In Defense of a Narrow Drawing of the Boundaries of the Self[1]

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In his monograph *Happiness for Humans*, Daniel C. Russell defends a number of theses which together constitute a normative conception of happiness for humans.[2] He argues that someone's happiness is constituted by what he calls *embodied activity*. Russell thereby focuses our thinking about happiness on a special sort of agency, rather than on our patiency (to borrow Russell's terminology). We *make* our lives happy by engaging in the right sort of activities in the right way—specifically, by engaging in embodied activities in ways that are virtuous. What simply happens to us, on the other hand, is never constitutive of happiness. Accidents of fortune merely have the potential to prevent us from being happy, and their occurrence can force us to have to try to make our lives happy in a new, distinct way.

An embodied activity is one which depends for its identity on things which lie outside of the agent's control. Whether or not it is possible for the activity to continue is not completely up to the agent, for example, my activity of living alongside my spouse; my wife might die, or otherwise become unavailable to me. Contrast this with a *formalized activity*, such as living in a way which is respectful of others. It's entirely within my control whether or not I live in ways which are respectful, so the activity does not depend for its identity upon anything which is outside of my control. In terms of this contrast between embodied and formalized activities, Russell's philosophy of happiness becomes the view that not only is happiness a matter of activity, rather than what happens to us, but it is a matter of embodied activity, not formalized.

Russell's view is a eudaimonism, in that 'happiness' here refers to the final end of an individual's practical reasoning. 'Happiness' refers, here, to our conception of what for the sake of which we

ultimately should live. 'Happiness' has plenty of other senses; for example, one's good mood (and no-one really thinks that we should live *ultimately* for the sake of that). A eudaimonist doesn't need to deny that 'happiness' has other senses, nor take the eudaimonic sense of 'happiness' to be primary. What matters is that the eudaimonic sense of 'happiness' have ethical importance. And indeed, we do think it has ethical importance. We want to have a *correct* conception of happiness, because we want to live ultimately for the sake of what is *actually* valuable. Russell's contention is that when it comes to the value that may be realized by our own agency, the correct conception of happiness is virtuous engagement in embodied activity. To live for the sake of anything else is not to live for the sake of what's actually valuable. It matters, ethically, that we live for the sake of what's actually valuable, so it matters, ethically, whether or not Russell can successfully defend his view.

To defend his view about what's constitutive of happiness, Russell defends what he calls the *embodied conception* of the self. This is the view that the boundaries of the self whose happiness is at stake include all the constitutive parts of its embodied activities. In particular, those boundaries include all those things which we do not control upon which the identities of our embodied activities depend. My spouse, as she is now, forms constitutive part of the embodied activity of my life alongside her. And so she falls within the embodied conception of myself. (The "as she is now" qualifier captures the point that my spouse could change such that she remained the same person, yet no longer formed part of the embodied activity, such as if she were to stop being interested in me.)

Then, to defend this expansive way of drawing the boundaries of the self, Russell appeals to the relationship between experiences of loss and one's assumptions about possibilities for action. If I lose a limb, I must reconfigure my conception of what engagement with the world is now possible. Similarly, Russell argues, if my spouse or career becomes unavailable to me, many assumptions about how I can engage with the world must be replaced.[3] In terms of embodied activities, the point is

that once we've recovered from losses, our activities will look very different to the ones in which we engaged before. Now for eudaimonists, happiness is defined relative to a conception of possibilities for action: happiness is the final end of *my* practical reasoning and that's dependent on what activity is actually possible for *me*. Thus, if our conception of our possibilities for action changes radically, then we are effectively considering the happiness of a different self. And so our self should be taken to include those things outside of our control which partly determine our possibilities for action. Then, the activities of the embodied self are embodied activities, and so the happiness of the embodied self is constituted by embodied activities. Thus, our happiness is constituted by virtuous embodied activity.[4]

In *Happiness for Humans*, Russell begins by arguing that happiness is virtuous activity, and then goes on to discuss embodied activities in particular. Thus, in the foregoing summary of Russell I took it for granted that when we reflect upon what for the sake of which we ultimately should live—a process I propose to call *eudaimonic reflection*—what we seek to determine is *which* activities are constitutive of happiness, and how engagement in those activities could be virtuous. I am convinced by Russell's arguments that happiness is virtuous activity. In this paper, my goal is to argue against the embodied conception of the self, and Russell's view that it's only embodied activities which are constitutive of happiness. Russell and I are in agreement that it is the practical concerns which prompt us to engage in eudaimonic reflection which determine where we should draw the boundaries of the self. We disagree about which boundaries best answer to those concerns.

I will defend the *formalized conception* of the self, whose proponents include in the self only that which lies strictly within the scope of my agency: what I absolutely control. Note that I absolutely control how I treat my children, because that is up to me, but I don't control how my children respond to me. This thus contrasts with a commonsensical sense of 'control,' on which we can say, for example, that parents control their children. In the present context, they do not, because how parents treat their

children does not absolutely determine how the children will respond. I will show that if we adopt the formalized conception, we can consider the relevance to our happiness of both formalized and embodied activity. By contrast, under the embodied conception, it is possible to consider the relevance of only embodied activity. I accept Russell's arguments for the relevance of embodied activities to eudaimonic reflection, but we should not adopt the embodied conception of the self.

