happiness is identical to well-being. Although Sumner distinguishes between different forms of happiness, I refer here only to “*being happy/having a happy life*” (p. 145), as this is the interpretation Sumner uses for his theory. This form of happiness includes an affective as well as a cognitive component. The affective part incorporates what is generally understood as well-being, and includes activities or experiences that make our life satisfying or fulfilling (p. 146). The cognitive part of happiness is about an “affirmation or endorsement of the conditions or circumstances of your life” (p. 145). The cognitive part is crucial as it implies a *judgment*²¹ on one’s well-being. The idea of “true” well-being refers to Sumner’s second line of thought, where “authentic happiness” stands for life-satisfaction. As explained in 2.5,

²¹ Own emphasis.

Sumner draws the analogy between welfare and perceptual properties as they both are dependent on the subject himself. Welfare can be identified with happiness when the subject has a positive attitude, when “we interpreted that point of view as an endorsement or affirmation of the conditions of her life” (p. 160). Happiness can be equated with life-satisfaction when it means to have a positive attitude in life, but only if it is *authentic*²².

Here lies the problem, namely to evaluate when the condition of authenticity is fulfilled. This is where Sumner’s response to adaptive preferences steps in, pointing out the issue that the evaluation of one’s well-being “does not accurately reflect the subject’s own point of view” (p. 172). Sumner recognizes that the very perception or the way the individual looks at his circumstances in life might be “wrong”. Subjective reports can be “colored” by certain moods (p. 155), depending on the circumstances under which the subject is asked, or that his happiness refers to a certain (short) period in time. Basically, according to Sumner, happiness in the sense of well-being needs to be “free from oppression or coercion” (p. 156). He therefore goes on to argue that the subjective evaluation needs to be *reflective*²³ in order to count as a representation of the individual’s view on life: a subject’s endorsement of the “epistemic conditions” (p. 156) of her life should be authentic. Sumner proposes that the authenticity of a person’s choices, values or preferences is bound to the conditions of information and autonomy.

Sumner adopts the first condition of the information requirement from the informed desire theory. This condition is meant to prohibit that the individual makes the mistake of desiring those things that are actually not good for him (p. 159). Due to the possibility of a “factual error” of a person’s self-assessment, Sumner suggests that information as a condition for authenticity could be directed towards a reality requirement (“ideal information”) or a justification requirement (“reasonable belief given the information available”) (p. 160). According to Sumner, neither of these approaches is compatible with a subjective theory since they do not put the “individual sovereignty” into the focus (*ibid.*). He takes another route, asking at which point more information would actually be *relevant*²⁴. He argues that more information would be relevant if it was contributing to the individual’s well-being. In practice, this theoretical insight is hard to implement. For example, if someone had a long relationship, and only

²² Own emphasis.

²³ Own emphasis.

²⁴ Own emphasis.

later finds out by talking a friend that his partner cheated on him, it is difficult to estimate how much the information affects his well-being. Sumner proposes that the relevance of the information is shown by the person himself: he either puts a “discount rate” on his retrospective evaluation of well-being concluding that he was not doing well in that point in time; or he decides that he does not care at all, so the information appears to be irrelevant (p. 160 f.). The reality or justification requirements do not make sense because they try to capture some discount rates fitted to everyone. Sumner resumes that the relevance of information in respect to one’s well-being is finally dependent on someone’s personal priorities (p. 161).

Furthermore, Sumner argues that the people’s knowledge may not be problematic but rather the “malleability of their personal values”, which I hereby identify with the concept of adaptive preferences. Sumner hereby relies on a point based on the Sen’s critique that the individual well-being and therefore the self-assessment are “too sensitive to such extraneous factors such as social conditioning etc.” (p. 162). Sumner admits that this problem cannot be balanced out via the cognitive aspect of happiness. Per definition, any information requirement, either of reality or justification, does not imply a critical stance towards these social influences, which effectively constitute the standards by which “people judge how well their lives are going” (ibid.). As a consequence, he concludes that so far his theory on well-being “does not rule out finding fulfillment in forms of life which are trivial or exploitative or demeaning” (p. 162).

