

Welfare, Meaning, and Worth

by

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

Ch.1 Introduction

Ch.2 Five Test for Lives Worth Living

Ch.3 An Objective List Theory of Worth

Ch.4 A Mental Statist Account of Welfare

Ch.5 The Good Cause Account of Meaning

Ch.6 Against Welfarism about Morality

Ch.7 Is Life Worth Living?

Bibliography

Ch.1 - Introduction

Introduction

Near the end of Plato's *Apology*, shortly after the Athenian jury reaches a guilty verdict, Socrates says that he would rather die than forego philosophy: "I say that it is the greatest good for a man to discuss virtue every day and those other things about which you hear me conversing and testing myself and others, for the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being."¹

Although I admire Socrates' brave defense of philosophy, I think that he is likely mistaken. I am not entirely sure what Socrates means, and I will not try to settle the issue here, but on a plausible interpretation he radically overstates the importance of philosophical inquiry.² It's not just that I enjoy garden tomatoes and Texas barbeque too much. Rather, it simply defies credibility to suggest that the overwhelming majority of people throughout human history have lived worthless lives due to insufficient self-examination. Fred Feldman voices a similar concern:

Surely there are plenty of unreflective, philosophically unsophisticated people who have been happy, and whose lives have been morally good, beneficial to others, and good in themselves for those who lived them. To say otherwise, it seems to me, is to suggest that if you are not happy in the peculiar way preferred by some philosophers, then your life is not

¹ *Apology*, 38a.

² My hesitation concerns how to interpret these remarks in light of his likely commitment to the unity of the virtues and intellectualism. See: Penner (1992). If self-examination cannot fall without toppling all the other virtues, then there is a plausible case to be made for the bold claim. I will not be exploring this issue here.

worth living. This seems to me to be an astonishing view (whether Socrates' or not).³

I agree. My principal goal in this book is to develop a more plausible account of what makes a life worth living.⁴

Socrates' claim about the lives of non-philosophers is contentious, but it does not seem at all controversial to say that some lives are not worth living. For instance, most intuitively, a life that significantly advances horrendous evil is not worth living. Hitler, Pol Pot, and Stalin lived worthless lives. These are not instances of "the good life." No matter how good Hitler's life might have been for him, he did not lead a worthwhile life; he did not lead a choice worthy life. Killing millions of people is hideously evil. And, most plausibly, moral repugnance is sufficient to sap a life of positive worth. But it is not the only thing to do so. Intense pain can suffice. Lives spent in persistent, incapacitating agony are not worth living. There's no controversy here. By any plausible account, they are *lives worth avoiding* (LWA).

There are clear cases of lives not worth living. And there are not so clear cases. Worth appears to come in degrees. Lives entirely consumed by meaningless activities, such as counting blades of grass, collecting rubber bands, or making handwritten copies of *War and Peace*, appear to be less worth living than those spent in pursuit of valuable ends, but it is not so clear that they are not worth living.⁵ Perhaps the same is true of unexamined lives. I think this overstates the importance of self-examination, but there is most likely something lacking in the unexamined life.

In the first part of this book, I develop a theory that accounts for these intuitions. My goal

³ Feldman (2006, p.15, n.6).

⁴ Although this quote suggests that Feldman has in mind a theory of worth that includes both welfare and moral worth, he does not offer such a theory. He defends a theory of well-being; I defend a theory of worth. I argue that the two notions are conceptually distinct.

⁵ Rawls (1971, p.432) and Wolf (1997, p.211).

is to provide a theory of worth and to show where such a concept fits in the taxonomy of the axiology of lives — the theory of the value of lives.⁶ The central thesis of this book is that there is more to what makes a life worth living than welfare. I suspect that this is a widely accepted view, but it hasn't been appropriately recognized in the philosophical literature. In what follows, I make the distinction clear, argue for its importance, and explore some significant implications.

Most fundamentally, I argue that the notion of worth captures matters of importance that no plausible theory of welfare can account for. Worth is best thought of as a higher-level kind of value. I defend an *objective list theory* (OLT) of worth — lives worth living are net high in various objective goods.⁷ In what follows, I try to put some meat on these bones. Not only do I defend an list of some of the goods, I also defend a set of bads, a set of things that detract from the worth of a life.