The contest between the formalized and embodied conceptions has relevance to our contemporary engagement with ancient eudaimonism. In particular, it is relevant to the *sufficiency thesis*: the claim that virtue is sufficient for happiness. This was classically defended by Plato and the Stoics, and rejected by Aristotle.[5] Russell argues that the defenders of the sufficiency thesis in ancient philosophy after Aristotle won the argument, and then he diagnoses the failure of the thesis's detractors. The problem, he explains, was that all sides implicitly accepted the formalized conception, which is very friendly to the sufficiency thesis. Then it is no wonder that the arguments of those seeking to defend the sufficiency thesis were that much more convincing. If Russell is right, then we can conclude that Hellenistic defenses of the sufficiency thesis were the weaker for their proponents having implicitly assumed the formalized conception. Moreover, if acceptance of the formalized conception permits one to argue for the sufficiency thesis in a way strong enough to have clearly won the debate in the Hellenistic world, then an important preliminary to any successful contemporary defense of the sufficiency thesis is an explicit defense of the formalized conception. I won't discuss the sufficiency thesis or ancient philosophy any further, but I will note that my purpose in this paper is to provide just such a defense.

There is one more conceptual preliminary. The notion of eudaimonic reflection implicitly invokes a pretheoretical distinction between the *living of lives* and the *circumstances of lives*.[6] Simply, when we are trying to better determine what for the sake of which we should live, then we are considering how to live our lives, *given* the circumstances in which we have to live them. What we need to note is that

each of the formalized and embodied conceptions yields a way in which the distinction between living and circumstances can be disambiguated. For the living of a life is just the activity of the self whose happiness is at stake. To draw the *formalized distinction*, then, is to say that the living of our lives is only what we absolutely control, and the circumstances of our lives is everything else, including, for example, the state of our bodies. The *embodied distinction* (or, *Russell's distinction*) additionally includes in the living of our lives those things that we do not control, but upon which the identities of our embodied activities depend. So it would include my spouse.

Russell does not make explicit use of the distinction between living and circumstances, but his arguments for the embodied conception are effectively arguments for the embodied distinction. Indeed, my reasons for objecting to the embodied conception are based on the distinction between living and circumstances. In defending the formalized conception, I will defend the formalized distinction, but I will not commit to any theoretical views about *what* exactly *is in* our control. All I need is that we all arrive at eudaimonic reflection with a rough, mostly-overlapping conception of what lies within the scope of our agency, although making serious reflective progress may well require making that conception less vague.

It is reasonable to question whether there is, in fact, anything that we absolutely control. For if there isn't, we will not be able to properly distinguish between the embodied and formalized conceptions.[7] In response, I suggest that to rely upon the foundational idea that we can make our lives happy by how we live them, as do both Russell and proponents of the formalized conception, is to presuppose that there exist conceptions of *how it is good to engage with the world* to which it is absolutely up to us to commit our agency, looking forward from an occasion of eudaimonic reflection. Equivalently: all sides presuppose that there exist conceptions of *engaging virtuously* with the world, in accordance with which it is absolutely up to us to live. If there does not exist any such conception, then I will engage

with the world *well* only by chance. Then there does not seem to be anything I can do to *make* my life a happy one by living it well—in particular, I can't engage virtuously in any embodied activities. To get Russell's eudaimonism off the ground, then, we have to suppose that we absolutely control enough of how we engage with the world that in eudaimonic reflection we can commit ourselves to engaging with it in accordance with conceptions of what it would be to engage with it well. This gives us enough to distinguish the two conceptions of the self: the formalized conception includes only my engagement with the world, and the embodied includes more.

2

In making my first argument my aim is to show that while Russell makes a good case for the relevance of embodied *activities* to eudaimonic reflection, he doesn't establish that we must, or even should, adopt the embodied conception of the *self*. I'll consider an attempt to apply the embodied distinction and then the formalized distinction to eudaimonic reflection, and then the converse attempt to apply the embodied distinction subsequent to the formalized. Contrasting these two attempts will reveal that the formalized distinction enables useful eudaimonic reflection which is not possible if we adopt the embodied conception.

What is the basic structure of the activity of eudaimonic reflection? I suggest that in eudaimonic reflection, for some actual or possible aspect of our life, X, we ask ourselves how our life is going, or would be going, with regard to X.[8] This is to ask whether and how X is, or would be, good or bad for us. Although what we are ultimately after in eudaimonic reflection are general truths about happiness, the basic materials of such reflection are our concrete practical experiences, by means of reflection upon which we hope to refine our general conception of what for the sake of which we ought to be living. For example, reflection upon my particular relationship with my spouse might enable me to refine my general conception of just how friendships can contribute to a good life, helping me to realize

what can be only superficially valuable in friendships.

