

has value has it because of our valuing. Each side tries to make sense of as much of the messy data as we can, and each side has its own strengths and weaknesses. If we think of philosophical theories as ships, and we think of the rock-bottom divides between philosophers as indicating which ship we're trying to build, maybe philosophical progress comes from each crew trying to make their ship as seaworthy as possible. As philosophy moves on, we change a lot of the planks and we make improvements as we learn more about the sea. When it comes to a topic as important as flourishing, we surely do not know which ship is the best, which means we should hope that our fleet is in the best possible shape. For that reason, we should be grateful for Richard Kraut's work even if we don't always agree with it. He has replaced enough planks from the original Aristotelian ship that it floats much better than it used to.

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Activity, Consciousness and Well-Being

L. NANDI THEUNISSEN

I once opened a fortune cookie containing the message, 'All happiness is in the mind'; it is still affixed to my refrigerator. I did not put it there to signal assent so much as ripeness for further investigation. As befits the genre, it is a wise-sounding pronouncement. If we think of 'happiness' as a state of mind, as we moderns do almost reflexively, then the pronouncement would be trivial. But presumably it is intended to be substantive. To understand it we need to know what substitutions are permitted for 'happiness'. The well-lived life? What is naturally sought, perhaps ultimately? Well-being?¹ We also need to probe the phrase 'in the mind'. For students of philosophy, it could be tempting to read 'mind' as soul or even self – familiar translations of the

1 For recent discussion of the relevant concepts and their relationship, see [Lin 2022](#). See also [Vogt 2017](#) (ch. 2).

Greek *psyche*. In that case, we are being told that what we human beings seek, perhaps ultimately, turns on the condition of our soul. I could potentially get on board with this, but a lot depends. Are we talking about an absence of sin? Psychological health? Facility with rational powers?

In his latest book, *The Quality of Life* (2018), originally given as the Tanner Lectures, Richard Kraut offers – and defends – a further interpretation. All happiness is in the mind in the sense that the only kind of thing that is intrinsically good for human beings, the only kind of thing that directly affects the quality of our life, is conscious experience. If Kraut defends the message in my fortune cookie, he defends it as the claim that the quality of our experience is all that matters to how our life is going. This is a somewhat literal construal of the message, but it is a striking and radical proposal. For consider what it entails. Kraut is denying that whether your friends *actually* care for you, or whether the work on which you spent your best years is *actually* read and appreciated, makes a difference to the quality of your life (there are no non-experiential components of well-being). He is also denying that it makes a difference whether the beautiful sunset that makes you feel alive and connected to all-that-is is more than a simulacrum (experiences do not need to correspond to a reality beyond themselves to be intrinsically good for us). This is ‘strong experientialism’, the thesis that all components of well-being are experiential and that if an experience is illusory, this does not in itself (non-instrumentally) diminish its value for us (Kraut 2018: 81). If you find yourself thinking of Robert Nozick’s experience machine, you are very much on the right track. We are being told to plug in!²

Kraut has long investigated questions about the nature of goodness and the well-lived life, bringing these characteristically Greek preoccupations into contemporary discussions. But the present work marks a break in his thinking, and even a renunciation of sorts (note the subtitle, *Aristotle Revised*). Kraut is departing from the form of perfectionism that he has defended in the past according to which happiness, understood as the well-lived human life, crucially involves the development and exercise of our characteristic powers of thought, feeling and agency (see Kraut 2007 (ch. 3)). Kraut remains committed to the view that exercising our powers, or in other words, *being active*, is relevant to our good, and as we will see, maintaining the importance of activity is a key element in Kraut’s response to Nozick. But Kraut is now inclined to emphasize activity only insofar as it bears on conscious experience. He works to close the gap Nozick had insisted upon between doing something and having the experience of doing it. And where the gap remains, he urges that activity matters only insofar as it conduces to valuable states of consciousness. I want to probe the envisaged relationship between activity and consciousness in what follows. I will urge that there can be a robust and relevant difference between doing something and having the experience of doing it – that much depends on what the activity *is*, and a closely related

2 For a qualification on this way of formulating the point, see Kraut 2018 (116–117).

point, what counts as *successfully* doing it. I will also resist the claim that the value of engaging in an activity, whatever it is, is the state of experience yielded thereby. These will be my grounds for resisting Kraut's construal and defence of the message in my fortune cookie.