⁶ Only a few have drawn a distinction between what makes a life worth living and what makes a life meaningful. As far as I can tell, Baier (1988) provides the only sustained discussion of the distinction. Baier (1997, pp.67-69) also makes a few passing remarks on worth. Apart from this, only Trisel (2007) argues for the distinction, though he offers what appears to be a welfarist notion of worth. Metz (2007, p.213) makes a clear statement of the difference, but provides little defense. Metz (2002, p.788, n.10) also briefly notes the distinction. Blumenfeld (2009, p.8, n.2) seconds Metz's proposal. Haack (2001) proposes that we ditch the concept of meaning for worth. She does not explain the conceptual difference. Wollheim (1984, pp.444-8) proposes a distinction between a life worth living and a worthwhile life. I decline adopting this terminology, since there is better, more familiar conceptual machinery: his distinction closely tracks that between welfare and meaning. Other commentators, such as Wolf (2010), understandably interchange concepts such as "the good life," (pp.12, 52, and 118) a life that would seem a benefit (pp.21, 23, and 27), the "fully successful life" (p.32), the "fully flourishing life" (p.12), and the life good for the one who lives it (p.32). Since she thinks that the notion is different from self-interest (pp.56, 63, and 116) and happiness (p.109), it appears that we might have in mind a similar notion. By "the good life" Hurka (2011) seems to have in mind a life worth living. He too defends an objective list account. Haybron (2008, p.38) refers to "the good life" as "a choiceworthy life on the whole." This closely tracks the notion I defend. Here I will try to avoid the vexed term "the good life," since some, such as Feldman (2006), use it to refer to a life high in individual welfare, though this usage is somewhat aberrant. Baier (1997, pp.67-9) makes a few passing remarks on worth. McDermott (1991) and Harries (1991) putatively discuss worth, and both are cited as making a contribution to the literature, but neither directly addresses the topic.

⁷ My theory is not meta-ethically agnostic. I assume a robust form of moral realism.

In a suggestive precedent to my view, Shelly Kagan argues that we should distinguish between the value of a life *for* the one who lives it and the value of the life, or, as he puts it, between "me and my life."⁸ Kagan leaves it an open question as to how welfare and the value of a life are related. I offer an explanation of the relation. Although the notion of the value of a life is somewhat more obscure than the notion of a life worth living, I think that they amount to roughly the same thing. As Kagan suggests, I think that there is something morally salient about the worth of a life that cannot be reduced to welfare. The worth of a life is plausibly more important. I offer a novel defense of this view.

Welfare, Meaning, and Worth

I approach the subject of the worth of a life as a mode of evaluating lives. Hence, I am not trying to offer a descriptive theory of a psychological state, such as fulfillment or happiness.⁹ Instead, I am interested in the evaluative concept of worth. Worth is a kind of value that is conceptually distinct from several other ways in which a life might be good.¹⁰ Before we proceed further, it will be useful to consider a few reasons to think that worth is a higher-level form of value, one that encompasses both welfare and meaning. This will help set the stage for the next six chapters.

At this point, we do not need explicit theories of welfare or meaning to establish the conceptual distinctions between worth, welfare, and meaning. We can draw the distinctions by using examples that are part of the core data that theories of welfare and meaning must account

⁸ Kagan (1992; 1994; and 2009, p.257).

⁹ This is not to say that the evaluative notion will not make reference to psychological states. Haybron (2011) makes a similar distinction in regard to happiness. The evaluative notion tracks what is better called well-being. The descriptive concept is that of a psychological state—happiness.

¹⁰ Feldman (2006, pp.8-12) lists five ways in which lives can be good: morally, causally, aesthetically, exemplarily, and prudentially. Sumner (1997, pp.20-25) distinguishes between four kinds of value: aesthetic, perfectionist, ethical, and prudential.

for, that is, data they must explain if they are to be descriptively adequate to everyday practice and not grossly stipulative.

A theory of worth will answer this question: What makes a *life worth living* (LWL)? This is not the same question as what makes a life good *for* the one who lives it.¹¹ A theory that answers the latter question is a theory of well-being (i.e., "welfare" or "prudential value"). The two questions are clearly related and they are often conflated.¹² Perhaps they will have the same answer.¹³ But most likely worth is not strictly a matter of welfare, since one can live a life of great hardship and suffering that might nevertheless be worth living.¹⁴ Prima facie compelling examples abound: The proverbial soldier in a foxhole who throws himself on a grenade to save his comrades does not enhance his welfare. Far from it. But he does improve the worth of his life. Intuitively, he's not made better off by jumping on a grenade; but the value of his life is enhanced.

