Smuts, Aaron. *Welfare, Meaning and Worth.*
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This volume is a welcome and innovative addition to the existing analytic literature on the notion of the life worth living (or the good life) and related issues. Chapters 1–5 present Smuts's views on how to conceptualize the life worth living and its components. Chapters 6–8 discuss topics related more loosely to this main theme, such as problems in welfarist understandings of morality (chap. 6), why people engage with art that arouses painful emotions (chap. 7), and the pessimistic challenge (chap. 8). Smuts employs "a life worth living" to refer to what some other authors (e.g., Thomas Hurka, Susan Wolf, Daniel Haybron) have called "the good life," and he opts for an objective list theory of the notion (chap. 3). His list of goods that increase the degree to which lives are worth living includes pleasure, knowledge, achievement, loving relationships, virtue, good effects, and (qualifiedly) an appreciation of beauty; his list of "bads" includes pain, false belief, failure, lovelessness, vice, bad effects, waste, and (qualifiedly) the experience of ugliness. While some of the items on Smuts's list have also appeared on other such lists, as he acknowledges, he is innovative in, among other issues, his discussion of the negative value of waste. As Smuts shows, waste is not precisely the opposite of achievement, since lives can lack achievement not only in trying and failing but also in not trying at all. Although the discussion of achievement and waste is interesting and important, some aspects of it may require further defense. For example, Smuts takes achievement to have to do with difficulty and thus holds that greater difficulty in attaining one's achievements increases the degree to which a life is worth living (42). Yet let us compare two hypothetical Mozarts, the first of whom composes symphonies very easily (we might call him a natural), while the second experiences many difficulties in writing them. Many would not take the latter's life to be more worth living. Smuts also distinguishes between achievement and good effects, thus allowing empty achievements, which achieve nothing of worth and produce no good effects, to enhance the degree to which lives are worth living (42–43). But if we think that collecting used rags, for example, is worthless, we would not think much of someone's success in collecting unprecedented quantities of them (even in the face of considerable difficulties) and would not take it to increase the degree to which that person's life is worth living. Indeed, such endeavors may be categorized as yet another type of waste, thus actually decreasing the degree to which life is worth living.

The objective list of goods and bads Smuts presents is one way of categorizing what makes a life worth living. A second categorization focuses on two basic elements: welfare (chap. 4) and meaning of life (chap. 5). By "welfare" (which he uses as a synonym for "well-being"), Smuts refers to that which has prudential value for a person, or is in that person's self-interest. He defends the view that only conscious mental states are bearers of this prudential value. On the basis of a sharp distinction between welfare and meaning, Smuts argues that classical attacks on the mental statist view of welfare, such as Nozick's experience machine, are ineffective. He agrees that life in the experience machine would undermine meaning (and hence the ability to lead a life worth living) but points out that this need not undermine the mental statist understanding of welfare: indeed, welfare would be higher in the

experience machine. Smuts copes in a similar manner with other putative counterexamples to mental statist understandings of welfare and questions the viability of such counterexamples (such as that of the deceived businessman who experiences happiness, not knowing that his wife doesn't really love him, his colleagues secretly scorn him, his children are nice to him only so he would finance them, etc.).

Smuts's analysis of the other ingredient of a life worth living, namely, the meaning of life (chap. 5), follows what he calls the good cause account of the meaning of life. This theory identifies the meaning of life with the objective good that one causes (75–76, 85). It is a purely objectivist theory: Smuts takes any subjective element to be irrelevant, and hence he also argues that agents needn't intend or even be aware of the good effects their actions cause. As a pure objectivist, he rejects not only the purely subjectivist theories of meaningfulness but also the more moderate hybrid ones, such as Susan Wolf's, according to which meaningful lives must combine objective worth with some sense of fulfillment. But although Smuts presents powerful criticisms of subjectivist and hybrid accounts, showing that they have highly unintuitive implications, I suspect that many will see his objectivism as highly unintuitive as well. Consider the following description from Vladimir Nabokov's *Glory*:

> Right under his feet he saw a broad black abyss, and beyond it the sea, which seemed to be raised and brought closer, with a full moon's wake. . . . The crickets kept crepitating; . . . and above the black alpestrine steppe, above the silken sea, the enormous all-engulfing sky, dove-gray with stars, made one's head spin, and suddenly Martin again experienced a feeling he had known on more than one occasion as a child: an unbearable intensification of all his senses, a magical and demanding impulse, the presence of something for which alone it was worth living. (Vladimir Nabokov, *Glory* [New York: McGraw-Hill, 1971], 20)