1. *Doing something versus having the experience of doing it*

Let me begin, as Kraut does, with Nozick's experience machine.³ To recall the famous thought experiment, this is a device that furnishes those who plug in with any experience of their choosing: to hear next weekend's performance at Carnegie Hall; to attend a discussion at Plato's Academy; to see an exhibit at the Palais de Tokyo. While experiences generated by the machine are illusory, we are supposing that they are phenomenologically indistinguishable from the experiences we would have in the real world.⁴ So, should we plug in? Nozick banks on our felt leeriness on grounds that we would be forfeiting our agency for passive consumption of a scripted show. In his diagnosis, 'we want to *do* certain things and not just have the experience of doing them' (Nozick 1974: 42; quoted by Kraut 2018: 84).⁵ To plug in is to cede to our worst impulses to give up and check out, and we rightly recoil.

The thought experiment is familiar, but Kraut encourages us to move cautiously (see esp. Kraut 2018 (90–106)). Consider that, when we listen to a performance at Carnegie Hall in the real world, we think about and respond to what we are listening to. We attend to a musical phrase and find it ingenious. Kraut invites us to wonder how Nozick is conceiving of these active dimensions of our experience. For instance, if active engagement and responsiveness are absent from the experiences had by way of the machine, then plausibly the experiences would not be phenomenologically indistinguishable from the ones we ordinarily have. Or if engagement and responsiveness are themselves scripted by the technician, so that the technician is the one who decides what we think and feel about what we are listening to, then arguably we would be strangely alienated from our own minds, having thoughts and feelings that seem to us to be authored by someone else. Or could it be that the technician gives us the experience of actively thinking about and responding to the performance when we are not *actually* doing these things? This, Kraut argues, is incoherent. There is no difference between having a thought occur to one and having the experience of having a thought occur to one, and no difference between responding to what we listen to with pleasure and having the experience of so responding with pleasure. Real experience involves activity, and for machine generated experiences to have the same feel, they would need to involve activity as well. To enjoy

3 The thought experiment was originally proposed in Nozick 1974 (42–45).

4 This presupposes internalism about mental content.

5 I leave aside Nozick's other, related, misgivings. These are discussed by Kraut at 83–89 and 106–116.

the rich experience that real life affords, we would need to be active in the machine. To plug in is not thereby to check out.

Kraut draws a strong lesson from these reflections on the experience machine. For any of the pursuits or activities whose engagement bears on our quality of life, there is no meaningful difference between engaging in the activities and having the experience of engaging in them. We can enjoy the full mental, affective and agential dimensions of these activities in the machine. The examples that work more easily for Kraut are those that fit what I will call his late intellectualist turn, activities like listening to music, or considering an argument, or reading an article. These are activities where success involves no more than engaging in the activity in ways that are appropriate to them. I will raise a question about the intellectual or contemplative examples immediately below, before dwelling on the practical or productive kinds of case – activities like writing a novel, ameliorating a patient's symptoms or giving a performance. In these second cases, there is an end or goal apart from our activity that is the reason we engage in it. The standards of success are different here – there are external markers. We engage successfully when we do the thing it is the point of the activity to do. And that can depend on other people and how they are affected; it can depend on meeting standards that are institutionally defined; and in general, how things turn out.

1.1 *Listening to music*

First, let's consider the contemplative case more closely, taking Kraut's example of listening to music (Kraut 2018: 90–92). As Kraut makes the point, to engage fully and appropriately in this activity involves listening with the right cognitive, affective and imaginative orientation. It involves having our attention be guided by the formal features of the music, being absorbed in such a way that we are not distracted by the exigencies of the moment, working actively to put the parts together as we draw relevant connections and find meaning.⁶ Kraut very lucidly makes the case that, far from being a passive receptacle for experience to happen to one, experience of this sort requires activity – tracking, cohering, relating, responding and so on. Now, as we saw a moment ago, Kraut denies that there is a difference between having a thought occur to one and having the experience of having a thought occur to one.⁷ But what would Kraut say about the difference between understanding and having the experience of understanding? We can think we are listening sensitively and appreciatively but be quite mistaken. We can have an experience of being absorbed by the music, of putting the parts together, of drawing relevant connections and of finding it all exhilarating, but be quite unmoored. In other words, there is a difference between tracking the features of the music and having the experience of tracking them, and between appreciating how the