The “real” problem then seems to be hidden in the standards people use. The “hopeless beggar, the dominated housewife” etc. are typical examples, which Sumner borrows from Sen, to illustrate that their expectations and therefore standards for self-assessment on their well-being have been lowered and distorted via “processes of indoctrination or exploitation” (p. 166). According to Sumner, hybrid theories try to deal with this issue and base their theory of well-being on two conditions related to what contributes to well-being: first, the subject needs to find it satisfying and important to his life and secondly, it should be “independently valuable” (p. 163). The counter-part then of the reality requirement as a “remedy for factual mistake” then would be a *value requirement*:

“Here the subject is presumed to be mistaken not about some state of the world but about the value, from an independent standpoint, of some condition of his life; he takes that condition to be more, or less, valuable than it really is” (p. 164).

According to Sumner, a value requirement is “even more questionable than a reality requirement” because it presupposes that something is valuable that corresponds to something real in the outside (p. 164).²⁵ Sumner then asks “how are we to determine which aims or activities or forms of life *really are* valuable”. Again, our retrospective assessment of well-being demonstrates that there cannot be a “right answer” how to respond exactly to the circumstances as our values and standards have shifted as well. Here, Sumner draws the analogy of the first-person and second-person evaluation and the difficulty to find *which* independent evaluative standpoint should be considered in this case (p. 165): from a first-person perspective, they do not necessarily question the standard of their life; although the second-person perspective might try to “correct” this uncritical behavior, this does not necessarily mean that they adopt other values. Sumner’s suggestion then is to find the counterpart of the information requirement “with the defeasibility implied for individual self-assessments” (p. 166). Sumner suggests that the emphasis should not lie on the idea that “their values are objectively mistaken, but that they have never had the opportunity to form their own values at all” (ibid.). Sumner identifies this issue with a lack of autonomy.

The notion of autonomy needs to be further dissected here. According to Sumner, authenticity is a core aspect in the concept of autonomy (p. 167), and there are two types of theories on autonomy Sumner considers.²⁶ First, he makes use of the definition of autonomy as proposed by Frankfurt and Dworkin.²⁷ Their approach acknowledges a person’s values as his own when he himself identified them or endorsed them as his “standards for the conduct and assessment of her life” (p. 168). Sumner points out that this “process of identification” requires the “capacity for critical reflection on one’s aims or goals” (p. 168). This kind of capacity is illustrated by Frankfurt’s “hierarchy of desires” (ibid.). This means that desires can be categorized into first-order and second-order desires: while first-order desires include “actions of the agents or states of the world”, second-order desires imply to “take as their objects those first-order desires”

²⁵ This is basically the point where Sumner rejects the normativity criterium (cf. Tiberius).

²⁶ Interestingly, the theories yet need to be explained are also referred as *authenticity models*; the idea is that “in order to be termed autonomous a person must be ‘really himself’” (Schermer, 2001, p. 24).

²⁷ The Dworkin/Frankfurt theory of autonomy is also known as “split-level self” theory (Schermer, p. 20).

(ibid.). The difference consists then in the level of reflection.

This model, however, has been criticized for various reasons. A crucial one is that so far it can be only assumed that second-order desires are “more reflective”. The question remains “whether the values or standards under which it is conducted have themselves been accepted autonomously” (ibid.).²⁸ Sumner gives the example of the dominated housewife who might have reflected upon her situation and accepted her “subordinate status as the appropriate role” (p. 169). In the light of this critique, an “infinite regress” evolves because one could always go one step back of higher-order desires, trying to distinguish between the autonomous values and aims from the non-autonomous ones. Sumner resumes that the Dworkin/Frankfurt theory on autonomy highlights the “*psychological*”²⁹ process of identification” concerning goals and values, and the individual’s capacity to step back to evaluate these (p. 169).