The protagonist, Martin, did not cause anything, but just "fell into" a meaningful subjective experience. Hence, Smuts's theory will take this experience to be irrelevant. Yet many will see this as a highly meaningful experience and hold that many such experiences can make life meaningful. The same is true of what Abraham Maslow describes as "peak experiences," that is, deep, intensive, elevating, and fulfilling experiences of reality and of oneself. These experiences are also subjective, and people sometimes just find themselves in them, rather than causing them. Smuts's account excludes these aspects of a meaningful life, as it would cases of noble failure, in which people act competently and heroically for a good cause, showing great courage, wisdom, and vision, yet in the end fail (sometimes not even by their own fault) and thus do not produce the intended good results. At the same time, Smuts's account includes lives that many may well not see as meaningful. Consider the case of Jim, a not very smart racist who experiences life as highly meaningless. Jim hates minorities (accusing them in everything bad in his life) and joins a racist organization that plans to terrorize them. Not being very smart, however, he at the last minute unintentionally disrupts and exposes the organization's operation that would have otherwise killed many thousands of people. (This is a revised

version of an example Smuts himself presents; 88.) Many would not take Jim to have had a meaningful life, although they would agree that it had a good effect. More generally, in Smuts's account, cases in which similar actions cause similarly good results, where the only difference is that in one the results are intended while in the other they are accidental (or even unwanted), are considered to be equally meaningful, as are the life of a person who is miserable and depressed and the life of a person who is deeply appreciative of life if only their actions produced similar results. However, this is highly unintuitive.

Smuts acknowledges this, asserting boldly that his theory of meaningfulness, although compelling, "is not entirely intuitive . . . is not entirely non-revisionist" (85). This, of course, is a perfectly legitimate move, but readers may be concerned that this revisionism conflicts with Smuts's other argumentation in this chapter, as well as in the rest of the book, which does rely heavily on intuitions: he criticizes and rejects alternative accounts because they clash with our intuitions. If intuitiveness is deemed important for a theory, Smuts's good cause account becomes problematic, and if revisionism is accepted, then many of Smuts's other arguments become less effective.

Readers may also want to know more about the relation between Smuts's two categorizations of a life worth living, the shorter (welfare and meaning) and the longer (listing many specific goods and bads such as pleasure, achievement, pain, failure, and waste). The longer list does not seem to be an elaboration of the shorter. Perhaps they intersect, but then it is unclear precisely how. It may be that some elements in the long list (e.g., virtue, knowledge, achievement) make life more worth living by making it more meaningful, while others (e.g., pleasure) make it more worth living by enhancing welfare, and yet others enhance both. But once we remember that, for Smuts, meaning has to do with objectively good results of one's actions, it seems that the relation would have to be more complex, because some items in Smuts's longer list, such as knowledge and virtue, do not always have such an effect. Nor do knowledge and virtue always increase welfare (as Smuts uses the term). But this suggests that there can be cases of knowledge and virtue (and of some of the other items on the long list) that, according to the short list, will not make a life worth living. This aspect of Smuts's theory should probably be elaborated more.

The discussions of welfare and of meaningfulness complete the part of the book that presents Smuts's analysis of the notion of a life worth living. The concluding three chapters are more independent of the main topic. Chapter 6 presents a metaethical discussion in which Smuts criticizes theories that take moral value to be based merely on welfare. He distinguishes between narrow welfarism about the moral good (focusing on hedonism) and wide welfarism about the moral good (desire satisfaction theories and objective list theories). Smuts argues that narrow welfarism should be rejected because it excludes too much that is relevant to the moral good. When criticizing wide welfarism, Smuts focuses, among other issues, on the difficulty of reducing the value of fairness to welfare, and he develops the discussion of harmless bads, primarily the enjoyment of fictional suffering. Such enjoyment, in Smuts's view, is immoral even if no one is harmed, hence providing another counterexample to the view that morality can be based on welfare alone (109–12).

Chapter 7 presents a discussion of aesthetics and attempts to explain why (some) people enjoy sad songs, melodramas, horror films, and other artworks that arouse in them negative emotions such as sorrow or fear. Smuts first criticizes some alternative explanations, such as the hedonic compensatory theory that claims that other aspects of these artworks arouse a pleasure that exceeds and compensates for the sadness or fear. Smuts plausibly replies that, among other problems with this theory, the enjoyable aspects of such artworks are sometimes weak and insufficient to compensate for the painful ones. Further, people could opt only for artworks in which there are no painful aspects that have to be compensated for. Smuts's suggestion is, instead, that people seek painful art because it deepens their understanding of their own valuing. For example, intensifying sadness when hearing sad songs allows a profounder feeling of the events in life, a better appreciation of their significance, and even greater concentration and self-reflection (126–28). The popularity of painful art, moreover, again shows that we are moved by an interest not only in welfare but also in meaning. Smuts does not suggest that this explanation holds for all cases of attraction to painful art, and indeed his discussion seems to do a better job of explaining people's attraction to Greek and Shakespearean tragedy than their attraction to many horror films or sad romantic songs that are enjoyed, it seems, in a significantly less reflective mode than the one he describes. The puzzle, then, largely persists, although Smuts has presented an interesting and, I believe, powerful partial reply to it.