6 Kraut's descriptions recall Beardsley (1979) on aesthetic experience and I self-consciously recall his treatment here.

7 There are familiar complexities here. I may have the experience of thinking about the current Chancellor of my university when I am not thinking about the current Chancellor of my university (the person I am calling to mind does not meet that description because, unbeknownst to me, they have stepped down).

parts cohere and having the experience of appreciating how the parts cohere. How will Kraut handle this difference?

One option would be for Kraut to maintain that *actually* appreciating the music with understanding and merely *seeming* to appreciate the music with understanding are phenomenologically indistinguishable. The experiences are the same, their felt quality is the same, so things are going just as well for the appreciative as for the non-appreciative listener. Whether we are enjoyably moved through an appreciative grasp of what we are hearing, or enjoyably moved through the wayward turnings of our own minds, makes no difference. About a comparable example Kraut says that it does not enter the experience of a mathematician that her train of reasoning actually constitutes a proof, however much she thinks it does; whether she gets it right or not, her experience is the same (Kraut 2018: 137). And it is something of a refrain in the book that what matters is the rich phenomenology of intellectual exploration (a point I come back to at the end of this article). In a way this is just one of the tenets of Kraut's experientialism, the thesis that experiences do not need to make the right kind of contact with reality to be valuable for the person. But I find this implausible and unsavoury in the musical and the mathematical case. My reasons are Nozickian. In one scenario we have exercised our agency successfully – we have engaged appropriately in an activity – and in the other we have not. If Kraut endorses the position of phenomenological indistinguishability, he forfeits his nice response to Nozick's objection, namely the response that there is only a threatening gap between agency and experience when we labour under an inadequately agential conception of the latter.

A second option would be for Kraut to maintain that *actually* appreciating the music with understanding and merely *seeming* to appreciate the music with understanding are not phenomenologically indistinguishable. The experience of tracking and putting together a complex piece of music in such a way that we succeed in taking in its particular qualities with comprehension (and so on) is different from the experience in which we are not doing these things. I find this independently plausible. If aesthetic experience involves being guided by an object and its qualities, understanding how the elements are functioning together, then doing this and not doing this are different experiences (and it is a separate matter whether we can tell the difference from the inside). If Kraut takes this line, he is able to preserve the intuition that failed aesthetic agency and successful aesthetic agency have different values for the agents. But there is a remaining puzzle about how someone in the experience machine could order up the experience of successfully appreciating a complex piece of music. As Kraut interprets Nozick's thought experiment, we should be envisaging a person who has the relevant musical training before plugging in. Only then will they be capable of the sort of aesthetic experience that trained listeners have in the real world. This seems right to me. But capability does not guarantee success. In Kraut's rendition of the thought

experiment, we are active and responsive in the machine and that means that error is a standing possibility (see [Kraut 2018](#) (109–111)). There is always a degree of risk involved in undertaking worthwhile activities. For instance, I have all the training I need to write this article. Can I pull it off this time? Now, as always, it remains to be seen.

I have been examining the experientialist's claim that whether one is doing something, or merely having the experience as of doing it, makes no difference to how things are going for the one in question. I have urged that there is an important difference between comprehending and non-comprehending engagement. I focused on Kraut's aesthetic example, but the point extends to other contemplative kinds of case, like reading an article or considering an argument. Whether Kraut can take account of this difference depends on what he says about veridical and non-veridical experience. I think the relevant gap between agency and experience becomes more obvious when we shift from contemplative to practical or productive activities, and this is what I turn to now.

