

## Thinking Makes it so; A Defence of Narrative Reflection as the Appropriate Measure of Worthwhile Life

### *Abstract;*

*If the unexamined life is not worth living, is the examined life necessarily worth living? And what are we to say if our mode of examination is flawed? Given the proliferation of research highlighting the biases, flaws and heuristics which are operational when we engage in evaluative judgements, the second question becomes not an obtuse irrelevance, but rather a pertinent and critical issue. Furthermore, with an increasing body of work suggesting that life is not in fact worth beginning or living, the first question takes on a greater urgency. This essay attempts to answer the question of where we are to locate the guarantor of a life being worth living; that is to say, whether or not we can be wrong as to the judgements we make with regards the worthwhileness of our own lives. Taking it as axiomatic that "worth", with regards to a life, is something internal to the life in question, I show how one could suggest that we can indeed be misguided in our evaluations, before demonstrating that such a position is untenable, in that it rests upon flawed conceptions as to what constitutes a self to whom a life could be worth living. I put forward the argument that the worth of a life can be found within the moment that I call 'narrative reflection', which is the moment where the subject evaluates his situation and condition. This moment is elevated to utmost importance in my account due to the fact that it is itself constitutive of the self, and thus an active part of variable within the life being examined. After replying to a series of conceivable objections, I draw out some tentative implications which this depiction of worthwhile lives leads to.*

Could we be *wrong* about whether our lives are worth living? Seeing as we generally conceive of something having 'worth' by virtue of some fact or attribute to itself (Joske, 2004; Metz, 2012), we might conclude that a life's worth could only be known by the person whose life is under discussion, and thus that it could only be they who could be right about such a question. However, just as we are often mistaken about the world around us (in cases such as optical illusions, for example), it is possible that we could be equally misguided as to the world within us, which gives rise to the concern that we may indeed be mistaken as to worth of our lives. Throughout this essay, I shall call 'the objective stance' that set of considerations which are united by an understanding that there is some sense in which an external measure of internal value is needed for an accurate analysis of the 'worthwhileness' of a life. I will argue

against these positions, instead advocating a narrative understanding of lives worth living which can better account for our own sense of selfhood, as well as our ethical intuitions with regards to worthwhile lives. After first presenting a typical understanding of how an objective stance would appeal to a life's worth, I will show that we are justified in holding that a life is worthwhile so long as the life in question's self-reflections consider such to be the case.

### **The objective stance**

David Benatar, in his anti-natalist tract *Better Never to Have Been*, asserts that life is characterised more by bad than good, despite acknowledging that most people feel otherwise (2006, pg60-92). He accounts for his conclusion's counter-intuitive nature by appealing to the misguided means through which we evaluate our lives, implicitly suggesting that there is a more accurate reflection of how worthwhile our lives are, reflection which is inaccessible to the self (though still based on considerations as to his own internal states). If we are to consider 'worth' as identifying something internal, how could we conceive of a measurement which would be external to the individual, yet have his internal attributes and states as its object? Kahneman's 'objective happiness measure' (2003) presents us with a possible solution to this question, in that it measures subject's internal states while measuring the data acquired through means unavailable to subjective introspection. In contrast with earlier attempts to analyse the quality of individual's lives, by asking participants to reflect upon their lives, objective happiness monitors the valence of a subject's current affect, averaging all these valences out across a set period. Theoretically, we can conceive of a situation whereby we could apply such a measure to an entire life, and thus come to an understanding of whether it is reasonable to consider the life worthwhile based upon the average of the aggregated affect valences, being either positive or negative.

Is this an improvement upon self-reflective measures? Certainly, it could be argued that it is a more accurate reflection of well-being and worthwhileness throughout the life. The main core of this suggestion lies in the fact that the objective happiness measure tracks what we could consider to be of primary importance to individual lives, on the understanding that it is a truism to say that we are concerned with how we are feeling at any given moment, while it is not the case that we frequently reflect upon our existence as a whole; indeed, we are more likely to have no thoughts at all at any given moment than we are to have thoughts about our selves in the strict sense (Crossley 2000, pg5). Thus, to give self-reflection pre-eminence as a guide to internal worth is misguided, since it is an activity which occupies only a

small portion of our lives. Thus, even though most people, when asked about whether their lives were worthwhile, give positive accounts (Sharot 2012, pg87), this only has tangential relation to their true worth. In this sense, self-appraisals of subjective happiness should not be considered as facts, but rather as “fallible estimates of an objective true score” (Kahneman 2003, pg22).