Christman tries to avoid with his “historical approach” of autonomy that one need to go back “infinitely”, suggesting that the process in which the desire was *formed* needs to be considered: “conditions and factors relevant during process of coming to have the desire” (in Sumner, p. 169). This scope of autonomy is crucial as it admits to distinguish between what makes the “processes ‘manipulative’ in a way crucially different from ‘normal’ processes of self-development” (Christman, 1991, in Sumner, p. 169).³⁰ At first sight then, this “backward-looking” on the formation of preferences seems to solve the problem of adaptive preferences by getting to the source of one’s desires (cf. Elster). With Christman’s approach, they can make the standards they have “internalized” (Sumner, p. 169) explicit.

Nonetheless, Christman acknowledges that this historical approach is incomplete when it comes to distinguishing between ‘manipulative’ and ‘normal’ processes (Sumner, p. 170). Sumner’s suggestion is that we can identify those normal processes by accepting that *all* of our values and goals etc. are formed by our personal, individual lives and thereby are influenced *to some extent* via the circumstances we live in (ibid.). In contrast, processes are manipulative when they do not respect someone’s autonomy: “by denying the subject the opportunity for critical reflection on the process itself and its

²⁸ Furthermore, the person himself does not necessarily identify himself more with these second-order desires (ibid.); it is legitimate to wonder whether second-order desires are more authentic than first-order desires.

²⁹ Own emphasis to highlight that this is Sumner’s interpretation of it.

³⁰ Christman’s historical approach of autonomy stands in contrast to the so called “time-slice theories” that focus on the “attitude the subject *now* has to the value or desire in question” (Sumner, p. 169).

outcome" (p. 170). What is very important here is that Sumner explains that this in return requires the outlook on autonomy offered by Dworkin/Frankfurt. To acknowledge autonomy means to leave room for the individual's very capacity to take a step back to assess his values and standards, "including the very values promoted by that process itself" (ibid.). This is crucial and shows that the historical approach proposed by Christman does not necessarily consider that non-autonomously adapted preferences could still be endorsed or identified as "his own" when they are made autonomous.³¹

To conclude, I shortly recapitulate how Sumner's authentic happiness theory can be used to respond to adaptive preferences. Happiness can be identified with well-being when it is authentic. The conditions for authenticity are reflected in the requirements of information as well as autonomy. The information requirement is difficult to consolidate with a subjective theory because it denies the "authority" of the subject's point of view.³² While the values and aims are decided via personal preferences, Sumner refers to the standards with which person evaluates his well-being as problematic. This is why the lack of autonomy is recognized as the main issue of adaptive preferences. Both theories of autonomy are needed to reflect on these standards: the strength of the Dworkin/Frankfurt model is that the individual should use his capacity of reflection, which implies to identify one's standards and values (p. 171). To make sure that these values and goals have been autonomously adopted, Christman's historical approach is useful because it looks back in time on how the values and standards have been formed and adopted by the individual (ibid.). In return, Christman's theory should at the same time leave room for the possibility of "critical distance", which is the very state in which the individual reflects upon his values and preferences.³³ All things considered, concerning the assessments of these conditions, Sumner proposes that they are defeasible unless it can be seriously doubted that the person lacks information or autonomy. Authentic happiness, then, can be considered to be life-satisfaction when one authentically endorses the conditions of life by showing a positive attitude.

³¹ Sumner gives the example of someone who is raised up in a very religious community, living with strict rules. After living years outside this community, he returns back because he re-appreciates the values he grew up with (cf. p. 170).

³² Interestingly, Sumner refers later only to information as a "reality requirement" because the justification requirement loses its relevance due to the autonomy requirement.

³³ Sumner acknowledges that they have been later versions of Dworkin/Frankfurt and Christman, in which they tried to integrate each other's viewpoint.

3.4. Adaptive preferences in the enhancement context: strengths and weaknesses of the “authentic happiness” theory

In a nutshell, adaptive preferences are problematic because people adapt their preferences non-autonomously to the given circumstances to feel better and thereby deceive themselves as well as others about their true state of well-being. I now want to further discern Sumner’s theory as a response to this problem by considering some strengths and weaknesses.