1.2 *Writing a great novel*

Take the example of writing a novel – it is an example of [Crisp's \(2006: 636\)](#) that Kraut discusses at some length ([Kraut 2018: 116–121](#)). We are to envisage two people who have as their end to write a novel, one in the real world and one in the experience machine (I'll call the latter the 'unreal' novelist). The unreal novelist has the experience of writing a novel, and this involves the complex intellectual and imaginative processes that mark the writing of the novel in the real world. The content of the unreal novelist's novel is identical with that of its worldly counterpart. The only difference is that it does not exist as a product apart from the novelist's activity – there is no file, nothing in print, just the 'mental analogue' of the book (for simplicity's sake, and without taking a stand on familiar ontological questions about what a book is, I will speak of the one novel as 'real' or 'existing' and the other as 'unreal' or 'non-existent'). Does the existence or non-existence of the product, of the novel, make a difference to how these lives are going?

It is noteworthy that when we say things like, 'I plan to write a novel', or equally, 'to give a performance', then unless we add self-deprecating and other qualifications ('I'm just trying it out with no expectations about how it goes'; 'I'm experimenting') we are understood to be aiming to write a *good* novel, to give a *good* performance and so on. These terms, 'novel', 'performance', are used in a somewhat normative sense.⁸ We are taking on the work of doing something that has a point or function. We are setting out to do whatever it is the point of the thing to do, and point implies success. There is something it is to realize the point. And what are the determinants of successful realization here? Plausibly the determinants here are, at least partly,

8 This point has been made much of by meta-ethical constitutivists, and of course finds its home in Plato and Aristotle. [Barney \(2008: 301 and *passim*\)](#) nicely emphasizes the normative nature of the related concepts of end and function in ancient discussions.

institutional, for one has entered a public arena. It is a fine or an excellent novel if accomplished writers, or respected critics, would recognize it as such. There are difficulties here of course because the critics do not agree and there are vulgar trends and so on. But at the very least we can say that whether your novel is great is not up to you to determine. You aim to write a good novel, and you succeed in this or you do not. Beyond the making of good work, your feelings and other intentions do not bear on an assessment of its worth.

Though I will not harp on it, the fact that the measure of greatness is external reintroduces a version of a question raised earlier, namely, how someone in the machine could order up *successful* engagement in an activity, as here, the experience of writing a *great* novel. The unreal novelist can use their powers to write the best novel they can write. But to the extent they are using the skills they have developed before plugging in, and the heft, such as it is, that God has bestowed, there can be no guarantee that the result has literary merit (though they may ask to be put under that illusion). To the extent that we are not spectators of a show, but free agents of the kind Kraut describes (Kraut 2018: 109–111), it is not clear that we can have a guarantee of success, or of things turning out well. In this, of course, there is no difference from real life.

In any event, let's allow that the real and unreal novelists succeed in writing a great novel – a novel with the same superlative literary content. The only difference is that the one novel exists as a product apart from the author's mind, and the other does not. When Kraut discusses the example, he imagines two possible paths for the great novel in the real world. In the first, it exists and *can* be read and appreciated by others, but unfortunately never is. In the second, it *is* read and appreciated. In neither case does Kraut think its real-world fate affects how things are going for the novelist. I disagree in both cases, taking them in turn.

What is the point of a great novel? Why are they written, and why are they read? In what does their value consist? Naturally people disagree, but let's take a view that Kraut is likely to be sympathetic to, namely, that the value of a great novel lies in its propensity to afford experience with a marked aesthetic character, experience it is good for people to have by being enriching, edifying, illuminating etc.⁹ When the novel exists as a product apart from the author's mind, there is a live possibility that it can afford the kind of imaginative, affective and cognitive experience it was designed to afford. That is, when it exists, it stands a chance of being read and appreciated even when it is not. All that is needed is for a reader to stumble on the manuscript or find a copy in the dusty reaches of the stacks. To that extent, I venture that the existent, but unread, novel has value.

