

Wellbeing and Education: issues of culture and authority

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The idea that education should equip people to lead flourishing lives and help others to do so is now becoming salient in policy-making circles. Philosophy of education can help here by clarifying what flourishing consists in. This essay examines one aspect of this. It rejects the view that well-being goods are derivable from human nature, as in the theories of Howard Gardner and Edmond Holmes. It locates them, rather, as cultural products, but not culturally-relative ones, drawing attention to the proliferating forms they have taken over the past three or four centuries. It looks to aesthetics and art criticism as a guide to a philosophical treatment of well-being goods more generally. It also takes off from aesthetics and art criticism in seeking to identify reliable authorities on the flourishing life. On this, it rejects elitist conceptions in favour of a more democratic model, emphasising its importance in education for citizenship.

A contribution that philosophy of education can make to current British policy-making is to explicate the concept of personal well-being. Now that support for an aims-led curriculum is gaining ground in all regions of the UK, the idea that education should equip pupils to lead flourishing lives and also help others to do so is, not surprisingly, very much to the fore. Where policy makers need help is in giving valid substance to this fine-sounding ideal, in detaching it from interpretations that fail to pass muster. This is where philosophy of education comes in.

The nature of personal well-being is a big topic. In this essay I shall not be dealing with basic needs, and only with one or two perspectives in the area beyond these to do with goals. Here I shall bypass a host of issues to do with subjective accounts of well-being of an individualistic sort, whether in terms of pleasurable sensations (not such an outmoded approach as it may seem, judging by the impact of Richard Layard's (2005) recent book on *Happiness*) or in terms of informed desire-fulfilment. There are problems with both these standard theories of well-being. There are also difficulties with a standard alternative to them, the naturalist view that sees well-being values as derivable from human nature. I will take up the story at this point, first looking briefly at naturalism and then moving on, elaborating an idea of Joseph Raz's (2003), to what seems to me its most reasonable replacement. In this, the essay also develops themes raised in my 'Education, the market and the nature of personal well-being' (White, 2002).

1

I shall be taking it, again agreeing with Raz, that a personally fulfilling life is one largely filled with successful and wholehearted engagement in intrinsically worthwhile activities, where these are not relative to individual preferences. But what grounds can be given for this non-relativity? Is well-being *objectively* determinable? And if so, how?

Perhaps via biology? Flourishing is different for different species. Cats do well if there are trees around up which to scamper, elephants do not go in for climbing. Human beings share some sources of well-being with other creatures, but, being differently constituted, not others. It is not difficult to link standard candidates for worthwhile activities with features of our nature. We enjoy physical exercise. If we were made of different stuff, this might have no attraction for us.

We are social and sexual animals and also self-aware ones. So the high value we attach to intimate relationships is hardly surprising. And so on.

There must be *something* to the notion that human well-being depends on human nature. We see this very clearly in the sphere of basic needs. If we were not constituted in the way we are, if we were Tin People, we would not have to have oxygen, homes, clothes, food and drink. The issue is whether *everything* depends on our nature. If it does, we can read off what it is to flourish from reflecting on or discovering what sorts of creatures we are. But can we in some sense of the term *derive* friendship and love of music and other personal values from our nature? If we begin from our sociality, aural ability, etc., how do we reach these values? Could there be something in our nature that impels us towards them?

Something like development, perhaps? We are born with an ability to hear sounds. Could this gradually unfold into more sophisticated abilities and inclinations – to like some sounds and not others, to like sequences of sounds, to like the sequences, repetitions and variations found in musical creations? Howard Gardner (1983) claims that we have, among our ‘multiple intelligences’, a musical intelligence that begins in inborn neurological structures and develops or unfolds into higher and higher stages, the highest being found in the works of a genius like Mozart. Gardner has a similar story to tell in other spheres of human life. We also have a linguistic intelligence, a spatial one and so on. There are in his view eight or more discrete intelligences, all operating on the developmental lines just illustrated and all of them having their high points in outstanding human achievements in different realms.

Seventy years before Gardner, the educationalist Edmond Holmes published a vision of education as self-realisation. It was based on instincts. We are born with six of these – the communicative, dramatic, artistic, musical, inquisitive and constructive. In each case these develop into more advanced forms. The artistic instinct, for instance, ‘will expand, in the fullness of time, into a strong and subtle feeling for visible beauty, into a restless desire to give expression to that feeling’ (Holmes, 1911, pp. 166-7).

