

# COMMENTS FOR MATTHEW CASHEN

“Angela the Diplomat”

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Matthew Caschen (2023a, 2023b) argues that Neera Badhwar’s (2014) neo-Aristotelian theory of well-being is inconsistent. Cashen motivates his approach with a revised version of a thought experiment by Dan Haybron (2007, 2008). I’ll begin with a summary of Cashen’s challenge, then sketch one approach for resolving the alleged inconsistency.

## 1. HAPPINESS IN A WORTHWHILE LIFE

According to Badhwar, well-being “consists of happiness in an objectively worthwhile life” (23). It is a consequence of the theory that both virtue, as a feature of objective worth, and happiness are “partly constitutive” of well-being (33–48). Here, “well-being” stands in for Aristotle’s term *eudaimonia* (4) and “happiness” denotes “a long-term psychological state” that disposes its possessor to find life both enjoyable and meaningful (33–40).

External goods, or as Cashen refers to them, happy-makers, play an important role in Badhwar’s theory.

External goods like reputation, wealth, health, decent friends, and a presentable appearance fulfill certain

deep needs that cannot be fulfilled without them, no matter how virtuous our lives. We can be virtuous even if we lack these external goods. . . . But it is only if we both possess these goods and respond to them, or use them, according to virtue, that we can enjoyably exercise many of our powers and capacities and satisfy our basic human needs for society, security, and pleasure. (200)

Cashen's charge of inconsistency centers on Badhwar's account of happy-makers. "Badhwar," he claims,

cannot consistently maintain both her general position that well-being is happiness in an objectively good life, where an objectively good life is a life of virtue, and the specific claim that [happy-makers] enhance well-being as "sources of happiness in their own right." (Cashen 2023a, sec. 2)<sup>1</sup>

## 2. ANGELA THE DIPLOMAT

Cashen first motivates this claim by asking that we imagine parallel lives for a diplomat named Angela (a thought experiment first put forward by Haybron (2007, 8–11; 2008, 161–63)). In the first life, Angela postpones a much-desired early retirement to help avert a bloody conflict. Angela succeeds and, in the process, exercises more virtue but experiences less happiness in this season of her life. In the second version of her life, Angela retires

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<sup>1</sup> The quotation is from his recent article in *Happiness Studies* (Cashen 2023a), where he retains the tradition term "external goods" in the place of "happy-makers." The claim that external goods are "sources of happiness in their own right" comes from Badhwar (2014, 184). Cashen draws the same conclusion in this presentation: "Now, it's only because Badhwar treats happiness and virtue as distinct sources of wellbeing that Angela's case can be framed as the dilemma, 'which to choose, happiness or virtue?' But I want to show now that Badhwar can't consistently hold these two to be distinct sources of well-being" (Cashen 2023b, sec. 3).

early with no regrets. She is decidedly more happy but exercises fewer virtues.

Haybron crafted Angela's story to highlight the intuitive implausibility of perfectionist well-being theories—that is, any theory that makes excellence or virtue a welfare constituent.<sup>2</sup> Cashen, however, revises the story, intending to highlight an inconsistency in Badhwar's theory. We are now to imagine that retired Angela is not only happier but that at least some of her happiness results from vice.

I believe that Angela's revised retirement story is plausible and that it offers a substantive challenge to the intuitive plausibility of neo-Aristotelian theories. Moreover, there are some features of Badhwar's theory—for example, her rejecting global virtue and making happiness partly constitutive of well-being—that lend plausibility to this new version of Angela.

However, the whole point of the story (and I ask that Cashen correct me on this point if I'm mistaken) is to elicit something like the following rejoinder from neo-Aristotelian well-being theorists: Virtue is a necessary condition for well-being. Either it is impossible to acquire happiness from vice or happiness acquired from vice is not worth having (i.e., worthless happiness does not contribute to a person's well-being).<sup>3</sup> Cashen's next step is to take this claim and combine it with other parts of Badhwar's theory to uncover a contradiction.