What makes subjective self-reflection fallible? We can look at some mechanisms through which our self-evaluations operate, of two classes; biases and heuristics. Our recollections are characterised by a bias toward optimism, in that we tend to recall positive events before negative events when prompted (Matlin and Gawron, 1979), and the affective intensity of pleasant memories fades less than negative recollections (Skowronski et. al 2003; Thompson et. al 1997). These two psychological tendencies help to ensure that reflecting is typically characterised by a positive valence. Furthermore, in our orientation toward the future, we have a remarkably robust “tendency to overestimate the likelihood of favourable future outcomes and to underestimate the likelihood of unfavourable outcomes” a phenomenon termed ‘the optimism bias’ (Bracha and Brown, pg1; Sharot, 2012). We can see how this could impact upon our reasonable desire to continue a life, given that our expectations as to what is in store for us are so systematically (irrationally?) prone to positive error. Thus, it is conceivable that one would acknowledge that their past was predominantly marked by negative experiences, but erroneously consider the rest of one’s life worth living or capable of mitigating previous suffering, and resultantly, ascribe life a positive appraisal. Thus, in our temporal orientation toward life, we are in some sense ‘nearer’ to positive than to negative affect.

Furthermore, the ‘better than average’ effect (Alicke and Govorun, 2005), through which we overstate our own abilities and good qualities, could skew our judgements as to being reasonably pleased or satisfied with our lives, seeing as happiness and well-being have been shown to be greatly influenced by relative positioning with relation to others (Sharot 2012, pg70-71; Shwarz and Strack, 2003, pg70-74). On top of these biases, we often tend, when undertaking self-reflection, to utilise heuristics which frame our thought and thus our conclusions. One striking example of this is the huge correlation that is seen when subjects are asked about their dating life before they are asked to rate their life satisfaction, as opposed to the significantly lower correlation when the order is reversed (Kahneman, 2011, pg101-2, 399-402). The implication here is that the subjects are using their answer to the previous question as a cue with which to consider how well their lives are going. By tracking individuals current affect at random intervals, without demanding reflective biases, we would get a more accurate picture of whether a life is characterised more by

good and bad, and derive a conclusion as to the worth of the life from this total sum<sup>1</sup>.

### **Narrative Reflection; a defence of self-appraisal**

However, though this approach to 'worth' might be logically pleasing, perhaps even considered as having added heft through its appreciation of developments in modern psychology, in fact it is deeply flawed, as well as psychologically naïve. The first reason we should reject the objective stance is that it places too much value upon affective states. We can see that, although pleasurable feelings may be central to whether life is worthwhile, it's not the pleasurable states *in themselves* which make life worthwhile, but rather pleasurable states of a certain nature. An illustration to such effect is Robert Nozick's 'experience machine' (1974, pg42-45). This thought experiment asks us whether we would decide to plug into a machine which could give us intensely pleasurable experiences and allow us to conceive of ourselves as doing all manner of wonderful things, although we would only be sitting within the machine. The consensus since Nozick's posing of the question has been that most people would not plug into the machine<sup>2</sup>, showing that pleasurable subjective states in themselves are not all that we desire. This is not to say that pleasure is not important to us, but simply that it is an explanation for what we desire, as opposed to being the direct object of said desires. To this degree, there seems to be something pivotal to accounting for the worth of a life which the objectivist stance overlooks.

What could be internal to a life, which would grant it status as being 'worth living', if not affectivity itself? To see what it could be, let us first take note of a commonality between the previously elucidated objective stance and what I will call the 'narrative reflection' account; that the life as a whole is the unit of moral concern. The difference between the two accounts, as will become clear, is that the objective account considers the worthwhile to be some ratio or some grouping of positive and negative units, whereas as the narrative reflection, on my account, will consider the life to be an irreducible single unit, and thus will ground its ethical salience in the actual nature of said life, psychological warts and all.

---

<sup>1</sup> This is not to say that an objective stance is tied to the notion that pain and pleasure are symmetrical; in fact, many have argued that since 'bad' is stronger than 'good' (Baumeister et. al, 2001; Royzman, and Rozin, 2001), that pleasures must outweigh pain quite comprehensively for life to be worthwhile (Shriver, 2014; Mayerfeld, 1996).

