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## **Minor Goods and Objective Theories of Well-Being**

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**Abstract:** Objective theories of human well-being typically focus on goods such as friendship, knowledge, autonomy, and achievement that are realized by everyone or almost everyone, are realized often in life, and are typically quite important to people. In this paper, I defend the possibility of minor objective goods—goods that still benefit people independently of their subjective attitudes toward them, but which are somewhat less prominent in life. Some examples are experiences of humor, care for young children, care for animals, engagement with nature, and engagement with places or objects of cultural significance. I argue that these goods can be defended in the same way as more widely-recognized objective goods—by appealing to considered judgments about well-being. I further argue that there is no reason to rule out a long list of goods and that the minor goods I have mentioned cannot be subsumed under other recognized objective goods. Even thinkers who endorse a connection between human flourishing and human well-being should affirm the goods I have listed, since these goods can be defended as part of human flourishing.

**Keywords:** Welfare; well-being; objective list theory; human flourishing

### **1. Introduction**

According to objective theories of human well-being, certain things are good for people independently of their desires and other subjective attitudes toward them. Among thinkers who defend these and related views—such as John Finnis, Martha Nussbaum, Thomas Hurka, and Brad Hooker—there has been a fair degree of consensus over which goods benefit people in this way.<sup>1</sup> These thinkers typically affirm a list of basic objective goods that includes things such as

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<sup>1</sup> See John Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980); Martha C. Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Thomas

friendship, knowledge, autonomy, and achievement, as well as some other goods that vary among thinkers, such as life and health, play, aesthetic experience, and pleasure. Significantly, these are all what we might call major goods: goods that are realized by everyone or almost everyone, are realized often in life, and are typically quite important—in at least some form—to the people who experience them.

But, are there other basic objective goods that we might call “minor goods”? These would be things that still benefit people independently of their desires and other subjective attitudes toward them, but which play a less significant role in most people’s lives. Some examples might be experiences of humor, care for young children, care for animals, engagement with nature, and engagement with places or objects of cultural significance (such as historical landmarks and artifacts).<sup>2</sup> While these goods are not as important to most people as the major goods I have listed, they do have intuitive appeal as objective elements of well-being. Among the thinkers mentioned above, though, only Martha Nussbaum gives significant attention to minor goods like these and—as I will note below—even her approach to them is not ideal.

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Hurka, *The Best Things in Life: A Guide to What Really Matters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Brad Hooker, “The Elements of Well-Being,” *Journal of Practical Ethics* 3 (2015): 15-35, <http://www.jpe.ox.ac.uk/papers/the-elements-of-well-being/>. Similar or related views are also defended or discussed in Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), Appendix I, “What Makes Someone’s Life Go Best”; James Griffin, *Well-Being: Its Meaning, Measurement, and Moral Importance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); James Griffin, “Replies,” in Roger Crisp and Brad Hooker (ed.), *Well-Being and Morality: Essays in Honour of James Griffin* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 281-313; T. D. J. Chappell, *Understanding Human Goods: A Theory of Ethics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998); Thomas Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 1998); Richard J. Arneson, “Human Flourishing Versus Desire Satisfaction,” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 16 (1999): 113-142; Andrew Moore, “Objective Human Goods,” in Roger Crisp and Brad Hooker (ed.), *Well-Being and Morality: Essays in Honour of James Griffin* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 75-89; Mark C. Murphy, *Natural Law and Practical Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); David S. Oderberg, “The Structure and Content of the Good,” in David S. Oderberg and Timothy Chappell (ed.), *Human Values: New Essays on Ethics and Natural Law* (Hounds Mills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 127-165; Guy Fletcher, “A Fresh Start for the Objective List Theory of Well-Being,” *Utilitas* 25 (2013): 206-220; Christopher M. Rice, “Defending the Objective List Theory of Well-Being,” *Ratio* 26 (2013): 196-211.

<sup>2</sup> Thanks to Christopher Gowans for first drawing my attention to the omission of the value of care for young children from some objective theories of well-being.