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, Gardner’s theory is as hugely influential in educational circles as Holmes’s was early in the twentieth. It is more sensitive than Holmes’s to individual differences, and also more interested in the highest flights of achievement. But it is built to the same general plan. Both accounts assume that the idea of development, which is familiar enough in physical/biological cases, can also be applied to the *mind*. But there is no basis for this assumption.

How can one identify the mature state in the case of the mind? Anyone can *see* a fully-grown oak tree or animal body. There are objective criteria at work. But what counts as mature musical or artistic ability? Here we find not consensus, but controversy. This is because value judgements are now in play, with all the differences in weighting they bring in their train. But how have the values come about? The developmentalist account purports to belong to empirical science. It claims simply to be revealing what is in our common nature. But it is still left, at root, with the fact-value gap. It cannot be relied on to bridge it. (For a fuller critique of Gardner’s attempt to build this bridge, see White 2006).

2

We need a solid basis for why an activity is worthwhile. Looking, again, at aesthetic values may help. These include the sheer sensuous beauty of sounds and sights, as well as formal qualities to do with shape, balance, contrast and complexity; and qualities more directly connected with human concerns, such as expressiveness, humour, suspense, delicacy and depth of insight into human nature. What is the basis for these values? They are not simply a function of personal preference. Although individuals may weight them differently, they exist independently of private inclinations. Neither is their attractiveness to us derivable just from our human nature. These are qualities discovered in works of art and other aesthetic objects by competent judges in the field. The qualities exist independently of any particular person's inclinations. Not everyone may at first perceive them. You need practice in doing so. Experienced judges can induct you, can bring you to see the contrasting elements of a painting previously invisible to you, the way an unexpected longer line in a poem about a skylark mirrors the expansiveness of its melody.

Not all judges agree on the aesthetic value of all the experienced qualities. Some – formalists – admit only formal values. But there are no radical divisions in this area, such that all values accepted by one group of judges are rejected by another, and vice-versa. What one finds, rather, is differences in inclusiveness. Most critics today include formal values but go beyond them.

Aesthetic values in their present rich abundance are largely the product of the last few centuries. Not that this period has been static. New values have become established. Specifications of more general values have arisen. Values have coalesced and overlapped with others to form qualities independently appreciated. Many of these changes have occurred through the introduction and development of new art forms or modes of appreciating nature.

The novel is one of these new forms, being largely the product of the last three centuries. The question 'What are the features of a good novel?' simply could not have been asked much before that time. As the form has developed and generated sub-species, more specific values have come into existence – those to do, for instance, with a good detective novel. Music has proliferated into a multitude of forms and genres, both classical and popular. Gardens and landscapes have become the focus of aesthetic interest in their own right. Film is now a new art form with its own canons of excellence, overlapping as they do with drama, other visual arts and an aesthetic interest in nature.

There is no need to generate more examples. The main point should be clear. Aesthetic values are extra-individual. They cannot be understood except as historically located, the product of a culture. This is not to say that, once in existence, they cannot persist outside the cultural conditions that produced them. The new qualities that Mozart added to classical music did not die with the princely regimes of the eighteenth century. The fact that they are cultural in origin does not mean that aesthetic values are relative to certain cultural conditions.

3

Aesthetic activities suggest a way forward for worthwhile activities more generally. The former are a category within this larger class, so if the points made in the last section are true of *them*, we know that they must also be true at least of *some* worthwhile pursuits. But there is reason to think that the case goes wider.

Being a clinical psychologist is a form of work virtually unknown before the twentieth century; just as working on a computer help desk was unknown much before the twenty-first. Both can be fulfilling; both bring with them their own forms of worthwhileness. The values they contain – helping others, possessing and intelligently applying knowledge and so on – are not, in their general form, unique to them - but the particular shape they have and the way they are combined *are* unique.

The last two centuries have seen a vast proliferation in fulfilling kinds of work, many or most unknown in a pre-industrial age. (They have also seen a huge expansion of *unfulfilling* forms of labour.) Extend the period back a century or two and you find equally impressive changes in intimate relationships. The modern idea of marriage as something freely entered into by both parties and based on love and companionship is an institution with roots in sixteenth and seventeenth century Puritanism (Taylor, 1989, p. 226). This brought a gradual shift ‘from the patriarchal to the conjugal family, that is to the family centred on the married couple’ (Walzer, 1966, p. 188). This pattern of married love, in its turn, has generated further variants: romantic conceptions of it, companionate marriages, open marriages, stable unmarried partnerships, gay and lesbian unions. . .

