

The Strictly Sequential Hybrid Theory

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## Abstract For Masters

### The Strictly Sequential Hybrid Theory

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The Strictly Sequential Hybrid Theory (SSHT) proposed in this thesis addresses the limitations of traditional hybrid theories of well-being, which integrate subjective experiences with objective goods but struggle with "unwarranted attitudes"—attitudes not tied to objective goods yet influential on well-being. Previous enhancements like those by Wall and Sobel gave unwarranted attitudes undue significance, leading to counterintuitive effects. SSHT recalibrates this by assigning a secondary but crucial role to unwarranted attitudes, ensuring alignment with intuitive notions of well-being. It emphasizes a structured integration where objective values and warranted subjective experiences primarily determine well-being, while unwarranted attitudes are considered to resolve ties in closely matched scenarios. This approach allows SSHT to offer a more coherent and balanced framework for understanding well-being, surpassing previous models in both comprehensiveness and philosophical depth. SSHT's nuanced method marks a significant advancement in the philosophy of well-being, contributing a refined perspective on the complex interplay between subjective and objective elements that constitute a good life.

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## Introduction

This paper introduces the Strictly Sequential Hybrid Theory,<sup>1</sup> a novel account of hybrid theory aimed at deepening the philosophical understanding of well-being by meticulously assigning subjective experiences and objective conditions to their appropriate places. Traditional hybrid theories have laid the groundwork for this endeavor, striving to combine subjective experience with objective components of a good life. These theories, as pioneering as they are, often struggle with the complex interplay between an individual's intrapersonal experiences and the supposed objective goods of well-being. Following the footsteps of these attempts, robust hybrid theories proposed by Steven Wall and David Sobel further sought to harmonize these dimensions but encountered counterintuitive consequences in their treatment of unwarranted attitudes<sup>2</sup> To set the stage, Wall and Sobel define (un)warranted attitudes as follows:

Warranted attitudes respond appropriately or fittingly to the objective goods (or bads) at which they are directed. They contrast with both unwarranted attitudes, which fail to respond to objective goods (or bads) appropriately and warrantless attitudes, which are not directed at (or not directed in response to) objective goods (or bads), but rather at states or objects that have no objective value or disvalue (or regardless of their objective value).<sup>3</sup>

This paper aims to investigate the foundational role of unwarranted attitudes in grounding benefits associated with well-being.<sup>4</sup> While acknowledging the merit of Wall and Sobel's contributions in

highlighting a pertinent issue, this study seeks to construct a more coherent and comprehensive hybrid theory that grants benefit grounding ability to unwarranted attitudes, yet not so much that it makes the theory fail. This aims to overcome the limitations inherent in both traditional and robust hybrid theories, ultimately aligning more closely with prevailing intuitions regarding the nature of well-being. The Strictly Sequential Hybrid Theory proposes a refined framework that places unwarranted attitudes in a secondary yet significant role.<sup>5</sup> By aiming to find the equilibrium between the traditional hybrid theory and the robust hybrid theory, this sequential approach modifies the role that unwarranted attitude plays. If done successfully, this methodical integration would capture the full spectrum of well-being, offering a balanced perspective that acknowledges the importance of both subjective experiences and objective goods.

This paper commences with a brief introduction to traditional hybrid theories and the reasons for their emergence including necessary explications of subjective and objective theories. Following this, it presents the argument for the robust hybrid theory, accompanied by a critique. The paper then introduces the Strictly Sequential Hybrid Theory, offering a detailed account of its claims. Finally, it addresses a potential yet powerful rebuttal that merits a response.

## 1 Traditional Hybrid Theories

Initiated by Derek Parfit,<sup>6</sup> there are three categories regarding well-being, namely hedonism, desire satisfaction theory, and objective list theory.<sup>7</sup> Among the three, hedonism and desire satisfaction theory are commonly regarded as subjective theories,<sup>8</sup> and the objective list theory is,

evidently, an objective theory.<sup>9</sup> The traditional hybrid theories of well-being arose to address shortcomings in both objective and subjective theories, which, arguably, alone fail to fully capture what constitutes human flourishing.<sup>10</sup> Objective theories emphasize achieving the goods that are independent of one's attitude, such as friendship and knowledge, which neglects personal preferences. In contrast, subjective theories focus on positive attitudes<sup>11</sup> and satisfaction, overlooking the values of objective achievements. The hybrid theory integrates these aspects, proposing that well-being involves both engagement with objectively valuable goods and subjective satisfaction from these engagements. Generally speaking,<sup>12</sup> in traditional hybrid theories, one is benefited when they have positive attitudes toward endeavors that correspond to objective goods.<sup>13</sup> In other words, an action is capable of grounding benefits whenever the two criteria stated above are met. Whether benefit would be yielded in cases where only one of the two conditions was fulfilled varies greatly between different derivative theories.

In the effort to demonstrate the necessity of the emergence of traditional hybrid theories, I will need to present a brief introduction of the most prominent and relevant subjective and objective theories in well-being, along with their flaws.

## **1.1 Objective Theories**

Objective theories assert that certain criteria objectively determine an individual's well-being or lack thereof, applying to individuals regardless of personal attitudes or preferences. Being objective qua objective ignores subjective attitudes or feelings regarding the supposed goods.



According to Lin<sup>14</sup>, "... any theory that includes at least one objective good will imply that being connected in the right way to your pro-attitudes is not a necessary condition of something's goodness for you." In scenarios where a person holds the most distasteful attitude towards a supposed objective good, it does not alter the supposed fact that the objective good provides benefits for that individual, thus granting it the normative power to generate welfare.

