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NARRATIVE VALUE AND WELL-BEING

BY FRANCESCA FU

SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF
BACHELOR OF ARTS

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APRIL 30, 2021

Section I: Introduction

When one looks back on one's life, one can often construct a narrative out of the events in one's life. One's narrative could be a narrative of progress or a narrative of forgiveness or a narrative of deterioration. This idea that our narratives can be part of our lives is seen in everyday life. David Velleman formalizes this idea by arguing that one's narrative can increase one's well-being, which has implications for how we can increase our well-being. Should we seek out goods or undertake activities that could give us a better narrative? What narrative would increase our well-being? In order to answer those questions, in Section I, I explain that the concept of well-being involves one's life going better or worse for the individual in question. Some philosophers think that one's well-being increases when one obtains more objective goods, and one of those objective goods under debate is one's narrative. Since Helena de Bres's argument does not show that narratives by themselves increase one's well-being, I turn to Velleman's argument for narrative value where one's narrative contributes to one's well-being independently of the value already in one's life. After relying on an intuitive understanding of narrative and surveying the literature on how one's narrative can affect one's well-being, in Section II, I clarify Connie Rosati's account of what one's narrative is by pointing out how it has an objective and subjective component. Moreover, I highlight worries with the account of narrative Rosati uses for how it assumes that there is a single narrative and that the individual is cognitively able to interpret the events in one's life into a narrative. From thereon, I present Rosati's argument that one's narrative needs to be chosen or internalized, affirming, and make one's failings nearly irrelevant to make a positive contribution to one's well-being. I then add the necessary condition that a narrative needs to be true for it to increase one's well-being. Finally, in Section III, after rejecting irreplaceability as necessary for a meaningful narrative, I draw from

Antti Kauppinen's account of a meaningful narrative to argue that meaning is necessary for a narrative to increase one's well-being.

Section IA: Background for the debate on well-being

Most would grant that one's life can go better or worse with regards to one's well-being. For example, one's life usually goes better when one has emotional support from others, and one is engaged with one's hobbies, job, and activities. On the other hand, one's life goes worse when one loses the relationships one has with others, loses one's job, and is unable to partake in one's hobbies, if one has any. The term well-being captures the idea of how well one's life is going for the person in question and not for people outside of the subject (Kraut 1). If something is good for you, it maintains or increases your well-being or prevents your well-being from decreasing. When one person's well-being increases after one nourishes herself, that does not mean that another person's well-being has also increased.

When talking about well-being, well-being refers to the value *in* one's life as opposed to the value *of* one's life. This distinction has been made by Julie Tannenbaum, who explains that the value *of* one's life assesses the moral status or moral worth of a person's life (439). According to Kant, questions about one's moral status are different from questions about what things make a person's life good for her. Even if a person's life has little well-being in it, the value that she has as a person does not change. Even in a life of poor quality, the individual's rights should be respected, given that they have not been forfeited, overridden, or waived. The individual still should not be unduly killed. Value in a life refers to well-being in a way that is separate from questions about one's moral status.

There are several conceptions of well-being, and each has a different implication for what increases our well-being. Under a narrow hedonistic conception of well-being, pleasurable

mental states are assigned a positive value given their duration, intensity, and number. Similarly, under this view of well-being, the painful mental states are assigned a negative number depending on their duration, intensity, and number. A life with less pain, stress, anger, hunger, boredom, etc. is better for one than a life with more such negative mental states (Benetar 71).

Another theory of well-being is the desire-fulfillment theory of well-being. On this theory, one's well-being increases if more desires are fulfilled and fewer desires are left frustrated (Parfit 494). The longer, more intense, greater quantity of desires that are fulfilled, the more one's well-being is increased. When one wants a burger and gets the burger, one's well-being increases. When one wants to become a parent and one becomes one, one's well-being increases.

A subjective conception of well-being can be contrasted with an objective conception of well-being. On this view, certain things are good and bad for people, regardless of what one believes or desires about those things. I'll focus only on the objective goods, since these are what matters in what follows. An objective good is one that is intrinsically valuable and not merely instrumentally valuable (i.e. good only for something else). One's level of well-being is higher if one has more objective goods and fewer objective bads (499). How much objective goods increase one's well-being depend on how many objective goods there are and their degree of goodness.

There are different views about which things are objectively good for people. On the capabilities theory of well-being, developed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, capabilities and functionings of humans that contribute to human flourishing are what is objectively good (Sen 31). The capabilities refer to what one can do or achieve, and the functionings refer to the actualization of one's capabilities, that is, what one actually manages to do (31). To illustrate the

difference between capabilities and functionings, we can take the example of an exceptional track athlete who has the capability to run a five minute mile, even if she chooses not to, and so is not currently completing the mile run. When she runs the five minute mile, that is an example of one's functioning.

Martha Nussbaum further fills out the capabilities theory by specifying the relevant capabilities that increase one's well-being, which are based on the distinctive characteristics of humans as a biological category. Sen and Nussbaum draw from Aristotle and claim that the relevant capabilities are those that are characteristic of humans and not of non-human entities, such as immortals or plants (Nussbaum 505). The relevant capabilities are distinctive of humans and pick out humans as a unique kind of thing. Even though the essential features of being fully human manifest in numerous ways, some of the shared features of being human include being mortal, having a body that requires food, water, and shelter, associating with other humans, having the capacity for pleasure and pain, having cognitive capabilities for perception, and having the capacity for practical reason, etc (508). Having those capabilities is the first, minimum threshold that makes for a human life (513). Beyond the bare minimum traits it takes to be human, there is a second, higher threshold of well-being where one has a flourishing human life when the threshold is met (513). Reaching the second threshold involves having the capability to have those aforementioned needs adequately met. The capabilities that are part of the second, higher threshold include being able to live to the end of a normal human life, being able to have good health, being able to think and reason, being able to form attachments with others, and being able to enjoy recreational activities, among others (516). So, on Sen and Nussbaum's view, the more that a person has those aforementioned capabilities, the higher level of well-being that one has.

An offshoot of these theories of well-being is a hybrid theory of well-being, which combines features from each of the theories of well-being. A hybrid theorist of well-being proposes that pleasure, fulfilled desires, objective goods are necessary, but not sufficient for having a good life (Parfit 502). So, if one were to only have pleasure, one would have a very low level of well-being. One account of a hybrid theory of well-being is Kagan's view of "enjoying the good" (Kagan 253). He proposes that one's life goes better if one takes pleasure in objective goods in virtue of the features that make the objective goods good (255).