In the same period, new forms of literature have developed, with variants of their own, to explore the subtleties, conflicts, ridiculousnesses and tragedies of the new types of intimacy. Prose novels in different genres, verse-novels like Pushkin’s *Evgenii Onegin*, modern dramas like those of Ibsen and Chekhov, films and soap operas have all appeared on the scene. New roles in all these fields have also come into being or have transmuted from earlier forms: novel reader, novelist, producers, film-makers, TV script-writers, designers. . .

There is no need to go into further examples of worthwhile activities in such detail. In field after field one could tell a similar story. Think of the invention of and variations in new sports and outdoor activities over that period. Think of developments in home-making, in gardening, in foreign travel, in scholarship, in teaching, in socialising, in bringing up children.

It is not surprising that I have kept coming back to changes within the last four hundred years or so. It is over this period that the idea that a human life is not a passage to another state but has its own intrinsic significance has gradually gained ground, seeping downwards through the social hierarchy until, within the last century, in Britain at least, it has become near-universal.

All this supports the thesis that personal flourishing is not, as market theorists and others may have us believe, a matter of the satisfaction of the individual’s major informed desires. Its ingredients are not relative to our particular wishes. They lie outside us as individuals. They are created largely within cultures – granted that, as we have seen, they could not exist in the complex forms they have come to possess if our human nature were different, if we were not creatures with limbs to exercise, sexual appetites, senses, social attachments and so on.

Are there some values that escape the cultural net – that are more directly dependent on the way we are made? We enjoy listening to birdsong, smelling the scents of flowers, sexual activity, wandering about in the sunshine. Pleistocene Man could have enjoyed all these things too – even if he could not have enjoyed watching surf movies or clubbing. I do not want to deny this, not knowing much about life in the Pleistocene, although I suspect it was less laid-back than these examples suggest. At the same time, in our own case these enjoyments are more convention-bound than they may seem at first. The flowers in whose scents we delight are often carefully placed to produce just this result, in herbaceous borders and in living room vases.

A fulfilled life is one in which one successfully engages, for the most part, in worthwhile activities. These are not relative to individual preferences, although in a society like our own in which personal autonomy is itself a well-being value, individuals make their own choices and weightings among them. The activities themselves are virtually all, if not all, cultural products. Today they include a huge range of things, given the expansion of worthwhile pursuits and their variants over the last three or four centuries. As with aesthetic values, life values more generally are not relative to the culture in which they were formed. We may owe the institution of marriage based on affection to the Puritans, but it is still important to us even though its religious connotations are now largely forgotten.

4

If individuals are not authorities on what a flourishing life is for themselves, who – if anyone – is?

No one can lay down in detail how a person will best flourish in the future. There are simply so many ways of thriving, so many forms of well-being goods. One can discuss these with the individuals concerned and warn them about misconceptions, but as autonomous persons weightings among goods must be up to them. But are there authorities on how well or ill individuals *have* flourished – until now in the case of the living, and over their lives as a whole for those who are dead? And are there authorities on what flourishing is more generally?

The arts may throw light on this. Good critics make judgements about particular works. They help us to see positive qualities we may have overlooked. They pan them for their sentimentality, their woodenness. We do not always agree with their conclusions, but still can find what they say helpful in reaching our own. Despite disagreements among them over different weightings, objectivity is at work in their field. Critics' judgements are not simply subjective reactions. Their conclusions have to be justified by argument, especially by reference to features in a work that they assume their readers are able to perceive. Their arguments are always up for assessment, open to replacement by better ones. In this, they are no different from judgements in what are usually seen as the epistemologically harder domains of history or the sciences.

I realise this is something of an ideal picture and that actual critical judgements do not always follow this sober pattern. But there are plenty of critics dedicated to producing well-founded accounts of the strengths and weaknesses of works in their field. They see themselves as belonging to a serious community of enquirers and are willing to revise their own judgements in

the light of better arguments from elsewhere. Their communities each have histories. Over the past two to three hundred years bodies of expertise have been built up in literary criticism, music criticism and other fields. Here there is a stock of opinions about all but the most contemporary works that can help writers to form their own judgements. Over aesthetic judgements about particular works some people are thus better placed than others. Someone who has never read Russian poetry is in a worse position to judge the value of Pushkin's *Bronze Horseman* than someone who has studied the subject for years and is an accepted authority. I, who have an amateur interest in the field, cannot vie with the latter but can make a better fist of things than the former.