For the first part of my argument, let us consider application of Russell's distinction to eudaimonic reflection, upon X, and with the foregoing basic structure. Where would Russell have us focus our reflective attention? He holds that happiness is constituted by only embodied activities, which suggests that it is vital first to distinguish, among the elements of X, the embodied activity. Then I can consider whether and how that embodied activity contributes to my life being a good one, and avoid mistakenly taking other elements of X to be *constitutive* of my good, though they might be relevant to my conception of happiness in other ways. Now, to distinguish those elements of X which are part of the embodied activity is just to apply the embodied distinction. Recall that this is a distinction between living and circumstances. On Russell's view, it's only embodied activities which constitutively contribute to the living of lives in the relevant sense, so to apply Russell's distinction to X is to divide it into an embodied activity, E, and the circumstances in which the embodied activity plays out, C, say.

For example, let's indeed take X to be a spousal relationship. Then application of Russell's distinction might enable me to see that while my wife is a constitutive part of my happiness because the embodied activity cannot continue without her, the neighborhood in which we live is not, falling within C and not E. On the other hand, the relationship's being good for us might be dependent upon living here, in which case the neighborhood too would be partly constitutive of my happiness. As outlined above, Russell persuasively argues that consideration of whole embodied activities can enable us to better understand how it is possible for us to engage with the world, and so better understand happiness.[9] If he's right that it's only embodied activities which can be constitutive of happiness, then success in eudaimonic reflection will require me to determine what really lies in E and not C, which is equivalent to correctly applying the embodied distinction to X. Then I can ask whether and how my life is going well with regard to E.

However, in addition, it will always be intelligible and useful to now go on to apply the *formalized* distinction, to E. This is to divide E into those aspects of the embodied activity that I do and do not control, and to do so focuses our eudaimonic reflection upon two questions which are conducive to its success. Firstly, we can take as given the things about E that I cannot control, and ask what it would be to control well those things I can control. In our example, this is to ask, *given* that I'm in this relationship, what would it be to *engage virtuously* with the relationship, and to what extent have I been doing that? Secondly, we can take as given how I think I should control those aspects of E that I can control, and ask whether it is good to find myself with those aspects of E which I do not control. In our example, this is to ask, *given* my conception of how best to handle the relationship, is it good, and how it is good, to find myself with a relationship like this to handle?

Answering these two questions can help us refine our conception of happiness in two robustly independent ways. This is easy to see in our example. In answering the second question, I might conclude that this sort of relationship is not good for me to have, perhaps because my partner discourages me from certain kinds of ethical improvement. This is significant to eudaimonic reflection because we seek to live for the sake of obtaining those things outside of our control that we think it is best for us to have. Independently, in answer to the first question, I might conclude that to abandon the relationship would not be to handle it well, because of responsibilities I've picked up. This is significant to eudaimonic reflection because we seek to engage virtuously with the world. Putting these two answers together, I come to regard my relationship as a kind of embodied activity that I should try to avoid getting into again, but also something that I cannot just run away from. This is a conclusion about how I should live, looking forward from this occasion of eudaimonic reflection: I should seek to responsibly extricate myself from the relationship.

We should note that it is difficult to see how this sort of nuanced assessment of how my life is

going with regard to E could be achieved except by means of a (possibly implicit) application of the formalized distinction. In order to conclude that I cannot just abandon the relationship, I have to consider how it is good for me to engage in the embodied activity, which is, precisely, to take as given everything about E which falls outside of my control—I have to consider only the living of my life, in the sense of the formalized distinction. Similarly, in order to develop my conception of what sort of things outside of my control it is good for me to have, based on consideration of E, I have to set aside my agency—I need to consider the relationship independently of how I think it's responsible to engage in it if I'm to see that it's not good for me. Thus, application of the formalized distinction is always intelligible and always useful: after application of the embodied distinction, subsequent application of the formalized can be seen to advance eudaimonic reflection.

Now, for our contrast, let us consider applying the two distinctions in the opposite order. X is my relationship with my spouse, including the worldly circumstances in which that relationship plays out (i.e. Russell's distinction has not been applied). Apply the formalized distinction to X, such that Y comprises those elements of X that I can control, and Z comprises those elements of X that I cannot, say. Now, Russell's distinction is between embodied activities and the circumstances in which they play out. Embodied activities contain elements that I do not control, and thus neither side of Russell's distinction—the activity nor the circumstances—contains *only* things that I control. However, Y contains only elements of X that I control. Thus, Russell's distinction cannot be applied to Y because it cannot be used to partition Y into two parts.

So, then, an application of the embodied distinction subsequent to the formalized must be an application to our reflection upon Z. What is the latter? We've just seen: when we apply the formalized distinction and consider what we don't control, in this case Z, the point is to take as given our conception of engaging virtuously with what we don't control, and try to develop our conception of what things

that we don't control it is good for us to have. How could applying the embodied distinction help? Well, on Russell's view, of the things outside of our control, it is those which help define (good) embodied activities which it is most important for us to have, since embodied activities are what constitute happiness. So what we need first to do is determine which elements of Z are part of the embodied activity, and set aside the others. And this is just what it is to correctly apply the embodied distinction to Z. Then we can consider whether and how this embodied activity makes my life good. Thus the embodied distinction is useful to eudaimonic reflection upon Z, to the extent that Russell is right about the importance of embodied activities to happiness.