As we proceed, it is important to keep in mind a distinction between (1) a life worth starting and (2) a life worth continuing. The phrase "a life worth living" is ambiguous.¹⁵ It might mean either. I am concerned with whether life is worth starting, not whether it is merely worth

¹¹ Feldman (2010, pp.161, 167, and 168) suggests that we commonly use the phrase "a life worth living" as roughly synonymous with a life high in individual welfare. I'm not so sure. Nevertheless, I don't think my distinction does the least bit of violence to normal usage. It will just require a bit of tidying up.

¹² This is likely because the phrase "a life worth living" is somewhat ambiguous. I have in mind a general notion of worth. I will try to make this clear as we proceed.

¹³ If it is conceptually possible for one to sacrifice one's own good in the service of other goods without compensatory prudential benefit, then we require an evaluative notion other than welfare.

¹⁴ Darwall (2002, pp.26 and 109 n.5) suggests that a life having worth is an estimable life. This is plausible, but he thinks that the contrast is between welfare and perfectionist value. I disagree. I see no reason to think that worth is a form of perfectionist value. I will not explore this suggestion further.

¹⁵ David Benatar, *Better Never to Have Been: The Harm of Coming into Existence* (2006, New York: Oxford University Press), pp.22-24, notes the ambiguity.

continuing. Clearly, throwing yourself on a grenade is not a great way to make your life worth continuing. The best way to understand the difference is to see it as one of duration. A life worth continuing is one where the period ahead is worth living.¹⁶ A life worth starting is one where the life as a whole is worth living. When I refer to a life worth living, I have in mind the life as a whole.

Worth and well-being are easily confused, as we might say that a life is "worth living *for*" someone. In such a case, we are interested in what's in it *for* the individual. It appears that this usage strictly tracks the notion of welfare or prudential value. Surely welfare is part of what makes a life worth living, but it is not the entire story. When I talk about worth I'm interested in the worth of a life, perhaps in the sense that makes it worthwhile or choice worthy, not merely the worth of the life *for* the one who lives it. This distinction is crucial.

Although we are not always explicit in conversation, the idea of worth I'm discussing is widely recognized. Just as some things that do not promote our self-interest are nevertheless worth doing, some lives low in welfare appear to be worth living.¹⁷ When we wonder whether some activity is worth doing, our only thought isn't "What's in it for me?" The same should hold for lives. Conversely, some lives high in welfare are not worth living. Most plausibly, a supremely happy Hitler does not live a life worth living. It would be highly counterintuitive to suggest otherwise. More needs to be said, but these considerations suggest that worth and welfare are distinct. Not only are they conceptually distinct, they are extensionally non-equivalent. For present purposes, all I intend to show is that there is a conceptual distinction.

¹⁶ Benatar (2006, pp.22-24) thinks that the two require very different standards. David DeGrazia, "Is it wrong to impose the harms of human life? A reply to Benatar," *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics* 331 (2010): 317-331, p.320, questions the need for different standards.

¹⁷ Owen Flanagan, *Self-Expressions: Mind, Morals, and the Meaning of Life* (1996, Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp.3-11, also draws the connection between activities worth doing, or things worth caring about, and lives worth living.

Although we probably implicitly operate with this distinction, it is often blurred. And, more importantly, it isn't adequately appreciated.

Theories of welfare tell us what makes a life good for the one who lives it. A leading theory of welfare called *mental statism* holds that the sole bearers of intrinsic prudential value are mental states, that ultimately the only things that make a life better or worse for the one who lives it are experiences.¹⁸ Hedonism, for instance, is a type of mental statism. It holds that only the mental states of pleasure and pain are intrinsically prudentially valuable.¹⁹ Most controversially, mental statism implies what is known as the *experience requirement* — the claim that what you do not experience cannot hurt you.²⁰ There is a decent consensus, although not without dissenting opinion, that experience machine style examples show that the experience requirement and, by implication, mental statism are false.²¹

The most compelling counterexample to mental statism is Nozick's experience machine.²² I will be returning to this example throughout the book. Although I think it fails to hit its intended target, it has wide-ranging implications for thinking about the value of lives. Nozick asks us to imagine a machine that can simulate a wide array of fantastic experiences. The thought

¹⁸ Kagan (1994 and 1992) confesses his temptation toward mental statism. He later (2009, p.771, n.3) recants.