In this paper, I will first describe the distinction between major and minor goods that I have in mind and then give an argument for why objective theorists of well-being should accept at least some minor goods as part of their theories. In short, I will argue that objective thinkers should accept these goods because they can be justified in the same way that major goods are typically justified—by appealing to considered judgments about well-being. After this, I will consider and respond to some objections to the idea of minor goods and discuss why thinkers who identify human well-being with human flourishing should also accept minor goods.

## **2. Major and Minor Objective Goods**

As noted above, according to objective theories of well-being, certain things benefit people independently of their desires and other subjective attitudes toward them.<sup>3</sup> These theories contrast with subjective theories of well-being, which identify well-being with what people desire under certain conditions or hold other positive subjective attitudes toward.<sup>4</sup> Although objective views are controversial, they gain support from the thought that certain things are good for people and worth pursuing as part of well-being, whether or not people want them, like them, or hold other positive subjective attitudes toward them. It seems, for example, that friendship, knowledge, autonomy, achievement, and certain other goods are worth pursuing in this way—and thus have objective value as part of well-being. Some objective theorists also connect the goods they propose to an objective account of human flourishing and so identify the goods on their list with the actualization of human nature.

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<sup>3</sup> Here, and throughout the paper, I focus solely on the case of human well-being.

<sup>4</sup> There are also hybrid theories of well-being that combine objective and subjective elements. Many of these may be able to incorporate the minor goods I discuss in this paper.

Now, the basic goods most frequently identified by objective thinkers are almost all what we might call major goods. These are goods that (1) are realized by everyone or almost everyone, (2) are realized often in life, and (3) are typically quite important, in at least some form, to the people who experience them, in the sense that they are highly valued and significant to people. For example, almost everyone has a friend at some point in life, and most people participate in friendships on a frequent, even daily basis. Further, at least some friendships are typically quite important to the people who experience them. While people may have relatively little interest in some of their friendships, they are usually highly invested in at least some others, such as those with close family and friends.

On this definition, goods such as friendship, knowledge, autonomy, achievement, life and health, play, aesthetic experience, and pleasure would all count as major goods. I do not mean to endorse each and every one of these as an objective good, or to suggest that there is a perfectly sharp division between what I am calling major and minor goods. My main point is that objective theorists of well-being have tended to look for goods that are fairly prominent in life and, in so doing, may have overlooked certain other basic objective goods.

In contrast to major goods, what I have called minor goods lack at least one of the three features I have associated with major goods. That is, minor goods are either (1) not realized by all or almost all people, (2) not realized often by many people, or (3) not very important to many of the people who experience them. As noted above, a few examples of minor goods might be experiences of humor, care for young children, care for animals, engagement with nature, and engagement with places or objects of cultural significance. Different of these goods satisfy different parts of the definition of minor goods. Experiences of humor, for example, are realized fairly often by most people, but are not usually that important to people, at least as compared to

other objective goods such as friendship and knowledge. On the other hand, care for young children is often quite important to those who take part in it, but it is not experienced at all by many people. These examples illustrate that the goods I am calling “minor” are minor in different ways and do not necessarily have a deep structural similarity to each other.

My use of the terms “major” and “minor” is analogous to the way in which these terms are used to describe major and minor powers in international politics. The dividing line between major and minor powers is not always clear, and countries can be considered minor for a number of different reasons—on demographic, military, economic, or cultural grounds. Major powers are often the most important players in world events, but minor powers also have influence and can be of decisive importance in some instances, such that it would be a mistake to entirely overlook them. In a similar way, even if major objective goods are the primary building-blocks of well-being for most people, there may also be minor objective goods that are minor in varying ways and can make key contributions to well-being.