Let us suppose, for a different example, that X is my career. Then Y is how I engage in that career, and Z is the circumstances in which I engage in that activity, which includes my continued status as employed by this particular institution. In my eudaimonic reflection upon Z I seek to determine whether my continued employment is one of the things outside of my absolute control which it is best for me to have. Russell would have me first ask whether X could continue if I were to lose my job. If it could—perhaps because I could easily find another job—then my continued employment here does not help define the embodied activity of my career, and so it cannot be one of the things outside of my control for the sake of which I should seek to live. It is not material to my flourishing. On the other hand, if X could not continue, then taking steps to keep my job would be part of my attempts to realize my happiness, if I further conclude that X is a *good* career.

We've now considered applying each of the two distinctions in one order and then in the other. What is the significant contrast? Well, recall that applying either of the distinctions involves adopting a conception of the boundary between the living of my life and its circumstances, and a corresponding conception of the self. Then my claim is that, of the two reflective processes just described, in order to obtain the insights described, the first process requires the abandonment of the embodied conception in

favor of the formalized, but in the second, the formalized conception need not be abandoned. Thus, if we adopt the formalized conception of the self, both of the reflective processes just described remain possible, whereas if we adopt the embodied conception, we'll be limiting the possibilities for developing our conceptions of happiness. Another way to put this is that in the first process the application of the formalized distinction subsequent to the embodied is necessary, whereas in the second, after applying the formalized distinction, we can apply Russell's valuable discussion of embodied *activities* without requiring the embodied *distinction*.

Consider again applying the formalized distinction subsequent to the embodied. In order for me to see that I would not be living my life well if I were to simply run away from the relationship, even though I've concluded the relationship is not good, I have to treat the elements of the relationship as circumstances of my life, and then ask what it would be to live virtuously in circumstances like those. My holding to the embodied conception would block this, because that conception includes too much in the living of my life to permit me to take up the required perspective—the embodied self cannot engage in the relevant formalized activity. So I really do have to apply the formalized distinction, and abandon the embodied conception of the self. The need for the formalized conception of the self is explained by this need to draw a distinction between living and circumstances not possible under the embodied conception.

On the other hand, consider again our reflection upon Z, after an application of the formalized distinction to X. In this case all of the elements of Z are regarded as circumstances of our lives, and I suggested that Russell's discussion of embodied activities prompts us to try to determine which elements of Z are definitive of embodied activities, as these are especially relevant to refining our conception of what things outside of our control it is good for us to have. But, crucially, this is essentially a distinction among kinds of circumstances, not one between living and circumstances, and

so we need not adopt the embodied conception. For instead of considering how the loss of elements of Z would affect the possibilities for action of the embodied self, we may simply consider how such losses would affect how the activity of the formalized self plays out in its circumstances. What we should consider is whether elements of Z are required for the continued possibility of the formalized self engaging in the relevant activity.

This works because while the embodied self cannot engage in formalized activity, the formalized self can engage in embodied activities. Consider again the case where X is my career, such that Z includes my continued employment at this institution. In order to conclude that my remaining employed here is one of the things outside of my control which is significant to my happiness, what it's essential for me to see is that my job is not interchangeable in the way that so many other elements of Z are: losing my job would be an interruption to my career in a way that moving to a different neighborhood, say, need not be. But I can see this by considering how different the activity of the formalized self would be, with respect to X, in circumstances in which I no longer have the job, and how similar its activity would be if I simply moved neighborhoods. Consideration of Russell's account of embodied activities can help put me in a position to see this difference, but the embodied conception of the self is not required. There is no need to draw a distinction between living and circumstances in order to apply Russell's insights about happiness to Z.

My argument in this section has been essentially a matter of drawing out consequences of how a proponent of the formalized conception draws the boundaries of the self strictly more narrowly than does a proponent of the embodied conception. Consideration of formalized activities requires us to adopt the formalized conception: considering formalized activities requires us to regard as distinct from ourselves everything except what is under our absolute control. By contrast, consideration of embodied activities is possible whether we adopt the embodied or the formalized conception of the

self. This contrast was established by considering application of the formalized distinction both before and after application of the embodied distinction. To adopt the formalized conception of the self is not to rule out consideration of embodied activities, but to adopt the embodied conception is to rule out the eudaimonic reflection enabled by application of the formalized distinction.

An immediate consequence is that to adopt the embodied conception is to commit ourselves to the idea that there isn't anything more to eudaimonic reflection than consideration of embodied activities. This is because reflection on formalized activities requires us to take aspects of the embodied self as given, but this cannot be done without accepting the formalized conception. In giving the examples of this section, about how we learn about what's valuable from application of the formalized distinction, I've shown that there is more to eudaimonic reflection than consideration of embodied activities. And to adopt the formalized conception is not to rule out consideration of embodied activities. So we should adopt the formalized conception. While Russell's discussion gives us good reason to think that consideration of embodied *activities* will be an important part of successful eudaimonic reflection, we should nevertheless reject the embodied *self* as fundamental to the structure and purposes of eudaimonic reflection.