<sup>2</sup> Although there have been those who have suggested that we would (Cahn and Vitrano, 2013)

What seems most troubling about the objective stance is that it enacts a degree of violence upon the life by cutting it into blocks of experience. When we talk about the worth of a life, we are not talking about an undifferentiated block of time, but rather we are talking about a particular life which progresses in linear fashion throughout said block of time. A life can only be worthwhile *for* someone, and thus, without an understanding of the type of thing which that someone is, we cannot begin to properly understand how a life could be deemed worthwhile. The objective stance considers the temporal character of a life in the form of what Paul Ricoeur calls discrete time; proceeding through an undifferentiated character of “and then?, and then?, and then?” This conceptualisation of time is to be properly contrasted to ‘human time’<sup>3</sup>, which is characterised by an integration and closure of sorts, which occurs during self-reflection through a process of “emplotment” (Crossley 2000, pg48-49). It is this act of emplotment which gives a narrative (or a self, in this particular context) its particular character.

This process of emplotment takes place within the moments of ‘narrative reflection’, a process through which a self is formed and endures, and to which questions of worth can be attached. Indeed, it has been suggested that even the attempt to understand questions of persons or identities abstracted from their narrative form is itself mistaken, if not unintelligible, seeing as intelligibility is inherently intertwined with narrative (Zahavi 2005, pg106-110; Polkinghorne 1988; Crossley 2000). While these acts of narrative reflection are not frequent within our lives in terms of the actual duration of reflection, they are integral in that they shape the meaning of the past and the future which an individual has, and in this sense they involve the entire duration of one’s life. Husserl relates this mode of temporal emplotment to our experience of a melody; we do not encounter the notes of a melody in isolation, but rather within the broader structure (Crossley 2000, pg48). One could add that one does not evaluate the beauty of a melody by its constitutive notes, but rather as a unity.

Why is this more temporally dynamic understanding of human lives more viable than the objective stance? Even aside from its appreciation of the life in question’s

---

<sup>3</sup> We can look at Kahneman’s findings that the more time a parent spends with their children, the less subjective well-being they will experience (Sharot, 76-77) and ask whether a parent would give up their child were they to regain all the subjective well-being they lost. I suggest it is unlikely, and we might tellingly call such a trade *inhumane*.

character, I think it has greater explanatory power with regards our moral intuitions as to what constitutes a worthwhile life. Here, I align myself with Tim Bayne when he critiques David Benatar's asymmetry argument<sup>4</sup> as overly reductionist. It seems plausible that when thinking about creating people, we tend to reflect upon the decision within the framework of good and bad lives as opposed to good and bad in and of themselves (Bayne, 2010). As Benatar himself highlights, our thinking about what is good and bad for lives is constrained by what is to be expected of a human life, i.e. *sub specie humanitatis* (2006, pg81-86). Thus, when a child is struck by debilitating illness at 15, it is considered a profound tragedy, whereas if the same thing happens to a 90 year old, our reaction is not nearly so acute, because we have no expectation of her being healthy and buoyant until the age of 240, as we might were we to judge *sub specie aeternitatis*. Thus, our thinking about good and bad themselves are mediated through the broad narrative framework of what a human life typically consists of, a fact that largely helps to explain why suffering can, upon integration into a life narrative, take on a redeeming, or formative character (Ozolins, 2003; Frykman et.al, 1998). Thus, it is not that a life will have suffering that is of brute moral concern, but rather whether a life will, *as a life*, will be one of suffering.

Through this narrative understanding of worthwhile *lives*, we can explain why it is that the positioning and trajectory of lives matter with regards to our evaluations of how good or bad they were (Benatar 2006, pg61-62). For example, let us say there are two individuals, A and B. Each lives for eighty years and experience the same level of wealth, success, health and happiness over the sum total of their eighty years. However, A starts life healthy, wealthy, does well at school and is a happy child, but takes to alcohol and becomes poor, depressed and alone, whereas B started out in a tough life in poverty, never reaching school because he was inflicted with a terrible illness. Through sheer willpower and determination, he eventually becomes a success, both personally and professionally, and is much loved and full of love for others. I think most people would agree that B had a better life, despite their sum total of utility being the same across their lives.