I am not taking a stand on whether objective list theories or hybrid theories are correct, but instead, I will assume that at least part of a person's well-being is determined objectively, by which I mean that some things are good for a person regardless of the person's beliefs and desires. I am also not taking a stand on whether Sen and Nussbaum are correct in claiming that capabilities or specific types of capabilities are objectively good. Instead, I want to focus on one proposal for an item on the objective list: one's narrative. I will present de Bres's and Velleman's argument to show how one's narrative can increase or decrease one's well-being. From thereon, I will rely on Velleman's argument that a person's narrative can affect one's well-being and focus on the debate of what features of narrative are necessary to increase one's well-being.

Section IB: Can one's narrative affect one's well-being?

Given that some objective goods can positively affect one's well-being, one question is if one's narrative can positively affect one's well-being. Can one's narrative be one of the things on the list of objective goods? In order to answer this question, I will first consider Helena de Bres's claim that narratives that are true and adhere to a set of salient narrative conventions are valuable, since such narratives bring about the objective goods of understanding and community.

This argument, however, does not show that such narratives are objective goods, which, recall, must have non-instrumental value in order to avoid the double-counting of objective goods. After dispelling de Bres's argument, I turn to Velleman's argument that one's narrative itself can affect one's well-being, which he argues for with two compelling examples. Finally, I conclude this section by replying to Brännmark's disagreement with Velleman's claim that momentary value exists.

de Bres claims that one's narrative that is true and usually, one's narrative that adheres to a set of salient narrative conventions makes one's life intelligible to oneself and others, which then brings about the goods of understanding and community (562). According to de Bres, narrative conventions are models for one's narrative that have a predetermined structure and plot (557). Narrative conventions can include the themes and plots of romance, comedy, tragedy, and redemption where they then become salient if the narrative convention is "prevalent in a community for which the narrator has an affinity" (557; 562). Moreover, the community where the narrative is prevalent is conceived in a very general and broad way where it includes the "entire population of humans, past and present, or a subset living in a particular time or place" (562). Since narratives can be simplified into narrative conventions and can emphasize important events in one's life, de Bres claims that narratives then make one's life intelligible and gives one insight into one's life. In essence, according to de Bres, most narratives will make one's life intelligible to oneself and others.

From thereon, de Bres argues that the intelligibility that one attains from true narratives that adhere to a set of narrative conventions brings about the goods of understanding and community, which then makes one's life more meaningful. The good of understanding in part involves "making sense' of complex matters, through apprehending the relationships between

their elements or parts” (559). The good of having community involves having “companionship, cooperation, solidarity and love” (561). Those goods are seen as objective goods. Thus, her argument is that narratives that are true and adhere to a set of salient narrative conventions are instrumental to bringing about objective goods. She then claims that the objective goods of understanding and community that follow from true narratives that follow a set off salient narrative conventions are sufficient for a meaningful narrative. So, the first part of her argument can be directly applied to how narratives can increase one’s well-being, as one could say that if one has more objective goods, then one’s well-being has increased.

One issue with this view that true narratives that accord to a set of salient narrative conventions make for meaningful narratives is that it is both overly inclusive and overly exclusive. Intuitively, a narrative of carelessness and disregard is not meaningful, even if it is true and adheres to a set of narrative conventions. A narrative where one acts immorally, squanders one’s successes, and ruins one’s relationships yet feels connected to that community is intuitively not meaningful. Additionally, this view does not include narratives that are intuitively meaningful, such as if one holds a narrative that is not prevalent in the community one has an affinity for. For example, we can imagine a community that values a narrative of honor and gaining power while an individual holds a narrative that involves accepting and forgiving others, and the individual’s narrative is not respected by others. In this scenario, the individual feels connected to the community that values a narrative of attaining power and rejects other communities that value other narratives. Intuitively, the individual’s narrative is meaningful, even if the individual does not feel aligned with the community that the narrative is prevalent in. However, de Bres’s view excludes that narrative as being meaningful.

Moreover, for something to be one of the things on the list of objective goods, the thing needs to by itself, independently of what it brings about, increase one's well-being such that the list of objective goods avoids double-counting objective goods. If the objective list of goods contained merely instrumental goods, there would be double-counting of things that are objectively good. We can imagine that one's life only contains a merely instrumental good, such as money. That life would not have anything of value in it yet. However, when the merely instrumental good brings about an intrinsic good, such as if one buys sustenance, then the life has something valuable in it. However, in that life, there is only one objectively good thing in it— the sustenance. de Bres's argument does not give reasons for how narrative directly or by itself could increase one's well-being. Rather, de Bres's argument makes causal claims that show what narratives can bring about. According to de Bres's argument, one's narrative would lose its value if the goods of community and understanding were not attained. de Bres argues that community and understanding are things that by themselves increase one's well-being and not narratives.

In contrast with de Bres, Velleman argues that narratives directly impact one's well-being. To show that the narrative of one's life can impact one's well-being, Velleman first distinguishes well-being of the whole from well-being at a given time. Well-being at a given time, also known as momentary well-being, refers to how well an individual's life goes at a moment in time (according to whichever theory of well-being one favors or holds) (48). For example, momentary well-being measures one's well-being when one is 20 years old. This snapshot of well-being is unlike one's well-being as a whole. The well-being over one's life as a whole takes into account how things went as a whole. This type of well-being measures how well one's life as a whole went from years 0 to 20. Even if there are bad moments in one's life, one's life as a whole can still have a high level of well-being. On many theories of well-being,

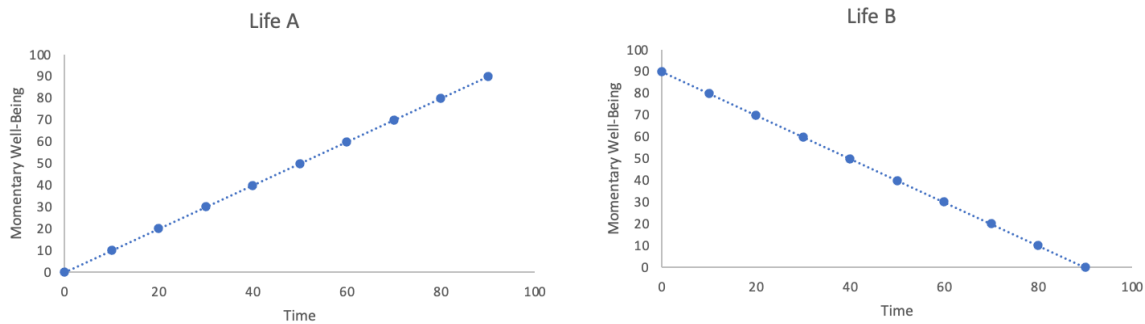
such as hedonistic theory and objective list theory, how well one's life is going (or went) at a given time does not depend on what comes before or after it. Before Velleman argues for narrative value, Velleman sketches out two compatible ways of assessing one's well-being; one can increase one's momentary well-being and/ or one's well-being as a whole.