Objective list theory, the most prominent objective theory, if not the only, offers multiple objective goods that everyone ought to pursue, and their lives go well if and only if and because they have the listed objective goods in their lives.<sup>15</sup> For example, popular candidates include pleasure, friendship, knowledge, love, etc., which means that a version of objective list theory could argue that one's well-being depends on the number and the intensity of the candidates that are present.<sup>16</sup> However, the concern comes in when an agent has a neutral or even negative mental attitude towards the candidates. It is counterintuitive to argue that one's life is going well because their life obtains something that one could not care less (or hate), e.g., the problem of alienation.<sup>17</sup> As Fletcher defined in his book, alienation or to be alienating means to "fail to be sufficiently sensitive to the cares and concerns of the agent."<sup>18</sup> Suppose a person believes the most negatively in regards to friendship which results in the absolute absence of friends in his life and he would be disgusted immediately with a single instance of a friend, this said version of objective list theory would insist on the idea that having friendship for him would, in fact, make him better off than he would be otherwise. The lack of subjective factors utterly detaches the agents from their well-being, handing away the authority to determine their own well-being in

totality to the external, which motivates many, including philosophers, to turn their heads to subjective theories.

## 1.2 Subjective Theories

Subjective theory, a.k.a. subjectivism, according to Eden Lin is “roughly speaking, the view that you are authoritative or sovereign over your own well-being, in the sense that the only standard for determining how well things are going for you is provided by your own favorable and unfavorable attitudes.”<sup>19</sup> However, it encounters challenges when considered in isolation. For example, desire-satisfaction theory<sup>20</sup> states that “one life is better for a subject than another iff it contains a greater balance of desire satisfaction over frustration than the other,”<sup>21</sup> which essentially argues that one is well(ill)off if and only if and because their desires are (not)fulfilled. The immediate critiques of this theory are numerous, including “the problem of changing desires,” “the objection from remote desires,” and “the problem of defective desires.”<sup>22</sup> The problem of changing desires points out that our desires change as time goes by. Suppose my love for soda as a kid gave rise to the desire of drinking soda every day for the rest of my life. However, as I grow older, I do not have such a desire anymore. In principle, my childhood desire to drink soda everyday forever is frustrated, but it is not obvious how my life is worse off or how fulfilling the desire could make my life better off. The objection from remote desires argues that there are desires that are too remote, unrelated to the agent herself, to contribute to one’s own well-being if fulfilled. The problem of defective desires is more obvious in the sense that the fulfillment of a defective

desire, such as killing or raping, would not result in one being better off, at least not in a widely accepted sense. These three critiques created a massive difficulty for the desire satisfaction theory.

One other instance of subjective theory, as said previously, is hedonism. Hedonism is widely accepted as “a family of views on which a person's amount of welfare is entirely determined by the facts about the pleasures and displeasures that she experiences, in such a way that, other things being equal, the more pleasure (displeasure) she experiences, the higher (lower) she is in well-being.”<sup>23</sup> The well-being of a person solely depends on the subjective experience. Hedonism has always been a heated battleground. Its recent supporters include Ben Bradley who defended the idea that pleasure is the only factor that makes one’s life go well by reflecting on the notion of death.<sup>24</sup> He argues for an account of hedonism which says that good experiences grounds benefits, thus making one’s life better, while bad or negative experiences do the opposite.<sup>25</sup> On the contrary, one of the most famous objectors of hedonism, Robert Nozick, spelled disaster for hedonism using a thought experiment called the experience machine, a thought experiment that questions the nature of happiness by asking if we would choose to plug into a machine that could guarantee us constant, perfect experiences at the cost of living in a simulated reality.<sup>26</sup> The experience machine, arguably, rendered hedonism implausible by giving a scenario where the most reasonable person would choose to opt out of hedonistic ideology, suggesting that happiness is, after all, not all that matters.

### 1.3 Objective-Subjective Hybrid Theories

The problems stated above lead to the emergence of objective-subjective hybrid theories, which have shown promise in addressing these difficulties to a significant extent.<sup>27</sup> For example, a hybrid account by Shelly Kagan offers a picture of constructing well-being as the marriage between the objective and subjective, as “enjoying the good”.<sup>28</sup> Other forms of combining the objective and the subjective have been extensively argued by Richard Kraut and Robert Adams.<sup>29</sup> Kraut argues that the objects of our desires must possess inherent qualities that make them worth wanting. This approach requires us to evaluate our desires and the objects of those desires based on their intrinsic characteristics. Kraut's theory emphasizes that not all desires contribute positively to our good and that some objects are inherently more valuable and conducive to well-being than others, while Adams takes a rather unusual path to argue for a type of hybrid theory that combines personal desires and perspective with an external standard of value embedded in the divine figure. He argues a hybrid account of “enjoyment of the excellent”, similar as Kagan’s, but only that the notion of “excellent” is the infinite good proposed by God.

In these hybrid cases, the problem of alienation is mostly eliminated since merely having the objective good does not ground benefits, and one must subjectively have a positive attitude towards it (e.g., enjoyment, endorsement).<sup>30</sup> At the same time, the flaws with subjective theories stated above such as defective desires disappear, or at least are rendered benign, thanks to the participation of objective values. Killing and raping would lose their ability to ground any benefits whatsoever. However, Wall and Sobel still find these “traditional hybrid theories” importantly

unsatisfying, which has led to their invention of the Robust Hybrid Theory.

## 2 Introduction to Robust Hybrid Theory<sup>31</sup>

In their article, “A Robust Hybrid Theory of Well-being”, Wall and Sobel introduce a modified theory of well-being based on a hybrid theory that combines objective values and subjective attitudes<sup>32</sup>, named robust hybrid theory. There are several components that are central to understanding as well as making sense of this theory.