### **3. The Argument for Minor Objective Goods**

The main reason why objective theorists of well-being should affirm the value of at least some minor goods is that these goods can be defended in the same way that many objective theorists already defend major goods. In particular, objective thinkers often defend major goods by appealing to certain considered judgments about well-being.<sup>5</sup> They ask people to consider whether these major goods contribute to well-being in their own right—aside from any other goods that may accompany them—and suggest that the correct answer is “yes.”<sup>6</sup> For example, it

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<sup>5</sup> Thinkers who connect well-being and flourishing may not use the method of justification discussed in this section, so I provide further arguments that appeal to these thinkers in section 6.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Hooker, “The Elements of Well-Being.”

does seem, upon reflection, that friendship and knowledge are good and worth having as part of well-being, even aside from any other goods that may accompany them.

In addition to this basic argument, which involves an appeal to explicit judgments about well-being, objective theorists also use a number of other methods to elicit people's implicit beliefs about well-being. For example, they ask people to reflect on what they implicitly value and pursue in everyday life, what they would want for those they care about, or what is missing in the lives of those they pity.<sup>7</sup> These forms of reflection also have considerable power as means of support for the traditional list of basic objective goods. Many of us, for example, value friendship and knowledge in our everyday lives and pursue these goals as part of well-being, even when other options are available and these goods are not a means to our other goals. In addition, it makes sense to want those we care about to experience friendship and knowledge and to pity people who lack these goods or are blocked in some way from pursuing them.

Significantly, objective theorists do not hold that the items on their lists are made good by the kinds of judgments just described: that would not be an objective view. Rather, these judgments serve as evidence for the objective value of the list items—a value these items are claimed to have independently of people's subjective attitudes toward them. Of course, competing theorists of well-being also appeal to people's considered judgments in support of their views. What is distinctive of objective theories is the claim that these considered judgments, when properly scrutinized, ultimately vindicate the objective value of certain goods.

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<sup>7</sup> See Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, pp. 63–64, for a discussion of implicit judgments. For remarks on the relation of care and pity to well-being, see, respectively, Stephen Darwall, *Welfare and Rational Care* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002) and Brad Hooker, “Does Moral Virtue Constitute a Benefit to the Agent?” in Roger Crisp (ed.), *How Should One Live?: Essays on the Virtues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 141–155, p. 149.

Now, in addition to the major goods that objective theorists typically identify, the minor goods I have listed also have significant intuitive appeal as part of well-being. Although these goods are often less central to human life, I suggest that they can be successfully defended as part of well-being using the same strategies that objective theorists typically use to defend the major goods on their lists. First, we can consider explicit judgments about minor goods such as experiences of humor, care for young children, care for animals, engagement with nature, and engagement with places or objects of cultural significance. Upon reflection, these things do seem to benefit people in some way, even aside from other goods that may accompany them. Just as it enhances well-being to take part in goods such as friendship and knowledge, experiences of care for young children and engagement with nature seem to benefit people in some way. Further, the objective value of these goods is supported by what many of us implicitly value and pursue in everyday life. In addition, it seems reasonable to want those we care about to enjoy these goods in appropriate circumstances, and to feel pity for those who do not or cannot experience these goods. This all suggests that these minor goods have objective value in the same way as the more traditional major goods that objective thinkers typically identify.

To illustrate further, let me briefly zoom in on the good of engagement with places or objects of cultural significance, which is realized when people interact with these items with some appreciation of the connection they have to a given culture—be it their own or another's. For example, contemporary Americans might view an original copy of the US Constitution or visit the historic Ebenezer Baptist Church where Martin Luther King, Jr. served as pastor. They might also preserve hand-made furniture passed down in a family for several generations or collect ancient Chinese artifacts with some appreciation of the role that these played in ancient Chinese culture. Clearly, engagement with places or objects of cultural significance plays a

limited role in most people's lives and is not a central pursuit of most people. Still, it does seem to have some value as part of well-being, even aside from other goods (such as knowledge) that accompany it.

This is one reason why it makes sense to expend a moderate amount of effort to visit places or objects of cultural significance, rather than just viewing pictures or replicas of them. It is also a reason to learn about cultural artifacts in one's community, since such appreciation helps to constitute the objective good of engagement with these objects. In addition, this value helps to explain the worth of making such cultural experiences available to others through education, preservation, and related activities. Taken together, these judgments suggest that engagement with places or objects of culture significance has objective value as part of well-being.