Now, some people think that there can be value without the possibility of appreciation by valuers. That way of thinking about value has been criticized

9 I take the phrase 'marked aesthetic character' from Beardsley (1979: 728).

trenchantly by Kraut elsewhere (see Kraut 2011). Many of us have learned from him. Many find it plausible, to paraphrase Thomas Nagel, that there is no value in aesthetic works, in the Frick collection, if all sentient life is destroyed (Nagel 1986: 153). Many agree with Henry Sidgwick that ‘no-one would think it made sense to aim at the production of beauty in external nature apart from any possible human experience of it’ (Sidgwick 1874: 1.9.4). In the terminology of Joseph Raz, value is ‘personal’ in the sense that it necessarily depends on there being a live possibility of appreciation by a valuer (Raz 2004: 274).¹⁰ On this way of thinking about values, the real but unread novel has value where the unreal novel does not. The real but unread novel has value because, since it exists, there is a live chance for it be read and appreciated, while the unreal novel lacks value because there is not in the same way actionable scope for appreciative engagement. On this way of thinking about values, the real novelist has succeeded in creating something that has value even when the novel is not actually read and appreciated. And creating something of value is what the novelist set out to do.

Now take the scenario in which the novel *is* read and appreciated. In this scenario, the novel not only *can* but *does* afford aesthetic experience. It actualizes its potential; it realizes its point. Does that make a difference to how the real novelist’s life is going? Of course it does! The novelist’s labour has borne fruit. The *fruit* is the appreciation of sensitive readers, *not* in the sense of honours and praise (see Kraut 2018 (120)), but in the sense of comprehending engagement. The novelist succeeded in doing what they set out to do. Now Kraut finds it mysterious how the life of the real novelist can be affected by what goes on with other people: whether they take up the work in the way it was designed to be taken up or not. But is it mysterious?

Suppose first that the novelist is *aware* of their success – they read reviews, they receive letters, they attend venues where the work is discussed. Again, we are not talking about vulgar fame or honour. We are talking about being aware that they successfully realized the point of their undertaking. I submit that, from the novelist’s point of view, having their work taken up in the relevant ways will be found most relevant to the question of how things are going for them. We fully expect them to take pleasure and find satisfaction in it. Indeed, as I will indicate below, I think that so much is part of the moral psychology of engaging in an activity or having an end. Having an end involves appropriate emotional responsiveness to success or failure in the realization of our end, or if there is no clear endpoint, to how our end is unfolding. Knowing that it is going well is or ought to be sweet (ought to be because familiar pathologies loom: the disappointment one feels when things turn out better than expected; the empty feeling that attends the successful completion of something difficult).

10 The notion of live possibility, taken from Raz (2004: 290, 2005: 4), is meant to be intuitive and imprecise. It is synonymous with ‘fair chance’ or ‘actionable scope’. It is given content by examples such as those discussed in the text. I discuss personal value, and related topics, in Theunissen n.d.

Suppose, second, that the novelist produces the great novel and the novel finds an audience and the audience is suitably affected, but the novelist does not know this. Since the novelist does not know it, they cannot feel the pleasure that naturally and appropriately attends – or as Aristotle says, ‘completes’ (NE 10.4) – the successful exercise of their agential capacities. Well, that is a damn shame I say! The novelist is robbed of something. By an unfortunate twist of fate, they are not able to form emotional responses that are commensurate with how things are going for them. All the same, I would urge that having the experience of satisfaction or pleasure at a job well done is not the *measure* of a job well-done. It is a *symptom* of it – albeit a fitting one. The pleasure or other gratifying experience is the flower but not the *fruit*. Even when one does not know it, the success of one’s project *does* matter to how one’s life is going. It matters because it bears on whether one did what one set out to do. It bears on whether one realized the point of one’s undertaking.¹¹

1.3 A valuing account of well-being

The view of well-being that is in the background of my discussion of Kraut’s examples is non-experientialist, and it is perfectionist in spirit in foregrounding the Nozickian theme of agency and its successful exercise. There is a plurality of accounts that emphasize these themes. I have elsewhere proposed a view of well-being that makes use of a term that Nozick himself foregrounds, namely, *valuing*.¹² On the account that I find plausible, what is ultimately good for human beings is to exercise our capacity to *value*, and value not just anyhow, but well, which is to say, with *excellence*. What is it to value something? To value is to engage in activities, projects and relationships in such a way that we make them part of our lives or adopt them as final ends. On my account, this is a complex cognitive, emotional and practical orientation that involves believing that one’s end is worthwhile; being prone to experience a range of emotions concerning the constituents of one’s end and concerning one’s success or failure in one’s pursuit of the end; being stably motivated to pursue the end in relevant contexts; being guided by the end in long-range deliberation so that one’s ends structure one’s more particular deliberations and give them meaning and direction.¹³

What is it to value well or with excellence? More than believing that one’s ends are worthwhile, to value well involves actually *having* worth-

11 Talk of doing what one set out to do (as in writing something worthwhile) is not meant, and should not be taken, to preclude the observation that in creative undertakings the outcome planned may not be the outcome realized, and that discoveries are made that could not have been fathomed at the outset. I am thankful to Michele Theunissen for prompting me to make this clarification.