This gives us a template: outsiders, more authoritative insiders, more ordinary insiders. Is it one we can apply to judgements of well-being more generally? There are next-to-no complete outsiders. Nearly everyone gains some experience of friendship, for instance. But all of us are outsiders vis-à-vis some pursuits, indeed most pursuits. I know nothing of Persian music, you are ignorant of chemical engineering; others are experts in these fields. These are the far poles of insidership and outsidership. Between them we find all sorts of gradations.

What about more authoritative insiders? Is there any parallel to the world of critics in the arts? There is an important difference between the two fields. Art critics are usually expert in one area of the arts but not in others. The domain of well-being values is not so neatly demarcated. Broad-stroke divisions can be made between close personal relationships, the pursuit of aesthetic interests, sporting and other physical enjoyments, forms of meaningful work, travel and adventure, intellectual interests connected with the pursuit of truth, and no doubt others. But these categories are rough and ready; and they also overlap. There exist nothing like the relatively clear dividing lines one can draw between, say, literature, music, painting, sculpture and architecture. Indeed, as far as criticism goes, one should make finer distinctions. A critic specialising in poetry may have no expertise in the short story, and an authority on German poetry none in Portuguese. Authorities on personal flourishing, if any should exist, would have to have more global interests. They would be looking at individuals' lives, or past lives to date, as a whole, looking across the range of their activities and relationships, the role of luck in their lives, the extent to which their basic needs were met, interactions among all these things.

5

Are there, then, authorities on well-being in general and on how well particular lives flourish?

John Stuart Mill held that the mental pleasures of intellectual and aesthetic activity are of higher value than physical pleasures, because those who know both kinds of enjoyment markedly prefer the former. The argument is unconvincing for several well-known reasons. If it had been sound, we would have made progress in identifying authoritative judgements on the flourishingness of particular lives. There does not seem to be a case for a relatively easily demarcatable group of well-being critics – unlike the situation in the arts. There is no community of experts on what constitutes a flourishing life. Sure, there are plenty of gurus around to tell us that the secret of happiness lies in meditation or yoga or this or that regimen. But there is no good reason to believe them. What *is* true in Mill is that some people are in a better position than others to know about well-being goods. Those who know nothing about jazz, or skiing, or close friendship, or

working as a vet are obviously in a worse position than those inside these activities. The most authoritative voices on what constitutes our well-being are among those with a wide acquaintance with all sorts of goods.

The closest we can get to authorities on well-being is a far looser body of people than a well-demarcated community of experts. They not only must have some experience of most of the major areas of worthwhile activity, but are also interested in reflecting on what makes a flourishing human life, on which candidates – shopping, for instance? – are genuine ingredients and which will-o'-the-wisps. They must be people who must have some knowledge about all these things and who also must have some free time and freedom of spirit in which to do their thinking. Some of them will do this in a more solitary way than others, but, like art critics, all should welcome critical discussion of their own ideas and others'.

Two centuries and more ago those who fitted this bill were largely confined to the rich and those associated with them, and not to all of these, only the more reflective of them. They included literary figures and journalists, but not all of them, and also some, but not all, of their readers. Nearly everyone in the population – more perhaps in England than in Scotland - must have been outside this group. The situation is very different in Britain today – and also in comparable countries. Few of us still have our horizons hemmed in by extreme poverty, drudgery or constricting conventions. Few are so occupied in meeting their basic needs that they have no time for anything else. Nearly all of us, including many of the least educated, have been exposed to a huge array of well-being goods, some experienced directly, others via the imagination. They include among other things the following: the affections of family life, friendship, sexual relationships, other forms of companionship; occupational goods – given the immense proliferation of interesting sorts of work since the eighteenth century; sport and exercise; home care and garden care; an interest in other animals; travel at home and now often abroad.

The arts deserve a comment to themselves. Television has brought comedy, drama, dancing, pop concerts into all our homes. Music of every genre is easily accessible, wherever and whenever we want it. What was even for royal circles in the early twentieth century the occasional treat of a visit to the theatre or to listen to music is now a daily possibility for a whole population.

All these and other kinds of worthwhile activity are within the reach of almost all of us. And this is only a minimum. Above this, many of us, thanks to educational improvements, engage in artistic, intellectual and other pleasures less accessible to others.