A first relevant consideration is the idea that since the “cognitive dissonance” is essentially rooted in the person’s mind, it needs to be dissolved by the person himself. This is shown in the way Sumner combines the insights of the different theories on autonomy in order to turn non-autonomous preferences into autonomous ones. Sumner eventually stays close to the Dworkin/Frankfurt theory of autonomy as the psychological process remains central. While Christman’s historical approach “obliges” them to look outside their mind, Sumner returns back to the distinction made between first and second order desires, which should establish clarity over their aims and values. Sumner and Schermer also remark that the decision in the end is up to the individual himself: “upon reflection, one may thus either change one’s preferences, or come to re-affirm them” (Schermer, p. 131). Autonomy, as understood by Sumner as a condition of authenticity, might be defined as follows: “autonomy is the capacity to reflect critically upon one’s motivational structure and to make changes in that structure” (Dworkin 1982, 1988, in Schermer, 2001, p. 22). This implies that if the person can be considered to be autonomous, he can consequently give an accurate reflection of his well-being.

The second strength is related to the previous point, namely that the approach of the “authentic happiness” theory corresponds to a recognized practice in psychology: evaluating a person’s well-being or to assess what is good for someone, should naturally start with asking the person himself. This advantage can be further illustrated by the direct comparison with the three main theories of well-being. For example, while objective list theories generally lack a reference to the particular person, Sumner’s theory is even able to explain the nuances of prudential value: “everyone cares about it *to some extent* for its own sake, thus that its presence in a life makes that life *to some extent* more satisfying or fulfilling” (cf. subject-relativity, p. 181). His theory eventually becomes more context-sensitive towards the individual who values different things depending on time, age, location etc. In contrast to hedonism and desire theories, which

emphasize enjoyment or satisfaction of certain desires, happiness as more “general rubric” (p. 181) is more open to different aspects contributing to well-being. In sum, the strong reliance on the individual’s reflection constitutes a main strength for the purpose of understanding the person’s priorities and well-being.

To stress a third aspect, I refer to Sumner’s notion of life-satisfaction, considering it to be especially valuable in the enhancement context. Sumner understands well-being as being mind-dependent and therefore on the person’s attitude towards life by authentically endorsing the conditions one lives with. The notion of endorsement is equivalent to the idea of resilience suggested by Schermer. She points out that it would be “good” at times when people can identify themselves with an “objectively sub-maximal” level of well-being. I argue that enhancement technologies represent one example of our culture of “endless possibilities”, aiming at maximizing prudential value. Taking this as an example of upward driving preferences, they stand in contrast to adaptive preferences in which they serve as a “survival strategy” (Sen in Sumner, p. 167). The main difference is that we indeed have more choices or more “freedom” to choose, and we are normally also aware of the options available. A parallel to the criticism leveled by Sumner on the desire theory can be drawn here, because our life-satisfaction or personal fulfillment cannot be traced back or summed up by the satisfaction of certain desires; neither can probably the mere “all-purpose goods” altered capacities via enhancers be a guarantee for life-satisfaction.³⁴ Instead of wanting more means to maximize one’s well-being, one could show a positive attitude towards what one has and be resilient towards one’s own shortcomings. In this light, the authentic happiness implies a promising approach emphasizing that the person should critically reflect upon their aims and the standards via his autonomy.

At this point, I want to take a step back, pointing out that there is also an interesting parallel between Sumner and, in particular, Savulescu. They both focus on the malleability of the subject, and not on the circumstances per se. This is remarkable since the supposed strength of Sumner’s authentic happiness theory, staying close to the person’s mind processes, turns out to be a disadvantage in responding to adaptive preferences. What might be the most obvious idea about adaptive preferences is to recognize the environment’s power to influence one’s well-being. An alternative position

³⁴ Therefore, a difference of outlook on how well-being can be altered can be remarked here: while Sumner relies on attitude referring back the psychological nature of human beings, Savulescu approves of enhancement by concentrating on the biological conditions of human being.