3

In my second argument against the embodied conception, I will not directly consider eudaimonic reflection. Instead, I will argue on epistemic grounds. If this argument is successful, we should not attempt to apply the embodied conception to eudaimonic reflection because that would involve epistemic irresponsibility. The focus will again be on Russell's primary motivating example: relationships with others which are sufficiently intimate that those others come to partly constitute the activity of living my life well. I will argue that drawing the boundaries of the self in this way involves forming beliefs in a way which is not epistemically responsible. In making this argument I will rely on the claim that there

is a strong, particular sense in which other people are unknowable to us. The epistemic irresponsibility will be the failure to take account of this unknowability in the formation of an embodied conception of happiness.

The relevant sense of unknowability is developed in the fiction of Haruki Murakami. I'll now expand upon this sense of unknowability, before turning to explain the corresponding epistemic irresponsibility. In summary, the view is that it is impossible to know all the details of a person's thinking and feeling, in the sense that however much we come to know about someone, there will always be aspects of that person that escape our cognitive and emotional grasps. Further—and crucially for my purposes—the presence of these unknowable depths tends to undermine almost any knowledge of the person that we *do* manage to acquire. It's not that Russell requires that participants in embodied activities attempt, *per impossibile*, to understand other people down to the depths of their souls. Rather, when an agent draws the boundaries of the self in the way that Russell would recommend she commits herself to claims about other people, in a way which fails to recognize the possibility of the unknowable depths of those other people undermining the agent's knowledge of them, such as it is.

How exactly does Murakami think that other people escape our attempts to know them? Murakami develops his point by means of what we might call his *disappearing women* trope.[10] Across his work, women who are intimately involved with men suddenly disappear from those mens' lives. These disappearances are never just accidental. They always involve some element of the woman's will, although just how much the women wanted to disappear is one of the many things that remains forever mysterious to the protagonists. The men who are left behind always find themselves with the sense that they never really knew the women with whom they were involved. But they seemed to have been as intimate with these women as it is possible to be. There was, then, something *in* the women that was forever out of their reach. They realize that there is a strong sense in which the women were

unknowable to them. Other people always outrun the extent to which they participate in the activity of any given person's life.

I'll now consider in detail a representative example of a woman who disappears out of a man's life in Murakami's fiction: Naoko, in *Norwegian Wood*.[11] In her childhood and teens, Naoko was in a relationship with Kizuki. They were deeply devoted to each other throughout many formative years. What began as a close childhood friendship naturally became something romantic when they reached an appropriate age. Their lives and identities were defined in terms of each other. Kizuki, however, suddenly committed suicide, one day when he was seventeen. He did not warn Naoko that this was going to happen. Unsurprisingly, she was deeply scarred. A few years later, the male protagonist and narrator of the novel, Toru, meets Naoko by chance in Tokyo. Toru was a school friend of both Kizuki's and Naoko's, so the shock of his sudden death was something that they shared, and the two start spending time together, and begin to be sexually involved.

Naoko, however, basically fails to adjust to adult life. She is forced to retreat into a remote community in the mountains for people with mental impairments like hers. Toru visits her there, and they exchange numerous letters. Another patient, Reiko, believes that if it is possible for Naoko to recover, it will require Toru's participation. The result of this is that figuring out Naoko's condition becomes an embodied activity in which Toru, Reiko and Naoko are all engaged. Toru's visits to the mountain are not mere excursions, and his letter-writing, including to Reiko, is a defining activity of his life in Tokyo. He spends a lot of time just waiting for phone calls or letters from Naoko to arrive. Toru begins to forge a new relationship in Tokyo with a girl named Midori, but his devotion to Naoko renders him emotionally distant.

In the end Naoko's condition deteriorates and she commits suicide. When this occurs, the reader does not experience any surprise. There is a strong sense that this conclusion to Naoko's story is

inevitable. It is not, however, her suicide which constitutes Naoko's disappearance from Toru's life. She gradually fades into what Toru describes as the unchanging world of those who have already died. Kizuki, he says, is permanently seventeen years old; Naoko feels that he is calling to her, and she seems to be becoming herself something fixed and unchanging, and dead.[12] And Toru's attempts to help Naoko recover cannot continue unless Naoko is able to change and reject the world of the dead. The embodied activity of trying to understand and help Naoko dominates much of Toru's life back in Tokyo, but Naoko is fading out of that life in a way that is entirely out of his control. When Toru returns to Tokyo after visiting Naoko in the mountains, he returns to the world of the living, from which Naoko is rapidly fading. She steadily shades out of his life as it becomes clearer that she will never be able to come back down the mountain.