First, the robust hybrid theory is a “hybrid” theory in the way that it allows both subjective and objective components to play a role in grounding well-being or benefits, as discussed in previous sections. It is a combination of two fundamental accounts of well-being: objective list theory and subjective theories. Secondly, it is named “robust” because it “grants a broad and not subservient role to both objective and subjective values”.<sup>33</sup> In their article, Wall and Sobel distinguished between the “two normative roles that the attitudes can play in grounding benefits”: Type 1 and Type 2.<sup>34</sup>

Type 1 is the traditional, non-robust type, or the type that previous accounts of hybrid theory adopt according to Wall and Sobel, of normative role that attitudes play in grounding benefits. It is present when positive attitudes can ground benefits, yet its power is “entirely subservient to objective standards of value”.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, the attitude that grounds benefit, in this case, is named warranted attitudes, as opposed to unwarranted attitudes, which do not reflect any objective values. Unwarranted positive attitudes, according to this account, do not ground

benefits. For instance, suppose a person P has a favoring attitude towards counting blades of grass. Because such behavior does not correspond to any objective value in any version of objective list theory, this behavior does not ground benefits for P, meaning that it does not add any amount of well-being to P's life, no matter how favorable P is towards such action.

Type 2 is the type of normative role that attitudes should play according to RHT. It is present when attitudes can create benefits without necessarily reflecting objective values.

Attitudes have the power to generate benefits all on their own disregarding the value an object or an action may have on the side of objectivity. In other words, unwarranted attitudes could ground benefits. There are two cases regarding the sovereign power that attitudes are allowed to have, namely restricted account and unrestricted account. In the latter, attitudes ground benefit without any restriction on the status of valuableness the objects may have. Favoring attitudes towards dis-valuable objects ground benefits. In the restricted account, attitudes ground benefit so long as it does not run counter to objective values. In either case, attitudes enjoy significantly more sovereign power, avoiding being merely a moon to the sun of objective values. To flashback on the P example, in this case, if type 2 is present, P's favoring attitude towards counting blades of grass would ground benefits for P, adding well-being to P's life, arguably in both restricted and unrestricted cases.

In conclusion, traditional/non-robust hybrid theory places attitudes in a subordinated position, limiting its power to independently ground benefits. Attitudes ground benefits only if it reflects objectively valuable objects. On the other hand, a hybrid theory becomes robust if and

only if and because it grants equal benefit grounding power to the subjective even when it is not warranted by the objective.

### 3 RHT's Challenge

RHT is significantly stronger than traditional hybrid theory mainly in terms of two ways, namely its explanatory power and intuitive appeal. However, it is still unsatisfying as a hybrid theory.

The implausibility of RHT could be easily spotted and illustrated by conducting thought experiments or case studies, which is what will be presented next. Before going into the case study, an objectivity theory needs to be in place, as a placeholder, to fill in the side of objective values. So, for the sake of the argument, I will choose three of the five proposed goods by Rice, because it is intuitive, simple, and satisfactory to serve the purpose.<sup>36</sup> In this case, the values on the objective list would be pleasure, loving friendship, and achievement.<sup>37</sup>

Imagine a world with two characters who are named Zach and John.

Zach is a mediocre young man who is barely surviving his life. He has two to three friends that he regularly spends spare time with, to whom he has a fairly favoring attitude. He has a fair amount of pleasure in his life, yet mostly from sugar and alcohol. In terms of achievement, he has a decent job downtown that granted him promotions several times during the decades he worked there, towards which he feels positive. Upon reflection, Zach's life is as mediocre as it can be with some yet limited amount of objective good that he feels positive about.

John, on the other hand, is much better off. John is the CEO of one of the most renowned nongovernmental organizations in the world, whose ambition is to eliminate hunger and promote human rights around the globe. He is, after 30 years into this field, passionate about his work and has won a huge number of honors in light of his contribution. In private, John is an extremely lovable person who has befriended lots of great people from different cultural backgrounds. He loves all his friends, especially those who he hangs out with all the time. On the days off, he enjoys reading, watching movies, jet racing, etc., from which he finds tons of pleasure. John's life in general is arguably as well off as one can be with a tremendous amount of objective value along with extremely favoring attitudes.

Up until this point, I argue it safe to claim that according to RHT, John is significantly better off than Zach. However, a small modification to Zach's life is enough to raise a threatening problem to this verdict. Suppose Zach has an ultimate favoring attitude towards something that does not reflect any objective values. For the sake of the argument, I suppose it is driving along the border of the city, round after round. In this case, it is a question whether there could be enough rounds of driving during the lifetime of Zach that would turn the table and eventually render Zach's life better than John's life overall. Wall and Sobel have no choice but to give a positive answer because, according to RHT, this behavior of driving along the border, even in the restricted account, grounds benefits; therefore, there will be a pivotal point where the benefits derived from the action of driving along the border of the city is accumulated enough to surpass the overall benefits that John had accumulated in his entire life, especially when, suppose, Zach's enthusiasm regarding such activity is as tremendous as humanly possible.



### **3.1 Response to Potential Objection 1: The Runover Objection**

One objection that the defenders of RHT could make is that in the restricted account,<sup>38</sup> the endlessly repeated action of driving around the border of the city runs over the objective values of, in this case, friendship, achievement, and pleasure. Because the mere action of driving involves nothing but mechanical movements of the body plus the intellectually unchallenging effort, this behavior does not correspond with any of the objective values itself. Moreover, the opportunity cost of doing such a time-consuming action runs over the objective values. By spending an overwhelming amount of time every day on an action that does not promote any objective value, Zach would not be able to obtain as well as develop meaningful friendships, since Zach would have no time left in a day every day to engage in conversations with others, let alone participating in meaningful activities with friends. The same logic applies to achievement and pleasure. As a result, the potential benefits grounded by driving along the border of the city, according to the defenders of RHT, should not be counted in terms of the purpose of increasing well-being, because it runs over the objective values, violating the doctrine of the restricted account of RHT.