would be to admit that “*we do not have nearly so much control over our happiness as it is often supposed*” (Walker, p. 191).³⁵ However, opinions differ on this statement. While disability studies and empirical research on happiness tell us that the environment has a major influence on our well-being (cf. Harnacke & Bolt, unpublished), Walker traces this back to our biological or genetic conditions. But what does this idea have to do with a critique on “authentic happiness”? Sumner does not give a refined analysis of the environment’s impact and a statement on how people should *interact* with the conditions. For this, it appears to be necessary to deal with the environment and knowledge as something which is “outside the mind”. Here, I argue that the weak points in his theory are mainly related to how he defines the information requirement.

First, I point out that it is problematic that Sumner does not clearly differentiate between information and autonomy as two conditions since the information requirement seems to be merged into autonomy. Sumner seems to “downplay” the condition for information, by rejecting a reality as well as a justification requirement because it is not compatible with a subjective theory. Sumner’s solution to the “circularity objection”³⁶ is that the norm is given by “the nature of subjectivity itself” (p. 174). However, I suggest that taking a look at the formation of values and aims (cf. Christman’s theory of autonomy), demonstrates that information is essential for autonomy as well. The problem is that even if both conceptions on autonomy are combined, it is questionable whether a person can be autonomous enough to be critical towards the very “autonomy-subverting mechanisms”. Without knowledge or awareness of the outside conditions, they might hardly be critical towards the very normative standards. By only looking “inward”, I consider that Sumner’s approach is not necessarily steered to avoid that people more or less remain a “cog in the wheel” because they do not recognize the standards the circumstances are ruled by.

Furthermore, I observe that Sumner’s theory in particular asks for “information” and the interaction with the environment to question the standards for *personal* satisfaction or fulfillment. Sumner admits that the question of emancipation is a practical question: “how much emancipation from the background and social conditions

³⁵ Own emphasis.

³⁶ A circularity objection is raised against subjective theories because the values for 1. the individuals and 2. the conditions cannot do without “presupposing the objectivity for the property in question” (p. 173). In Sumner’s case, this means concretely: “when is a person informed and autonomous?” (p. 174). The problem is that the fact that someone endorses his life conditions does not per se explain that they are indeed valuable.

a subject must exhibit in order for her self-assessment to be taken at face value” (p. 171). Since life-satisfaction is Sumner’s main concern, it becomes automatically vague which sort of information is needed. His theory thus stands in contrast to the informed desire theory, which normally has a set of information for particular desires. Additionally, I want to emphasize that the point of the informed desire theory is to know the “non-normative facts”. However, information or knowledge about the world in the wider-context we live in is rarely non-normative. Considering these points, it should be questioned what the “autonomy subverting-mechanisms” in the enhancement context would be. I propose that these work in a much more *subtle* way compared to the ones in the human development context. It is not only our own unconscious, non-autonomous preferences we need to be aware of but also how the environment shapes our desires. At the same time, can we really say that we did not have the opportunity to form our own values in our society? Probably not (in that dimension), but in return, our “supply creates demand” culture heightens our need to critically examine the knowledge about the world and our interaction with our environment. This step appears to be necessary for preserving our personal fulfillment and therefore be “authentically happy”.

Secondly, there are also some implications for the assessment of well-being. From the second-person perspective, it might be hard to distinguish between an affirmative/rejecting attitude and a downward/upward striving adaptive preference. The spectrum that has been analyzed with a focus on autonomy could be considered as well for the information requirement. In the case of downward adaptive preferences, the problem might be that a person simply does not know other options that could change his well-being to the better or make him happier. In the case of upward adaptive preferences, the person might be misinformed about the benefits of attaining what he wants, such as with enhancement technologies. Sumner’s authentic happiness account is insufficient to the extent that it has problems to make a faithful assessment on the authenticity concerning the second person’s evaluation of his well-being. Griffin’s version of the informed desire theory could help out here. In his view, “one must be able to explain why one finds a thing valuable” (Schermer, 2001, p. 14). The evaluation or explanation of a person concerning his well-being should be based on reasons that are “intelligible” (Griffin in Schermer, *ibid.*). The “intelligibility criterion” helps to verbalize the relation between the individual and his condition (e.g. it would make the wish to use a particular enhancement technology transparent). In practice, the “intelligibility

criterion” might help to be able to distinguish between someone who has authentically endorsed the conditions of his life and the one who adapted his preferences.