Naoko's slide into the world of Kizuki is not simply some illness with which she is saddled. It affects the quality of her will. She defined herself in terms of Kizuki, forming her conception of herself as he formed his conception of himself as they grew up together. It is *Naoko* that wants to join Kizuki in the world of the dead, just as much as it is Naoko who wants to follow Toru back to Tokyo—she seems to take it that her good is to die, even though a part of her takes it to be her good to live. And however much he shares with Naoko, Toru is not capable of understanding this desire of hers to die, and how it relates to her desire to stay alive.

What the reader of *Norwegian Wood* comes to see is that the full structure of Naoko's ends for her activity outstrips the extent to which she is engaged in living a life involving Toru. It is important to note that it is not simply that Toru correctly understands some aspects of Naoko, while other aspects remain hidden from him. Rather, Toru develops a conception of Naoko which turns out to be inaccurate, because what he doesn't know about her undermines what he thought he did know. Specifically, Toru thought that Naoko could recover and participate in a life with him in Tokyo. A suggestion Murakami

makes in the novel is that Toru is *radically* wrong about this.

Let's return to Russell's embodied conception. What happens when someone draws the boundaries of the self such that other people are taken to partly constitute the activity of living well? To do this is to incorporate my conception of my spouse, say, into my conception of my own good. She's a constitutive part of an activity which I take to be my happiness, and so a *conception* of her is constitutive part of my conception of that activity. The radical unknowability claim, however, threatens to undermine the epistemic status of any such conception of my spouse that I form, thereby undermining, in turn, the epistemic status of my conception of my happiness.

Exactly how adoption of the embodied conception involves epistemic irresponsibility will depend on the structure of the conception of my spouse. Now, the core idea of the embodied conception is that my spouse, as she actually exists in the world, forms constitutive part of the activity of my life alongside her. So the most straightforward way in which I can incorporate a conception of my spouse in a conception of this activity is to incorporate my holistic understanding of her. On the embodied conception, it's whole people that form parts of the living of my life, so it's natural to think that it's conceptions of whole people that form part of my conception of what it is to live my life happily. Based on the aspects of my spouse that are knowable to me, then, I form a conception of who she is *simpliciter*.

In engaging in this process I do not presuppose that I know everything there is to know about my spouse. But I *do* presuppose that those aspects of my spouse which are *not* presently knowable to me do not undermine the conception of the whole person which I form based on those aspects of her which *are* knowable to me. This, though, is what a proponent of the radical unknowability claim calls into question. If people have depths which have the potential to undermine everything we thought we knew about them, then I am not epistemically positioned to form a conception of a whole person on

the basis of those aspects of my spouse which are knowable to me. Thus, any conception of a whole person which I do form is liable to track what my spouse is actually like only barely. So while I think I am taking the activity of my living well to be partly constituted by my spouse, what I'm actually doing is taking the activity of my living well to be partly constituted by someone who does not actually exist, because there is no person that corresponds to the conception of a whole person I've formed. If you like, I take my happiness to be the activity of living alongside a two-dimensional projection of a higher-dimensional person.

We can distinguish two senses in which I've gone wrong. Firstly, adoption of this embodied conception involves forming the false belief that my spouse *as I understand her* is a constitutive part of the activity which is what it is for me to live well. But my spouse as I understand her cannot be the person who actually does participate in the activity of our lives, thanks to unknowability. My spouse just behaves similarly to that imaginary person, for the time being. Involving forming these false beliefs, to adopt the embodied conception is to involve myself in epistemic irresponsibility.

Secondly, having an embodied conception of the good that is epistemically mistaken in this way will likely cause me to treat my spouse inadequately. In particular, I am likely to *reduce* my spouse to my two-dimensional projection of her, not taking into account the fact that there is more to her than that of her which now participates in our life together. Let me explain how this likelihood arises. Russell reads Epictetus as arguing that incorporating things outside of our control into our conception of our own good is dangerous, because it might mean that we seek to preserve our access to those things at the cost of acting virtuously.[13] This is, I argue, what can too easily happen with the embodied conception. My conception of my spouse is probably mistaken, because the full structure of my spouse's ends for the living of her life outstrips what I can know of her, in a radical sense. My spouse's success in her own eudaimonic reflection, then, might invalidate my conception of her. But I take my spouse *as I*

conceive of her to be part of my good. That means that I believe that I should take steps to maintain the situation in which my spouse appears to match the conception of her that is a constitutive part of my conception of the activity of living my life well. This is to reduce my spouse to that conception—to reduce her to those aspects of her that are relevant to the activities of the living of *my* life—and attempt to stymie opportunities for her personal growth. Instead of taking my happiness to depend on my spouse, as a proponent of the embodied conception would intend, thanks to unknowability, I end up taking my happiness to depend on just some parts of her, and this leads me to treat her disrespectfully.

When we deal with other people, however intimate the relationship, a certain humility is required in the face of their unknowability to us. They might change in ways that outstrip our present understanding of them. But if I've incorporated that understanding into my conception of the good for me, it will be difficult to retain this humility. For to have performed that incorporation just means that I take it to be part of my good that my spouse matches the way that I conceive of her. This makes it difficult to treat her *as someone who could* make a decision about how to live that outstrips the understanding of who she is that I've held up until this point. What if, in fact, my spouse has outgrown the relationship? What if, as Murakami suggests might be the case, Naoko *should* return to Kizuki's realm and leave Toru behind? My spouse might rightly change out from under me. For me to fail to permit this would not be to treat her as she ought to be treated.