Why is it reasonable to judge B to have a better life than A? It has to do with our narrative understanding of good lives, which involves thinking about our temporal orientations. We are temporally biased towards the future, in that where pain is

---

<sup>4</sup> Benatar (2006, pg18-59) suggests there is a basic asymmetry between pleasure and pain in considerations of genetical questions, which to him suggests that avoiding the creation of pain is a good thing, whereas the avoidance of the creation of pleasure is not a good thing

located in a life is important to us, in our own lives or in judging others<sup>5</sup> (Parfit, 1984, pg165-167). What this means is that, when thinking about these two lives we can imagine a time when B has nothing to look forward to but good times, where he has left his past behind, whereas we cannot look at A' life and only find happiness lying ahead. Seeing how the narrative of a life and lives in general accounts for the degree of worth to which we attach it, it seems only natural to appeal to the moment of narration and narrative orientation (i.e. the moment of self-reflection) as the proper measure as to the worth of any given life.

### **Objections to the Narrative Reflection account**

It seems to me as though this narrational subjectivity is a far more conducive approach to understanding how a life can be discussed as being 'worthwhile', and our moment of reflection a far more appropriate tool for calibration as to how worthwhile any given life is. One definition given by a previous philosopher which, on the face of it seems to align itself with this characterisation is that given by Thaddeus Metz, who suggests that for a life to be considered worthwhile, it must be "reasonable to exhibit pro-attitudes toward it such as appreciating it, desiring it, being glad about it and being pleased about it" in virtue of various facts internal to the life in question (Metz, 2012, pg446). This definition, much like the above 'narrational' analysis, gives an elevated role to the act of self-reflection, which I have suggested is constitutive of the self *to whom* a life can be considered worthwhile. As has already been suggested, for one to exhibit any attitudes at all towards a life is to already become embroiled in the act of self-evaluation, and thus the study of its narrative trajectory, seeing as the life must be comprehended through its narrative structure before it can be the object of such attitudes. However, this definition also hints at what could be a potential weakness in this proposal; namely whether it is *reasonable* to hold these pro-attitudes.

By calling into question the 'reasonable' aspect of our evaluative judgements, we can conceive of a series of objections which might be levelled against the exalted position of this narrative reflection. The first objection is that there is something unreasonable with regards to our contextualised, asymmetrical weightings of comparative phenomena, that the centrality of narrative trajectory within appraisals

---

<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that Parfit himself considers these biases ethically problematic

of worth are not merited, and that our asymmetrical weightings of the value of life A and B are not reasonable, as has previously been suggested. Here, we could combine the arguments of Singer (2005) - who suggests that our moral intuitions, due to their evolutionary contingency, *in and of themselves*, do not carry moral weight - with some of Derek Parfit's reflections upon our bias toward the future, which we have already touched upon. From this angle, our appeals to ethical intuitions are not valid grounds for defending a position, and our conception of a life's narrative trajectory being as being morally salient is not only contingent, but wrong, in that it takes a pain at time T to be less important than a pain of equal intensity at time T+1, simply because time T has passed and time T+1 is in the future.

A second related, but different, objection could critique the centrality of narrative reflection as unreasonable, this time from the perspective that it could be considered unreasonable to discount large amounts of one's existence from an ethical discussion. It seems obvious to say that none of us have full knowledge of our existential situation, and when we reflect upon our past (and indeed, the prospects of our future) only a tiny proportion of what either was or will be experienced is considered. In this sense, to place the ultimate worth of a life within infrequent moments of introspection, at the cost of moments of pleasure and pain which were of immediate concern to us at any given time, we are dismissing the vast majority of someone's lived experience as ethically insignificant.

The first objection fails because it appeals to a type of life which is not accessible. We cannot dissociate the nature of human lives (and, thus, their value and worth) from their temporal character. As Kant highlighted so long ago, we cannot even conceive of a world without time passing; it is simply beyond our capabilities (1990, pg28). In much the same way, since 'ought' implies 'can', it seems incoherent to suggest that we *should* somehow change our temporal orientation with regards human lives. Kaufman gives an account of how we cannot conceive of ourselves as having significantly different orientations to either pain or time than we currently do, an account which I find persuasive (2004). Since our forward thinking bias has a clear selective advantage, and is such a deep-seated aspect of ourselves, it seems implausible to suggest we could get rid of it. More damning, however, is the realisation that, were it conceivable to change our temporal orientation to be temporally neutral, it should be conceptually possible to have a bias toward the past. However, since we generally recognise 'will' as a central aspect of a life and necessary for the presence of a self, or an agent, we cannot imagine someone with a past bias, since to be a self or an agent involves making decisions and planning

among other things. Thus, alteration of our attitude to time would altogether negate the self (Kaufman, 2004).