There are no sharp edges here, no higher and lower culture, only complex spectra of involvement across whole populations. And not only do we all participate in these various worthwhile activities themselves: we also enjoy thinking and talking about what we like and do not like about them, comparisons between them, conflicts we face in doing one thing rather than another. So on the back of first-order valuable activities comes the higher-order – but not necessarily higher-value – activity of reflecting about these, by oneself and via intercourse with others. This intercourse is not always face-to-face, as in the conversations we have with friends and colleagues. We also listen to what novelists, dramatists, poets, journalists, biographers, academics and even chat-show participants have to say. At their best, they help us to clarify or concretise our own more inchoate thoughts about well-being; challenge them; add new

perspectives. As creators of public texts and events, they provide shared reference points and illustrations for our conversations. You might even say they help to keep going something like a national, and sometimes international, conversation, which all of us can drop into and out of as we wish. The internet now provides a more interactive, more global and at the same often more intimate version of the same thing.

Who, then, could be an authority on how well individual lives are going? Like political authority in our age, authority on well-being does not belong to an aristocracy or to any other social class or group. It is diffused across a whole population. In democratic politics, we each have, in theory, an equal voice in determining what kind of society we want to see. Our participation as electors is formalised, brought under clear rules. In other ways, our involvement in politics is more varied from one person to another, more difficult to pin down. If there is a sense in which nearly all of us now, to some extent or other, have a voice on how well people are flourishing, it is also in an unformalised way. There are no rules laying down that we should all have an equal say. Yet there are no well-being experts whose voices legitimately crowd out others. Nearly all our voices are heard, in different contexts and to differing extents.

6

Well-being is not to be understood in terms of individual desire-satisfaction, even where the desires are both informed and of major significance in a person's life. If it is not a subjective matter in this sense, neither is it an objective matter of deriving it from features of our human nature. The truth is more subtle. Well-being is still desire-dependent, but the desires in question are those not of an individual, but of a loose collection of people such as that described in the last paragraph.

It is hard to be precise about who is inside this body, and if inside, how far inside. I have been emphasising that nearly all of us are inside to some extent, that those who have a fuller acquaintance with different kinds of goods are further inside than others, but that there are no sharp lines at any point. This is where education comes in. One of the purposes of education in a democratic society is to equip people for a flourishing life. As part of this aim they also become better qualified to make judgements about human flourishing. They become better-informed contributors to the national and global conversation.

In characterising education, Michael Oakeshott has also famously used the same term. For him education is an initiation into the 'conversation of mankind', a conversation 'begun in the primeval forests and extended and made more articulate in the course of centuries' (Oakeshott, 1962, p. 199). The 'voices' in the conversation are those of specific kinds of human activity – science, practical activity, history, the arts. To be educated is to have learned to recognise these voices, to have entered into these pursuits and mastered them.

There are problems about this vision of education. One would need to know more about the aims of this initiation, and about their grounding. As part of this one would have to see how far the metaphor of conversation can be sustained. An actual conversation is among individuals, not pursuits. Science and history are not literally talking to each other. In non-metaphorical language, what is Oakeshott trying to say? I do not need to follow these matters up here. I

mention them to clarify the difference between what Oakeshott is saying and what I am saying. The voices I have in mind *are* those of individuals. They are people reflecting on and expressing their ideas about human well-being and its ingredients. They sometimes do this face to face, in literal conversations; and sometimes they participate in discussions on a wider scale.

All this is part of education for democratic citizenship. The link is not hard to discern. A citizen is expected to participate, as an elector and in other ways, in decisions about the future of a political community. These decisions will be about how to make life better for people, about their flourishing. The more fully the citizen understands what this involves, and the less he or she is led astray by misconceptions of it, the better for the polity. Whereas Oakeshott's 'conversation' evokes the wide-ranging, unfocused atmosphere of an upper class dinner party, what I have in mind is connected to a more serious and vital purpose. Not that my citizens are always, by any means, communicating about the good life with civic aims in mind. They may be reading a novel, or talking to a neighbour about the demands of looking after a young child. I am talking about the taken-for-granted background of life in a modern, reasonably educated democracy – about the mass of insignificant occasions like these that bear on matters of well-being and their significance in our political life.