Velleman claims that these two ways of assessing well-being are connected in that the total value in the whole depends not only on the sum of the value of the moments of well-being but also on the metaphysical relations of the parts (48). In other words, the well-being as a whole or value in the whole depends in part on the connection between the parts of one's life. The total value in one's life could depend on how well each year went and if those years improve, how those years built on past years. For Velleman, even if the well-being of the whole and total well-being of the moments are equal to each other, their equivalence would only be an accident, since the well-being of a whole should not be determined by summing up the well-being of the parts, and the well-being of the moments should not be determined by dividing the well-being of the whole (49).

To argue that one's narrative can affect one's well-being as a whole, Velleman presents an argument that has two main steps. Velleman first provides two examples of two lives with equal amounts of momentary value, and yet intuitively one life has gone better than the other. He then argues that the difference in how the two lives went overall or as a whole is best explained by the different narratives of the two people's lives. While a bad narrative can contribute negatively to one's well-being, Velleman and I will focus on how one's narrative can increase one's well-being.

When assessing the well-being of one's entire life, Velleman rejects that the mere sum of momentary well-being adequately captures the well-being of one's life by presenting examples

of two lives. In one life, the individual's life starts off well; she has a comfortable, happy childhood (49). However, in the middle of her life, she is the victim of bad luck and she finishes the second half of her life poorly (49). For the second life, the opposite is the case. She starts with a rough childhood, midway through, her fortune reverses through good luck, and she ends her life comfortably and happily (50). We can assign a numerical value to well-being at a given time and then add all the values over the lifetime. The numerical value of each moment of well-being is such that when all the values of the moments are added, the two lives come to the same sum total, as depicted in the figure below.

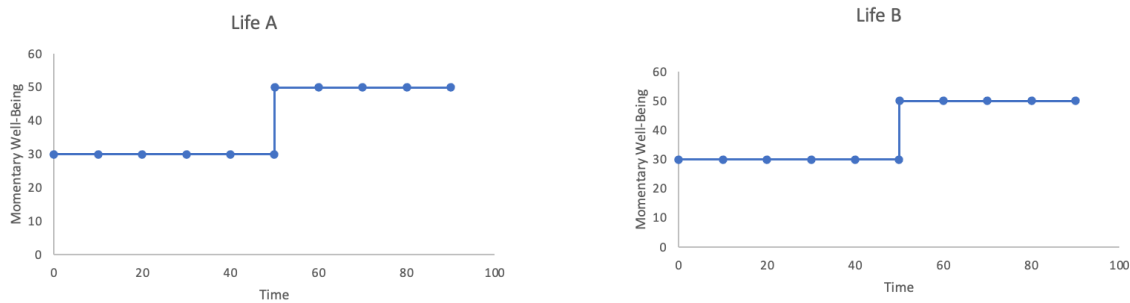


Even though these two lives are of equal momentary value, intuitively, the latter life has a greater level of well-being as a whole (50). This example shows that what is good for one can increase the momentary value in one's life without improving the overall well-being in one's life. Thus, the well-being of the whole does not need to equal the well-being of the sum of its parts. The well-being can be more or less than the sum of its parts given the relations between the moments.

Another example that shows that how well a life went as a whole can be more than the sum of the well-being of the moments is Velleman's example of two politicians. We can imagine that there are two politicians who are both working hard and trying to get elected (53). However,

politician A wins the race while politician B loses the race but instead wins the lottery. With these two lives, we can assign numerical values to the well-being of the moments and after assigning numerical values to the well-being at a moment and adding all the values over one's life, the two politicians trying to get elected have the same sum total value of momentary well-being (53). Despite the fact that politician B lost the race, her momentary well-being is equal to politician A's, because winning the lottery increases her well-being. The equal amounts of momentary well-being and the shape of the lives are depicted in the following graphs.

Even though these two lives have equal amounts of momentary well-being due to different circumstances, intuitively, the winning politician's life has gone better than the politician's life that lost the race but won the lottery.



To argue for narrative value, Velleman argues that the only relevant candidates to explain the difference in sum total amount of well-being in A vs. B's lives are the timing of events and the value of one's narrative. I propose that the value of agency can explain the difference in value in the example of the two politicians. The timing of events could explain the difference in well-being in the first example of the two lives, if one holds a principle that there is additional value when one's well-being increases later in one's life. Velleman actually denies that the timing of events can even explain the difference in value of the first example of two lives with opposite trajectories. While the difference in well-being could potentially be explained by the timing of events in the first example of two lives, it cannot explain the difference in total value in

the example of the two politicians' lives (53). The timing of events refers to at what point in one's life when one's well-being is high or low. If the timing of events were to explain the difference in the sum total amount of well-being for the two politicians, then the timing of events must be different. However, the increase in well-being in the politicians' lives occurs at the same time; one politician gets elected the same time that the other politician wins the lottery (53). So, the timing of events is the same in the two politician's lives and cannot explain the difference in the well-being of the whole of the two lives.

Another candidate that could explain the difference in overall well-being of the two politician's lives is the value of agency. Increasing one's well-being through exercising one's agency has greater value than increasing one's well-being due to non-agency. In the case of the two politicians, one politician's well-being increases when she uses her agency to successfully win her election, and the other politician's increase in well-being depends primarily on external factors or the person picking the lottery ticket. So, the example of the two politicians does not capture all the value that is present; one life has more well-being from having one's well-being increase come from one's agency. Additionally, in order for agency to be an alternative form of value in these example lives, agency needs to be distinct from a narrative. While having a narrative may require that one have agency, they are still distinct concepts in that agency refers to exercising one's capacity to act while a narrative is a representation of events. So, there is an alternative explanation for why one politician's life is better than the other.

Ultimately, Velleman argues that narrative value is what best explains the differences and not the timing of events or any other factor, since it can explain the difference in well-being in both examples. Narrative value refers to the value that the narrative of a person's life contributes to the person's well-being (60). The narrative of one's life can add or detract to the overall well-

being of one's entire life independently of how it affects one's momentary well-being (60). In the lives of two individuals where the trajectories are opposites, the life that ends well tells a story of improvement while the life that ends badly tells a story of deterioration (50). And the story of improvement is a better narrative than a story of deterioration. For the two politicians, the winning politician's well-being as a whole is higher, because it is a story of success (53). She accomplishes her goal of winning the election. For the other politician, despite the good the lottery win brought, her story is still a story of failure, since she loses her political race.