In chapter 8, Smuts replies to pessimistic arguments suggesting that life is not worth living, primarily David Benatar's arguments that it would have been better for us not to have come into existence at all. To cope with Benatar's asymmetry argument, according to which the absence of pain is good for the nonexistent, whereas the absence of pleasure is neither good nor bad for the nonexistent, Smuts argues, among other points, that even if Benatar is right that the absence of pleasure is not bad for the nonexistent, this by itself does not show that the presence of pleasure is not good for the existent (138). Smuts also emphasizes that the debate should take into account not only issues of pleasure and pain but also issues of significance. Benatar also argues that life is painful and bad even independently of the asymmetry argument; to cope with these claims, Smuts emphasizes that even if our lives could have been better in the ways that Benatar identifies (we could have been smarter, lived longer, etc.), this by itself does not show that they are bad. Likewise, although everything will eventually be annihilated, things can be quite valuable.

Surprisingly, after vigorously attacking many pessimistic arguments, Smuts concedes a great deal to what he calls "empirical pessimism," which points out the many types of suffering and injustice in the world. Finding no refutation to this argument, Smuts doubts that many pessimists actually believe what they preach and points out that most people do not commit suicide. However, this reviewer knows quite a few pessimists who do strongly believe what they preach, and as Smuts himself argues, the suicide test is unreliable: many who want to commit suicide may refrain only because they are even more terrified of the act or of being dead, they do not want to cause pain to loved ones, and so on. And, of course, even if many pessimists do not believe what they preach, their argument may still be strong and require a reply. One such reply to what Smuts calls empirical pessimism could ask whether

life is indeed so terrible. Clearly, many horrific things, such as torture and murder, happen in the world all the time. But many good ones, such as decency, compassion, friendship, and help, happen as well. Smuts mentions the evening news, but we should remember that the news, a major source for our knowledge of the world, is biased: it emphasizes bad events and filters out good ones. Cases of Boy Scouts helping an old person cross the street will not be reported in the paper, but if they steal her purse, this will be. Many years of many people not embezzling is not news, but one act of embezzlement by one person is. The good is hardly reported, and when it is, it rarely reaches the front pages or headlines. Further, there is a great variety among lives. Some of them are terribly bad indeed. But others are quite good.

Welfare, Meaning, and Worth is a stimulating and important contribution to the philosophical literature on these and related issues. Many of its arguments are likely to arouse fierce disagreement and, thereby, advance the discussion in the field. It will be required reading for professional philosophers who work in these philosophical areas and of much interest to others.

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Sypnowich, Christine. *Equality Renewed: Justice, Flourishing and the Egalitarian Ideal.* New York: Routledge, 2017. Pp. 252. $155.00 (cloth).

According to Christine Sypnowich, theorizing about equality is in a bad way. The ideal of equality has come under sustained attack from theorists of ‘difference’, who focus on claims arising from the particularities of identity and culture and view equality as a homogenizing doctrine based on a false universalism. Defenders of equality, meanwhile, have become “mired in odd debates and concerns” (221) about welfare for surfers, expensive tastes, and the precise distinction between choice and luck. To make matters worse, liberal political theory is dominated by neutralism, an “aberrant” view that is “at odds with the tradition of conceiving social justice with reference to ideas of wellbeing, the public good, and community that are so central to the ideal of equality and the hope of its realisation” (212). These various developments all conspire to leave equality beleaguered. The key to its renewal, Sypnowich argues, is a return to a focus on human flourishing or well-being, recasting egalitarianism in an unapologetically perfectionist vein. “It is the task of the egalitarian state to enable citizens to live worthwhile lives” (7). Sypnowich thus endeavors to defend flourishing as the proper metric of equality, responding to various objections to perfectionism along the way, and to show that this conception of equality both enables a persuasive response to theorists of difference and illuminates contemporary debates about topics such as responsibility, multiculturalism, the public good, and global justice.

As should be clear, *Equality Renewed* covers a lot of ground. Sypnowich touches on a huge range of subjects and thinkers, including drawing on unusual sources such as William Morris (133–37) and commenting on unusual topics such as the role of the aesthetic within egalitarianism (168–70). This wide scope is both a strength and a weakness. It means that the argument sometimes feels rather unfocused, and