Finally, I argue that the answer Sumner gives in his “authentic happiness” theory is not stimulating to come to the “root” of adaptive preferences. As already highlighted in the introduction, an important purpose of subjective evaluations on well-being is to inform policy makers. Sumner’s suggestion is to take the subject’s reports as defeasible when they are authentic, but this does not necessarily give the critical insight into what needs to be changed in practice. The “authentic happiness” theory concentrates on the individual’s attitudes towards the conditions he lives in. However the attitude of the individual should not be the solution to those “autonomy subverting-mechanisms” to which they are prone to respond to via adaptive preferences. Sumner recommends that “the obvious remedy is to correct for the conditions under which their expectations about themselves came to be formed” (p. 166). However, to do this, a judgment needs to come to fore that these conditions need to be changed. Concretely, instead of focusing on the “change in function” of the individual, it might be even better “to adapt the circumstances to increase well-being” (Harnacke & Bolt, p. 10).³⁷

To briefly summarize, Sumner’s authentic happiness theory promises a valuable approach to respond to adaptive preferences as a theoretical framework. Sumner’s definition of authenticity helps to gain a deep insight into the nature of well-being. This adds to a comprehensive understanding of how adaptive preferences are absorbed by the individual and need to be dissolved by him via his autonomy. “Authentic happiness” as life-satisfaction gains remarkable relevance in the context of enhancement: it might be “good” to show an affirmative attitude towards what one already has instead of longing for something that may not contribute to their well-being in the end. What remains unclear in his theory is the value of the information requirement as it is merged into the autonomy condition. In practice, having knowledge about one’s options and also the critical behavior towards it is crucial and can hardly be solved by autonomy alone. Furthermore, his argumentation is intermingling with well-being as prudential value and the assessment of it because a theory of well-being needs to be subjective. Sumner’s proposal therefore might not be suited as a practical, normative framework as it does not appropriately consider the relation between people and their direct environment and the meaning for their well-being.

³⁷ Freely translated from German: „Funktionsänderung“; „Dann kann es also sinnvoller sein, um schlichtweg die Umgebung anzupassen, um Wohlbefinden zu steigern“ (Harnacke & Bolt, p. 10).

Conclusion

To conclude, I present the main findings for answering the research question: *What is the problem with “adaptive preferences” and to what extent can Sumner’s “authentic happiness” theory on well-being be taken as a framework to respond to this problem in the context of enhancement technologies?* After having encapsulated the major points of my argumentation, I will end by remarking some limitations, as well as adding some suggestions for further research.

In Chapter 1, I first of all gave a short introduction to enhancement in order to give an idea what it implies. Heilinger gives a definition of enhancement that offers a neutral approach to the topic. His “dynamic minimal-definition” focuses on the intervention itself, underlining that it is evaluated positively by the subject. Directly after, I briefly outlined a selection of arguments brought forward by Savulescu and Walker, as prominent defenders of enhancement. Both emphasize that enhancement technologies improve our capacities and thereby alter our well-being and happiness. In Chapter 2, I presented the three main conceptions of well-being, based on Parfit’s division into the objective list theory, hedonism and desire theory. By means of Tiberius’ analysis, I could analyze how thoroughly the theories are able to explain well-being as a prudential value. What has become clear is that each of the theories struggles with justifying both, what is good *for* a person and why we consider something as *good* for well-being. Sumner’s theory as a hybrid theory tries to circumvent this by settling both criteria within the person himself. The combination of the experience requirement and the information requirement represents the normative significance and forms the basis that the attitude of the person is authentic. By this, Sumner’s theory seeks to overcome the bias of their well-being and illustrates a suitable approach for adaptive preferences.