12 Nozick speaks of ‘valuing’, ‘valuers’ and ‘value-seeking’ in Nozick (1981: 517 and *passim*). Drawing from treatments by Scheffler (2010) and Raz (2004: 270–281), I sketch a valuing-based account of well-being in Theunissen 2020 (ch. 4). Valuing-based accounts have been independently and systematically developed by Tiberius (2018) and also Raibley (2013). Tiberius’s view differs from my own in being subjectivist where mine is realist.

13 It is this last point that brings out the sense in which the ends that bear on the quality of our lives are higher or more final ends. See Vogt 2017 for related discussion of (in her terminology) ‘mid’ and ‘large scale’ pursuits.

while ends.¹⁴ Second, the ends in question need to be appropriately chosen by the valuer in light of their aptitudes, sensibility, loves, background and experience. Not all ends are for everyone, and we need to pursue those that are suitable, or fitting, given our particularities. The rationale for the second condition is largely given by a third, which is that to value well is to value successfully. The question of success naturally arises because it is internal to the question of whether one is doing something at all. Doing something badly shades in to not doing it. If one sets about doing something, one sets about doing it successfully, though naturally, what success comes to will be highly context dependent – dependent on the character of the end. Since success comes in degrees, the thought is that the degree of one's success in one's pursuit of final ends affects the degree to which one is faring well.

In sum, the proposal is that what it is for us to live well is to value well or with excellence, and to value well or with excellence is to successfully pursue suitable and worthwhile final ends.

2. *Activity and states of consciousness*

I have been evaluating Kraut's claim that whether one is doing something, or merely having the experience as of doing it, makes no difference to how things are going for the one in question. I have argued that there is a robust and important difference in various kinds of case, and I have given the outline of an account of well-being that explains this difference. Well-being crucially involves the successful exercise of our agential or valuing capacities – as Kraut is right to emphasize – but for some, and even many, activities, the determinants of success are extra-experiential – how other people are affected, what the critics say etc. I focused on Kraut's (and Crisp's) example of writing a novel, but I would make analogous points about other kinds of end, for example, being in a relationship with someone. Now, Kraut is seeking to narrow the gap between activity and the experience of activity, but he is not denying that there are differences, for example, between making something and having the experience of making it. Where there is a difference, Kraut contends that what matters for the people engaging in the activity is the state of consciousness that is yielded thereby. Activity matters insofar as it conduces to valuable states of experience. Kraut is drawn to this conclusion by considering a thought experiment of Aristotle, a thought experiment to which he returns many times in the book.¹⁵ I close with some reflections on it.

14 One wants a story about what this comes to of course. I have given the outline of an answer for the aesthetic examples that interest Kraut, and I discuss these and related examples further in Theunissen n.d. For a more general discussion of worthwhileness, see Theunissen 2020 (ch. 4. and *passim*). For related treatment, see Vogt 2017 (ch. 6).

15 For Kraut's discussion, see the index entry on sleeping and dreaming.

Familiarly, Aristotle invites us to consider a person who has achieved an excellent state of the soul but is asleep for their whole life. According to Aristotle, we would not regard this person as living well, and what is missing in their life is *activity*. If excellence is a candidate for the good human life, it is more plausible to propose *excellent activity* (NE 1.5 1095b31-1096a1). Kraut agrees, but the key ingredient he takes activity to add is *consciousness*. He thinks that in the absence of consciousness, in the absence of an experiential component, activity lacks value. To bring this out, Kraut embroiders Aristotle's example by countenancing a person who engages in excellent cognitive activity in their sleep. This person solves a difficult mathematical problem that has long been plaguing them. Unfortunately, though, they have no recollection of the solution upon waking. Mental activity in the absence of conscious awareness is without value for a person. What this shows, according to Kraut, is that the value of mental activity, of solving a mathematical problem, lies in the experience of intellectual exploration (Kraut 2018: 9, 109). In his words: 'When we deliberately activate our psychological skills and powers, we are aware that we are doing so and the prudential value of activating them may derive from the conscious experiences that are thereby brought about' (Kraut 2018: 8). Activities that have value for a person are those of which they are conscious. So the value of activity lies in the production of states of consciousness.