This is not yet a strong objection to the embodied conception, because I've considered only a very simple way to incorporate a conception of another person into my conception of an embodied activity. On behalf of a proponent of the embodied conception, I'll now consider two ways in which the embodied conception could be modified in an attempt to accommodate the radical unknowability claim.

When I take my good to be an activity partly constituted by someone else, Russell could first argue, I need not incorporate a conception of what they are *like* into my thinking, but instead incorporate,

as it were, a reference or pointer to them. I take my good to involve an embodied activity of living alongside my spouse, *however she turns out to be*. All my beliefs about how she *is* are regarded, when I am thinking about my happiness, as defeasible. No matter how I have to change my understanding of who she is as we go through our lives, my happiness is an activity that involves living with her, coming to understand her better, even if I never come fully to know her. Since I don't take any particular beliefs about how my spouse is to form part of my conception of my good, I'm not being epistemically irresponsible, and I won't be liable to reduce her to any particular set of properties that she has. I will be humble with regard to how she is.

A proponent of this refined embodied conception does manage to take some account of the unknowability of others, but we have not fully accounted for their unknowability. In particular, a proponent of this embodied conception ignores the fact that people can change in ways that mean we should allow our intimacy to fade away. Recall that Russell is motivated by the contention that when certain aspects of our lives that are not in our control become unavailable to us, the activity that was our happiness has to end, to be replaced with some new, distinct activity. The problem with this first revision of Russell's view is that its proponent cannot recognize a sufficiently wide range of reasons for why a relationship might have to end. On this view, I conceive of my spouse as partly constituting the activity of my happiness, however she turns out to be. But there are ways in which she could turn out to be that mean we should part ways, or that mean the activity of living with her is no longer part of my good. This is what makes Murakami's examples so haunting. As I said, it is not simply that Naoko is impinged upon by mental illness. There is an element of who Naoko *is* that is at least partly responsible for her disappearance. Now, it might well be that Naoko is making mistakes about how she must live. Perhaps there is no inevitability to Naoko's slide back to the dark, static, unchangingly adolescent embrace of Kizuki. The novel underdetermines this question. Murakami's suggestion in the

novel is simply that it *could* be the case that Naoko *ought* to disappear out of the life of the protagonist. And if that's true, then it could cease to be part of Toru's happiness to live alongside Naoko in Tokyo. A proponent of the revised embodied conception under discussion cannot really make sense of this. For they hold that no matter how Naoko turns out, the activity of living with her is part of Toru's good. That's false, given unknowability, so it remains epistemically irresponsible to form such a conception of my good. Again, when I say that in *Norwegian Wood* Murakami suggests that it might be the case that Toru and Naoko should part ways, the fact that Naoko eventually commits suicide is not relevant. The relevant sense in which Naoko disappears is not her killing herself, but disappearing inside of herself, rejecting the world of the living. This is what a proponent of Russell's account cannot make sense of.

It is also worth noting that a proponent of this revised embodied conception does not really respect Russell's motivation for taking happiness to be a matter of embodied activities. On this view, my spouse could change all of her properties, such that it would be appropriate for me to grieve the loss, yet a proponent of the revised embodied conception would say that life with that particular other person would still be the same embodied activity. But the embodied conception was meant to capture the significance to my happiness of the life I am presently leading with my spouse, an activity which is partly characterized by properties she contingently possesses. A conception of the activity of living alongside a merely numerically identical person does not capture that.

There is a second revision of the embodied conception that Russell can make in response to the foregoing rejoinder. There is a middle ground available between the two options we've considered so far for the conception of my spouse that I incorporate into an embodied conception. I can form a conception of my spouse that takes her to have a number of properties, without implicitly filling in the gaps between those properties to form a conception of a whole person. That means that I incorporate into my embodied conception a partial conception of my spouse. Then my happiness is an activity

done alongside *this* person, however she turns out to be, so long as she continues to have the specified properties. If she changed so dramatically that she no longer has those properties, the activity that was the good for me would have to end; I could no longer be happy in the way that I had been. The idea is that I don't know what is going to happen in the future of my relationship because I don't know everything about my spouse; I take it to be my happiness to be along for the ride, though there are certain things that could mean we ought to part ways.

The purpose of this move is to avoid overreaching in the claims that my embodied conception entails about what my spouse is like. It includes enough about her to avoid entailing, as the second version did, that my good is to be with her no matter how she might change, but it includes little more than that. This embodied conception enables its bearer to be epistemically responsible in my first sense. The claims about what my spouse is like that are incorporated into my conception of my happiness are all true. There might be other aspects of her that would mean that even these properties of her could and perhaps will change, but that does not make it epistemically irresponsible to hold onto those beliefs for the time being. By avoiding filling in any details, possessors of this third version avoid being radically wrong in the sense that Murakami's protagonists were. The third version of the embodied conception is correct as far as it goes.