This argument will inevitably lead to an overly demanding, if not fully impossible, interpretation of RHT. If the action of driving along the border runs counter to objective values, then it will necessarily imply that a huge number of other activities of the same nature, which will be called neutral actions for the purpose of simplicity, run over objective values as well,

including some actions that are intuitively considered less extreme. It implies that as long as an activity does not suggest objective values, it runs over objective values, given that the time spent doing such activities could be spent in other ways that contribute to the increase of objective values. The taking place of neutral actions would almost always be at the expense of an opportunity to contribute to the boost of objective value. This argument, under such examination, would overrule almost all, if not all, benefits that unwarranted attitude could potentially ground under RHT. Consequentially, it is at risk of causing RHT to be a theory that theoretically exists yet lacks any practicality, for barely any unwarranted attitude would successfully ground benefits under these unreasonable conditions that actions need to meet.

### **3.2 Response to Potential Objection 2: The Pleasure Objection**

Another route responders could take is to argue that the reason it is possible for Zach to be better off than John by merely driving along the border of the city is that per having a favoring attitude towards this action, Zach necessarily takes pleasure from it.<sup>39</sup> By increasing one of the objective values, namely pleasure, Zach's well-being gradually increases as well, eventually to the point where John stops being the one who is better off. Zach's action of driving, in fact, is not a neutral action, and it is warranted by objective values, namely pleasure. With this line of reasoning, the tension in the case is explained away.

It is, indeed, hard to imagine, in the mind of the normal, that Zach has a favoring attitude towards driving along the border without taking pleasure from doing so. However, it is

conceptualizable that there are activities that one has a favoring attitude towards yet do not generate pleasure for the agent, since favoring attitudes suggest not only desire-related notions but also evaluative notions.<sup>40</sup> One instance of it is to interpret favoring attitudes as in attitudinal favoring. Consider the case of Taylor, who dedicates considerable time to creating intricate patterns in the sand on a beach. These patterns range from geometric designs to elaborate representations of natural scenes, each requiring hours of focused effort. Taylor does this alone, with the full knowledge that the tide will erase their work within hours. There is no audience for this endeavor, no lasting record, and the activity brings Taylor no conventional pleasure. On top of which, the effort is physically demanding and sometimes frustrating, especially knowing the impermanence of the outcome. Taylor's commitment to this activity is not driven by a desire for pleasure, recognition, or any objective goods. Instead, Taylor is motivated by a deep-seated evaluative belief in the intrinsic value of recreating the nature in the moment. This belief is not anchored in any objective measure of value.<sup>41</sup> To push it further, one does not have to believe an action to be able to contribute to possible candidates in any potential objective list theory, since this could be used by the objectors attacking the “unwarrantedness” of the attitude. One could have a favoring attitude towards something that is objectively meaningless and from which no possible meaning could be derived whatsoever. The point here is that contrary to many brute intuitions, pleasure is only one of many favoring attitudes there are that were proposed by numerous philosophers and some of the favoring attitudes could be quite far from being capable of reflecting any possible objective goods. Any reasonable person should agree that there are actions that one holds favorable attitudes towards that ground no possible objective benefits.

### 3.3 RHT is Bound to Fail

From the analysis above, there are only two possible options for RHT. 1) Hold onto the notion of robustness and bite the bullets on the counterintuitive conclusions of extreme cases. 2) Modify the theory so that it would be more plausible at the cost of compromising the Robustness of the theory. This paper endorses the second option.

For any theory of well-being, as long as the subjective attitudes are put on par with objective values, thus having the same benefit-grounding power as objective values, it is bound to be vulnerable to the criticism of pure subjective theories of well-being, such as the famous criticisms of the desire satisfaction theory forwarded by Heathwood.<sup>42</sup> No modification of the RHT would succeed by limiting the power of attitudes regarding meaningless neutral actions from adding a significant amount of well-being to agents who perform them unless it agrees to give up its ground of independence between objective values and subjective attitudes, which would compromise the robustness of the theory. The hope to further empower individuals' subjectivity to dictate their own well-being seems to be, at least in the scope of this paper, nothing but wishful thinking.

## 4 The Strictly Sequential Hybrid Theory

### 4.1 The motivation for a modified novel account

With all the critiques being said in the previous sections, I do sympathize with Wall and Sobel's motivation to free unwarranted attitudes from the cage of the objective, at least to a certain extent. Wall and Sobel would almost certainly agree with me in the argument that Subjective experience, either warranted or unwarranted, is fundamental for any plausible theory on well-being because it would be extremely problematic to assess well-being independently of subjective experience. It would bring about unacceptable alienation that could render any theory implausible.<sup>43</sup> In fact, Sobel argued for such a view stating that "in such matters of mere taste one has a reason to choose what one favors or prefers. In such matters, one's 'stance' or favoring can play a role in grounding reasons..."<sup>44</sup> and I do subscribe to this conclusion. Although extensive attempts were made aiming at being inclusive of the subjective in the past, it is still gravely alienating because, in those theories, what ultimately determines one's well-being are still the items in the objective lists that are not necessarily connected to the endmost agents, i.e., the individuals. The objective cap was always on the subjective.

On the other hand, the subjective should not be granted full liberty as well. It should be restricted, to a certain degree, to prevent the notion of the "good life" from being completely dissolved into ill-informed contentment. It is a highly subtle work of assigning the subjective to its proper position. In the light of maximum plausibility, I strongly concur that the objective still takes a heavier seat, as the objective list theorists and some traditional hybrid theorists would

agree. However, the place of the objective should not be as decisive as they argue it to be. I invite you to think of it as a factory line. Instead of being at the end of the line and being the final arbiter, the objective should be moved upstream, meaning to the prior steps of the line, as a sorting mechanism for attitudes and divide them by the criteria of whether they correspond or pinpoint with one or more items in an objective list, and treat them accordingly. As much as I appreciate their motivation, Wall and Sobel's mistake is that their theory opens the door for insignificant contentment to take precedence over genuine achievements.<sup>45</sup> The role of the subjective should be more pronounced than Traditional Hybrid Theories suggest, yet not as predominant as Robust Hybrid Theories permit. Thus, in the spirit of continuing the endeavor, the theory I propose aims to be a philosophical refinement of the appropriate roles that subjective and objective elements should play in well-being.