Moreover, Velleman's principle that narrative value can increase one's well-being unifies and explains the two cases above. It is a better explanation than the other candidates presented, because we should accept a principle that has a unified explanation for all the examples over an explanation that can only explain one example or is not unified. Thus, what best explains the difference in how the two lives went as a whole is the different narratives. Through examples, Velleman argues that narrative value can affect one's well-being as a whole.

You'll recall that one of Velleman's claims is that on many theories of well-being, such as a hedonistic theory or objective list theory of well-being, how well one's life is going (or went) at a given time does not depend on what comes before or after it. Namely, there is such a thing as momentary value, and that is crucial to the first step of his argument where one's well-being as whole can be different from the well-being of the moments. Interestingly, Brännmark denies that there is such a thing as how well each moment in one's life is going. According to Brännmark, it is a mistake to think that certain moments are more valuable than others. Instead, those "statements are about the *importance* of [those moments] in making the life in question good" (325). He "den[ies] that there are such things as self-contained momentary instances of well-being to begin with" (Brännmark 326). The value of the whole is not based on the sum of

the value of each moment of well-being, nor is the value of each moment of well-being derived from the value of the whole life of which it is part of. While Brännmark agrees with Velleman's conclusion that one's narrative can affect one's well-being, he diverges from Velleman in that he does not agree with Velleman's thought experiment that two lives with equal amounts of momentary well-being can have different total values.

He provides an analogy to demonstrate his claim where he compares the total value in one's life and momentary well-being as analogous in all relevant respects to the total value of a book and the value of its chapters. Brännmark claims that the value of a whole book is not the sum of the value of the chapters, and the value of the chapters is not derived from the value of the book as a whole (325). So, according to Brännmark, the chapters do not have their own independent value, and there is no such thing as momentary value. Brännmark rejects Velleman's argument for narrative value on the basis that there is no momentary value and hence, the examples of the two lives with different total values but same amounts of momentary well-being in their lives cannot be appealed to.

Nonetheless, in my view, the value of the parts can be determined separately from the value of the whole. While Brännmark concedes that one can "identify the qualitative peaks" in a book, he claims that one "can hardly say much more about them than that they are important in making the book as good as it is" (325). However, I think it is clear that we can say much more than he allows. Even when we do not know the value of the whole book or what even happens after the halfway mark, we can divide the book into its diction, characters, plots, and so on. Then, we can assign value to those parts, such as by judging the descriptiveness of the word choice, how well the characters have been developed, and how well the plot ties together the events so far. Moreover, some parts of a book are better than the other parts, such as if the book

drags on towards the middle. And this can be determined before one has reached the end of the book and without knowing how all the chapters tie together. So, Brännmark should not reject Velleman's thought experiment for narrative value, which depends on the existence of momentary value, since the value of the parts and the whole can be talked about separately and even before the value of the whole is present.

Given Velleman's compelling argument that a person's narrative can affect a person's well-being, I will analyze how the narrative of a person's life plays into one's well-being. Exploring the connection between narrative and well-being will be done in part by answering the question of what features of a narrative are necessary to make a positive contribution to one's well-being?

Section IIA: What is one's narrative according to Rosati?

When Velleman argues for narrative value, he does not define what a narrative is and may have thought that what one's narrative is obvious. Unlike Velleman, Rosati indicates that a narrative is a representation of the events in one's life from the individual's perspective. After providing her description, I raise some concerns with her view of what a narrative is.

One view of one's narrative, which is held by Rosati, is that one's narrative is a representation of the events in one's life through the point of view of the person whose life it is (Rosati 33). An example of one's narrative is a life story, where one's life story can include the series of major life events and how those events happened, such as milestones reached, relationships formed and lost, and the development of one's personality traits.

According to Rosati, one's narrative has an objective component, which consists of the events and the relations among the events. One's narrative is objectively determined by the events or what actually happened, since one "cannot interpret events in just any way we like"

(39). For instance, if one has only lived in Los Angeles, one's narrative cannot involve living in San Francisco, since that is something that did not happen. The second objective component of one's narrative is the relations among events, such as the timing of events and the "underlying causal connections" (39). Those two components together have been described as the plot of a narrative by Antti Kauppinen, who draws the idea of plot from Aristotle (358). When Velleman refers to narratives, he focuses on the objective component of one's narrative, such as the events and the relations between those events. The narrative of the politician that wins her race depends on whether or not she wins the race and the events that precede and succeed the win (Velleman 60). However, Rosati adds to the discussion on narrative by pointing out that there is more to a narrative than the events and their relations.

Rosati's account of narrative also has a subjective component. One's narrative can also depend in part on the narrator's interpretation of those events. Rosati writes that "it seems we can make different things of [the events]" (39). Additionally, the subjective aspect of one's narrative need not be verbal or expressed to others; it can mean thinking about one's life in a narrative manner (34). Presumably, Rosati would agree with the example that when one fails to convert one's artistic passions into a career, one's narrative is constrained by that event, which is the objective aspect of one's narrative. It is then impossible for one's narrative to involve having a successful career based on one's artistic interests. However, one's narrative can be interpreted such that the failed career can be seen as an example of when one tried her best or seen as part of one's journey of expanding one's abilities. One's interpretation of the events can alter one's narrative.

Given that one's narrative depends in part on one's interpretation, the way that one interprets the events can originate either internally from within oneself or from an external

perspective (39). When one's narrative originates internally, the narrative is a story that stems from the person in question, and that narrative is believed by the person. Even if the narrative comes from a third person perspective, what makes one's narrative one's own is that the narrative is adopted or believed by the individual (47). Sometimes, a friend tells an individual that her life has not been a failure and that she has overcome lots of hardships, and the individual comes to see her narrative that way. Because the new narrative has been internalized by the individual, the narrative is the individual's own narrative, given that it is true to the events in the individual's life. So, according to Rosati, the perspective of the subject, rather than an observer, determines what the narrative is.

Although there are objective and subjective components to the account of narrative Rosati uses, one issue is that this account does not restrict the number of narratives a person could have. One's life can have multiple narratives, and Rosati acknowledges that "we can tell more than one such story" (39). The individual can interpret the events in their life one way one day, and another way the next day, or in a few years. When one feels anxious, one may see one's narrative as one of failure. However, when one feels well-rested or is having a good day, one may see one's narrative as one of progress or success. Even though it is possible that individuals have multiple narratives, for simplicity's sake, Rosati speaks as if there is a single narrative for a given person. When Rosati gives the example of fictitious William Stoner's narrative, Stoner ultimately only adopts one narrative of his life—the narrative that reduces his failures (43). Even though Rosati provides multiple interpretations of Stoner's narrative, only one narrative is adopted (44). So, Rosati focuses on one narrative in a person's life and assumes that one's narrative is maintained. While it is possible to evaluate how multiple narratives might contribute to one's well-being, I will focus on evaluating how a single narrative contributes to one's well-

being. So, for ease of the rest of this thesis, I will continue to speak if there is only a single narrative of a life.