I have not provided a full argument for the good of engagement with places or objects of cultural significance or for the other minor goods I have mentioned, since that would require a more detailed examination of our various considered judgments and a fuller response to the arguments advanced for non-objective theories. Further, the list I have given is not meant to be exhaustive; there may be other minor goods in addition to those I have listed. Still, it seems clear to me that some, if not all, of the minor goods I have listed are strongly supported by considered judgments about well-being. In particular, I suggest that there is little room for many current objective theorists of well-being to resist the inclusion of minor goods within their views, since the objective value of these goods is supported by the same kinds of judgments these thinkers typically use to support the major goods they affirm.

#### 4. Martha Nussbaum's Strategy

Some thinkers may suspect that the minor goods I have mentioned and any others that might be proposed can be fitted under some already-recognized major good or under some new major good that could be added to the list. This is, in a way, the approach Martha Nussbaum adopts. She affirms the value of experiences of humor, at least implicitly, by placing them under the general capability of play, which she defines as “being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities.”<sup>8</sup> Similarly, she seems to fit care for young children under the general capability of affiliation with others,<sup>9</sup> and care for animals—as well as engagement with nature—under the capability she describes as “Other Species: being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature.”<sup>10</sup> This leaves her with a list of basic capabilities that includes most of the minor goods I have mentioned but builds each of them into a more general good.<sup>11</sup> Play and affiliation satisfy my definition of major goods, since they are realized often by almost everyone and are typically quite important to people. Even the good of concern for other species comes close to being a major good if it includes any kind of positive interaction with animals, plants, or the natural environment. However, I suggest that Nussbaum’s view does not correctly model the considered judgments that typically support the goods she considers.

In forming a list of objective goods, theorists seek to identify goods that are basic and irreducible to each other. The correct way to differentiate basic goods is to think of which goods are needed for a complete explanation of how different states of affairs contribute to well-

<sup>8</sup> Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, p. 80.

<sup>9</sup> See *ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80, bold type removed.

<sup>11</sup> Her full list of basic capabilities includes (1) life, (2) bodily health, (3) bodily integrity, (4) senses, imagination, and thought, (5) emotions, (6) practical reason, (7) affiliation, (8) relation to other species, (9) play, and (10) political and material control over one’s environment. See *ibid.*, pp. 78-80.

being.<sup>12</sup> For example, we can talk about scientific knowledge and historical knowledge, but these two types of knowledge are not distinct basic goods. This is because a full explanation of how instances of scientific and historical knowledge contribute to well-being would refer only to their status as knowledge, not to the fact that one is scientific knowledge and the other is historical knowledge. Stated differently, we are looking for the good-making properties of various states of affairs: those properties in virtue of which things ultimately benefit people.<sup>13</sup> In the case of knowledge, the property “being an instance of knowledge” is the relevant good-making property. Thus, knowledge (and not scientific or historical knowledge) is a basic good. However, friendship and knowledge cannot be reduced to a single good in this way. While friendship may involve knowledge, this fact does not provide a full explanation of how friendships benefit people. The fact that some relationship is a friendship will also figure in a complete explanation of how it benefits people, so friendship should be listed as a distinct basic good.

Turning now to the minor goods I have identified, it appears that they also stand as basic goods and cannot be combined into major goods in the way Nussbaum suggests. For example, her capability of relation to other species would seem to include care for animals such as pets, as well as more detached forms of engagement with nature, such as taking a walk in the forest.<sup>14</sup> However, there is no single good-making property which fully explains how these different experiences benefit people. While both involve some interaction with non-human species, this alone does not explain the full value of, for example, caring for a pet. In caring for a pet, people

<sup>12</sup> See Chris Heathwood, “Monism and Pluralism about Value,” in Iwao Hirose and Jonas Olson (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Value Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 136-157, p. 140; Eden Lin, “Monism and Pluralism,” in Guy Fletcher (ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Well-Being* (London: Routledge, 2016), 331-341, pp. 333-334. Thanks to an anonymous referee for encouraging me to clarify this issue within the paper.