## **4.2 The Theory itself**

In light of 1) the inherent shortcomings of the equating power of the subjective and the objective as well as 2) the evident implausibility of subjective attitudes outweighing objective values in theories of well-being, we are compelled to recognize a hierarchical relationship between these constructs, assigning objective value a slightly superior position of influence. As discussed previously, it is tricky to correctly position the unwarranted attitudes in terms of their benefit-grounding ability. Existing hybrid theories all ended up in failure by either overvaluing or undervaluing the unwarranted attitudes. In the attempt of this paper, I argue that a more

convincing account of objective-subjective hybrid theory should consider unwarranted attitudes as a factor, yet as an independent and inferior category. When assessing well-being, objective values and warranted attitudes should be the major and primary sources of evaluation, whereas unwarranted attitudes should be considered in a secondary manner. Unwarranted attitudes should stay secondary unless in a case of comparison. In cases of comparisons between the well-being of two agents, only when the benefits of the two agents do not significantly differ do the unwarranted attitudes begin to participate, in the hope to break the tie.<sup>46</sup> In the case of Zach and John, Zach's objective goods and warranted attitudes are significantly less than John's, so there is no amount of unwarranted attitude accumulated by Zach driving around the border of the city that would stop John from being the one that is better off. Analogously, objective goods and warranted attitudes are the aircraft carrier and tanks in an arms race or combat, and unwarranted attitudes are pocketknives. Pocketknives could make a difference when the two parties each have only one man standing after a brutal night of warfare, but as long as one of the two parties has one more tank than the other, the pocketknife shall lose its shine immediately.

Such a theory with this hierarchy embedded conforms importantly better with intuition. Those who enjoy more objective goods and more warranted attitudes are rightly better off than those who have less. Those who are low in objective goods and warranted attitudes are not offered any detour to overtake, thus the otherwise implausible result is eliminated. On the other hand, those who enjoy roughly the same level of objective goods and warranted attitudes are not left cold by having the theory assigning them the same level of well-being despite their

individual differences. Those who have more favoring attitudes towards tiny little things in life are rightly better off than their counterparts who did not bother to engage with the less important.

By taking a back seat but possessing a certain measure of control, the approach towards unwarranted attitude in this theory is not completely overlooked as it was in the traditional hybrid theory. This particular stance, evidently inspired by Wall and Sobel's initiative for an adjusted hybrid theory, acknowledges the presence of unwarranted attitudes without allowing them to overreach as they, unfortunately, did in RHT. In doing so, it finds a middle ground that was absent in the theoretical framework and managed to avoid the extremes that led to erroneous conclusions in the Robust Hybrid Theory. This balanced approach towards the handling of unwarranted attitudes offers a more satisfactory resolution by being less susceptible to criticism from advocates of both the objective and subjective theories of well-being.

This equilibrium, or golden mean if you will, regarding unwarranted attitudes, if successful, represents a more appropriate method in dealing with the complexities associated with these attitudes. It allows for a nuanced understanding that does not overly commit to the biases that flawed earlier interpretations within the RHT. This strategic moderation ensures that unwarranted attitudes are neither dismissed outright nor given undue influence, thus aligning more closely with Wall and Sobel's vision of a more plausible hybrid theory.



### 4.3 Existential Objection<sup>47</sup>

There is a potential objection that could threaten both the robust hybrid theory and the strictly sequential hybrid theory. This threat is more obvious in the face of the robust hybrid theory, although it is not immediately dismissible in the front of SSHT as well. Since SSHT is built upon RHT, I need to address this objection against RHT so that SSHT could possibly stay intact. This objection applies to SSHT as well, but I find it to be clearer and easier to comprehend if I spell and address the majority of this objection in the part of RHT, and if I could address the objection properly for RHT, the objection would be dismissed for SSHT as well given the same hybrid paradigm that they share. Also, given that this paper sympathizes with Wall and Sobel's motivation overall, this potential threat shall be entertained and diluted as much as possible.

In the face of the RHT, the criticism implies that the traditional objective list theories, which acknowledge multiple basic goods including objective ones, might already encapsulate the variety of goods that Sobel and Wall aim to introduce without the need for a hybrid approach. The unwarranted attitudes are itself a kind of objective goods that could go into an objective list theory since objective list theory only suggests, arguably, nothing but two criteria, namely pluralism and objectivism.<sup>48</sup> (I will call such fictional theory hybrid list theory for the purpose of simplicity of further discussion.)

There are two possible variants of this objection. First, the unwarranted attitudes could be framed as an objective good, or a series of objective goods by themselves, e.g., gratification, satisfaction, etc. (The items in the list that are linked to subjectivity are called subjectively

objective items, e.g., gratification and satisfaction, and those that are linked with objectivity are called objectively objective items, e.g. friendship and knowledge, for the purpose of clarity and simplicity for the discussion later.) As a result, the RHT is nothing but another objective list consisting of two opposing kinds of objective items rather than a genuine hybrid theory. One instance of its possibility could be an objective list theory consisting of, e.g., love, friendship, knowledge, tranquility, gratification, and satisfaction.<sup>49</sup>

Second, the objectors could argue that it is not the case that the unwarranted attitudes could be framed as an objective good or a series of objective goods. Rather, unwarranted attitudes, as well as warranted attitudes, themselves could be in the list of the items in hybrid list theories. Thus, RHT is nothing more than a hybrid list theory consisting of items as simple as warranted positive attitudes and unwarranted positive attitudes as subjectively objective goods along with objectively objective goods. For example, it is, as the objectors would argue, conceivable that a hybrid list theory consists of love, friendship, knowledge, tranquility, warranted attitudes, and unwarranted attitudes. In this manner, it would seem like RHT is a hybrid list theory after all. However, this argument does not conform to the requirement of the objective list theory that the items have to be basic goods.<sup>50</sup> The warranted and unwarranted attitudes are more of second-order good instead of basic goods such as gratitude. In other words, both the warranted and unwarranted attitudes are not good for and by themselves, they are good in the way that depends on other basic goods such as love, friendship, etc. If an attitude pinpoints, e.g., love, then it becomes a warranted attitude by nature. If an attitude does not pinpoint any objectively objective

goods, then it becomes an unwarranted attitude by nature. Both warranted and unwarranted attitudes exist dependently, so they do not deserve places in any objective list theories.