In the end, however, possessing this third version of the embodied conception is still liable to cause me to treat my spouse inadequately. In the case of the first version of the embodied conception, we saw that in addition to the epistemic irresponsibility involved in taking my happiness to involve someone who does not actually exist in the world, forming such a conception also has the practical consequence of taking steps to maintain the person in a state in which she can still be reduced to that conception. As Russell points out in his discussion of Epictetus, if we take something to be part of our good then we will defend it. Even if I accept that my spouse might change in three-dimensional space, I will try to

limit that change such that my two-dimensional projection of her remains possible. But what if she has outgrown the relationship? I should not try to prevent this growth of hers. This problem arises just as much for the revision of the embodied conception now under discussion as it did for the original version. For if I form this third version, I take my good to be living alongside someone with a certain set of properties, and so I am in danger of trying to maintain my spouse as having those properties. But, in fact, I should permit her to change in ways that might mean we should part ways. It is difficult for me to permit that if I take it to be part of my good for her to have certain properties that ground her continuing to live her life with me, because to take it to be part of my good involves seeking to maintain those properties.

Let's consider, briefly, how a proponent of the formalized conception avoids the epistemic irresponsibility under discussion. Such a theorist holds that the activity of living my married life well is an activity that involves *engaging* with my spouse, without claiming that my spouse *partly constitutes* that activity. So I do not incorporate into my conception of living well a conception of any particular other people, which avoids the epistemic irresponsibility. Now the radical unknowability claim, in these terms, is that my engagement is only ever with aspects of my spouse, not with all of her. This still obtains. But, crucially, the notion of engagement, unlike the notion of embodied activity, does not involve the risk of reducing my spouse to those aspects of her with which I engage. Indeed, to the extent that I am living well, my engagement with my spouse will express a recognition that she is a far larger thing than what I see in our living together. This is an epistemically responsible response to the unknowability of others.

Finally, consider the possibility that the radical unknowability claim applies just as much to one's own self as to other people.[14] An embodied conception will include a conception of myself as I exist in the world just as much as it includes conceptions of relevant other individuals, and so there is

the potential for further epistemic irresponsibility in both of our senses. Suppose that what I don't know about myself, as I actually exist in the world, threatens to undermine what I do know. Then incorporating into my embodied conception a conception of myself based on what I do know will involve forming false beliefs, in just the same ways that incorporating a conception of my spouse did.

Further, if the embodied activity of my embodied conception depends on my being a certain way, then I'm committed to maintaining myself such that it can continue, which might clash with how I really am. Perhaps the truth about me, as I actually am, means that this career is no longer constitutive of my happiness. But my belief is that I should seek to maintain the conditions required for the embodied activity, because it's constitutive of my happiness, so I am liable to suppress any discovery of the truth about myself, forcibly reducing myself to those aspects which are compatible with the continuance of the activity.

A proponent of the formalized conception can be seen again to fare well. From the eudaimonic reflector's perspective of seeking to develop my conception of engaging virtuously with the world, both the possibility and my discovery of hidden depths within myself are further circumstances of living to which I should try to respond virtuously. I need to ask: *given* that there is the possibility I'm radically wrong about who I actually am in the world, how it is virtuous to go on? As we've seen, the formalized conception of the self is required to ask this sort of question. The answer will be similar to what it was for my spouse. I should live in ways which are epistemically humble with respect to myself, not making plans and choosing embodied activities in ways which involve assuming things about myself which may turn out not to be true.

Notes

1. Thank you to Julia Annas, Rachana Kamtekar, Jeremy Reid, Houston Smit, Mark Timmons and an anonymous reviewer for helpful discussions and comments on this material.

2. See Daniel C. Russell, *Happiness for Humans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
3. See Russell, op. cit., p. 213.
4. Martha C. Nussbaum, in *The Fragility of Goodness (updated edition)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), looks to agree, saying that "externals are not merely instrumentally related to good activity but enter themselves into the specification of what good activity is" (p. 319) and that "the world" provides "a constituent part of the good activity itself." (p. 381) Also see pp. 343–4.
5. On Plato see Julia Annas, *Platonic Ethics, Old and New* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 5. On the Stoics, see Julia Annas, *The Morality of Happiness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 166, 431. On Aristotle, see his *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. and ed. Roger Crisp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), bk. I, ch. 10.
6. See Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 78, 128–30 (e.g.).
7. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for putting the question this way.
8. See Annas, op. cit., p. 121.
9. See Russell, op. cit., chs. 9–10.
10. I found this name for the trope in an infographic credited to "/u/TazakiTsukuru," at <https://imgur.com/a/trXpDLO> (retrieved 28th March 2019).
11. See Haruki Murakami, *Norwegian Wood*, trans. Jay Rubin (New York: Vintage International, 2000).
12. See ibid., pp. 37, 141, 279.
13. See Russell, op. cit, pp. 237–8.
14. Thank you to an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.