While it could still be claimed that the self should not be a morally relevant unit, and that this is a similarly contingent intuition, and that, for example, only pain or pleasure matter, this is irrelevant to our discussion. The issue at hand is where the site of measuring a life's worth could be located, so, for our discussion, it is taken as axiomatic that there is some sense in which *a life as a unit* could be worthwhile. Furthermore, it seems generally accepted that while states of pleasure or pain may indeed be intrinsic values (Goldstein, 1989), they cannot have any importance other than that which is tied to those who experience them, thus making an agent ontologically prior (Goldman, 2008).

The second objection seems very humanistic, in that it makes a life's every lived experience morally salient, the very opposite is the case. Perhaps it is important first to recognise that within the narrative account, every individual moment within someone's life does indeed matter for them *as they are experiencing it*, and that every moment has *the capacity* to become ethically significant. However, without an understanding of a life's trajectory as a whole, there is no significance for individual moments *in and of themselves*, and thus, once they are in the past and forgotten, I suggest that they *no longer* carry ethical weight in terms of what it is reasonable to appraise. To put it another way; it does not seem unreasonable to disregard a moment which has already happened, which has no bearing on anybody's present or future state, which has had no significance for any agent, in an appraisal as to the worthwhile. To insist upon the ethical significance of someone's entire life is actually akin to denying him the opportunity to express his selfhood and self-forming character, by refusing him the capacity to choose what it was that was important in his own life, what made him who he was, and what made it all worthwhile (or not). Related to this is Paul Ricoeur's understanding of forgetting as a resource, without which we would not be able to create our own selves to the extent which we do (Dessingué 2011).

Having countered these two arguments relating to the criteria of the 'reasonability' of the narrative reflection account, there is a final objection which could be made on such grounds, which questions our conception of what is reasonable in general; an objector could suggest that our humanistic understanding of reasonable self-appraisal is simply a means of smuggling the conclusion in with the problem. While we have previously argued for the importance of the character of human life for our judgements of what is good and bad, to do so for what is reasonable or not is a

different challenge. From this perspective, perhaps we are too weakly reasons-responsive to be capable of enacting valid self-assessments, given the psychological dispositions which impact upon us, as well as the extent to which we rely upon heuristics to come to such judgements (Kahneman 2011).

This third objection is quite strong, upon examining what it relies upon. As previously stated, we come to conclusions as to a life's worth with regards its internal qualities *sub specie humanitatis* (as we normally do) or *sub species aeternitatis* (a measure Benatar advocates) (2006, pg81-86). The reason I consider it invalid to understand the internal 'goodness' or 'badness' *sub specie aeternitatis*, is that, without a limited framework, we can always imagine a spectrum of pleasure and pain without end in either direction, making any comparison with our state moot, seeing as it would be possible to consider ourselves both infinitely better off and infinitely worse off than we could be. We can make the same two comparisons (*sub specie humanitatis* and *sub specie aeternitatis*) with knowledge and reason-responsiveness, however, and this time we cannot dismiss the relevance of comparing our lot *sub species aeternitatis*. It is not inconceivable to compare ourselves with some being which has full knowledge of its situation, something akin to Laplace's Daemon, and thus there is the possibility of comparing our lot with such a condition.

There are problems, however. If a being had this full knowledge or absolute strong reasons-responsiveness, which we may consider ideal for making such self-appraisals, what difference would it make as to the accuracy, or relevance of its assessments? If it is to take into account irrelevant, trivial moments of a life which most people forget, and to place them alongside milestones such as finding love or making a million euro, is this more reasonable? I have previously suggested that temporal discounting is a valid and reasonable practice, but I did so with the implicit assumption that one couldn't possibly remember all that one had lived through. If such a feat of recall were possible, however, the moment of narrative reflection would be problematic; a maximally reasonable agent would have to rethink its entire future potentialities as well as its entire past if it were to come to 'maximally' reasonable self-assessments. Such a self-assessment is inconceivable, once we apply our previous discussion of time to this agent's actions; he would forever be contemplating the past and the future, and contemplating his contemplation, creating a vicious cycle. In order to act, as well as in order to judge and evaluate, we have, at some stage, to stop thinking. When it is that we choose to stop thinking, will, ultimately, be an arbitrary point. Thus, it seems like the act of forgetting, as well as the act of ignoring is, in a sense, a constitutive element of self-knowledge (Brown 2003). Hence, we do not need an agent to be aware or conscious of its entire life

when making appraisals of its life's worthwhile character. For a self-evaluation of the worth of one's life to be reasonable, extraneous details may be legitimately ignored, left aside and ordered in significance. What is important is that there are reasons presented and considered, and that it is the narrative voice of the self which is presenting and considering (Crossley 2000, pg53).