Another concern with Rosati's account of narrative is that it assumes that the individual is cognitively able to recount and interpret the events in one's life into a narrative. If a narrative partially depends on one's interpretation, one needs to have self-awareness about one's role in a situation, be able to remember past events, and be able to make connections between causally connected events. Moreover, one may also need imagination to conceive of other ways of interpreting the events in one's life and practical reason to choose between different narratives. However, this account of what a narrative is leaves out those who do not have the cognitive capacity to form a narrative as well as those who do not think of their lives in terms of narrative. Notably, Galen Strawson, who shares a similar understanding of one's narrative as Rosati, has rejected the psychological claim that humans think of their lives in terms of narrative, since he "does not figure [himself], considered as a self, as something that was there in the (further) past and will be there in the (further) future" (Strawson 430). In other words, he does not see past events as being part of himself and thus, does not connect the events and their relations together, as is necessary for one to have a narrative. So, one's narrative may not be as subjective as Rosati conceives it to be. Even though Rosati's account of narrative has its limitations, there are still people who are able to and do interpret their lives through narrative. So, I will focus on those who have formed narratives about their lives in order to evaluate Rosati's claim, which is about how an interpreted narrative could increase one's well-being.

Section IIB: Rosati's sufficient conditions for one's narrative to contribute positively to one's well-being

Instead of using the terminology of "narrative," Rosati uses the term "storytelling." While storytelling is an activity that involves constructing and recounting one's story, the story, or narrative, is the product of constructing one's own life story. This interpretation of Rosati's use of storytelling comes from how Rosati explains that it is "the effects of recounting to ourselves stories" that can increase one's well-being (43). She also cautions against exaggerating how "consciously or how deliberately we engage in storytelling about our lives," as it may be that "some of us engage in little storytelling if any" (44). Nonetheless, Rosati seems to use the two terms interchangeably, and I will focus on Rosati's argument that involves narrative, the product or creation of storytelling. Hence, I will also use the terms "storytelling" and "narrative" interchangeably.

In this section, I will first lay out Rosati's view that storytelling that is internalized or chosen, affirming, and makes one's failures less relevant is both necessary and sufficient to increase one's well-being. However, on Rosati's own criteria for increasing well-being, storytelling with these features is not always sufficient to increase one's well-being, which is shown with the example of Alcoholics Anonymous. Moreover, I show that even on a non-technical, or intuitive understanding, of well-being, storytelling that has these three features she describes does not always increase one's well-being. What we learn from my critique is that storytelling that increases one's well-being must be true.

For Rosati, a certain kind of storytelling empowers the individual to increase one's well-being. Regardless of where the story originates, the story needs to be (a) chosen or internalized, (b) affirming from one's own point of view, and (c) make one's own failings less relevant in

order to positively affect one's well-being. A positive story about oneself can be told in part by "making one's failings nearly irrelevant" (47; 45). Making one's failings nearly irrelevant can be better represented by the idea of making one's failings less relevant or central to one's story. To make one's failings irrelevant does not mean to ignore the failings or to believe that they did not happen, since it is not possible for storytelling to reverse events that did happen (46). Rather, making one's failings less relevant involves reinterpreting the events that did happen to place them in a larger story that is not defined by deficiencies (46). Instead of focusing on one's shortcomings, one can focus on another aspect of one's story. For example, a series of failures can be made less relevant by accepting that the failures happened and seeing those failures as part of a story of persistence.

Not only should storytelling reduce the role of one's failures, the type of storytelling that improves one's well-being involves taking up and internalizing an affirming story. According to Rosati, when one's story is taken up and internalized; it becomes one's own (47). Not only does the story need to be chosen or internalized, it has to be affirming by supporting one's self-worth for the story to increase one's well-being. Rosati gives an example of what affirmative storytelling involves with a person who is going through a difficult time and tells a story of herself as a failure. A supportive, caring listener or friend would try to get the person to emphasize the parts of her story that highlight her successes, positive character traits, or unique features until that story is embraced by the friend (46). By retelling and reinterpreting one's life's events, one can resonate more with an affirming story about one's life (46). To fill out Rosati's view, beyond the failures in one's life, other negative aspects of one's life that can be reinterpreted by storytelling include misfortunes and feeling unsatisfied with one's life. For instance, some of those events could become stories of forgiveness or redemption.

Rosati then uses the example of the fictional William Stoner to show that he engages in the kind of storytelling that increases one's well-being. William Stoner was raised on a farm in rural Missouri and attends college with the intention of studying agriculture to help his family's farm (40). However, upon taking an English class, he becomes enamored with literature and eventually completes a Ph.D. in it. After his graduate studies, he becomes a professor, has an unsuccessful marriage, his relationship with his daughter deteriorates, and he publishes a book to mixed results. Towards the end of his life, he is essentially demoted after a dispute with his colleague. However, he also develops a loving relationship with one of his graduate students. In essence, Stoner's life was mixed; while his life has some good and successes, such as a consistent love of literature, his life also consists of failure and could have been better (39).

However, what is notable about Stoner's life is the interpretation of the events in his life. At the end of his life, he recounts his life to himself. There, he considers the view that his life was a failure; to an outsider, his life consists of failed loves and a rocky career (21). Yet, he ultimately rejects the picture of himself as a failure and instead, chooses to see himself and his life as defined by his persistence and faithfulness to literature (42). Without being prompted by anyone, after self-reflection, and under a calm state of mind, Stoner freely adopts the narrative of loving literature. Another story that resonates with Stoner and supports his own worth was chosen. He explains that the outward perception of his narrative as one of failure is "mean, unworthy of what his life had been" (21). So, he sees his life in a more positive light and sees himself as deserving of love, regardless of what happened in his life. He feels "himself at last beginning to be a teacher" and as a "man to whom his book is true" (42). Discovering one's value as a person and one's value to other people is affirming. Even if he cannot change past events, the narrative Stoner adopts minimizes his unsuccessful relationships and rocky career

into a larger narrative of persistence and dedication to literature. So, Rosati shows that Stoner's storytelling is chosen, supports his worth, and diminishes the importance of his failures, which then increases his well-being.