In the face of the SSHT, this objection could argue the similar. The fact that there is an additional limitation the SSHT applies to the unwarranted attitudes in order to confine its benefit-grounding ability so that it would not trespass, would constitute merely a subversion of the same objective list theory where the weight of the items is changed. The items are weighted by a hierarchy where the subjectively objective items are assigned a conditional secondary place, meaning that they are secondary when a tie is not achieved. For instance, an alternative objective list theory could consist of items of two categories: the primary category of love, friendship, knowledge, tranquility, and the conditional secondary category of gratification and satisfaction. This may look alien or even bizarre, but it is, as the objectors would argue, an objective list theory rather than a hybrid theory.

#### **4.4 A response**

This objection is well-thought. However, there are important factors that pinpoint hybrid theories in SSHT and RHT that prevent them from being reduced to mere objective list theories. Hybrid theory qua hybrid theory supposes not only components of the objective and the subjective at play in determining well-being, but also the correspondence, as an important yet not necessary factor, of a specific “object” and its attitudes. The correspondence or the linkage of the two aspects ensures that they are combined in a way that is better than if they are separated and

alone. The single presence of objectivity causes the problem of alienation and the single presence of the subjectivity brings about gravely counterintuitive verdicts of a good life. In hybrid list theories, objectivity without pro-attitudes and unwarranted attitudes are free to ground unlimited benefits individually so that a life full of nothing but alienation and unwarranted satisfactions could be deemed a perfect one. While in SSHT, the combination of the objective and the subjective grounds the most benefits and the objective and subjective alone grounds limited benefits, which I argue conforms significantly better to intuition.<sup>51</sup> SSHT addressed the problems from both sides by adopting the hybrid paradigm with modifications.<sup>52</sup>

Thanks to the lack of correspondence between the objective and the subjective, hybrid list theory would yield completely divergent verdicts in the light of specific instances compared to SSHT. Hybrid list theory values objectivity by itself alone without the necessary corresponding attitudes, so for a person who is extraordinarily alienated from all the objectively good deeds he or she does, hybrid list theory would offer an enormous amount of credit for the benefits that objectivity grounds while SSHT would not give nearly as much due to the unacceptable alienation it presents. As a result, any attitudinally unwarranted objectivity would be valued much more in the hybrid list theory than SSHT.

In terms of the subjective realms, it is impossible for the hybrid list theory to distinguish the warranted attitudes from unwarranted attitudes. If one excels on one of the subjectively objective items from mixed sources, a hybrid list theory would either overcount his well-being by assigning too much weight to unwarranted attitudes or undercount his well-being by putting every positive attitude, e.g., gratification, including warranted ones in a secondary place. For

instance, if one has a score of 100 on gratification, in which 70 is warranted and 30 is unwarranted, since this supposed hybrid list theory only has one item named “gratification”, it would never properly and accurately assign the proportions to the places that they belong. It is either that all of the 100 would be counted as a primary factor leading to implausible results or all of the 100 would be counted in a secondary manner, as the unwarranted attitudes when a tie is absent, which would lead to a result that is much lower than it should be. Without the assignment between the subjective and the objective, hybrid list theory could have done the calculation as accurately as SSHT and as required by any intuitively compelling theory of well-being. Therefore, it is impossible that SSHT could be just another objective list theory.

## 5 Conclusion

This paper presented a brief introduction to subjective theory, objective theory, and traditional hybrid theory along with their problems in order to explain the emergence of the Robust Hybrid Theory (RHT). In examining the Robust Hybrid Theory and its place within the philosophical discourse on well-being, this paper has identified a fundamental flaw that challenges the viability of maintaining the theory's robustness while addressing its shortcomings. This paper also handled two potential rebuttals to my objection to RHT. The “runover” objection, appealing at first glance, fails to hold up under rigorous examination due to its potentially overkill implications. Similarly, the “pleasure” objection overlooks the existence of scenarios where

favorable attitudes are present without any associated pleasure, indicating a lack of comprehensive engagement with the complexity of human experience.

As the analysis progressed, it became clear that RHT's ambitious attempt to accord justice to unwarranted attitudes falls short, rendering the theory implausible. Despite this, the intention behind RHT to find the balance between the subjective and the objective is noteworthy. In response, I proposed a restructured framework that repositions unwarranted attitudes in a way that lessens the theory's vulnerabilities to common critiques. This Strictly Sequential Hybrid Theory (SSHT) suggests that unwarranted attitudes should influence the conception of benefits in a subordinate role, offering a more defensible approach for comparing well-being across individuals. This is particularly relevant when there is no significant disparity in objective goods and warranted attitudes among agents.

In conclusion, this paper's journey through the conceptual underpinnings of RHT and toward the proposal of SSHT underscores the necessity for a continuous reevaluation of well-being theories. By striving for a philosophical refinement that better accounts for the complex interplay between subjective and objective elements of well-being, SSHT represents a step forward in the dialogue on the nature of a good life. However, the work is far from finished. The emergence of other important questions, such as the method of calculating the objective, the attitudes, etc. require further philosophical research.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The abbreviation SSHT will be used to avoid excessive repetition in this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Steven Wall and David Sobel “A Robust Hybrid Theory of Well-Being.” *Philosophical Studies* 178, no. 9 (November 4, 2020): 2829–51. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-020-01586-w>. This paper inherits the idea from Wall and Sobel and assumes that unwarranted attitudes are important in determining well-being. Thus, this paper does not engage in the debate of whether it is the case.