<sup>13</sup> See Heathwood, “Monism and Pluralism about Value,” p. 141; Lin, “Monism and Pluralism,” p. 334.

<sup>14</sup> Being able to “enjoy solitude in the forest” is one of Nussbaum’s examples of the capability of relation to other species. Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, p. 80, n. 85.

show proactive concern and attention to its needs and spend time enjoying the pet's subsequent development and activity. These dynamics are valuable elements of care for a pet that do not occur during a walk in the forest. Accordingly, the minor goods of engagement with nature and care for animals should be distinguished as two basic goods. Both goods are needed, in their own way, to provide a complete explanation of why various states of affairs benefit people. In a similar way, care for young children does not benefit people on account of the same underlying properties as reciprocal friendship with adults. And, experiences of humor do not benefit people for the same reasons as participation in forms of play such as sports and games. In each of these cases, there are distinct good-making features which justify the recognition of distinct basic goods.<sup>15</sup>

To be fair, Nussbaum may not be trying to provide a full analytical account of the basic goods in her work on human capabilities. Rather, her goal may be to cluster basic goods into a reasonably short set of categories which can then be further analyzed and developed as needed.<sup>16</sup> Still, I suggest that objective theorists of well-being should not rest content with the taxonomy of capabilities that Nussbaum has proposed, but should further divide some of her list items in the ways indicated above. While Nussbaum's list has been of great significance in drawing attention to many of the minor goods considered in this paper, I would offer this emendation to her account.

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<sup>15</sup> I do acknowledge that there are remaining gray areas. How similar is care for a young child and care for an animal? How about care for a fetus or embryo? Or the distinction between more and less cognitively-sophisticated animals? I believe that the best way to proceed is not to lump all kinds of caring relationships into the same category, but rather to acknowledge multiple goods and then work out the remaining ambiguities through further reflection and analysis. The other option, as I see it, would be to affirm caring relationships in general as a basic good.

<sup>16</sup> See Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, pp. 76-77.

## 5. Objections and Responses

Let me now turn to address some further objections that might be raised against the idea of minor goods. Some thinkers may assume that people need to realize all of the items on a list of basic objective goods to some significant degree in order to attain well-being. This may cause people to hold back from affirming minor goods such as care for young children and care for animals, since these are not realized to a significant degree by many people. However, there is no *a priori* reason to assume that every objective good needs to be realized by every person as part of their well-being. In this regard, James Griffin and John Finnis already note that people can reasonably focus on the pursuit of different goods and that some people may end up pursuing certain objective goods little, if at all.<sup>17</sup>

Further, this fits well with the underlying logic of objective theories. The core claim of these theories is that certain goods contribute to well-being independently of people's subjective attitudes toward them. These goods are, in a sense, opportunities for well-being, which people can realize by pursuing them. This, though, leaves open the question of whether or not objective goods are all necessary for well-being. Given the circumstances of human life, some goods such as friendship and knowledge are almost unavoidable, which may lead thinkers to assume that every basic objective good must be realized to a significant extent in every person's life as part of their well-being. However, there may be other goods, such as some of the minor goods I have mentioned, that are less common in life but still benefit people objectively when they occur. When these goods are realized, they would contribute to people's well-being, even if people's lives could go well in many other ways without ever including these goods.

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<sup>17</sup> See Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, pp. 105-106; Griffin, *Well-Being*, p. 70.

As another objection, some thinkers might wonder why the minor goods I have listed have not been identified more often by theorists of well-being if they are in fact objective goods. In this regard, I can first note that I am not inventing new goods from scratch, as would be the case if I proposed some unprecedented activity and then claimed that it benefited people.<sup>18</sup> Rather, I am drawing attention to goods that are already valued and pursued by many people in everyday life but have escaped the notice of some theorists of well-being. In part, this may be because objective theorists have been looking for major goods, or because minor goods are by definition less prominent in life. Still, I am not the first person to identify these goods. As I have noted, Nussbaum includes several of them in her account of basic human capabilities. And, in everyday life, many people value and pursue the goods I have listed.