In the first half of Chapter 3, I outlined what lies behind the concept of adaptive preferences and what is problematic about it. Adaptive preferences reflect a psychological reaction in which we adapt our wants and needs to the circumstances in order to feel better. According to Elster, they are mainly problematic because the person is not aware of them due to a lack of autonomy. Moreover, Schermer demonstrates the implications of adaptive preferences for our (notion of) well-being. Concretely, this does not only imply how well-being can be defined or what it constitutes of; it is also a matter of perspective from which well-being should be evaluated to attain a most accurate representation of the person’s *true* well-being. Adaptive preferences can,

figuratively speaking, strive in certain directions. The paradox is that the person who has lowered his aims, standards etc. has the tendency to feel better, whereas the one who has lots of goals and higher standards becomes dissatisfied more easily. What both types have in common is that preferences are formed non-autonomously. Apart from the condition of autonomy, I pointed out that some knowledge about one's conditions should be also necessary.

In the second half of Chapter 3, I analyzed Sumner's authentic happiness theory and in which way it can respond to the problem of adaptive preferences. In general, I maintain that Sumner's theory corresponds well to the spectrum that Schermer provides and is theoretically fitting to solve the issue. Sumner and Schermer points out that adaptive preferences are not problematic if a person has become autonomous. Autonomy implies to be able to identify one's values and goals and "look backward" to be aware of how the very standards have shaped the personal priorities. Sumner's focus clarifies that well-being is mind-dependent, thus the person needs to dissolve the cognitive dissonance, staying close to psychology's conception of well-being. "Authentic happiness" is a consistent theory as Sumner deliberately combines the elements of other theories to avoid a conflict of what should be best for the person. Lastly, "authentic happiness" could play a role in the context of enhancement, because being happy with what one has, albeit greater possibilities, gains increasingly importance. Showing an affirmative attitude towards the conditions one lives could help to maintain their well-being.

An important lack in Sumner's presentation of authenticity is his definition of the information requirement, since the information requirement falls back onto autonomy. This is problematic since the reflection necessary to tackle the "autonomy subverting" influences consists in a reflection that goes beyond the "internalized" values". Only with further knowledge and a critical assessment of this can the standards be questioned. The environment of people plays a crucial role here because it can alter their well-being and in general shape preferences into another direction. Furthermore, it remains difficult to assess the authenticity of well-being because the evaluation of well-being is prone to be wrong about the difference of attitude and adaptive preference, which is fatal in two ways. First, the point of assessing well-being is to be certain that the person is doing well and secondly, one gets to know the root of the problem. To sum up: since Sumner uses the criteria of subject-relativity and normativity differently by stressing the subjective

point of view, the “authentic happiness” is enlightening concerning the nature of well-being. On a theoretical level, Sumner’s approach can respond to adaptive preferences by emphasizing the critical capacity, thus autonomy, of the person. The other side of the coin is that this approach sets boundaries on the authentic assessment of well-being. In practice, authentic happiness can only provide limited normative guidance.

Eventually, I show how I restricted the scope of my research. First, the discussion on enhancement is kept on a general level. For example, the viewpoints within the debate or the empirical research done in the field are not further considered here. Furthermore, the welfarist position, which places well-being into the focus of ethical theory, adopted by Sumner is not further investigated. Nonetheless, I suggest that some research should be done on the ethical relevance of Sumner’s theory. Another big topic within the enhancement debate, which came implicitly along with Sumner’s idea of attitude, is the discussion on identity. Part of that can be compromised by the question whether we actually want constant happiness and whether we have the power to maintain it – even with enhancement. This could be further analyzed with the “authentic happiness” theory and Elster’s idea of “Character Planning”, implying that adaptive preferences can be also consciously, deliberately chosen (Schermer, p. 119). Thereby, I would like to close by referring to a quote by J.K. Rowling:

“It is our choices that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities.”

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