¹⁹ Parfit (1984, p.493) and Wolf (1997) reverse this distinction. They seem to hold that all forms of mental statism are forms of hedonism.

²⁰ Griffin (1986, p.13). For further discussion see Sumner (1996, pp.127-130). Since the experience requirement is not always presented in the same way, I have chosen to focus on mental statism. Soll (1995), for instance, defends a theory called *experientialism* that has both motivational and broad axiological implications. Mental statism, as I have formulated it, implies only a limited axiological claim about well-being: Something can affect someone's well-being only if it makes an experiential difference for that person. This is not the same as what Dorsey (2011, p.172) might call the endorsement requirement.

²¹ Nozick's (1974, pp.42-5) "Experience Machine" and (1997, p.263) "Mongolian Pornographer", Nagel's (1993, p.64) "Deceived Businessman" and (1993, p.66) "Contented Infant", and Mill's (2002, p.12) "Pig" are the most pressing thought experiments in opposition to mental statism. I consider this full set in chapter four.

²² Nozick (1974, pp.42-5). Moore (1903, p.197, sec.119) considers a similar life of illusion.

experiment gives us, what is by now, a familiar sales pitch: Perhaps you want to write the great American novel. In the experience machine you can have the experience of writing the most celebrated novel in history. Your work will be praised far and wide. Champion athlete, war hero, legendary lover, you name it — in the machine, you will experience any life that you desire. Most important, life in the machine will seem as real as any experience that you have ever had. You will never know the difference. I mean it. When we hook you up to the machine, we'll do you the favor of erasing from your memory the decision to plug in.

Nozick asks us whether given the chance we would step into the machine. Intuitions diverge, but many, if not most, people that I've spoken to decline. Most of us opt out of the machine because we do not merely want to think that we have written the great American novel; we want to write it. We do not merely want to think that we have genuine relationships; we want to form genuine bonds with others. We like to win, but we do not want every game to be fixed in our favor.

Although most non-frivolous, non-terminally ill people would opt out of a life in the experience machine, this does not constitute a decisive objection to mental statism. Yes, the thought experiment clearly shows that we want more than mere experiences, but it doesn't show that things without any experiential impact can affect our well-being. The thought experiment merely confirms what we already know: We desire many things other than our own well-being.²³ Strict psychological egoism is highly implausible. We often non-selfishly desire the good of others. People frequently sacrifice themselves for a cause or for the benefit of those they love. And many people have been known to sacrifice their own well-being for other kinds of goods,

²³ In defense of mental statism, Haslett (1990) appeals to this distinction, as do Goldsworthy (1992), Bradley (2009, p.10), Kawall (1999), and Feldman (2012, pp. 67-72). For additional discussion of this line of argument, see Tännsjö (1998, pp.111-112) and Sumner (1996, pp.96-7).

such as knowledge, contact with reality, moral worth, and meaningfulness.

Most of us think that a life in the experience machine would be meaningless. Insofar as we desire meaningfulness, we will opt out of the machine.²⁴ This does not show that we think that we would be better off — that we would have a higher state of welfare — outside of the machine. Life in the machine simply cannot give us everything that we want. Since we want more than what merely increases our well-being, the case against mental statism is inconclusive at best.

There is no need to pretend that that this brief consideration of the experience machine objection is a decisive reply. I will provide a more extended reply in chapter four. For now, regardless of whether the experience machine objection refutes mental statism about welfare, the objection has important implications for axiology. Here's one: Although some think that you could live a life high in prudential value inside the experience machine, few think that you could live a very meaningful life inside the machine. At least this much is clear. This shows that there is a conceptual difference between meaning and well-being. If they were conceptually identical, it is hard to see how we could be less certain about how meaningful a life could be in the experience machine than about how high in welfare such a life could be. But many people are indeed far less certain about one than the other. Perhaps the set of lives high in meaning will be identical to the set of lives high in welfare. I doubt it, but either way, there is a conceptual difference. The two concepts are not the same.