Let's accept for the sake of argument that activities that have value for a person are those of which they are conscious. Does it follow that the value of an activity lies in the production of states of consciousness? Think of the mathematician in Kraut's example. They have as their end to understand something. Is understanding a state of consciousness? Is understanding an experience or state of mind? That's an interesting philosophical question. Some issue an emphatic "no". One thinks of Wittgenstein's exhortation not to 'think of understanding as a "mental process" at all!' (Wittgenstein 1958: §154). If someone understands, this is shown in the fact that what they go on to do is correct. And Wittgenstein's point is that we should not view understanding as an occurrent mental state that explains this facility. We do not set to work on a mathematical problem in order to have a certain kind of experience, a mental state of understanding, but to have facility. To say this is not to deny that we can feel a certain way about being able to do something that previously we could not do. We can feel immense joy, or relief of a garden variety. But it would be a mistake to infer that we solve the problem for the sake of feeling joy or relief.

From the supposition that we engage in activities consciously it does not follow that we do so for the sake of states of consciousness. There is a slide in saying that when an activity is good for us we are conscious of it and so what is good for us are states of consciousness. For the mathematician, solving a problem in their sleep without recollection is bad. One reason it is bad is that,

insofar as they cannot proceed with facility upon waking, we may reasonably doubt that they understood anything in their sleep. But, if we can put that to one side, waking without recollection is bad because it does not allow them to write up the proof, to discuss it with colleagues, to publish the findings – the activities that constitute the mathematical life. It is true that we are conscious of these activities. It is also true that positive states of experience are often a dimension of them. It is delightful to figure things out. Understanding something difficult can border on the sublime. But it does not follow that these states are what the activity is *for*. That, I think, is a false reduction. The point does not rest with contentious views about the nature of understanding. The lesson can be formulated with a state like pleasure. Allow that pleasure is a mental state and allow that we are pleased when we successfully complete something difficult and worthwhile. It does not follow that being pleased is what the worthwhile, difficult thing is *for*. To repeat myself, pleasure is the flower but not the fruit (except – as with eating some strawberry sorbet – when it is).

My first reason not to follow Kraut in moving away from perfectionism to experientialism is that there are non-experiential dimensions of the good for human beings. I have suggested that well-being crucially involves the successful exercise of our agential, or valuing, capacities, and that the mark of successful exercise can be and often is extra-experiential. My second reason is that when we restrict our attention to the dimension of our good that involves conscious activity, it is not obvious that what is good for us is always, or ultimately, or solely, a state of consciousness. Happiness may be ‘in the mind’ in some sense, but for reasons given, I prefer Kraut’s earlier, perfectionist construal and defence of the message in my fortune cookie.¹⁶

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Experientialism and the Quality of a Life

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The value of a life for the person living it has been conceptualized in various ways. One might begin by asking what *intrinsically matters* to a person, and then use this as a kind of standard for assessing how their life might have more or less value. What intrinsically matters to people typically extends to a wide variety of concerns – beyond caring about their own happiness, they typically care intrinsically about certain people or relationships, or about autonomy, or knowledge, or personal accomplishment, or recognition or advancing an impersonal ideal. Let’s call such a view *Pluralism*, though this term could no doubt be used for a range of alternatives.

On the other hand, however, one might think that this is the wrong way to understand what makes a life go better or worse *for the person themselves* – however worthy such goods might be, only goods that are actually realized *within* that person’s life, in the specific sense that they make some difference to *felt character of life* for that person, are genuinely part of what that person’s *quality of life*. Goods that might be the object of a person’s aspirations, but the attainment of which makes no difference to