## **Implications and Conclusions**

What does this mean for our thinking about worthwhile lives? For one thing, it takes in full seriousness Socrates' assertion that an unexamined life is not worth living, attaching great normative significance to the act of contemplation. To take one example, we might well come to the conclusion that Wittgenstein did indeed have a wonderful life, as he said at his deathbed, despite his the outwardly miserable impression of his life (Hall, 2010). Understanding that our conception of the human life as a narrative form gives shape to what we hold to be worthwhile, we are given reason to exercise caution in our undertaking of seminal life transitions; an example would be not getting married too rashly, particularly given the positive correlation between successful marriages and happiness (Argyle 2003, 359-362). As well as this, perhaps it liberates us of a tendency to take our entire lives too seriously; a life can be wholly worthwhile regardless of whether one accomplishes nothing on a particular day, or even over particular year.

These considerations also have relevance for deciding whether or not to have children, and other such 'genetical' issues (Heyd, 1992). Though there are many reasons why one might consider not having children, as well as having children, were the decision to be made based upon the child's prospective well-being, we can see that the cases where we would be ethically wrong to bring a child into existence are few, given the optimism biases which typically characterise our moments of narrative self-reflection. On this account, it would be defensible to bring a child into existence, even if it were known that its life would be considered 'bad' from the objective stance, so long as the act of narrative reflection were deemed positive by the individual reflecting, or could be predicted to be as such.

To bring out the dynamic, partial character of the narrative reflection account of worth, I first presented what I called the objective stance as to how to gauge a life's

worth. Following this, I gave an outline as to what the nature of the narrative reflection account consists of, and why it is both more robust and more attractive as a position than the objective stance. I then posed some potential objections to the narrative account, which focused on the extent to which it could arrive at a *reasonable* measure of worth. These I subsequently refuted, on the grounds of their having faulty understandings of what it is to be a person, and what it is to enact a reasonable self-appraisal. I have suggested that the narrative reflection account of a life's worth is logically robust, as well as having the benefit of allowing us to hold on to our intuitions about the values of subjective states, good lives and bad lives, and the significance of our temporal orientations. Ultimately, this approach, both in its understanding of what it is to have a worthwhile *life*, as well as a *worthwhile* life, departs little from the words of the bard when he wrote; "there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so" (Shakespeare 1969, pg134).

## Works Cited

Alicke, Mark D., and Olesya Govurun. "The Better-Than-Average Effect". *The Self in Social Judgement*. Ed Mark D. Alicke, David A Dunning, Joachim Krueger. Psychology Press; New York. Pg85-108. 2005

Argyle, Michael. "Causes and Correlates of Happiness". *Well-Being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology*. ed. Ed Diener, Daniel Kahneman, and Norbert Schwarz. Russel Sage Foundation; New York. pg353-373. 2003.

Baumeister, Roy F., Ellen Bratslavsky, Catrin Finkenauer, and Kathleen D. Vohs. "Bad is Stronger than Good". *Review of General Psychology* Vol 5, No.4, pg323-370. 2001.

Bayne, Tim. *In Defence of Genethical Parity. Procreation & Parenthood; The Ethics of Bearing and Rearing Children*. Ed David Archard and David Benatar. Oxford University Press; New York. pg31-56. 2010.

Benatar, David. *Better Never to Have Been; The Harm of Coming into Existence*. Oxford University Press; Oxford. 2006.

Bracha, Anat and Donald J. Brown. "Affective Decision Making; A Theory of Working Bias". *Working Paper Series*; Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, no. 10-16. 2010

Brown, Rachel. "The Emplotted Self; Self-Deception and Self-Knowledge". *Philosophical Papers*, Vol 32. No. 3. Pg279-300. 2003

Cahn, Steven M, and Christine Vitrano. "Choosing the Experience Machine." *Philosophy in the Contemporary World*. Vol. 20, No. 1, pg52-58. 2013

Crossley, Michele L. *Introducing narrative Psychology; Self, Trauma, and the Construction of Meaning*. Open University Press. Philadelphia. 2000

Dessingué, Alexandre. "Towards a Phenomenology of Memory and Forgetting." *Ricouer Studies*. Vol. 2, No.1, pg168-178. 2011

Frykman, Jonas, Nadia Seremetakis, & Susanne Ewert. *Identities in Pain*. Nordic Academic Press; Lund. 1998.