The distinction between welfare and meaning is compelling, as is the distinction between welfare and worth. But one might wonder if worth and meaning are two different kinds of value. I think they are. Even without developing a theory of the meaning of life just yet, we can see that

²⁴ A desire for meaning is not the only thing that can motivate repulsion at the experience machine. Other desires will suffice, such as the desire for contact with reality.

there are good reasons to think that worth and meaning are distinct concepts. A largely meaningless life might nevertheless be worth living. Consider a happy rubber band collector: It is not clear that the rubber band collector's life is entirely worthless; however, apart from whatever limited achievement value results from having a large horde of rubber bands, his life is decidedly meaningless. Hence, worth is not entirely a matter of meaning. But meaning is nonetheless relevant to worth. Other things being equal, the more meaningful a life, the more it is worth living. These considerations give us reason to think that worth is a higher-level mode of evaluation, one that encompasses lower-level values such as meaning and well-being.²⁵

My principal goal in this book is two-fold: (1) to defend the distinction between worth, well-being, and meaning that I just articulated, and (2) to develop theories of each form of value.

Overview

In the chapters that follow, I defend a theory of worth, a theory of welfare, and a theory of meaning. I devote a chapter to each form of value before exploring the implications for moral theory and the viability of pessimism about the human condition.

Chapter 2 "Five Tests for Lives Worth Living" evaluates four historically precedented tests for what makes a life worth living: (1) *The Suicide Test* (Camus), (2) *The Recurrence Test* (Schopenhauer and Nietzsche), (3) *The Extra Life Test* (Cicero and Hume), and (4) *The Preferring Not to Have Been Test* (Williams and *The Book of Job*). I argue that all four fail and then consider a more promising fifth test, *The Pre-Existence Test* for what makes a life worth living: (5) A life worth living is one that a benevolent caretaker with foreknowledge would

²⁵ Trisel (2007, p.2) argues that worth is a broader notion than meaning, but the theory he offers looks very much like a narrow welfarist account of worth. Hence, it's not clear if he would distinguish between welfare and worth.

allow. A life worth avoiding is one that a benevolent caretaker would disallow. This test usefully tracks the general extension of the concept of what makes a life worth living. I consider three objections and note that there appears to be an indeterminate middle category of lives worth neither. Ultimately, I argue that any plausible test will risk circularity or will require a theory of worth to be viable. No informative test can serve as an analysis.

Chapter 3 "An Objective List Theory of Worth" provides an analysis of worth. I defend an objective list theory (OLT) of the worth of a life: the most worthwhile lives are those high in various objective goods. These principally include welfare and meaning. More specifically, I defend a list composed of pleasure, knowledge, achievement, loving relationships, moral worth, and good effects. I offer a brief case for the inclusion of all the items on the list. In the process I make a novel case for the irreducible value of loving relationships. I also defend a largely symmetrical list of bads, with one original addition: waste. I offer a two worlds argument in support of the claim that waste is a kind of bad that is distinct from mere failure.

The main goal of this chapter is to show the advantages an objective list theory of worth has over similar theories of well-being. Most importantly, I present three significant objection to the objective list theory of welfare that can be avoided by adopting the OLT of worth.

Chapter 4 "A Mental Statist Account of Welfare" defends mental statism about well-being — the theory that the sole bearers of intrinsic prudential value are conscious mental states. The principal goal of this chapter is to make mental statism more attractive. I pursue this goal in two ways. I do not simply try to paint over the blemishes of the theory. Rather, I try to show that what at first appear to be flaws are in fact errors of perception. Although many think that the

experience machine is a hideously repulsive canker, the problem is not without a solution. If we distinguish between worth and welfare, we can cleanly account for the intuition that something has gone very wrong with a life spent in the experience machine. And we can account for what is lacking in the life of the grass counter by making a similar distinction.

After addressing the putative flaws with mental statism, I point out four of its attractive features. (1) Mental statism helps account for our reluctance to know if we are indeed in an experience machine. Thinking self-interestedly, our happiness matters far more than truthfulness and the like. (2) Similarly, mental statism tracks the intuition that the principal source of prudential value is pleasure (broadly construed). Increasing the amount of objective goods in a life does not seem to improve the value of the life for the one who lives it unless the goods make a positive experiential difference. (3) The problem of changing desires forces defenders of desire satisfactionism to abandon the theory in favor of forms of mental statism. No other theory can account for the importance of experience in a non ad hoc manner. (4) Most important, mental statism is strongly supported by the unique prudential status of valuable experiences. One can self-sacrifice for any of the goods on a plausible objective list except pleasure (broadly construed). This suggests that experiences are the only ultimate source of prudential value.