When storytelling is internalized and affirmative, storytelling will increase one's well-being through Rosati's account of well-being, which involves, in part, empowering the individual and bringing about internal motivation. Rosati claims, but does not defend, that an activity, project, relationship, or one's narrative can increase one's well-being if:

“First, when a person is so related to a thing—an activity, an undertaking, another being—her engagement with that thing tends to support her sense of her own worth or value, which is not to be confused with those feelings of self-esteem that arise from her accomplishments or her manifestation of excellences. Second, it tends to be enlivening rather than enervating. Third, it tends to provide an important component of her identity and a sense of direction in life and so to contribute to her self-understanding. And finally, it provides a source of internal motivation. Being good for a person, I have claimed, just is being productive of these features” (Rosati 45).

In sum, Rosati has five conditions that can be extrapolated from the quote above, which are necessary and together sufficient for something to increase one's well-being. In other words, if something (1) helps one see one's worth or value as an agent (2) shapes or expresses one's identity (3) gives one a sense of direction in life (4) energizes one (5) provides motivation, then X increases one's well-being. Rosati assumes that those conditions are self-explanatory, and I will do the same. In my view, the increase in well-being that comes from seeing one's worth and feeling energized is compatible with increasing the momentary value in one's life as well as increasing one's well-being over one's whole life, since the narrative relations between the moments do not necessarily play a role. In essence, Rosati claims that one's well-being increases when the above five conditions are met.

While Rosati assumes that such storytelling meets all the conditions to increase one's well-being, I argue that the way that storytelling increases one's well-being can happen without necessarily being energizing or motivating. Even when storytelling is chosen, affirming, and makes one's failings nearly irrelevant, storytelling is not necessarily energizing or motivating. On Rosati's account of well-being, there are five ways storytelling can increase one's well-being. However, only seeing one's worth, shaping or expressing one's identity, and giving one a sense of direction are needed for storytelling to increase one's well-being.

The more limited set of conditions to increase one's well-being are met in the case of Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) meetings, and the example was provided by Rivka Weinberg. When one attends a closed AA meeting, members acknowledge that they are alcoholics and talk about their experience with alcohol use. In AA's Twelve Steps to stop drinking, some of the tenets involve members admitting that they are powerless over alcohol, detailing how they have harmed other people through their drinking, making amends to those that they have harmed, and believing in the help of a greater power ("Alcoholics Anonymous"). So, the narrative of someone who attends AA meetings involves being an alcoholic, whose drinking has hurt oneself or other people. Also part of one's AA narrative is that when one drinks, one cannot control how much one drinks, and that one is part of a community of alcoholics.

Even though the case of attending AA meetings can increase one's well-being, attending AA meetings does not always energize or provide one with internal motivation. Thinking about and being reminded of one's AA narrative is emotionally draining, since it brings to mind the harm that one's drinking has done. Part of going through AA involves acknowledging how one has hurt another person through drinking. It can be draining to see how one's life falls short whether by luck or one's own doing. For example, in a story of forgiveness, being forgiven does

not undo the hurt one previously caused and is not something for one to forget. Over time, the thought of one's narrative may be less draining, but one's narrative still primarily involves one's struggle to manage drinking with control, so the thought of one's narrative still is not easy to think about or energizing.

Not only can the narrative itself not be energizing, the process of forming one's story or storytelling can also be draining not only for bringing to mind the harm drinking has done but also from trying to understand one's real motivations (and not rationalizations) and vulnerabilities that lead one to drink. In a life of hardship and trauma, sometimes writing or recounting one's story involves a bitter understanding of life's shortcomings in a way that is not internally motivating, energizing, or affirming yet still increases one's well-being. For memoirist Mary Karr, she explains that the process of writing about her life and looking back, "exposed the schism between who I'd wanted to be and who I'd actually been" even as she claims that her own narrative "has some magic power" (175).

Moreover, the AA narrative is not internally motivating. The narrative of someone who attends AA meetings does make one more internally motivated to not drink, but does not necessarily make one feel more internally motivated to continue doing one's everyday tasks, since there is risk of feeling the urge and being provoked to drink again. To see how one has failed and hurt another person can lead one to feel worse about what one has done in the past. One might not want to continue acting in the face of what harm one has done in the past, and thus the narrative is not internally motivating. So, Rosati's account of how storytelling increases one's well-being is unnecessarily limited to one's successes and positive traits. Storytelling about one's narrative increases one's well-being even when that story does not leave one motivated,

energized, or affirmed so long as it contributes to one's identity, allows one to see one's worth, and gives one direction.

While Rosati's form of storytelling seems to be entirely subjective, she claims that reinterpreting one's story is not the same as telling a false story and that a false story would not allow for a stable increase in one's well-being. She argues that in the example of Stoner, his storytelling is able to increase his well-being, because it is still constrained by the facts and events in his life (48). Stoner does not think that his failings and misfortune did not happen. For Rosati, a true story is important, because an untruthful story of one's life would not be able to be maintained for a long period of time and would eventually lead to more disappointment and disillusionment with oneself (48).

While Rosati briefly puts out that false storytelling about one's life would not improve one's well-being, her reasons for rejecting false storytelling do not hold up. In many cases, false stories have been held up over long periods of time, because some of those people have fully inhabited the false story such that they do not see the falsity or have the need to confront the falsity until the falsity is exposed by others. For example, in the case of writer Hache Carillo, only after he passed away did people outside of his immediate family, such as his husband, discover that he was not Cuban American as he had claimed, but that he was African American and was born with the last name of Carroll (Page). With his created Cuban identity, he often wrote about the Cuban American experience. The example of Hache Carillo and others show that false narratives can be maintained over long periods of time.

Nonetheless, I claim that truth is a constraint or necessary condition on the kind of storytelling that can increase one's well-being. We can take the example of an individual who has the narrative that one is the victim and that everyone around the individual is the problem,

which then causes the individual to lash out at others around the individual. This narrative is false, since even though others around the individual may have accidentally harmed or inconvenienced the individual, the responsibility of others in causing problems in the individual's life is overblown by the individual. The individual does not adequately consider one's role in facilitating the events that happen. In such a case, the narrative that is false may be comforting to the individual and allow the individual to avoid taking responsibility, but it does not increase the individual's well-being overall. As long as the narrative is held by the individual, there will be cognitive dissonance in that the individual will not be able to adequately account for why one feels slighted, and one will encounter evidence that one is the problem in one's relationships.

Additionally, one's narrative needs to be consistent to increase one's well-being. Had Stoner's narrative oscillated to be one of failure one day and one of resilience the next day, the narrative would not increase his well-being. A narrative that changes constantly does not help one interpret future events that happens. If one holds a narrative of resilience and one encounters a setback, that event would be seen as one small hardship in a larger narrative of persistence. However, if one holds a narrative of decline and one encounters a setback, the setback would be seen as another example of one's decline. A narrative that changes constantly does not adequately interpret the events in one's life and does not increase one's well-being.