Gawron, V. J, and M. W. Matlin. "Individual differences in Pollyannaism." *Journal of Personality Assessment*. Vol. 43, No.4, pg411-412. 1979

Goldman, Alan H. "The Case against Objective Values." *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*, Vol. 11, No. 5, pg 507-524. Print. 2008

Goldstein, Irwin. "Pleasure and Pain; Unconditional Intrinsic Values." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. Vol. 50, No.2, pg255-276. 1989

Hall, Ronald L. "It's a Wonderful Life: Reflections on Wittgenstein's Last Words." *Philosophical Investigations*. Vol.33, No.4, pg285-302. 2010

Heyd, David. *Genethics*. University of California Press; California. 1992

Joske, W. D. "Philosophy and the Meaning of Life." *Life, Death & Meaning; Key Philosophical Readings on the Big Questions*. Ed David Benatar. Rowman& Littlefield Publishers; Maryland. pg49-62. 2004.

Kahneman, Daniel. "Objective Happiness". *Well-Being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology*. ed. Ed Diener, Daniel Kahneman, and Norbert Schwarz. Russel Sage Foundation; New York. pg3-25. 2003.

Kahneman, Daniel. *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. Penuign Books; London. 2011.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. J. M. D. Meiklejohn. Prometheus Books; New York. 1990.

Kaufman, Frederik. "Pre-Vital and Post-Mortem Non-Existence." *Life, Death & Meaning; Key Philosophical Readings on the Big Questions*. Ed David Benatar . Rowman& Littlefield Publishers; Maryland. pg241-264. 2004

Mayerfeld, Jamie. "The Moral Asymmetry of Happiness and Suffering." *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, Vol 34. No.3 Pg317-338. 1996

Metz, Thaddeus. "The Meaningful and the Worthwhile; Clarifying the Relationships." *The Philosophical Forum*. Vol. 43, No. 4, pg435-448. 2012

Nozick, Robert. *Anarchy, State and Utopia*. Basic Books; New York. Pg42-45. 1974

Ozolins, John. "Suffering: Valuable or Just Useless Pain?" *Sophia*. Vol. 42, No.2. pg53-77. 2003

Parfit, Derek. *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford University Press; New York. 1984.

Polkinghorne, D. *Narrative Knowing and the Human Sciences*. SUNY Press; Albany. 1988

Royzman, Edward B., and Paul Rozin. "Negativity Bias, Negativity Dominance and Contagion." *Personality and Social Psychology Review*. Vol. 5, No. 4. Pg296-320. 2001

Shakespeare, William. "Hamlet Prince of Denmark". *Complete Pelican Shakespeare; The Tragedies*. Penguin Books; Middlesex. pg118-164. 1969

Sharot, Tali. *The Optimism Bias; Why We're Wired to Look on the Bright Side*. Constable & Robinson; London. 2012.

Shriver, Adam. "The Asymmetrical Contributions of Pleasure and Pain to Subjective Well-Being." *Review of Philosophy and Psychology*. Vol. 5, No.1. 135-153. 2014

Shwarz, Norbert, and Fritz Strack. "Reports of Subjective Well-Being: Judgemental Process and their Methodological Implications." *Well-Being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology*. ed. Ed Diener, Daniel Kahneman, and Norbert Schwarz. Russel Sage Foundation; New York. Pg61-84. 2003.

Singer, Peter. "Ethics and Intuitions." *The Journal of Ethics*, Vol. 9, No. 3/4, pg331-352. 2005

Skowronski, John J., Charles P. Thompson, and W. Richard Walker. "Life Is Pleasant – and Memory Helps to keep it That Way!" *Review of General Psychology*. Vol.7, No. 2, 203-210. 2003

Thompson, Charles O., Rodney J. Vogl, and W. Richard Walker. "Autobiographical Memory; Unpleasantness Fades Faster Than Pleasantness Over Time." *Applied Cognitive Psychology*. Vol. 11, No. 5, pg399-413. 1997

Zahavi, Dan. *Subjectivity and Selfhood*. MIT Press; Cambridge. 2005.