<sup>3</sup> Wall and Sobel, “A Robust Hybrid Theory”, Note 8.

<sup>4</sup> The scope of this paper will not consider problems of meta wellbeing as discussed by Shelly Kagan “The Limits of Well-Being.” *Social Philosophy and Policy* 9, no. 2 (1992): 169–89. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0265052500001461>. or anything of this nature.

<sup>5</sup> Significant as in Wall & Sobel’s sense, meaning that it grounds benefits to a certain extent.

<sup>6</sup> Derek Parfit *Reasons and Persons*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984, p.493.

<sup>7</sup> Recent dispute regarding Parfit’s categorization sees Christopher Woodard “Classifying Theories of Welfare.” *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 165, no. 3 (2013): 787–803. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42920185>.

<sup>8</sup> Prominent philosophers who support this view include Fred Feldman. “Pleasure and the Good Life”. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, Chris Heathwood “Desire Satisfactionism and Hedonism.” *Philosophical Studies* 128, no. 3 (April 2006): 539–63. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-004-7817-y>, and Ben Bradley “A Paradox for Some Theories of Welfare.” *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 133, no. 1 (2007): 45–53. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25471885>.

<sup>9</sup> There are other categories such as perfectionism. See argument of perfectionism by Guy Bradford “Perfectionism.” *In Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Well-Being*, edited by Guy Fletcher, 101115. New York: Routledge, 2016, Thomas Hurka “Perfectionism”. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, Philip Kitcher, “Essence and Perfection.” *Ethics* 110, no. 1 (October 1999): 59–83. <https://doi.org/10.1086/233204>, and Richard Kraut, *What Is Good and Why the Ethics of Well-Being*. Harvard University Press, 2007. There are theories that categorize hedonism as an objective list theory who only contains one basic good, see Guy Fletcher, “A Fresh Start for the Objective-List Theory of Well-Being.” *Utilitas* 25, no. 2 (June 2013): 206–20. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0953820812000453>. However, this paper places hedonism as a subjective theory, as more commonly agreed upon.

<sup>10</sup> Certainly, there are philosophers who advocates for the success of subjectivism or objectivism, yet this paper is built upon the claim that subjectivism or objectivism alone creates, at least some, implausibility, which I share.

<sup>11</sup> The attitudes refer to desires and beliefs, as Wall and Sobel would agree given their brief mention and

discussion of “subjectivism without desire” by Dorsey, “Subjectivism without Desire”, in note 11. See Wall and Sobel “A Robust Hybrid Theory”.

<sup>12</sup> There are indeed various sorts of hybrid theories that propose distinct methodology overall, this is just an oversimplification for the purpose of this paper.

<sup>13</sup> By corresponds, it means to pinpoint, highlights, and matches.

<sup>14</sup> Eden Lin, *Wellbeing, part 2: Theories of wellbeing*. *Journal of Ethics* 25, no. 3, 287305, 2021., p.8.

<sup>15</sup> Philosophers such as Fletcher and Rice all have argument related to this topic. See, Guy Fletcher, “A Fresh Start for the Objective-List Theory of Well-Being.” *Utilitas* 25, no. 2 (June 2013): 206–20. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0953820812000453>, Guy Fletcher, “Objective List Theories.” *In Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Well-Being*, April 14, 2016, 55–82. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315682266.ch12>, and Christopher Rice, “Defending the Objective List Theory of Well-Being.” *Ratio* 26, no. 2 (April 16, 2013): 196–211. <https://doi.org/10.1111/rati.12007>.

<sup>16</sup> The mathematical methodology could vary from theories to theories. Some take intensity into considerations and some don’t. I only present here one of the ways it could be done that is intuitive, since this paper has no mathematical intentions in this regard.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Railton, “Facts and Values.” *Philosophical Topics* 14, no. 2 (1986): 5–31. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43153978>, p.9.

<sup>18</sup> Fletcher, *The Philosophy of Well-Being*, p.168.

<sup>19</sup> Lin, *Theories of wellbeing*, p.4.

<sup>20</sup> It could be called Desire Fulfillment Theory or Desire Satisfactionism by Chris Heathwood, “Desire-Fulfillment Theory.” *In The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Well-Being*, edited by Guy Fletcher, 135-147. New York: Routledge, 2016.

<sup>21</sup> Chris Heathwood, “PREFERENTISM and SELF-SACRIFICE.” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 92, no. 1 (February 16, 2011): 18–38. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0114.2010.01384.x>. 125137, p.25.

<sup>22</sup> Heathwood, Chris. “The Problem of Defective Desires.” *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 83, no. 4 (December 2005): 487–504. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00048400500338690>. Heathwood, “Desire Satisfactionism and Hedonism”, p.541-543

<sup>23</sup> Lin, *Theories of wellbeing*, p.2.

<sup>24</sup> Ben Bradley. “Wellbeing and Death”. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

<sup>25</sup> Bradley, “Wellbeing and Death”, Chapter 1. He endorses hedonism by mainly negate the alternatives.

<sup>26</sup> Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*. New York: Basic Books, 1974, p.42-45.

<sup>27</sup> There are philosophers like Hurka who dismisses Hybrid Theory in its totality, but it is beyond the scope of this paper. See Thomas Hurka, “On ‘Hybrid’ Theories of Personal Good” *Utilitas*. 31. 1-13. [10.1017/S0953820819000256](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0953820819000256), 2019.



<sup>28</sup> Shelly Kagan, "WELL-BEING as ENJOYING the GOOD." *Philosophical Perspectives* 23, no. 1 (December 2009): 253–72. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1520-8583.2009.00170.x>, p.255.