### 3. THE HAPPY-MAKERS DILEMMA

At this point, Cashen's argument takes the form of a dilemma:

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<sup>2</sup> Following Haybron I use the term perfectionism to refer to any theory on which well-being partly consists in some kind of perfection, excellence, or virtue (Haybron 2008, 156).

<sup>3</sup> Badhwar (2014, 14) suggests that Rosalind Hursthouse should make a similar move. Cashen's (2023b, sec. 5) predicts the following response: "the pleasures and other positive psychic states that result from our vicious habits and choices may make us happier, [Badhwar] says, but they can't augment our wellbeing."

if, on the one hand, happy makers enhance wellbeing in their own right, then [Badhwar] cannot say they do so only when used virtuously, that is, when qualified in the right way; but if, on the other hand, they enhance wellbeing only when used virtuously, then happy makers don't themselves enhance wellbeing. (Cashen 2023b, sec. 5)

If we add these conditionals to the theory, Badhwar is stuck with the following formally inconsistent set:

1. Happy-makers are sources of well-being in their own right.
2. Happy-makers are sources of well-being only insofar as we use them or respond to them in accordance with virtue.
3. If happy-makers are sources of well-being in their own right, then happy-makers are *not* sources of well-being only insofar as we use them or respond to them in accordance with virtue.
4. If happy-makers are sources of well-being only insofar as we use them or respond to them in accordance with virtue, then happy-makers are *not* sources of well-being in their own right.

#### 4. AGAINST INCONSISTENCY

I will now try to defend the consistency of Badhwar's theory.

Propositions 1 and 2 are internal to the theory; propositions 3 and 4 are principles external to the theory. To demonstrate inconsistency, Cashen must hold that 3 and 4 are conceptual truths. However, if I can show that it is conceptually possible to deny 3 and 4, then I can ward off Cashen's conclusion.<sup>4</sup>

I propose that Badhwar's theory can avoid inconsistency by adopting a powers approach to instrumental value. The view I have in mind has been developed by Dale Dorsey (2021, 50–60).

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<sup>4</sup> This analysis was inspired by Alvin Plantinga's free will defense ([1977] 2017).

He begins by drawing a distinction between instrumental value and being instrumental *to* value. Something is “instrumental to value,” he notes, “if its actual consequences are, on balance, good” (50). Something is instrumentally valuable if it has the power or disposition to be instrumental to value, where a “*disposition* or *power* is a property that attributes to an object the tendency to behave in a certain way assuming certain conditions obtain” (53). These “certain conditions” are commonly referred to as activation conditions.

Here is an illustration to motivate the view.

### **Nefertiti’s Tomb**

Nefertiti’s tomb is finally found. Within lies a vast treasure of immense value. Unfortunately, the tomb has an infallible security system that incinerates the contents when breached.

Given the infallible trap, there are no actual circumstances in which the treasure can be put to use. It follows that the treasure is not instrumental to value. But, even sealed in the tomb, this treasure possesses the power to be instrumental to value. In other words, given the right activation conditions, the treasure will manifest the power of being sold at auction or displayed in the Cairo Museum.

Now, let’s see if we can use the powers theory of instrumental value to generate a neo-Aristotelian account of happy-makers that avoids Cashen’s happy-makers dilemma.

### **Happy-Makers**

Happy-makers are instrumentally prudentially valuable objects, states, or events that possess the power to make human lives happy. All of the activation conditions for this power require that they be used or responded to in accordance with virtue.

On this account, every happy-maker has the power or disposition to make human lives happy. It is this power that allows

happy-makers to be sources of happiness and well-being “in their own right.” Nevertheless, all happy-makers possess a set of activation conditions that preclude the manifestation of this power outside the scope of virtuous use or response.

I grant that this account of happy-makers is implausible. It does, however, suffice to show the consistency of Badhwar’s account in the face of Cashen’s objection.

## REFERENCES

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