Beyond this, some thinkers might be afraid of affirming a very long list of objective goods, fearing that this would be implausible, or at least inelegant. However, these concerns do not provide a strong reason to limit the list of objective goods. The thinkers I am considering have already chosen to affirm a plurality of major objective goods, such as friendship, knowledge, autonomy, and achievement, because these goods fit well with various considered judgments about well-being. Having already affirmed five or ten goods, there is little further theoretical cost to adding another five or ten to the list. Rather, if certain minor goods are intuitively valuable in the same way as the more widely-accepted major goods, objective thinkers should go ahead and affirm these minor goods, even if it means a longer list of goods.

Objective theorists do not need to fear that the inclusion of minor goods will open the door to an unlimited number of goods, including idiosyncratic or implausible ones. This is because my view does not challenge the principle that many objective theorists already use to

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<sup>18</sup> For a discussion of this intriguing possibility, see Chappell, *Understanding Human Goods*, pp. 44-45.

determine what counts as an objective good. In particular, things should only be counted as objective goods if they have strong intuitive support (of a kind that survives critical scrutiny and reflection) and are irreducible to other basic objective goods. I have argued that some minor goods meet this standard, but that does not mean that anything at all can be affirmed as an objective good.

## 6. The Connection to Human Flourishing

Some objective theorists of well-being use a further criterion to determine what counts as an objective good by connecting the goods they identify to an account of human flourishing. These thinkers typically appeal to an objective standard of flourishing as a foundation for their account of well-being and hold that a proposed item can only count as a basic objective good if it is also a basic aspect of human flourishing.<sup>19</sup> This approach is often inspired by Aristotle and the natural law tradition and not all objective theorists of well-being use it. Still, those who do might doubt that the minor goods I have defended are basic aspects of human flourishing and so hesitate to affirm them as basic elements of well-being.

In response to this, I suggest that the minor goods I have listed can be defended as basic aspects of human flourishing. In the context of Aristotelian and natural law accounts, human flourishing is analogous to the flourishing of plants and animals and relates to the way in which humans exercise the basic functions of their nature. In particular, the basic aspects of human flourishing are said to be (1) characteristic human activities which (2) contribute to the full

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<sup>19</sup> This type of view is defended in Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*; Murphy, *Natural Law and Practical Rationality*; Oderberg, “The Structure and Content of the Good.” For related work, see Anthony J. Lisska, *Aquinas’s Theory of Natural Law: An Analytic Reconstruction* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); Rosalind Hursthouse, *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999); Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001); Richard Kraut, *What is Good and Why: The Ethics of Well-Being* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2007); William A. Lauinger, *Well-Being and Theism: Linking God to Ethics* (London: Continuum Publishing, 2012).

actualization and development of human nature and (3) cannot be subsumed under other, more general activities of this kind.<sup>20</sup> As I will argue, the minor goods I have listed can plausibly satisfy these criteria.

To begin, the minor goods each involve a characteristic human activity. Flourishing is an active matter, and paradigmatic aspects of human flourishing—such as health, friendship, and knowledge—each involve an activity in which biological or psychological processes operate to achieve an end. In a similar way, the minor goods I have mentioned are all activities. This is clear in the case of goods such as care for young children and care for animals, but also applies to the other goods I have listed. If engagement with places or objects of cultural significance, for example, were merely a matter of being near a culturally significant site or object, then this would potentially be too passive to count as part of flourishing. However, participation in this good requires active awareness, appreciation, and sensitivity to places or objects of cultural significance, and so involves activity. Further, the activities involved in the various minor goods are characteristic of human nature, in that humans are apt to perform them when placed in the relevant circumstances. Goods such as experiences of humor, care for young children, and appreciative engagement with nature involve activities that are common in human society and can be found in virtually every human culture.