The democratic ideal I have been presenting is threatened, in Britain at least, by the remnants of a more exclusivist perspective on well-being. The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have seen various attempts to draw status lines between the upper, middle and working classes. You can see a famous example of this in the three great educational reviews of the mid-nineteenth century, one for each class: the Clarendon, Taunton and Newcastle commissions. The structure of class divisions has changed since the 1860s, but a remnant of the old desire for firm social boundaries has persisted in repeated attempts to exclude the mass of the population from enjoying fulfilments open only to the few. Leaving on one side taxation policy, lines have been drawn to demarcate 'higher' culture from allegedly deceptive enjoyments 'below'. These lines have been mirrored in educational divisions between grammar schools and the rest. An ideology of vocational selection connected with intelligence testing has been used to keep the lower classes, apart from those climbing the scholarship ladder, away from jobs that contribute to rather than obstruct personal fulfilment.

The result of this élitism has been to leave many of our more deprived young people ill-equipped to enjoy a more flourishing life. Stepping stones that they might have trodden – e.g., in popular music, sport, relationships – have been discounted. In a world where the traditional solace for the poor – the prospect of a better life hereafter if one avoids immorality *pro tem* – no longer soothes, too little is done to help young people fill their lives with worthwhile pursuits. Too many are abandoned to street corners and to boredom. For their own sake and for the sake of a more complete democracy, there is much still to do in education and in social policy more widely.

7

This essay has argued for the dependency of well-being goods on culture and cultural change. In doing so, it has distanced itself from the naturalist view that they are derivable from human nature. Let me look at this last approach yet once again. I recently visited the *China: The Three*

Emperors 1662-1795 exhibition at the Royal Academy in London. I was struck by the ingredients of the good life apparently enjoyed by the imperial circle. These included: hunting; looking at the moon; appreciating rocks, lakes, pine trees, cranes; calligraphy; enjoying fireworks; boating; poetry; sitting drinking tea; playing the zither. These items do not strike us, as Europeans, as totally foreign. Many have parallels in our own culture and its history. The question is: how can these parallels be explained?

Given the meagre links between China and Europe at this period and before, it may be tempting to suggest that only our common human nature can be the answer. We are prompted to think that when a society, or social group, rises above the level of subsistence and has the time, resources and this-world ethical outlook to make the most of our short human life, the activities it favours as elements in flourishing must be built around such things as the exercise of our senses, physical activity, self-awareness.

It may well be true that we cannot imagine a radically different kind of society. We are, after all, talking about human flourishing and not the flourishing of spiders. So it is not at all surprising that *our* well-being is built around things that *we* can do and experience. But, to elaborate a point I made earlier, this is not to say that we can first look objectively, as biologists and psychologists might, at general features of human beings, including their various capabilities, and from these alone deduce the components of well-being. We possess eyes and ears, as well as propensities to see sights and hear sounds. If we did not have these things, visual art and music would be out of our reach. But how does our having them make art and music *valuable*?

To take this further step, we need to appeal to public agreement within a culture or sub-culture. Personal well-being in this way parallels morality. In his *The Concept of Law* H.L.A Hart described various features of our common human nature – our vulnerability, approximate equality of power, limited altruism, limited resources, and so on – that go some way to explaining commonalities in moral and legal codes (Hart, 1961, ch 9).¹ On vulnerability, for instance, if we were built with carapaces and not just of flesh and bone, one reason for the prohibition against killing would disappear. We could imagine a parallel list of common features related to personal flourishing. But just as the wrongness of killing does not follow from the fact that we are made of flesh, neither does the worthwhileness of drinking tea with friends follow from the facts that we have taste buds and are social animals. The empirical facts are necessary for both morality and well-being to exist, but are not enough to generate them. While they were still existing in virtual isolation from each other, China and Europe created their own, partly similar but in detail no doubt very different, versions of human flourishing. Their creations were cultural products.

8

I have argued that, in the European context at least, well-being goods have been increasing in range and specification for several centuries. As they have grown, those best placed to know about them have also changed. Someone living in 1850 may have been among those best fitted to understand what it was to live a thriving life in the mid-nineteenth century; but he or she could hardly be a reliable judge - at least in any detail - of what this would be a century and a half later. Those of us living today are obviously in a better position. – Not all, but many of us. The last

century and a half has seen a broadening of participation here, parallel to developments in political democracy. There is still a long way to go on both these fronts. Dykes continue to be erected by those who see themselves at the upper end of society to keep those 'below' from sharing in the good life and in political power. Whether the dykes will continue to be breached over the next century is uncertain.

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Note

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¹ I am very grateful to Patricia White for suggesting this parallel.