<sup>29</sup> Kraut, "Desire and the Human Good" and Robert Adams, "*Finite and Infinite Goods: A Framework for Ethics*". Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

<sup>30</sup> See similar arguments by Christopher Woodard, "Hybrid Theories". In G. Fletcher (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Well-Being*, (2016).

<sup>31</sup> In this paper, I use RHT as the abbreviation of Robust Hybrid Theory, and I use them interchangeably.

<sup>32</sup> I will refer to the account on which hybrid theory is based as the traditional hybrid theory in this paper.

<sup>33</sup> Wall and Sobel, "A Robust Hybrid Theory", p.2830.

<sup>34</sup> Wall and Sobel, "A Robust Hybrid Theory", p.2832.

<sup>35</sup> Wall and Sobel, "A Robust Hybrid Theory", p.2832.

<sup>36</sup> Rice, "Defending Objective List Theory", p. 197. I only chose three due to the conciseness of this paper, and three of them is enough to illustrate the idea.

<sup>37</sup> Note that there are many other candidate theories that could fit in this position just as well. I will use Loving friendship and friendship interchangeably since in normal cases, friendships presuppose the notion of loving.

<sup>38</sup> Since the unrestricted account is significantly bolder claim that is bound to be more fallible or vulnerable to other criticisms than the restricted account, I will focus on the restricted account here and in this paper in general.

<sup>39</sup> There is an abundance of literature that are devoted to the discussion of pleasure. For example, Feldman, "Pleasure and the Good Life", made a distinction between sensory pleasure and attitudinal pleasure, p.55-63. Pallies advocates for a hybrid theory of pleasure. I will not offer an endorsement of any of these theories regarding the definition of pleasure here, since my responds to this objection shouldn't be in grave danger given any reasonable interpretation of pleasure. A prima facie account of pleasure should be sufficed for the purpose of this discussion. See Daniel Pallies, "An Honest Look at Hybrid Theories of Pleasure." *Philosophical Studies*, May 12, 2020. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-020-01464-5>.

<sup>40</sup> Dale Dorsey has a throughout argument on this point about the evaluative factors in subjectivism on page 415-417. See Dale Dorsey, "Subjectivism without Desire." *The Philosophical Review* 121, no. 3 (2012): 407–42. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44282261>.

<sup>41</sup> Tyler's example should be in the same nature as Zach's, only that Tyler's example should make it even clearer that one could have a favoring attitude towards an endeavor yet fail to take pleasures, or any other

possible objective values, from it.

<sup>42</sup> Heathwood, "Desire Satisfactionism and Hedonism", p.541-543. Note that the success of some of the criticism of subjective theories does not signal that unwarranted attitudes should not ground benefits at all. The implausibility of pure subjective theories, arguably, heavily pinpoints in the intuition that the subjective cannot be the single most important factor that grounds benefit. Indeed, some subjectivities, e.g., those that correspond with defective desires should not ground benefits since they run over objectivity, as mentioned previously. Except those, the subjectivity should at least be considered to have a role in terms of grounding benefits, which is the main theme being argued in this paper.

<sup>43</sup> See the critiques of objective theories in previous sections.

<sup>44</sup> David Sobel, "The Case for Stance Dependent Value." *Journal of Ethics and Social Philosophy* 15, no. 2 (March 4, 2019). <https://doi.org/10.26556/jesp.v15i2.517>, p.146.

<sup>45</sup> I do not believe that this was their intention or they would sit right with it.

<sup>46</sup> It is a matter of course that it is almost always impossible for two lives to be completely equal in terms of their objective achievements and their attitude-in-total towards the achievements. First, it is beyond challenging to calculate objective achievements. A big part of the popular candidates of objective list theories are rather abstract, e.g., friendship, knowledge, tranquility, etc. Friendship, to start with, is impossible to be numbered. It is far from reality that having ten friends is always better than having one in terms of their "friendship score". A person who befriended ten might suffer from the lack of deep friendships and a person who only befriended one might enjoy the strong bond of this exclusive friendship. Same logic applies to other abstract entities. However, it does not dismiss the notion of a tie in real-life scenarios, since a tie in this sense does not have to be a mathematically meticulous parity, which is neither, arguably, possible nor to be strived for in this paper. An intuitive account of "tie" would be sufficient in this account. We could have intuitions of two people running into a tie in relevant sense, just as we have the intuition of one is better off than the other. As long as two lives were compared in accordance with the one hybrid theory of their choosing, the emergence of an exceptionally hard call would be a great indicator of a tie, from which one could proceed to bring unwarranted attitude they have on to the table to further the investigation. Also, there will be extremely difficult borderline cases, but it is not the focus of this paper and it more likely than not would require another paper to address.

<sup>47</sup> There are critiques against hybrid theories in general, for example Hurka, "On 'Hybrid' Theories", argues that hybrid theory is all mistaken. However, it is not the goal of this paper to address the general attacks against hybrid theory in the great scale. Instead, the following objection is inspired by Eden Lin's claim in note 78 in his introductory paper "*Theories of wellbeing*" as well as the discussions with him. I thank Prof. Lin for the short discussion.

<sup>48</sup> Eden Lin, "The Subjective List Theory of Well-Being." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 94, no. 1 (February 20, 2015): 99–114. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2015.1014926>, p.100.

<sup>49</sup> Gratification and satisfaction (subjectively objective items) in this instance, according to the objector, could cover the benefit-grounding aspect of the unwarranted attitudes promoted by Wall and Sobel.

<sup>50</sup> Lin, "Subjective List Theory", p.100.

<sup>51</sup> I inherit Wall and Sobel agreement with the existence with tolerable alienation. Wall and Sobel, "Robust Hybrid Theory", p.2846-2848.

<sup>52</sup> Note that even though correspondence is emphasized, it is far from a relapse to traditional hybrid theories, given that correspondence is not necessary to ground benefits as stated, opposing to the principles of traditional hybrid theories.

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