However, not everything humans characteristically do is part of their flourishing. Rather, the concept of flourishing is restricted to those activities that contribute to the full actualization and development of human nature. Here, evaluative judgments typically play a role in

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<sup>20</sup> As David Oderberg puts it, one rule that should guide the identification of basic objective goods is that each should correspond to “an active power or faculty the proper operation of which fulfills human nature.” Another rule is to “look for the most *general* goods” that meet this description. Oderberg, “The Structure and Content of the Human Good,” p. 140.

determining what counts as flourishing.<sup>21</sup> Goods such as health, friendship, and knowledge are typically viewed as positive ways of activating human nature and so fit well with the concept of flourishing. In a similar way, the minor goods I have listed are all things that a fully actualized human being can be envisioned as doing. These activities—experiences of humor, care for young children, care for animals, engagement with nature, and engagement with places or objects of cultural significance—are not pointless, unintelligible, or destructive. Rather, they are key parts of what many people would view as a complete and fully-lived human life. It may be possible to flourish to a significant extent without performing these activities, but, even so, these goods seem to fulfill human nature in important ways when they occur, and so plausibly contribute to human flourishing.

Perhaps the strongest concern about the inclusion of minor goods as basic aspects of human flourishing is the thought that they are not independent aspects of flourishing but can instead be subsumed under other more general aspects. This relates back to my earlier consideration of Nussbaum's views. In that discussion, I argued that the minor goods I have listed should be viewed as basic goods with respect to human well-being. Now, the question is whether they can also be viewed as basic aspects of human flourishing.

In considering this question, we can note that people often use the same biological and psychological processes in several basic aspects of flourishing. For example, knowledge is a basic aspect of human flourishing, but also plays a role in the good of friendship. In a similar way, affection and sympathy play a role in friendship, care for young children, and care for animals, but this does not in itself decide the question of whether these forms of caring comprise

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<sup>21</sup> See Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, p. 83; Murphy, *Natural Law and Practical Rationality*, pp. 29-30, 36-41; Kraut, *What is Good and Why*, pp. 145-148; Lauinger, *Well-Being and Theism*, pp. 64-66.

one or several basic aspects of flourishing. What is important is whether these activities all contribute to human flourishing on account of one, or more than one, underlying feature. Just as each basic good corresponds to a good-making property that explains why certain things are good for people, each basic aspect of flourishing should correspond to a flourishing-making property that explains why certain activities contribute to flourishing. Friendship and knowledge are distinct aspects of flourishing, for example, because while friendship involves knowledge, this knowledge does not provide a full explanation of the way in which friendship contributes to human flourishing. In a similar way, friendship, care for young children, and care for animals each plausibly contribute to human flourishing in their own way. They each, in other words, actualize human nature in ways not found in the other kinds of relationships. There is, to be sure, a common denominator among these relationships (they all involve certain kinds of care), but this alone does not seem to be the flourishing-making property. Rather, the unique ways in which care is expressed and received in different types of relationships seem to be what make a difference with regard to human flourishing.<sup>22</sup> In a related way, the goods of engagement with nature and engagement with places or objects of cultural significance involve important kinds of knowledge, but that alone does not account for their full contribution to human flourishing. Rather, these are distinct ways of fulfilling human nature that occur when people are in contact with, and sensitive toward, specifically natural and cultural objects. On the basis of the preceding paragraphs, I conclude that the minor goods I have listed can be plausibly viewed as basic, irreducible aspects of human flourishing. Accordingly, thinkers who connect human well-being and human flourishing need not hold back from affirming these goods as basic elements of human well-being.

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<sup>22</sup> My comment about gray areas in note 15 applies here as well.

## 7. Conclusion

Overall, I suggest that objective theorists of well-being should recognize at least many of the minor goods I have listed as basic elements of well-being. Affirming these goods can provide further nuance to existing theories and strengthen them by bringing them into closer fit with some important considered judgments about well-being. Further, it can validate the judgments of many people who already pursue and value the goods I have mentioned as objective parts of their well-being.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Thanks to Christopher Gowans, William Lauinger, Sophia Stone, Mark Pickering, and an anonymous referee for helpful comments on work leading to the final version of this paper.