Section III: Meaning as a necessary condition for one's narrative to contribute positively to one's well-being

In this section, I aim to show that a narrative must be meaningful in order to positively contribute to the person's well-being. My account of the necessary and sufficient conditions for a narrative to be meaningful (that is, for something to make a narrative meaningful) partly draws

on Kauppinen's account, and I'll begin first by briefly specifying what meaningfulness involves, which has three "meanings" about the purpose, intelligibility, and significance of one's life.

When talking about life being meaningful, which is something that is intrinsically valuable, I am referring to the meaning in a life as opposed to the meaning of life. When talking about meaningfulness, I am referring to the meaningfulness in one's life where that refers to the meaning in an individual person's life and not meaning for the existence of humans or humans as a species. This distinction has been referenced by Thomas Metz (Metz 3).

One account of the concept of meaningfulness is about life being purposeful. Metz explains that "the concept of a meaningful life is that of an existence that plays a role in the realization of valuable ends, even if that role is not to will them into being" (24). In other words, a purposeful life, and consequently a meaningful life, involves bringing about valuable ends. Meaningfulness as purpose is connected to questions like: what is the point of one's life? One's purpose can come from many sources, such as by fulfilling God's will or by conducting scientific research or raising a family. One's purpose can be supernatural or non-supernatural.

Another account of the concept of life being meaningful is when one's life has significance. On this view, when one's life is meaningful, one is "connect[ed] with something valuable for its own sake beyond one's person" (28). One must be connected to intrinsically valuable goods that are beyond one's animal self, which include the goods necessary for survival and pleasure (29). For instance, doing something significant could mean having a conversation with a close friend about one's values while doing something insignificant might involve making mindless chit chat about the weather with a stranger.

Another sense of meaningfulness involves one's life being intelligible. When one's life is intelligible, it is understandable, since there is "existentially relevant information... in our

understanding of the universe we inhabit” (Goetz and Seachris 9). When one wonders about life’s intelligibility, one question one asks is: how does my life fit in with the greater scheme of things? This concept of meaningfulness is analogous to how a piece of a puzzle is intelligible when it fits with the rest of a puzzle.

While I do not take a stand on these concepts of meaningfulness, the concept of meaningfulness informs Kauppinen’s criterion for meaningful narrative. The criterion for a project to make one’s narrative meaningful are as follows:

“A central project contributes to the meaningfulness of a chapter [in one’s life] to the degree that a) the goal is interpersonally or objectively valuable, b) the agent adopts the goal as her own, is irreplaceable, and exercises her essential human capacities in pursuing it, and c) the agent is successful in reaching the goal and is positively changed by this” (364).

It is clear from this quote, and Kauppinen never says otherwise, that he thinks that projects must be objectively valuable or valuable to others, one’s own, use one’s human capacities to achieve the goal, positively change the agent, and one’s role in the project must be irreplaceable for one’s narrative to be meaningful. Despite mentioning success in the quote above, he wavers on the question of whether the success of a project is necessary for a meaningful narrative. Elsewhere, he says that “reaching the goal is not always the only important thing, since “in some cases, merely having done one's best is a state of affairs that it is valuable to bring about” (362). Given that I’m inclined to agree with this statement, I’ll drop the role of success in making a narrative meaningful. After explaining the terms that make a narrative meaningful, I argue that irreplaceability is not necessary for one’s chapter to be meaningful. Additionally, I provide an argument to show that events or non-projects can also make one’s narrative meaningful. Finally,

I argue, by appealing to examples, that a meaningful narrative is necessary to increase one's well-being.

So, ultimately, according to Kauppinen, a meaningful narrative consists of projects that:

- a. are objectively valuable or valuable to other people
- b. i. are one's own, ii. use one's human capacities to achieve the goal, iii. irreplaceable
- c. positively change the agent

The projects in one's life include the goals that one has and the activities that one undertakes to reach those goals (359). When the project is objectively valuable, the project is valuable regardless of what anyone thinks about its value. That is different from when something is simply valued by others, which is when only others think the project has value (362). A project's objective value can come from being valuable to others. Additionally, a meaningful narrative consists of projects that are one's own where the goal of the project is not determined by internal or external forces (e.g. coercion), stems from one's practical reasoning, and is "wholeheartedly embrace[d]" (361). Completing the project also needs to use one's human capacities, such as one's practical reason, emotional engagement, or physical effort (361). The project also needs to positively change the agent. While Kauppinen does not specify what a positive change involves, he uses the example of Martin Luther King's life to illustrate a positive change. Martin Luther King's first boycott positively changed him, since it "'touched [King] indelibly—astonished, battered, broadened, and inflamed him'" (362). The example of Martin Luther King suggests that a positive change is a long term change.

Since I object that irreplaceability is necessary for a narrative to be meaningful, I will first interpret the term as Kauppinen uses it. While he does not explicitly explain what irreplaceability means, he does offer a suggestive example about the meaning of irreplaceability

where a handmade wooden assault rifle from a parent will have more significance than if the wooden assault rifle was given by a stranger (364). Moreover, he writes that “if anyone could replace [the individual in question],” one’s life would not be meaningful (353). In this case, the parent’s role in giving the gift cannot be replaced by another person to get an equally valuable result. Thus, based on the example above, according to Kauppinen, irreplaceability refers to how one’s role in completing a project cannot be substituted by another person, since no other person would be an equally worthy substitute to complete the project.

However, a person being irreplaceable to the success of a project is not necessary for a meaningful narrative, since a narrative of being a participant and being one part of a project can still be meaningful. Even when a project is central to our lives, we may not play the greatest role in the success of those projects. If one were part of a relay race or competition and one was the slowest person on the team, one would be replaceable in that another, faster person could be part of the team and would add more value to the project of winning the race. Even if the team wins the race, on Kauppinen’s principle for a meaningful narrative, the narrative of being a not-super-important team player would not be meaningful. Similarly, if one centers one’s life around social justice by protesting with thousands of other people, one would be replaceable in that other protestors could stand in for the individual protestor. Kauppinen’s principle would have to claim that being one anonymous protestor in a large group and having a small contribution to a project could not make for a meaningful narrative. However, intuitively, contributing to a project and being a part of the project’s successes, such as by being a member on a team, can be the source of a meaningful narrative. Intuitively, a narrative championing for and contributing to social justice is meaningful. Thus, it is not the case that one must be irreplaceable for one’s narrative to be meaningful. While I reject that irreplaceability is necessary for a meaningful narrative, the

other conditions proposed by Kauppinen are necessary and together sufficient for a narrative to be meaningful.