Chapter 5 "Meaning: The Good Cause Account" defends the theory that one's life is meaningful to the extent that one promotes the good. Call this the *good cause account* (GCA) of the meaning of life. In a plausible formulation, it holds that the good effects that count toward the meaning of one's life need not be intentional. Nor must one be aware of the effects. Nor does it matter whether the same good would have resulted if one had not existed. What matters is that one is causally responsible for the good. I argue that the best theory of the meaning of life should

clearly distinguish between subjective fulfillment and objective meaningfulness. The GCA respects the distinction, and it is superior to its leading rivals in the recent literature.

This chapter proceeds in a few steps. The bulk of the effort is devoted to defending the general contours of the GCA. I begin by sorting out some of the conceptual terrain. First, I develop a defense of the GCA in response to the problems facing a few other theories.²⁶ I argue against both subjectivist theories and hybrid theories — those that include both objective and subjective conditions. I show the relative virtues of the GCA over two of the most compelling theories in the current literature, those offered by Erik Wielenberg and Susan Wolf.²⁷ Finally, after defending the major commitments of objectivist theories of the meaning of life, I respond to several novel objections to objectivist theories of meaning.

Most important, I offer reasons to reject a problematic refinement. It holds that the meaning of one's life is determined by the difference in value between the actual world and the world where we never would have been. The Pottersville sequence in *It's a Wonderful Life* (Capra, 1946) seems to promote this view. But I think there are excellent reasons to reject it. In the process, I explore a few options for a more precise formulation of the GCA.

Chapter 6 "Morality: Against Welfarism" develops a case against three forms of *welfarism*. In its most general form welfarism holds that the ultimate ground of all moral obligations is welfare. My primary target is welfarism about the morally relevant good (WMRG)

I argue that welfarism as a theory of the morally good is highly implausible. It is far more certain that there are other forms of value besides welfare than it is that any of the considerations in favor of welfarism, jointly or in conjunction, are true. WMRG stands or falls on

²⁶ For an overview of the literature, see Metz (2002, 2005, and 2007).

²⁷ Wolf (1997 and 2010) and Wielenberg (2005).

the breadth of the concept. On a narrow theory of welfare, as I prefer, welfarism as a theory of the morally relevant good is implausible. Too much else is important. However, if the welfarist adopts a broad theory of welfare, such as the OLT, then welfarism suffers from the full suite of objections I presented in chapter two.

Welfarism suffers from additional problems. I present three version of what we can call the argument from irreducible goods. Most important, I defend the claim that the value of fairness cannot be reduced to welfare. In addition, I provide a sustained argument for the existence of harmless bads. In particular, I argue that it is morally bad to enjoy fictional suffering even though no one is harmed. If this is true, it gives us excellent reason to reject WMRG.

Chapter 7 "Is life Worth Living?" argues for optimism about the human life. I argue both against anti-natalism and two forms of pessimism. David Benatar claims that being brought into existence is always a net harm and never a benefit. I disagree. I argue that if you bring someone into existence who lives a life worth living, then you have not all things considered harmed her. According to the theory developed in chapter three, lives are worth living if they are high in various objective goods and low in objective bads. These lives constitute a net benefit. In contrast, lives worth avoiding constitute a net harm. It is the prospect of a LWA that gives us good reason to not bring someone into existence. Happily, many lives are not worth avoiding. Contra Benatar, many are indeed worth living. I intend to show that even if we grant Benatar his controversial asymmetry thesis, we have no reason to think that coming into existence is always a net harm.

I begin with a presentation of Benatar's asymmetry argument. Although I do not accept his core theory, I show that Benatar's argument is unsuccessful either way. We do not wrong the

one we bring into existence if she lives a life worth living — a life that is high in various objective goods. However, we should not bring anyone into existence who will live a life worth avoiding. Happily, not all lives are worth avoiding. This is the view of the optimist.

Benatar anticipates this style of objection. In reply he defends a wholesale pessimism about the human condition. I argue that his reply to objective list modes of evaluating lives is unsuccessful. To be worth living a life need not be the best that we can conceive; it merely needs to be preferable to non-existence. I raise problems for both Benatar's and Schopenhauer's arguments for philosophical skepticism. Then I argue against the breed of matter of fact pessimism advocated by Philo and Demea in Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Although the pessimist is right that the world is rife with suffering, I argue that this is no reason to abandon optimism.