While Kauppinen does not talk about how non-projects can contribute to the meaning of one's narrative, my view is that an event can contribute to the meaning of one's narrative irrespective of his conditions. Sometimes, the narratives in our lives are not entirely determined by the individual's actions and wishes, yet they can still be meaningful narratives. A meaningful narrative without a project is evidenced by the case of a narrative of unexpected reconciliation. In the scenario of unexpected reconciliation, we can take two close friends who have a falling out, mutually decide not to be friends anymore, and move on. One day, one friend unexpectedly apologizes and decides to put the past behind her. The two friends reconcile and rebuild their friendship. This narrative of unexpected reconciliation does not involve a project, since the friend who did not apologize had moved on and did not have the goal or even desire initially to reignite the friendship. Even though the first friend who did not reach out did not have the goal of reigniting the friendship, now the narrative that involves her friend is about a repaired relationship. Nonetheless, intuitively, such a narrative is meaningful, since it involves forgiveness and reconciliation. So, a project is not the only way that a narrative can be meaningful, the content of one's narrative can involve one's relationships and accidental events.

After rejecting one of Kauppinen's necessary conditions for a meaningful narrative and adding that events can make for a meaningful narrative, I will argue that a meaningful narrative is necessary to increase one's well-being by appealing to examples. For example, a narrative is meaningless when it consists solely of repetitive tasks, and that narrative does not increase one's well-being. We can imagine a life where one's activities and projects almost exclusively involve filing papers and watching tv shows and commercials. Crucially, this narrative of dullness is a

meaningless narrative, given that the projects in the individual's narrative are not objectively good and do not require very many human capacities. In such a case, one's narrative would be one of dullness and intuitively, such a narrative does not contribute independently to one's well-being. The well-being that currently exists in the individual's life only comes from the well-being of the moments. Thus, this narrative fails the principle that a narrative must be meaningful to positively contribute to one's well-being. It is not meaningful and thus, does not contribute to one's well-being.

Similarly, a narrative that is determined entirely by another person is one that is meaningless and hence, does not increase one's well-being as a whole. When the projects in an individual's life are determined by another person, such as one's parents, and one does not give any thought to whether the project is good or whether one should undergo the project, the projects in one's life are not one's own. We can take the example of a narrative that involves the project of attending medical school. However, the project was undertaken solely on the basis of one's culture and one's parents. For a project to be one's own, it requires that one has acted on the basis of one's own evaluative judgments. So, this narrative is not self-determined and fails to meet Kauppinen's criteria for a meaningful narrative. And, intuitively, a narrative where one has not thought about or sufficiently engaged with the reasons for doing the project does not contribute additionally to the value already in one's life. Again, in this example, one's narrative is not meaningful and does not add to the total value in one's life.

With examples of meaningless narratives and the intuition that they do not increase one's well-being as a whole, the contrapositive is also the case; narratives that are meaningful do increase one's well-being as a whole. One example of a meaningful narrative is a narrative of acceptance and self-discovery, such as when an individual accepts oneself as LGBTQ+ after

years of being in denial of one's sexuality. Eventually, after finding support in others, in this case, one decides to come out on one's own terms. Intuitively, such a narrative increases one's well-being as a whole. Of note is that such a narrative not only increases the total value in one's life but also meets my principle by being a meaningful narrative. Even though this narrative does not necessarily involve a project, when it is one's project to accept oneself and come out, it meets Kauppinen's conditions for a meaningful narrative. The coming out narrative I have specified involves a project that is objectively valuable for its own sake and because one gains self-knowledge. Moreover, in this case, undertaking the project of coming out is one's own, since it is of one's own volition to share this aspect of oneself with one's friends and family. One was not forced to undertake this project. This project also involves the human capacities of having self-awareness, questioning one's internalized beliefs, and exercising compassion for oneself during the slow process, among other capacities. Finally, even if one's relationships are negatively affected in the process, this coming out narrative positively changes the agent and outweighs the negative changes, since one feels better about oneself by accepting oneself and one finds community with other LGBTQ+ individuals. So, through examples, I have argued a meaningful narrative is necessary for a narrative to increase one's well-being.

Section IV: Conclusion

In Section IA, I began by explaining the debate about which things increase or decrease a person's well-being. Afterwards, I assume that some things increase one's well-being, even if one neither desires it (or would desire it) nor believes it is not good for one. That is, I assume that some things are good for someone objectively. After explaining the predominant theories of well-being, in Section IB, I present and ultimately reject Helena de Bres's argument of how narratives that are true and adhere to a set of salient narrative conventions are objective goods,

since I argue that they only increase one's well-being instrumentally or indirectly. I then complete Section I by presenting David Velleman's argument that the narrative of a person's life is one of these objective things that can increase or decrease one's well-being. I also respond to Johan Brännmark's denial of the existence of momentary well-being and consequently, his denial of Velleman's thought experiment for narrative value. The rest of the thesis is focused around how a narrative can positively contribute to one's well-being. In Section IIA, I explain Rosati's description of a narrative and point out some of its limitations. In Section IIB, I then present her conditions that a narrative must be chosen or internalized, affirming, and making one's failings nearly irrelevant to increase one's well-being. I then add the condition of truth as necessary for a narrative to positively contribute to one's well-being. Finally, in Section III, I briefly explain what meaningfulness involves and use part of Kauppinen's account of a meaningful narrative to argue that a narrative needs to be meaningful in order to increase one's well-being as a whole. While I accept most of his criteria for a meaningful narrative, I reject that one needs to be irreplaceable for one's narrative to increase one's well-being and show that non-projects can make for meaningful narratives as well.

In this thesis, I have explored whether and how one's narrative can increase one's well-being and what criteria are necessary for one's narrative to make a positive contribution to one's well-being. As one's narrative is one of the things that can increase one's well-being, aiming for a good narrative can be something worthwhile to pursue. Even when one's life is going badly and one's efforts are not paying off, there can be another reason to persist— one may eventually come away with a good narrative. As the debate on narrative value continues, one can look to assess which common narrative tropes meet the necessary conditions to increase one's well-being. One can also analyze how narratives that increase one's well-being actually apply to

people. Helen Small has suggested that a narrative of progress is limited to few people given that many people's lives end in decline at old age (100).

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my thesis readers, Rivka Weinberg and Julie Tannenbaum, for their sharp comments, time spent reading drafts, and support throughout the process. Throughout my time at Scripps, I have learned so much about philosophy, thinking clearly, and the kinds of people we should be. I would also like to thank my friends and family for their encouragement and for giving me the opportunities that I have today.

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